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Oral history interview with Roy Lichtenstein,
1963 November 15-1964 January 15

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Roy Lichtenstein on 1963 Nov. 15-1964 Jan. 15. The interview was conducted in the artist's studio and home by Richard Brown Baker for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker, November 15, 1963. I'm in the studio of Roy Lichtenstein on West 26th Street, New York City, to talk to him about his life and career. My habit is to begin these interviews with a quotation from a writing about the artist descriptive of his work. I found in my large archives on you a great many writings, but not always very good in describing your work. They're apt to take a position toward it so much that they don't describe it. However, Robert Rosenblum in *Metro 8* has several paragraphs that I'm going to read now that I think do give a general picture of your current style. Rosenblum says,

"Lichtenstein explores the mass-produced images of the crassest commercial illustration. By magnifying these images he reveals a vocabulary of uncommon rudeness and strength, coarse and inky contours, livid primary colors, screens of tiny dots, arid surfaces suddenly emerge as vigorous, visual challenges to the precious refinements of color, texture, of line and plane found in the Abstract Expressionist vocabulary. Like all artists, however, Lichtenstein has chosen his visual sources discriminately and has learned to manipulate them in the creation of a style that has become uniquely his. From the multiple possibilities offered by commercial illustration he has selected those devices which produce a maximum of pictorial flatness, thick black outlines that always cling to a single plane, an opaque, unyielding paint surface that bears overly no trace of handicraft, insistently two-dimensional decorative patterns, wood cut arabesques and mechanically regimented rows of dots that symbolize texture and modeling."

Does this passage from Mr. Rosenblum seem reasonably accurate to you?

RL: Well, it is accurate. It's also flattering at the same time.

RB: I didn't want to choose one of the attacks on your work, I myself was a little put off by his use of the word "coarse and inky contours." Now your contours, to my mind, are the reverse of fine or refined, but on the other hand the word "coarse" seems to me inappropriate in relation to your style.

RL: If coarse means ragged, they're not ragged, if you mean a description of the line, I think there's probably an Art Nouveau appearance to them which really isn't coarse. At the beginning they were more coarse than they are now. There is a refinement always that I try to get into it, but the art I'm depicting is coarse and perhaps that led him to-

RB: Yes. Well, I think he was just trying to indicate that they were rather wide and clear, and firmly visible. They're not ever so delicate that they escape the eye. Actually later on I think he says, "thick black outlines" which is really another way of saying coarse and inky contours. Now I also want to read something else I think that was written by Max Kozloff in *Art International* March 1962, "An artist like Lichtenstein turns the whole abstract representational argument inside out by demonstrating that the recognizable is not necessarily communicative at all, and that it is just as difficult to abide the known as it once was to take the unknown seriously. Here is a pretty slap in the face of both Philistines and cognoscenti alike." Do you remember that passage?

RL: Yes.

RB: What is your opinion of that?

RL: I like the idea because I think it's one of the things that I want to do. That is, they seem to be made for the sole purpose of communication, and yet they really don't communicate any story, and each particular painting doesn't communicate, at least in the way that it was meant to in the original comic strip or book.

RB: You mean it doesn't communicate the storyline in the comic strip sense?

RL: Yes. Also, I hope anyway, that it is mysterious in a way. I mean that it's brought up other mysteries and yet seems to be so apparent. It has a clarity, and its original purpose of course is communication, but the purpose

that I use it for is obviously not communication in that way.

RB: I think I understand what you mean, and to my mind, your painting, which I personally like very much, communicates primarily on an aesthetic ground, and this your critics deny you.

RL: Yes.

RB: In many cases they seem to find no aesthetic message whatsoever. It seems to me that they perhaps are blind to it.

RL: Well, my purpose, whether I succeed or not of course, I suppose will be up to history, but my purpose is entirely aesthetic, and relationships and unity are the thing I'm really after.

RB: I'm going to read one final quotation before we get started. Here's a quotation from you yourself in this recently published interview with Gene Swenson in *Art News*—what would that be—the November issue?

RL: It would be November 1963.

RB: Now, you say this to him, "In Abstract Expressionism the paintings symbolize the idea of ground directedness as opposed to object directedness. You put something down, react to it, put something else down, and the painting itself becomes a symbol of this. The difference is that rather than symbolize this ground directedness I do an object directed appearing thing. There is humor here; the work is still ground directed, the fact that it's an eyebrow or an almost direct copy of something is unimportant, the ground directedness is in the painter's mind and not immediately apparent in the painting. Pop Art makes the statement that ground directedness is not a quality that the painting has because of what it looks like."

Then it skips a line or two— "This tension between apparent ground directed products and actual ground directed processes is an important strength of Pop Art." I found this very interesting and I think I more or less understand its meaning, but I, perhaps through sheer ignorance, had never heard this phrase "ground directedness" before. I want to ask you a few questions about it. I think the description of Abstract Expressionism in the first, few sentences here is fairly clear to me, I mean you put something down, react to it, put something else down, and so on.

RL: So that you're attuning yourself to what is there and what it suggests for you to do to continue it towards a final unity, I think.

RB: This is the Abstract Expressionist?

RL: Yes.

RB: Now you yourself did abstract expressionist paintings at one time, didn't you?

RL: Yes.

RB: So you have been through this approach to painting personally and can speak with some experience as a practitioner?

RL: Yes. If I understand it and if I was successful with it, yes.

RB: Well, that, "The difference is that rather than symbolize this ground directedness I do an object-directed appearing thing;" well, we've just read a description of what you do, and in a painting such as yours which contains an airplane floating or any one of the common objects that you depict is the "object-directed appearing thing." Now what is your definition, though, of this phrase "ground directedness"?

RL: Well, the word is used in psychological optics, I think. Let me say that Hoyt Sherman at Ohio State, whom I do refer to in this article of Gene Swenson's, did a lot of work in trying to explain unity and all that. He's published a few things and most of the ideas I have about this are expressed in his terms.

RB: He uses this phrase "ground directedness"?

RL: He uses the phrase.

RB: What does "ground" mean though in this case?

RL: Well, I think it means the inclusion of all the important elements, inclusion in your mind at the time you're working of all the significant elements and sort of attuning yourself to them with the purpose of unity so that your next move is related to these things, ground things, and it's usually peripheral elements and then the

figure that you do is the emerging act, not figure nor object directedness, it doesn't refer to a thing necessarily, it could be a line or a mark, anything that you're currently working on is figure in this thinking. And "ground" is not necessarily objects surrounding it but anything surrounding it—color, size, position. You see, you tune yourself in more in a size positional way than you do in an object way, and your response is in terms of size, position, brightness, and so forth, and when I say "object—"

RB: Well, object directed I understand fairly well because that is the object, say, the washing machine, which is the more obvious subject of the painting and that is a clearly recognizable object. I personally need further understanding of this phrase "ground directed" though. There is this word used by painters the "ground" of a painting.

RL: Yes.

RB: Now this is a physical factor, isn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: It is the raw canvas more or less.

RL: The support actually.

RB: The physical support. Now what relation has this use of "ground" to your use of it here?

RL: It has some relationship in that it refers to the biggest aspect of the painting, the existence of the entire surface, but—

RB: The overall physical basis of the painting is what you mean by "ground directed" then?

RL: Well, no, there I would mean the overall, my overall, reaction to the largest context within me, rather than the physical support, when I say, "ground directed." It would have to do with the inclusion of both the peripheral and the central in my vision, the whole thing in other words.

RB: I was going to inquire about this further sentence, "The ground directedness is in the painter's mind." I think this is very important for understanding, but that's why I want to go into it further to see if I could get a fuller grasp.

RL: Maybe I could explain it this way, that you could have two portraits, almost identical portraits, both looking like the person, and one could be a unified thing and the other have almost no unity, could appear very much like the other one—

RB: Unified aesthetically?

RL: Aesthetically unified, one, being for our purposes, a great work, and the other having almost no significance, and yet there wouldn't be much actual difference between the two in terms of where the marks were on the surface or where all the contrasts lie. They would all be different. I think the same kind of thing could be seen in that two people could read the same sheet music, and an eighth note would come out to be an eighth note, more or less, in one musician than in the other, and one could be performing at a very high level, being completely attuned to the thing, and the other person might be, might think of himself as a professional, but who would produce something with very little unity in it. And yet the real difference between the two would be slight mathematically, but very crucial.

RB: For example, if I should confront two painters, one of the genius of Rembrandt and one an utter hack, with two canvases of identical size with the outline of a head, say a photograph of Thomas J. Jones, and give each one the same photograph and have the head all outlined and send Rembrandt and this other man to paint from this basis alone, from the photograph, not seeing the subject, and having the outline of the head already established for both painters, you are indicating therefore that the Rembrandt genius probably would produce a unified work of art.

RL: You'd have to alter your outline a little bit no doubt to do it, but they both—

RB: Yes, I suppose he would but, in this very minor way that you're speaking of, but he would be "ground directed" in the sense you mean? Or he would achieve—

RL: That's the essential quality of an artist in a way, one of the essential qualities"

RB: —within his intelligence, his ability to place the color relationships in such a way that there is an over-all unity.

RL: The color and the form both. The difference between working and not working in an aesthetic way is slight. I think that's the whole point almost that I'm making because it also relates to the point of copying the comic strip. They look a lot like the original, but really there's nothing in my work that's in the same positions really. It's very similar but it's not the same, and I think it relates to the portrait idea we're talking about.

RB: I would think this is the heart of your difficulty with the opposition in a sense, isn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: That they are only able to see, or will allow you, only what you have reproduced as resembling what's already there, and they deny your slight changes amount to anything aesthetically, and from your point of view it is precisely in these slight changes that is the essence of your art?

RL: Yes. I assume that they will think that similar things are identical and I knew they would react that way.

RB: I think this is very interesting to me, because as you know I am primarily connected with art through collecting and looking at works of art. And as I look at them, I'm always aware of the fact that it must be very, very slight qualities that make me want to own a particular picture, as between it and another that I may consider very well done but I don't like so much that I want to own it, I mean this is the criterion that a buyer uses. And it is such a slight ingredient that makes the difference, I think. I'm always bewildered and astonished in a single sense, as I start a day of doing galleries perhaps that I end up perhaps at five o'clock in the afternoon, after seeing the works of thirty artists and admiring lots of them, and suddenly I may see a painting that really bowls me over. Now why it does is something that I'm not articulate enough to express, and I think it is this kind of very fine difference that exists visually. You see an old friend half a block away just turning a corner, all you actually see perhaps is a leg and an arm, some very slight fragment of the body, and yet you identify him.

RL: Yes, that's marvelous because there's such a slight thing. And if you know the person completely, and although people seem so much alike when you think of it on the surface, but they must be vastly different or you must be capable of perceiving slight differences, and this is a point even in vastly free work like Abstract Expressionism, the difference between one that is significant to me is the slight adjustment, because you can certainly do work like that that's meaningless in spite of the whole purpose of it seeming to be to get you to interact in an aesthetic way with the painting and become one with it. Its whole purpose for being is this almost learning to become more sensitive through interaction with the art.

RB: Yes.

RL: This quality is one I think would make Pop Art or anything like I'm doing a difficult area in which to learn about art because it's very complete. I think it may be why Classical art usually has a relatively short-lived period. It seems to be important there at the beginning—I'm talking about artists like David and Ingres, I mean how quickly the followers of them became relatively unimportant painters.

RB: I think the reason they're unimportant is that—possibly relates to what we're just speaking about, because many of those followers of [Jacques-Louis] David and [Jean August Dominique] Ingres were technically of superb competence—

RL: Yes.

RB: And if you look at their work from the point of view of an amateur you have to admire them fantastically, but there is that somehow miniscule difference, which is really I would say, the difference between vitality and sort of academic skill, and that's what makes all the difference, isn't it?

RL: This would be a difficult area to develop vitality in, don't you? Almost—I don't know if it's really true, but it seems that you almost have to come from this loose background in order to do it because you don't get the chance in a more classical, tighter art to feel in this ground directed way. I hate the word "ground directed" because it sounds so scientific, but I think it is really more descriptive than any other.

RB: You don't think a great realist painter could manage to be ground directed?

RL: Oh, yes; I think—

RB: Take Ingres, for instance.

RL: I think—

RB: Yes?

RL: I think possibly he didn't start that way, I don't really know history enough to know really what his

beginnings even were. I'm not sure that one couldn't start this way, but it would seem to me better to start in a way that was looser, and I'm sure that what I'm saying really isn't true in the light of history because I can think of the early Renaissance School in which one artist learned from another and there was very tight painting all the way along really, so I'm sure that it is possible to learn about art doing it in a very strict and tight way too. It really depends more on where your mind is directed. Of course the whole culture at that time might have demanded that more elements be taken into account. There probably wasn't the large quantity of unorganized art, disorganized art that there is in the culture today to look at. Or their lives altogether were more organized, so that this would no doubt lend to a more organized visual art as well as any other kind of art. In other words, you almost have to learn about art because society is so confusing that you really have to understand what you're doing probably isn't in a society that is more understood by everyone.

RB: Don't you think that the environment or the society of one's own day is a very important factor in an artist's career? If you were attempting to be another Ingres in the present world it would be a kind of retroactive thing. If you had been of his same generation, it would have been an entirely different world that would have surrounded you. It might have been possible to be doing work of real significance, in terms that today it isn't possible to do.

RL: Yes, I think that whether one tries to go back or not, one is always so influenced by present environment that one certainly can't do Renaissance work today.

RB: I think you can do it but I don't think you can do with this degree of aesthetic meaning.

RL: But it wouldn't mean anything. People who try to get Renaissance elements, or Baroque, or any other period, into present day work, there's always a sort of weakening effect that it has on it.

RB: I think Pop Art wouldn't perhaps exist as it does if the people who are allegedly Pop artists weren't conscious of what's been going on in the last ten or fifteen years.

RL: Yes.

RB: Suppose you'd been brought up in Alaska, and had never seen an art magazine, and had never seen any painting more recently executed than 1910, it seems to me unlikely that you would produce the work you do today even if it's so remote from Cubism perhaps and from Abstract Expressionism.

RL: No. I don't think today one can do art which is primitive, you know, without awareness of what has just taken place or what is taking place at the present. Of course, Pop Art has this very ridiculous relationship to society that's so apparent it looks like signs in the street and things like that, which is more a humorous relationship of the artist to his environment, but I think the more important aspect of the relationship between the artist and his environment might be the strident feelings the art has, and the more subtle quality that it has, rather than the obvious relationship that it has to current material—which I think is maybe more humorous than significant—because Abstract Expressionism, which has no direct and obvious relationship to society, doesn't look like anything in society, also is definitely a product of this age.

RB: I think it is, yes. You mentioned humor. How important is the humor in relation to your work, do you think? It's secondary, isn't it, to the aesthetic, the ground directedness, or is it included within the ground directedness?

RL: I'm not sure really of the real role that it plays. It seems to me to be a necessary thing to get me going. I'm much more interested in it if I see a humorous aspect and I have been for quite a while. Even in my early paintings there was humor.

RB: I was thinking—I was rather annoyed on your behalf by a review that appeared which started out by saying your work was a terrible disappointment because it was supposed to be humorous and it wasn't really humorous at all. Do you remember that?

RL: I remember it from somewhere.

RB: Well, I thought that was unfair, although there is humor, and no doubt a very important element, nevertheless I think that is somewhat secondary to aesthetic tension.

RL: Oh, I do. I don't think that it could possibly mean anything if it was just humorous.

RB: No. It would have a brief meaning only. It wouldn't be art, I don't think, in the lay sense.

RL: In the same way I don't think it would be art, and many people think that its transformation takes place because it's larger than comic books and because I'm putting it on canvas rather than its being printed, and this kind of, this is a transformation that it has, but I don't really think especially if I just blew them up mechanically and drew it, it would be kind of a gesture, but I don't really feel it would have much significance to the work.

RB: If you merely did that it would be possible for several hundred other people to do a cheaper product of identical merit. I would think of course you do have sources which you follow pretty closely.

RL: Yes.

RB: I think Bob Rosenblum speaks of your discriminating choice of sources. It is your decision in the first place of what to copy or what to transform, that is one of the initial important acts in your work.

RL: Yes. I look for things that have a kind of interest; I'm not sure what the qualities are in the things that I pick.

RB: If you were not an artist but merely a craftsman, for instance—I don't think Leo Castelli, the gallery director, would simply send a Western Union messenger down with instructions to blow something up to such-and-such dimensions, copy it, and deliver it to the gallery by Thursday because Mr. XYZ of Chicago would like it of that size and subject and so on; it would be purely a craft act on your part. I mean this is the fundamental difference between what actually happens with you and what a parody of your career would describe as—

RL: That's right. I think there are people who think that is what is happening.

RB: Oh, I'm sure there are, yes. I'm sure there are.

RL: Along with it being a major plot against the art world or something.

RB: I'd like to know when you first heard the phrase "Pop Art." I suppose you can't remember—you didn't hear it probably as far back as when it was first used by Lawrence Alloway?

RL: No, but I knew that it came from Lawrence Alloway and I think it was in 1961, November or something like that, I heard about it.

RB: You did hear the word "Pop Art" then because—

RL: I think so. I may be wrong.

RB: —the end of November 1961 is when I bought the painting by you called *The Washing Machine* [1961], and this was before your first exhibit, and Ivan Karp of your gallery was using the term "Commonnest Art" at the time, in my recollection.

RL: That's right.

RB: And I didn't feel even following October or whenever it was that Sidney Janis put on the show called "New Realism"—was it?

RL: Right. "The New Realism."

RB: Even at that month that Pop Art was as generally accepted as it is now, it seems to be more or less established as the phrase, whether one likes it or not. But I remember Ivan told me that the artists didn't like it. Now maybe this is untrue, but it's my recollection that you'd all had a meeting and decided to call it "Okay Art." Do you remember such a—?

RL: We had a meeting and there was some discussion, but not much to do with what to call it. I don't think any of the artists ever met and decided what to call it at all.

RB: The reason I asked when you first heard "Pop Art" is that I'm trying to bring out in the interview the fact that this is all a very recent development, and it is my impression as a sort of general magazine reader, "Pop" has been the select phrase really because it is such a short word. .

RL: Yes.

RB: It's more vivid, it's more memorable, and for popular writers, headlines, and everything else, it's much easier to use.

RL: And it relates to the kind of art very well, too, I think. I like it.

RB: It conveys something of the spirit.

RL: Well again it's a humorous word that I like because it, in a way, disposes of the art in a strange way, in such a way of disparaging the art? I'm not sure that's the word, but it degrades it or berates it or something. It's too strong a word I guess.

RB: It takes it lightly of course. I don't think it's quite as strong as—it treats it with no particular dignity, I mean if you call it the socio megliobola—or something like this kind of art, or some sort of fancy phrase nobody would remember it, for one thing.

RL: I think that's one of the things about "New Realism," or the painters of common objects, that they get a little pedantic, a little too fancy.

RB: Yes. Language just doesn't welcome big elaborate phrases. You see, your phrase "ground directed" is one of those specialized phrases that's never likely, I think, to become part of the common vocabulary.

RL: No. I don't like it for that very reason, but I can't think of another way of putting it.

RB: No. But if one defines one's terms, those special terms are fine, but this is not popular language when terms are closely defined. I wanted to bring out the fact that this is really between November of 1961 and the present, your personal fame has greatly increased, and the fame of this type of art has expanded because very little of it existed, I think in the United States in November 1961. Most of it has been painted since, hasn't it?

RL: Most of it, definitely; but [Claes] Oldenburg, I think, and [Jim] Dine were doing work that was certainly related.

RB: Yes. You mentioned Oldenburg somewhere I read, as an artist whose work you had seen almost before you —

RL: It might have been in *Forum* possibly but—

RB: Yes, yes.

RL: I didn't see that article really.

RB: That article was in Volume Two, November 1963, by John Coplans.

RL: That's right. What he said. He interviewed me and wrote it down and I'm not quite sure it wasn't recorded.

RB: How many times were you interviewed before 1961?

RL: Just about never.

RB: There was an article that I was shown when I first saw your work and Jim Rosenquist's that had appeared in the *St. Louis Times-Dispatch*, that must have been—

RL: That was 1961 though, I believe.

RB: Yes. That was probably in 1961.

RL: It appeared on New Year's Day, wasn't it?

RB: Of '62? Or '61? I don't know, it preceded your two shows, his show and yours I think.

RL: I have a copy of it, I can look it up for you if you want me to.

RB: Well, it's not that important now. I mean we'll go into your biography more or less chronologically after a while. But in this sort of preliminary discussion, I want to place the time in your career that we're now talking about, because five years from now things will be different of course. In other words, this is fairly close to the beginning of your, what I always call rather pompously, "international renown," and you certainly lacked it in 1961, I would think. But you have been interviewed just as indication of how this has changed, with the exception possibly of that *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article about your work and Rosenquist's, there was very little probably of interview before that.

RL: Yes—

RB: How many have there been since? There's the Swenson one in *Art News* in November 1963, and Coplans' in *Art Forum* also in November '63, these are current now.

RL: Yes.

RB: Have there been others?

RL: Ellen Johnson interviewed me and wrote something, I think, in my Paris catalogue at the Illeana.

RB: Sonnabend Gallery show?

RL: Yes.

RB: I was looking at that catalogue, it was all in French so I didn't read it as carefully, because I was searching for a suitable quotation to recite here you see, and I didn't want to do it in French but I thought there was a piece by Juquois.

RL: Yes. Alain Juquois.

RB: And then a quotation from Rosenblum, a translation.

RL: And there was one by Ellen Johnson.

RB: Oh, I missed that. Well, who else?

RL: Oh, we were both on television, Rosenquist and I.

RB: Were you? What station was that?

RL: CBS I believe. Yes, CBS. It was a program called *Calendar*, that was a morning program which I don't think is on anymore.

RB: What year was this?

RL: It was last winter.

RB: 1963 perhaps, even so?

RL: Yes, it was 1963 and Lawrence Alloway—

RB: Was the moderator?

RL: No, first they interviewed him and me and then there was a panel discussion with Alloway and—let me see—I'll remember it later.

RB: They were present you mean at the discussion?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, was this man you forget somebody who was taking the opposition point of view?

RL: No, not exactly but it wasn't complete—it was one of these programs where you have a half hour, and for some reason it boils down to about three minutes each—

RB: Yes.

RL: By the time the commercials get finished, and everything else in the format of the program, and there were announcements and so nobody got to say too much. .

RB: Rehearsed in advance?

RL: No. And a few other things—

RB: I was present at New York University at what I thought was a rather dreadful panel discussion, in which I forget all the people on it, some of whom were very noisy and obstreperous and difficult and Ivan Karp and you were defending—

RL: True. Ivan Karp and Alan Kaprow and there was [Walter] Gaudenek.

RB: Yes. Gaudenek was particularly angry, wasn't he?

RL: Yes. He walked off.

RB: I had left before he walked off.

RL: That was a wise idea.

RB: Well, have you been in many other panel discussions?

RL: I was in one at Hunter College. . And I spoke to the American Society of Industrial Designers at the Waldorf once, a major effort. Let me see—I've done several things at Rutgers.

RB: Are you still teaching at Rutgers?

RL: No, I'm on a year leave of absence.

RB: But last year you were on the faculty of Rutgers University?

RL: That's right.

RB: Yes. So you were on your home ground, but this might have come up even before you became famous, shall we say?

RL: Possibly.

RB: I just wanted to bring out the fact that you have become a "name" artist now. Do you find this burdensome?

RL: No, I find it delightful.

RB: Well, it might become burdensome after another twenty years, if you get to be as famous as [Pablo] Picasso or something.

RL: It's the best kind of burden I think to labor under.

RB: Let's go back now really to the beginning. I'd like to have you say your own name.

RL: Roy Lichtenstein. That's kind of a combination of ways of saying it, I say it that way because most people can write it without me having to spell it for them. If I say Lichtenstein [giving it German pronunciation] they really think I was born in another country.

RB: Yes. Well, I like to have it pronounced just in case—technically speaking, they tell me these tapes after a certain number of years possibly blend together and it's lost, but the policy of the Archives of American Art as I understand it, is to keep the actual physical tapes as well as having the transcription. Of course, on the transcription your pronunciation wouldn't come through. And I think it's rather—one would like—well, it sounds too grand, but what I going to say one would like to have heard Shakespeare pronounce his name, but that's a little too far-fetched.

RL: No.

RB: But you know there is uncertainty as to how his name was spelled for instance and pronounced too.

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, first of all tell me the year and the place and the date of your birth.

RL: I was born in 1923 in New York City.

RB: What date—what day and month?

RL: October 27th.

RB: What was your father's name?

RL: Milton. Milton Lichtenstein.

RB: You have a middle initial, don't you?

RL: Yes. It's "F."Fox.

RB: Roy Fox?

RL: Yes.

RB: And I forgot to ask you if you've ever used any other name?

RL: No.

RB: What was your mother's name before her marriage?

RL: Beatrice Werner.

RB: Were either of your parents married before they were married to each other'?

RL: No.

RB: What was your father's occupation at the time you were born?

RL: I believe he was a real estate broker in New York City, that's the occupation he had throughout his life. Earlier he had been, I think, a furrier for a little while, and a few other things, nothing that he went into very seriously before he went into real estate.

RB: So he's no longer living?

RL: No. He died in 1946.

RB: Oh, when you were really quite young then?

RL: No, I wouldn't say that. I had just come out of the army as a matter of fact.

RB: Yes. But—well, quite young. Well, that's too bad. I'd like to get some idea of what the background of a painter at the time of his birth was. Were your father and mother fairly young when they were married?

RL: No, I think they were in their thirties. I think my father was in the 30's and my mother was 28 I think.

RB: Were you the eldest child?

RL: Yes. I have a sister who is four years younger.

RB: Do you remember where your parents lived when you were born? Were you born in their home or in a hospital?

RL: In a hospital. Flower Hospital. I think we were on 127th Street, I believe. I believe so, I'm not quite sure. Then we moved to 104th Street in New York City, I remember playing in what is called Strauss's Park up there, it's a little triangular part of a block.

RB: I seek to find out what your earliest visual memories were. Do you recall the—I don't know how old you were when the move took place—

RL: I'm not quite sure either. I imagine I was six or so.

RB: Well then, you do remember the first apartment? Was it a house or an apartment?

RL: It was an apartment because we always lived in an apartment.

RB: Well, what sort of furnishings did it have?

RL: I'm not sure I can really remember, but I do remember crawling under tables and looking through a Victrola and—

RB: I've been told by one artist that he was fascinated by the underside of tables in his very earliest infancy. Were you?

RL: Well that's my most vivid recollection—the under parts of tables and the piano, I can remember pulling the brass bars out that work the pedals and things like that, and I can remember being under the piano, but—

RB: Does the presence of the piano indicate that either your mother or father performed on the piano?

RL: My mother played the piano for quite a long time, not professionally.

RB: But for recreation?

RL: Yes. She took piano lessons for a long, long time—fourteen years, and she would practice for four hours a day, and—

RB: I can remember as a small boy being given a headache by the attempt my mother made to play the piano in my presence. Did you enjoy her practicing, or did it irritate you?

RL: No, I think I enjoyed it.

RB: She perhaps was better than my poor mother.

RL: I don't think she was practicing that much when I was young.

RB: What recollection have you of pictures on the wall in your childhood? Were there any?

RL: Yes. I can remember the standard one of the grapes and the still life and it looked kind of Italian naturalist.

RB: A Realist painting, you mean? An original work of art, or a reproduction?

RL: I think it was original but not of that period, it was a copy or something like that, either a copy or a pastiche or something. I know I'm sure it had no value of any kind, but it could be just used incorporated with Dada today. Collage but it was a very—

RB: I suppose this painting remained in the family home most of your childhood?

RL: I think they got rid of it when I was, oh, probably around twelve or so, I think it disappeared.

RB: That must be the first painting you recall though?

RL: Yes.

RB: You don't associate furniture, was it Germanic and heavy?

RL: I think it was heavy.

RB: Your father was of what national stock—German?

RL: Both my father and mother were German-Jewish.

RB: And your father was born in this country?

RL: He was born in this country, and his mother was born in this country, but their parents came from Germany, two great-grandparents. I don't remember my great-grandparents.

RB: You remember your grandparents?

RL: Yes.

RB: What was your father's father's name?

RL: I'm not sure.

RB: What was his career?

RL: He died when I was very, very young. I remember slightly but I don't really remember him—

RB: Well, was it not—was he in business, or—?

RL: I am not sure. I believe he was.

RB: Was he an educated man, or relatively?

RL: He wasn't a professional man I don't think. No.

RB: But he was born in this country? It was your great-grandfather that immigrated—?

RL: Yes.

RB: About how far back would this take us I wonder?

RL: I don't know.

RB: They wouldn't go back to that wave of German immigration that followed 1848, would it? You know there was a whole group of sort of German intellectuals and liberty-lovers that fled the country more or less because of the collapse of the 1848 effort to—

RL: I doubt that that was the reason he came over but it might have been about that time. I really don't know. I didn't know him.

RB: Have you ever learned or been interested to know what part of Germany they came from?

RL: I think they came from around Frankfort.

RB: Around Frankfort. Yes. There's no traditional family craft or career that—Were they agricultural? You don't know?

RL: No, they weren't agricultural. They kept a store.

RB: Shopkeepers?

RL: Shopkeepers.

RB: Now on your mother's side—her father—do you know your maternal grandparents names?

RL: Yes, I think he changed his name from Kunzenzerner to Werner and that was—

RB: Yes, a rather unmanageable name, and he changed it to Werner, which is a pretty typical German name, isn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: Were these forebears Orthodox Jews?

RL: I imagine originally they were Orthodox, but they became Reformed. Well, my father was not religious at all, and my mother was only slightly, mostly because my grandfather knew Hebrew and attended temple regularly.

RB: Your mother's father knew Hebrew?

RL: Yes.

RB: He was, I presume, a rather scholarly individual then?

RL: Only in this regard. I think he wasn't a professional man in that sense.

RB: Maybe that was part of his ordinary childhood training and education to learn Hebrew?

RL: Yes. Yes. He attended temple regularly, and my mother did occasionally, and still does at all the holidays, but I had very little religious training.

RB: I want to stick though with your ancestors to get a clearer picture of their economic status. Would you think they came in poverty and made their way fairly successful in terms of the economic situation of the family, or—?

RL: Well, my grandfather, for instance, his brother was an eye specialist in Germany.

RB: So he was professionally educated—which family was this grandfather from?

RL: This is my maternal grandfather.

RB: The one who changed his name to Werner?

RL: Yes. He came over and he went into the clothing business. They must have had some money I think, but I think he didn't have much, I think he just worked his way up, but I guess rather successfully—

RB: In the garment business, perhaps?

RL: Yes. And he came in via New Orleans actually, where my mother was born; but she was taken away at the age of three to Stamford, Connecticut, as a matter of fact.

RB: So her childhood was spent in Stamford, Connecticut?

RL: That's right. And I believe my grandfather was in the clothing business on 23rd Street here in New York City.

RB: After he left Stamford, you mean he—or they lived there?

RL: I'm not sure whether he went there, or when they left, I'm really not positive.

RB: Well, he might have been a commuter from Stamford?

RL: Yes, I think that's what it was. And then they moved to New York City.

RB: Where did your mother get her education, in the public schools in Stamford or—?

RL: I believe so, yes. To public school it might not have been, it might have been private.

RB: Did she go to college?

RL: No.

RB: And I presume your grandparents didn't. Did your father go to college?

RL: No. As a matter of fact, I think he left school rather early, I'm not even sure that he graduated from high school. He went to work rather early.

RB: Through necessity or through temperamental—

RL: He was one of seven children and he was one of the successful ones, from their viewpoint anyway. I mean he was personally successful in business anyway.

RB: Therefore your early childhood was not, shall we say, embittered by inability to be adequately fed and clothed and things like that?

RL: No. As a matter of fact I feel in a way that I don't have enough sense of the depression, I don't remember it as depression year. I knew there was one but—

RB: Let's see, 1929 you were quite—

RL: I was six years old then, but the Depression kept going. I was a little young to be too aware of it but—No, there was no poverty in that sense.

RB: Please try a little harder to reconstruct the actual physical and artistic nature of that first environment, what it had in the way of beauty, or ugliness, from the age of two to six and so on, what sort of things your eyes looked at, is what I'm interested to find out.

RL: I would think it would be the kind of standard trappings of middle-class people whose origins are fairly recently from Europe.

RB: There were no heirlooms brought from Europe, for instance, that sort of like that?

RL: There were things handed down from probably grandparents in the way of dishes and things like that, that were not, I imagine, really of any great value but of—

RB: Did you like them? I mean did you—or were you led to admire—?

RL: I don't know if I had much of a feeling about it, and art wasn't a great part of my life then at all. I'm sure I wasn't thinking of—I drew somewhat, in fact I drew quite a bit I guess at that time, as a young child. But I had no training - not that I should have at that age, but—

RB: You had crayons and pencils?

RL: Yes. And I remember I did a lot of drawing and other people have recalled that I had done a lot of drawing, I don't know what that means if anything.

RB: I found in talking to a number of artists of your generation that they had a rather meager background in visual terms compared to what perhaps one might find in the homes of the wealthy, maybe, or the homes of, let's say, professors of fine arts or things of this sort.

RL: No. There was nothing like that. Nothing that would really be called art now around me at that time, nothing at all.

RB: I would think you might retain feelings toward the ugliness or the attractiveness of this early setting, but you don't have any strong—

RL: I know exactly what it felt like but I'm not sure I could describe it.

RB: Try.

RL: Most things were heavy and dark, that was the—

RB: Germanic furniture is apt to be, yes, great wardrobe things you mean and—

RL: That's right.

RB: Oak furniture and heavy tables—

RL: That's right.

RB: Heavily upholstered chairs?

RL: Yes. Spanish shawl on the piano and lots of photographs in frames and that kind of thing.

RB: Yes, I know what you mean. That was characteristic. Rather dark walls? Or light-colored walls?

RL: I imagine they were dark, or maybe they were papered or something, undoubtedly, and figured probably.

RB: You have said more than once that you have a poor memory. How is it poor? Is it poor in all respects, or is it poor in a selective way? I mean, are you better at remembering things visually, say, than dates? Or do you remember names badly and faces well, or is it just universally bad for everything? That's the way you make it sound.

RL: It's not all that terrible but it's—I'm pretty bad, I guess, at both names and dates. The names of people, particularly relatives, family history for some reason or other. I don't think I'm very concerned with it.

RB: That would be the reason of course if you're not particularly interested. There are some families that go in for that have, of course, a particularly distinguished or unusual family history, or have lived in one community for centuries and have developed sort of legends.

RL: Yes.

RB: I would suppose since your family was in New York, which is not a particularly cozy environment to inherit, and haven't been here for more than a generation or two, you wouldn't have deep roots in your background whatever that may mean, to use a cliché. But I want to find this out. But to get back to your memory you mentioned that your father was one of seven children?

RL: Yes.

RB: Now these aunts and uncles, were they frequently in your home?

RL: Yes.

RB: It was a big family then? My mind seems to recall—

RL: Yes. My paternal grandmother, my father's mother, was living with my aunt—

RB: Who was unmarried?

RL: With my mother's sister. No, she was married. And in the summer we would go to Massachusetts a lot, Lake Buell it was called at that time, and my grandmother, I remember, would—she used to be in the kitchen all day long and, you know, cook constantly and eat nothing and—

RB: She did the cooking for the family more or less?

RL: Yes, with the help of aunts and my mother, but she—I remember her very well.

RB: That's what I'm thinking of now. What—

RL: She was always working and was always happy and always doing things for other people constantly.

RB: What of your immediate family in your childhood other than your parents had a kind of influence on you? I mean were any of them remarkable in any particular way as personalities or—?

RL: I think probably my father was the most remarkable personality. He was a strong person, and in spite of his lack of education, he was very intelligent, I think, and he was very good at math—I mean he never had advanced

math but he was very fast at math, which I'm very slow at.

RB: As you saw him in the family group were you bound to respect his intelligence? I mean he was a leader within the family?

RL: Yes.

RB: What were his general interests other than business? I mean was he particularly athletic or—?

RL: No. No. He had, I think, very few—he was interested in golf but he was not a great sportsman or anything else. He was a humorous person.

RB: He made jokes?

RL: Well, funny turns of humor. They were not jokes as such but—

RB: In the way he expressed himself, you mean?

RL: Yes. And he had maybe a similar, maybe I've gotten some of my interest in humor from him.

RB: I should imagine so. Tell me more about the style of his humor.

RL: Well, he had a way of turning serious events into something comical constantly and I think—that of course could be very bad and degrading but he didn't do it quite that way. I mean it sounds awful but—

RB: Was he a salesman in his real estate business?

RL: No. He bought and sold garage properties, property that could be used for parking lots and garages.

RB: He specialized in this branch?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, that's interesting. I asked you if he was a salesman because I could picture him utilizing his humor in dealing with a customer in this sort of thing.

RL: He was sort of a salesman, but I think it was more that he would purchase properties from people he knew wanted to sell, and sell it eventually for commissions and things. I don't know too much about it.

RB: Did you say he worked on his own or was he a member of a firm?

RL: Well, he was a member—a partnership. Loeb was his partner.

RB: What was Mr. Loeb's first name?

RL: I think it was Herbert.

RB: What was the firm called?

RL: Lichtenstein & Loeb, I believe. By the way, it was called the Garage Realty Company, and it was downtown on Broadway, but I'm not sure now where or how far downtown.

RB: It's a rather interesting business in a sense for a man of his generation, he must have been one of the originating persons in this field, I would think, because during his lifetime the rise of the automobile—but let's see, when would he have been born?

RL: Let's see now, I think he was 32 when they were married and I was the first child which came a few years later you can add all that up—let's see, I was born in 1923, and if you add 34 and 23 you get—

RB: Yes, but they did have cars around 1903, a few. But he would have been still fairly young, I think. But the whole business would have—

RL: I think he probably was early in the field. I think the way he said he got into the business was that someone was going to give him money to buy a garage originally, a parking garage, and so he worked for one to find out about the business and in working for one, or maybe several, and never really getting the money to go into the business, he became a kind of an expert on the ins and outs of the business and just went into the brokerage end of it, which turned out to be much better, I guess. And he had other property besides just garages.

RB: You say "in the brokerage," now that to me means that you went and paid him a commission on the basis of the thing. But something else you said made me think that he bought speculatively for certain properties to sell.

RL: I think he did too. I know he did.

RB: There are a great many garages all over Manhattan, many of which must have been built in his lifetime because they don't look very recent. I wonder if he was concerned with the location of garages and the commissioning and erection?

RL: I don't know.

RB: He didn't talk too much about this at home.

RL: No, he didn't. Very little, in fact, he said almost nothing.

RB: About his business?

RL: Yes.

RB: But on the whole was he a very silent man, you mean?

RL: No.

RB: You really didn't define his humor too thoroughly.

RL: No, I don't know that I can really.

RB: Can you give any example—it's always—humor dies within a second usually so it's hard to—

RL: I know it, and reconstructed it never sounds as good as it did at the moment, so much of it depends on what leads up to it.

RB: Was it the kind of humor that would send you all into hilarious bursts of laughter?

RL: Yes, it was that kind of—

RB: Or was it just the kind of subtle—

RL: It was subtle but it would make us laugh I know.

RB: And your mother was very fond of this too, the laughter? And your sister?

RL: Yes. It's very hard to describe. I'm giving you such a vague picture of my childhood, but it's pretty vague too in my own mind.

RB: Well, you may never think about it.

RL: I don't really.

RB: Some people do, some don't. The mere fact that you don't is a fact.

RL: Well, I think art, too, is a very minor part of my life, in fact, I didn't take art in school. I went to Franklin High which is a private boys' school on 89th Street off of Central Park West. It's not in existence now.

RB: You're really getting chronologically a little ahead of yourself.

RL: Yes. But there was no art there either. They didn't teach art.

RB: Well, when you went to school though at the beginning—I went to a school in Providence, Rhode Island, it was a private school run by Quakers, we had an art teacher every week for half an hour, as I recall. Now you didn't have anything like this at the age of six or seven?

RB: Yes, of course in kindergarten and the lower grades you get art, and I can remember repeated designs were the thing. You would, you know, divide your page into boxes and put the same thing in each little box, I can remember doing that. I remember in kindergarten things like cutting out rabbits in paper, and gluing stuff, and jigsaws and things like that.

RB: You went to kindergarten before entering regular first grade?

RL: Yes.

RB: Was this a private—?

RL: Yes.

RB: You must have been quite young?

RL: Probably five.

RB: Was it a small group of children or a big one?

RL: I believe it was attached to a public school and it was around 104th Street and West End Avenue, around that area somewhere. And I remember being in class and I remember I was very quiet and never said much.

RB: In your early childhood, I mean, say, from the age of five or six on until twelve, were you able to walk to school, were you so close to the schoolhouse—?

RL: Yes.

RB: How crowded were the schools then? I mean you had a regular sort of school day?

RL: Yes. I think there were probably twenty-five or thirty in the class.

RB: This was a public school you went to?

RL: Yes. Until high school.

RB: And what school was it?

RL: Well, I remember going to P. S. 9 when we lived on 86th Street between West End and Riverside Drive.

RB: But you didn't live there at first—when did you move there?

RL: We moved there it must have been when I was ten or so.

RB: I don't know that 104th Street neighborhood very well, but was this sort of an improvement in neighborhood when you moved?

RL: I think so.

RB: Particularly then the West Side was perhaps better than it is now. I live there at the moment so I'm not—people are moving back there now, come to think of it.

RL: Yes, I was going to say.

RB: Very nice large apartments.

RL: By—

RB: By 'now' I really mean five years ago perhaps.

RL: Well, I think the progressive march is to the East Side. I think that's the goal but—

RB: You think you moved to a bigger and better apartment?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, how much bigger was it?

RL: This was—I don't remember the size of the other one too well. I have a vague idea how it looked but everything looks bigger when you're younger I think.

RB: Yes.

RL: But the one I do remember on 305 West 86th Street had seven rooms.

RB: In a big building?

RL: It was on the eleventh floor just across 86th Street.

RB: Yes. You didn't look out onto—?

RL: A park or anything? No. I used to play on Riverside Drive before they fixed it up. It was nice before it was fixed up, I mean, it was nice for children to play there, and I used to go down by the railroad track and I had a mica mine which—

RB: This was one of your little private hobbies, you mean, a mica mine?

RL: Well, I thought it naturally was, you know, when I played in the park. It had granite rock and mica I used to collect, and it was very rugged then.

RB: This was before the West Side Highway was built, is that what you mean?

RL: Yes. You could walk right down to the railroad track, you'd have to go over a few embankments, but that was fun and there were hobos and people living in little tin shacks down there I remember.

RB: It was not a particularly perilous neighborhood I hope?

RL: It was not, no.

RB: At times one hears disturbing stories about the safety of people in this area today.

RL: No, I think it was pretty safe then.

RB: Do you remember the move at all? Was it an exciting one?

RL: I don't remember the move, no.

RB: You would have changed schools, or hadn't you started to school before you moved there?

RL: I'm not really sure that I was ten, but I think it was about that time. I think I did change schools, yes. I remember the number of the first school but I—

RB: I happen to have gone only to one school so it remains relatively simple in my recollection. Therefore I'm puzzled that you can't remember, but they may all look alike more or less. I would think they might have had certain personalities, physically, architecturally that would linger in your recollection.

RL: No. Most of New York school buildings, the old buildings, have very similar architecture.

RB: Did you like going to school?

RL: Not very well, no.

RB: Do you recall why you didn't?

RL: Well, I think I was very—I was timid.

RB: Were you full-size or were you rather diminutive as a child?

RL: I was I think relatively small. I don't think that disturbed me, I don't think I was that small but—

RB: Well, some of us have had the experience of being treated pretty unkindly by some of the other boys in the neighborhood. I mean were you the victim of all sorts of brutality?

RL: No, I was never victimized or anything like that, no.

RB: I suppose there were girls and boys in your school?

RL: Yes.

RB: But it was the actual class work that you found rather tiresome or inhibiting or boring or—?

RL: I guess—it wasn't a great hatred for school, I think it was just that I—I think maybe it was because I would probably rather play all day than go to school. I don't think it was a great feeling against school that I had, it was just a minor dislike for school probably no different from most children. But I did sort of average work in school I think, nothing outstanding, I wasn't terribly disturbed by the work.

RB: Did you have any trouble learning to read or arithmetic or—?

RL: I don't think so, I did fairly well in most subjects.

RB: But you were never the brightest boy in class sort of thing?

RL: No.

RB: Did your parents follow with great interest your process of learning?

RL: Yes. Very much. My mother used to help me a lot with homework.

RB: Your mother rather than your father?

RL: Yes. I think I got progressively better as I got older and I did very well in college and then better in graduate school.

RB: What do you recollect of those early teachers? They were mostly women I suppose?

RL: Yes. All of them

RB: Did any of them have any personalities of sufficient distinction for you to remember them?

RL: Well, I remember them, they were all fairly horrifying.

RB: What were they like?

RL: Well, it seemed that they'd been there for ages.

RB: They were all pretty elderly.

RL: They seemed that way to me at the time.

RB: Severe, or what?

RL: I think so. Relatively severe and kind of hysterical people.

RB: You didn't like any particular one?

RL: No, I can't remember liking any of them.

RB: You were never teacher's pet, then?

RL: No. No.

RB: Was there anything that was particularly obnoxious that you remember especially?

RL: Not in a brutal way or anything, no.

RB: Well, I don't mean physically brutal, I was thinking of just such a distasteful personality that it would be unpleasant to have to be daily in their presence and that sort of thing.

RL: Yes, there were two teachers, but I want to keep them nameless who were that unpleasant.

RB: Were you conscious of their being just unfair, for instance? I suppose they exercised discipline in class, and you must frequently, like every child, have been upbraided for occasional lapses in conduct. Did you feel that they were unjust?

RL: Yes. But nothing personally, no, just that they used to scream at the whole class, not at anybody in particular. I don't know if I really thought it was that disturbing, I thought that was the way school is and I don't think it really disturbed me very much.

RB: Was this group of students racially diverse?

RL: Yes, I think they were.

RB: What sort of people were in these classes?

RL: Oh, I think it was sort of a cross-section of New York City.

RB: I don't quite know what the neighborhood would have been like then. These neighborhoods change in New York so much.

RL: Yes. I think at that time it was both Jewish and Irish.

RB: Quite a few Irish in it?

RL: It seemed to me. Yes. But there were a few Dutch, I remember. I don't know whether there was a Dutch locality, I don't think so, but I can remember one or two who I knew were Dutch for some reason or other.

RB: Any Negroes?

RL: I don't think so.

RB: I'm naturally interested to see whether your early environment would have created or allayed racial or religious prejudices. Did you have any feeling of, say, of being different from the Catholic Irish boys or girls?

RL: Not as related to school, I don't think so.

RB: Well, as people that you met. I suppose these were your associates as children?

RL: I think that at the time I associated almost always with Jewish children.

RB: Did you have some private friends that were children of friends of your parents, that sort of thing?

RL: I think they were children who lived on the block, you know, in the neighborhood and whom I'd meet.

RB: Well, some parents are of course extremely anxious to preserve their children from contact with vulgar or immoral or indecent or coarse or some other kind of children. Did your parents have to worry about that?

RL: No, I think it was the same kind of neighborhood that we lived in before.

RB: Because I know now today—well, you're a parent so you know more about this than I do, but I mean people do worry about having their children associate with—

RL: Well, we try to give ours the broadest possible contact—I mean racially, but not try to find people we dislike in order to associate with.

RB: I think the United States is so rich in racial and other linguistic varieties. Now your childhood in New York would have—there would still I would think be quite a few children around whose parents were immigrants and who might consequently have a poor background at home of knowledge of the English language, that sort of thing, I mean if your parents had been anxious that you spoke correct English, for instance, they might have felt if your best pal was somebody whose parents couldn't speak decent English—

RL: I think they would have worried about it. But I don't remember it really coming up as a problem though.

RB: The children as you remember them in school did speak proper English?

RL: I think we had a great variety of children in the class. For some reason or other the ones that were closest to me—I think they all lived within a block of me—and it just happened that that was a neighborhood—

RB: Doesn't this happen—I of course wasn't brought up in New York City but when one reads about—I apologize for bringing the phrase "juvenile delinquency" when I'm talking about your childhood—but the contemporary juvenile delinquency and all these gangs are based, I think, on blocks aren't they? I mean they are regional?

RL: They are regional, yes.

RB: They have territories and so that this has emerged out of tradition that existed more agreeably apparently in your childhood, it was a propinquity.

RL: Well, I remember being held up, as it were, on Riverside Drive, oh, maybe 5 times or so by small gangs of children—

RB: Who robbed you—?

RL: Yes.

RB: —or beat you?

RL: No, just robbed me; you know I would have a nickel or something. But even that didn't disturb me and I knew they were not brutal children it seemed to me, and I really wasn't worried about them particularly, but if you were overpowered in numbers you'd just give them the nickel or whatever you had in your pocket and that would be the end of it. But it wasn't viewed as a big problem—and at that time there were not these great gangs that they have today.

RB: I suppose there were relatively few Puerto Ricans in this neighborhood then, as compared to today?

RL: Yes. I don't think there were any.

RB: So your friends, the kids you played with, were really neighbors' children?

RL: That's right.

RB: There would have been sufficient density of course that in a block alone there would be quite a few children of your age, wouldn't there?

RL: That's right. It's amazing compared to a small town how many people live in a concentrated area. I'm sure there were a hundred children on the block.

RB: I don't know whether this might lead to a provincialism of mind in a sense, of course not for you, but for certain people because in a village of 10,000 I suppose a growing child associates with people scattered all over the community and this is really an awfully narrowing sort of experience in a way.

RL: Except that a small town often has a very similar group of people living in it. Many of them come from the same origins and have been there a number of generations possibly.

RB: They have a kind of narrowness of not welcoming outsiders.

RL: And they are likely to be just as similar to one another as people living on a single block in New York City.

RB: Yes. Or possibly more so. I was just thinking of a kind of regional narrowness based on the narrowness of geographic operation you might say.

RL: That's true, because I lived in New York until 1940 and I know very little of New York. I didn't know the Village very much and I didn't know uptown beyond about 104th Street or so. I'd been to these places but I wasn't very familiar with it at all. I knew the West Side from about well 86th Street you know maybe 90th Street down to 42nd or something. That was the area that I was familiar with.

RB: You could almost say that it was a small town childhood then in a sense.

RL: In a way.

RB: Well, actually you couldn't, I mean any child of eight or nine is not likely to be allowed by his parents to roam all over unless—particularly in a city—you have a chauffeur.

RL: We could take the bus and the subway.

RB: Do you think others were more inclined to spread around?

RL: I have some friends who really got around quite a bit to various places. I do remember later I became interested in jazz and then I would go up to the Apollo Theatre in Harlem.

RB: But by this time you were in your teens, I suppose?

RL: I was fifteen or so, yes.

RB: Well, I'm still thinking of this period when you were under twelve really.

RL: I remember I went to the Public Library and I went to the Planetarium, spent a lot of time in the Museum of Natural History.

RB: You did? On your own or did your family take you?

RL: I went on my own.

RB: I hope it wasn't as noisy in there as it is today, the reverberations of children; they come in busloads.

RL: They do come in just huge groups. No, they didn't then. The school would take us—I remember seeing things like *Nanook of the North* [1922] and those kinds of pictures they would take us to, occasionally. But the population was less at that time, and I think the schools did much less extra-curricular work then than they do now.

RB: There is, I guess, a growing tendency for organized expeditions by schools. I in my childhood had a few. I remember one year our class went to visit various businesses, like a newspaper plant, one of our schoolmates was the son of the editor. And other trips would be arranged; you didn't have that kind of thing?

RL: No.

RB: In the school system as you had it—it consisted only of class work? I mean were there organized sports for the children?

RL: They had a gym, yes. It was as a class and you'd go there at a specific hour and jump up and down. It wasn't so much games as just exercise. I think they probably didn't have floor space for anything else. I think maybe even more than one class would use the gym at the same time and we would—

RB: Well, for the average day you would go to school, say, at nine o'clock in the morning and did you have lunch at school?

RL: —Come back at 3. No, we came home for lunch.

RB: And therefore you didn't have any communal meal with the other students?

RL: No.

RB: And you also had no obligatory sport except gymnasium probably?

RL: No. I'm talking now about public school and primary and intermediate grades.

RB: Yes, that's what I'm talking about too, before you went to Franklin.

RL: That's right.

RB: Our afternoon classes ended around three, and we had playing fields surrounding the school, and we always had to something; volleyball or baseball.

RL: I think this was a question of space. There was a gymnasium and there might have been some sports there by a selected team or something, I'm not quite sure but at least—

RB: But you weren't particularly athletic or enthusiastic, I take it?

RL: No. That's right.

RB: So you would normally go home and play with other boys I suppose, at this time?

RL: That's right.

RB: Probably no girls that you bothered with at that age?

RL: No.

RB: And would you stay around on rainy days in your parent's apartment? Or their parents?

RL: That's right. We used to run up and down the back stairs I remember, up to the top of the building. And when the weather was good we played marbles right out on the street— on the pavement. Marbles were very important.

RB: Were you good at marbles?

RL: Oh, I think I was pretty good at marbles. Then I spent a lot of time on Riverside Drive and sometimes we went over to Central Park.

RB: At the present time in Central Park there are lots of school groups that seem to come and do athletics, I mean regular organized groups.

RL: We did that in high school, yes.

RB: But you just played more or less independently through most of your early youth?

RL: That's right.

RB: You mentioned going in the summers to Massachusetts to Lake Buell. Was this a regular custom every summer?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, for how long? I mean did your father stay behind or—?

RL: Yes, he came on weekends. The men would come on weekends.

RB: How would you get there?

RL: We went by car. My father had a 1923 Cadillac which could carry about fourteen people. It had those jump seats that pull out—

RB: Oh, I remember those.

RL: —and a glass partition between the chauffeur, which was my father. And we could speak through a microphone in the car which was very impressive.

RB: Had he bought this secondhand perhaps?

RL: I think so. It was quite a car, it used up gallons and gallons of gasoline I think per mile.

RB: Was he proud of it?

RL: Yes, we all liked this car very much, I think he only drove it in summer. But I think we went up there for about six years in a row, maybe from the time I was seven or maybe it was earlier than that, maybe from the time I was about five. I don't remember what happened before that.

RB: This place is near what town in Massachusetts?

RL: I'm not sure. I have a complete lack of sense of geography. I remember we were driven up and there we were.

RB: It was country though? You were in a house on the shore of a lake?

RL: On a lake, yes.

RB: With lots of grounds around it, or was there a community—?

RL: I think we were free to walk pretty much anywhere around there. We didn't own the house, we rented it.

RB: No, but some of these places have lots and houses close together more or less almost like a suburban area.

RL: No, they were separated. You couldn't see houses on either side but it was wooded enough. It's not that they were so far away, we could walk to the houses on either side easily in ten minutes or so.

RB: You had a bicycle up there, I suppose?

RL: No, I don't think I did there.

RB: Did you have one in New York?

RL: Yes. But I did a lot of roller-skating in New York, I roller-skated all over New York because there were not so many cars and the streets were paved and easy to roller-skate.

RB: Yes. I don't see too many children roller-skating.

RL: No, because of the cars now, but I remember I roller-skated everywhere. I roller-skated to school.

RB: On the sidewalk or on the street itself?

RL: In the street.

RB: That would be too dangerous today. And you could do that particularly on side streets. I suppose there was relatively little traffic, although 86th must always have had a lot of traffic.

RL: Yes, but not as much. I roller skated on all the streets on West End Avenue and Columbus Avenue and Amsterdam, except where there were cobblestones. There are still places where there are cobblestones.

RB: And you didn't take the bicycle to the country because it couldn't have been transported in the Cadillac, I suppose? Did a lot of cousins go as well? You spoke of your grandmother and your aunt with whom she lived.

RL: Yes, that's right, and my cousins.

RB: What were they—boys, girls your age or—?

RL: No, I think as a matter of fact there was one cousin, Susanne, who was the daughter of Mrs. Neubauer who is my father's sister. I think that's all the children except that other s [check tape] would come to visit.

RB: Did you do a lot of swimming in the lake? Boating?

RL: A lot of swimming and a lot of boating and fishing, and I used to be in the water all day long, either in it or on top of it. We had a little dock and a rowboat.

RB: And you were allowed to go out by yourself or with Suzanne and others?

RL: Yes. Or by myself. I could swim across the lake, I remember.

RB: Do you remember being taught to swim? Who taught you?

RL: No, I don't remember. I think my father taught me.

RB: But you learned so early and it came very naturally to you. You liked the water, I take it?

RL: Yes. I was a pretty good swimmer.

RB: Did you go to the movies a lot when you were a child?

RL: Occasionally. I went to children's films on Saturday. I remember we went when I was very young, they had special Saturday morning films.

RB: Oh, in theaters? Or in some sort of educational institutions?

RL: No, I doubt that it was educational. It was just the neighborhood theater. It was probably a series of cartoons and funny pictures, I suppose. And I went to other movies, I remember.

RB: Well, some children I think did it an immense amount, others like myself hardly ever went, my parents didn't favor doing this, for some reason or other I went very seldom.

RL: Well, I didn't go too often.

RB: When you were up at Lake Buell did you have that sort of recreation?

RL: No, there were no movies.

RB: Did you drive around the country a lot at the time?

RL: No.

RB: You just sort of all stayed there and really lived on the water—

RL: Yes.

RB: As far as the children were concerned I suppose that was the major thing?

RL: That's right.

RB: How long would you stay?

RL: At least two months, it was the summer as we figured it.

RB: Well, that must have been something you looked forward to and enjoyed very much?

RL: Yes.

RB: And that was really, other than the parks, your first association with nature, you might say?

RL: That's right.

RB: Did you have a vegetable garden or any of that sort of thing?

RL: No.

RB: So you weren't trained in the soil?

RL: My great feeling for nature comes out in my paintings, doesn't it?

RB: Well, I wouldn't say that you looked like John James Audubon particularly in your paintings, but there's a magnificent show on at the present time at the New-York Historical Society of Audubon's original watercolors which the Society bought from his widow, his bird watercolors—they bought it a hundred years ago, 1863, and they are full size and very interesting. Did you ever go in these exhibition rooms of the New-York Historical Society?

RL: Yes. Yes, I did. I have seen them.

RB: As a child?

RL: Yes.

RB: Did you ever go into the Metropolitan?

RL: I went there occasionally. Not a lot.

RB: You didn't have a strong childhood attraction toward art?

RL: No. I think I got interested in art probably because our high school didn't give it and it was an escape. And I went to—do you want to jump ahead?

RB: We'll have to go back later, but go ahead if you want to now.

RL: I took art in the summer, I think, of 1939, which was about my graduating year from high school, or maybe the year before. I studied with Reginald Marsh at the Art Students League and before that I went, I think it was to Saturday classes at Parsons or something. And I had no idea what art was about or—

RB: How did this happen that you did this? You wanted to do it?

RL: Yes.

RB: It wasn't suggested to you?

RL: No.

RB: And you felt the absence of it in the school where you went?

RL: Yes. Well, I liked to draw. At that time I was probably copying things from books and—

RB: Yes. But I think we'll talk a little later about the actual experience with Reginald Marsh and all that when we get further along in your career.

RL: Yes. All right.

RB: I'm just tempted to ask now where you lived in summers [and] whether you ever sketched trees, boats and things like that?

RL: I doubt it. No. I don't remember doing it.

RB: And you think in these childhood drawings that it was largely copying things from books.

RL: Not childhood drawings, no, I think I—

RB: Those were more out of your mind, just imagination and so on?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, there probably was a period between, say, age eight until you did take up—

RL: Well, I didn't do any.

RB: Oh, you didn't do any, yes. Well, I think we'll wait a little till we get into the actual beginning of your art career and see if we can get a little more out of your ordinary childhood. Were you a boy scout or anything like that?

RL: For a little while. For about six months or something. We went camping once I remember, I don't know where but the troop took us on a camping trip overnight or it might have been two days. I remember we had to make a fire with one match or something and cook.

RB: Did you ever go to boys' camp, summer camp?

RL: Yes, I did.

RB: What age were you when you went to that? Maybe you would have been perhaps twelve or thirteen or something?

RL: Yes. You know, I must have gone to Lake Buell much earlier than I said I went, because there wouldn't have been room for the summer camp thing to come in.

RB: Well, you concluded you may have gone as early as five or even younger.

RL: That's right.

RB: Were you quite young when you went to camp? I mean like nine or ten?

RL: No, I think I was a little older than that and I went for a few years. First I went to Camp Sagamore, then it was called Camp Belgrade and it moved up to Maine, I think the owners split and—

RB: Where was Camp Sagamore?

RL: On Sagamore Lake in New York State, I think.

RB: Tell me a little about the appearance of this Camp Sagamore. Did you live in tents?

RL: No, we lived in wooden huts. I think maybe there'd be 8 boys or so in a hut. With a counselor.

RB: Was this a Jewish camp?

RL: It was more or less, yes. I don't know if there was an attempt to keep it that way but act ally it was. It had no religious emphasis—

RB: No, I didn't mean in terms of religious services. Were most of the boys from New York City or were they from all over?

RL: Almost all from New York City, but there were boys from other areas.

RB: And what sort of program did that camp have?

RL: I think this was pretty general, the crafts, baseball and swimming, and they would have, oh, overnight camping trips and all the usual—

RB: I may be mistaken but it seems to me that summer camps are a sort of 20th Century and largely American phenomenon. The influence it exerts upon the human being I don't fully know, I only went one summer to camp in my life and I remember it quite pleasantly, but to me it was the first time away from home more or less. Was it to you?

RL: Yes. I think that was fine, it didn't bother me at all.

RB: It could have helped develop a sense of your own individuality and so on. Was this a camp that obliged you to write home every day or week—all that sort of—

RL: Oh yes. I forget exactly how often but I'd write them one sentence letters and put it in the envelope. "Everything is fine."

RB: How did you get up there? Were you taken by groups under camp auspices?

RL: Yes, by train. I remember we met in the Penn Station and went by train, the camp probably chartered a number of cars. I liked swimming and boating most, and baseball least, and crafts somewhat, tennis a little bit.

RB: What sort of crafts did you have?

RL: Woodworking I suppose—but they weren't trying to push you into any kind of craft. It was pretty much what you wanted to do. They had crafts scheduled. As I remember they had kind of alternate things, you could do at each period. I'm not sure.

RB: These boys that you met there, were they different? I mean you hadn't known these same boys before?

RL: I believe I didn't know any of them from home.

RB: Well, this sort of thing is a kind of social expansion of the child, isn't it, meeting strangers like this. Was this fun, exciting, upsetting, frightening?

RL: No, it wasn't—I think it was fun, I think everybody was pretty much in the same situation and there weren't too many people who had known each other before they got there.

RB: And you made your way amongst them pretty easily?

RL: Yes.

RB: Because you said you were so quiet earlier as a child I was wondering whether you—?

RL: Yes. I think I got less quiet and more outgoing later. I'm not terribly outgoing now, but I'm—

RB: Well, in this period of the camp for instance, you would have had to be a social being on your own without the support of family. You thought of yourself as getting on pretty well with the others?

RL: Yes. I feel that I was pretty happy there.

RB: Why do you think you changed from Sagamore to the Camp Belgrade?

RL: The owners split up, and I think I knew the owner of the one that went to the Belgrade Lakes in Maine. I knew him better than the other owner.

RB: You exercised some choice in this? Or your parents?

RL: Well, my parents, I suppose, or they might have asked me where I wanted to go. I don't remember who did, but I don't think there was too much doubt about it because the other owner we didn't really know.

RB: Did any of these counselors have any personalities that might have been said to educate you or do anything in the building up of your own—?

RL: Well, later there were a few that encouraged me in drawing and painting, which I did at Camp Belgrade.

RB: Oh, you did some up there?

RL: Yes, I remember I did some watercolors. I imagine they were awful. I mean one was of forest trees and I remember doing the lake and very romantic watercolors.

RB: Was the counselor by any chance an art teacher by profession?

RL: I think he taught, I think actually the one that I remember was teaching drama, and I think he may also have taught art but I'm not sure that they had specific art. I think it might have been done during the time that we were in arts and crafts or something like that. There was no program for art there, but they had materials for art.

RB: By the time you were at Camp Belgrade would this be overlapping with your being at the Franklin School or was this still going back to the grade school period?

RL: Probably I was 12 or 13 by that time and I went to Franklin, I was there for 5 years, the year before high school. Actually, Franklin School was some boy's school that started in kindergarten and went up.

RB: Was it a preparatory school for college?

RL: Yes. But it started in the beginning and they did 12 years in 11 or some system like that, so I was there in what would be 3 years of high school.

RB: Of course your parents had to pay to send you there, I suppose they felt you would get a better education there—

RL: That's right.

RB: —than you would have if you had gone on in the public school system?

RL: Yes.

RB: Was there any great change in the type of boy between the ones you had known in public school and those that attended this school?

RL: I think I was much more familiar with my classmates at Franklin than I was before. I can't remember specific friends that I had from my class in public school. Most of the friends were still people on the block where I lived.

RB: Well, it would seem there was not too much real occasion for your getting to know boys at the public school who lived far away because if you didn't have much of an athletic program.

RL: That's right. And we didn't eat together and we used to line up and march from one room to the other so that there was no way to get to know anyone.

RB: Yes. But surely many of the boys that lived on your block must have gone to the same school because it was all based on a regional address, wasn't it?

RL: That's right. True.

RB: So you must have walked home with neighbors.

RL: Yes.

RB: But when you went to Franklin the area covered was larger I suppose in the city?

RL: That's right.

RB: Was this a Jewish school or in any way had any particular characteristics?

RL: I believe it was mostly Jewish.

RB: You said it is gone out of existence.

RL: Yes.

RB: What happened to it? The war or—?

RL: No, I think the owners just retired. It was owned by two or three people as a corporation. I guess they didn't have anyone to continue the line or something, I'm not sure what happened. I only think it's out of business. It might still be running, I believe it isn't, though. I'm sure if it is still going, I'll hear from them.

RB: That's probably why it isn't still going, they didn't organize their alumni. You didn't quite remember whether the Belgrade and Franklin overlapped.

RL: No, I don't think they did.

RB: Belgrade came first?

RL: Yes.

RB: So you had had this encouragement there to do watercolors and drawings at camp but you found no corresponding element in your academic life in New York?

RL: That's right. As a matter of fact, I think Belgrade did overlap a little bit. I went back there as a waiter in my last year, you know, when I was too old to go as a camper, and I must have been old enough to be in high school. I was not old enough to be a counselor because they were all college students. I guess I was in high school probably the next to the last year maybe as a waiter.

RB: 17 maybe at this stage? Or 18?

RL: I was still 16 when I graduated.

RB: Oh, you graduated that young?

RL: Yes. My birthday is in October, and I became 17 at Ohio State, I remember.

RB: That is a little ahead of the average age for a person—

RL: It had to do with this 12-years-in-11 thing, and I guess I missed a year there somewhere.

RB: When you transferred though had you no problem of catching up with the students who had already been brought up through the whole Franklin system?

RL: I did. It was not something that was specific, but I felt a little bit behind them. You see they learned French from kindergarten on up.

RB: What language instruction did you have in your childhood?

RL: In my childhood? I had heard some German around, but I never learned German.

RB: You had no language instruction at all in public school?

RL: No language, that's right.

RB: What age were you when you entered Franklin?

RL: Let's see, I was there for 4 years, and I must have been 12.

RB: So then you began elementary French that year?

RL: Yes, that's right. They started with elementary French right from the beginning. The students who had been there right from the start had French, but the concentration wasn't very great.

RB: Had you any particular attitude toward languages as a boy, I mean did you want to learn them or did you hate them or—

RL: No. I was interested in languages, not greatly interested, but I enjoyed languages Latin was difficult for me, but I liked French.

RB: You did fairly well in French?

RL: Yes.

RB: Can you read French readily now, and talk?

RL: Not readily. I can read it, I can usually translate it pretty well.

RB: You never got to the point where you could read—have you ever been abroad?

RL: Just overseas.

RB: The Army?

RL: That's right.

RB: That means that you never actually lived in a French-speaking community?

RL: No, I took "French Language and Civilization" at Cité [Cité Universitaire, Paris] for a month after the war in Paris. You were supposed to know French to take the course in the first place, and I guess relative to the other GIs [nickname for American Soldiers] I knew French. I wasn't very fluent in it.

RB: You would have had at least 3 years of Franklin French, I suppose?

RL: Yes, 4.

RB: 4 years. And then you took college board?

RL: Oh, I took college board, yes, but I didn't take French in college.

RB: You finished it there. Any other foreign languages that you learned?

RL: No.

RB: And Latin was something you studied for how long?

RL: 4 years.

RB: What science did you have in your schooling?

RL: We had general science in high school. It included physics, the physical sciences, biological sciences. We had about 4 years of it.

RB: You didn't have sort of one year chemistry, and one year physics and so on?

RL: No, it didn't work that way. In fact there was really no chemistry. It was physics and the biological sciences.

RB: As a student since art wasn't involved in it—were you better at things like science or the humanities?

RL: I was pretty good at things like English grammar, and I was good at physics, and I was sort of medium in languages, and not very good at math.

RB: How do you evaluate that experience of having to learn Latin? Do you think it was a waste of your time?

RL: I did then. Now, I don't think so, I think the whole experience there was a good training because we really had to study, which was very unlike most of the high schools apparently. We really had 3 hours of homework at night, every night, and so that just [word missing/check tape] the ability to work I think, if it really does train you to work, I'm not sure, but I think so.

RB: Were the teachers of a superior caliber at Franklin?

RL: Yes, I think so.

RB: Do you remember any of them as individuals?

RL: Oh, there was a Mr. Kern who taught French, and Mr. Baronberger and Mr. Hall were the headmasters of the school. I can remember them all but I'm not sure I can remember their names.

RB: Well, it's not so much their names I'm thinking of. I'm trying to smoke out whether any of them were the kind of people who influenced you in your development and possibly people you admired or detested and who therefore you reacted against in some positive way.

RL: No, I think they were all very well-chosen teachers and they were very sensible people—

RB: All university graduates, I suppose?

RL: Yes. At least, yes. Probably had advanced degrees, which most teachers would be anyway but I think they were very superior teachers.

RB: At what stage in your life did you begin to assume you would go to college, because you said neither of your parents had been to college, and I don't know whether any of your uncles—

RL: No. I think almost no one had been to college.

RB: So it wasn't an inevitable family tradition?

RL: They were sure I was going to college right from the beginning I think.

RB: Your parents decided?

RL: Yes. They wanted me to go to college, and I wanted to be an artist, and we sort of compromised on Ohio State, which was one of the few places that would give a degree *and* art training and was out of New York, and I wanted to see some more of the country too.

RB: Until you went to college had you traveled anywhere to/other than New England?

RL: No.

RB: Did you like New England as a place?

RL: Well, the only part of New England I saw was the place we were in. We didn't travel much when we were up there.

RB: I suppose when I say that I'm thinking, do you like the kind of landscape that New England has?

RL: Oh, I do like that landscape a lot.

RB: That's what I meant. Because you wouldn't have really known New England, I suppose, as a sociological environment.

RL: No, I had very little insight into different sociological environments at that time.

RB: One thing I neglected to ask is the role of music in your childhood. Were you taught any instrument as a child?

RL: No, but I took clarinet lessons, oh, at 14 or 15.

RB: Which was your choice?

RL: Yes.

RB: You were never taught the piano?

RL: No.

RB: Was your sister taught the piano?

RL: Yes, she took lessons.

RB: Curious, isn't it? My sister was given piano lessons, I never was. Apparently, it was expected that girls should play the piano.

RL: I think the piano had to do with girls and I think a lot like my going to private school and my sister not.

RB: Oh, she didn't go to private school?

RL: No. The emphasis was on sending the boy to college—although she went to college too—but I think some of that feeling about what boys ought to do in the way of music and shouldn't do in the way of music, and what they should do in the way of college preparation was probably European in tradition.

RB: Yes. Did your parents take you to concerts at all in your childhood, Carnegie Hall children's concerts?

RL: I believe I went to a few things like that. I remember a few plays now, come to think of it, I remember I used to go to the Lewisohn Stadium—I don't know whether I was taken or not. I think I went on my own when I was a little older, probably 14 or 15. I think I might have been taken to begin with.

[END OF SESSION]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker November 20, 1963, once again in Roy Lichtenstein's studio. I just asked you at the end of the last tape a question about your cultural background.

RL: You mean the extent of culture, music and so forth?

RB: Cultural pressure and childhood environment one might put it. I think that there might be a little more of this in the homes of Jewish rather than other groups. Largely speaking, in this country there is not much cultural enthusiasm, as you know.

RL: Yes. I don't know whether there's more, I suspect there might be striving in that direction but this might be true of urban families in general, I'm not sure. I think there was striving, there was not any pressure but I think it was expected that one would see a number of plays, a number of musical events, I think, a year. There wasn't any tremendous pressure though—and not much great knowledge either, I would think.

RB: Well, being in New York City, of course, the opportunities were manifold compared to what they would be for people in smaller communities, but so great are the opportunities that you can almost ignore them all.

RL: I guess great many people do. But I think I was more interested in science at the time. It was probably more science fiction than science, although I thought it was science in the books I was interested in.

RB: Did you read quite a few science fiction books?

RL: No. I really didn't. But I read certain things about physics, and animal life, and so forth. Did I mention that I spent a lot of time in the Museum of Natural History? I think I did.

RB: You mentioned going there, yes. I don't know whether you specified the particular parts of it that appealed to you.

RL: Well, many of them, I guess. The Indians were always something but that wasn't a great interest. I think I was probably more interested in biological sciences and anthropology. I think the origins of man, that section, was probably the most interesting to me at the time. I remember there were, oh, medical displays of various kinds and then the rise of man from the ape and so forth—evolution. I can remember being greatly interested in that.

RB: Believing in it I presume?

RL: Yes. I guess I believed in it.

RB: Did it horrify you the thought of humanity being less dignified, shall we say, than the old concept of man being the center of the universe and of creation in seven days?

RL: I probably wasn't instructed in the other sufficiently to have any feeling of despair about finding out that we might have developed another way.

RB: You said you were not given much religious instruction.

RL: I went to Sunday school a little bit. I guess I must have been, let's see, 8 or so, I'm guessing at the age, about 8, I think, I went for about 6 months.

RB: Do you remember where?

RL: No.

RB: What happened? What sort of instruction?

RL: Well, it was probably—I remember stories from the Bible, they were probably children's versions.

RB: Old Testament history in a sense.

RL: Yes, that's right. There might have been more connected with it, it wasn't—I didn't learn Hebrew, I know. I think it was pretty much confined to—

RB: There must have been some stage in your early childhood when you were taught about Moses and all sorts of prophets and various tales that are part of our common heritage.

RL: Oh, yes.

RB: I don't know other than in Sunday school or in your family where you would be told the—

RL: Well, in connection with the Seder and things like that you get history, and I'm sure I've heard innumerable stories, but I don't think anyone really took Adam and Eve seriously as being the origin of man in my family. I was probably told the story but not with any conviction about its reality and—

RB: Well, if you remember, there had been recently, I think, sometime in the twenties that famous Scopes trial in Tennessee—

RL: Yes.

RB: —in which William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow were antagonists over the issue, that of course is preceded, but it shows that the climate of American thought was not entirely adapted throughout the country to evolution. But I would think your family was what you might call an enlightened, urban type of family. They wouldn't have 19th century theological views to any great extent.

RL: No. I doubt it. I really don't know how convinced they were of Darwin's ideas, but I think that they would more or less—I don't think they took Bible stories as being actual, I don't think anyone in my family did. Although

they would be interested and they would read them to me.

RB: Yes.

RL: I've certainly read them.

RB: Your own personal interest in evolution—

RL: And genetics too—I remember Mendel—I used to be interested in that. They probably still have the display of seeds and then mice and what happens in the 2nd and 3rd and 4th generation of black and white mice and that sort of thing.

RB: Did you form any personal views as to the balance of influence between environment and heredity in the development of the individual?

RL: I think so.

RB: What are those views?

RL: Well, I imagine they're just the idea of it being a combination. I mean one's personality being a combination of environment and heredity. The personality is almost completely affected by environment, I guess, but I imagine you are born with certain energy level and proclivity toward certain activity, possibly, and that your physical structure which would be, besides being formed by heredity, I imagine, would also be formed by environment, to a great degree, and through your psychological outlook too.

RB: If somebody said to you, "An artist is born, not made," what would you say in qualification to that?

RL: I would doubt it completely. I think that something like talent for the arts is not hereditary. I would guess, and I would be almost positive, that there are thousands of people who have an ability for the arts who never even thought of going into the arts.

RB: That's something that I'm sure is correct, however this is a question of utilizing latent ability. You wouldn't contend that almost every person was capable of becoming—

RL: No. No. I imagine that you would have a certain ability you were born with that would allow you to be able to pursue it, otherwise you'd have no chance.

RB: Actually, we were speaking a while ago of aptitude. You would concede that an individual has a certain aptitude greater than a certain other individual's, like for instance, I might be quicker at putting squares in square holes than you, I mean I might have more manual dexterity.

RL: You can't be sure that that's something inherited, though. To a degree, possibly, or it just may be quickness of action or keenness of sight or some physical attribute you might be born with, but I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of that is also psychological and—

RB: What I was really trying to find out was whether you had any extreme view, either a behaviorist point of view, considering almost everything was due to training and environment, or whether you concede, as a result of this interest in the biological processes, you certainly are aware of how science considers the human creature to be formed and developed.

RL: Well, I think probably I believe in a greater role of environment and psychological outlook than I do the physical capabilities. Undoubtedly, there are certain people, say, who will always run faster because they have the physical capability of doing so, but I think that—

RB: Our environment, of course, could induce an individual to cultivate his ability to run in connection with the hunt or self-defense or just merely a matter of running to catch a bus. He might not develop the faculties as much in an urban environment, so environment certainly would affect such a thing as that.

RL: That's right. No, you need a certain amount of native equipment, I think. But I think it is the kind of looking and finding the purposes that are right rather than inherited attributes in the arts. I think a lot of people could be painters. Even under those circumstances you're going to find some are going to be greater than others. But I think the ability to perform in the arts is something that is learnable too. By that I don't mean necessarily that you would come out an artist because you went to an art school, but I think if you found the right approach, that many people could be writers, musicians and painters. And the problem is to find where to set yourself for action, because I think so few people understand anything at all.

RB: Understand what?

RL: Any of the arts.

RB: I see.

RL: What to do, how to set yourself so that you can reach your subconscious or however it is that you create—or the right part of your sub-conscious or conscious.

RB: Do I understand that you imagine most people have hidden assets that they haven't the techniques or the will power to exploit?

RL: I really feel that. Even under that which are the best circumstances, as I said, you'll find some who'll be much better, but I think almost anyone could create art of fairly significant level if they knew how to do it, how to go about doing it.

RB: This is interesting, actually, in relation to the kind of painting you do which draws on the art of comic strip artist. I don't know how you'd place him in the hierarchy of arts, he's not a fine arts artist, but I've felt right along one of the strong justifications, you might say, for pop art is that in the economic life of this country more money is available for artistic talent used for commercial ends, and agreeing with you that many people have artistic latent abilities, I think a great many people must be drawn into doing things to earn a living which are quite remote from fine arts but in which they use artistic potentialities and make what on a certain level are works of art. Cartoons could be this, advertising art, the design of a refrigerator, all these things could be related.

RL: But they really haven't anything I would call art connected with it. I mean they are really using a craft ability almost entirely and artistic sense only slightly. There's composition connected with comic strips, but in a very superficial way. They are made visible and apparent which is part of it, but that is not a very deep level of—

RB: No, it may not be, but I've seen, for instance, articles made by American women, say, of the 19th century in their homes, bedspreads and things like that, and some of these designs I think are quite beautiful. Whether they were copying them from a book, I'm not sure, but if they did partially work out these designs they were anonymous private individuals using what I consider artistic talent in their work.

RL: Yes, they are really quite beautiful and I imagine they did copy the designs from patterns, but in spite of that—

RB: *They* exercised the kind of choice you do, however, in choosing a pattern, I suppose from several opportunities.

RL: Well, not only that, I think it's the actual placement which you know we spoke about. It's that slight variation that you put in, and probably in their case completely subconscious, because they probably imagined it was completely arranged for them in the book and they didn't realize that they were really placing, in spite of the fact that they were adjusting only slightly parts of it in the more interesting ones.

RB: To return to that aspect of the question of heredity versus environment, I'm—part of your childhood environment reminded me of this—I'm reminded of your telling me how your father was so humorous. Of course, this was some of your childhood environment, and your work involves humor. I don't know whether to imagine that you inherited a sense of humor from your father or because it was in your environment. This leaves the question open, doesn't it?

RL: Well, I'm almost positive that humor isn't inherited, that it is, you know, part of—

RB: Well, aren't there families that have a sort of common personality trait or traits throughout several generations, and some are rather stuffy and lacking in humor as a set of people, don't you think so?

RL: But I would guess that was still environmental.

RB: So on the whole you feel that environment is the more potent influence in molding the individual?

RL: In his personality, I think, yes. But it is hard to say which is more potent because you're created with this physical, including the brain, equipment, and there certainly is a tremendous mold, so it isn't all environment, certainly.

RB: In most cases our activities are influenced strongly by our environment or our resources, and our activities, if carried out, I suppose, over many years, tend to influence the development of our personalities, but they don't provide the whole key to our personality.

RL: True.

RB: One question I don't think I asked you, it seems an obvious one, what comic books and things did you read in your childhood? What newspapers did your family have? Did the New York newspapers that you took have comic strips?

RL: Yes, they did. I don't think I read them very much though, as a matter of fact. And I didn't read any comic books that I know of. We got the *New York Sun* and the *New York World-Telegram*, it seems to me. My father brought home one, and my grandfather brought home the other, and there were comics in them.

RB: But they weren't something that you followed regularly?

RL: I think I followed them regularly, yes. I remember—

RB: Do you remember what one? Of course, you mentioned your memory is not too good. I seem to recall certain comics, comic strips that I have read almost all my life occasionally, if not now—

RL: Well, I guess there was a long time when I didn't read any. In fact up to the time that I started painting comic strips, I didn't read them except for following them in the newspaper as a child, but—

RB: Well, that's what I'm thinking of primarily now when you were 8, 9, 10, 14, this sort of age.

RL: Yes, I did follow some comic strips—*Dick Tracy*, I suppose, and let's see, and they had one back there that was *Buck Rogers*, oh, *Alley Oop* I remember very much.

RB: I suppose you remember the incident when there was an earlier newspaper strike, when Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia read the comics over the radio to the children.

RL: Yes.

RB: That implies that the children are so devoted to these that a single day's break upsets them very much. You don't remember this passionate addiction to—

RL: No. But I remember LaGuardia reading the comic strips.

RB: You do? You heard him?

RL: I think I heard him—I didn't really, I wouldn't have tuned in to hear the comic strips, I don't remember what age I was when he was reading the comic strips—

RB: This must have been in the 40s. I'm not sure.

RL: But I think I may not even have been in New York at the time and I doubt that I would have tuned in to hear it. Now it seems like a very good idea to me, but at the time I probably would have thought its only comic strips.

RB: Well, it seems clear then that they didn't exercise an unusual amount of influence.

RL: No, I think I wasn't interested very much in them at all.

RB: Did I ask you what magazines as a child you might have read, any children's magazines or any particular thing you subscribed to or any that the family did— that you followed from issue to issue with enthusiasm?

RL: They used to get the *National Geographic*. That's the only one I really remember now.

RB: You regularly read that.

RL: Yes.

RB: Are you a reader of periodical literature now?

RL: Well, I get the art publications.

RB: But you don't read the general fiction or reviews on articles?

RL: No. The only things I read, besides some books, are the art magazines and the *Sunday Times*.

RB: What art magazines do you read?

RL: The ones that exist, like *Art News*, *Arts*, *Art in America*, *Art International*, *Metro*.

RB: Now why do you read these?

RL: Because I'm in them, I think. No—

RB: That's probably it. I read them largely because I want to read about the artists that I'm interested in and collect, but I think a great deal of them are rather unreadable, and I'm not sure that I would read them at all if I weren't so personally involved in the art scene.

RL: I think so, too, because the ideas are rather repetitious for one thing, and they have to write a certain amount of material to put out the same size magazine every month so a lot of it isn't very interesting.

RB: If you haven't seen the exhibits or know the work of the artist about whom the article is written it seems unlikely to be interesting to me.

RL: No. You have no idea what the work is like, for one thing.

RB: When did you start reading these art magazines? How far back in your life do you think?

RL: Well, I think I've always gotten them, I would ret say always but I would say after the war.

RB: After college?

RL: Yes. So that I probably started about 1949 or something like that, quite a bit after college, to look at them. But I don't seriously read them from cover to cover, I just go through and see who I know is in usually or certain things I'm particularly interested in.

RB: Yes. Well, they're for you, shall we say, like a trade magazine in a sense, they're the organs of your trade?

RL: Yes.

RB: Now I suppose we might travel out to Ohio State with you. You mention that it was chosen because of its location being away from home and because it had an art school that you could study in. Did you make this decision on the advice of relatives, friends or—?

RL: And through school. It was a college prep school and they expected you really to go to Harvard, Yale or Princeton but none of them gave art at that time I think. Maybe Yale did, I'm not positive. That was in 1940.

RB: I suspect the tradition of the Yale Art School was completely Beaux-Arts at that time, rather academic and perhaps it was not appealing

RL: Well, I doubt also that my grades would have been that good.

RB: Well, now, you gave me somehow an impression that you on the whole were a pretty good student.

RL: No, I was average.

RB: With no outstanding excellence in any one subject?

RL: Not really, no. I got through everything but that was about it. RB: You had to take College Board entrance examinations, didn't you?

RL: Yes. I took some, I think.

RB: Otherwise you'd have had—unless this university had a different kind of standard. But Ohio State is a state —?

RL: It's a state college, and I think its intention is to take everyone that graduates from high school from Ohio. Of course, they can't do that so that it does limit the enrollment, but that was the intention.

RB: It could be that you had a privileged position in being a New Yorker, that they were anxious at that time, this being before the war—

RL: It was not difficult to get into college at that time

RB: I'm thinking that they would like, perhaps, to have a wider regional spread. You would have had to pay. And perhaps Ohio students didn't?

RL: That's right. Maybe a minimum fee for Ohio students but I don't think so, but there's definitely an out-of-

state fee.

RB: So you had really a fairly easy task of being admitted, is that it?

RL: Yes.

RB: I was just wondering if you remember more about how you came to choose this—what were the alternatives?

RL: In general, I don't remember what the alternatives were now. But there were several colleges that I applied to, and I think a few that I got into, and I decided to go to Ohio State.

RB: You didn't visit the campuses of any of these?

RL: No, I didn't .

RB: You didn't have friends at Ohio State at the time?

RL: You're right. Not at the time, no.

RB: You were the only one from your class that went?

RL: Yes.

RB: Were you lonely, shall we say, or shy upon arrival?

RL: Well, no, the fraternities tried to rush us and so forth so there were plenty of people I knew way before I got there. They would come and try, you know, to get you into a fraternity and that sort of business.

RB: You mean even in New York—?

RL: Oh, well, Ohio State has an enormous number of New Yorkers. Because New York City is sending an enormous number of people to college, for one thing, so that they do spread all over the United States.

RB: Yes, sure.

RL: But this is fairly convenient in that easily in a day you can get home, so that it's not that faro

RB: Ohio State is situated where?

RL: In Columbus, Ohio. About 600 miles from here. The train does it overnight.

RB: I'm a little surprised about this fraternity rushing prior to your reaching the campus. I always thought that the student got there, was there for a week or so at least before—and was looked over and also had the opportunity to see the buildings and equipment they had.

RL: Well, we weren't expected to *choose* a fraternity or anything before we got to the college. But fraternities were at least an enormous part of Ohio State.

RB: Do you mean that some old grad or member of the fraternity would come and meet you in New York—

RL: That's right.

RB: —and say, "Here we have a wonderful alert, bright, nice young man named Roy Lichtenstein who is coming to Ohio and I suggest you try and grab him for the fraternity." Is this the way it worked?

RL: Yes.

RB: I see. Well, what was the result? I mean how well did you make out? What fraternity did you get into?

RL: I hate to talk about fraternity life.

RB: Well, I think it's part of American culture and since I went to Yale and they do have fraternities, or did, but not very all-inclusive, and we didn't live in them, I know very little about the system firsthand. I would like to know more from you.

RL: I thought we could avoid this whole thing, but I guess not.

RB: Why do you say that? I mean do you look down upon it?

RL: No. At the time it was very convenient because you would meet people and you lived at the fraternity house and all of your worries about loneliness and so forth were allayed and it was kind of convenient, but there is something kind of ridiculous about fraternity life I think now.

RB: Well, you're speaking as a mature adult today, but you went there at the age of what—19? 18?

RL: 16.

RB: 16! Oh yes. That's right.

RL: I was 16 when I got there, 17 in October.

RB: I'm still not sure—when you arrived where did you live? Were you eventually to live in a fraternity house?

RL: Yes. As a matter of fact, I lived there immediately.

RB: But then you must have been already committed to a particular—?

RL: Well, I guess there was a friend of the family who, a remote friend, who knew me and who was a member of Phi Sigma Delta which was the fraternity I belonged to, and that's where I stayed and that's the one I eventually joined.

RB: Suppose either you had detested this fraternity once you got there, or they found you an obnoxious brat and wouldn't have you, how long would you have been able to stay there after you arrived? Would you then have left, say, for another fraternity that you liked better or been thrown out of this or something?

RL: Yes. I would have left for another one or gotten a room somewhere.

RB: I see. A lot of students don't belong to fraternities?

RL: Yes, that's true.

RB: Why—I see—it's supposed to be—of course it gives one a social world of one's own, and I suppose you pay for certain privileges. Did you eat in the fraternity house?

RL: Yes.

RB: And the student who doesn't make a fraternity has to eat in drugstores and things?

RL: I think there are cafeterias connected with the school and there are a lot of eating places of course. I think now it would have been kind of fun not to belong to it. It would have been a more individualist act not to have eaten in the fraternity and lived there and so forth.

RB: Still, if you were only 17, it seems to me you probably were better off having some sort of environment to be part of whether it was a good environment

RL: Well, I was better off but whether to be sheltered is good or not good—

RB: Well, how sheltered was it? It might have been just the reverse, you might have been surrounded by corruption, vice, evil, temptations, etcetera, etcetera.

RL: Oh, no, no. No more than I would have been out of the fraternity, I think.

RB: Did you have several in a room or one roommate apiece or—?

RL: 2 in a room.

RB: Did you stay with the same roommate, or was this all shifted around?

RL: I think we were shifted around a number of times.

RB: What special characteristics did this fraternity have as distinct from others in Ohio State?

RL: Probably none, I think. They were not for specific things. I know that, say, at Princeton there are different kinds of fraternities in certain ways, I think, I don't know, it's hard to describe why, but I think there are some that worry more about your family than others, and so forth.

RB: Yes. In some of the Ivy League colleges I've always had the impression, I think it was true at Yale too, that this is a sort of social prestige. But this was not so much the case in your—?

RL: It's to a slight extent the case. But in a state university the emphasis isn't quite that important because you're not likely to find—

RB: There's not such diversity of wealth, I mean—

RL: No. There probably would be very few old families.

RB: But in Ohio State as a New Yorker were you considered, or did you find yourself, somewhat different from some of the Ohio boys?

RL: Well, I found that I was more inept socially.

RB: More inept?

RL: Yes. More inept socially.

RB: You should have been more slick.

RL: Well, yes, in certain ways maybe. But the big emphasis in Ohio high schools at the time seemed to be dances, you see, and I went to a boys' school. I don't mean that I was inept socially in that I didn't know what to do socially, but they seemed to have spent their entire teenage career at dances.

RB: And you didn't have school dances at Franklin?

RL: No.

RB: Did I ask you if you went to dancing school?

RL: Yes, I did.

RB: In New York?

RL: Yes. For about a year. It was a frightening experience.

RB: I'm surprised you went for only one year. I was subjected to it for quite a few.

RL: I think it was one year as I remember, it might have been two. I must have been 14, or 15.

RB: Were the other boys and girls in this dancing class of similar background, families from the West Side and —?

RL: Yes.

RB: Was it afternoon or evening?

RL: It was evening I believe.

RB: At certain dancing schools people start much younger, you know, when they're only 9 or 10—

RL: Yes.

RB: And I—

RL: Yes?

RB: And I just am wondering if you came into this and stayed with some of the others who had been there earlier and already knew how to do basic dances that you didn't know about.

RL: No, I think we all started together.

RB: So you had the common fundamentals?

RL: Right. Huge girls and little boys.

RB: So you knew how to dance anyway when you got out there—

RL: That's right. But I didn't swing the way they did. They don't dance the way you do in dancing school. Ours was rather traditional dancing and with the amenities and so forth connected with it. They sort of—

RB: Had this generation of Ohio students got this practice in high school of going steady with a girl and all this sort of dating system?

RL: Yes. And automobiles and all sorts of things that New Yorkers can't indulge in.

RB: I wasn't sure whether that was a postwar business of going steady so much.

RL: I think that is postwar pretty much, but it was almost the same kind of thing.

RB: So you felt that you had to get adjusted naturally to a kind of—?

RL: And I was rather young at the same time.

RB: Yes. Well, you would have been at 17.

RL: See, if the girls are 18 it doesn't work out too well.

RB: No. It puts you at considerable disadvantage. And you weren't exceptionally tall and big?

RL: No.

RB: You probably looked fairly young for your age, did you?

RL: I think so. I didn't do too well I'll say.

RB: You mean the girls snubbed you?

RL: Not entirely, no. No. I think that—well, I was shy—I don't think it was so much that they were snubbing me but that I was very shy.

RB: And your classes were naturally mixed?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, if you belonged to a fraternity didn't you have all your meals at the fraternity?

RL: Most of them, yes.

RB: And the girls, of course, wouldn't be eating there?

RL: Oh they were invited, not constantly, but there were certain days.

RB: That would be a special guest sort of arrangement.

RL: I always had a date for whatever was going on, I wasn't in any difficult trouble but I just felt quite a little bit out of the swing of things, but not too far.

RB: What studies did you have in your freshman year?

RL: Oh, let's see. Well, we had English composition and then we had English literature.

RB: What did you read in English Literature?

RL: I'm not sure.

RB: You don't remember at all?

RL: It was a mixture. I think it was—there was some Shakespeare I remember but I'm not quite sure what else there was. Now, let's see because that was, of course, before the war and I can't remember a book I read yesterday so—

RB: You mean you don't remember the titles or the contents of the book, or neither?

RL: The title.

RB: Well, you give the impression of not being a great reader and never have been, so I presume that you're

not deeply versed in Shakespearean literature, say.

RL: That's true.

RB: How did you do in English composition?

RL: I did very well. I'd much rather write than read. I mean I like to perform in any of the arts more than to be a spectator.

RB: That's probably very interesting, significant possibly.

RL: Maybe.

RB: No. It seems to me it would be somewhat significant, the creative personality presumably overflows in a desire to do or present things.

RL: I do, though, I really have a feeling that, you know, not that I never read but that it's a little bit wasting time. I have the feeling that it's a luxury I can't afford.

RB: This could also be, of course, in reverse. A scholar or a literary person could feel looking at paintings was—

RL: A waste of time.

RB: —a trivial waste of time.

RL: No. I didn't say that. I know that it doesn't make much sense but that's the feeling I have, you know, that—

RB: I can understand it but I mean it's interesting to know you do have a slightly, shall we say, look down upon devoting time to certain other art. You felt, I would gather, less disturbed over wasting time, shall we say, on listening to jazz than you would have felt on wasting time reading Shakespeare?

RL: Yes. I don't think—oh, it's very hard to say that I felt it was a waste of time to read, I usually read while I'm eating here, for instance, or something but I don't read beyond that point because I feel I'd better go paint. I don't as a concept feel it's a waste of time to read at all. But I find myself getting interested to do something when I'm reading and it may be because read in the same place that I work, I don't know that that's really the reason but it may be that way. And I might go out to listen to jazz somewhere. Although I don't spend a lot of time listening to jazz either I must say. It's just something I do.

RB: No. I was just attempting to discover whether if you had two hours to devote to a measure of fun you would feel that you'd rather, and that it was also more useful or more fascinating to you to listen to jazz, say, than to sit down and read a remarkably brilliant piece of literature that you found entrancing?

RL: Well, for one thing it takes your complete attention to read a book, where as if you turn the radio on and paint, it doesn't interfere at all with your work, and most of the things I listen to I just listen to on the radio and it doesn't interfere in the least with my work so that I can be doing both things.

RB: If you were going this afternoon to Boston by train you'd have several hours, I think, in which you couldn't actually be painting, would you be likely to take a book or a magazine?

RL: Yes. A book.

RB: That's not too common, you know, you see all these people sitting on trains at most reading newspapers or magazines, not a book.

RL: No. I try to read kind of valuable books because I feel I haven't read much and there's no point in reading something silly if I have so many things I haven't read.

RB: Yes. To go back to your freshman year of studies, what else besides English and composition?

RL: Well, we took art, of course. And beginning drawing.

RB: What else though in addition to art—did you have a science? Or mathematics?

RL: I think I had completed my science and mathematics before I went—no, wait a minute now—I took physics. I did take physics.

RB:: I'm not sure whether you were entering a special school of Fine Arts at Ohio State or whether the freshman

RL: Yes, it's the School of Fine Arts but the freshman year still entails liberal arts courses.

RB: Yes. Any foreign language requirements?

RL: No. I had enough language at high school to—

RB: And you didn't take throughout your entire Ohio—no language at all?

RL: No.

RB: So principally from then on you were working on art?

RL: Art and—oh, you had to take other courses. I took one course in Economics. I did very badly in. It was either freshman or sophomore year.

RB: And you didn't follow that by later courses, I presume because you did badly in it?

RL: No. That was not my area, I found out.

RB: Did you have government?

RL: No.

RB: History? No history at all?

RL: I had no history other than art history.

RB: What history had you had at Franklin?

RL: I had history from the Stone Age to the present. I don't remember how it was divided but it was.

RB: Did it focus on Western European civilization? Or did it encompass and create a bridge between East and West?

RL: No, it was Western except for the Middle East on the way up from the Egyptians, you know.

RB: Well, your situation is somewhat like mine educationally—South America, Africa—

RL: No, they didn't exist.

RB: —China, all those places more or less didn't exist except at certain points where they briefly came in. If I were a Chinese sage I would find you a totally ignorant man in respect to the thought and perhaps the art and the history of China and Japan.

RL: Yes. I took, let's see, I guess I took Eastern Art history later in college. We had art history, of course, too at the freshman level. In fact, quite extensive art history. We had a two-year art history program that we attended for an hour every day for two years.

RB: Who were the lecturers?

RL: There was Dr. Fanning who was the lecturer in art history. He had been, I think, an architect at one time or his training I think might have been in architecture as well as art history. He was a very exacting person.

RB: By "exacting" you mean he examined you very closely in tests on facts, dates, that sort of thing?

RL: Yes, facts and dates, it was very specific. He was anyway.

RB: What do you think of art history as a discipline for an artist? Do you think it's a bad or good thing?

RL: I think it's good, I think—

RB: It depends perhaps on the way it's taught.

RL: Yes. But I don't know, I don't think it makes too much difference how it was taught in that it won't influence the artist. I mean it will have some influence but I doubt that you could predict where the influence would come.

RB: I've talked to some people that were given art historical training and they've given me the impression, perhaps it's the personal character of the individual, but the training, the emphasis was so much on ability to identify—

RL: Yes. That's what this was.

RB: That if I put in front of you a photograph of a painting you will be able to say, this is Velasquez, this is Monet, and so on.

RL: That's entirely what this was and you remembered that if the slide had a crack in it, therefore it was Chartres, you know, or something—

RB: But this left very little room in the case of the individual I'm thinking of for the development of individual judgment whether the Monet was a good painting or whether the Chartres cathedral—

RL: I think this was supposed to come through your studio work, you know. There was very little discussion as to the merits of the work, it was only pretty much when it was done and who did it and how large or whatever it was.

RB: I have a kind of uneasy feeling this might be very deadening to the aesthetic impulse.

RL: It made me pursue art history I know, but I think that you realize it's a kind of boring course, it doesn't deaden your artistic spirit otherwise.

RB: Slides were used, I suppose? Double slides two at a time?

RL: Occasionally two at a time, which is pretty much the practice now I know, it makes some comparison.

RB: Yes.

RL: This was very specific—method of doing it, name, dates. Almost no aesthetic discussion.

RB: Starting with—?

RL: Oh, it started in the cave, I think.

RB: Swept on through Greek and Roman—?

RL: Yes. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine.

RB: What resources does the art gallery in Columbus have? Is there one in connection with the University?

RL: Yes, and there's one in the city.

RB: Was it used by the students?

RL: I don't think so, no. No, I don't think it had—almost everything was slides. I doubt that we even visited it, and, of course, there was a great emphasis on architecture which of course you have to have slides for. It was all done in the classroom.

RB: I'm somewhat depressed to hear this account.

RL: Yes. It is depressing. Particularly with my marvelous memory. But I got through it pretty well.

RB: Let us assume that you had extremely good judgment but there was apparently very little opportunity to exercise the aesthetic judgment, it was just your memory that would be the emphasis here in this kind of course.

RL: As a matter of fact I remember now that, it was Frank Roos who gave the introductory course which I actually took my freshman year and now when I come to think of it, this two-year course in art history started the sophomore year, sophomore-junior. But there was an art appreciation course except that Mr. Roos was still pretty much names, dates and places in his handbook of art, little postage-stamp-size reproductions—

RB: Reproductions, like the Metropolitan Museum miniatures sort of thing?

RL: Yes. It had that look to it. And so we had to learn the chronology of different periods and who did it and so forth, but there was more discussion on the merits of the painting. I'm not sure this really helps—to be told why a painting is good. Even that is pretty superficial.

RB: I think it is although once I was really astonished and fascinated to hear a talk in the Uffizi in Florence by a staff member and she analyzed only a few paintings for this special group that I happened to be with and she did it in a way that I thought was remarkably interesting and on the basis of aesthetics, it was a very intelligent analysis in aesthetic terms of the painting. Now this one hears very seldom, I think.

RL: Yes. Well, there are some brilliant art historians I think that probably teach very interesting classes. Of course, if you're taking studio art and devoting most of your time to painting, just seeing the work of the past and having an idea of historical position and iconography and so forth as really a separate kind of course isn't interesting, except that being forced through it you do learn something. And you have to connect it up yourself with the meaning of the work itself by something you have to bring to it.

RB: I myself as a Yale undergraduate was majoring in English literature. I declined to take the course on art appreciation because I considered this, not exactly sheer waste of time, but a sort of gut course, a rather unserious sort of thing to a person who's interested in learning.

RL: Yes. That's right.

RB: So I had the same kind of snobbery toward art, you see, at this stage that you had perhaps toward literature.

RL: Oh, I—no, I don't feel that way, I think you're misinterpreting a little bit when I say "waste of time," it's not—

RB: I used an exaggerated phrase but I think, I mean—well, one only has a certain amount of time to devote to things and you do allocate usually according to your tastes and judgment—

RL: Well, you even probably feel that way about all studio art, you know to do it if you're not thinking of being an artist, it's a course that's an easy credit, you know.

RB: No, I'm not referring, I'm thinking of a course basically for art appreciation, nothing to do with being an artist, of course, but the same sort of thing I imagine, slides and art history and—

RL: Yes, it's a pretty simple course, you know, but it's one of the requirements for art majors, or was at that time. It was supposed to survey art before you take the studio course which would start you off so slowly that you would be taking all these studio works while you were still dealing with Egyptian art and they wanted some quicker survey so that people definitely would have a general idea of art during their studio work. That makes some sense because most of them had no art background and no contact with art at all and they hadn't even seen museums to any great extent.

RB: These were your fellow students focusing on art?

RL: Yes.

RB: You were surprised to discover their ignorance?

RL: I wasn't particularly enlightened in art myself but I was amazed at their ignorance in certain subjects.

RB: As a New Yorker you'd at least been in the Metropolitan and seen some great paintings.

RL: Yes. Many of them were never in a museum.

RB: Although Ohio is full of great cities and distinguished museums.

RL: It seemed at that time, I'm sure it's different now, but the whole high school level was appalling. I know when I taught at Ohio State and got papers from them, you know, you couldn't have gotten through freshman year in my high school with the papers that they handed me in sophomore year in college. This wasn't true of all of them, of course. It was more apparent on that level because almost everyone should be able to write fairly fluently by the time he gets to college, and they couldn't at that time. Now I'm sure they're much more selective and also that the high school system has probably been souped up since then.

RB: Let's see, what year were you a freshman at Ohio State?

RL: In 1940.

RB: When World War II had already begun but the United States was still at peace technically.

RL: That's right.

RB: Perhaps you'd start describing the studio work which was after all your major endeavor as an undergraduate, wasn't it? Had they very good facilities for instruction?

RL: They had ordinary facilities, and I'm not sure that would make too much difference anyway. We were in an old, kind of Romanesque building. I think it's still there but there's a modern building being built around it in wings and I think it will eventually disappear as a building when the modern building is completed. But the classes at that time were not particularly crowded, and you don't need much in the way of facilities except an easel and a pad and a piece of charcoal so that—

RB: Well, how were the classes conducted, I mean had you a model frequently, or every day?

RL: Yes, we usually had a model and sometimes still lifes or groups of students from the class would pose, you know, just take turns, maybe three people from the class would pose together. It was pretty good and this Mr. Sherman—Hoyt L. Sherman—was at that time a sort of guiding spirit in the school.

RB: This is the man that really influenced you quite a bit?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, tell me a little more about him. How old a man was he in 1940 or '41? Perhaps you didn't meet him until you were a sophomore or—?

RL: That's right, I didn't meet him immediately, but he must at that time have been fortyish, I guess.

RB: And his own background was that of an artist or a philosopher or art historian?

RL: He was a graduate engineer actually. But he—and he might even have taught as a kind of graduate assistant in the Engineering department of Ohio State, I'm not sure, and got shifted over shortly to the art department. And he was a painter although he's devoted much more time to writing about his theory than—

RB: What kind of painter would he be?

RL: He did landscape painting in a kind of romantic Fauvist way, I think, and they were well put together paintings and I think he understood—

RB: How profound was his general culture in the aesthetic field—had he first hand experience at great art?

RL: Yes, he had travelled a lot and he was very familiar with history and I think his explanation of art or the art process I think is as clear a one as any I have ever read.

RB: Did he present this largely through lectures?

RL: Through lectures and through—he taught studio classes and in teaching aesthetics he was to go from a concept that made sense to the actual what do you do when you have the piece of charcoal in your hand, a very clear transition. Most art writing is on a very ethereal level conceptually and books on how to draw are absolutely deadly. His interest was in the nature of unified perception and what this means to art, and what kind of unity is involved in unified perception whether it's applied to art—

RB: Unified perception and "ground directed" are somewhat connected, are they not? We somewhat discussed that "ground directed" phrase earlier.

RL: That's right. This is his phrase too, I mean it's not that he made it up but he uses it.

RB: "Unified conception" is easier for me to take in as an idea in terms of words, than that other phrase "ground directed."

RL: That's true, yes. But he tried purposely to employ the language of psychological optics because he felt it communicated—actually I have the feeling it doesn't communicate in that people involved in psychological optics are not particularly interested in art necessarily, and people who are interested in art are definitely not interested in the vocabulary of psychological optics, so that it really doesn't seem to communicate unless you happen to be interested in both.

RB: He was the person that actually came around and criticized your individual sketches and things?

RL: Yes. I had other teachers first, and I didn't understand him at the time I had him, I had him for several years. I had the feeling he knew just what he was saying and if I could only find out what he was talking about I knew it would be important but he—despite the fact that he's very clear, you can't understand him until you're able to

do it and see it; you don't know what the words mean and—

RB: Of course, this might be marvelous in a teacher, providing it does create in the pupil the desire eventually to find out. I think if one feels that one grasped everything immediately and totally with no mystery behind it perhaps the educational process withers. It may be that if there is that lingering uncertainty as to whether you grasped the whole message—

RL: Yes, but I felt sure that I hadn't grasped it but that he was saying something.

RB: Was this true of other students? Did you students used to discuss his views frequently among yourselves?

RL: Yes.

RB: Were they baffled by it too?

RL: Yes.

RB: But most of the consensus was that he knew all what he was talking about?

RL: I don't know if that was the consensus or not then but there were a number of people who felt that he knew what he was talking about. I think most people dismissed him as some kind of a nut.

RB: How did he stand with the other faculty people?

RL: At that time he had great respect and he was both feared and loved.

RB: What kind of personality has he?

RL: He had—he spoke very glibly, which made people suspicious of him. And he was very outgoing and—

RB: Sounded superficial?

RL: He sounded superficial to some people, and he wanted, I think, to influence people maybe more than they wanted to be influenced I felt, I mean other staff members. I mean, he felt he was right, which I feel too.

RB: You feel he had a power drive?

RL: Yes, he did have a power drive. I think he also wanted to be head of the department very badly and he was sort of the logical person both to be it and to want it, because he had by far the most strength, but—

RB: He had enemies.

RL: Yes. He also had enemies in high places, and other places—

RB: What happened?

RL: He never did become head of the department. He's still there.

RB: But in a secondary role?

RL: Well, I don't really know. He's a full professor, I mean he's not in a secondary role in that sense, but I have the feeling that the school now has become very large, and I think everything has been compromised. I mean that compromises have been made and everybody is teaching the middle ground, I would guess, I don't really know.

RB: At the time you were an undergraduate, how large a group was studying practically as you were in studio?

RL: I remember there were 700 enrollments and that meant of course that one person might be taking several classes. So I would guess there were maybe 300 students in the arts but that would include art education and art history and the studio courses.

RB: A fairly big group, though.

RL: It was large.

RB: I suppose Ohio State is a very large university.

RL: It is, and it has a very large art department. There must have been 35 instructors at the time I was there,

and I think there are almost 60 now. It's a huge department.

RB: It seems staggering to me. Think of all these artists being produced all over the country in such abundance. It's frightening. Did any of the fellow members of your fraternity also go in for art?

RL: There was a friend of mine who went into art and I think he was maybe the only other one in the fraternity who was in art. He became a cartoonist. But he had always wanted to be a cartoonist.

RB: What's his name?

RL: Al Katz. He isn't a cartoonist now but he became one after he graduated. It almost sounds like Al Capp who is the cartoonist.

RB: Yes. Afamous cartoonist indeed.

RL: Yes. He did some cartoons which came out in the *New York Times* and so forth, but he is in some other - I think he may be on the selling end of art now—

RB: I only asked that question because I was wondering if in your sphere in the college you were in with a group of like-minded people, or whether you were somewhat—

RL: No.

RB: —separate and they were all engineers or future lawyers or—

RL: That's right.

RB: How did that work out? Was that broadening for you or would that make you feel a little isolated?

RL: I don't think either one. I didn't feel isolated because they were all taking different things from one another—there were a lot of people taking accounting, and there were a few pre-med people.

RB: A cross-section.

RL: Yes, a cross-section, and I wasn't any more of an oddball than anyone else. It wasn't that the fraternity was devoted to any particular direction.

RB: Did your friends though largely come to be those in the art studio field or more the ones in your fraternity?

RL: Well, after the war, you see I went to the army in 1943 so I was there about two years.

RB: Only two years at first? I see.

RL: And then when I got back I went back to visit the fraternity once, and that was it. And then—I think it was my second year—we got an apartment and didn't live in the fraternity at all anyway.

RB: You were married by this time?

RL: No, no, I mean a group of fellows. So the kind of intense fraternity activity was just my freshman year and part of my sophomore year, and from then on I drifted away from it anyway.

RB: You're sort of ashamed of it, so let me go into it more—

RL: I'm not ashamed of it, it's just because it's so undramatic, I think that's all it is, I'm not actually ashamed of it at all. I think what disturbed me about it is that it is sheltering and I feel that I shouldn't seek sheltering situations.

RB: To what extent was it sheltering precisely?

RL: In that things were taken care of for you, you knew where you were going to sleep, and you knew you were going to eat and social events and all this were almost automatically provided.

RB: Did you have any aspirations to, or were you obliged to, participate in the management of the fraternity?

RL: No. I could have been if I were interested. Anyone who was interested could try—

RB: You weren't on house committees?

RL: —but I wasn't interested.

RB: No. Of course if you had been interested that would have—I mean to have to supervise the cooks or something wouldn't have been sheltering, would it?

RL: No. That's true. But I guess I wasn't interested in that kind of responsibility anyway. There is more a feeling that I should have been, but at that time I don't think I would have been interested in managing the fraternity.

RB: No. It doesn't sound like what an artist normally would be interested in. I was wondering though, you seem so worried about it being sheltering—of course I haven't got further on in your life—wasn't the army also in its way a rather sheltering experience?

RL: Yes.

RB: Do you think you would have benefitted as a human being or an artist if you—

RL: Yes, I have the feeling. I think I've been in so many sheltering situations.

RB: Well, I see what you mean. Probably like me you'd really rather be comfortable than not, but sort of feel a certain guilt at being comfortable.

RL: I'm sure it's something like that.

RB: But I don't quite see, as long as one is a undergraduate in a university in America that there is a very great scope of choice.

RL: No. I didn't feel worried about it at the time at all I'm sure.

RB: And then you have to go to these classes and things which provides a routine. I don't quite see why that would have been particularly sheltering. I suppose this atmosphere was kind of juvenile in feeling, wasn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: Did you have a lot of bull sessions and serious talk, or is this kind of thing—?

RL: I guess we did, yes. We had discussions in the fraternity and then the art students would be a sort of separate area.

RB: How did it affect you when the United States found itself at war suddenly on December 7, 1941. You were a sophomore then, were you?

RL: Yes.

RB: Probably frightened I should have thought at that age.

RL: I really don't remember being the least bit frightened or I don't think I knew what it meant, you know. It was funny. I knew we were at war, but nothing really seemed to happen.

RB: The atmosphere was strangely unreal perhaps.

RL: Yes. I guess I didn't know quite how to deal with it all.

RB: My own education happened to have had a considerable emphasis on international affairs and war was always just around the corner all through my years, and I find it difficult to believe, since you were nearer the explosive point than I was, that it wasn't omnipresent to you, but perhaps it was my bent and interest in international affairs, as distinct from art.

RL: Of course, the Midwest has this feeling, has an isolated feeling that nothing is going to ever touch us anyway.

RB: The debate on isolationism was raging through those years—well, your freshman year there was still a very strong isolationist sentiment certainly.

RL: Yes, that's right.

RB: This was not something you discussed much, or felt, you don't remember—?

RL: Yes, I was aware of this, and I was probably more aware of the world because of being a New Yorker than most of the people out there. But we were living in an environment that didn't change in any perceptible way at Pearl Harbor, you know, and we still—I don't mean I didn't feel anything but it was resolved rather quickly. The next day we went back to class and did more drawing and it didn't seem to make any difference in the routine.

RB: Since your art contains scenes of exploding airplanes and guns firing and all this sort of thing it is to a certain extent a war art, isn't it? Of a kind of fictionalized way?

RL: Yes. Of course, it's also done in this dispassionate style—

RB: Yes. But it is—it makes it interesting to realize, if you're remembering accurately, that you were so apart from a tremendous traumatic experience the civilized world was engaged in at that time in your life. And this didn't affect you at all?

RL: Yes, well, it eventually affected me in that I went into the army and it affected me initially. But it seemed that I was immediately taken up with the routine and nothing changed very much. There was a slow change, and then I was drafted and then I was very much aware of where indeed I was.

RB: Let's see, you would have been—

RL: In '43—I forget when I registered.

RB: You had to register through Ohio or through New York?

RL: Through New York.

RB: And you were called up I suppose according to a chance allotment and age and everything.

RL: That's right.

RB: But you were the most vulnerable age being of course unmarried and sort of war age. And you weren't called up?

RL: Well, you see I was still young.

RB: You were too young at 17?

RL: I think you have to be 18. And so it wasn't until I was 18 that I—

RB: Yes, but immediately you knew that your college career wasn't going to run a sort of normal course.

RL: No. That's right. I was just waiting to be inducted.

RB: Did this in any way affect the social life of the college, or the intellectual?

RL: It didn't seem to me it had any effect. There might have been more aware areas like political science or something other than the arts. But it seemed to me that life went on pretty much the same and so we'd just be drafted after a while and a number of fraternity brothers started to leave.

RB: To go back to before you went into the army, I suppose you came back home several times to New York?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, did you come home for Christmas and Easter and that sort of thing?

RL: That's right.

RB: During the summer between your freshman and sophomore year, where were you?

RL: I believe I spent the summer in New York City. I think I just was here.

RB: At home. You were not in a position of having to work, I take it?

RL: No.

RB: I think at that time anyway it was perhaps less common to have summer jobs than it has since been in recent years for people of that age.

RL: A number of people were counselors and that sort of thing.

RB: Yes, but the undergraduate today—it seems to me they all get jobs now not necessarily from economic need.

RL: No, it's just done.

RB: But I think then jobs were fewer to get.

RL: Yes.

RB: So that it wasn't encouraged so much. Until the war boom, economically there might not have been—

RL: Available jobs.

RB: —quite such available jobs. Nevertheless, by that summer, was the United States at war?

RL: We were at war in my first summer.

RB: Well, actually the economy must have been very active at this time.

RL: Yes. But I think the idea of getting a job hadn't occurred to me.

RB: What did you do?

RL: I don't remember what I did.

RB: You were no longer bicycling around?

RL: It could have been that that was the summer I might have been a waiter at camp. I really don't remember what I did that summer. It might have been that I did that. I'm not positive. I was under the impression that was earlier though.

RB: But not much art then? I mean you didn't have a studio?

RL: No. I undoubtedly drew but I don't remember where.

RB: In that early work you did at Ohio State in the studio was there any particular individual tendency marked, or was everybody sort of assigned and doing the same sort of thing?

RL: No, they were fairly enlightened and they—you would get the same problem on drawing the model but there was no emphasis on, oh, anatomy actually as such. Even they were still more interested in your response to it, individual response and unified one and so forth rather than learning anatomy or drawing in any particular style. And I don't think I had any unique style any more than anyone else had.

RB: Yes. Well, you probably didn't but I am wondering whether you had a bent toward modern art as then being, of course, Braque, Picasso and Miró and that group, or whether you were more traditionally-minded and would have been more likely to picture your future work as academic painting than distorted grotesqueries in the Picasso style?

RL: No, I think it was—as I remember it—the work was rather Expressionist.

RB: More like German Expressionist?

RL: Yes.

RB: I'm wondering at this stage how familiar you and your fellow students were with what was then modern art, I mean how much of an influence did Picasso have—?

RL: Well, I knew of Picasso, you know, of course. He was beginning to become an influence but as yet—

RB: But how much had you seen of his work, though?

RL: Well, I'd seen, I think *Guernica* [1937] was exhibited out there at that time. I remember seeing it.

RB: Out there!

RL: I believe so. In a museum close by.

RB: I don't know its history. It was created in Paris, wasn't it, in connection with the civil war?

RL: It was for some World's Fair thing or—

RB: In Paris, I think, yes. It was created to help the Spanish Republic—

RL: In Paris, yes. That's right.

RB: In defense against France, but by 1940 the Spanish civil war had ended in the defeat of the Republic so there was no particular motive to send it around as a propaganda statement.

RL: No, I think the Museum of Modern Art probably—

RB: Already had it?

RL: It's possible. It might not have been my freshman year, I'm not too sure. But I think probably the blue period of Picasso had its greatest influence at that time. It was probably also attached to social realism more than they appear to be now attached to social realism in the minds of the people today.

RB: You don't remember though whether you had any sort of pro or con attitude toward modern art? I seem to remember that I was extremely skeptical—

RL: Yes. That's right.

RB: And had a sort of distaste for modern art for years till I knew it better, and I wondered if this was your attitude.

RL: Well, the general—regionalism seemed to be the pervading style in the Midwest, but I was still under the influence of Sherman and he was very interested in Picasso and—

RB: He was responsive to the School of Paris painters?

RL: Yes.

RB: Not, let's see, who was it—John Steuart Curry and Thomas Hart Benton, you mean the people like that who were getting the publicity in the United States at that time?

RL: Yes. And there were innumerable Midwestern local painters, and art didn't seem to be centered in New York at the time at all, at least in the eyes of Westerners. I think it's actually true that even New York was full of Midwestern art, and regional art.

RB: Yes. Grant Wood and people like that were probably big names then on the scene.

RL: Yes. I have a catalogue I was looking at just the other day; it was 1950 at the Metropolitan and it was an appalling group of artists that they assembled.

RB: I think I saw that big show, yes, of contemporary art; they've never had one since I think.

RL: They made every error one can possibly make in choice, I think.

RB: That was, however, 1950.

RL: That's 1950 and that was even ten years later.

RB: See, I wasn't involved very much at all with art in any form in the period we're speaking of, so I can't bring to bear too much personal recollection.

RL: Cezanne was probably the biggest influence at that time, Cezanne and Van Gogh.

RB: On your schoolmates and yourself?

RL: Yes. And we didn't like the regionalism or any of that at all. Nobody ever got into shows from our place you know, with this influence. Everyone else seemed to be getting all the prizes, but we knew we were right, you know.

RB: Ohio shows you mean?

RL: Yes. At the same time we were—well, I guess this would be a little later—the awareness of Kline and de Kooning we were too late on that.

RB: Well, yes, but that's much later.

RL: Yes. Just after the war.

RB: Because Kline's work in black and white really didn't start till '46 or '48 or so. I would guess then that modern art to you at the time you were a freshman, sophomore was really Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cezanne?

RL: Yes.

RB: With a sort of skeptical interest in the sort of unestablished Picasso and Braque generation?

RL: That's right. I mean I felt there must have been something to it if Sherman was for it. That was my feeling, I think at the time, and I knew that—it was very obvious to me that there was some underlying, difficult-to-grasp principle about art. That if two things can be very much alike to me and one can be of great value, the other be aesthetically valueless, that there must be some very subtle thing that has to do with painting. And I was very much interested in finding out what the underlying principle is—and I am in most things, I want to know—it isn't a group of compromises, of doing all the best things. I know this isn't what makes an art and that you need some way of tapping your resources so that you can fluently come out with—Shakespeare and other writers and other artists must have some way of reaching a process out of which will almost constantly flow the things of a high level. It isn't just because they're, they, you know, I mean that's part of it too but—

RB: How is it though that nobody ever seems to be able to find out how they do it despite these tens of thousands of professors and instructors who analyze and lecture upon their achievements?

RL: I'm sure that this isn't easy. And even the people who do it can't explain it, you see this is another thing. Cezanne probably couldn't explain how he did it, or James Joyce or anyone couldn't say how they go about doing it.

RB: Would you say that in these two years we're speaking of at Ohio you had a reasonably good aptitude in drawing in the sense that, quite apart from high art, fine art, but I mean the capacity, say, to reproduce?

RL: No, I don't think so.

RB: Were you better or inferior or equal to the average in the class?

RL: I was probably a little above average in that quality but I wasn't worried about that.

RB: You never felt the precise reproduction of an object was your aim at the time?

RL: No. They also didn't emphasize that very much. I think it was the summer of '39 that I took a course with Reginald Marsh at the Art Students League. I don't think we said much about that, did we?

RB: Oh no! We should talk about that.

RL: Well, there isn't really too much to it.

RB: This was, though, your first possible contact with a painter of some stature and recognition?

RL: Yes. I think when I first went there to apply I was fairly unaware of his stature and position. I seemed to be an available course and there was someone else—oh, Marager was the other possibility.

RB: Who?

RL: Marager. He had a—he was visually interested in a medium or the techniques of Van Eyck or something.

RB: How do you spell that name? I don't quite place him.

RL: I'm not sure how you would spell it. So I chose Marsh. I had known of his work but—

RB: This was a summer course in which you worked mornings or afternoons at the League?

RL: I worked mornings, I believe.

RB: The usual sort of about three hours or something?

RL: That's right.

RB: And he came in to criticize perhaps once or twice a week, is that how it worked?

RL: Yes. That's right. So you'd see him very seldom as he breezes through the room and makes some comment.

RB: When you began with Reginald Marsh at the League had any of your time been spent practicing in oil painting or drawing from the model? You didn't have this in school?

RL: No. I had taken Saturday classes a year or so before that—I think it was at Parsons.

RB: Oh, you didn't tell me about that.

RL: No. I'm beginning to remember these things.

RB: You were trying to supplement what Franklin offered at that time? So you went to Parsons? It was then on 57th Street.

RL: That's absolutely no way to art and I just went to learn how to draw, you know. We drew still lifes and we used watercolor or some opaque watercolor

RB: You must have been only about 14 or 15?

RL: Yes.

RB: Very young. Was this a children's class or adults?

RL: I think it was an adult class. And we drew from still life, flower arrangements and—

RB: Have you any recollection who taught that? At Parsons?

RL: No. It wasn't anybody that was well-known.

RB: This would have been on East 57th Street?

RL: I believe so.

RB: Or at least they were before their present quarters. And Parsons, of course, is primarily a school for interior decorators and designers wasn't it?

RL: It seems that it is now. I think they gave this one course in just plain still life painting or something at that time.

RB: Tell me more though about your experience with Reginald Marsh. He died fairly young so in 1939 he was a fairly young man. I don't know how far his reputation had advanced at that stage.

RL: Fairly far, I think. See he was already in this book by Thomas Craven, you know. I don't know ever when it was published but it was fairly early, so he must have been pretty well-known at that time.

RB: If I'm not mistaken Thomas Craven was an opponent of modern art.

RL: Yes. Yes.

RB: In favor of regional art.

RL: And I think it was his book that someone gave me for Christmas. I still own the book and it was about the first art book I ever had and I don't know how much I agreed or disagreed with it. I knew they had Picasso's *Woman Before the Mirror* [*Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932] reproduced in it, but he said very berating things about it, I remember.

RB: The mere fact that you remember getting the book, though, is significant since your memory of books isn't very strong. Well, it shows a sort of latent interest naturally that you had in art.

RL: Reginald Marsh would come around, as you say, about twice a week and there was a fellow there who would pose the model.

RB: The monitor.

RL: Generally, the monitor would take care of the class. And I think I was more influenced by what other students who had been with Marsh longer, the kind of work they were doing, and they kind of explained the meaning of Marsh, and there was a kind of a revival of the Ashcan School of the 30s movement and so forth to me. And Marsh would come in and he would actually draw on your painting a little bit and put in more muscles

or something or other. And his Renaissance method of underpainting and glazing and so forth I did learn somewhat. I have feelings about him—I don't feel he's too great. There's a certain brassiness about it along with the Renaissance. The Renaissance is a kind of weakening effect I think, but there's also a kind of brassy quality that is very commercial in a way. It isn't like commercial art, but it has the feeling of the commercial aspect of his work.

RB: Yes.

RL: And I don't think it was an influence on me, although it's a possible source of pop art but—

RB: Well, you certainly use different color arrangements than he does.

RL: Yes.

RB: I was rather disappointed in the effect in terms of color of the Retrospective I remember of Reginald Marsh at the Whitney Museum. He didn't use color very effectively.

RL: No. I think that he was too involved in this Renaissance method of painting it seemed to me; he let it inhibit him and it doesn't really look like Renaissance painting either. But I think he got so involved with the idea of underpainting and glazing that he didn't let it really—he has a very strange color quality where parts of it seem absolutely colorless and then he has these strokes of kind of gold or white, which I think are intended to pick it up, but it doesn't really raise the tonality of the whole painting the way it ought to.

RB: There is a quality of vigor of course—an exaggeration of vulgarity.

RL: Yes.

RB: Doubtlessly characteristic of Reginald Marsh's work. Your fellow students must have been much older than you. Possibly some of them were in their fifties even?

RL: Yes.

RB: Do you remember that any were quite good?

RL: Some of them had worked with Marsh for quite a long time, and they thought they were good, and I thought they were good. I don't know how they would seem to me now.

RB: So far in your fellow student group either at the Art Students League in New York or subsequently in Ohio, were you associated with any fellow student who today is somebody you know of as a creative artist?

RL: No. As an amazing matter of fact, I haven't. Except that student of mine—I don't want to take credit for it—Tom Doyle, the sculptor was a student of mine at Ohio State.

RB: Oh yes. But your own fellow students when you were a student? None of them are celebrities—at the moment?

RL: No, that's right.

RB: I just didn't want to overlook your being at the next easel to some world famous figure and missing—in a way it seems curious that you didn't go back to the Art Students League in the summer after you were a freshman at Ohio State. You had already done this with Marsh.

RL: I don't really remember what I did that summer. It's very strange.

RB: It'll probably come back to you, but you're quite sure you only did one season at the Art Students League?

RL: Yes. Almost sure.

RB: How satisfied were you with that experience at the time?

RL: I think—I've seen some of the paintings after the war that I did then. I had them in a closet, and they looked very bad, but at the time I was kind of happy with it, it was every day and there was a lot of art and it was the first contact with it and I felt that I was learning a lot.

RB: You haven't been at the Art Students League since as a student?

RL: No. There seemed to be very little of the thing I really was searching for, which was kind of the basic process of art or some way to direct yourself. It still seemed to be painting pictures with really no idea why a thing

should be one place and not another. Or any kind of real interaction with the painting or get into—it was sort of between my image of the model and my image of the painting rather than between me and the painting. The major effect and effort was to get the painting to look like the model, you see.

RB: Yes.

RL: Through whatever eye I happened to be seeing the whole situation.

RB: Yes. I'm wondering what else might be significant before you entered the army.

RL: I don't know, I had a number of teachers at Ohio State in art—Mr. Gatrell—he was influenced by Sherman, and Robert King who is still out there, and so is Mr. Gatrell, who was a very good teacher; but also influenced by Sherman. These are all people that I had before I had Sherman. And Mr. Grimes, who I think is now head of Denison art department—James Grimes.

RB: I gather you might have had more than one teacher simultaneously?

RL: That's right.

RB: This is in the practice of art as well as art history?

RL: You almost always take two studio courses along with art history.

RB: To what extent were you given practice in sculpture, say?

RL: Yes, I had Mr. Fry in sculpture who was a rather academic sculptor. We worked a lot in plasticene and made sort of statue-like sculpture in a way. It wasn't quite that rigid but—

RB: At the time did you feel you were likely to become a painter and not a sculptor?

RL: Yes.

RB: You never aspired to be a sculptor?

RL: No, not a sculptor as such, but in my first show at Carleback I had quite a few assemblage things. Little sculptures I made out of hammers and rasps and tools actually.

RB: What year was this?

RL: '51.

RB: '51. Well, that's way ahead of where we are at the time.

RL: Yes. But I had an interest in sculpture, although I thought of myself as a painter.

RB: Yes. You were taught to make the maquette—no, what is the—?

RL: There's an armature inside—

RB: Armature! is the work I'm trying to think of. And all the traditional techniques?

RL: Yes. And casting and so forth, mostly in plaster.

RB: How much emphasis was there in the painting part on basic techniques from the conservator's point of view? You already mentioned learning something about glazing and so on from Reginald Marsh. I was wondering how much in this various instruction you had was related to craft.

RL: They didn't have a course in that as such which some schools have. They taught it along with painting but very casually. There was very little emphasis on preserving the painting. You know that you paint thick on thin or, you know, slower drying materials over quick drying material so it won't crack, but they didn't care much if it cracked or not and I don't either.

RB: Well, students' work—well, I hope you do today when you create.

RL: Well, now it's pretty simple, it's just one layer of paint pretty much. And I'm using plastic medium anyway so it's not likely to crack.

RB: Did you paint on—did you stretch your own canvases at that stage or did you buy sort of canvas board

things or—?

RL: I think we painted on paper or chip board which is cheap cardboard that is flat, not corrugated. It's a brown cardboard that is very inexpensive and we usually painted with some kind of—as a matter of fact we used to get big cans of soybean base paint like a water base house paint, it came in colors, before we took oil painting we usually—we would stretch canvas then.

RB: I'm rather hopping around, but did you have a motor car while you were an under-graduate?

RL: No. I couldn't drive.

RB: Was it allowed?

RL: I think so. Yes.

RB: You mentioned Ohio boys sort of taking girls out in cars. I was wondering, sometimes some colleges' freshmen aren't allowed them and others I don't—

RL: No. I think we were allowed cars.

RB: But you didn't know how to drive?

RL: That's right. I had then no desire for a car anyway.

RB: No. When did you learn to drive? No. When did you learn to drive once you were in the army?

RL: I drove in the army.

RB: Not until you were in the army?

RL: That's right. You see, because you can't drive in New York until you're 18 and I was already in college. I felt that I would never be allowed to have a car anyway, I mean I didn't want my father to buy a car for me. Something like that was going a bit far, and cars were just out of the picture completely for me.

RB: In those undergraduate days, your first two years at Ohio, did you just stay in the fraternity over the weekends?

RL: Yes.

RB: Or was it the custom to go places like Cleveland or somewhere for weekends.

RL: Oh, I went home with some of the fellows once in a while but not very often.

RB: As a guest you mean of Ohio people? I was trying to discover whether the whole place fell apart on weekends.

RL: Not on weekends. No it was only on the longer holidays that it fell apart.

RB: Yes. Well, then you came home of course. Do you think you stepped up your visits possibly to the Metropolitan and the Frick or things like that during as a result of your advancing art education?

RL: Yes, definitely.

RB: So probably you would go to them during these vacations?

RL: That's right. And in summer too.

RB: Did you ever attend lectures?

RL: Not very often, no.

RB: Just went and looked yourself.

[END OF SESSION.]

RB: We're resuming now on December 6, 1963. Since our last meeting I find in the studio of Mr. Lichtenstein five paintings more or less brought to completion whereas on my first coming here there were about six or seven canvases on easels all with just the outlines of future paintings. So you have really done quite a bit of work in

the last few weeks despite all the interviews and so on that you've been bravely having, haven't you?

RL: Yes.

RB: You must have painted these actually in the last week or two weeks?

RL: Yes, that's right. A lot of time is taken up with the drawing part and there's more work in the drawing part probably than is apparent, but the painting part of it doesn't take so long in time.

RB: No, I can see that because you apply the paint flatly. How many coats do you have to put on of one flat area usually?

RL: Well, it depends pretty much on the color. To cover the blue or something usually takes two, but sometimes the red only takes one. But there's a lot of changing in them which is not apparent and which I—well, I try to make it look as though it were done at once and had no changes in it, but sometimes there's considerable change goes on. But I use Magnicolor for large areas and that's always soluble in turpentine so you can take it right off to the bare canvas if you have to.

RB: The pictures that I can see from here, have they titles? There's a very small one which I think you spoke of a moment ago. It has the wording, "What, why do you ask that? Why do you know about my image duplicator?" [*Image Duplicator*, 1963] Do you want to describe that small painting?

RL: Well, there's just eyes looking out at the lower part of the canvas, and the upper part is the lettering that you described in a balloon.

RB: Very rarely I take it do you alter the text from the original cartoon which is your source of inspiration. In this case you did.

RL: In this case I did because the idea of my working with an image duplicator as a kind of mad scientist rather than a painter is sort of amusing.

RB: So you substituted the words "Image Duplicator" for whatever was in the original cartoon?

RL: Yes.

RB: And this is a kind of sly reference, isn't it to sort of attacks upon you as a duplicator of other people's work?

RL: That's right, yes.

RB: Then the next painting is a slice of bread with butter on it on a plate with a red surrounding area [*Mustard on White*, 1963].

RL: That's on Plexiglas, it's the first one that I've done. It's done on the reverse side of Plexiglas to look more like a commercial sign possibly than the other paintings do.

RB: It shines, of course, from the side.

RL: Yes.

RB: It has the effect of glass or enamel or—

RL: Yes, and it reflects the observer too and things in the room which I like too. I like to get them so glossy that they reflect objects around the room the way some signs do.

RB: Well, why do you want that?

RL: It gives it a hard appearance, clear and kind of easy to clean, and all the practical things that signs, say, in diners would have, so that somebody could go along and clean them all very easily.

RB: You mean if I owned this painting I could just take a damp sponge every two weeks and go over the whole surface like a mirror.

RL: Well, I don't care whether you clean it or not but I think—

RB: Well, I mean is that possible?

RL: It would be possible to do it with this painting, but I'm really trying—

RB: The paint wouldn't be damaged?

RL: No. That's true. Sure, there's a solution that you can clean Plexiglas with that would clean it and make it anti-static electricity so that it doesn't pick up dust too. But that's not really the idea—of keeping it clean. It's more to simulate a commercial sign.

RB: Yes. I'm not at the moment entirely convinced that I like the glossy surface.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE 1]

RB: You do find it satisfactory?

RL: Yes. I like it because it's a very difficult-to-look-at surface but it seems, I don't know, it has this hardness and vulgarity which I think—

RB: It has the hardness all right, but as I was remarking to you a moment ago, it seems to me to intensify the hotness of the color in a sense. Perhaps you want that. Perhaps you like the vulgar effect.

RL: Yes.

RB: There is, of course, this yellow of the butter, and the surrounding outside area being red these are two colors that you use frequently in paintings.

RL: Yes.

RB: Of course it seems to me their values in relation to each other have been slightly altered by this Plexiglas background.

RL: They do come out more intense and I think they come out darker.

RB: Yes. The red is darker I think.

RL: I'll have to work with this more to see if I don't have to change the actual paint I use so that the value doesn't come out too intense or—of course, part of that's the drawing rather than just the intensity of the color itself or the quantity of color.

RB: Would you explain again—you were just telling me what you thought you'd do in the future use of Plexiglas, that painting actually on the paper that adheres to it when you first get it, I couldn't quite grasp the benefit of this but—

RL: Because it's so difficult, since I'm working on the reverse side, I have to do the painting backwards starting with what I usually end with, which is the surrounding lines, and I think it might be a good idea if I painted the whole picture on the paper which is on the surface of the Plexiglas when you get it, and then more or less mechanically transfer that completed painting back to the Plexiglas because it's so difficult to make changes on the Plexiglas itself without—and still keep the clear, manufactured appearance of the image.

RB: In other words, you could readjust the widths say, or the curve of a line better on the paper and then having got it exactly as you want it, would cut it out.

RL: That's right. That's right.

RB: So that you would be in a state of final perfection when you actually apply paint to the bare glass surface?

RL: That's right. The painting would be all done. This way you can't adjust the lines without taking all the paint off since the lines are the first things on and they're covered with the paint that comes later, which is the opposite of the way they're done on a painting.

RB: Well now, in this very large painting [*Thinking of Him*, 1963] which I think is particularly handsome, and is by far the biggest there—five feet high or six feet high?

RL: No, 68 by 68 inches, it's about 6 by 6.

RB: Yes. There's the face of a young girl looking up and beholding a handsome young man in a sort of cloud, and still attached to the canvas at the right is the small cartoon showing the basic elements of this picture with many small changes. The principal change I notice is that in the original segment of cartoon the head was much bigger and you put a piece of paper off so that one only gets a corner or the front half of the side view of the woman's head. Is that correct?

RL: Yes. I wanted to focus attention more on the man and make a larger face. If it had had her whole head included it would, I think, weaken the idea.

RB: I see. So it's to make him relatively larger in proportion?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, of course, he is much smaller even so than she because—has this picture a title in your mind yet?

RL: It's either—it might be called "Brad" because that's my—

RB: Oh, that's your character in all your—

RL: It might be called that. I hadn't thought of it too much before, but she's thinking about Brad and—

RB: You've never called one yet just plain "Brad"?

RL: No, I haven't.

RB: But anyway, in painting this, which is on canvas, you have altered the thickness of some of the lines considerably from the drawing in the cartoon, and I gather that you changed the width at various times in the course of this?

RL: Yes.

RB: The line of the nose of the girl.

RL: Yes.

RB: So this is the thing in relation to the painting on Plexiglas that you were earlier speaking of.

RL: Yes. That's right.

RB: On the canvas you were able fairly easily to change this width?

RL: Yes. I can saturate color by putting thicker lines in or get rid of color by putting more black or I have control of the color and the saturation as well as the compositional strength of the thing. I have a lot of control over the whole painting by the use of black line and using it either thicker or thinner, but they get constantly readjusted and quite a bit of time spent on the part of it.

RB: Well, now, in connection with this particular painting, you mentioned a moment ago that the drawing sometimes took longer than the actual application of paint. How long do you think you spent working on that drawing?

RL: Well, I think I worked—I've been working on all of these for about a month.

RB: This whole batch?

RL: The whole batch.

RB: Which you work on alternately more or less?

RL: Yes. Probably about half the time is spent on drawing and half the time on painting but, you know, it depends pretty much on what painting and in some cases the drawing goes very quickly and the painting takes longer, you know.

RB: I think I noticed that you had put in, is it the upper right-hand corner completely above Brad's head, was that entirely invention of yours? We're a little too far away from the cartoon and the painting to see this directly, but a few minutes ago I was looking at this and I was studying with great interest the differences between the original cartoonist's segment and this painting, and there are several areas in which Mr. Lichtenstein has invented, added, and there are others in which he has fairly faithfully followed the original design, however, altering small degrees of things like the width of the line and so on, but I think it's that upper right—

RL: The clouded area surrounding the man?

RB: Yes.

RL: That's probably almost entirely invented as well as her hair.

RB: That's right, this gold and black element coming out in the lower left-hand corner which is her hair, that isn't there on the—?

RL: No, that's completely different. There is almost always some sections of the thing—clothing, hair, clouds, and so forth, which will look realistic in almost any shape you put them, and in those areas I can be completely inventive and without losing the degree of realism that the painting has. And they're a large help in composing the painting. Not that the other isn't altered but it's not altered in the complete way that these more amorphous elements are altered.

RB: You did most of that I presume at the stage in which you were drawing on the blank canvas with pencil?

RL: Some of it. Actually the hair got completely changed afterwards.

RB: In the probable process of painting you changed it, is that it?

RL: Yes. Well, it was quite different from the original in the drawing stage but then it got completely different again during the painting.

RB: Do you recall what induced you to make those changes?

RL: Oh, it's just that it was a question of the color not being saturated enough for the painting or it wasn't occupying enough area of the canvas. It looked inadequate somehow the way it was.

RB: To what extent are the colors the same as the original? I can't see from here. For instance, the background between the cloud containing Brad and the girl's profile is yellow. Now is that—?

RL: Well, in the original that area, it's completely the cloud in which she envisions this man she's remembering. There's no yellow, and the little clouds occupy that whole space so that there's a light blue half-tone screen over part of it in the original but there's no yellow at that point at all. In fact the hair isn't yellow in the original cartoon either, it's brown, but so that part of the color is completely changed. There's no yellow in the original picture. It's mostly yellow in this one.

RB: Yes. And are the Ben Day dots in the original at all?

RL: Yes, there's more of it in the original - the little blue dots in that cloud area. There are red dots in the faces of both characters.

RB: But you've used in two of these paintings a new, to me, I'm not sure, perhaps it isn't new in your work, a different shaped dot for the lips of the girl in this painting, for instance.

RL: It's the same shape. The screen has been moved over one space and there are two round dots but it forms a different design, it looks like little white strange shapes in between those dots but it's the same screen just shifted.

RB: I see. But have you done this before these two pictures?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well now, beyond that large painting of Brad in the girl's mind is a painting based on Picasso [*Woman with Flowered Hat*, 1921]. Do you want to say something about that one?

RL: Yes. Let me look at the name of that. Well, that's the *Woman with the Flowered Hat* by Picasso in 1940. And Morton Neuman who owns the original sent me a reproduction of his original painting because he saw some Picassos that I had done. And there are some changes in this from the Picasso, obviously complete changes all over, but the more obvious ones: I've changed the face color to the pink dots and the hair color to yellow, since all my girls have yellow hair, almost all of them do. And I was curious to see what it would look like with a more pseudo-realistic color, sort of correcting Picasso as though he had made an error in making the face blue. And one of the purposes of it is to make what looks like an insensitive reproduction of the Picasso, and changing the color of face and hair to ones that would be more conventional would be part of that insensitivity, and there is a general change of shape in the whole position of the head.

RB: I can't help but ask—you use the word "insensitivity" and yet you really can't mean that actually—

RL: No, I don't.

RB: —because I'm sure you've done it with great sensitivity to give an impression of—

RL: Well, I think there's something more brash, something more insistent and demanding about it. I remember when I first looked at Picassos it looked very insensitive—Picassos—to me. Now they look like art and they look very sensitive but I think that, you know, if you compare Picasso with some of the work that went before Picasso, the first, say, the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* [1907] or *Guernica* [1937] or something, it looks like shorthand and it looks very crude. After a while you see the subtlety in it and you realize it's a sensitive work but it has sensitivity because of its apparent crudeness.

RB: Of course, in Picasso's original it's apparent that the paint application is very different and there's a kind of crudity in that which your flatly-painted version in a way eliminates. Your—

RL: It takes on another kind of—

RB: —painting is a very different looking painting certainly.

RL: Yes, yes. Because now we're used to the crudenesses and now the crudeness looks sensitive to us, I think.

RB: So in a way this is a play upon changed values, you might say?

RL: Yes, because now neatness looks like insensitivity, or this kind of neatness, not when we see it in a Miró or an Arp. It doesn't look crude there—but it does when we think of it as—

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 2]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker talking on December 6, 1963 with Roy Lichtenstein.

We were in the middle of discussing a painting which you had done based on Picasso painting. You were interrupted in a sentence.

RL: Yes. Well, we were talking about why I was making it look insensitive, I think.

RB: Yes.

RL: How insensitivity, the appearance of insensitivity, I think adds a kind of vitality to it. Obviously it can't really be insensitive and be art; it's possible that it's going to wind up historically to be just plain insensitive but I think —

RB: But I don't understand your choice of this word: "insensitive." Is this one you've used before in your own mind or in conversation? One that has been suggested to you by critics, or other people, or one you're suddenly using today for the first time?

RL: No. I think I've used it myself. It's sensitivity that makes a difference, I think, aesthetically has to do with one being attuned to the position you're working on as related to the other positions in the painting and the size, position, brightness, and so forth. But the way I'm using insensitivity in this case is in terms of what one expects in relationship to where one is, where one is instructed in just terms of preceding art.

In other words, we now equate sensitivity perhaps with paint quality and modulation of color and so forth, so that when you're confronted with something that looks neat and pat, it looks insensitive, whereas at another age something with a great deal of paint quality such as abstract expressionism might look insensitive. I think maybe when you first look at a Pollock it's meaningless and therefore insensitive.

RB: Well, do I gather from what you're saying that you are confronting a problem which must be present in your kind of work, the problem of possibly doing something slick, and you don't want to do something that is merely slick and, in other words, you really want a kind of powerful crudity.

RL: Yes.

RB: And most art has in its initial stages, unless it becomes sort of second generation art in which people are following a lead—there is a crudity, and you're actually taking the word "insensitive" to yourself, accepting it and desiring it, in the same mood in which somebody painting in 1948, an early Abstract Expressionist School of New York painting would have been proud that it had vigor and crudity and strength. Is that—?

RL: These are still crude, obviously, in terms of realism compared with Ingres, David or Rubens, certainly to draw an eye as a couple of black lines is crude but we don't tend to think of that as being crude right at this moment compared with Abstract Expressionism, let's say, which would have another kind of crudeness. But I think also there's humor in the insensitivity too which I enjoy.

RB: Yes. I think this is very important in understanding your art. But I don't know how well I'm grasping it. Obviously, to my point of view, when you alter so carefully the width of a line as you did in the *Brad [I Know How You Must Feel, Brad...]*, 1963 painting we were discussing a moment ago, you are showing artistic sensitivity to the requirements of your canvas, heightening the effectiveness of it by subtle modulations. That's what I would have to call sensitive.

RL: Yes.

RB: And not by any means insensitive, so when you use this word "insensitive" you obviously have a very specialized feeling about it.

RL: Yes. But you see in the Picasso for someone to draw it neatly and make the face pink which is an obvious idea, this is the kind of insensitivity I want which is humorous insensitivity; I don't really want to be insensitive to the painting as a work of art. But I don't—I prefer probably that the art didn't show immediately, you know, and that—

RB: You've done several paintings based on Picasso.

RL: Yes, this is the fourth.

RB: And they very clearly come out of Picasso and yet they're so totally different that nobody for a moment would dream of their being, at least I think, nobody would dream of their actually being Picassos.

RL: No, I think they look entirely different, but there was a funny incident when I had the show at Illeana Sonnabend in Paris, and the catalogue came out. There was one of my—the Picasso one was reproduced there and some other gallery who was not sympathetic to my show at all said, you know, "And they had the nerve to show a Picasso along with that junk."

RB: Really?

RL: They must have thought that reproduction was really a Picasso.

RB: I don't see how they could have.

RL: I don't either, but I don't think that shows.

RB: But part of your art is so transforming Picasso that he's yours instead of himself and yet remaining himself and in this painting here, although you've made quite a few "insensitive" modulations, you have kept the basic structure in most ways, but at the bottom of the painting, for instance, on this lower left-hand corner, I remember there's quite a change in the width of that area between the edges of the painting and the beginning of the body.

RL: Yes. Well, since I do transform them in part you get into a bind sometimes and, you know, you can't make the painting work by merely putting black lines around and just transforming them into my style, really, although I do try to keep to the original as much as it's possible to keep and still get my painting to work as a painting. Often I get into things where I really have to make considerable changes.

RB: Have you any idea what Picasso thinks of your doing? Has he seen or heard of you, do you suppose?

RL: I have no idea.

RB: Because he himself in his old age in the last few years has done that whole series of variations on *The Women of Algiers* [1955] painting; so in way what you're doing to his painting is very much what he in recent years has done to Delacroix.

RL: Yes, and I've done one of his, you know, one the *Femmes d'Algiers* series [1954-1955].

RB: Have you?

RL: Yes. Which I did for that reason, because he did it from Delacroix.

RB: I take it this whole thing is—it sounds funny to say it's humorous to you but it tickles your sense of humor, shall we say, to be doing this too, because it seems to me that 30 years ago if you had been your present age you would have been in danger, like almost everybody else, of being a follower of Picasso, of being so influenced by him that your paintings would have looked very much from the, by-now, like imitations of Picasso, whereas you're able to pull off the feat, I think, of donning direct transcriptions of Picasso without making them look like paintings influenced and derived subconsciously from his work.

RL: I think I get great pleasure out of that because most of my early work was so influenced by Picasso, and my effort, I think, was to get rid of the influence of Picasso, and more I tried, apparently, the more they looked like Picasso.

RB: I haven't seen these paintings. These are paintings you were doing how long ago?

RL: Well, from about 1951-1957; the ones that I did of American paintings by Remington, Charles Wilson Peale and William Ranney. They were of American scene but they were seen more through Picasso's eyes, I think, than mine. And they were very Cubist and making Cubist paintings almost from these paintings. In this way they relate to my present work, in that they're derived from the graphic work of other people, but it was almost making them more artistic then. And I think I enjoy this because there I was trying to get away from Picasso so much and looking—

RB: You weren't able to really?

RL: Yes. And here I am directly copying them and they seem like less Picasso.

RB: Now you've become your own man, in other words, and have risen to a kind of level of detachment and self-possession which enables you to cope with the master on your own terms.

RL: Yes. As a matter of fact, I think—yes, I hope anyway. And I think that so much art, I think even Abstract Expressionism almost as a movement was an effort to get away from Picasso.

RB: Oh, I think it undoubtedly was.

RL: Because any hint of subject matter they ever put in looked so much like Picasso, I think even de Kooning's *Women* [*Women* series, 1938-1960s] as soon as there was an eye or a mouth or something in it, it took on a Picasso quality, at least to me.

RB: What you might call the revolutionary aspect of your work, if it turns out to be that, in a sense is your use of absolutely controlled flat areas of paint with no smudge, no drip, no drool, no free surge of impasto such as has characterized much of Abstract Expressionism. So I've always assumed that you were in rebellion, or reacting against, that aspect of painting.

RL: Yes. It's not that I don't like Abstract Expressionism.

RB: Oh no! I'm sure you do, but I mean for yourself, and to be—I think when I first saw your work and liked and still greatly like the painting I bought *The Washing Machine* [1961] I've felt it had a pristine quality to it, and a sort of clear, crisp element. I have a whole sales talk on this painting that I use and I must say it's singularly ineffective for those who don't like it. They say it just isn't art. I'm sorry to say they won't see anything to it, but I still feel this is true, and it seems to me you reached this mood inevitably in reaction to the prevalent mode of New York School painting.

RL: Of course, this is still very influenced, I think, by Cubism.

RB: Your work now?

RL: Yes. But I think the cartoons are, the original cartoons are, in that, oh, I would guess that the Disney invention of animals and so forth comes very much from someone like Miró probably. I'm not so sure that there wasn't a little interaction, that sometimes Miró wasn't influenced by cartoons, the flat application of color. Of course, it fits in very neatly with inexpensive reproduction, printing reproduction processes, so that the two might go hand in hand. But I'm sure there is an interaction at least between Cubism and cartooning in general and that my use of the cartoon is also a further use of Cubism, but I try to get away from Cubist mannerisms as much as possible and still retain some kind of composition.

RB: I think we should mention that last painting that's down there the smallest—it interests me, the sizes you've chosen for these. There are one, two, three, four, five paintings there practically complete on that wall all side by side; every one a different size; four of them are vertical paintings; only the one on Plexiglas is a horizontal one. How did you happen to choose those sizes before you began painting?

RL: I have a variety of canvases and stretchers, and I just—when I pick a subject I try to pick one, a shape that will fit the subject, and somehow or other a size which I think will be—I think if you make certain things too large, you're making too much of an idea sometimes.

RB: Well, that certainly would be so. Scale must have been important, but I was just wondering, now for instance the Picasso we've just been discussing is a much more complicated picture.

RL: It probably could be very large.

RB: Yes. I was wondering though how that came to be that size instead of the big one, the *Brad* picture [*I Know How You Must Feel, Brad...*, 1963] which is the biggest. It happens that's my favorite. I'm very enthusiastic over that.

RL: I don't know, I just look at them and I get some kind of a feeling about what size they ought to be.

RB: Now have there been cases in which after starting to draw on a particular canvas you felt this canvas is the wrong size?

RL: Yes. I've felt maybe it's overblown for the idea or it should be much bigger.

RB: And then you changed it to another size canvas?

RL: Or just abandoned it, I think in the actual cases in which this happens I just happen not to have done them at all, but I could have very well started over again on a larger or smaller size.

RB: Yes. But largely it is a sort of intuitive approach to the original work that has inspired you.

RL: Yes. Or, sometimes it works the other way. I have an available canvas, and I then look for something that would be right on it.

RB: Now that final painting over there, I can't quite see the words.

RL: "It is with me."

RB: In the balloon.

RL: Yes. It's a man and a woman, and the man is sort of kissing the cheek of the woman who seems to be immersed in her own thoughts and a little bit as though she didn't quite know whether she wanted the man to kiss her or not, and he's saying "It is with me." I don't quite know what that means, but I like that idea. Of course "It is" refers also to the Abstract Expressionist publication.

RB: *It Is* was a quarterly published in New York—does it still exist?

RL: I don't think so. No. And Pavia, I guess, was the editor.

RB: Yes, Philip Pavia, the sculptor, was the editor. Well, of course, since you're not an Abstract Expressionist, is there a sort of satirical allusion to this?

RL: Oh, I was just amused by the—the phrase comes directly from the comic that I took it from. It means almost nothing. It's just an allusion to the magazine which happened to be there.

RB: Well, except for this conversation, perhaps some student—if anybody ever reads this—will discover this point in your mind, this allusion about it, by which time "It Is" is perhaps not going to be known to any but rare scholars.

RB: It's possible this painting won't be known to anyone but rare scholars either, but it's a secondary thought really.

RB: Yes. Oh, I realize that, yes. But it's interesting to know that these double entendres exist in your mind and give you a sort of amusement as you go ahead and I suppose this keeps up your interest, shall we say?

RL: Yes.

RB: And, it's not necessary, perhaps, for the viewer to know these things.

RL: Yes.

RB: It may be interesting in your psychology of choosing the subject and being interested to do it.

RL: That's right.

RB: Because, after all, I don't know whether you would ever get bored with a picture as you're doing it.

RL: Well, I do many that have no captions but—and the caption is really only of momentary interest to me—and I don't think the words will mean much to people generations hence any more than they would in the *Bayeux*

Tapestry [1070s] or something, not that they're so much interested in it, but that's not the point of it really. The fact that someone is saying something I think might be interesting, but the meaning of it is, I'm sure, a very temporary meaning.

[END OF SESSION.]

RB: We're now resuming on December 11, our conversation. Since I was here the other day you have been kind enough to speak to Leo Castelli who was coming that very afternoon to tell him of my very great enthusiasm for the painting *Brad [I Know How You Must Feel, Brad...]*, 1963], the large one of the group that we were discussing, and to tell him that I was interested to buy it, and I saw him yesterday at the gallery and we shook hands on this proposition. It occurs to me it's a rather interesting sort of thing that this has happened this way because it's an indication of your current sales appeal, perhaps, that I flatly felt I shouldn't lose a moment to try to attach this painting to me, although I'm really not quite sure how and when I'm going to pay for it. This is something I'd like to ask you. Now, I have over the course of several years, frequently bought paintings from Leo Castelli on credit. He's very good about this. I always owe him money, it seems to me. I don't know, however, to what extent this holds the artist up in receiving the money. Is this something you would be willing to mention whether in your arrangements with him he—suppose I don't pay for, say, 14 months or something really long—I don't expect it to be that long, but let us say I didn't finish paying for it for 14 months - how would your share of this total price come to you? Would it be held up until—?

RL: No, no. I don't work that way at all with him, or he doesn't work that way with me. I get a monthly amount which is the same every month and it just pro-rates what I get, and if I need more money he'll give it to me, of course, and then the monthly amount gets adjusted in terms of—he tries not to stay too far ahead of me on sales, so that the monthly amount gets adjusted as well.

RB: Well now, your prices have been raised of course. Does that mean that your monthly amount has also been raised?

RL: Yes.

RB: This, however, is directly related to ultimate sales? Is that correct?

RL: Yes.

RB: In other words, if suddenly no paintings by you were sold for a two-year period what your income would be?

RL: The monthly amount would go down and then disappear.

RB: But it is a flexible enough arrangement so that if you produced a lot of big and very expensive paintings your income surely would go up? I mean you're not on a fixed salary like x number of thousand dollars per year?

RL: No, that's right. It gets adjusted so that we're fairly close to one another. He does though support a few of the artists. Actually, most of the artists that he has do sell very well so that there's no problem. But there are a few he has supported for a number of years and with no—well, the prospect for sales is there, he thinks, but I know that they haven't sold much and he has underwritten them for a number of years and continues to. If he likes the work and even if it doesn't sell, I think he's willing to go along with them for quite some time.

RB: I've asked this because I think every dealer in New York probably operates on a somewhat different basis from every other. I don't know. However, I've often been in debt to many dealers and I sometimes—I know one gallery, I'm told that the artists do not receive any money until the final payment is in for the painting. This rather distressed me because I have somehow usually imagined the dealer was taking the—

RL: No, I think the other is probably more true, I think. In many galleries you're not on salary with the owner.

RB: Well, very seldom is an artist on salary, I think.

RL: I think there are probably only five or six galleries in which this is true, if that many. And then maybe only some artists in the gallery. I'm not sure. It's a kind of a good arrangement for the artist, in that he can count on a set amount and also he won't be tempted to use up a lot of money if he gets paid from one sale.

RB: I think it would be better for the average artist because, let's say, you sell a \$4000 painting on December 6 and get the money December 8, you might go out and buy you wife or your girlfriend an enormously expensive diamond brooch or something and then not make any more sales for nine months and then only for a \$250 drawing. At least, this is what artists are reputed to like, I don't know whether many of them are that improvident but—well, also I think it's interesting that I have bought this painting in the studio. Some people who don't know anything about art might think that I would have negotiated the price directly with you. I

mentioned to you that I wanted to buy the painting and I asked you to mention it to Leo Castelli because there are other people—and he told me when I saw him yesterday—that he has many demands for your work abroad, that in a way he's doing me a favor, particularly as he's not getting a check this week or this month for the painting, he's doing me a favor I consider, to allow me to purchase this. I am motivated primarily by my admiration for the individual work, secondly by the fact that I have the belief that this particular painting is of outstanding quality and of a different type in a sense than the two that I previously bought. In other words, *The Washing Machine* and *Blam* [1962] are different aspects of your subject matter in a way. I feel that this painting would go very well with the three, as part of three good outstanding ones. This one has two good figures in it and the other ones - well, *Blam*, in a sense, has a figure but only a tiny little black falling pilot in the lower corner, so I consider this from the point of view of my collection an excellent addition. I also feel that very likely in about two more years the prices of your works will be still higher and therefore I'm less and less likely in the future to be able to afford one, so these are some of the reasons that tempted me to go out on a limb financially as it were to acquire this.

RL: I think often that collectors buy them on time in some way or other or at least they—

RB: That's very frequent, yes.

RL: Because I think some people are on incomes of various kinds they may get paid twice a year some huge sum or something that they don't have in between times.

RB: It's also interesting to me that since I was here, which was only a few days ago really, several of the other smaller paintings have disappeared. What happened to them?

RL: Well, Mr. Mnuchin

RB: M-n-u-c-h-i-n?

RL: That's right.

RB: He's the man who donates paintings to the Rose Art Gallery at Brandeis University.

RL: Yes.

RB: He's already bought some works of yours for that purpose?

RL: I think so. For Brandeis. He got the Picasso.

RB: The painting we discussed based on Morton Neuman's Picasso?

RL: Yes. And he got the small one called *It is...with me!* [1963], the one we talked about.

RB: Oh, yes. He bought them?

RL: Yes.

RB: Then, you've taken to the gallery the small painting on Plexiglas?

RB: Yes. I guess we're calling it *Mustard on White Bread* [*Mustard on White*, 1963] or something like that.

RB: How did Leo react to that new technical—

RL: I think he liked the idea, and is trying to find a way to frame it somehow because there are problems involved in the framing of a piece of Plexiglas.

RB: Well now, aside from my large painting *Brad* [*I Know How You Must Feel, Brad...*, 1963], which is still here, there is only the painting in which you used the word "Image Duplicator" still here. Why is that still here?

RL: Well, they haven't come to collect it yet.

RB: Oh, somebody else has already bought that?

RL: The gallery—no, it's not sold.

RB: Oh, it will go up to the gallery?

RL: In fact, I guess they both will. Will yours be at the gallery for a while?

RB: Yes. Mine will go to the gallery for a while definitely.

RL: They're supposed to frame them. I think they're picking them up this afternoon.

RB: I see, yes. I notice on the opposite wall now, we didn't discuss the opposite wall, but you already have two canvases, or three—

RL: There are two.

RB: Two, which you had partly drawn on when I first came here, but what I noticed with interest today is paper cut out and applied temporarily, I presume, to the surface. Now what is that technique? Is this something you use on all the paintings?

RL: I mask out the parts around where I'm going to put the dots, the Ben Day dots, because the stencil is rectangular and there's no way to stop the edge so you have to mask out the parts. Actually, in this case I'm going to put parallel lines rather than the dots, but I'll probably tape between the lines with masking tape.

RB: In general, you put the dots on before anything else?

RL: Before anything else. Yes.

RB: I see. Of course, that's almost rather obvious, I hadn't thought of it, but in order to prevent them going all over the areas that are afterwards to be solid color you block those out with paper?

RL: Yes.

RB: So that the dots go on the top of the paper.

RL: Yes.

RB: Then you take the paper off and then you have those clean surfaces and clean area?

RL: Yes, that's right.

RB: You've done that right from the beginning, have you?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, I was wondering when you began using the dots, which are sort of a trademark with you in a sense, aren't they?

RL: I began almost immediately when I started the cartoons. In fact, I think they were immediately that as soon as I started in the very first one I did. I just had one up that I had in the basement rolled up because *Life* magazine wanted a picture of it. It was one of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck on a raft.

RB: You did that in 196-?

RL: 6. It's actually the second painting that I had done, and they're on a flat raft and Donald Duck had caught himself on a fishing pole and Mickey Mouse is looking at him amused because Donald Duck thinks he's caught a fish and there's a caption to it, something about "My, you've caught a big one." It's a very corny joke which is—the early ones of course were of funny cartoons or animated, from animated cartoons. This one was really taken from a bubble gum wrapper, and I did a few of those.

RB: Yes, I think the very first ones of yours that I saw prior to being shown *The Washing Machine* all were straight out of cartoons with words in balloons.

RL: The distinguishing characteristic of these, I think, is that they're funny animals—more Disney things, which I gave up completely. I did one of Popeye and Pluto early too.

RB: I think I remember that. Well, this painting was never taken to the Castelli Gallery?

RL: No, I don't think he's ever seen it, as a matter of fact. If it gets published in *Life* he'll see it for the first time I guess.

RB: Oh, he didn't see it when he was here?

RL: He never saw it, no.

RB: One thing more I was going to ask in connection with Leo's visit; does Leo Castelli come periodically to visit your studio? Or do you telephone him and say "I've now completed or almost completed four or five paintings?"

RL: No. I think this is the second time he's been here—because we lived out at Highland Park and—

RB: That's right. You were not in New York until this season.

RL: He's only come *out* there once. And Ivan's come several times.

RB: Ivan Karp comes down?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, it's not so much in relation to you, as a general picture of how artist-dealer relationships work. I think probably in most cases the dealer doesn't, unless he has very close social relations, probably go very often to the studio.

RL: Yes.

RB: There isn't any particular reason.

RL: I think he came down because I have just moved and he wanted to see the studio and pay a social visit.

RB: Yes. I was just wondering whether this was a regular thing that he did. Let's go back now to your earlier life, having had this long interruption for the present. Now we left you about to enter military service, as I recall.

RL: Yes.

RB: Do you remember the details? Did you volunteer, or were you—?

RL: No. I was drafted. I went in February 1943 from New York City.

RB: How did this work? How big a group—I suppose almost every day—

RL: Thousands, I'm sure.

RB: Well, but with your little unit that went off from the recruiting station or whatever—

RL: Well, it was probably several platoons that went I think. There were huge numbers constantly going through I think as fast as they could be absorbed at that time.

RB: How did it work? You were told to report at an induction center in New York City, is that it?

RL: Yes. Then we went to Fort Dix and—

RB: They didn't transport you from New York City to—?

RL: Yes they did; I believe they did anyway. Yes. And then you were taken to the camp and that was—there were tents but they were on wooden foundations above the ground, and they had coal heaters in them.

RB: Let's see, this was February. Does that mean that probably prior to Christmas you were still in college? I mean did you go out during the autumn?

RL: I think I did.

RB: So then you came home for Christmas vacation?

RL: As a matter of fact, I remember that I was inducted in the middle of a semester.

RB: You probably didn't have too much advance notice.

RL: I didn't. Actually they were on the quarter system and I don't think I actually completed the quarter, I'm not positive, I think I got credit for some courses anyway, I think they were always giving military men as much the benefit of the doubt as they could.

RB: Yes. It is not a very important point, what I was wondering is whether you returned to college after Christmas vacation that year and then were drafted and came back to New York, or whether you just stayed around home waiting for this inevitable development?

RL: I think that I came home for Christmas and stayed, I believe. I'm not absolutely sure but I think so.

RB: Do you remember your emotions upon arriving for that first night in the army?

RL: Well, I think they tried to make it as difficult as possible. I was kind of amused, again actually my emotion to everything seems to be amusement, but they, of course, got us up as early as you can possibly get anyone up in the morning—

RB: You mean on arriving there?

RL: Yes.

RB: What—5:00 o'clock? 6:00 o'clock?

RL: I think it was five or something like that, I'm not sure, but I think they were trying to give us the idea that the army was rough, but I think we went to bed very early so it really didn't make very much difference what time we got up but, oh, they had us out doing some very strange, cooked-up job, I think.

RB: First of all, on arrival over at Fort Dix. I suppose you went through a sort of clothing dispersal center.

RL: Yes. We got our shoes, coats, underwear, everything, and we had this huge bag I remember, which we had to carry around, a duffle bag full of things and a nice lengthy walk with that, and every morning we'd have roll call early in the morning, and we had to stand out in the cold while they called everyone's name out.

RB: What sort of group was it?

RL: It was a miscellaneous group because no-one had—we took tests for aptitude and abilities and so forth while we were there so that the original group wasn't together at all.

RB: From the induction center you all dispersed in different areas?

RL: No. From—after we got to Camp Dix we were, I think, just alphabetically put together, and then we were organized into whatever skill or area you were put in. But no at the camp we didn't. We stayed together in what, I guess, was an alphabetical group. I don't know how many weeks we were there, but I don't think it was more than two weeks that we stayed at Fort Dix taking tests and so forth. Then, I was sent to Camp Hulen in Texas which is in anti-aircraft.

RB: They were general intelligence tests or aptitude tests?

RL: Aptitude tests, yes.

RB: How did you emerge yourself from these aptitude tests? I suppose they were confidential the results?

RL: The results were confidential, not to you, I think. RB: Oh, you got the results?

RL: Yes. I did fair—

RB: Nothing that surprised you?

RL: No.

RB: Were these tests would indicate your, say, physical aptitudes like quickness of hand?

RL: Actually, not at that time. Later when I was in the Air Corps we had those but no, I think the mental aptitude test was about the only one. But there were other things, routine things, I'm not sure, there were probably some medical examinations and some shots and things like that, but we did mostly nothing but wait. They had other jobs for us to do during the day which were kind of make-work things.

RB: Spending your time sort of swinging a broom around and cleaning the latrines is the tradition.

RL: Yes, that's right. That's it.

RB: See, I recently read the book called *The Mint* by T. E. Lawrence about this induction into the Royal Air Force as a volunteer, so I have notions based on Lawrence of Arabia's military life rather. I have the feeling that he had a lot of interesting descriptions about the men with him and the attitudes they had to the sergeant and the corporal and so on. You don't remember these as individuals?

RL: Not so much. I remember one person that could take things like Bantu shorthand or something, he was a

phonetic shorthand person who could take shorthand in any language because he knew an infinite number of symbols for transcribing a language and although he didn't understand the language at all, he was attuned to all of the sounds and had some sort of a symbol for it.

RB: He was a young man like you?

RL: Yes. He's the only one I remember with any special single skill in our particular tent.

RB: He presumably was snapped up by one of the intelligence services in Washington and trained as an intelligence officer. Should have been.

RL: I imagine he was.

RB: You never saw him after that?

RL: No.

RB: Most of these people were sort of run-of-the mill people, I suppose?

RL: Yes.

RB: And you went to Camp Hulen.

RL: In Texas. We went down I remember in a blacked-out train so we couldn't tell where we were, although everybody knew where we were.

RB: Before you got there you, of course, were near New York City. Before being sent in this blacked-out train to Texas, were you given leave?

RL: Yes.

RB: And you could go back into Manhattan to say goodbye to the family?

RL: Yes.

RB: But you probably were forbidden to say where you were going?

RL: Well, we didn't know where we were going.

RB: You didn't even know where you were going?

RL: No. In fact, we really didn't know till we got there where we were going. I think we were on the train for three days. At least, I guess it would take almost that long to get there by train, wouldn't it? I think they route you around in different ways trying to confuse the enemy or something.

RB: You had slept in sleeping cars, I suppose, or had to sit up?

RL: No, they were sit-up. It was an old train I remember, it was absolutely awful at the end of the three days.

RB: Not very good washing facilities either, I should think?

RL: No.

RB: Was that a rather grim experience or sort of fun?

RL: Grim, but not too bad. Everybody was in the same predicament.

RB: Playing cards and telling dirty stories and things like that?

RL: Oh yes.

RB: Did this camp in Texas differ in any particular way from Fort Dix?

RL: Well, we were put into anti-aircraft, that was what the camp was devoted to, and we went through basic training there first, and everyone gets approximately the same basic training, and that was something less than fun but it was all right.

RB: How did you measure up to the physical stress of this?

RL: I had no problem really.

RB: It wasn't an immensely exhausting experience?

RL: No, I've always, I'm not athletic in the sense that I'm particularly out standing in any sport but I don't have any trouble with exercise and I was young and out of college and, you know, I'd been to camp every summer. There was really no physical problem that I had with it. And we would go out on the usual training maneuvers, a lot of marching, I think we had 15-mile hikes and things like that with the pack.

RB: Where was this situated in Texas? Near any big city?

RL: I'm not sure where it was in Texas. I think it was, oh, yes it was on the Gulf, I believe. It was not near any city that was easy to get to bypass. In fact, I don't even remember having a pass during that time. I don't think so.

RB: In basic training possibly you were kept more on duty.

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, it must have been a kind of prison-like atmosphere in a sense.

RL: Yes. I mean there were rows of little wooden huts and the object was to keep those clean and the rows in between clean and march and do KP and then we would have the training with the guns. That was slightly after basic training—the anti-aircraft guns, I remember we never hit anything with them. They had sleeve targets on the airplanes.

RB: Had you experience with guns before the army?

RL: With just a 22 rifle. These were 40 millimeter I think at the time. I think they were guns of a type that got replaced after that by a higher caliber, and more automatic or something. But they had a separate range finder box in which you would track the plane and it would automatically set the gun.

RB: Although you were actually in Texas in a way, you were nowhere, I take it.

RL: Yes. That's right. I have no feeling for Texas or anything else because we were completely isolated. While I was there, I took tests for army specialized training program which they had in languages and engineering. I didn't take the ones in engineering, I took the ones in languages, and language aptitude, and I was going to go into the language army specialized training program, but—

RB: You had a good aptitude, is that it? The tests indicated that?

RL: Yes. But they closed that program at the moment that I was about to get in so they sent me to the engineering one and I don't add or anything like that, but I went through that. Then they sent me to Chicago.

RB: Well, let's see, you remained in this Camp Hulen in Texas for—?

RL: Just through basic training.

RB: And that was something like 13 weeks or 11 weeks or something of that sort?

RL: Yes, that's right. A little bit more than that probably, oh, maybe 17 or 18 weeks, maybe something like that.

RB: By the time you left there it was spring of 1943. Is that correct?

RL: Yes.

RB: Which, of course, just to throw in a historical reference, was the year prior to the opening of the second front in Western Europe, wasn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: You might well anticipate being - maybe you were sent overseas and fought - I don't know yet.

RL: Yes.

RB: But you all were there as guinea pigs prepared to be slaughtered, I suppose. How did this affect your emotional life at that time? Have you any recollection?

RL: No, I don't think you think that you're about to die—you're involved in daily life and thinking is not one of the things you do once in a while in these camps.

RB: I'm sure that's true for the average, but I'm wondering what an artist who was certainly not average, whatever else he may be, isn't quite average because he wouldn't be an artist if he were.

RL: There's something wrong with him anyway.

RB: No, not necessarily wrong, I don't mean that, but I mean there's a more active imagination I expect in an artist, so that's why I'm trying to find out if there were any very individual reactions that you might have had to anything along the way in the experiences shared by hundreds of thousands or millions of other American men.

RL: Well, I don't know. I hate to picture myself as an observer of everything going on although I suppose I was or thought of myself as that.

RB: Well, what did you observe in this situation?

RL: I don't think that I was concerned with the large picture of the war, though I was certainly concerned about how we were doing, and at certain times it was quite frightening. But—

RB: Yes. In '43 we had no guarantee of winning the war, had we?

RL: No.

RB: I forget the exact military situation in the East and West. Had you any preference at the time to—well, no, I don't suppose you would have, whether you were to be sent to the Orient or to Europe?

RL: The preference would be to be kept in the United States, I think. I would have preferred to go to Europe at that time, I'm sure, and that's where I finally wound up. I was trying to get into something that would be more interesting than anti-aircraft and I went to several places which I will tell you about.

RB: I'd like to find out whether you had ambitions within the army - naturally not as a life career I'm sure, but I'm wondering how much you were anxious to advance yourself, since you were obliged to be in military service, and what steps you took to—?

RL: Well, I wound up not advanced at all but I tried to get into something interesting.

RB: And you conceived originally language work would be?

RL: Yes. But I was put into the engineering thing, which was more interesting than marching.

RB: What did that consist in, that basic training?

RL: Well, it was supposed to be a two year period, I think. Training for that amount of time, and—

RB: Well, that would have kept you more or less healthy for a while. RL: Unless they bombed Chicago or something.

RB: It was spring I suppose when you went to Chicago? The spring of 1943?

RL: It must have been spring sometime. I'm not sure, I do remember getting into Chicago but I don't remember what the weather was like.

RB: Oh, I thought everybody always remembered the weather in Chicago.

RL: The experience of winter in Chicago very vividly but not my arrival.

RB: How about in Texas, there's nothing to be said visually or aesthetically or emotionally about it.

RL: Well, it was absolutely flat and completely uninteresting landscape. I remember when the train stopped and we were all to get out with our equipment, we must have had some equipment at that time, we did, as a matter of fact, I had this large duffle bag, which I'm still carrying around, the train just sort of stopped in the middle of a prairie and there was absolutely nothing in sight and we marched for, oh, maybe three miles till we saw the camp; it seemed that way anyway, and the camp being made up of little huts wasn't visible on the horizon as we got off the train, so it looked as though we were absolutely in the middle of nowhere at all when we got off and marched to the huts. I think - you were asking about my observations before, and I think my observations really more centered around the people in the bunk. It was the first time I had really been with a large number of Southerners and some of whom I couldn't understand at all.

RB: Their accents?

RL: Yes, I could make out only about half of what they said.

RB: You, of course, being a native New Yorker must have seemed to them a city slicker type. Did they seem like rustic boors to you?

RL: No. I think I was more interested in them than in thinking about them being rustic boors. I think many of them had more, really turned out to have quite a lot of ability. I think what they didn't have mostly was schooling, not the Southerners necessarily, I'm talking about New Yorkers as well.

RB: Yes.

RL: But the general run of people that I met in the army were - I always had the feeling maybe lacked training in an interesting field but I didn't feel they were natively stupid, though there were certainly some.

RB: It's an interesting thing in a sense to have been a college student living among young people of your own age just as you were too in the army, but to have suddenly this change from a group of students on the college level concerned with educational aims, to a complete cross-section which might have had all sorts of brilliant people, and might have had some of the most ignorant types.

RL: Well, no, I would think that particularly in this anti-aircraft group, the most intellectual, those who were useful in other areas, the professions, useful for the army professions at least, were not in it, they were out, and those of very low intelligence were out, so that you got a kind of middle group. There were a few exceptions but they were selected.

RB: Then what you'd call the infantry in the old days would that have been where the bottom level?

RL: Probably, yes.

RB: So you had to prove in your intelligence test a somewhat superior IQ to be sent there?

RL: Well, relatively superior, you know.

RB: Well, I don't mean they had to be genius or anything.

RL: They also, I think they select a range of IQ's because some people will only do KP probably eventually but, by and large, I think it was a medium IQ group. They also scattered a bit, but you do find people like poets and painters and English teachers and things mixed in with the group because they're of no particular use to the army in any way special.

RB: No.

RL: Where scientists would be immediately called out and so as a matter of fact, chemists and so forth probably were exempt from the army. But people who had been trained in chemistry and hadn't gotten degrees in chemistry were probably in the medics or with the technicians in some other area. So a great deal of selectivity had occurred at this time, but you find people interested in the arts. There was at Camp Hulen there was a, oh, a fellow who—oh, many people had read quite extensively and they might have been teaching or they might have been preparing for teaching in college and so forth, so you got—there were quite a number of college-educated people. Actually, I think that many of them, those who were not educated, had great potential, maybe were more purposeful people, I think, than I met in college, not all of them, but I felt rather good really about the general run of people. I wasn't particularly worried about their lack of education or IQ, I didn't feel that at all about the people. There was always someone who was considered a buffoon or something.

RB: Yes. What I would like to find out though is partly to illuminate you as a person and secondly just it's interesting, if Ohio State had been a very highly intellectual environment and you were primarily an intellectual, it's to be assumed that in going into this military environment you would have noticed a conspicuous difference. However, I take it there was not a great cultural climate at Ohio State.

RL: No. Ohio State at that time at least was not an intellectual community and—

RB: Yes. So you were not making a tremendous sacrifice of stimuli?

RB: No. And I'm not an intellectual.

RB: No, but just looking at some of the books on the shelves ahead of me, they are not books you'd find in the home of a handyman or a street cleaner or a streetcar conductor, I presume, and therefore since also you're an

artist you would be likely to suffer, I think, some spiritual poverty, shall we say? If you were placed for a great many months in the company of relatively low order of intelligences with nobody ever to discuss anything interesting with. Now you didn't find this—you were able to find people.

RL: Well, there were always a few, almost every place I stayed in the army there were, oh, two or three or four, you know, of us who would get together and—

RB: The character of bull sessions was not noticeably different in the army than it was at college, say? I don't mean you would have a bull session discussion Aristotelian philosophy, but one has the impression from books sometimes that men frequently discuss nothing but food and women, or women and food. But somebody like an artist would be expected occasionally to want to talk on some other level than sex. And this you were able to do?

RL: Well, when I first got to Hulen, they had a camp library and I really, I didn't know too many people, and I remember now that I did spend quite a bit of time, almost all the free time reading, in fact at that time I was reading the philosophers, and they had a kind of unusual library.

RB: What philosophers? Greek philosophers?

RL: No, it was Descartes and—

RB: The original texts or were you reading books by Will Durant on popular—

RL: No, it was the actual work of the philosophers.

RB: And how did that come about, through college? Had you been studying?

RL: I hadn't studied philosophy. I don't know how it came about, I was just—

RB: Because there would have been a great many novels and books that were of more easily readable nature available to you.

RL: Yes.

RB: So this is an indication of some more serious intellectual life than you would confess to a moment ago.

RL: Well, I just remembered it. But I think the reason—we had so much time, so much free time—

RB: You did?

RL: Yes.

RB: What

RL: We would get off at 5 o'clock or so and many times, even during the day, there were rest periods and so forth.

RB: What did the average guy do?

RL: Well, I guess many of them just sat around and talked, and I wasn't struck by the low level of conversation in the army as compared with college. I guess that the people that I was with were of maybe even a superior level to those in college, because we found each other, kind of, in the army, but there were groups that would use vulgarities constantly. The whole conversation would be on a kind of silly level, but I guess I wasn't too affected by it because I wouldn't get into that, that's all. There were people who were sort of thieves and there were people who were of all different persuasions in the army, I remember. But then generally they were fairly honest with their fellow soldiers, I think, and they all changed a little bit and they were all sort of influenced by everyone else around.

RB: You don't think it did you any personal harm?

RL: No, I don't think so at all.

RB: You didn't feel an immense loneliness out there, isolated in this Texas prairie?

RL: No. No, I didn't at all, because it was interesting—just the change was interesting. I never felt lonely, and we always had a few people who were good to talk with.

RB: Do you remember any individuals that you knew in Texas, for instance?

RL: Names again.

RB: Not necessarily names, no, types of personality or backgrounds.

RL: Well, I remember one fellow who had been—he was quite interested in contemporary plays on a level which was not too great, at that time, but he had been on soap operas.

RB: Oh, he was an actor?

RL: He was an actor. And, he had actually been in radio commercials and so forth, he was an interesting person and he was in my tent, or bunk, I guess it was at that time. And he was interesting. There were several others who, in later camps which I—I wasn't actually in the anti-aircraft too long, because I got into this engineering ASTP thing. But I remember I also did quite a bit of drawing down there.

RB: Was this considered oddball?

RL: I kind of hid it a little bit, you know, I just got a small pad and pencil and went out and drew. I don't think that anybody knew that I was drawing.

RB: What was there to draw? What sort of things could you draw?

RL: Oh, I just—there wasn't much landscape around.

RB: No. Did you draw sketches of people?

RL: People usually, yes. People in the group of friends that I had.

RB: Sort of portrait sketches?

RL: Well, no, they were more just figure studies than portraits I think, and including the rest of the bunk and whatever objects were around.

RB: Of course, this might have made you very much an object of interest by people if you did their drawings and so on.

RL: Well, I wasn't very good at a portrait, as portraits.

RB: No. You weren't doing that sort of facial identification type of thing?

RL: No.

RB: Well, on to Chicago which you, once again went to by long train ride I suppose?

RL: Yes.

RB: Where did you live in Chicago?

RL: I went to DePaul University.

RB: I've never heard of it.

RB: There's a DePauw too but it's—

RB: I don't know this. Is it a Catholic university?

RL: Yes.

RB: Priests training or—?

RL: Yes.

RB: But it had been taken over for the purpose of—?

RL: Yes. I think many of the schools at that time had grants from the government to train people in various areas. Well, this was basic engineering which was math, chemistry and physics. And we squeaked through that and—

RB: Who taught?

RL: Regular faculty taught.

RB: Priests then?

RL: Priests. That's right. I think there were a few people who were not - yes, there were. There was a man in I think chemistry who was not a priest, but connected with the faculty, or might have been hired particularly for this and wasn't a regular faculty member. I'm not sure.

RB: Was this your first close experience with Catholic clerical figures?

RL: Yes. But they confined themselves to the subject and there was not Catholic indoctrination obviously in the army, but

RB: But you would call them "Father"?

RL: That's right. Yes. I was amused at it, you know, because I had absolutely no contact—well, I had gone to the Catholic Church as a child I remember, with a maid.

RB: Of course, you were brought up by Jewish parents?

RL: Yes.

RB: Did you tell me they weren't particularly synagogue-going, or temple going?

RL: That's right. No, but I remember I went several times to early Mass. That was interesting. But this, of course had nothing to do with religious training.

RB: Tell me something about the actual instruction that you received at DePaul.

RL: Well, it was very fast, everything was speeded up considerably since they were trying to get four years of training into two, and so things were done at a very fast rate and you were supposed to spend most of your time studying when you weren't in class.

RB: What were the classes called—I mean you had four or five different courses? RL: We had chemistry, physics, and math and—

RB: Was any of this a repetition of what you'd had at Ohio State?

RL: Well, the physics was. I had never had chemistry. The math too, in a way. I didn't take math at Ohio State but we started with basic algebra really and started to work our way up, we got as far as—we had solid trig and we also had descriptive geometry, which is drafting, drafting methods, and we had solid, descriptive geometry I think which is three-dimensional.

RB: Did you tell me you weren't very good at mathematics?

RL: No. I wasn't. Or any of these subjects, as a matter of fact. I think I did all right in them at A.S.T.P. but nothing—

RB: ASTP?

RL: That's Army Specialized Training Program. But we had—I had no natural abilities, I think, in this area. And I was kind of amused, that, you know, you had to take tests to get into the program in the first place and I did them in languages and having achieved that, and that program closing, they immediately put us in engineering, for which we had no ability.

RB: How would you evaluate the experience? Do you think you gained anything?

RL: Yes, I'm very happy with it because it's something I never would have taken otherwise.

RB: Yes. You think it's amplified your understanding of the modern world, you might say by having basic training in science?

RL: Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, I've used the drafting and that part of it, I did take drafting, engineering drawing at Ohio State because of the war and to give me some kind of skill to go into the army with, and did wind up doing maps which—

RB: Finally, oh yes.

RL: But we have a long way before we get to the map part. So it's kind of good that I had this training. I've

never really used it - well, I didn't go far enough in any of it to use chemistry or physics but I think that I'm very happy to have been forced to take that part of it. I think in the same way that I'm happy that in high school I was forced to take Latin, all of which I've never used but—

RB: No, the utilitarian aspect of education is something separate from the concept of being an educated person which really doesn't have utilitarian aims, does it? Now do you think an artist, a painter in the fine arts field, even if he's a pop artist, gains by being an educated man? Or do you think you would be as good an artist or as good a person if you had never even gone to college at Ohio State, met alone having this training in the army?

RL: No, I think—well, I think an artist—I've never met any that weren't educated in some way or other, either self-educated or—but I think—I don't know what the relationship is, I don't think there's any direct relationship between education or intelligence either one to the arts, except possibly literature, where we sort of equate intelligence with reading ability and understanding verbally, but it seems to me that you would almost never get a totally uneducated artist or—

RB: I would agree with you. It seems - I don't know the answer to this question. If I had a son who wanted to be an affluent artist and was now sixteen, would I insist on his going to a university, or would I say no, studying physics and philosophy are just going to waste your important time, you should spend all your time drawing from a model or experimenting with color or something? I think an artist primarily is a person full of awareness, powers of observation, not primarily perhaps, but I mean these are aspects of an artist, isn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: —and how can you be in the complicated modern world, as aware as you might wish to be, unless you have some basic educational experience in science and history and all sorts of things?

RL: No, I would certainly advocate, maybe advocate that an artist take anything but art because in painting, unlike music where there are so many things to learn, there is almost no technical parts that would take you anything but a week or so to learn. You certainly have to have practice in drawing. I mean you can't, your awareness, unless it has some way of getting there, getting on the canvas, is of no use, and so you certainly would have to be painting personally, but I think that drawing lessons and painting lessons can be so useless unless you happen to meet somebody who you feel knows something about art, and it's very hard to tell who that is and you might learn more from the student in your class than you do from the prodding teacher because all of the technical aspects of art have almost nothing to do with art. And I would feel that a general education, or education in anything you're interested in would be superior to an art education.

RB: It seems to me in the kind of art that you're presently doing there is naturally technique, I mean nobody who ever held a brush or had drawn could do as well, and there's also this intuitive artistic sense that makes you decide that a line should be so wide or so narrow and curved here and not there. But in addition to all that there is this subject matter that you have, this, perhaps, parody of life in a sense, that is selected by you initially when you choose your subject matter, a very important part of your work. And if you were a relatively uneducated farm boy, not even seeing contemporary magazines to speak of, do you think you could achieve the kind of attitude of mind which is essential to the work you're doing today? I don't think you could.

RL: Well, I certainly wouldn't do this kind of painting. But to speak about the technical aspects of the painting I'm doing now, I almost learned it all in the process of doing these paintings, and the previous technical ability had almost nothing to do with this, and I almost had to learn to draw all over again.

RB: Yes.

RL: But I also think that, I really don't think that a person can—

RB: Can I be rude and interrupt you to tell you that I was discussing your work briefly last summer with a rather eminent American sculptor whose work I don't greatly admire but nevertheless he told me that you do not know how to draw and that what you try to do you don't know how to do. Now what exactly he meant by you were trying to do, I don't know. He draws quite a bit—this particular sculptor whose name is well-known to you I'm sure. Should I tell you?

RL: Tell me.

RB: Theodore Roszak.

RL: Oh yes. Is he at Smith or Columbia?

RB: I think he's ceased teaching. He used to teach at Sarah Lawrence but he was spending last summer at Kingston, Rhode Island, afterwards had a heart attack I believe, and at that time I heard him give a talk at the

University of Rhode Island. He was very interesting, full of stuff, and then afterwards I was invited with a small group of people to the home of an art faculty member there, where pop art came into the discussion to which he's opposed as you can imagine. I said something, you know, in defense of myself as having bought some, and this is how it came up, and I distinctly remember because I had not long before acquired this drawing which I greatly admire, *The Pilot* [1963], you know which to my mind shows evidence of skill in drawing of a certain type. Of course we didn't have that there to discuss, and we didn't really discuss you very much but I know he said, "Lichtenstein doesn't know how to draw." Very arbitrarily.

RL: I think he's right in that way. I never drew the way you draw there with the conventions of the cartoon and my early ones look very unskilled to me in that kind of drawing. But the manner of the cartoon is—

RB: Do you know him? Have you met him? Has he seen your work?

RL: No, I have never met him, no.

RB: I wonder on what he based his rather dogmatic utterance, you see.

RL: I don't know. I think that many of the cartoonists can't draw either in the even they can't draw the way he is, but that part of it doesn't worry me although I do try to get some of the same technical things that the cartoonists have. But they make up the figures out of little tricks and turns of plane and so forth which if I worried about I wouldn't be able to organize thy painting, though I know they have many devices of drawing which I don't use.

RB: I think one reason Roszak would not care for your work is that in his talk he stressed particularly the importance of space. Now he's very science minded, to get back to what we were talking about when this conversation arose. I take it he is fairly educated in science and believes that the artist today, the sculptor, is fully as part of the modern world as some of these space people scientifically engaged in the concepts of space and study of space, something that sculptors are doing in a very avant-garde and very intelligent way. And since your work is flat largely, and it doesn't approach spatial treatment from the way his mind approaches—

RL: Did he say this or—?

RB: No, he didn't say that. But he had earlier in his talk discussed space. And I've seen some of his drawings, and I just think that his aims are so different from yours.

RL: Yes. From my point of view he doesn't understand space, but that's something that's—

RB: Well, that's interesting. Please say more about that.

RL: I think there's a confusion in his mind between illusory depth and aesthetic space, you know, that's really kind of unquestionable and fundamental.

RB: That may well be. I don't know his work extremely well. As I say, I don't particularly like his sculpture myself. It's always rather spiky.

RL: Yes. It has that Rico LeBrun horror which I can't stand.

RB: But I have seen some of his drawings and although they don't have a strong aesthetic appeal to me they do manifest great skill and a preoccupation with illusory space, it would seem to me. Now take this painting of *Brad* [*I Know How You Must Feel, Brad...*, 1963] that we discussed before, this figure of Brad that she's looking at in a cloud is, in a sense, a spatial concept, isn't it, from your point of view?

RL: Well, I don't think that the appearance of space one way or the other is an important element, I really never care whether a thing looks near or far in a painting and whether a thing looks near or far to you has to do with your own association toward some of the symbols for space in a painting, perspective being one of the symbols. If you associate converging in lines with an object in the natural world which is deep, like railroad tracks which would come together at the top or something like that, why then you would think of depth. If you think of the converging lines as a rooftop that you're looking at head on, a slanted roof then it has no depth. So you have to associate it with some three-dimensional actual phenomena for it to look deep. So that really the lines themselves have no spatial character. It's only when they're associated with something in the three-dimensional world, so I don't deal with space in my thinking in that way.

RB: No, you don't try to obtain depth, do you, in the sense that he—?

RL: Well, I might in certain pictures want something to look deep in these cartoons, and I know that if I do certain things it will look deep, but my thought when I'm putting something on the painting has nothing to do with depth, I mean my sense of position is related really to apparent plane which coincides with the picture

plane, I mean the actual canvas.

RB: Well, I mentioned this particular painting because of course the girl's face is much nearer, one sort of assumes, one imagines it's larger, but visually it's not particularly nearer, I mean you maintain one plane as far as I can see.

RL: Well, the man is in the balloon which is supposed to signify her imagination about the boy, so he is smaller, so at times he might give the appearance of being back further because you see sometimes—

RB: Well, it doesn't really in a sense that I don't think I would like the picture to the extent that I do if it seemed to be back from—it seems to me controlled in a—you obtain this unity of or whatever, I forget the phrase you use for that—ground-directed—is this ground-directed?

RL: I think unity of field is a very brilliant good thing. I think of all the lines, each part of it that he is made up of and him himself, the whole object, as being on the same plane with the woman.

RB: Yes.

RL: Now, if he were not an imaginary person in a balloon, and he were drawn fully on the page, then you would think of him as being back further, because he is smaller—

RB: Yes, that's right. He's cut off you see, you don't see his whole lower body because the balloon goes round him and this white space below the end of the necktie you might say.

RL: Since you know he's supposed to be imaginary, you don't necessarily project deep space into it. But I think that whether you indicate space or you don't indicate space, this is sort of a personal matter and maybe you should be consistent about it or something like that in the painting, but other than that it has no value aesthetically. At different times there were different interests in different kinds of illusory space so that it has some importance in painting, but I think it has no importance as to the ultimate aesthetic work of the painting.

RB: I think Mr. Roszak's view is that possibly space is the problem for the 20th century artist. I don't know how old he is—at least 20 years older than you, perhaps 30, I don't know—so he belongs in a sense to a different generation, but you are existing at the moment and operating in the same 1960s period, but his idea is that space is the - I think from my recollection of his talk - is the important concept.

RL: I think that many sculptors get into this spatial dilemma and it seems to me almost always that the best sculptors have been painters. And I think Picasso is the best sculptor of our age and the most inventive, and somebody who knows and understands it spatially; it seems to me so many sculptors get mixed up in this three-dimensional space because they're working with three-dimensional elements, but so much good sculpture is almost well, it's two-dimensional in a certain respect. It doesn't mean it has to look two-dimensional. I think Henry Moore is a good sculptor, I think that what he does is a little bit of Picasso, but he still organizes well, and the works are absolutely three-dimensional looking and involuted and involved, but I think he's not confused as to the sense of relatedness in it. I think many of them get so involved with the fact that sculpture is a three-dimensional material that they lose a relationship in it which—two-dimensional, in a sense, is kind of hard to explain, because obviously it's three-dimensional, but the sense is almost an affinity of two-dimensional points of view. Asculpture from any viewpoint should work the way a drawing works, which is a two-dimensional thing. I think that most of the painters approach sculpture from this point of view, as the position of one part to another they see almost two-dimensionally. The fact that it goes back has more to do with the other view than it has to do with the plane, the view from one position. I don't mean that you look at it like a cube and it has four sides or something like that but, as I say, I think you look at it from almost an infinity of two-dimensional views. And I think Picasso understood this and there's really no difference between his paintings and sculpture. When things are either put near or actually placed on the same plane really doesn't matter so long as you're seeing it together. If you stand far enough away from a piece of sculpture really makes very little difference whether the shape is near or far beyond, say, 30 feet, for instance, you can't get any parallax on it anyway and all the sizes become relatively the same. The sizes become flat, or I think that a sculptor would feel this automatically; he doesn't have to stand back 30 feet to look at the work, of course how far back he stands has something to do with, would be related to the size of the sculpture too, but I think he has a feeling of plane or at least of some kind of two dimensional relatedness which many people who own these sculptures lose. And many sculptors too who think of themselves as pure sculptors I think do fairly bad drawings, whereas people who think of themselves as painters seem to do better sculptures because—

RB: Could we consider one or two sculptors now as examples of these? You've already said that to your mind Picasso is the great sculptor of the age. What other names among sculptors do you like?

RL: Well, let's see, I've mentioned Moore.

RB: Yes. How do you feel about Jacques Lipchitz?

RL: I think he's pretty good. He's better than many people. I don't particularly like, say, Lippold or—oh no, I like him, I've gotten the wrong one.

RB: Seymour Lipton?

RL: Yes, Lipton.

RB: Lippold is the man with the wires and so on.

RL: Lippold, yes, I kind of like that.

RB: David Smith?

RL: David Smith I like pretty much, yes. I have a great feeling—

RB: Smith is a painter whose paintings are not fully accepted certainly.

RL: Yes.

RB: He's done some marvelous drawings though at times. So he's not solely a sculptor.

RL: No. No. He's pretty good I think. Of course I like Stuart Davis.

RB: Is he a sculptor?

RL: Not Stuart Davis, what am I thinking of? No, he isn't. I like, I was thinking of Calder.

RB: Alexander Calder?

RL: Yes. I was thinking of Calder, and I said Davis for some reason. I guess I associate the two somehow or other along with Marin as people who were painting in America who were—of course Marin isn't like the other two in some ways—but they were good painters.

RB: What do you think of Calder's drawings and paintings? Have you ever seen them?

RL: Yes, I have.

RB: I saw some yesterday, as a matter of fact, very interesting black and white drawings now on exhibit in the Perls Gallery done in 1943, I believe. Did you see these?

RL: No, I didn't see those.

RB: These are short, small drawings, rather fanciful, cartoon-like in a sense.

RL: They're like his wire sculptures?

RB: Yes. Possibly like that.

RL: I've seen some like that.

RB: I think they were done on the theme of not exactly illustrations but as if they were illustrations for children's stories. I'd never seen work of his like this. Most of the work he does is like Miró as far as his painting—

RL: I think I've seen a children's book maybe made by him, written by him, or some—at least maybe other reproductions of those drawings, I didn't see that show. And they're very fanciful as you say, and they're a little light—

RB: Yes.

RL: But I think that his work, his two-dimensional work is essentially good.

RB: You, I think, never tried sculpture, have you? Or did you?

RL: Well, let me see. I don't know, if you give me a list of names I'll tell you.

RB: Well now, if I said I'm sorry I told you I was going to buy your painting yesterday but last night I bought a sculpture by XYZ and that's going to cost me so much I want to cancel the deal. Now if XYZ was Giacometti,

say, how would you feel at this?

RL: Well, I like his work. I think it's stayed a little bit the same in a way for quite a while, but I think that essentially his sculpture art is his style.

RB: Well, if I had said I was buying a very expensive sculpture by Seymour Lipton?

RL: That wouldn't please me too much, no.

RB: Or Herbert Ferber?

RL: I don't like his work either.

RB: Or David Hare?

RL: I like his work.

RB: I'm not so sure I like his recent work.

RL: I don't know if I've seen his recent work. I used to see him quite a bit.

RB: How do you like Richard Stankiewicz's work?

RL: I like his work. And I like Chamberlain's.

RB: Richard Hunt from Chicago?

RL: I don't know his work.

RB: A Negro from Chicago. Very talented. What, about some of the English ones—Armitage? Chadwick?

RL: I don't like either of those particularly. No, I think Moore is about the only English sculptor that I like.

RB: Yes. Well, we needn't go into this too exhaustively. Actually this digression occurred in connection with your curriculum in physics and chemistry and so on. So back to Chicago. How long did this stay last?

RL: Well, I was only there for nine months, which was one term, and then they—

RB: You lived in a dormitory of the college? With roommates?

RL: Yes.

RB: Did you live a more or less normal sort of undergraduate kind of life, or what military aspects—I mean you had to do KP and things like that?

RL: No. All of this seemed to have been taken care of for us somehow, and we lived sort of—well, it wasn't college-y because we didn't have any of that kind of spirit, which I can do without anyway, but it—

RB: You didn't have a social life and all that?

RL: We did around Chicago. But there was none much connected with the school. And we lived in a fair dorm.

RB: You spent many hours boning up for your exams?

RL: Well, not as many as I would like to. We spent a lot of time going down to the Loop in Chicago actually and listening to [Jack] Teagarden play his trombone, which was much more interesting.

RB: Oh really? This was, of course, an old hobby of yours, jazz. You had some friends in this group who were also interested in jazz?

RL: Yes. I had gone around with a fellow by the name of Murphy who was also in the same ASTP program.

RB: He was a musician?

RL: No, no. He was just interested. And we were looking for women most of the time. I suppose that was our largest effort.

RB: Were you successful usually?

RL: Well, occasionally.

RB: How much did you use the USO?

RL: Not much. Not at that time anyway.

RB: You even went freelancing in the cafés?

RL: We were freelancing. That's right. I remember we lived in a large dorm. It probably wasn't actually a dorm, as I think of it now it might have been converted from something else, there were many double-decker metal beds which I think are sort of standard army beds which were put in something that might have been a gymnasium or something.

RB: Did you meet any interesting girls in any particular way?

RL: No, we weren't looking for intellectually interesting girls.

RB: No, I realize you were looking for sex, but I mean sometimes I believe you get something more than sex with a woman, and I just wondered—

RL: That's true. But we weren't—no, nothing was particularly outstanding about that.

RB: You didn't have any sort of permanent girlfriends at the time or anything?

RL: No.

RB: It was just carrying on, shall we say.

RL: That's right.

RB: Did you go to movies a lot too?

RL: No. No.

RB: Where did you go when you took these girls on dates other than straight to bed?

RL: I'm afraid I don't remember.

RB: Any answer is incriminating. No, I was wondering what kind of recreation in a social sense you would have had.

RL: There were a few organized social events, I think, and, oh, I think we went to the USO a few times, something like that.

RB: How were you on going to the Art Institute on Chicago to look at works of art?

RL: I don't think I got there the whole time I was in Chicago, I hate to say.

RB: You weren't immensely drawn by culture at the time.

RL: No.

RB: How did you like Chicago as a city?

RL: Well, I remember it being very windy, as everyone does, and it was cold in the winter. It was like New York in a way to me.

RB: Like New York?

RL: Yes, like a little New York.

RB: I mean you felt it wasn't quite up to?

RL: Yes. Oh the other hand, I never before that time had taken advantage of New York particularly, so it didn't seem particularly lacking to me, either, and the things we were looking for were not culture, I guess, at that time anyway, so—

RB: Were you impressed by the waterfront? The Loop is, I know, very beautiful.

RL: The waterfront is kind of interesting and the highways and so forth that were around were interesting architecturally I guess.

RB: Were you interested in architecture to any great extent?

RL: Not to any great extent. Now I am to a degree. I had a period where I was much more interested in modern architecture, but it was after the war. And now modern architecture doesn't seem as interesting to me as it did then.

RB: Yes. But at this time in your military service you were not terribly interested in great art or in architecture or things like that, I gather?

RL: No. I wasn't. I think I've always—not always—but I think I've mostly been interested in just my own work.

RB: Well, that's a characteristic of most artists, isn't it?

RL: But we all go to museums and things, and up to this time I really had not much art training in spite of the training we had at Ohio State.

RB: Well, you were pretty young - were you still under 20?

RL: Yes.

RB: Yes. Well, one can't expect to have done everything, felt everything, but I just like to find out what things, you know, were stirring within you. So about that experience in Chicago - how did it terminate? Did you finish ?

RL: No, we did finish the nine months and then there was quite an outcry, and many stories about the fellows in school while other G.I.'s were going down at the front and so forth, so that the army I think was forced to terminate the program. I think about that time we had reached the invasion and this was before the Battle of the Bulge, that hadn't quite occurred yet. It wasn't so much before it. See I applied for the Air Corps while I was in ASTP and went to Keesler Field, Mississippi from Chicago to go into pilot training, or in the Air Force somehow, and that program was terminated about the time of the Battle of the Bulge.

RB: But you were still in Chicago when General Eisenhower launched the invasion of Normandy?

RL: Yes, I believe so. I must have been, yes.

RB: Of course, when you first entered this program actually fighting, except by air force and naval units, was not so widespread.

RL: Well, there was also the Pacific and all of that, there was fighting there.

RB: There had been in North Africa too, but I mean the real mass involvement of fighting men didn't occur until Fortress Europe was attacked.

RL: Yes.

RB: You remember any particular excitement when this invasion began?

RL: Oh yes. Oh, it was tremendously stimulating. We kept up with the newspaper reports, radio reports of it.

RB: Did this provoke any desire on your part either to have it all over in Europe before you had to go there, or a strong desire to get in the fight right away yourself.

RL: There was no strong desire to get into the fight, I assure you.

RB: You were just as happy going out with a girl that evening as having a wound in a Normandy trench.

RL: I think so, yes.

RB: Why not? Well you said you applied for pilot training?

RL: Yes. Well, I applied for the Air Corps to go into either pilot navigation or—?

RB: What led to your application?

RL: I knew the program was ending and I still wanted to get into something interesting and so that was the next

—

RB: That was the thing that most appealed to you?

RL: I think they might have encouraged this because they had sort of trained people in ASTP and so I think they encouraged us to try to find other areas of interest because they had in this one place selected people somewhat, and—

RB: Well, they had already invested some time in giving you further education and training. What qualifications did you have to offer? I mean was it easy to get accepted for this?

RL: Well, I had of course a little more math than most people would have by this time, it was fresh, and the other things too. So, I went down to Keesler Field with other people.

RB: You didn't answer quite whether this was a difficult thing to succeed in being admitted to.

RL: Well, I, you see, you don't know. You go down for tests—

RB: I see, I'm sorry. I thought you meant you had already been accepted.

RL: Well, I think you needed a certain score on aptitude tests to get there but that score is the same test that you take when you get into the army so that for officers' training or something you need—I guess many went to officers training school too and then some went to a specific air corps which, of course, is also officers if you're a pilot or navigator or bombardier or something. So that it amounted to officers training, but this specific one that I went to was—

RB: But when you traveled there you were in a sense accepted only on probation pending certain results from further testing and so on ?

RL: Yes, that's right, because they give you a very acute physical, testing everything like peripheral vision, and ability to perceive depth, and there were tests with blocks putting the right block in the right place, and manual skills, and the physical, you know, blood pressure, heart, and balance, everything. We were tested for days and days. And all sorts of coordination and—

RB: How did you make out in this?

RL: I made out very well. And I was always amazed because I never thought of myself as a great physical specimen. And many athletic people would fail because of some slight eye defect or not enough teeth or just some—

RB: You had perfect vision?

RL: Apparently at the time. Apparently I got through on everything and was accepted for the pilot training.

RB: Well, this was I suppose one of the highest standards of general ability to coordinate mind and muscle, wasn't it? I mean the pilot was the most supremely trained individual in World War II, wasn't he?

RL: In this kind of coordination, yes.

RB: Yes. So what happened then?

RL: I guess the tests themselves lasted for about a week. There were other things, we had to wait before we were tested and after we were tested and so forth so it took up several weeks. But anyway I never got to the program, because they really needed a lot of infantrymen in a hurry and they cancelled the whole program.

RB: Sounds like total war atmosphere.

RL: This was the second cancellation of a program.

RB: So you didn't receive pilot training at all? Didn't even begin?

RL: No. They sent us directly to the infantry.

RB: Was this where the Battle of the Bulge came in, or—?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, the Battle of the Bulge occurred as my recollection December 17, or something of the sort, 1944. It was a sudden reversal of our military position in France. I'm quite sure it happened before Christmas.

RL: Well, let's see, I got out of the army in January '46 and I was overseas for one year so I think I went over in January of '45 finally got overseas.

RB: Yes. Well, would that have been only a few weeks actually after the Battle of the Bulge?

RL: Yes. I got over there after we had regained our position pretty much.

RB: Yes but you were in a sense rushed into preparation for battle in what might have been a situation of very great prolonged seriousness.

RL: Yes.

RB: I can remember Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. was in Paris with me as a civilian and quite important in the unit we were in the Office of Strategic Services, he was a civilian because he had children, but he was suddenly, because of the Battle of the Bulge, made a private right then and there. I mean they were scraping the bottom of the barrel. Actually Arthur was kept with us; he just lost a lot of money and status. So you were only at Camp Keesler for a few weeks?

RL: Yes, that's right. We were in Mississippi, that was Keesler Field. Mississippi. Now let me see where we went. I think we went—I can't remember the name of the camp right now, it's a good thing to suppress—I believe it was in Texas again in another place. And it went for—

RB: Incidentally, had you felt great disappointment at this sudden cancellation?

RL: Yes, I was interested in this pilot training thing because I had never thought of myself as a pilot and suddenly began to get intrigued with it, and I was very disappointed about that.

RB: How many days approximately were you in the status of believing you were going to become a pilot?

RL: Well, it was only a few days when we got the results of the test, but then we were told pretty quickly that it was all over, and that we'd be in the infantry. But I remember when we got to the infantry I was put on the garbage trucks; therefore I was not ready for combat. That was kind of nice, the garbage truck, because there was a kind of camaraderie of the people at the lowest level and we'd go along and collect the garbage in the truck and walk around in all the garbage and then throw it all in the incinerator and we did this every day. I must have been in that for maybe two weeks. I think that's all I got there. Then I was orderly to a general, a major general.

RB: What was his name?

RL: What?

RB: What was his name?

RL: I thought you'd ask.

RB: Oh, you don't remember?

RL: He doesn't remember mine either, I'm sure.

RB: What did your duties consist in?

RL: Well, I swept up the place and I swept up his house and made the bed.

RB: Was he the commanding officer?

RL: He was the commanding officer, I think of the camp. Or maybe a section of the camp, I'm not quite sure. I wasn't there very long anyway.

RB: What a comedown from being a pilot to suddenly making beds for the general.

RL: I don't know. And one day he came in and I didn't know whether to present arms with the broom or what to do and he talked to me and I seemed semiliterate to him and he asked me if I were happy in the moderate job and I told him it was better than the garbage truck sort of, although I think I really preferred the garbage truck so he sent me to the office, to the colonel to get some kind of more appropriate job; and this is an interesting point. Here we are in the Battle of the Bulge and I was in the headquarters office and my job at that time was to take the Bill Mauldin cartoons as they came out in the army newspaper *The Stars and Stripes* and enlarge them and frame them so that each time the issue came out I would copy the cartoon, which is my present occupation

too.

RB: Is that so! Well, how did this happen?

RL: For the colonel. The colonel liked Bill Mauldin cartoons and wanted them in his house and they had to do something with me and they couldn't think of what to do, and I had art training so that was my job which didn't seem to be a terrific emergency.

RB: No, not at all. Was this the colonel's idea or some junior officer wishing to please him?

RL: No, it was the colonel's idea, surprisingly, and

RB: And you made these enlargements by what means? RL: I just drew them larger.

RB: How many do you suppose you did?

RL: Oh, I must have done two dozen or more. I did that for, probably, well, a month or so. I don't know if I did past Mauldin cartoons or whether they were all current ones, but—

RB: It's very clever of you to forget the name of the colonel.

RL: Yes.

RB: Do you remember the name of the colonel?

RL: No, I don't. But if I did I don't think I would—he would be court-martialed.

RB: Because if you become sufficiently historic, shall we say, at some time somebody is going to find in an attic one or two of these in the colonel's possessions and they'll become a collector's item maybe.

RL: I hope not.

RB: Did you select particular ones or did you just do everyone that came along?

RB: I did every one that came along.

RB: Yes. And what else did you do?

RB: Well, that was about all I did to begin with. Then I got into map work. I think that going into the office also meant that I was transferred to the Engineer Battalion of the Infantry Division that we were in. It was the 69th Infantry Division.

RB: What's the name of this installation?

RL: The actual name of the camp? I don't recall it at the moment, but I will.

RB: It's a rather curious series of blanks that you don't remember. The name of the major-general, or the colonel, or the place in which—

RL: I'm very good at that; it's one of my specialties.

RB: Well, you do remember the name of Bill Mauldin, the cartoonist.

RL: Yes. I can't say I like—I mean his cartoons were amusing, but I wasn't interested in their art qualities particularly, and I didn't really relish doing this job.

[END OF SIDE 1, REEL 2]

[END OF SESSION]

RB: This is Richard Brown Baker once again in Roy Lichtenstein's studio. We're a month later from our last conversation. It is now January 15, 1964. I went to Leo Castelli's to see the painting I bought which we discussed and I was told the name has been changed so since we were talking about it as "Brad" I thought I'd go into this question with you on the tape to clarify. It's now called what?

RL: *Thinking of Him* [1963].

RB: I wonder if you'd explain to the owner why this change generally took place.

RL: I don't know. Somebody thought of a name and it sounded, they thought, like a better name. I think Ivan thought of the name actually.

RB: Well, I suspected Ivan was responsible. It was Ivan of course who told me the name had been changed. Now you called it "Brad" before and Ivan said this was not "Brad" as I remember.

RL: Well, that's just his emphatic way of trying to get a point actively across.

RB: I'm not sure I like the title tremendously but that's another matter. It sounds a little—

RL: I don't care it might be a bit cute or something.

RB: But I want to find out about your naming of things. How often does the gallery make the final choice?

RL: Well, I don't care too much about naming them, they're either named after the thing it is, if it's a product it's called what it is, like Roto Broil or something. Or they're named after the statement in the balloon if there's a statement.

RB: Yes. Which this painting lacks.

RL: And for the situation, I really don't care what they call it. I have no interest in naming the painting really. "Brad" might be a little confusing because a number of paintings have Brad in it, and it might be difficult to think of which painting it is, which is probably the principal reason for changing the name.

RB: Since I was here you've produced a very interesting, beautiful, powerful triptych which is on a series of three—I don't suppose this triptych is named but the first one has the text at the top, "As I Opened Fire I Knew Why Tex Hadn't Buzzed Me If He Had." Then the second one says, "The Enemy Would Have Been Warned." And the third one, "My Ship Was Below Them." Now I think these three paintings are very interesting and one thing that's interested me is to see the difference between the original cartoon, a drawing you made of each of these three panels, changing somewhat the cartoon and then finally the ultimate version on the canvas of the painting. I think you've produced some very significant transformations in these paintings from this original.

RL: They are substantial, I think.

RB: Would you think these are more changed than you used to change a year or so ago?

RL: Well, I don't think it's a question of time. Some paintings are completely changed and some stay very close to the original. Some are entirely made up. And it just has to do with how the particular situation strikes me rather than the transition from not changing them much to changing them greatly. There really is no transition.

RB: Well, for example, in this, one of the changes you made in the left hand panel is the shape of the nose cone of the plane which on the cartoon has a name "Flying Cloud." You left out the name, didn't you, on the plane?

RL: Yes.

RB: And created a great swirling—what would you call that fascinating white thing?

RL: It's a reflection from the propeller.

RB: But it adds visually a great deal to the picture indeed. And that's completely invented. And eliminated are the two sort of black blobs or something in the original cartoons which indicate, I suppose, the propeller.

RL: Yes, that's right.

RB: You've also considerable change in the—well, you might say the design of the fuselage not only its cone or the end part is changed, but the—

RL: The actual taper of the fuselage of the whole thing is really quite different.

RB: But on the other hand you have retained in the lower right hand corner "Brat."

RL: Yes.

RB: But you have changed that somewhat too in the lettering from the original cartoon.

RL: Yes. Talking about changing it and leaving the name off the plane—I very rarely put any brand name on anything, or any identifiable product, which some people do. The only one I think that I can remember I've done is Roto Broil, actually keep the name of a product or an airplane, or keep a type of airplane identifiable. I do like

to make more general types and not advertise actually any product.

RB: Oh, I see. Well, in this case you wouldn't have been advertising exactly because Flying Cloud is a cartoon strip name.

RL: Also I wouldn't want it identifiable—not because I don't want anybody to know where it comes from, but it gets too specific, I think. A name like Tex has a general meaning which is also in the cartoon which is all right, but a specific name that would identify a product or specific cartoon I would leave out.

RB: Now the middle panel under "The Enemy Would Have Been Warned," you've made that at the top one line, for instance, in the cartoon "Been Warned" is in the second line, but you made very remarkable changes in this particular middle panel. The angle of the plane fuselage rising up is made more vertical than in the cartoon and so also the upthrust of the two—

RL: Those are machine guns actually.

RB: The flame coming out of the machine guns, and that's greatly changed. Then coming down is this "brat tat tat" in lettering which forms in the painting a vertical line, you might say, at the right of the painting. In your drawing you had changed that somewhat already from the cartoon here, but then I think you made a further change. If I'm not mistaken the "B" in the painting is cut off at the top. I don't think even in your drawing, of course in the cartoon "brat tat tat" is more done condensed and quite different from your version of it. But you did make three changes there I think, or at least several stages of change.

RL: Yes.

RB: And another thing I notice especially, the bullets falling away are helter skelter in the cartoon, very insignificant artistically, you might say, whereas the bullets are yellow in your version. They're sort of pale purple here [in the original cartoon] or lavender color, or maybe it's just gray. But anyway they're bright yellow in your version, the same as part of the interior flame of the fire from the gun. But you planned and organized and related them to each other in a very interesting way, I think, in the painting.

RL: Yes, they do a lot of work for the design in the painting because they were an element, of course, which can be easily shifted. Smoke and cloud.

RB: Yes, it's a logical thing. I mean the idea of having bullets there, of course, was contributed by the original cartoonist and you took it over at perfect liberty to change their position of course, but there's a very notable improvement in their position. However, I think probably the most significant change of all in that center panel is the creation of the white areas which you—what would you describe that as being? That's almost—well, there is some white area—

RL: Yes. The smoke is and that part of the wing.

RB: Yes. But that part of the wing was not white in this original cartoon.

RL: No. It needed a larger arrangement of light in the painting, I guess.

RB: But the design of your white areas is quite—how shall I put it— skillful? Beautiful? What shall we say?

RL: Thank you.

RB: Have you any recollection of what went through your mind as you made those changes other, I mean in connection with the white area, for instance, what were you trying to do with it?

RL: Well, I thought I needed a larger area of white in the painting to give me a section of the painting in which a number of things were white, the smoke and the wing, which is a very conventional kind of organization, of keeping dark areas together and medium areas together and light areas together, comes really from all Renaissance painting, Cubism and every other kind of painting. And it wasn't so much that I intellectually wanted to keep it that way but I felt that that's how much white would be needed to counteract the blue.

RB: The blue is intense. In the cartoon it's a pale, pale blue. It's deep, very rich blue in your painting, a beautiful blue.

RL: In the last painting the background is light blue and in the cartoon it's actually deeper. My original idea really was to get the first—I was going to have the first panel with a black background, the middle one with a blue one, and the last one with a light one so it would progress from dark to light, but when I really got the thing going I didn't feel that the first one would take a black background, I didn't think it would work in it and I made it purple. Which doesn't give it a graded order of background, but it's not too important anyway.

RB: Since the three paintings are designed to be related, you spoke earlier to me about not necessarily intending them to be touching each other. You have left on all of them a sort of border land of white about an inch, all three, so that if they were actually physically touching they would still have dividing areas between them other than what the frame, if they were framed, would provide. To get back to that white area in that central painting—there is an angle in the cartoon, too, that is in opposition to the prevailing upward to the right angle provided by the fire and the upward surge of the plane, but this white is a sort of counter movement, isn't it? From the lower right up toward the left as distinct from the others going against it and helps provide balance and vitality, I think, to the painting.

RL: Well, I hope so.

RB: The third painting which you just spoke of is also—well, it's a further close-up of the guns, isn't it?

RL: Yes.

RB: Which the center panel shows from a greater distance.

RL: This is moving picture technique which is why I think I was interested in this particular group to begin with, the focusing in on, progressively getting closer to the machine guns, as a kind of dramatic moving picture technique taken over by the cartoon.

RB: That, of course, is true, isn't it? From the left-hand one is seeing the plane's whole nose at a distance and then one gets quite close in the middle picture, and then practically—well, certainly one's eardrums would be broken if one was that close to the actually present guns, I think, in the third painting. But the center panel and the right-hand panel have the same, because they are of the same guns, general upward to the right movement, don't they?

RL: Yes. All three—somewhat.

RB: Well, they all three do that, yes, more conspicuous, of course in the second two because they both deal with these guns.

RL: Yes.

RB: This painting you say will be included in a show at the [Leo] Castelli Gallery next—

RL: Starting next month.

RB: In February then, of 1964.

RL: If all goes well.

RB: I'm sure Leo will like it. Leo hasn't seen it yet?

RL: No.

RB: You started these paintings before Christmas? Or after Christmas?

RL: I think slightly after Christmas, just about—during that time.

RB: Then on the other side of the studio you're already working on two paintings, or is it three?

RL: Well, I have the razor blade painting which I think is finished. That's on canvas. It's done with an air brush; the razor blade part of it was done with an air brush, which is a new idea.

RB: The razor blade is surrounded by dotted yellow.

RL: Light dotted yellow—

RB: Which is very eye-shaking. More so I think than your dots in other paintings.

RL: I have one painting on Plexiglas midway—

RB: I want to speak about the Plexiglas because we did speak of this use of Plexiglas on an earlier tape. This is a new departure for you in general and you've had more experience with it now. Do you think you're going to be using it more in the future as a technique?

RL: Yes, I do.

RB: Tell us a little more about how it works. Let's discuss that stapler painting—it's a small painting.

RL: It's just in blue and it will be blue and white. And I think I discussed last time the difficulty was that you had to start with what I usually end up with, and that's the lines in the painting. And what I'm going to do is—the Plexiglas comes with a sheet of paper on either side which is rubber cemented to the surface of the Plexiglas and can be used as frisket—which is a technical term where material can be used to mask out areas—and you cut it with a stylus or razor blade and remove parts of it and it will leave the surrounding area, and you can either paint within the area that you've removed or spray or whatever. And it's surrounded and protected by the paper that you did not remove and that's called "frisket paper," which is a commercial art product. And the paper that Plexiglas normally comes in is very useful in this regard. And so what I will do is paint the painting directly on the paper in fairly rough fashion but—

RB: Well now, this larger painting that's on the easel, which is to be a Lichtenstein version of a Picasso still life thing, is at the present only roughly drawn, but I believe you told me that certain areas you would want to change the shape of, but you're now planning to paint on what serves as frisket paper, to paint, let's say, an area of black and then if you want to enlarge it or diminish it or change it you will do it on this—

RL: On the paper. I'll continue to draw this in pencil and as I'm going on, I'll make corrections in pencil and so forth, till I get the thing the way I think it ought to be and then I'll paint the whole painting, the colored areas and lines and everything, and make whatever corrections are necessary right on the paper, which will be quite easy to do because I can just paint over. It really won't make any difference how sloppy it is on the paper, but finally I pin it down on the paper and then just mechanically transfer it from the paper to the Plexiglas by cutting through—

RB: You will have got the final painting created in paint on this paper that you'll tear off eventually?

RL: Yes.

RB: But you'll start with any particular area?

RL: Well, I'll start with the lines because they have to be put on first because they hide other areas and, in other words, physically you would have to start with the lines, otherwise they'd be obliterated. And since I suppose I usually put them on last they therefore have to go on first in order to be nearer the surface. And so the lines will be first and probably the dotted areas next because you can always take advantage of that frisket paper to mask out around dotted areas, which I now have to do with tracing paper on my paintings on canvas. So then the areas that have color will be put in. It sounds very mechanical but it will be; it will have to be transferred mechanically from the paper forth onto the Plexiglas.

RB: In one sense, when you stop to consider it, you are destroying the original painting, aren't you?

RL: Yes.

RB: You paint it and destroy it.

RL: There's actually some sense of position and placement that can be used when you're just cutting the area with the razor blade in the same way that you might cut a woodcut that's already been drawn on the block and you cut it into the block and you get a little extra power out of having reinforced and redrawn the line. And I notice when I use a razor blade on this frisket, I can get quite an interesting kinesthetic sense of position with this and a very exacting one because you have to cut both sides of the line with a razor blade; you've already determined the line to a very great extent but this pins it down even further so that you can really use this as a tool for expression lots of times along the way. I think once the lines are in, the rest is pretty mechanical because there's nothing. Once you determine an area is going to be red, it gets to be red and there's nothing much you can do with that. But I think at least part of the process of getting it from the paper to the Plexiglas is an artistic, aesthetic process.

RB: I see. That's interesting.

RL: Also the character of the cut lines is quite different from the one of painted lines. It's much more commercial looking and sharper.

RB: Which you desire?

RL: Yes. It's very steely, kind of an exacting cold, definite line, which is really—

RB: Your choice of Plexiglas is quite narrowly concerned with the sheen of the surface?

RL: Yes. The cold, industrial look.

RB: Have you explored the problem of the durability of Plexiglas?

RL: Well, Plexiglas is supposed to last forever and it's not supposed to yellow—and the paints are Magnicolor which are also acrylics, which is what Plexiglas is, and so it should be inert and durable. Also the paint is on the inside and will be backed with something and it will be relatively untouched by anything once the whole thing is together.

RB: Yes. It has the advantage, doesn't it, that with a damp cloth one could wipe over the surface without touching the paint at all.

RL: Yes. That's no doubt the use of Plexiglas in signs in places like Nedick's [American fast food restaurant chain], you know, they're easily cleaned.

RB: This small painting of the stapler, now you were explaining to me, it's not quite finished now, but it's mostly finished. But you've got the black and the yellow already there I can see.

RL: It's really blue, yes. Blue and yellow. Very dark blue. And there's no yellow, that's just the paper that happens to be not taken off yet.

RB: Oh! Yes, I'm seeing this from an angle from a distance.

RL: That's the frisket paper which gets peeled off. And then it will be transparent and then I will paint the thing white, you see.

RB: Well, that's what I was leading up to. Finally, having made the design and used the black and the dots, you are going to put a coat—

RL: Of white paint.

RB: This white paint will then lie really outermost and serve—

RL: Will serve as white canvas.

RB: Like the effect of white canvas. I suppose it is more likely to retain its pure whiteness with the surface in front of it?

RL: It should. If things work out the way I think they will, it should just about last forever. The surface of Plexiglas is a little scratchable, but it can be repolished actually. It's kind of difficult, I think, but it can be repolished.

RB: How thick is Plexiglas?

RL: Well, I'm using, let me see, eighth inch Plexiglas—you can get it sixteenth or eighth inch. You can get it any thickness but I wanted to have it as thin as I can get it so that the paint looks nearer the surface and you really feel you're looking into something.

RB: You don't think people are going to have the feeling that these things have been manufactured rather than hand-painted?

RL: Well, I don't mind that. I think that's what I sort of like. Particularly, it's good for things like Picassos I think.

RB: It's a minor matter, but what is the cost to you of the Plexiglas as distinct from canvas and stretcher?

RL: It's rather expensive, Plexiglas is.

RB: Well, how much for, for instance, that rather small sheet?

RL: It runs about a dollar twenty-five a square foot, I suppose.

RB: It's not a major expense though.

RL: No.

RB: Do other artists use this painting material—Plexiglas—or is this new with you?

RL: Well, since I decided to use it, I've noticed that quite a few artists have been using it. It just so happens that [James] Rosenquist exhibited in his Environment at Sidney Janis Gallery ["Four Environments by Four New Realists" 1964]—some of that was on Plexiglas. Under that bridge that went over the lake it was a Plexiglas lake

or something—

RB: Oh yes.

RL: —with things painted on it. He paints on both sides and the effect is quite different from mine. And there was a movie thing at the same show which was also on Plexiglas. It was not painting on Plexiglas but used Plexiglas for that sign, the light, it was kind of an opaque, semi-opaque milky Plexiglas that he used.

RB: Well, these of course have only just gone on display within a week or ten days and I suppose were created quite recently.

RL: Yes, but I'm sure that they didn't produce theirs because they saw mine, or vice versa.

RB: No, it does seem to be a relatively new technique though, I gather.

RL: I think so. I hadn't heard of anyone painting on Plexiglas; there was a lot of painting on glass at one time I think.

RB: Plexiglas, of course, is lighter than glass and less breakable, which is certainly an advantage.

RL: Yes. The reason for it is more the antiseptic industrial look than it is—

RB: In your case?

RL: Yes.

RB: Yes. Let's go back now to your life. We had got up to 1944, late in 1944. Do you want to carry on from that point? You spoke about your assignment to do enlargements of Mauldin cartoons. I think we more or less finished that subject. You don't remember at this point, or don't choose to remember the name of the camp.

RL: I don't know. I never will. I never delight on dwelling on those things, I never think about it. In fact I've blotted out successfully my entire life, early life.

RB: I'd just like to know whether you actually have forgotten or just consider it more productible and prudent not to record it.

RL: Well, I don't think I would—I would not record the name of the colonel who had me doing this assignment in the middle of the war, I'm sure, even if I thought of his name I wouldn't let you know, but I'd be so proud of remembering someone's name that I would tell you that I remembered it if I had.

RB: I see, yes. It's interesting that you feel this loyalty to the colonel for his assignment which was better, I guess, than sweeping and making beds.

RL: It really didn't make too much difference to me which I was doing at the time.

RB: Well, what happened after that, when that ended?

RL: Well, I really think that assignment was supposed to be a temporary assignment and I was going to go into map-making in the same office and they just wanted something for me to do in the meantime.

RB: Did this camp have a map-making unit at that time?

RL: It wasn't a unit but it was part of the intelligence operation of the Engineer Battalion. We had both the function of mapping areas and sending these actual, on the spot, mapped areas back to division headquarters further up, and also of getting maps from higher echelons and taking our section off of the map, with certain objectives written on it and getting those maps delivered to the various battalions of the outfit. So we served that function and I started to work on those maps at the same time I was doing the cartoons, or at least learning about that kind of draftsmanship. I had taken drafting at college, engineering drawing, and we had been through engineering at ASTP, so it was a job that followed somewhat logically from some of my training. And, that's the capacity in which I went overseas. And I did go overseas in January or so, January or February of 1945.

RB: How long advance notice did you have that you would be sent overseas or was it kept a secret?

RL: We were not supposed to know which—well, you see we realized when we were no longer with the Air Corps that the reason was the Battle of the Bulge. And so we had the notion that we were going to Europe at least, and almost all of our training had been in that direction, although I know many people get shipped to other areas in

spite of that, and we were never sure of where we were going to go. They never tell you your destination or exactly when you're leaving, but we were fairly sure we would go to Europe. And we did go.

RB: Well, was it just suddenly one day?

RL: I believe they don't tell you the exact time, but they give you time for leave and then you realize you're going to go pretty soon.

RB: Did you go home to New York?

RL: Yes. Our outfit went up to New York, and we took a boat from New York.

RB: What kind of a transport?

RL: The *Le Jeune* it was called; it was a medium ocean liner.

RB: A big ocean liner or one of those Liberty Ships or Victory ship?

RL: No, it had been an ocean liner, a French ocean liner. It was not a huge one; it was a sort of medium-sized one, a luxury liner converted for troop transportation.

RB: And it formed part of a convoy, did it?

RL: Yes.

RB: There were destroyer escorts?

RL: Yes. A large convoy, and it took 14 days. RB: It had been very dangerous previously.

RL: We had some apparent difficulty. We did hear depth charges going off. I mean a session of depth charges.

RB: January of 1945. Cold, wintry weather, naturally.

RL: Yes.

RB: Did you go by the North Atlantic?

RL: Yes. I remember it got warm as we got to the Gulf Stream, relatively warm. We landed in Southampton, England. Our actual route probably really was circuitous. I don't know how—although maybe transports do take 14 days or so to get across, I'm not sure. And we had to wait for the slowest ship, you know.

RB: When I went over I was on the *Queen Mary* which was so fast it went unattended by escorts and landed in Scotland. However, I remember we had about 17,000 men aboard that ship. How were your accommodations?

RL: There were I think five hammocks in a row, one on top of the other. It was a deck that had been closed in and it was converted to sleeping quarters; there must have been thousands of people sleeping in the same place, you know.

RB: I think it was a pretty grim experience. There was no place to go except to lie in one's bunk all day and read or something.

RL: Well, there's nothing to do at all.

RB: How many meals did you have a day? We had two.

RL: Two I think. There was nothing to break the monotony. I guess we shot crap and talked. I think I drew quite a bit.

RB: Where would you have got the paper?

RL: I brought it with me. I always made sure I had some pads and pencils.

RB: What sort of drawings would you have made?

RL: Sketches of people. I did a lot of that in the army. I don't really know how I spent the 14 days. It's very difficult to say, because I don't remember doing anything. It must have been very undelightful and unexciting. I remember I tried to go on KP [kitchen police] once and got sick down in the hold.

RB: You mean you were assigned to do it and you tried to carry through but couldn't, is that it?

RL: I was assigned to do it but I couldn't make it. That's right. But I didn't get sick actually, I wasn't really sick on the voyage, but I got pretty green being down in the bottom of the ship in all that food. I don't see how they can do it.

RB: You didn't have a stormy crossing particularly?

RL: It wasn't very bad.

RB: And then you landed at Southampton?

RL: Yes. And we went in closed trains north. You have to go north from Southampton, and I don't know where we were but we stayed in an old boys' school. It was a stone building in a very pleasant area. It probably was a secret that was revealed eventually because it's pretty hard to live in a place and not know where it was. I don't really remember the name of it, and we were in contact with almost no one else.

RB: You mean you were in this relatively isolated building which perhaps was originally a country house and had become a school.

RL: Yes.

RB: And you didn't go into the village pub?

RL: No.

RB: You were just isolated.

RL: Yes. It was a staging area.

RB: But how did they keep the men occupied by?

RL: I was on KP a lot, I remember, and that was about the last of the KP I did because once we got to Europe they had those permanent KPs or something, people who did that.

RB: Oh. In the fighting area more or less?

RL: Yes.

RB: Well, how long do you think you remained in this English—

RB: About three weeks or so. It rained quite a bit but the landscape was lovely. There was no town and there were buildings, farm buildings in the distance but—

RB: And you literally met under these circumstances no English people?

RL: No. I got a pass to London once for three days.

RB: This was during the time when the V-2s were falling I think.

RL: Well, there were V-2 s falling but they had lessened quite a bit, but a lot of London was really devastated.

RB: Yes, I know it certainly was.

RL: One fell while I was there.

RB: But by this time the Allied forces had gained a great enough area on the continent to eliminate a great many of those launching bases.

RL: Yes. But they were still going over because I remember when we landed in Europe you could see them at night, see them go.

RB: Oh, they continued for quite some while, I think, if this was January. This was still January while you were there, or did it stretch into February before—

RL: Oh, February probably.

RB: Well then, you set forth—how?

RL: By ship. It was one of those—was it LST [Landing Ship, Tank]? Or landing craft? We crossed the Channel to LeHavre.

RB: Right into the harbor?

RL: Yes.

RB: Which of course, was, had for months been, under allied control.

RL: Yes.

RB: What army force were you attached to? RL: The Ninth.

RB: Whose general and chief was—

RL: I don't know who it was. I don't remember who it was. Nobody spectacular like [General George S.] Patton.

RB: By the way, before we get on the Continent, what did you do during that three-day visit to London? This was your first visit to Europe, wasn't it?

RL: Yes. We looked around, we went to—

RB: Where did you stay?

RL: We stayed in a hotel, a small hotel whose name I also don't know, went to a few restaurants and we went to the theatre—I don't know the name of the play or where—and we went sightseeing and—

RB: The blackout, of course, existed in London and the days got dark pretty early in January. You probably went to quite a few pubs too, I should think.

RL: Yes. That's true.

RB: What general impression did London make on you? It was full of Allied troops.

RL: Well, it was a strange impression because it could have been like any other—it is very much like New York I think.

RB: Did you think it was like New York?

RL: Well, it was like New York when it's full of troops or something, everything sort of leveled off in a way. I mean it was quite different from New York. It doesn't have any of the feeling of New York in normal times, I think. Oh, you can't help but be touched by its historic aspect. You never get the feeling in New York that a building is historical, even if it's fairly old.

RB: No. Well, you responded to this in London to a certain extent?

RL: Yes. Oh yes.

RB: Did you go to the Houses of Parliament or St. Paul's or—

RL: I saw most of these things from the outside.

RB: Did you go around with a couple of buddies or something?

RL: Yes. There were I think about three other fellows.

RB: Naturally, you didn't visit the museums although I believe part of the National Gallery may have been open.

RL: No. I didn't go to the National Gallery.

RB: Well, I don't think it was functioning very much in terms of a gallery. Most of the paintings were—

RB: I would guess so because the same was true of the Louvre.

RB: Oh, I know they were all put away from sight for safekeeping at this time, so there was only architecture, you might say, to stimulate your aesthetic.

RB: True. I don't seem very stimulated, do I, by it? But I don't know, in the army I was mostly looking for women and not for architectural monuments.

RB: How successful were you in London as compared to the United States?

RB: I don't think we did too well in the three days we were there.

RB: You really didn't?

RL: No.

RB: Well, of course you didn't have much novelty value as American GIs, that's a certainty.

RL: True.

RB: But all those pubs and so on there must have been, after all, there were plenty of women of the streets functioning in London in those days too.

RL: True.

RB: But perhaps that's not, we hope, exactly and solely what you were looking for. But you didn't feel any particular feeling about the character of the British people as such as a first experience abroad?

RL: I think it's very difficult to find that out in three days in a city.

RB: Yes. And it really was only those three days.

RL: And it was under such unusual conditions. I certainly had a feeling about the people but I don't know that I for certain could put it in words. I never have a tendency to put it in words anyway when I sense something, that's why I'm so bad at describing things. I know that when I see something I get a sensation but the idea of putting that sensation into words never occurs to me and I never describe things to myself, I think, and therefore I can't do it to other people.

RB: I think I was trying to find out whether you had had any significant reactions. RL: I think one of the problems is that you're always with GIs, you're never away from it and you go the PXs [Post Exchange] or whatever the equivalent was, I think there were PXs there really.

RB: There were PXs for selling, yes.

RL: And then you see a British girl out in the distance surrounded by ten GIs, so you really see the GIs, you don't see the girls. I spoke to some I remember, I don't know what my feeling was, I think that I probably had very little contact with people from England, and the idea that they were people who were people—

RB: No, I think you're quite right. I was by this time in Paris and Paris was so full of American soldiers that it didn't... I knew Paris from the past and it didn't seem the same thing at all.

RL: It changes the character of the landscape as well as giving you no one else to speak with but GIs because it's obviously easier to speak with GIs than it is to make an effort to speak with someone else.

RB: Yes.

RL: And you're completely surrounded by them. It's difficult to know the country at all.

RB: Well, you landed in LeHavre after a rough or reasonable—

RL: Reasonable journey.

RB: And then what happened?

RL: Then we were—I know we were in trucks for about a week and a half and we went through France and Belgium and Germany, I mean we started into Germany, entered into the Leipzig-Kassel area, and that's when we sort of began to be in combat although Leipzig and Kassel had both been taken when we got there. I guess it was slightly after that that we really reached the front. And we were going rather rapidly, and we spent a lot of time in the truck, I remember, and I had sort of frostbite in my feet, slight frostbite. It was very cold and there was snow. My feet were really numb for about a year after I got out of the army.

RB: Is that so?

RL: Just the soles, it didn't prevent me from functioning but there was just a slight lack of feeling in the soles of my feet.

RB: Lucky your hands didn't suffer that, as an artist.

RL: I wouldn't play the violin again.

RB: Where would you have lived at night—in tents?

RL: Sometimes—or in buildings that the army had taken over, commandeered from people, not in France of course but they would have prepared areas. We stayed in some hotels in small towns or something, it seems to me, or places that the army had contracted for, I think, in France that had troops stay as a sort of system of getting us from one place to another.

RB: You were still a—what was your rank at this time? A private?

RL: A private, I guess.

RB: So you would get the worst possible accommodations I suppose.

RL: Yes. They weren't bad though. Well, at times they were, at times they weren't. We rarely slept outside. A few times we actually pitched tents and lived outside but usually they billeted us in houses or hotels or castles or all kinds of buildings. But usually there would be a group of men sleeping on the floor in a room.

RB: You all had a sleeping bag as part of your equipment?

RL: Yes. I think as I remember I hadn't changed my clothes for about two months at one period there and I slept in a sleeping bag with my shoes on and it was a real mess. That was later when we got further into Germany.

RB: Bathing facilities were rather lax.

RL: Well, it was freezing for one thing and there were no—

RB: No nice warm showers.

RL: No. There were no warm showers.

RB: Oh, God. Must have been stinking.

RL: Finally, every once in a while, a kind of shower truck unit would come up and you'd take a shower. Anyway they would billet us so many to a room and if there was a bed you'd sleep on the bed, or if that were taken you'd sleep on the floor in your sleeping bag. But we got into some fairly elegant places also some decrepit places, but in Germany I think the thing would be each town would have kind of a mayor I guess, or if we just took the town we would just march in and commandeer a place and have the people in it move to some other place and we would just take over a certain number of buildings for ourselves. But of course with our allies we would not take over the buildings, you know, that was arranged somehow.

RB: Yes. Well, did you fire a gun at any stage along the way?

RL: Only for practice. And never at anyone.

RB: You never were actually in combat in a sense?

RL: No. Not technically in combat. The outfit was in combat but my job was back at the office, which was nice. Also when we got into Germany it was better to house people in the headquarters in houses, because the Germans would be less likely to come back and bomb the buildings in the cities, because they could never be sure which was housing German people and which was housing officers or offices. So that it was always better when possible to have headquarters people living in buildings rather than out in the field. It was sort of protection. So that was a lucky kind of protection for us. RB: The United States Armies were by this time in a fairly optimistic mood.

RL: Yes, we were making sometimes twenty, fifteen miles a day in progress and we were taking a lot of prisoners and there was no doubt at this time that we were going to win. It was just a question of when they would give up.

RB: Now your duties would not have got you in touch with prisoners?

RL: No, but I was on guard duty sometimes. No, it didn't, no. For one thing, our outfit usually handled either mining or removal of mines from fields and building of bridges, and probably prisoners were taken by the infantry. We were an engineer battalion in an infantry division. I don't think we ever got one prisoner, as a

matter of fact. It wasn't up to us to process them.

RB: Yes. Did your outfit suffer heavy or minor casualties?

RL: I think fairly minor, relatively minor. But a number of casualties.

RB: Well, what I'm really thinking of, did any of your pals get wounded or killed?

RL: Yes, there was a friend of mine who worked in the office. He wasn't a friend of mine, I just knew him well, I mean knew that he was there, worked in the office. And he tried to disassemble a mine rather than blow it up, as he had been told to do, and he got blown up, and it was sort of, it was right outside the office.

RB: You were there?

RL: Yes. But that was about the only—well, casualty I really came in close contact with. I knew that people in the outlying areas of our outfit were, would be killed, you know, but—

RB: Did your outfit have any experience with the concentration camps in Germany, the horror of all that?

RL: No, I never saw one as a matter of fact. No.

RB: Well, where did you finally settle down then more or less?

RB: We went on directly until the war was over and it was our outfit I guess, our division that met the Russians.

RB: Oh, it was!

RB: Yes.

RB: Where was this?

RL: Well, it must have been in somewhere in the line of Leipzig and Kassel, in the northern sector, anyway, of Germany.

RB: Did you see them?

RL: No. I saw some Russians but actually I didn't see the troops. I seemed to miss everything interesting all the way along. I came in contact with Russian prisoners that had been released, that were living in a, oh, hotel like in a small town, and it was kind of fun, the strenuous dancing they did every night and the drinking of something that must have been vodka, they might have made it themselves, it was pretty potent whatever it was. And they seemed to have a lively life, I think they must have danced all night, I don't know what they did in the daytime. But it was a hearty—

RB: These were ordinary soldiers?

RL: They were just ordinary soldiers—no, they must have been captured people actually because there were both men and women, and they lived together in a barracks which was a rather strange arrangement. But it was like an army barracks, with double-decker beds, a huge place, they all lived in the same place.

RB: How much direct contact would you have had yourself then with these Russians?
Any?

RL: No. I just went there I think for a few nights, it was kind of fun to go. I don't remember which town it was in but it was a small town. I think they had been released and they had probably been part of a town that had been overtaken by the Germans and they had been maybe working in a factory and—

RB: Yes. They may have been impressed into labor duties and brought from the Ukraine or something.

RL: Yes.

RB: You, of course, were forbidden to fraternize at this stage with Germans, I believe, wasn't that right?

RL: Possibly. Let me see. I think actually during—yes, until the war was over. That's right.

RB: I thought even after it ended there was a ban against social recognition of the Germans as human beings almost, wasn't there?

RL: Oh, maybe for not more than a week at the most. It seemed to me that almost immediately there was

social—it might have been outlawed but not observed as a rule.

RB: Yes. I think it was intended to impress upon the German people the enormity of their crime in the treatment of the Jews and other people and not to treat them as human equals.

RL: It didn't seem to work at all.

RB: I don't suppose I should require too much detail, it's not too relevant to your career but—

RL: Well, let me see now, which part are we thinking about? When the war was over?

RB: Well, finish up your duties in the war, I mean what, if anything, outstanding happened, I mean you weren't wounded? You weren't ill?

RL: No.

RB: Were you meeting anybody interesting among your colleagues? Were you drawing?

RL: I was doing some drawing.

RB: Were you learning languages?

RL: Well, I did that later. When the war ended I got shifted to the Information and Education Section, it was really the same office all of that, but rather than the map work I went to a school. The school was in a cave in a mountain where they had built Messerschmitt [German aircraft manufacturer], and it was in the southern part of Germany. As a matter of fact I think we went to Oberammergau which would be in Austria, I guess.

RB: No, that was in Bavaria.

RL: But the school was near to it because we made a side trip there in Information and Education. Then we were sent back to our units, I think that was a week or so that we were there.

RB: How did you get into this school? Was this something you requested to do, or something you were just assigned to?

RL: Well, I think I was either assigned or volunteered for it.

RB: What were you supposed to learn at this school?

RL: Well, you learned how to teach troops what's going on in the world. It was a kind of orientation—

RB: Our troops?

RL: Our troops. Because the war was over and they wanted an educational program that would deal with the war in Japan partly and the social-political feeling of the world at that time—which is a large order but it was very simplified.

RB: Yes. To back-track a second you might say something about the emotional experience of the day of victory itself in Germany and where were you, what happened?

RL: Let me see, well, I don't know the name of the town, it was some small town, we'd been making a different town every day it seemed to me, we were going very quickly and there was word that we had won, and they weren't quite sure and we were checking on it and then we went wild, I guess, when we found out that they had actually given up.

RB: What time of day was it when you learned this?

RL: I believe it was afternoon. But we had had so many kind of half-way stories and we realized that they couldn't go on, we actually had geographically captured most of Germany anyway, the fact that they had given up was not that significant, there was no doubt that we were going to win, it was only a question of time. But it was exciting to know that we had just—

RB: How did the troops carry on and what did they do to celebrate or what happened?

RL: I think we didn't do anything. I mean there was no celebrating. I think we—well, we probably drank to it since we always managed to capture wine cellars and things, which was part of our standard operation. And I think it was our chief objective.

RB: It was considered appropriate to go into a private house and then remove the wine cellars?

RL: Well, no, it was always illegal to do that, but I remember once our carpenter built a very elaborate system of boards over a door which was supposedly nailing the door up to a wine cellar and the whole thing hinged on one nail, it was a very elaborate system of nails which had been turned over and it was really held by only one nail. It looked very official—I'm sure everyone knew it was faked but the officers had to carry out their end of it by saying it was not permissible and everybody had to go through with the act.

RB: This was a restaurant wine cellar or private home?

RL: No, I think it was a private one. Everyone I knew had—was it Four Hennessey? Or something, there were certain brands that were very popular and desirable and somehow or other it was more a game I think, you know, because it was not permissible and it was a fairly insignificant crime really that it was something that everyone tried to do.

RB: How much looting did you notice? I mean, of course, the objective of getting liquor.

RL: There was a lot of looting. I think I never actually saw a group of drunk troops, though, I mean en masse or—there were individuals who would get drunk, but it was rare that anything was really out of hand, I'm talking about the whiskey part of it. It was more a game of getting it.

RB: But being an artist, I presume you would be sympathetic to some works of art and architecture and I wondered if you had witnessed what is called vandalism.

RL: There was a lot of vandalism. There was a lot of throwing bayonets into paintings and—

RB: You saw this personally? How did you feel?

RL: Yes. And burning up furniture for firewood and all kind of things. It was—

RB: Well, did you see really fine works of art destroyed?

RL: No I never saw—they were usually—but I don't think it would have made any difference because—well, I don't know what you could do about it. Nothing I guess.

RB: I'd hate to think of troops throwing darts into one of your paintings that belonged to me as an exercise in entertainment.

RL: There were a few very decent libraries in private houses and they were guarded by our troops—they were definitely guarded so that we really couldn't get to them, which was good—of rare good books and things. But I think that most paintings that were good and the most really valuable things would have been put away. They would have felt that they were losing the war by that time and they would have done something to protect works of art. But I don't think it would have made any difference to the troops if they had been excellent works of art, I think they would have thrown—bayonets at paintings seemed to be one of the things to do. And I know that museums were guarded by our troops very well. And in homes you would rarely find works of exceptional value.

RB: As an artist, though, didn't it displease you to see—

RL: Yes, it did.

RB: I would think you would have felt rather strongly about this.

RL: Yes, on one hand; on the other hand there was a kind of Dada sense of insanity about it that's—

RB: You were the mass man rather than the artist in these circumstances.

RL: Yes. It's strange—I don't know what my feeling was, usually the paintings were so bad, but it didn't make any difference, there was still a feeling of horror about ruining a painting whether it good or bad. Because partly maybe I realized it wouldn't have made any difference, it could have been a good one and the same fate would have befallen it. But there was a feeling of horror and humor but a funny kind of humor. It's a kind of desperate humor, you know. You know you couldn't stop them, it would be worse to prevent them.

RB: Well, you weren't in a position of authority obviously.

RL: No, there was nothing I could do about it. The burning of furniture for firewood was another thing that was—it didn't seem to make any difference what the furniture was. We stayed in some—oh, there was a castle that

was owned by the newspaper publisher of the town of Kassel that we stayed at, it was sort of French building, a chateau-like affair. It was very elegant, it was over-elegant and it was—there were some very rare pieces of furniture there that I'm sure got ruined beyond repair. The library there though was protected, and I don't think there were works of art, yes, there were a few I guess, minor paintings which got ruined. We were I guess the same, or worse or at least equally barbarian as anyone else. And I don't know, our troops seem to change into something when they get into uniform. Probably all troops do unless they're—

RB: I fear so, yes, but it always horrifies me to think of possibly being with a group of other young men and going into a house that might actually contain extremely rare examples of furniture and beautiful works of art and have them just wantonly destroyed without any sense.

[Interruption for telephone call]

That telephonic interruption has occasioned your remarking that I was to take up and come back right to the present. You said you had given up smoking and it just happens that—was it two days ago?

RL: Just about.

RB: Two days ago this report was issued putting the health menace of cigarette smoking very vividly before people. Now I haven't noticed any smokers giving up. Is your decision based on this medical report?

RL: No, but I thought it would be a good occasion to give it up. I've given it up three times before. I gave it up for about a full year each time and I think it's a way of torturing myself, because as soon as I get it completely given up, then I reward myself by allowing myself to smoke.

RB: Did you take seriously that medical article?

RL: Well, I think there's nothing new in it, and people thought anyway that smoking had this effect—I haven't read it in full.

RB: It seems to me very well timed your giving it up. I would encourage you on the basis of this report never to resume.

RL: No, I never intend to resume when I cut it out, but for some reason or other you get so fresh and clear and healthy feeling that you feel that you can smoke again.

RB: How much were you smoking, say, a month ago?

RL: Oh, a pack and a half or so a day.

RB: And when did you stop? After this report was published?

RL: Yes, I stopped two days ago.

RB: And you won't admit there's any direct connection between the report?

RL: Oh no, I said I just used it as an occasion to. I knew the report was coming out and I was also thinking of stopping again anyway. So I did. I think the supreme irony would be if you really cut it out and you also got lung cancer, you know—you would have felt you could have smoked all this time—or if you cut out smoking, which is really quite an effort, and you slip on a banana peel on the street or something. You would have wasted this wonderful time when you could have been smoking.

RB: Well, that's—yes, I agree with you because I have cut out certain fatty substances to lower my cholesterol count and it did occur to me that although I may potentially be prolonging my life, if I get killed by a taxicab two years hence, I will have lost two full years of whipped cream.

RL: I understand your psychology!

RB: But I'm delighted to know at least one individual who has responded at least for a couple of days anyway.

RL: Oh no, no. It's going to be forever.

RB: And how is it affecting your nerves?

RL: Well, they're on edge, and they stay that way for about two weeks, and then I get back to normal.

RB: Well, to go back to the war now, you had started to speak of this educational place, and we really didn't go into that very fully. You were being trained to teach.

RL: I went down to the southern part of Germany, I think it was, and it was a short course on teaching orientation to the troops, it was mostly on describing the war in the Pacific and so forth, and sort of as a kind of pastime, information program because they had this problem of what to do with the troops now that the war was over so—of course they had the job of occupying Germany for one thing, but—

RB: Yes, I'm presuming that your records had indicated your aptitudes and so on, those made you a suitable candidate for this kind of assignment.

RL: Well, I was working in the office so the officers there knew me, for one thing.

RB: Oh, it was a personal sort of thing.

RL: I think it was. And I was working in what would be the intelligence branch, I think it was S2 or something, or G2, I think G2 was on a higher echelon, this was probably the lowest echelon of intelligence been on. But anyway it was in that early area that took care of Information and Education. I was the logical person for it anyway.

RB: What were you taught?

RL: Well, how to present material to the troops visually and orally.

RB: Who was your teacher—an officer?

RL: He was an officer.

RB: But what was his background, I mean was he himself a teacher or—

RL: He was a teacher and intelligence officer of some kind, I mean he came from the department probably in Washington. And it was a very short course and they took people who had some teaching experience. I don't know where I dug up my teaching experience from but I think I had some somewhere, had probably assisted or something. I'm not sure.

RB: Were there interesting men assigned to this job?

RL: Well, I was the only one in the outfit. No, there was an officer—

RB: Well, at school there must have been other people studying.

RL: Oh, I was only there for, say, about a week or a week and a half. I don't remember.

RB: You don't remember the people there?

RL: There was one man from each outfit, so they wouldn't know each other. And then I went back to, let me see, we were in—was it Bremen, no—

RB: Bremen is a coastal city, a seaport. RL: A coastal city in the north?

RB: Yes.

RL: Yes, that's where we were stationed at that time, I think. Yes.

RB: Did that beer hall still exist where in my time I had a glass of wine of the 18th century? I'm afraid this was —

RL: I'm sure it didn't exist because there was almost nothing left. Anyway I went there and I did the job and spoke to the troops. It wasn't the only thing I was doing, but it was—

RB: What did you do now, be a little more specific.

RL: Well, you would lecture to various groups. Current events, you know. That was what the Information and Education thing was about.

RB: And you obtained your source material from the newspapers?

RL: Anything. Newspapers. I am sure it was no material that they couldn't have gathered themselves.

RB: I can't quite picture you as a political commentator at this stage.

RL: No, I couldn't either but I guess maybe compared with some of the others I was, or something. I don't feel that I was a political commentator, and I think it was partly informative, partly entertainment, partly time-wasting, you know. They just had to do something with them. They thought up various programs, one of which was—well, through us we also sent people to various schools and various projects.

RB: Were you an easy and assured public speaker at this stage?

RL: I doubt it. Well, I was nervous to begin with—no, at the beginning I was—

RB: I would have been quite frightened I think to have to—

RL: Well, I remember I prepared a lot of visual material which would prompt me on what I was going to say. Maps and headlines, charts and things, I Don't remember the specific information. Actually I didn't do it for very long because one of the things that came through was this French Language and Civilization at Cité Universitaire in Paris. Various school things would come through us and—

RB: The news of their existence you mean?

RL: Yes. The openings, and we would give them out according to army test ratings. So I gave myself this—well, I was the non-com in charge of it. There was an officer in charge of it and he gave it to me actually. But it was fair and square because nobody else had any French.

RB: Oh, I'm sure it was an excellent fortunate thing for you to do and very well qualified. I was just wondering whether this was again your initiative or something that

RL: Well, I wanted it actually. I knew it was going to come through and I was waiting for it.

RB: When would this have been?

RL: That was in, let's see, December it must have been. Because—

RB: So you had this full summer in northern Germany?

RL: I think I got out of the army in February—wait a minute—I got out in January of '46.

RB: And the surrender of Germany occurred somewhere—President Roosevelt died I think in April, and it was in May I think, wasn't it, that the Germans surrendered. And then the Japanese gave up in the middle of August.

RL: Yes.

RB: So the opportunity to go to the Cité Universitaire occurred only after the surrender of Japan. Of Japan? Yes. The war really was over.

RL: Yes.

RB: So all the time that the Japanese were still fighting your unit potentially might be sent to the Far East. Is that correct?

RL: That's correct. And part of the program that I was doing was to inform the soldiers of the Japanese area. The progress of the war and also to enlighten them because we might really wind up over there. We thought we might but it was still fairly remote, and also there was a good feeling at the end of the European war that now we could concentrate all our troops in the Far East and it made the possibility of losing the war rather remote there too.

RB: Yes.

RL: Well, I went to Paris, I was only there a month and then I came back to the States and was discharged. I was out of the army I believe in January of '46.

RB: You went from Bremen to Paris as an individual or as part of a unit? You went by train?

RL: I think I went by plane if I remember. And I think I went as an individual, yes.

RB: Well, how long was this course intended to last?

RL: I think six months. I got an emergency furlough because my father was dying at the time.

RB: Oh, that's why—oh, I see.

RL: I got this to come home so after a month I went back to the States.

RB: Otherwise if it hadn't been for this family circumstance you would have remained there for six months?

RB: Yes. I would have continued, yes.

RB: Well, you were billeted somewhere in a hotel in Paris, or—

RL: In the American—what was the name of the American—it's like a dormitory connected with Cité. I think it's a permanent—

RB: Oh, I believe there is a residence hall or something.

RL: Yes. Which is for American students and that's where we were.

RB: And how did that first month work out? I mean what intellectual stimulation did it provide you?

RL: Oh, well, the lectures were in French and everyone was supposed to know French but—

RB: Did you know it well?

RL: I knew it not too well. I had taken quite a bit of French in high school. And I would say I was probably, in spite of the fact I didn't know French too well, I probably was above average in understanding the people there. No one else seemed to understand French either.

RB: Had you been to Paris before this assignment?

RL: No.

RB: How did you react to Paris? Can I draw more blood for Paris than I did for London?

RL: I doubt it.

RB: You didn't like Notre Dame?

RL: I have a way of seeing everything and saying it was nice. That's the end of that.

RB: It shows a good friendly disposition if everything is nice.

RL: I don't know, I have a way of not wanting to describe things. I never describe anything to myself or anyone else, it's a very strange thing.

RB: What do you mean you don't describe to yourself? Short of being, say, a diarist I don't know that people really describe things to themselves.

RL: Maybe they don't. I always have the feeling that some people I know are so verbal about describing in detail things that happen to them and—

RB: Well, people are. Now, for instance, Bob [Robert] Indiana is a very verbal person, I take it, and he also is a diarist and he likes to write and if you read the description of his studio, say, the whole environment, this is describing to oneself perhaps in more than the average way, but I'm just really trying to clarify what you meant.

RL: I sometimes have the idea that maybe other people describe things in words to themselves more than I do, maybe it's not true. I don't mean they talk to themselves but they're thinking that way.

RB: The question is really interesting how they register with you, it doesn't have to be in words, but does it register as a visual—

RL: See it registers but I don't know how to explain how it registers. I think that's it. You know my memory of it will be something like kind of cold, damp stone and I'll remember the Metro and standing waiting, you know, or various railroad stations or going to Rheims Cathedral, the trip there in the train and, oh, a kind of impingement of these things on myself but I'm not particularly—

RB: They only become of interest in a sense if they somehow enter into you and become part of you and come out later in some form. I don't know that I could answer the question very brilliantly "What has Paris contributed to your life?" I don't know that one thinks in those terms and yet in some instances Paris has contributed a great deal to people's life. There were GIs who rushed to meet Gertrude Stein and rushed to meet Picasso. You were not among them?

RL: No. I remember I always wanted to meet Picasso and I found out he had a studio in—was it—*Rue des Grands Augustins* or something and went there.

RB: You did go?

RL: I went but I was actually afraid to go in. There was a big gate and there was a paper mill or something on part of it, it was very closed off. I think actually at that time Picasso was not seeing GIs any longer. This was rather late.

RB: It never would have occurred to me—I was in Paris the same time you're speaking of I think—to go to see these people because I would have felt it was somewhat presumptuous to take their time.

RL: That's what I felt too, but I went to look at it and kind of thought, you know, wouldn't it be nice if he came out and I'd say hello to him or something. But he never came out and I never went in. You know, had there been a line of people waiting to see him I might have gone in, but there was nothing, which was good because I'm not even sure he was there at the time. But I would feel it rather presumptuous because what do I have to say to him that would be of any value to him.

RB: You might prophetically have said, "I am going to repaint your paintings, Sir, in a different way." But you—do you think that experience in Paris added anything in some minor little way to your personality or cultural richness?

RL: No. I was mostly in contact with GIs. I was doing my homework and going to class mostly. But it was only a month, of course, you don't gain a tremendous amount of knowledge and the art history was art history that I probably already knew. I could understand the French lectures because that kind of voice and the kind of distinct pronunciation would be understandable to me. I couldn't understand anything on the Metro or casual street conversation. I know that when I used to try to overhear people speaking I couldn't understand anything going on, but I could understand the lectures very well.

RB: It seems to me your painting is on the whole clear painting, if there is such a thing as distinct from misty. It's obviously clearly delineated and that makes me suddenly think that your mind perhaps is sympathetic to what is supposed to be the typical French mentality—clear and precise. Do you think you feel sympathy with the French?

RL: To say that I knew the French from being there would be not really true. We met some students. There was a sort of get-together on Saturday or Friday, I'm not sure, in which we would meet female, mostly, students of Cité some place where they sort of arranged a social gathering. But their English was usually so much better than our French that we rarely got a chance to speak French. And to say that I knew much about the French people would not really be true. I don't know. I have a feeling about them but I'm not sure that this is accurate or that it's influenced me in my work at all. As a matter of fact, I would think my painting is not French painting at all.

RB: No, it's not French painting but this element of a fairly obvious statement, I mean this stapler painting we spoke of earlier on Plexiglas is.

RL: Well, pseudo-factual, I mean that's what—it may look factual.

RB: Yes, it's not an enigmatic or romantic painting, is it?

RL: No.

RB: And then the clear lines with which you do things.

RL: Well, [Fernand] Léger would probably be the closest.

RB: Yes. I've always felt a certain relationship between your work and Léger's.

RL: Most French painting really is more Expressionist I think, or romantic anyway.

RB: Did you know Léger's painting quite well at that time?

RL: I knew it. I never did like it; I actually don't like it today, as a matter of fact.

RB: Much of it I don't like but there's some I think is extremely beautiful, of course.

RL: I've never really reacted to it and I think it's probably strange because most people think of mine as being very much like his. The subject matter is somewhat similar. The industrial thing certainly is. I don't have any

feeling for his painting in spite of the fact that I can see that it obviously looks similar.

RB: Some of the Louvre was open when you were in Paris. Did you go there?

RL: Yes.

RB: What did you look for?

RL: Well, I remember seeing—I looked around and the Egyptian Collection was still in the basement and I think they couldn't move that very much in spite of the possibility of it being bombed. And I remember the *Mona Lisa* was up for the routine tourists. I think they brought that out and brought it up rather quickly.

RB: They had a selection of various smaller works. I remember being very impressed by some Claude Lorraine paintings that were hanging about that time.

RL: The one that impressed me most I think was *The Wash Woman* by [Honoré] Daumier, that one, you know, I think he has a child and a woman coming up from the bank of a river or something. A very beautiful little painting.

RB: Yes, I think Daumier was a marvelous painter.

RL: A fellow cartoonist.

RB: That's true, yes of course he was, wasn't he?

RL: I just thought of that. Couldn't be more different.

RB: Well, Daumier's painting is certainly different from yours. But it is interesting to think about the cartoon link.

RL: It's not much of a link because actually his purpose was different in both respects. He probably thought of his painting a little bit separate from his cartooning, and his cartooning as being an artful act rather—he was imposing art characteristics on the cartoon as well as actual aesthetic value. I guess in a way doing the same but trying apparently to remove apparent aesthetic qualities.

RB: Trying to remove aesthetic qualities?

RL: Well, apparently aesthetic ones. The tracks of it, such as brush strokes and things that look to be art, the outward manifestations that we usually associate with art, or that we—

RB: But the essence of art you would accept I hope as part of your creation.

RL: True.

RB: But you are at war, as it were, with certain manifestations of modern painting?

RL: With what we consider painting, which I think almost every painter is at war with really. I would think that almost all painters are at war—most of the major changes in painting can be looked at, at least as a war with painting that went—preceding and—

RB: And you are, I take it, in rebellion against the brush stroke.

RL: Yes. I'm thinking of doing now some things on Abstract Expressionism, since I've done Picasso ones, and there the problem will be to paint a brush stroke, a picture of a brush stroke which would—

RB: That's interesting. I should invite you to my collection to go through to see if you can find any painting to parody. But totally—

RL: Mutilate.

RB: That's an interesting problem. I wonder what artists would lend themselves—

RL: Purposely dripped paint and things, you know, where the drips are actually drawn as drips that look like drops of water drawn by a commercial artist.

RB: I wonder if some of the Pollocks would lend themselves to this.

RL: They might.

RB: You should go to the new exhibit and have a look around, maybe you'll find a clue. Or do you think de Kooning would, de Kooning women would they—

RL: That's a possibility. De Kooning probably comes closer. I've made some little sketches but most of the shapes look like wooden signs rather than brush strokes, they look like a lot of cartoon drawings of wooden signs, you know how the edges are zigzagged and they've got marks through them which look more like weathered wood than they do—I have to think of a way of representing—

RB: Oh, yes. It's an interesting approach. The effects of your visit to Paris then. Well, let us summarize if we may. You improved your French.

RL: Little bit, yes.

RB: Have you ever been back to Paris since?

RL: No.

RB: And your French is not as good as it then was at this moment I presume.

RL: True.

RB: Well, unfortunately you had this tragic event then of your father's illness. When did his illness begin?

RL: Well, it had been going on for an indefinite number of years but they—

RB: What was it?

RL: It was a heart ailment. Apparently he had something as a child which deteriorated his heart tissue and then it showed up again later. It got progressively worse.

RB: You were aware during much of your stay in Paris that your father was quite ill?

RL: No, I wasn't. They hadn't informed me.

RB: Oh! It was a rather abrupt notice then that you received?

RL: Yes. Well, they called me before saying they were going to do it but that it wasn't as serious as it sounded, which I realized—

RB: You mean your mother?

RL: Yes.

RB: She telephoned across the Atlantic?

RL: I believe that—or wrote—one or the other. I think she wrote probably. I'm not sure they allowed telephone calls.

RB: Telephone phone calls probably weren't available at that stage.

RL: I think it was with a telegram or anyway a letter saying that it wasn't as serious as it sounded but it had to sound that serious in order to get the Red Cross to okay me to come back. I didn't believe her of course, and that was her way of making it less shocking. So I did come back. And he did die.

RB: You came back, you said, in—before or after Christmas?

RL: January or February I'm not sure, of '46. Flown back.

RB: And how long were you here before your father died?

RL: Oh, a few—well, I was out of the army before he died.

RB: You got what I believe is called compassionate home leave? And then—

RL: I'm not sure. Something like that. And then I had had enough points I guess to get released from the army. And I was at, I think, Camp Dix or some separation center and I did get out in - well, I was actually out in February of 146.

RB: When you first arrived home though were you given temporary leave and then were able to go and stay with your family. Is that it?

RL: That's right.

RB: Well, this of course was a turning point in your life with the loss of your father and getting out of the army, I mean this would have been a very significant stage. What was going on in your mind at this time concerning your future? What did you do?

RL: Well, I went back and finished college for one thing. RB: You wanted to finish college? Yes.

RL: I only had two years of it or so. Two and a half years I guess I had.

RB: Well, how soon did you pick up I mean after a period of mourning and distress and so on.

RL: Well, I went back to college—let's see, as soon as I could get back and register with a semester or a quarter whichever it was. It was in '46 and it must have been, because actually I graduated also in '46. Well, of course I had a long way to go, it was just the beginning of the year.

RB: Yes. Probably college was in session during the summer?

RL: Yes, but I don't think I went during the summer. No, I think I finished before summer. I must have gotten into the last semester or quarter, they were on the quarter system.

RB: Were there many other GIs at that time already enrolled?

RL: Yes, quite a few GIs. I got in and I got a lot of credits added to my record from these various things that I had, you see, and although I only had two and a half years up to then, and then only had one semester I did graduate. They gave me all the credits—

RB: Well, every effort was being made at that time to compensate you veterans for the loss of your time.

RL: Yes. They also liked my work and all of that, so they—

RB: What were you doing now back at college precisely in the way of academic work?

RL: Mostly painting. I had taken most of the courses that led up to that and then I took all painting I believe and some graphics and—

RB: Who was your instructor at this stage?

RL: Well, both Hoyt Sherman and James Grimes.

RB: And how were you painting at this period? What style of painting?

RL: I was painting abstractly, I think kind of like [Piet] Mondrian.

RB: Oh, a geometric approach? Influenced to the extent of confining your palette to his rules or—

RL: No, the palette was different, just the shapes were the same I remember. I didn't do—

RB: The fact that you were painting flatly?

RL: Flatly. Slightly modulated in the same way he does I mean more or less. There's a subtle modulation going on behind the thing, a subtle thing.

RB: Did you ever paint with heavy brush strokes at any stage, or have you always been—

RL: Yes.

RB: But at this stage you were painting flatly and—

RL: Yes. Before this I had done things that probably came closer to the blue or rose period of Picasso and they also had somewhat of a Van Gogh look, if you can picture it, and the brush strokes were kind of heavy. But these are periods of very few paintings since I was a student at the time, and there were no lengthy periods and I probably didn't do more than ten Mondrian-like paintings, and then I went into something more fluid and abstract.

RB: What became of these works—destroyed?

RL: I think they're destroyed, yes.

RB: The opportunities to see 20th century art in Paris would have been few I suppose?

RL: I didn't see any, as a matter of fact. I believe that the Museum of Modern Art was open, I'm not sure.

RB: I don't know, I remember going to a *vernissage*, the first I ever went to in Paris, somewhere around the period when you were there I should think.

RL: I was really relatively unaware of art at the time in a funny way, I mean I knew the existence of some people but I guess I was young and I wasn't that interested in anyone else's art as much as I was in my own.

RB: Well, that's very characteristic, I think. But I just wanted to find out.

RL: I guess I didn't know then what, I didn't know intensely what the meaning of various kinds of art was. You get a very confused notion of art I think when you start. It seems to me you start with the idea that the art is done by or something like that I think.

RB: Of course your education was being paid for under the GI Bill of Rights?

RB: Also under the GI Bill of Rights.

RB: Yes. Had you any responsibilities concerning your father's estate, business things and so on?

RL: No.

RB: The bank or your mother or someone was his executor?

RL: Yes.

RB: And didn't you participate in this?

RL: No. And I was actually home and painting with no idea of what I was going to do when I got a call from this state asking me if I wanted to teach, so it was very simple.

RB: To teach as an instructor in painting or in—

RB: As an instructor in painting.

RB: Who do you think suggested you for this?

RB: Well, a number of people, there was Mr. Fry, a sculptor, and Mr. Sherman and Mr. Grimes, I think I was pretty friendly with all of them and they liked my work I think and

RB: What, may I ask, was the salary?

RL: It was \$2300 a year. Which was a normal starting salary at that time I remember.

RB: It sounds very little today but it would be at least \$4000 in terms of buying power today I think probably.

RL: Yes, I think so. But we lived on it and as a matter of fact with slightly higher. I was married and we lived on it.

RB: But when you went out there you weren't married?

RL: No.

RB: Or engaged?

RL: No. Or had no prospects of being married.

RB: I see. So you returned. Where did you set yourself up to live as an instructor?

RL: I had a room in a rooming house almost the same as I did as a student except that I didn't have any roommates.

RB: Were those roommates when you went back after the war fellow art students, or how did that group get

together?

RL: No. Well, yes, as a matter of fact they were. Let me see, there was one fellow, Ryan, who was an art student and also was a part owner of interest in various things, there was a beer parlor and things like that that he was involved in.

RB: An entrepreneur.

RL: Yes, he was a kind of student entrepreneur. We had a room. As a matter of fact it was kind of an apartment room combination. We found out the first night that it was right near a bowling alley and we could hear the ball and the pins and all.

RB: All night long?

RL: Well, till eleven or so. Yes, he was my roommate for quite a while after the war. As a matter of fact until—

RB: What was his first name?

RL: I think it was Jim Ryan. I know his last name was Ryan.

RB: That's curious. I should have thought you would have called him by his first name and would be much more likely to remember that than his last name.

RL: I don't know, I think we were in the habit of calling each other by last names. Which is a New York habit, although he wasn't a New Yorker. Yes, it's very funny. I hear children on the street now and I remember because it sounds very strange to me now. New York has a kind of wretched habit actually, it isn't all of New York either but it's probably a segment of New York, where children will call each other by their last names. I remember very—

RB: I've heard you once referred to as Lichty. Now does anybody call you Lichty?

RL: They used to but not now. But I can remember as a child, you know, yelling out, "Hey, Ryan," "Hey, Kulevich," "Hey, Mallon," you know, the last name you don't even say Mister or Sir, it's the use of the last name and for some reason or other. Because of that possibly I remember last names better than first names. I've never heard that anywhere except in New York. It may be true in other places.

RB: Well, when I was at Oxford a Scottish friend of mine named Nigel Walker greatly resented if he was called Nigel by his friends because at his school only the smaller children, the children were called by their first names.

RL: New York has a kind of system though—

RB: What kind of situation was it teaching in this job when you went back? How big a department?

RL: I enjoyed it very much. There were about 40 in the department altogether.

RB: 40 teachers?

RL: It included art education, and art history and studio courses. There might have been about 35 when I first got there and by the time I left there were 40 or so. I think there are almost 60 now. It's a very large department.

RB: It seems incredibly large. There must have been an enormous number of students there.

RL: There was Stan Twardowicz who's shown quite a bit who also started the same year. He shows at the Peridot Gallery.

RB: I've seen his work. He taught there?

RL: He started at the same time I did.

RB: Had you known him before?

RL: No. He was from Detroit. He now lives on Long Island.

RB: Yes. Well, anybody else that one might have heard of among these teachers?

RL: No, I was trying to think of who would be there—there was Bob King who had been there a few years before. I'm trying to think of people you might—and Chuck Surry who is still there, and so is Bob King. Chuck Surry started a year after us. We had quite a few teachers because there was this great influx of GIs so that

they probably picked fairly unqualified, at least on paper, teachers then than they would have later. That's one reason why I got to teach there without having, having just graduated but no other experience and without any advanced degrees, although I did work on my master's degree while I was there.

RB: I don't really see why an academic degree is particularly relevant to a painter teaching painting.

RL: It sure isn't, but almost all art departments require them. As a matter of fact, they didn't require them, Stan Twardowicz didn't have one and never got one, I'm not sure he graduated from high school, as a matter of fact. But it seems that the worse the school is the more they require degrees, probably to prove to the dean that they have worthy people.

RB: Yes. And also it's used, I suppose, in connection with salary scales. Had you had a certain kind of degree you'd get a better salary, wouldn't you?

RL: Probably would have started at a higher salary.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...June 11, 2009