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Oral history interview with Harold Rosenberg, 1970 December 17-1973 January 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Harold Rosenberg on December 17, 1970 & June 30, 1971. The interview took place at his office at the New Yorker Magazine in New York, New York, and was conducted by Paul Cummings 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.

Interview

Tape 1, side A [Both tapes are 45 minutes per side; the tapes used for transcribing are copies of the original recording, which was made on reel-to-reel tape.-Ed.] [Confidence in the accuracy of this transcription is considerably diminished due to relatively poor tape quality-Trans.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: December 17, Paul Cummings talking to Harold Rosenberg in his office at The New Yorker magazine.

HAROLD ROSENBERG: . . . the [life of that] town.

MR. CUMMINGS: Okay, well, you said that _____ in the other [tape] you had started talking about your relation to art and you interest in art. How did that develop over the years?

MR. ROSENBERG: I guess the basic and original relation to art came about, as is often the case, from my having friends who are artists.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: When I was about, oh, eighteen, I'd say, we lived in a neighborhood in Brooklyn which turned out to be quite an avant-garde neighborhood, that is, there were a number of musicians and composers and painters around.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were they?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, the painters are not very well known today. One of them was a young poet named David Arkin, who then became a painter. He went to study at the Beaux Arts in Paris. He's the father of the actor, Arkin.

MR. CUMMINGS: Alan Arkin.

MR. ROSENBERG: Alan Arkin. They moved out to the coast. He was also a friend of Rothkowitz, now known as Rothko. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Rothko, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . whom I met through Arkin back in the early thirties. And let's see. There was a guy named Harold Baumbach, who shows every once in a while. He lived in that neighborhood.

MR. CUMMINGS: What part of Brooklyn was this?

MR. ROSENBERG: Holland Park, it was called.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Around 45th Street, 46th Street, and Fort Hamilton Parkway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, I know Baumbach. His brother is a stockbroker.

MR. ROSENBERG: Huh?

MR. CUMMINGS: His brother's a stockbroker.

MR. ROSENBERG: I didn't run into his brother. His old man was an upholsterer and Harold began to write, too, but he switched over to painting somewhere along the line. And then there was Elie Siegmeister, who was a composer.

MR. CUMMINGS: I don't know him.

MR. ROSENBERG: A fellow by the name of Sitkowitz, who was sent by Copland and Sessions to study with Madame Boulanger. In those days they had a kind of foundation, called the Copland-Sessions Foundation. They'd send the talented young composers to study with Boulanger. So we had quite a milieu out there in the wilds of Brooklyn.

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: What's her name was there, too. The harpsichordist. She'd come out and visit. You know, who's married to Leonid. What's her name again? [Sylvia Marlowe-Ed.]

MR. CUMMINGS: I can't remember her name.

MR. ROSENBERG: I can't remember her name either, but I should because we've known each other for about forty years. [laughter] We always joke about it, you know. When we meet, you know, we always joke about the fact that we've known each other for forty years. So we had a crowd, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, did you see each other frequently?

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah. And the thing was that the musicians were avant-garde. You know, they would play Stravinsky and Schönberg, so that it was a kind of advanced group, and we were writing poetry. That was the milieu. And then I got laid up for a while Arkin was in Paris, and when I began to move around again, after about a year, I couldn't do anything much, so I started to paint a little bit to keep busy. I used to do a lot of drawing-I think this is on the other tape-I used to do a lot of drawing when I went to law school. I used to sit and draw portraits. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Of. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . sketch portraits of people to keep from being bored to death by the lectures.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So I really studied art in law school.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I'm curious, could you describe sort of a typical gathering that you had with these various people at some point or other?

MR. ROSENBERG: Oh yeah, sure. It was very lively. Siegmeister's father was a very prosperous doctor. And he had a beautiful mansion. Burrough Park was a rather plushy neighborhood, although I wasn't very plushy, but the neighborhood was. And they had a beautiful, big three-story cottage on the corner, and on the top floor was Elie's musical studio. And we dropped in. The place was spacious. We would argue about modern art and what was going on and read *Transition* magazine, and stuff like that. This would be about 1925, '26.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: When we were kids, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of things did you read besides *Transition* at that point?

MR. ROSENBERG: Oh, I read Ulysses and some French poetry and Wallace Stevens, e.e. cummings, you know, that bit.

MR. CUMMINGS: A little of everything.

MR. ROSENBERG: And I would write poetry and so. . . . I published in *Transition*.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really, when was that?

MR. ROSENBERG: 1932. I had a couple of pieces of fiction, actually, my first published piece was a short story. I think it's the last. . . . No, I published a couple of short stories after that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of things were you writing in those days?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, I published a book of poems in '41, which has poems that were published in *Poetry* magazine largely, and there was a magazine called *Pageny*, and there was a magazine called *Blues*, which Charles Ford edited with Parker Tyler back in the early thirties.

MR. CUMMINGS: I've never heard of that one. I haven't seen it listed anywhere.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, it was, it ran for about four or five issues. Charles came up from the south somewhere. His father was a hotel-keeper, and he had money, and he kind of paid for the magazine, which he and Parker edited. Actually, you see, the point was that the kind of thinking that was involved in modern art became a sort of second nature to us. We were always talking about it.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you meet all these people? They just lived around the neighborhood?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, we started out, you know, in the neighborhood, and then later on when I moved down to the Village around 1931 or '32, I got to know a lot of other people. We put out a magazine-a fellow named Hayes and I-put out a magazine called *The New Act*, which we published ourselves. This is right after the Depression had started, and all the magazines collapsed. That is, *Hound and Horn* collapsed, *Symposium*, they all collapsed; they ran out of money. So we did the next best thing; we bought a mimeograph machine-or a multigraph machine-and put out four issues of a magazine, which I think the Gotham Bookmart still has. I think he's probably getting $100 for the four issues.

MR. CUMMINGS: He's got everything in that cellar. [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, you know, we had Ezra Pound as a contributor to the magazine, Gertrude Stein, quite a number of other people like that, you know. I think we didn't get anything from Eliot, but you could get anything you wanted in those days from these guys. They all had trunks full of stuff.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. So you'd just write them a letter and they'd send you something?

MR. ROSENBERG: Write 'em a letter and they'd send you something. Williams, we had Williams in it. We had Stevens in the magazine. This was about 1932. As I say, we were all part of the avant-garde. We knew all about what was going on in Paris. . . . "All"-we knew as much as we could about it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: We read French magazines.

MR. CUMMINGS: What do you think it was about the avant-garde that intrigued you? Or was that what you found for, you know, an academic thing?

MR. ROSENBERG: No, actually I think that it, it became a. . . . Well, it was more of a question of getting to grasp it through our constant conversation and discussion, looking at pictures, listening to music, and. . . . You have to of course first overcome certain feelings of-what shall I say?-repugnance to what sounded, let's say, noisy, lacking in harmony. Then if you started out by knowing about the ordinary kinds of appreciating, let's say Wagner, or even Italian opera, you know, but to have to. . . . Well, you moved into realizing something about the Beethoven string quartets, and then you could move over to getting a kick out of *The Firebird*. After a while you became more or less identified with the more advanced forms of music, and more advanced forms of painting. I remember there was a young friend of ours, who was a poet named Clarence Weinstock. He later became a communist and worked for the *New Masses*. But he wrote very conventional poetry. He was a disciple of Swinburne; he tried to write like Swinburne.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh my. Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: And we would say, "Well look, Clarence, you know, that sounds pretty old hat." He'd write poems about the death of the gods, you know, stuff like that. [Laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: Not many of which had been ever in Brooklyn.

MR. ROSENBERG: Right, yeah. He wasn't from Brooklyn, but he would come to these affairs that we had, and then we would meet each other in the Village, and we got to be very friendly. If you look at this *New Act*, you'll see that the people in it were avant-garde writers. And Clarence ran around looking at paintings a good deal, so that when the Museum of Modern Art opened he'd say, "Come on, let's go and take a look at that." So we began to get wind of painting. And then I remember when there was a big noise about Brancusi, when the case, you remember? About *Eye of the Bird*? Was it a work of art?

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: But I think the main influence was probably literary. That is, the fact of reading Joyce and Proust and Pound, Eliot. These were strong forces. You could begin to feel them, and then you could also from them. . . . Of course, from Eliot you went to LaForgue and Baudelaire and Rambeau, some of that. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Symbolists, the French Symbolists.

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah, they were part of the. . . . You got wind of the Surrealists and so, you know, you were right there, by 1932 or '33 it was all second nature.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. What do you think caused your interest in that rather than more conservative and more historical things? The fact that it was new and these people were living?

MR. ROSENBERG: That's difficult to say. I was-was and still am-to some degree a conservative, in that I also am very much interested in Dostoevski, who was not regarded as avant-garde. On the other hand, I read a good deal of André Gide. André Gide was interested in Dostoevski.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: He was also interested in analyzing Dostoevski from the point of view of what he called a "gratuitous act."

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So that there we were, you know, reading *The Vatican Swindle*, and Gide's little book on Dostoevski.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: It all got to be related, of course. Mallarmé was a very fascinating poet, and André Gide was a very early influence. And my tendency has been to retain my interests in these people. Shakespeare always struck me as having avant-garde elements.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, actually, in the piece I wrote in "The Tradition of the New" on character change in the drama, which was an essay that I originally published in 1932-and which is still being reprinted every once in a while in an anthology on the drama-I took up this question of action as a basis for the transformation of the individual. This was. . . . You know, a lot of people have said that I got my ideas about action from existentialists. This was about fifteen years before any existentialist ever appeared in the world.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, that's true.

MR. ROSENBERG: In fact, I have a book coming out next April which has a very elaborate analysis of Hamlet, almost line by line, on the question of Hamlet as a break in the concept of drama. Where the problem of a dramatic character as a fiction is posed against a notion of Hamlet's consciousness of *not* being an actor, which is very persistent throughout the play. Hamlet keeps talking about being an actor, and opposes, too, the idea of being an actor. There are feelings he has which are practically inexpressible. Now this resulted in a very interesting problem, which as a matter of fact in a review of my *Tradition of the New* in Italy, some guy in a magazine wrote an article which he called "Rosenberg Against the New Critics," in which he made the point that whereas Eliot had claimed that *Hamlet* was an unsatisfactory play-that is to say that it was a play which broke down dramatically because Shakespeare was uncertain about Hamlet's character-or could not find the objective correlative, to use his term, with which to objectify the emotions of Hamlet.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: This reviewer or critic in Italy made the point, very accurately, that I contended that the problem of *Hamlet* was a problem of a change in the form of the drama. In other words, what Shakespeare had done there was to raise the question, especially in the play within the play, that the traditional drama no longer reflected the reality. It sometimes amuses me to read about these arguments in the art world today about illusion and reality, since it's a subject of course that's been dealt with for the last five hundred years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Absolutely.

MR. ROSENBERG: And it's just as much a hotbed today as it was then.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's true, because I was just thinking back, you know, in my little theater history, apropos of that point, that I can't think of another major play-or even some minor plays-where that takes place. You know, the role and the actor and the person and all those other things.

MR. ROSENBERG: I just got an essay last week from a colleague of mine at the University of Chicago who's a Greek scholar, but had written an essay on *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which he makes the point that-quoting

from the play-that Cleopatra was aware of the fact that she was going to be falsified as an actress throughout history.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Very interesting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. ROSENBERG: I never noticed that. In fact, I wrote to Green and I said, "David, you've spotted something which I missed when I was writing about it." I hadn't noticed that, although I'd written about the subject in relation to *Hamlet*.

MR. CUMMINGS: Marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: There's no doubt that Shakespeare, that he. . . . It's near the end of the play, and I checked over the whole quotation and he's absolutely right. And of course she also raises the point that she will be played by a boy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh?

MR. ROSENBERG: Which of course she was. [laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous. Absolutely marvelous. But the whole Elizabethan stage, I think was very exciting.

MR. ROSENBERG: Of course there was a lot of horsing around. And it makes it very difficult to grasp at times. That is especially since people have taken ennobled attitude towards the plays. It's very difficult. . . . For example, one of the arguments I had with Green was that he was over-Greekifying the play. That is, he was trying to make *Antony and Cleopatra* look noble, whereas the matter of fact was Shakespeare couldn't restrain himself from kidding around, making fun. Well, this in itself raises a very fascinating question, the question of the artists and their audience. If you break with the old art forms, which is what Shakespeare was doing. He was breaking down what Nietzsche called a barrier between the audience and the actors, which following Lessing, he said, was the function of the chorus. There was a function of the chorus, which is to establish a barrier between the audience and the actors. If you break that down, then the artist is involved with the audience. He starts to kid around with the audience. Not only that, but the concept of character gets to be different, because the characters become organic. That is, they become human beings. Therefore, they're more like the audience. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . whereas in the Greek drama, in the classical drama, they're beyond the audience. So that, as Nietzsche pointed out, they're really in the realm of the gods, you see, Dionysius. Well, once you study Antony as just another guy-he's a fat Roman, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Which is what Shakespeare says, you know. He's a *fat Roman*, who went to Egypt and got simply swept away by this corn, you see. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . of the serpent of old Nile.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Then you, then you find that the winking at the audience goes on right there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So you know he thinks he's a bigshot, but you know, we know about him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. No, that's true. There is that marvelous thing. And once you do that with the audience you can't really get back on your high horse and ride away again.

MR. ROSENBERG: You can't. That's right. You can't. You've really entered into collusion with the audience and you're on the road to some form of realistic art. And Shakespeare is like the breaking point with the classical drama, which he sort of was attacking constantly anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, he undermined Olympus.

MR. ROSENBERG: Sure. And of course always did have an extreme, you might almost say professional rivalry with kings. He always thought that he was a little better because he could, if he wanted to, make a speech and overthrow the whole regime, which is what he showed in *Julius Caesar*.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right, I see what you mean. We could go on forever about Shakespeare, but to get back to. . . . You moved from Brooklyn to the Village, when did you say, nineteen-thirty. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: About '31.

MR. CUMMINGS: Thirty-one.

MR. ROSENBERG: While I was laid up, you see, I began to paint, and I became really fascinated with painting in a peculiar way, that is. . . . One of the paintings that had a very strong effect on me was a reproduction of Leonardo's *Saint Anne*, for some reason. It was probably the condition that I was in. But I also looked at it from a, well, we might call a formal point of view. That is, I was intrigued by its rhythms and movements and so on. So when I began to paint, I was looking for kinds of abstract relations. So it made it easier to understand what people were doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: You hadn't studied painting or drawing in any way?

MR. ROSENBERG: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: This just started. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: This is all activity in. . . . As I say, I think it was to some degree related to the fact that my friends were doing it. So that the studio was not a strange place, and handling materials. I mean, one does know what people were doing and do it.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting that you got interested in a painting like that, yet your other interests were so new and so modern and so involved with the twentieth century.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, actually, you see, that's why I brought up Shakespeare. Because to me there was not that dissociation, which a lot of avant-gardists would make. For example, I was a great admirer of Browning, as a poet, and "The Ring and the Book," struck me as having a great deal in common. . . . You know, it's full of stream of consciousness. I could see the relationship between Pound and Joyce and Browning, which is definitely there. Browning definitely influenced Pound. I didn't have to wait to read about this. I mean, I could see it from knowing Browning quite well, and then seeing what Pound did with his dramatic monologues, and seeing what Joyce did with his Freudian revisions of the dramatic monologue, and of course in the Elizabethan theater you have the aside, which is a form of dramatic monologue.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So you could see all these things. I mean, you didn't have to get on a high horse about "modernism," uh?

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Maybe that was the, maybe that was the point. Maybe that was a very strong influence. I mean, it's one of the things that's true about deKooning, for example. Which a lot of nonsense is being made today that he's not really an avant-garde artist. Well, that's ridiculous. I mean, avant-gardism has to do with ideas, not with what's the latest gimmick, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Ridiculous. I mean, actually, most of the avant-garde ideas that are around now have been around for fifty years *at least*. We only keep forgetting that avant-garde art is fifty years old, and that it's forty years since there was an avant-garde movement in European art. That is, by 1929, we all took the view that Surrealism had exhausted itself- which was true. I think that *This Quarter* magazine had an issue in 1929, "Looking Back at Surrealism."

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh!

MR. ROSENBERG: So actually what was the case? The case was that we knew perfectly well that there was no more avant-garde movement. And for a long time, especially in the thirties, most of the artists around who were avant-garde in spirit were looking for a new formula. And then a few rather bright guys got the idea that there

weren't gonna be any. There wasn't going to be a new avant-garde formula. That is, there would not be a new school, a movement. And therefore, you had to, you had to *make something up*. The art history today, being completely distorted, with the account of the Surrealists coming to New York and influencing what took place in American art. The fact of the matter is nobody was interested in the Surrealists in the 1940s except Motherwell, who studied with [Kurt-JH] Seligmann and who hung around Breton for a little before he was kicked off the board of *VVV*. You know about that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ROSENBERG: So nobody looked to Surrealists, nobody looked to Surrealism for a new way of painting, for example. There were a few leftist painters who used Surrealist imagery with social themes, particularly out on the West Coast. In fact, I ran into a couple of them last winter in Los Angeles. We began talking about it, and they were astounded because they had been painting abstract art, so I had twenty years they didn't remember, they didn't realize anybody remembered that they made collages with matchsticks and tried to look like Picabia.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. ROSENBERG: Helen Lund. . . . what's her name. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Lundberg.

MR. ROSENBERG: Lundberg and her husband. They were both working in the thirties. Nobody ever mentions them. This is one of the things that was so lousy about the Dada----Surrealist show. There were about five or six very prominent Surrealist painters who were completely kept out of that show. It was ridiculous. I mean, Blume should have been in the show. He wasn't in the show at all. He was the most prominent Surrealist artist.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which Blume, now?

MR. ROSENBERG: You know, the one who did the Mussolini.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Peter.

MR. ROSENBERG: Peter Blume.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Won the big prize with that *South of Scranton* painting with sailors leaping around the. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right. [laughter]

MR. ROSENBERG: Why the hell did they leave that out? I mean, it's totally incomprehensible to me. Either they don't know something, or they have idée fixe, or they want to prove something which isn't the case.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who were the painters in that group, there?

MR. ROSENBERG: Where, on the West Coast? I don't remember. There were five or six of them that we used to hear about.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: But there were probably dozens of them that we never heard about. Now, what happened with Surrealism is very important because the artists were not influenced by them. Motherwell hung around them, but he was doing collages in the Cubist manner, and influenced somewhat by Matisse. But Breton was looking around for Americans, and he found Gorky.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: And he did a lot for Gorky. He really inspired Gorky in a new way. And Gorky, of course, was always looking for somebody to be inspired by.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh really?

MR. ROSENBERG: He picked up Matta's way of drawing. Matta was an official Surrealist at the time. Matta introduced him to Breton, and Breton. . . . From then he got that whole idea of letting himself go, which was his big problem, since he was very tight, you know, a psychologically tight fellow. And that did the world for him. It was great for Gorky. I mean, he really began to go to town. But nobody else was interested in Surrealism. But they were interested in Gorky, see. Jackson didn't get the idea of automatism from the Surrealists; he got it from

psychoanalysis. He did automatic drawings under the guidance of a. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really!

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . of a Jungian analyst, and I gather the book is coming out soon with those drawings which the analyst, who lives out on the West Coast, collected. I gather he's publishing them.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's interesting.

MR. ROSENBERG: It's very interesting because it indicates how much horse shit goes into art history.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, right. People sit and think, "Well, it must this way," and they go on and develop an essay.

MR. ROSENBERG: Pick up, pick up, they pick up four facts out of a hundred. The other ninety-six facts are unknown to them, whereupon they dogmatically insist that something is the case. *Or*, they tell a story which will justify what they have been doing that truly has nothing to do with what happened.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, can we go back to the early thirties here again? Because we're getting out of our chronology.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, we get into the thirties, into the early thirties. As far as I was concerned, I was doing some drawing. As I said. . . . Well, actually, I was getting around and I didn't paint very much anymore, but finally I got interested in it again, and I was doing some drawings from a model over at the Greenwich House. They had a project. Before the WPA. And there was a fellow teaching there and they had a live model, so we'd go there in the afternoon and draw a bit, you know. I think it was just a matter of liking to do it, no particular aim in mind. I liked to draw. They had the model; all you had to do is register. So I was there drawing one afternoon and a guy came rushing in like a messenger in an old-fashioned play, who announced that they were hiring artists up at the College Art Association. So he said, "Grab your paintings and go up there and get a job." So a couple of us did that. We went home and got paintings, went up there to the College Art Association, which was the agency appointed by the WPA to run the project in New York. In those days it was called CWA. So we went up there, we met up there, and we got hired as mural painters. So I always remember that one because when I came into the lobby there were several artists whom I didn't know. Couple of sort of old guys, you know, who had decorated restaurants down on the East Side or something like that. And so we went up to the first floor, I think it was, and some girl came out and she said to one of these fellows, "Did you get a card to come here? A notice to come here?" And he said, "Yes." She said, "Would you want to teach or paint murals?" So this poor guy, you know, he just seemed trembling with desire, but he couldn't bring himself to say he wanted to paint murals. So he said, "Well, I'll teach," so she said, "Well, you go and see this fellow." And then she said to me, "Did you get a card to come here?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, do you want to teach or paint murals?" I said, "I'll paint murals." [Laughter] So she asked me to go see some other guy, I think his name was Callam or something like that. So this guy said to me, "Well, did you ever paint murals?" I said, "Don't make me laugh." [Laughs] He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "*Nobody's* ever painted a mural in America, including me." So he said, "Okay, you're hired."

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: He could see that I knew what was going on. So I got hired. So that original group-this was the first group that was hired on a mural project-I don't know how many, a very small number. And one of them was Gorky! Whom I knew. Gorky began to say, "What are these things? Are they really gonna *pay* us for this?" I say, "Shh! Keep quiet. I mean, of course they'll pay us." So we assembled there. There were a few guys like Max Spivak, and Mike Lowe might have been there; I'm not sure. But at any rate, a bunch of boys were hired to paint murals. And then, after we'd assembled and filled out all the forms, we were told to go home and come back when they got in touch with us. So about ten days later we were summoned to come, and we showed up at the College Art Association, and this man came in and handed us each a check for fifty-five dollars! He said we were supposed to get $5.50 a day. We were on the payroll from the moment we were hired, so they by now owed us fifty-five bucks, which they gave us. So Gorky looked at this check [laughter] and he said, "Will they cash these checks?" And so she said, "Why, of course. You can go to the bank across the street." And Gorky still looked very dubious, so she said, "Well, I'll send somebody over to identify you." So we walked across the street to a bank on Lexington Avenue, and somebody said, "These guys are all right," so they gave us fifty-five bucks apiece. And we took the streetcar down to Greenwich Village and stopped at Hearn's Department Store on the way and picked up a pint of and went into Washington Square Park and we saluted the new era: We were now gonna get paid for not painting murals. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: That was the beginning of the WPA art project. I think it was that Christmas we had a huge party at the College Art Association and, while prohibition had already been repealed, they decided they didn't

want to spend the money on regular booze. So they got a five-gallon tin of alcohol and several cans of grapefruit juice. And David Smith, who was in charge of paints and technical matters, since he wasn't quite a painter yet, and he hadn't become a sculptor either, he was neither here nor there, he was made a supervisor of the materials, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: He issued paints and so on. So they put him in charge of mixing the drinks, since he was the paint man [laughing], he was supposed to mix the alcohol and the grapefruit juice. There was some old timekeeper there, an old Irishman. Well, David mixed the first batch, which was pretty rough, and the boys began to get drunk at once. It was in the afternoon, and they'd come with their wives and girlfriends, and they were in a hilarious mood anyway. And pretty soon Smith either got drunk or he got tired of fooling around with this mixture, so this old Irishman began to mix the drinks. And he'd just take a gallon of alcohol and pour one can of grapefruit juice into it to disguise the flavor. Well, this was just a stick. It made the alcohol even stronger than it was; it was pure alcohol to begin with. So the boys began falling like flies. You never saw anything like it. It was like a battlefield. And within one hour half the people were flat on their faces, and the girls were puking in the cans. And people were standing on the street down below looking up to see what the hell was going on in this place, and after a while people began carrying the stiffs out and putting them in cabs, and husbands arrived to take their wives out on their backs. It was really a great party. Terrific. And in two hours the whole was devastated. Nobody was left on their feet. [Laughter] It was the great opening party of the WPA.

MR. CUMMINGS: But did this group you were involved with do any murals? Did you do any projects?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, yes, actually I was on a project down at Textile High, but there they turned the thing over to a commercial artist, who decided to decorate this big auditorium by putting heads, which he copied out of encyclopedias, in an arrangement on both sides. You know, heads of Socrates and Napoleon. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: So he had these two beautiful walls decorated with these heads, and I did a sketch for the small wall in the back. But he was a conniver, this bird, so after a while he went to the administration and said, "Well, I think there ought to be uniform decoration in this auditorium, so I think you should let me do the whole thing." And so they let him do it, because they figured, well, they knew what they were going to get from this guy since he was a commercial artist who had done a few decorations before. Most of the other murals ran into trouble. That is, they were in all kinds of trouble. They would run into trouble because they didn't like how they were being executed. So most of the time we spent doing sketches. We did sketches, and they'd exhibit the sketches. I had some sketches exhibited with the Mural Society of America, but I never completed the murals, because this was supposed to be a children's courthouse, and they showed the sketches to some politicians and they didn't like it. You never knew exactly what was going on. So you'd say, "Well, maybe I'll move over to some other project."

MR. CUMMINGS: Kept moving around.

MR. ROSENBERG: I moved around for a while, finally wound up on one with Bill deKooning, who was supposed to be doing a mural for some place. His sketches were accepted, and Harry Holtzman had become a supervisor. So. . . . Harry said to him, "We were supposed to have an assistant. Since you now have an accepted mural project, you're supposed to have an assistant." So Bill said, "I don't want any assistance, I don't want anybody hanging around my studio." So Harry, who was, you know, always looking around to do something for the boys, said, "Well, why don't you make Harold your assistant, because he's a writer anyway, and he probably would rather sit home and write than paint. So he can be your assistant, then you can leave him in the Jumble Shop and go home. [Laughter] So we made that arrangement, that I would be Bill deKooning's assistant, and never came up to his studio. We'd meet at the Jumble Shop or at my house. Meanwhile, the writer's project had decided that they wanted to have an art literary magazine. It'd be both art and literature, so they came and offered me the editorship of this magazine. So I moved from the art project to the writer's project. And put out an issue of this magazine. And then I went off to Washington, where I became the art editor of the *American Guide* series, you see; that's how I became the editor of all those chapters in all those books dealing with painting and sculpture. So of course this gave me a kind of unique art education, which nobody ever had before, because my job was to find out what was done in painting and sculpture in all of the forty-eight states! Who the hell had ever studied art that way?

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So I found out a lot about it. You know, we could do these things on a historical basis, go back to the early explorers and early painters or draftsmen who came along with them and made sketches of what they found, you know. In Florida there were some Frenchmen, and there were Spaniards in other places, and so it was. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Lewis and Clark had a couple of draftsmen.

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah. And we followed this all the way through. In the Midwest, the Germans came after the Revolution of 1848.

Tape 1, side B

MR. ROSENBERG: And so a few artists would show up. Then the Germans would begin to import things, and so we went through the whole evolution.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of sources did you go to for that?

MR. ROSENBERG: We had a lot of WPA writers who sent out instructions to go to the local museums and dig up, make lists, see what they had, who came through there, find old newspapers. They were all studying this stuff anyway. So we'd dig up the ads that an artist would run saying that they were ready to do portraits or shop signs or make medallions or whatever the hell they were doing. We discovered, for example, in Missouri there was this terrific merry-go-round factory-or in Kansas, I think it was-a terrific merry-go-round factory, where they hired wood carvers from Italy and had them making these beautiful horses and other objects for sale all over the east and even in Europe. Things like that. We'd just have guys that'd dig up all this stuff. And my insistence in those days-and I think I was right, although I was probably influenced by Marxism in doing this-was to pay a lot of attention to the folk art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: To folk art, commercial art, and not to restrict it to the idea of how good these guys were in relation to contemporaries in Europe, because if you took that view there wasn't anybody there, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: And this is where I ran into arguments with the art departments in the universities, because when we would try to get them to act as consultants. . . . Usually the project would ask the chairman of the art department in the local state university to be a consultant on this. The guys would invariably answer, "Well, there wasn't any art in Kansas. There wasn't any art in Wisconsin." Maybe some portrait painter came through there for two years. That was all he'd know about it. You know, whatever was shown in the local museum. We said, "Never mind there isn't any. There's a hell of a lot. Just go and find it." Well, he wouldn't do it, so we'd use the boys to do it. They didn't need to know too much about art; all they had to do was dig up this stuff and send reports on what they'd found.

MR. CUMMINGS: Plain old basic research project.

MR. ROSENBERG: Sure, as a matter of fact, I wrote about half those essays. It was one of those things where you couldn't get the local people to do it, because it's too specialized a subject; they didn't know how to handle it. So I used to write them, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's some education, isn't it?

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah, it was pretty good.

MR. CUMMINGS: How many years was that?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, there was, let's see: I went to Washington in the spring of '38, and that continued till we finished the whole series. It went through early '40, I would say, 1940. By that time the project had been cut down a bit so I became a general editor for a while, and it wasn't necessarily specializing; we couldn't afford any more specialists in art. At one time we had one guy for art and architecture-one guy for art, another guy for architecture, another guy for history, another one for geology. There was a specialist in every field in the Washington office. But by about 1940 they cut the budget and about three-quarters of the specialists got fired. So there was a group of about seven or eight of us left and we did everything. That is, we would edit whatever we edited. So this continued right up to Pearl Harbor. By that time, I had a very fascinating project which I was working on, which was to do the. . . . There were six volumes, a six-volume work, on folk art in America. This was the stuff that was called the *Index of American Design*. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . which the art project had created during the six or seven years of the art project, from about 1934 to 1940. They took most of the people who weren't artists, really, but had some technical training, and had them meticulously copy designs on all kinds of things: fabrics, chests, whatever was there. And they had the most beautiful watercolors of each thing, in color. They tried to make them as accurate as possible,

almost trompe l'oeil, in some cases. They all were sent later to the National Gallery. But Eddie Cahill and I took up a project in which we would have texts written in the art and writers project for these books. And we had a publisher; it was Crown, I think, signed the contract. And we were to put out this six-volume series on *Index of American Design: Folk Art in America*, and I was the editor. So I traveled around, through the Southwest, and went to look at a lot of this stuff. And you know, the old Spanish monasteries with still some beautiful rose windows, and folk art. There was a guy outside the Santa Anita racetrack, an old guy, who had the biggest collection of, what do you call them, commodes. I bet you don't even know what a commode is. Huh?

MR. CUMMINGS: I haven't the faintest. [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: Eh? A commode is a pisspot.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: This old guy said, "I have the biggest collection of pisspots in the whole world." And these commodes were beautiful. They were decorated by hand. They had paintings on them, and were usually porcelain. They would be in a leather case, two in a case, and they were carried by servants. When people would go to visit, they would come with their own pisspots because it was part of their travel equipment. And this guy had shelves and shelves of them. He also had early coin machines. Or slot machines, where you'd put in a quarter. And some of them were the most elaborate things you ever saw. They were from the old mining camps. They have a huge. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, like a calliope, maybe?

MR. ROSENBERG: No, like a big billiard table. They had cowboys, Indians, troops-you know, federal troops-and so on. Put in a quarter and they would start shooting at each other, and the troops would come and they'd. . . . Very elaborate mechanism, which wasn't working any more, but you could see what they were supposed to do. They were all lined up with guns and everything. But he had a whole bunch of that stuff that was really fascinating. The Museum of Modern Art got it. I peeked at some of it, the most fantastic stuff, and it was all lying around. I don't know what ever happened to his museum. He was running it to make a buck. He'd charge a quarter to go through his museum, look at all these things. He had portable barber chairs that they used to take around giving haircuts in the mining towns. I mean, it was terrific. There was a lot of Spanish woodwork. There was a famous set of seven or eight paintings on sailcloth that was done by converted Indians, who did the stations of the cross in a ferocious manner. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Good God!

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . you know, with blood dripping down, and all sorts of stuff. I mean, it was great. And I spent about two or three months wandering around looking at that stuff. And I'd start in the Southwest because that was the richest material. So I went from one project to another and set up teams of guys who had worked with the art project to put a preliminary text together. And that was blown up by Pearl Harbor. You know, the Project went up with it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Whatever happened to all the research material?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, that stuff, a lot of that, *An Index of Design* mostly wound up with the National Gallery. I think somebody has done some books.

MR. CUMMINGS: I heard about that.

MR. ROSENBERG: After the war, somebody did some books on it. By that time, I wasn't interested in bothering with it. I never even looked into it. Of course there were thousands of paintings, as you know, that were simply junked by the local communities. There was a big collection here of work that was done by artists on the project and was sold later on by the hundredweight or the ton to a junk dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, I know.

MR. ROSENBERG: And then some other guy came around, and he went through that and he bought paintings, he bought paintings individually for about a buck apiece. And he took them down to Canal Street-he had a sort of junk shop down there. And then some other guy came along and he was sophisticated about them, and he bought whatever he wanted at five bucks apiece, and he made a fortune-became a big art dealer.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who's that?

MR. ROSENBERG: I don't remember the name, but he used to give lectures on the radio back in the forties, and he was a guy who got rich from picking up the paintings of the artists that were scrapped by the stupid administration.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fantastic!

MR. ROSENBERG: They didn't know what the hell to do with them. They just said, "Get 'em the hell outa here," you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Sell it for used canvas.

MR. ROSENBERG: A lot of them were, you see, allocated to schools and other public institutions. Lee Krasner's job on the project-she wasn't Pollock yet then-was to go around and find institutions that would take these. See they had to be tax-supported institutions.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: See, like libraries, schools, city halls. Any place that was tax-supported could ask for either a mural or easel paintings or a sculpture, and they would get it for nothing. So a lot of the stuff wound up that way in public buildings. But there were so many, there were six thousand artists on the project in New York alone, so just figure it out. Let's say half of them were deadbeats. The other half probably painted quite a lot of pictures; in fact, some of them were good painters. There were a lot of very good painters, and there were a lot of guys who *became* good painters. You know, Léger was on the project, did you know that?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, he did a mural or something, didn't he?

MR. ROSENBERG: He was on the project, worked, there was a period when you didn't have to be citizen or be on relief, and he was on the project so he did a lot of painting. The boys learned a lot from him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Bill deKooning was talking about seeing this guy work, you know, he'd keep on making drawings all day long, turning out drawings. These fellows would stand around absolutely amazed by this man. Of course, Gorky did a mural out at Newark Airport, which disappeared. I even did a mural at Washington Market, which collapsed.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah. Another guy and I did a mural in two days. We just slapped out a mural, about 40 feet long, five feet high, with house paint and just painted up one side and down the other.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs] Who was the other fellow?

MR. ROSENBERG: A fellow named Lachinsky. He was a very good painter, but he had a lot of children and he was working very hard and never could make it. He did a, I think did a mural also down in the municipal building, maybe. He was a good artist, but he was crushed by the economic situation. You know, it was a very tough deal in those days.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: The art project was fine, as long as it went. You got $23.86, and that was pretty good, you know; you could live on $23.86, but once it folded up a lot of these guys either had to go into war work or do something else. Many of them vanished, you know, into obscurity. They couldn't keep going.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting, every time the government subsidizes something like that, it disintegrates.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, it's not only the government; it happened with galleries, too. You know, Sam Kootz for a while after the war subsidized artists for three thousand a year, in return for which he took all of their work. Well, that was fine as long as they got the three thousand a year. When they thought back to the $23.86, the $60 a week seemed like a lot of money. But finally, I think it was the late forties or early fifties, he wasn't making a go of it and he suddenly decided to quit. Well, here the guy has no paintings and no money! That advance business wasn't any good for the artist at all. Same thing happened to Jackson when he was subsidized by Peggy Guggenheim. She gave him thirty-five hundred a year, in return for which he turned over all his paintings except one. The idea was that Lee could have one painting. Well, maybe he siphoned off a couple.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: At least that's what Peggy maintained. But not more than two or three, see. All that stuff went to her. Pierre Matisse was paying Miró I think something like twenty five hundred a year, something like that. And he must have made millions of dollars. Miró was giving all of his product for twenty five hundred or three thousand a year! In the thirties.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: And he was damn glad to get it, you know. He could live in Paris and work. I don't know what his arrangement was, but we all heard that Miró was getting fifty bucks a week. [laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic! Now fifty dollars doesn't even buy a bad Miró print.

MR. ROSENBERG: If you get *anything* for fifty dollars.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's extraordinary. But there really was no market in the thirties.

MR. ROSENBERG: No.

MR. CUMMINGS: I mean, nobody would buy American paintings.

MR. ROSENBERG: The market was mainly among the Social Realists, where they'd raffle off some painting for a good cause, or somebody'd sell a painting for thirty or forty bucks. But I'll give you a very concrete example. There was a guy named Berman. Not Eugene Berman, but. . . . What the hell was his name? Ben, I think. Ben Berman. Now Berman was a very excellent, skillful, naturalistic painter. He painted Eastside scenes. He was one of those painters who had to get the sunlight exactly the same as it was yesterday in order to continue with a painting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, God.

MR. ROSENBERG: Because he painted exactly as he saw. So he'd work on a painting sometimes three or four months. He was also extremely conscientious. If it wasn't exactly right, he would scrape it off and paint again. So it cost him quite a bit of dough, you know, to keep scraping the paint and putting it back on, and getting it *just right*. And he'd produce a very handsome naturalistic painting. He had good sense of color, a good sense of composition, and even though it has this photographic quality, it had a kind passion in it, see. Berman comes around. . . . And we were on the project together. At that time we were in the J.C. Penney Building over on 34th Street. They gave us a *huge* loft for nothing. You know, they gave it to the project; it was all unused anyway. Berman comes around. He'd just gotten a letter from his dealer. Poor guy practically had tears in his eyes. The dealer was one of the big dealers in those days. Maybe it was the Downtown Gallery; I don't remember exactly, so I don't want to accuse anybody of this, but it was considered to be a good dealer. He got a letter from the dealer saying, "Congratulations. We have just sold a painting of yours to a collector on Ward Island for $300." This was considered a good price for a painting: three hundred dollars. "You'll find an invoice enclosed." He looked at this invoice, whatever you call it, a statement. It turned out that he owed them fifteen bucks.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh!

MR. ROSENBERG: And it worked out like this: Three hundred dollars, they subtracted thirty-three-and-a-third percent, so it was two hundred dollars. Then they charged him rent for the time that the painting had been there. It was there for about a year and a half. Ten bucks a month. A hundred and eighty dollars. And then there were some minor expenses having to do with cleaning, insurance, things like that. In other words, he owed them fifteen bucks.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, there's a dealer I know that was doing that up to maybe three or four years ago.

MR. ROSENBERG: And there are guys that are doing worse.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Gorky in that period, I think was in the thirties, he went around telling everybody he met that they could buy any painting in his studio for twenty-five dollars-*five for a hundred*.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: That's the way he put it. [laughing:] He gave a reduced price on volume. If you took five, he'd give you five for a hundred.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fantastic.

MR. ROSENBERG: There was some collector out in Philadelphia who bought quite a number of Gorkys that way. [laughing:] They got fifteen Gorkys for $300. Who the hell thought they were worth anything, you know? Well, even in the fifties, Bill deKooning used to have paintings, you know, gouaches laying around on the floor; he was broke, he still couldn't pay the rent in the middle fifties. So I knew a woman, who used to be my assistant during the war, and she'd come around. . . . In '46, they had an auction. Peggy Guggenheim gave a lot of paintings to

Vue Magazine, which was floundering, didn't have any money-or floundering anyway. So she gave a lot of her stuff to sell. They had a big auction, on Madison Avenue-no, I think it was on Second Avenue at some auction house. Midtown. So I took this girl down there. She was my assistant in the OWI at that time, or she had been. And I bought her a Pollock for $48.50. A big one like this, a gouache with color in it. And I bought an oil painting for myself for fifty dollars. So she had that around. By the fifties, the Pollocks had begun to go up, so she came here one day and said could she buy a deKooning. She'd come to hear all about deKooning. So I said, "All right, I'll see what he's got." So I went over to Bill, and he was terribly broke. He couldn't pay his rent, he didn't any money, he. . . . And so I said, "Well, you know, this girl wants to buy a painting or a drawing for a hundred fifty bucks, two hundred bucks." So he said, "Well, let's, well, all right." He says, "I'll look around." He looks around the floor and he finds this beautiful pastel, two figures. So he says, "How is that?" "It's terrific." So he, you know, made a little matting for it, and he said, "Ah, I'll sell it to her for a hundred dollars." So, I said, "Nah, two hundred." "Oh," he said, "One hundred fifty dollars." So I take the painting down and I show it to this girl. She was, by this time, PR director at Bryn Mawr College. So she looks at the painting, and said, "Gee, that's terrific." So I said, "Well, it's yours, a hundred and fifty bucks." Well, she looks at again, and she said, "I'm afraid I can't buy it." "Well, what's the matter with it?" "Well, this figure here has her legs spread apart, and you can see her whole business, so. . . ." So I said, "So what?" "Well, I was planning to hang this painting that I was going to buy right over the mantelpiece, and the girls all come in to my, you know, to my house, and I don't think I can have a painting like this." I said, "Look, don't be a damn fool, Carol. Put it in the closet. Look at it when the girls aren't around."

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: You're getting a marvelous painting for a hundred fifty bucks; what the hell do you want? She said, "Well, no, this time I wanted to have something that would really look good in the living room." She wouldn't buy it. I brought it back to Bill. I said, "Well, I'll buy it." "Ah," he said, "in a pig's ass you'll buy it. Take it for nothing." So I said, "No, I wouldn't take your fucking painting. Take a hundred and fifty bucks." "Nah, nothing doing," he says, "I owe you money already. Take the painting." So I said, "Well, go fuck yourself." So I gave him back the painting. [laughter] And then later on he gave it to some guy whom he owed a few thousand bucks, and I imagine the bastard got fifteen thousand dollars for it later on. You know, it was a beautiful painting, two figures. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, gorgeous, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . in pastel, you know. In fact, it may even be in this book, in this deKooning book. Beautiful, the whole thing. But they were lying around on the floor, and he'd very often, you know, step on them, he'd pick 'em up and throw 'em away. This friend of Gorky's tells me, this guy out on the West Coast, what's his name? Hans Burkhardt. That guy studied with Gorky. He has a big collection of Gorkys. You know where he got 'em? Gorky would go down from his studio, he'd pick up an arm full of paintings and drawings-he'd kicked his foot through some of the paintings-the drawings he'd crumble up. He'd throw 'em in the ashcan. Burkhardt would wait till he went away and he collected 'em. He had a whole collection based on the ashcan.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So then he came to see me-I was doing a little booklet on Gorky-so he says, "Well, you know, I could have walked out with anything. He didn't give a damn." So he wanted to give him a medal because he didn't steal the paintings in the studio; he'd only pick up the ones that he'd thrown out. It showed that he had some kind of taste, you know, about what he was gonna get for nothing. So he had a collection, he had a big collection of Gorkys from the garbage can. This gives you a complete picture of the period.

MR. CUMMINGS: Not any more, though.

MR. ROSENBERG: I remember we used to find sculpture on the street sometimes. My wife took home an abstract sculpture, and we had it around for a while, and somebody swiped it or something.

MR. CUMMINGS: Art values were so different then, it seems.

MR. ROSENBERG: Then nobody thought it was going to turn into big business with the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, God. Well, we can go, I guess, chronologically again, trying a little bit here. Where did you live when you first moved to the Village? And what, you know, kind of things did you do and where?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, I got married to my wife in 1932, and we lived in Paradise Alley. You know where Paradise Alley is? It's on East Eleventh Street, off First Avenue. And that was a kind of little colony there, too. I think it still is-in another way; I'm sure it's not the same. But this is one of those places where they had cold water flats and the toilet was halfway down a flight of stairs. And there were studios in those buildings, on the

top floor. They had skylight studios. The rent was, I think, twelve bucks a month. And it's a-assuming that you paid it, which was always a question. And there was a guy, a painter, there named Jim Leshay, who was a sort of young artist then. He teaches out in Iowa now. He's been teaching there for years.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: It's very interesting. Leshay was influenced by Braque, and he was always trying to paint still life like Braque.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: He'd go and get a fish, and he'd put the fish on a nice long oval plate. He'd set up a kind of Braque still life and paint it. He did fine, up to a certain point. Then he didn't know how to go on from there. He was always repainting the goddamn thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: While it was sketchy, it looked very good. But after it got to a certain point, he didn't know how to go on. So he'd spoil it. He'd have to go and get another fish by that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Or he *ate* the fish. He'd get another fish and some apples, bananas. I was fascinated by the fact that he didn't know how to go on beyond a certain point.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: And I used to say to him-it wasn't a bad idea, either-I used to say to him, "Well, why don't you leave it that way?" I said, "You don't know what the hell to do next, right? Why don't you just leave it that way? What makes you think you've gotta do more?"

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: Which wasn't bad advice. "Aah," he said, "it's sketchy." "Well, remember, that's all you've got."

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: He wouldn't do it. [chuckles]

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that's funny, because his paintings still are very sketchy.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, he probably figured out that it was a good idea to leave it that way. Took him twenty years, or thirty years to figure it out. [laughter] This must have been '31; that's almost forty years ago. He ought to have learned how to finish a painting by now.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Or at least he should have learned that he didn't have to finish it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. That's marvelous. Well, how did the beginning of the Depression affect you and the group of people that you know?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well actually, I think we enjoyed it very much. I mean, the Depression came upon us in '29. I was living in Brooklyn then. I was laid up. I had osteomyelitis. I had trouble with my leg. I couldn't do anything. And so there was nothing to do. I mean, you read a little bit, or you went around with your friends. I mean, you didn't know what to do. Once the Depression really hit, though, and the bourgeoisie began to collapse, then of course it was a nice lively time, because nobody had any money.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: And you had a feeling of, you know, that the world was going through enormous transformation. So you, you know, you got along from hand to mouth, which was perfectly all right. Besides we were kids. We enjoyed it very much. So after we moved from Paradise Alley to Houston Street-I guess it was the following year-we set up this printing press and put out a magazine, without having any money either. That is, you know, the magazine, we figured out once, cost us six bucks an issue. We'd have typesetting parties. We'd get a few of the boys around, some girls, set type, and run off the pages, and we'd staple 'em together. We had

a forty-four-page magazine, which we sold in bookstores for a quarter, and got our six bucks back.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get any more than that?

MR. ROSENBERG: No, we never made any money on it.

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. ROSENBERG: But imagine putting out a literary magazine and breaking even. This is a great. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, if you didn't have royalties to pay, and. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: We didn't pay anything. Nobody got paid. We bought a big stock of paper for about forty bucks. And it was good for. . . . Thirty bucks was good for four issues.

MR. CUMMINGS: How many issues did you print each year?

MR. ROSENBERG: We printed four issues, but I think we must have printed about three hundred copies per issue. And we'd take 'em down to Eighth Street Bookshop, and The Gotham, and they'd sell 'em, for two bits.

MR. CUMMINGS: What other stores did people go to besides The Gotham, the literary people? What other place was there for the literary people besides The Gotham that they all went to?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, actually, the thing about the Village in those days was we had a number of places where we used to hang out-tearooms or joints, where we used to hang out. At night. But we didn't any dough, but we were more or less welcome because I suppose we provided local color or something. There was a hangout on Third Street, near Sullivan, where the train used to run in those days.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ROSENBERG: Run by a guy named Deutsch, who had a partner, Eli Siegal. You know Eli Siegal?

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. ROSENBERG: Eli Siegal was a famous poet. He won the poetry prize of *The Nation* in 1926. He was the first American imitator of Gertrude Stein. In his poetry, he imitated Stein. He imitated it quite well, too. Well, Eli and this fellow Deutsch ran a little cafe on Third Street called The Sam Johnson, and The Sam Johnson was our hangout for quite a while. Lee Pollock used to be a waitress there. You see, we knew Deutsch, and he ran the place really; Eli was just sort of a semi-silent partner. He would read poetry there. That was his main function. So it was understood that we have everything on the house. So Lee would bring us sandwiches and coffee, or something. And once in while we'd say to Deutsch, "Why don't you get rid of these lousy bourgeois and go and get some booze, so we can have a real discussion here?"

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So he would do that; Deutsch was great.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: So he'd kick out all his paying customers so we. . . . [laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: We had the Vie de Boheme clearly in mind, you see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: We knew how it was supposed to go.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: So there were these intellectual café proprietors, like Deutsch. And we also had friends, you know, who would go upstairs and get a bottle of grappa for a buck and a half and we'd have a party. So life was very gay, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, the Jumble Shop was a place people went, too, wasn't it, for a long time? That was a little. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, that tended to be for a more respectable element who had enough dough to buy a beer or something, you know. Most of us didn't have very much money to spend, so we weren't likely to go to a place that had middle class tastes, like the Jumble Shop. But Stuart Davis used to hang around in the Jumble Shop, and a few other guys, you know, the older guys who already some cash.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting to find out the places people went because you start developing the groups that way.

MR. ROSENBERG: Sure! This is a very important thing. Did you ever hear the story about Bill deKooning's discovery of Soutine?

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. ROSENBERG: You never heard this? Oh, it's a great story.

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. ROSENBERG: Actually, this story is hung on to the story about Motherwell. Well, anyway, he was sitting around, I think it was at Hedda Stern's. David Hare was there. David Hare knew Gorky very intimately in the late thirties and early forties, and he also knew Motherwell. He replaced Motherwell as the editor of *VVV*. So we were sitting around. I had just published a little book on Gorky, so it must have been about seven years ago, '62, I think it was. So Motherwell comes in with Helen [Frankenthaler-Ed.] and he starts giving me an argument to the effect that he introduced Gorky to Surrealism. He first told him what it was about. See?

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: And he went on like this. He got more and more passionate about it. So I said, "Well, look, Bob, you don't know what the hell you're talking about." Because in Ethel Schwabacker's book, which traced in detail Gorky's activities, she quotes a letter which he wrote to a woman whom he married but didn't live with, and in this letter Gorky quoted a poem of éluard, which he did not admit was a poem of éluard. He tried to palm it off on this girl as something he had written himself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Did you hear about this?

MR. CUMMINGS: I've heard that.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, I recognized the poem 'cause I'd always like éluard, so when I read this in Schwabacker's book, I looked up the poem in a copy of éluard. He swiped it from éluard, and passed it off on this girl.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: He found a translation of this poem of éluard's, probably his most famous poem. It goes like, "I kiss only your kisses," or something like that. Terrific poem. Anyway it was useless to tell this to Motherwell. He's riding his horse. I told him. I said, "This is 1936, Bob. You were still in diapers, for Christ's sake, you hadn't even come to New York. And Gorky knew all about it." "No, Gorky didn't know anything about it." And to prove this, he told the story about how he went with Matta to Florida and came back and there was a party going on somewhere, and he ran into Gorky. So he said he started telling Gorky all about Surrealism. And they left together. So he said he walked Gorky home, and was telling him all about Surrealism, and Gorky said to him, "Tell me more." So. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: Have you heard this before?

MR. CUMMINGS: No.

MR. ROSENBERG: Gorky kept saying, "Tell me more." So he told him more. Finally, he reached the house. He said, "Well, I'll walk you back." So he said, "Gorky kept saying, "Tell me more." And he kept on telling. So David Hare said, "Hey, look, you don't know what the hell you're talking about. This is an old gag of Gorky's. He was pulling your fucking leg, see?" But Motherwell, you can't stop him. Anyway, he goes on with this. He doesn't pay any attention to what we tell him. He proved his case: he told Gorky all about Surrealism, see.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: So I ran into Bill deKooning, and I tell him this story. [laughing] He said, "Oh, yes! Tell me

more." He said he went uptown to a gallery, and he saw Soutine for the first time. They had a show of Soutine. Well, he was very impressed by Soutine, and he was very excited. So he runs downtown, he goes into the Jumble Shop, and there's Stuart Davis and Gorky sitting talking to each other. So he sits down, and he begins to rave about this artist that he'd just seen, you know, for the first time up there. So Davis listened to him and. . . . Did you ever see Davis? You know, Davis says out of the side of his mouth, he says to Gorky, "Who the hell's this Soutine? Who the hell is this guy?"

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: And he said, "What is he? A painter or something?" He said, "Who the hell is that guy?" So Gorky said to Bill, "Tell us more!" [laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So Bill said, "Right away I knew I had come too late." [laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: Isn't that a great story?

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous.

MR. ROSENBERG: "Right away I knew I came too late." Motherwell thought when he said, "Tell me more," he wanted to hear some more. Isn't that a terrific story?

MR. CUMMINGS: That was really remarkable.

[End of session]

JUNE 30, 1971

Tape 1, side B (cont.)

MR. CUMMINGS: June 30, side two, reel one, back in your office. Why don't we just continue, then, talking about that project and how things went along with that, people who were involved with it.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, of course the project never got underway, because of the war.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Because I had just made a few visits to the Southwest and to San Francisco, Salt Lake City. I think I had first been to San Antonio, because we were setting up, or I was setting up, the cooperation between members of the Writer's Project and members of the Art Project, who had worked together to provide the text and the illustrations for the regional volumes, which they would then edit in Washington, the Washington office. But I had just about returned from two of those trips. And as I went to New England first, and then went down to the Southwest and back up through San Francisco, and Los Angeles-Los Angeles, San Francisco-and Oakland, to Salt Lake City and then back to Washington, where I was going to make another trip up to the Northwest, where there was quite a good deal of material.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: But the war suddenly intervened. Pearl Harbor closed it up immediately.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: The project was disbanded at once, after Pearl Harbor. So the plans were left suspended.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were just dropped, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: I seem to have heard that something like it was done later on by the, I believe it was either the National Gallery or the Smithsonian that inherited the plates of the *Index of American Design*.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, there is a book.

MR. ROSENBERG: They went to the National Gallery, and they did some kind of a book. Of course, I've never seen the book, but it's not possible that they would have had the resources that *we* had to do it, because we had thousands of people on the projects, the Art Project and the Writer's Project, and we could select among them the people who would work on it locally.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that was really your first great traveling session around the country being involved with that? Did you travel much before then?

MR. ROSENBERG: Actually I'd traveled quite a bit before that. You see, in the early days of the WPA, they had specialists on the projects that were. . . . They had specialists in the Washington office. There was a history editor, there was an ethnic editor, folklorist editor. There were people on flora and fauna, there were people on cities, there were. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Every topic had its own. . . .

MR. ROSENBERG: Every topic had its expert in Washington, which was very necessary, because we discovered that the local people very often, even though they were-we used a lot of consultants from state universities-very often they weren't able to write very well, or to do a first-rate editing job on the locality. After all somebody who became a historian didn't become a historian of Iowa necessarily. He might have just been in Iowa State University because he's a good historian, but he didn't know anything about Iowa. So we found that we had to do our own research. At least that's what they did, or were doing, when I got there.

Tape 2, side A

MR. ROSENBERG: I came on as the editor of art essays. And then there were two guys who were working in architecture. So this went on for about a year, and then the projects were drastically cut, and especially in New York. The whole thing was placed under the jurisdiction of the Library of Congress, and most of those people left. There were only about five or six of us who remained. And so we were no longer able to be specialists. We began to be general editors. I mean, they kept us for that reason, that we were *able* to be general editors.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. ROSENBERG: So I spent, say, three months in Seattle, Washington, together with another editor, putting their book together, which they weren't able to do.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. ROSENBERG: So we'd go out there as a team of mechanics to gather together a book.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: In fact there was an interesting story there. This lady and I came out to talk to the director of what they called the Women's and Professional Division, which was an echelon that included all the intellectual projects. He was about to end the project. He said, "There won't be any book, I can see that, with this amount of help. And we have spent enough money on it; we're just going to terminate it. I'm sorry you people took this long trip out here, because the project is terminated." Well, we gave him a spiel about what a disaster this would be for the state of Washington if it was the only book in the, the only state in the Union that didn't have a. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Have its own book, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . guidebook, and especially after they'd spent, I don't know, three hundred thousand dollars trying to get a guidebook, and especially since we were there now and would guarantee to give 'em a guidebook. So it would be his responsibility, after all this great expenditure, if they were left without a guidebook. Well, he couldn't very well refute that argument, so he said, "How long do you think it would take for you people to produce this book?" And of course we said, "We can't tell until we've examined the existing files and looked at the condition of the manuscript as it is now, and estimated how much help we could get from the present personnel, and then we'll give you an estimate." So he said, "How long will it take you to do that?" So we said, "Oh, about two days. We have to go down and talk to people." "Fine," he says, "I'll hold on and wait for you." So two days later we came back. We gave him a date! We said, "At the end of ten weeks you will receive the manuscript for this Washington State guide," and he said, "I never heard of such a thing." He said, "You people sound as if you building a bridge or something. How can you make an absolute estimate of the time for a book?" The other editor I think was very romantic about books, but not about this book. I said, "Well, we can do it. We know how to do it." [laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: Authority speaks. [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: "Well," he said, "I don't know, it just sounds farfetched to me, but you people after all are from Washington, and if you say so, I'll take your word for it." Well, we then gave him certain conditions, like maintaining the project and so on, all of which were violated very soon. So we gave him the book anyway. And exactly the date we promised it to him. We did it ourselves. As I say, he violated the conditions, but we gave him the book anyway. He was rather astonished and we were contemptuous because he had. . . . We pointed out to

him that he'd not kept his word. We were giving him the book anyway, not because we had any regard for him, but because we wanted to finish the job.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, did you spend that time in Seattle?

MR. ROSENBERG: We spent that time in Seattle.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you had about three months or so out there.

MR. ROSENBERG: Three months in Seattle, right.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it like? That must have been, what, about 1939 or 1940?

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah, about '39.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: What was it like?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, what was it like?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, Seattle of course took us by surprise, because we had, like everybody else, expected that the Northwest was full of snow, bears, you know, lots of. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Indians and _____ _____.

MR. ROSENBERG: Indians there were! The only thing we didn't find was the weather that we expected, because that's a semitropical climate. I don't know if you know it. The cold part of the Northwest is this side, the eastern side of the Rockies.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Soon as you get over the other side of the Rockies, you're in that Japanese stream and the weather is always either dry or wet. It's not winter and summer and so forth. It's wet and dry seasons. But we got there in January, which was the wet season, which meant that the temperature would be around fifty every day, but it was always drizzling or foggy and so on. In those days, Seattle was a beautiful city. It was the most interesting city but it's been completely ruined since by outer drives, highways that cut right through the city, the destruction of the waterfront, and the general drop, I imagine, also in lumbering, so that the whole character of the city has changed. In those days, it was really a kind of frontier town, even though it had a business center with tall modern hotels. There was Skid Row, what they called a long hill, was full of shops with outfitters for the lumbercamps and for fishermen-and sailors in general. There were rows and rows of these stores of equipment for these guys, and they used to hang around there. It was also a very radical town. There was a, what would you say, some kind of a big newsstand that was a block long that sold every conceivable piece of radical literature: Anarchists, Trotskyites. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Really!?

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . left-wingers of all kinds. And exhibited an array of American leftist stuff, you know. Like I.W.W.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: And the Representatives then in Congress were quite left-wing. The left Democratic Party, which was called the Commonwealth Party, was the majority party at that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Interesting.

MR. ROSENBERG: I think what's his name Senator, what the hell's his name? Begins with an R. He was a congressman then, and he was elected by this party. Then he became one of the biggest promoters of American military might and stuff like that, because. . . . See, what happened was that Boeing set up this huge aircraft factory south of Seattle.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: And at that time it was an important aircraft-building thing. But that wasn't the main thing about the area. There were this agriculture, food-raising, stuff like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of cultural life was there? Did you get involved?

MR. ROSENBERG: In Seattle?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: There was a very interesting cultural life centering around the University of Washington, which was Vernon Louis Parrington's university, you remember. You probably don't remember Parrington. He was dead then, but Parrington was the great historian of America's literature. He wrote a book called *Main Currents in American Thought*, which everybody grew up on in the thirties. Parrington is a kind of follower of Beard, I think, you know, sort of materialistic historian, interpreted literature on the basis of social and economic development. And his book was a kind of classic in the thirties. It seems to have been completely forgotten by this time. He was teacher at the University of Washington and had quite a number of disciples who were there when we got there. There were several very good anthropologists who had made studies of the West Coast Indians. There were some good historians. There was a famous historian who had been in and out of the University of Washington that had a great influence. There was a good drama group. A fellow named Savage, who was. . . . I think his Savage, a big husky guy who won a prize for a play in New York at that time. And they had a theater out on a boat.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really.

MR. ROSENBERG: And they had a lot of play readings. In fact, it was a quite lively place.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there any painting or sculpture then?

MR. ROSENBERG: Painting wasn't too good. The guy who was the head of the art project was the tall Scotsman, who was about four inches taller than I, named Inverarity, Bruce Inverarity.

MR. CUMMINGS: Aaah.

MR. ROSENBERG: We got very friendly with him. We used to run all over the coast with him. He had a car, little car, in which he somehow folded himself up, and he'd go up the coast. And he was a collector of Indian art. He had a beautiful collection of Indian art. He later became a museum director, upper New York somewhere.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yeah! Sure.

MR. ROSENBERG: What?

MR. CUMMINGS: That's right, because I'm trying to place the name, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah, Inverarity got, I think he's still up there somewhere in New York state. He came to see us a few years ago. But Inverarity was also interested in Japanese art, and he used to compare every scene along the Pacific, or the Straits up there, with Japanese prints. So it got to be a sort of kibitz among my wife and me and Inverarity that we'd beat him to saying, "Just like Japan."

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Because. . . . You see one of these tall cliffs, this gray cliff, and out of this little green trees would spring, right out of the cliff.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, "Just like Japan," you see, just like the Japanese prints, you know. And that, you know, great scale, you know, transformations of scale, huge cliffs with a little man at the bottom, and a body of water next to it, all very blue and clear, just like Japan. But the other artists I don't remember, oddly enough. The only person I remember of that art project was Inverarity, and I suspect that the rest of them weren't very good. I seem to remember some fellow who had a wonderful house, but I don't think he was a painter. He may have been with the writer's project. What was wonderful about his house was that it had once been a boat, and it was a magnificent. . . . Ferry, I think, which he had bought. And in those days houseboats were up and down the shore, most of them nonfloatables. That is, they were built out from the shore onto the bay, Elliott Bay, and the big lake out there. It was a huge lake. They built out these structures, some just shacks, and others quite magnificent structures, and they would call them houseboats, and of course the reason was they didn't have to pay any taxes. You paid the city or county twenty-five dollars or some such fee for rent, and for. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Parking.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . parking, so to speak, and that was it. You didn't have to pay any taxes; you didn't have to pay any rent. And you could build yourself a great big structure. Well, this guy had a, had gotten hold of a ferry, I think it was, that had beautiful inlaid floors and ceilings, all wood. And this thing was moored on the Pacific side

of one of the bays outside of Seattle, and there was a huge storm or a hurricane that picked this thing up and drove it inland for about three miles and carried it all the way into the forest.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wow!

MR. ROSENBERG: Right into a forest. It must have smashed trees en route, came in with a tidal wave and went all the way into this woods. So this fellow just bought the piece of woods where it came to rest and said, "Well, this is as good a place as any," so he fixed it up and it's magnificent. Just imagine, their living room was so large that he had three grand pianos in it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

MR. ROSENBERG: And, you know, and like different rooms looped around the pianos.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, my God! It must have been a strange sight in the middle of nowhere.

MR. ROSENBERG: Yeah, well, he just built a road towards it, and you came up and there was boat, you know, like Noah's Ark, sitting in the middle of a forest. It's a wonderful analogy. You know, he had electricity brought in and water and everything else, and he just turned it into a house where it stands. There were a lot of fantastic things out there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you remember who that was?

MR. ROSENBERG: No, he wasn't a painter, I don't believe. He probably worked for the Writer's Project, or he was a friend of somebody who worked on the Artist's Project. He was a nice guy. Another thing I remember about him was that he had a Plymouth which had gone 137,000 miles and he still operated it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, my.

MR. ROSENBERG: Which was quite common in those days. It was the Depression, nobody had any dough, they used to fix these cars forever.

MR. CUMMINGS: Kept 'em going.

MR. ROSENBERG: And of course Seattle, you know, is up and down, how the brakes in those cars would last that long. They would just need replacing. It was just endless, endless hills, all very steep.

MR. CUMMINGS: Sure.

MR. ROSENBERG: So this guy Inverarity lived in an apartment house which was built close to waterfront. We used to come in on the fifth floor and take the elevator down to the third floor, where he lived.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, my.

MR. ROSENBERG: And this was probably nine stories high. You could enter on the other street on the bottom floor. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . and take the elevator up. But the street that we came in was the fifth floor, and that was an entrance. [laughs] They used to park on the roofs, you see, of the street below. The houses, many of them were built up to the level of the next street, then they had parking lots on their roofs. The Pike Place Market was one of the most fantastic things in my life. This was the largest retail food market in the world, and the food was unbelievable. The Japanese raised fruits all through that neighborhood. They had rehabilitated land which had been burnt over in the logging operation. The land was utterly worthless because the pitch of the trees would get into the land. Nobody would touch it. No American would dream of farming that stuff. The Japanese would buy that, maybe five bucks an acre, and rehabilitate it. And they would grow these things on it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MR. ROSENBERG: The size and magnificence of these vegetables were. . . . Well, like the greens. You know, you'd see a tomato as big as a football.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MR. ROSENBERG: And then there was apples from Yakima, the other side, great apple. Salmon, they used to have about fifteen different kinds of salmon, from Indian smoked salmon, the Russian lox, all the way over to

four different kinds of pickles, and pickled salmon. . . . And of course the prices at that market! This pickled salmon was two pounds for fifteen cents.

MR. CUMMINGS: [gasps] But fifteen cents was a lot of money then.

MR. ROSENBERG: It was a lot of money, but you could buy a hell of a lot of stuff for it. We used to buy crabs there. Now these things I've never seen since. I was back in Seattle. Barney Newman and I wandered around that market a couple of years ago.

MR. CUMMINGS: They're tearing it down, or something, _____ _____.

MR. ROSENBERG: They're tearing it down, but it's already shrunk to one tenth its size. The Japanese never came back, you know, they were all locked up or put in a camp during the war. Their property was confiscated; I gather they never got it back. The people who ran it didn't run it the same way, so you don't see those fruits or vegetables any more. I was going to tell you about these crabs, which were a spectacle in themselves.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: We'd get a crab, but they went from ten cents up to thirty cents. A thirty-cent crab must have been a foot and a half in diameter. You'd get a pound and a half of crab meat out of one crab.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hmm!

MR. ROSENBERG: Buy one of these giant crabs and break it up with a hammer or an ax, and get a pound or pound and a half of crab meat. It was enough to feed our whole crew. One crab. And they've disappeared. It's amazing how those things disappeared.

MR. CUMMINGS: That market was very important. I know Mark Tobey has talked about the market.

MR. ROSENBERG: It was a center of life, and it made people happy to be able to buy that kind of food. They used to sell reindeer meat, whale meat, and everything you could imagine was brought in. It gave you a feeling of enormous luxury, right down on the waterfront. It was a wonderful place to just walk around. And they had a lower level where they sold other things. There were a lot of flea markets around there. The city itself is absolutely picturesque. I mean, it's strange that it produced these rather mystical and negative artists, like Tobey and what's his name. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, Morris Graves.

MR. ROSENBERG: Morris Graves. But the place is simply color, natural color. Indians would sit on the main street. They'd come in and families would just camp there. They'd live on the street. They'd spread out their blankets and live there. Ships of all kinds.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. From everywhere.

MR. ROSENBERG: Russia, Japan. The prows were over the street. You'd walk down the street under the prows of these ships. They've all gone too. They've built enclosed warehouses. Ships don't come there anymore. The salmon fishing has moved to another part of the coast. And that's all gone.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's incredible. You were in and out of New York at this point. You said you lived in Washington DC?

MR. ROSENBERG: I was in Washington during those four. . . . Four and a half years I lived in Washington.

MR. CUMMINGS: So, were you in New York very much?

MR. ROSENBERG: No, as a matter of fact, it was a period when I was not in New York very much. It was the only period in my life when I was really not in New York, because we. . . . Let's see, I went there in the spring of '38, and we stayed there until after Pearl Harbor, which was '41, right? Pearl Harbor was December 7, 1941.

MR. CUMMINGS: '41.

MR. ROSENBERG: The reason I'm so clear about the date is that our daughter was born one year and a day after Pearl Harbor, which was December 8, 1942. So it's easy to figure it out. It also gives me a good measure of my own dates, because we left Washington in the spring of '42. We got there in '38, '39, '40, '41, '42. Four years we stayed there, just about exactly. And in the spring of '42, they discontinued all the projects. We wound it up, and that was the end of it. So we then decided to go up to Cooperstown, where a friend of ours who had just bought a house lived, but he was drafted. And so he couldn't go up there, so he gave us that house. We went up there

and stayed there all summer and into the fall. May became pregnant so we stayed all that summer and fall into '42, and by around the end of November, I brought May down to Brooklyn, where she suddenly gave birth to the child. Not suddenly, really, I mean she just gave birth to the kid. Only "suddenly" because it took me by surprise in that I was supposed to go to Washington again, and it was the very morning that I was supposed to go to Washington that she gave birth to the kid, see. In other words, I got back to New York in the fall of '42 to look for a job, and while I was looking for a job, I was hired by the OWI overseas bureau as a radio editor. I didn't know anything about radio. But that was just a title. Actually I was a radio writer. I had gone there to the OWI to get a job as some kind of expert on America, for which by this time I was thoroughly equipped after all those years on the WPA traveling around the country and editing books from all over the country. They told me that they needed somebody who knew that. So that was fine, except that they hired me as a radio editor instead. And when I went down, I went to see some woman who had been working for NBC and she was in charge, was script clearance editor for NBC, and she looked at my papers and said, "Well, I thought you were supposed to be an American expert." And I said, "Well, that's what I thought." She said, "Well, what are you doing here?" I said, "You tell me." She said, "Well, you're not supposed to be here." I said, "I know, but. . . ." She said, "But you're here anyway, so you've gotta do it now." I said, "What do I have to do?" She said, "Write a radio play."

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckling]

MR. ROSENBERG: I said, "What about?" "Oh," she said, "We have this English program, broadcasting in English to our allies, the British and the Australians and Canadians, about the United States." I said, "Well, what kind of plays do you do?" She said, "Well, why don't you do one about Alabama." I said, "Where's the material?" She said, "We use the state guide for background."

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs uproariously] How did you pick the OWI as a place to look for something?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, everybody was working for the OWI. André Breton was in the OWI.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

MR. ROSENBERG: You walk 57th Street, you run into everyone and say, "What are you doing?" "I'm working for the OWI." [Laughs] Breton used to sleep there, he was always the broadcaster. Didn't you know that?

MR. CUMMINGS: Not really, no.

MR. ROSENBERG: Sure, Breton worked there for a long time. He had a magnificent voice. Breton had a marvelous voice. And he would broadcast on the international transmitters to France, speaking of course in his own name, giving them information about the. . . . I guess, when we got into the war France was already occupied, so this was very important. And a whole lot of people like that. Artists, writers. And then all the leftists were working there. Everybody you knew from the Village.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. ROSENBERG: There were some ex-Trotskyites who had moved into a glassed-in office, were bigshots, they wouldn't even talk to anybody.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: And all these Trotskyite kids had suddenly made themselves into bigshots.

MR. CUMMINGS: Executives.

MR. ROSENBERG: And then there were poets, who all were working in the same division I did. Langston Hughes. Who else was in there? Oh, a lot of well-known artists were in this radio department. When I was home, I never paid any attention to the radio. I didn't know what the hell kind of medium it was. So I went over to the library on 23rd Street, and I got out a book on how to write radio plays.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: And then I read it carefully, about three-quarters of it, and then I figured, well, the rest of it's getting complicated because it's going into refinements that won't be applicable to this kind of program. You know, had nothing to do with documentaries of this sort. So I simply read this book once or twice, you know, got the pitch of how you set up a manuscript. I got the Alabama guide and sat down and wrote a radio play, and brought it in, and the woman looked at it and said, "Gee, that's terrific. We'll put it into production right away."

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: So I was there. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: It's a marvelous story.

MR. ROSENBERG: I did some other radio plays later on for the government, after the war. They had a project in Latin America.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: And they used to pay I think it was two hundred dollars for a script, or something like that, which in those days was big money.

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: So I did one once on the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art; they had some kind of Surrealist exhibition, and they wanted to tell the Latin Americans about it through the cultural program.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long were you with the OWI then?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, I got into the overseas, and I was there for about two weeks, but I got a call from a friend of mine, who was working for the domestic radio bureau, which was in Washington. And he said that there was a fellow who was the head of something called the Special Assignments Division, who had just been appointed, and he was looking for what this guy called an "idea man." So when I talked to him and [maybe] come to Washington as an idea man. So since my wife had had the baby. . . . No, wait a minute. No, this is before she had the baby. She was staying at her father's house. And we had left our furniture in Washington when we went to Cooperstown. Had a whole house full of furniture, and an apartment which was rented by a friend of friend of ours who was an Englishman. A friend of ours had a radio section of British information, and he had a friend who was in the State Department, so he rented our apartment and our furniture, so we had all our furniture in Washington. So it seemed like a good idea to go to Washington, get our furniture, and stay there while May had the baby, see, which was a more restful situation than to get the furniture moved up here, and look for an apartment, and so we were sort of, it was interim situation. She was still up in Cooperstown when I took this job, so we felt it would be convenient to move back to Washington. Anyway, this guy showed up. His name was Leonard Levinson, and he was a Hollywood type. He wrote "The Great Guildersleeve," which was one of the top-rating comedy shows on the radio in those days, for one of the networks-I think it was NBC. And he knew a lot of people on Broadway. So he came to New York, and he called me. I remember it was on Thanksgiving, as a matter of fact. I was staying in my father-in-law's house in Brooklyn, when we got a call from this guy, and he said, "Let's have dinner and talk about your coming to Washington." So we got together, and he turned out to be a very amusing fellow. You know, he was like a Hollywood type, see. We were sitting in some restaurant, and Ronald Coleman came along; they greeted each other very warmly, you know. Then some other actor came along. What the hell. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So we had a big dinner, and of course he had to tell me about the job. I said, "Well look, Leonard, I want you to know I don't a damn thing about writing radio shows." In fact I said, "I know much less than most people because I never listen to the goddamn thing. When I do listen to it, I either listen to the Philharmonic on Sunday afternoon at three o'clock, or I listen to news programs. I don't find the rest of this stuff very entertaining, and so that's, I don't know anything about it, see?" Naturally, he responded like a typical Hollywood guy: "You're just the fellow we're looking for!"

MR. CUMMINGS: A fresh mind! [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: "A fresh mind," see. Everybody else knows too much about it. You're the guy. You're. . . ." [laughs] So I said, "Well, that's all right. In that case it's fine." So we began to negotiate. Well, the negotiating got to be about eleven o'clock, he said, "Let's go to Lindy's."

MR. CUMMINGS: Hmm, yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: We had to go to Lindy's, where he immediately got a table in the front, so everybody that came in could see that Levinson was in town. He knew all these guys.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, then we began to wait for the papers to go through. I agreed to go there. Well, this was of course a bureaucratic procedure, which takes quite a bit of time. So he would come up and he'd take me to see viewings of motion pictures. One time we went to Harry Hirschfield's house to have gefilte fish, because Harry Hirschfield's old lady made great gefilte fish. These guys, you know, were to me like people from another world. They would sit down and start trading jokes. They'd say, "Well, have you heard this one?" They'd tell a

joke. Well, that set up a category, so within that same category the other one would tell a joke. And then this one would tell another joke. They'd keep this up like Medieval doctors.

MR. CUMMINGS: Back and forth, _____.

MR. ROSENBERG: They'd keep going around with these jokes as if it were some dialectical contest. As a matter of fact, Hirschfield made a top program on this. Do you remember? It was called, "Can You Top This?" This program was a direct naturalistic reflection of their conversations.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really.

MR. ROSENBERG: And all they had to do was to take one of their conversations and make a package out of it, and they had "Can You Top This?" The only thing they brought into it was the laugh meter, or something. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right, and the audience.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . to measure the audience. But this is what they did anyway. That's the way they entertained each other, to get together and start these jokes, staying within the category. Naturally, if I was there, or some other guy, we were the laugh meter.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Except that I wasn't very good at laughing at those jokes, because the pattern [was taking] too much of their dialogue and discourse. It was bad.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fascinating how they worked _____.

MR. ROSENBERG: This absolutely came out of their normal intercourse. There wasn't a bit of invention about it. Sounds like a put-up thing. Absolutely not. This was simply their. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: What they did.

MR. ROSENBERG: . . . communication. But there were a lot of funny things that took place in the house of the Hirschfields, that they didn't even notice.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. ROSENBERG: They missed that all together. They were only interested in jokes. They didn't see anything funny that was going on there. [laughs]

MR. CUMMINGS: What did they miss?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, like some woman came in, and she turned out to be a relative of Hirschfield's, and he greeted her with, you know, with, "Sara," or something, "where've you been all these years?" She said, "I live right around the corner." I almost bust a gut, but they didn't think it was funny at all. [laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: They were using their own dialogue.

MR. ROSENBERG: And the old lady who made the gefilte fish and chopped liver. I mean the whole scene was as comical as could be. I don't know what the hell these guys were thinking about, but they looked to me like some strange members of a strange tribe. Then it turned out that I was the member of a strange tribe when I went down to Washington, because it was full of these professionals from Madison Avenue, and they would say, "Well, who the hell is that guy? You know, he doesn't look right." Which was true. I didn't know what they were talking about. I couldn't understand their jargon. And they. . . . Well, our style was different. But that whole thing got to be very comical because what happened was that. . . . You know, Leonard kept saying to me, "Well, why don't you come down to Washington and get to work?" I said, "Look, I have to get a certificate from the front office." Because I had been in Washington. I said, "Look, I'm an old bureaucrat. You don't move your ass until you get these slips saying you are now on the payroll."

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: I said, "Should you go down there without getting that slip? It'll take you three months more to get the slip, because nobody's going to knock themselves out to put you on the payroll if you're there already. And secondly, you won't be able to move any furniture, not only into the place, but out of the place. So this runs into hundreds of dollars." I said, "I'll stay here until I get that magical piece of paper." Which of course had an effect on Leonard. He began making midnight telephone calls and waking up the administrative assistant, and he pestered him over holidays until he finally got that thing through in pretty rapid order.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, boy.

MR. ROSENBERG: Because, you see, it was Thanksgiving when I met him, and on December the eighth we were already en route. See, so that's pretty good. That's about what? Two weeks, three weeks.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's pretty good.

MR. ROSENBERG: It was pretty good for the government. But Leonard, you know, this Hollywood star, began speaking with this guy over the phone at one o'clock in the morning, "You're interfering with the war effort! We can't get going! You're interfering with the war effort!" This poor guy wanted to behave like any other bureaucrat, but he couldn't do it with this nut.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So anyway, we get tickets, my wife came from Cooperstown, we got tickets on the Pullman, you know, parlor car, we were supposed to be met by Levinson on the nine o'clock train, and about four o'clock in the morning my wife gets labor pains. So we rush off to the hospital near where her father lived, and about, I guess about nine o'clock, she had the baby. It was rather a fast delivery. So I didn't catch the train, naturally. So I waited until that train came into Washington, which would be about one o'clock, and gave Leonard time to get to the office. I called up. They said, "He isn't here." I said, "Where is he?" They said, "He's in the hospital." I said, "What do you mean, he's in the hospital?" "Well, he arrived at the Union Station in this terrible pain. He had an attack of gallstones and was rushed to the hospital in an emergency ambulance, and that's where he is." So I called up. By this time he was comfortable again because of some sedative. He said, "Where were you?" I said, "Well, my wife is in the hospital." I said, "Of this trio that was going to go to Washington, I'm the only survivor, and you and my wife are both in the hospital."

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: So Leonard being a Hollywood character, was also very sentimental, you know, about having a baby and all that stuff.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh.

MR. ROSENBERG: So he said, "You better stay around there for a week at least." So I said, "All right, I'll see you next week." So the following week I came down there and there was Leonard sitting in the hospital bed, you know, the bed propped up, with two secretaries, one on each side.

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: Giving 'em orders. You know, like in a, a typical Hollywood scene: "Write to so-and-so. Tell 'em to take that off the air." [laughs] I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. So he said, "Well, yeah, I'll find something, I'll tell you what to do." He said, "Just go and sit in the office." So a few days later they decided to take him home to Hollywood since he was recovered but he felt weak. So they shipped him off to Hollywood. He never came back!

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: He never came back to the OWI. He found something else to do. His wife had a baby, he got into trouble, and I don't know what the hell happened to him. He never came back.

Tape 2, side B

MR. ROSENBERG: I used to see him after the war, but he never came back to the OWI. For a while, he was still on the payroll, so he used to call me up from Hollywood, and he'd say, "Go see the, go see the producer of "Terry and the Pirates" and give him some stuff about China so the show'll have more authenticity," you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: [chuckles]

MR. ROSENBERG: I said, "All right," so we had a guy who's an expert on China give me some stuff on China, and I went to see this guy in New York, who's running "Terry and the Pirates," and we wanted to know what we could do for him because of the China material. And thinking that maybe Chinese should not always be servants, you know. Flatter our allies. Things like that we were supposed to do. Leonard never came back. So after a while, they brought in another guy who had been an announcer on NBC, but he was a Harvard man, and he also wrote radio scripts. He was brought in-and Leonard resigned; he finally couldn't come back. So he took me to lunch, and I said to him, "Well, I resign." He said, "Why? What do you want to resign for?" And I said, "Well, as an old bureaucrat, I'll tell you. When you become the head of a division, you bring in your own friends." You know, you don't just keep anybody that's around. You get people you know." He said, "You're the only guy that I know."

MR. CUMMINGS: [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: So he said, "Don't go away, for God's sake." [laughter] I said, "You know, actually," I said, "I don't think much of this whole fucking advertising business, or the radio business either. Maybe I'm out of place here." He said, "Shh." He said, "I don't think so much of it either." He said, "That's got nothing to do with it." [chuckles]

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was he? What was his name?

MR. ROSENBERG: London was his name. George London. Well, George, you see, took over-I guess it was in '43. He retired last year from the Advertising Council. We had been together as a team all those years. From 1943 to 1969 we worked together. First in the OWI, and then the Advertising Council. The way it worked out, by the end of the war, he was the chief of the radio bureau and I was the deputy chief in charge of New York. Everybody else either dropped out or had been surpassed, and we took over the whole thing. We changed the whole modus operandi. We got rid of the jargon. We began talking in rational terms, instead of hints. We got away from that whole Madison Avenue style, which neither of us liked, which didn't make any sense at all. These guys were always showing off to each other. We wanted to know what they were talking about. We wanted to know what the program was. We wanted to analyze the program to see how it should be handled and how it should be justified, instead of leaping up with bright ideas the way they do in the agencies, and we put the whole thing on a completely different basis, where it continued to work. And when the war was over, the Advertising Council decided to continue. They took us over as the radio section, you see. In this we stayed together for all those years and provided what I would call essentially the policy thinking in the Advertising Council. See, my job after a while got to be. . . . He got to be a vice president of the council. My job got to be program consultant, the main function of which was to discuss the principles on which we either accepted or rejected proposals, which you can see is a highly complex, but very important, function. What are we, what are we, how do we judge whether to do this or not to do this? And what's involved, of course, is millions and millions of dollars of free time and space. Mostly free time on the networks, and so we had to develop a very complicated, and yet very accurate, system of making decisions about things. And of course I still am connected with the council in a more tenuous respect. That is, if somebody else has now begun to do the actual work, but they still consult me about the policy side. It's going to be a difficult problem to find new people to get this, because we developed the policies over a period of almost thirty years. It's a fantastic story.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, that is marvelous. Yeah. Did you spend time in Washington, then, or were you in New York.

MR. ROSENBERG: Oh yeah, that's what happened. Let's see, George came in about '43, I said? I think it was probably that fall or maybe the following spring-it had been less than a year-the proposal came out that the special assignments division that he and I were operating should be really in New York, closer to the agencies, the advertising agencies, with whom we'd worked on these things, and then the networks. That is, there was no point really in us being in Washington. So George and I had lunch one day, and he said, "What do you think about our moving the office-or at least you-up to New York?" I said, "Frankly, George, I will argue for this proposal even if it's absolutely senseless. I'm warning you that if it's the most impractical and idiotic thing in the world to do, I will argue for it because I want to go to New York."

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm, right. [laughs]

MR. ROSENBERG: "Now, having warned you, I'll tell you why it's a great idea." [laughter] So we analyzed it, trying to be as objective as possible, and came to the conclusion that it was a good idea anyway, even though we wanted to do it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So we did it. Well, that was the very important thing for me personally, to get back to New York. I didn't realize how in a way stultifying that Washington period had been until I was out of it. But the whole situation had changed since 1938, when there were still projects and the artists were all hanging around Washington Square Park, and they would get together and there was a writer's union, and you know, you had all these people, and of course a lot of them used to come to Washington, and a lot of the people got jobs in Washington. But I didn't realize until I got back to New York how alienated that Washington scene really was!

MR. CUMMINGS: Yeah, because what ever happened down there, besides your work?

MR. ROSENBERG: That was the thing. There were writers that came down. There was a guy named Merle Colby who had written several novels, the director of the writer's project in Massachusetts that moved down. Then there was the guy who was the director of the project who was quite a guy. There were some other people like that on the project who were interesting people. There were some people on other projects that we'd run into once in a while that were interesting. There was Ben Bodkin, who was a great folklorist; he lived right next door

to us. So it wasn't as if you didn't have the same people around that you would have seen in New York. And still there was some kind of indefinable difference. After I got back to New York, I realized that that was a very dry period for me. It's true that I was busy too, because during the war you put in a lot of hours in offices, but still it wasn't only that. The fact of the matter is that I produced very little during those years.

MR. CUMMINGS: You didn't have much time or energy to do your own writing.

MR. ROSENBERG: Not too much, no, that's true. When I got back here, well, I actually didn't really begin to do much work until after the war. And the last eight months of the war, I translated a book about DeGaulle from the French. But I was still working for the OWI.

MR. CUMMINGS: But back in New York, though, you saw all the art world people and the literary people and the things that were going on here.

MR. ROSENBERG: When I came back, you mean, on trips? Yeah, I'd come back on trips and see them, but that would be over a weekend, and then we'd go back to the grind.

MR. CUMMINGS: When did you come back to New York to stay?

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, that would be about nineteen forty. . . . Either the fall of '43 or the spring of '44. Somewhere along there. We moved into this house that we're in now, on Tenth Street. Dwight McDonald lived downstairs. When I came in to look for an apartment, I stayed in his place, and he lived. . . . No, he lived upstairs. And after I looked around for a couple of days, he said, "Why don't you take the apartment downstairs?" And so we took it. We've been there ever since. I think since '43.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's a long time to live in one place in New York City.

MR. ROSENBERG: Isn't it? Of course, the rent control helps. But then the following spring-you see, this is, begins to get into the real art world-the following spring I was sitting on my porch on Tenth Street. . . . And by that time, you see, Bill deKooning had moved to Tenth Street, and David Hare had a studio on Tenth Street. There was a whole bunch of guys on Tenth Street. It's hard to remember who moved in when. A couple of those guys were there before me. Some came a little later. But that was a kind of a loft street; Tenth Street between Fourth and Third, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: But the following spring I was sitting on my porch, when along came Lionel Abel. You know who he is.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ROSENBERG: And Lionel had been hanging around with Jean Barrault, who was a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, and a friend of poets and painters in New York. He was in exile, of course, you know, he was a refuge from Hitler.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MR. ROSENBERG: So Lionel's a friend of his. And Matta was around. And Julian Levy, naturally, a bunch of these guys. And they had in 1943 discovered East Hampton, and they all went out there. They were the first people to go out there. I think maybe. . . . Motherwell may have schlept along, because he knew some of these people too. And they rented places in East Hampton, Bridgehampton, and Amagansett. So Lionel Abel came over one afternoon and began telling me about this wonderful place. He'd been out there visiting with Mannheim, the translator. And he said he wanted to go out there and rent a place because the place the Mannheim had he paid fifty bucks for the season for, you see. And so Lionel thought maybe he might be able to get it for thirty-five, and he wanted to rent it because Mannheim in the meanwhile had been drafted, so he couldn't get the place. So while he was talking about it, he said to me, "Why don't you buy this place?" I said, "What place?" He said, "The one that Mannheim lived in, which we're going to rent." I said, "What the hell do I want to buy a place for?" To go to live in some joint a hundred miles out from here. You must be out of your mind." He said, "Well, all right, so you won't go out this year," he said, "you buy it and give it to us for the summer," and then you'll go out there next year, see." So anyway, you know, we were drinking martinis and, you know, it was a nice long day, and finally I said, "Well, how much is this goddamn place?" So he said, "Oh, it's about a thousand dollars." I said, "Well, how much land has it got?" He said, "I don't know." "Well, what kind of a house is it?" "Oh, it's okay. I mean, we lived there." So May always wanted a place in the country, so. . . ."

MR. CUMMINGS: You bought the house? Or what happened?

MR. ROSENBERG: So I finally said. . . . You know, I was getting more and more mellow, and May said, "Well,

yeah, it'd be nice to have a place in the country, so I finally said, "All right, okay, I'll buy it." The minute I said, "Okay, I'll buy it," Margie, Lionel's girlfriend at that time, felt, well, this is it. Now they've got a place to go for the summer. So she began calling me every other day and saying, "When are you going out?" Since I promised to go, there was no not going, so I said, "Well, I'll go next Sunday." So next Sunday morning she called up and said she made an appointment for me. They'd wait for me at the station at such and such a time. So I got on a train and I got there, and sure enough there was this kid son of a neighbor next door who was taking charge of the house for the owner, and so he took me over to the house, which was a kind of. . . . You've seen the house. It was a long shed-like affair. Now I've put a big studio in it, so it's, you know, changed its shape. But it was like a long. . . . It actually is called a hunting lodge. Like a small house. But it looked very nice to me, and then I looked around, and the old lady said it had five acres that went with it. So I said to this. . . . By this time, the little boy, who was about fourteen, had taken over, and I said, "Well, let's walk to the nearest beach." So we walked and I clocked it. It was, it took twenty minutes, so I figured it's a mile. It turned out to be a mile and an eighth, see. So I said, "Well, what the hell. There's no, there's really no point in my thinking about buying it, because I don't know how to think about it, so I'll just buy it."

MR. CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

MR. ROSENBERG: You know, it's like there's no point in thinking about something if you don't have the terminology.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Oh, one of the things I had done was, before I went out there, I said to George Ludlum, who was a great aficionado of real estate, I said, "George, suppose you want to buy a house, what do you look for?" So he gave me a list, like you see if the roof is leaking.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: You see if the sills are sound. Well, sills, you know what sills are?

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: They're the base of that house. He said to me, he explained to me he didn't mean the doorsills, he means the foundation. You look to see if there's water, if it's any good. You know, there were six things he gave me. So I get out there and I look. Well, I see the roof is leaking, the water is not operating because the pump of the. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: The washer.

MR. ROSENBERG: The washer had dried out. It was a leather washer. You have to prime the pump, so. . . .

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: But I figured if they drank it last year, it's probably still good, so we got good water but we got bad roof. The sills looked fine, but some of the other things were dubious, so I decided that even with this list I had no way of thinking about it, because the list hadn't been weighted.

MR. CUMMINGS: Still. . . . Yeah.

MR. ROSENBERG: You know, like, if those three things are lousy, and three are good, do you buy it or don't you? Suppose four are lousy and two are good. It's one of those riddles. So I figured the hell with it, I'll buy it. So I came back to New York and I described it to May, and I said, "Let's buy it." So she said, "Okay." Well, it so happened that the owner of the house lived on West Tenth Street, so I called her up that afternoon, and I said, "I want to buy that house that you have over there," and she said, "Fine. Why don't you come over now." So I went over there, and we gave her deposit on the place and I bought it. It was as simple as that. We had our car, we had a car-this is during the war-I had a car stashed away in the barn of Prestopino. You know Prestopino, the painter?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. ROSENBERG: Well, he bought a place in Bucks County, but on the Jersey side. So I had my car there, and we couldn't go and get it until they. . . . They were living there, but. . . . As a matter of fact, there's an interesting background to this buying the place. One of the reasons I was so reluctant to buy the place was that during the thirties artists were always buying places. They figured that in that way they'd become self-sufficient; they wouldn't have to worry about the landlord.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: Everybody was always worrying about the landlord. So they'd buy these places. Like Prestopino bought one, Schnitzler bought one, what's his name bought one. Green bought one, Balcolm Green. They would go off to these places, they would disappear for several years. They'd come back. You'd run into them. They'd have hernias, they'd have a broken arm, cut off a finger. . . . You'd say, "Well, what the hell are you doing?" "Well, you should see my place. It's terrific." "Have you done any painting lately?" "No, no. No. No time to paint, but I'm building myself a terrific studio. When I get that studio finished, boy, I'll really be in seventh heaven." They kept this up all the time. So I had decided no places in the country, I mean, to hell with this.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. ROSENBERG: You know, next thing you know you're spending all your time with hammers and nails. So I said to May, you know, "I'll buy this place, but I'm not going to do anything to it. I mean, the way it is, that's the way it stays." And, well, finally, we got out there. . . . Oh, Lionel then called up and said, "Look, you know, that place that you bought is a terrific place, but we don't have a car, and we found a place in Amagansett that we could rent for thirty-five bucks, so why should we go to this place if it's three and a half miles from Amagansett and it's mostly uphill on a bicycle?" So I said, "All right, I'll give you the thirty-five bucks as your share for the finding fee, and *we'll* go out there." [laughter] I paid him the thirty-five bucks, he rented a place on Main Street in Amagansett for a whole season for thirty-five bucks and he was right in town and he didn't have to peddle all the way out there for food. So we went out there. Of course that's what ultimately started this whole colony out there, because the next year-I think it was the next year-Jackson came out and then Mark Rothko came out. By 1946, the place had all of our friends out there, you see. This is '44. We didn't do very much in '44. But '45, there's quite a few guys came out. In '46 everybody's out there _____. Motherwell had a place, and did I say Rothko was renting out there? It was quite a gang, and then everybody began to build a home there, within the ensuing years.

[End of interview]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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