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# Oral history interview with Peter Grippe, 1968 Aug. 27

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Peter J. Grippe on 27 August 1968. The interview was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

### Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: – On August 27, 1968. I'd like to begin with what we were talking about just a moment ago, the – looking back on the path that you were going with Theodoros Stamos and a series of programs that you were involved with on radio/TV.

PETER GRIPPE: On the radio. Well, it is channel two. They both had a TV station –

MS. SECKLER: Yes, yes.

MR. GRIPPE: – also a radio station. And, well, in that series I – I had known Stamos for many years, and I first met him in our studio in – sometime around 1942 with Barney Newman, Jacqueline Rothko [phonetic], and certain other artists who were active about that time. And we were discussing those early days. And from 1942 to about 1948, 1949, covering all those early periods of the influence of the Museum of Modern Art on many of the artists who were active in those days.

And one of the big things we talked about was the – they had a show of industrial art, and works of art of – showing the relationship between [inaudible]. Of course, one of the very unique things that – the thing that we had talked about most was this airplane that they had on display, comparing it to a [Constantin] Brancusi.

MS. SECKLER: Sure.

MR. GRIPPE: You remember that, do you?

MS. SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MR. GRIPPE: Then I felt that – and what I told Stamos is that – Don't you feel that this was the beginning of what's going on today? I mean this is now [inaudible.] I thought it was rather foolish to compare the airplane [inaudible] to Brancusi, because I feel that one is a work of art, and the other is just the result of some great functional idea. It can be very – it can be interesting, it might sometimes be aesthetic in some ways, but I don't think it falls in the realm of beauty and art.

And so, they were making these comparisons to many, many things – [inaudible] – and many of us who were working in an abstract style in those days were very much against it. We felt this art style set us back at least 50 years by showing this kind of exhibition, making industrial products or industrial objections, functional objects like the airplane [inaudible], automobiles [inaudible], and interiors, and so on, making them as important as works of art and showing their relationship in the course of making them public [inaudible] –

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible] curators there in Bauhaus, their ideology at the time?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, yes. I think that a great deal of – I think [inaudible] Bauhaus was, of course, was very strong in those days. But I don't think they were making that point. It seems to me that since art was in a moment of transition from the influences of surrealism and cubism, futurism, the abstract expressionists were presenting a very subjective style to the public that
was –

MS. SECKLER: Well, they hadn't really developed yet in 1942.

MR. GRIPPE: Well, there were a number of people that were very active. I had [inaudible] to talk with Wayne Anderson [phonetic] about that. But some time in the late – I would say the late 1930s, you must remember that we had people like David Smith [phonetic], David Lasso [phonetic], very active in the abstract styles. Coming out of [Julio] Gonzalez to David Smith, Lasso was interested in many aspects [inaudible] early experiments of surrealists. I was involved in very much the same thing.

MS. SECKLER: Did you know some of the surrealist artists here, or had you been deeply impressed by their work that you had gone to see here?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, we missed the – I think [inaudible] much later, sometime around 1945. [Le] Corbusier [Charles-édouard Jeanneret] was here at that period, Louise Bourgeois. [Inaudible] very early, [André] Masson, Manget [phonetic] was here. [Inaudible] had many parties in those days with – they were held right after his exhibitions, along with Mary Calrey [phonetic], Fred Balanstein [phonetic]. And at all these parties I met not only the European artists like Lejet [phonetic] and Vivault [phonetic] and some of the surrealists, but we never really were involved with the surrealists, as such. We were more interested in [Alberto] Giacometti.

There is a little – I don't know what's it's called, a palace, a [inaudible] Museum of Modern Art. I think that is quite a strong influence, certainly on Lasso and myself. And many [inaudible] of those early experiences [inaudible] seem to be moving – or rather we were moving in those areas [inaudible] was of great interest to us, but not surrealism itself. I mean we found out very early that somehow [Salvador] Dalí made [inaudible] very kind of open ends in the surrealism movement which we didn't like.

But, as I say, we – the early artists like [Herbert] Ferber came, I think, a little later. But Ferber and [Seymour] Lipton were on the scene. There were a lot of – [Jackson] Pollock in 1943, who was experimenting in a very subjective and [inaudible] style. [Inaudible], Vazioli [phonetic] –

MS. SECKLER: Was [Arshile] Gorky involved at all –

MR. GRIPPE: Well, Gorky – yes.

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible] –

MR. GRIPPE: Gorky was – I would like that perhaps at the bottom of it all, along with this – I can't think of a South American –

MS. SECKLER: [Roberto] Matta?

MR. GRIPPE: Matta, yes. Now, Matta and Gorky were the – I think, along with David Smith, really holding the fort against the critics, you see, who were very antagonistic, very violently against them, and they wrote these very horrible things in their columns, and the way their –

MS. SECKLER: Edward Alden Jewell –

MR. GRIPPE: Jewell, yes, Jewell, and Debris [phonetic] was – Debris almost totally demolished Trian [phonetic], who was a very sensitive sculptor in those days who was completely unappreciated. And Debris totally demolished him. Jewell totally demolished Gorky. And I remember days when [inaudible] and I used to walk to the Waldorf cafeteria on Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue, taking a long walk in the afternoon with Gorky, we used to meet and have coffee and talk about the horrors of the critics, you know, and how they treated him.

And the reason I say that Jewell demolished him was that Jewell often used the expression that he was [Paul] Cézanne – a derivative of Cezanne, that most of his style – and then derivatives of Machow [phonetic], or derivatives of Mireaux [phonetic], and constantly [inaudible] Gorky, who of course, suffered [inaudible].

And so, coming back to the styles, so you say that that's early. I don't – I think that most people don't realize how early – that all this activity happened that early. You have to remember that – also, that Gotee [phonetic] did not come on the scene with anything abstract until 1945. At that time, around 1944 and 1945, Rothbow [phonetic] was working in the surrealist style. [Inaudible] magazine put out by – I'm just trying to think of his name, the publisher, he was also a painter – and there were many articles published in that magazine in 1946. You will see the styles, so that you – in the abstract group, the most active and the most original of that group, started quite early. I would say about 1938.

MS. SECKLER: No, I didn't mean to say they weren't [inaudible], I just thought they hadn't yet become what we later called abstract expressionists, maybe, but –

MR. GRIPPE: But they didn't change the –

MS. SECKLER: But they had their – the roots of it were developing at that time.

MR. GRIPPE: That's right, yes. Yes –

MS. SECKLER: And of course –

MR. GRIPPE: – because we often talked about it. And I saw David Smith's show in 1938. It was an outdoor show on Eighth Street and – where they later – I think a restaurant was put in that corner, but that used to be an empty lot. And David Smith had his first show there in 1938. [Inaudible] open – large, open structures, and –

MS. SECKLER:  Large open structures at that time?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, which were just [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  Yes?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, one of them was, I remember, a very open, spatial structure that was very, very interesting.  I think it was, well, close to five or six feet long and about three feet high.  And I remember the first show he had at [inaudible] had a photograph of this piece [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  Was there some [inaudible], or – he didn't destroy them himself –

MR. GRIPPE:  I really don't know, I just – he said that it no longer exists.  He may have destroyed it or something.  I really don't know.  But that was very interesting.

MS. SECKLER:  Could you give me an idea of what kinds of forms you were working with at that time, Peter?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, I had – I'd been involved for many years with a very flat approach to sculpture.  That is, trying to flatten sculpture to a facade, more or less.  And also a sense of movement, which came out of influence of East Indian art.  There was a number – a series of East Indian sculptures that I saw at the Art Museum in Buffalo [Art Institute of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY], and I saw these very beautiful carved [inaudible], which were shocking to me when I first saw them, because they – I had never seen anything quite like it before.  And this was in the early formative years when I was studying at the Art Institute in Buffalo.

And I got this idea of movement, which I was not at all – I knew a lot about – not a lot, but I had known a great deal about futurism and cubism at that time.  I didn't want to associate this idea of movement with action or anything else relating to the futurists, but rather an idea of breaking up images in a format, you see, trying to develop a series of ideas in one format, and having a lot of events happen in one plane.  And I called it movement, because I felt that working in this style, that I'd wanted many things to happen in a space of time.

And you've seen many symbols which I think came from a lot of the early American Indians [inaudible] which – a lot of the Aztec designs, the [inaudible], and I used many of these symbols sometime around the 1930s, and I was preoccupied with this idea of movement as a – you know, it's so far away it's hard to express it as I did in those days.  But factors that are just involved with or continue an idea that was many ideas [inaudible] in a kind of environment trying to incorporate many figures which were on one plane.  Whereas, in the old idea, I felt in sculpture, it was only possible to relate one figure to another, but it was never possible, it seemed to me, before I did this, that – to put a number of figures in this kind of context, relationship, and then having them – trying to see them not only from the front but from the back.

It may have come from an idea of [Pablo] Picasso's, you know, many [inaudible] during this period, where [inaudible] one plane.  I think I was trying to do something similar to that, and I called it movement in those days, because I felt that it was a philosophical idea relating to East Indian art, you know, beginning with – a beginning which has no end, so to speak.  Almost all things are possible in a new way, a new context and meaning.

MS. SECKLER:  I'd like to know what material you were working with at that time.  What do you – small things, or – what was the scale?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, I would say it ranged, I think, in size from, oh, about 24 by 30, and they were done in terra cotta, which was, I think, very difficult in those days.  It was hard to find a kiln large enough to bake the transparent terra cotta.  But most of them were very thin [inaudible] the thickness.  And they [inaudible] work in terra cotta in a like manner, and many of them were transparent, as I said.

MS. SECKLER:  How could you make terra cotta transparent?  I'm not familiar with that.

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, structurally or technically you have a problem.  The moment you open up areas, you see, in clay you have to build.  And there – terra cotta, in order to be [inaudible], keep it wet, keep it from [inaudible].

And then I – of course, I went the limits with it, and I tried to open it up as much as possible, to have very interesting openings, spatial openings, you see.

MS. SECKLER:  Oh, I see what you mean.  It isn't that the terra cotta is transparent –

MR. GRIPPE:  No –

MS. SECKLER:  – but that you open up the surface –

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  I see.  So that this facade sort of building would have openings.  And would there be one facade behind another sometimes, or that sort of thing?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, they became very complex in that way.  There was one facade [inaudible].  In the end they began to look like architectural stuff [inaudible], because I was suspending most of these masses in mid-air.

MS. SECKLER:  How did you do that?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, I handled – I had so much experience in handling clay, I had worked with it for so many years, I felt that technically I knew what to do with clay.  I think that's a very interest aspect of working with any material, and I think [inaudible] that most people do not use a material in the right way.  I was able to get [inaudible] others to do it.  I think it's a sensitivity to the material, the knowledge of the use of that material, to know how far you can go, what the limitations are, and so on.

I think architects have different problems with cement when they did these [inaudible] had managed to do [inaudible] things with cement, whereas I think I was really doing the same sort of thing, trying to get clay to do things – naturally, of course, but taking it to its roots, these – understanding that the more water clay has in its forms, you know, or its substance – then it, of course, will collapse.  I knew how much water to keep into clay.  And also I had to learn this facility for structurally [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  Did you get kind of [inaudible] of that?

MR. GRIPPE:  No, I [inaudible].   But I never had that [inaudible] directly without armatures.  At first – that is interesting in itself, because armatures seem to curtail any activity.  Because once you have an armature, you have to work within that scheme of the armature, within that limitation.  Whereas in terra cotta I had no limitations.  I could open it up.  If I felt that it would enhance the design by opening up certain areas, I did [inaudible].

But I was able to make them quite large at one time, and I felt that in those early years, if I had the kilns large enough as we have today, many areas [inaudible] kilns, I might have made them life-size or even larger.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.  Did you have to fire them in pieces and then assemble them?  Or could they be fired all in one –

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, I preferred to do them all in one section, although many [inaudible].   I don't like [inaudible] assemble things [inaudible] by an armature.  I felt they should all be in one piece, and they would make their point that way.  And I know that I didn't make them as large or as high as I wanted them without having to assemble them.

Of course you have the trouble of transporting [inaudible].  And as you know, the [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  After they were fired, would they be – well, I suppose [inaudible] breaking something.  They were much more durable.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, I –

MS. SECKLER:  They were not in any way glazed, as I recall, were they?  I mean –

MR. GRIPPE:  No, although I very – I did have my silly moments about it.  I did glaze some of them [inaudible], which I [inaudible].  After those few experiments with glazes until I decided that that was not [inaudible] like bria-a-brac.  No matter how important sculpture was, this [inaudible] art is [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  Were your surfaces scored [inaudible] you cut, lines of any kind?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.  I call – the interesting part about that is that I – having done a lot of ceramics with my wife in those days, we learned a great deal [inaudible].  One of the first [inaudible] come on the scene in 1939, and we did a lot of – we collaborated on a lot of designs on plates and so on, and my wife did a lot of ceramics.  And so we learned this idea of [inaudible].  So I used this in New York City in 1949, 1948.  And lo and behold, in 1945, Barney Newman came to my studio on Fifteenth Street and said, "Well, your [inaudible] are very, very important, and we are going to have a show called 'The Pictograph Movement' at Betty Parsons's, and you're responsible – your [inaudible] responsible for originating this idea, and we'd like you to join the group."  The pictographs, of course, that – which were all pictographs by Barney Newman, who was the first to call them pictographs, were [interruption to recording] on the terra cotta, you see?

And they were, you know, figures, snakes, dates, and – I had dates like 1999 and 1980, you know, so looking to

the future and then dates of the past that were relating to historical dates and so on. Plus there were these symbols that – which were personal to me, but I found later were many of the – like the moon and the sun and snakes and heads and so on, which were then, I think in Aztec or Mayan art, they were related to the early Americans. But I wasn't thinking of them at the time.

MS. SECKLER: Was that about the same time that Adolph Gottlieb was using pictographs, or did he come into that later? I've sort of forgotten –

MR. GRIPPE: Well, in 1944, I went to Barney Newman's studio – or his house at that time, he didn't have a studio, because he wasn't painting at that time – but I saw a painting done by Gottlieb in 1944 which was a copy of my city, an exact copy. And then Gottlieb started his so-called pictographs in 1945, which was certainly five years or more after I had developed it, you see.
Of course I didn't want to join the group in those days. I said, "Well, you know, Barney, I'm sorry, but these – this city series represents about six or seven years, now, of activity." And I am completely removed from it, and I just don't want to [inaudible] pictograph group, because it would be dishonest. I am very –

MS. SECKLER: What do you mean, you were removed from it? You had stopped doing the cities at that time?

MR. GRIPPE: Yes, because I – around 1944 I was involved with new space concepts. You know, I was doing a lot of spatial groups, developing some space ideas that I was interested in. I got completely away from the cities.

MS. SECKLER: Were you still working in terra cotta?

MR. GRIPPE: I turned – I think the space group began when I first started to work in wax and direct wax, when I had my first bronzes cast in 1944 – 1943 or 1944. And I began to –

MS. SECKLER: Some of your cities were cast, then?

MR. GRIPPE: No. None of the cities. Strangely enough, most of that – almost all of the city series were done in various materials like plaster, wood, and terra cotta, but not bronze. It was when I became involved with wax that I began to develop – certainly developing the city idea further. But being – instead of being involved now with the limitations of the city, I began to open up and think in terms of new space concepts and thinking about the negative and positive space at that time.

And so, when I had mentioned this to Barney Newman, that I refused to go into the pictograph movement with him – with his group, rather – he was very, very shocked and said, "Well, you're the originator of the pictograph, and you have to be in it." And I said no, I was being – I was now on a new – working out new concepts and new ideas, and space was a new – something new for me, and I was experimenting, and that I just couldn't see my way – that is I couldn't see myself going back to symbols and images and pictographs again after leaving it, you know, seven years of it.

And Barney Newman said to me, I will never forget it, because at that moment at the house, when we had this meeting, he says, "Well, if you're going to be into an abstract style," he says, "this is suicide. This is a terrible thing to do." And as you know, Barney Newman is more abstract than ever at this point.

MS. SECKLER: Yes. He became –

MR. GRIPPE: It was very strange to say that –

MS. SECKLER: Very [inaudible] – isn't it?

MR. GRIPPE: Because I wasn't – I think he was misrepresenting this idea of the abstract – I don't even know what abstraction means or what realism means. And I think this is the big problem we are faced with today, because – the meaning of these terms and this kind of a thing you talked about earlier, about the dictatorships of style. I had always talked to not only literally hundreds of young people that I talk to at Brandeis [University, Waltham, MA] daily that are taking courses in sculpture that one of the very important things for them to remember is not to restrict themselves, and to work any way that is natural to them, and not to be under the influence of any kind of dictatorship of style.

If a person wants to do a still life or a portrait or something abstract, one should not be limited to any group of artists, saying, well, it has to be done this way. I think this dictatorship of style has been a terrible thing in our time, and has destroyed many, many important talents. And I know many serious artists in their sixties that have been completely demolished by this dictatorship of style that has been set up, I suppose, primarily by the museums, secondly by the dealer, and then the collectors and the public as a whole, and this kind of confusion.

I don't see why an artist should not be – an artist, after all, if he is serious enough, will not be involved in any kind of dictatorship of style. But on the other hand, a lot of people do get kind of confused by this. And I think

it's about time somebody said it, says something about the fact that this is a terrible part of our dilemma. It just doesn't allow the artist the kind of freedom that he needs to be an artist.

MS. SECKLER: Take that a little further, Peter. Here, in terms of a concrete situation, here you were, rejecting the joining of a group representing something you were moving out of, and insisting on going ahead with abstraction. I gather what you mean is not that you couldn't go ahead with abstraction, or lead that group, or reject their invitation, but that in doing so you would be then penalized by the fact that some museum director would not consider your part of the significant movement, or something of that sort. Was that, in fact, what happened?

As you continued to move on with your exploration of abstract forms and the spatial thing that interested you then, were you then having more difficulty in finding a – you know, a gallery and buyers and so on?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I think that's somewhat true. I think this happens to most artists. It's – you have to be in the swing, or in the – what is current. And if artists are foolish enough to fall for that, and they want to be – want to get notoriety, or they want to get – you know, have success, and success means selling your work, then they have to do what is current, you see, in order to be accepted by the museums and also by the public and the collectors. As a matter of fact, you are completely ostracized in certain areas if you are realistic, and if you're abstract in certain other areas, because you're ostracized there. Now, there –

MS. SECKLER: Don't you think it's a little less, though, now than it was a couple years ago? That there is a little more – well, [inaudible] various directions, but still are, no doubt, limited.

MR. GRIPPE: Well –

MS. SECKLER: Certainly at the heyday of abstract expressionism, there seemed to be much more need for –

MR. GRIPPE: Much more difficult.

MS. SECKLER: I mean there was more pressure to conform then, it seemed to me somewhat, than it is today.

MR. GRIPPE: Well, there will always be individuals who set up groups, really, as defense groups against any encroachment by other artists to corner the market, so to speak, of their collectives. But –

MS. SECKLER: You were a part of, I believe, the – when they had the exhibition, the "9th Street Show" –

MR. GRIPPE: Yes, I was a –

MS. SECKLER: – you were a part of that exhibition.

MR. GRIPPE: Well, as a matter of fact, my wife and I organized it, along with Leo Castelli. Now, Leo Castelli gave some money to finance that "9th Street Show". And, of course I did all of the early work, and not only bringing the artists in, but hanging their works on the wall. And Milton Resnick and I built the – several retaining walls in that old loft, because we were afraid that a lot of the artists were going to end up in the cellar. And they were quite annoyed about it, and I said, "Well, no one will go in the cellar in this show. We are going to put everybody out in a very conspicuous place." A lot of artists were complaining.

But my wife did all the – Florence did all the actual mailing out of the cards, and doing all of the work at the desk. And I worked with Matt Gorelli [phonetic], also –

MS. SECKLER: [James] Rosati?

MR. GRIPPE: And Rosati, yes. And we were, you know, bringing in David Smith, trying to wean the artists away from the dealers, which was very difficult in those days. And to draw –

MS. SECKLER: Had they really gotten much attention from the dealers?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I think the dealers were a little frightened at that time that this was kind of, like, one of these independent shows like they had in Paris, and that we were setting up our own display or exhibition. And they were a little reluctant to send their artists. But we did talk to the artists.

I remember going to – this is very interesting. I remember going to Hans Hofmann's studio on Ninth Street, and when his wife was ill at that time. And I had – was – I was picked, actually, to go there to speak to Hofmann and see if he wouldn't give us a painting. I actually spoke to [Ibram] Lassaw to get something because they were both connected with [Samuel] Kootz. And lo and behold, the whole studio is full of nudes, studies of nudes. Now, no one knows that about Hans Hofmann.

You see, the thing about the abstract artist, the abstract expressionist, was that the moment it was set up as a kind of exclusive group – you know, in a way, the group did work along concepts and ideas that were removed from the existing – the so-called realistic artists. There were many in those days, the Sawyer Brothers [phonetic] and there were many other – Vince Spania [phonetic], and many others working in the realistic style, because we were, in some ways, the – I'm just trying to remember this group that met with [Robert] Motherwell and Richard Lippold, 30 artists. It's in one of the magazines that was published at that time. The 30 of us met with Alfred Barr and –

MS. SECKLER: Yes, yes, I remember that.

MR. GRIPPE: That group was [inaudible]. And I think what it tends to do , as soon as you've set it up as an exclusive group, it tends to alienate a lot of the artists who are working in a different manner or style. And the public, as well as the museums, and it begins to set itself up as a – [interruption to recording].

MS. SECKLER: – the effect it has on the artists who were excluded from groupings, and so on. Well, what – at this time you were organizing this "9th Street Show," did you feel that you belonged, in spirit, with the rest of the artists that were shown? Or did you feel that you were still playing a very independent role, but these were people with whom you had some, let's say, companionship, where they were friends –

MR. GRIPPE: No. It's very difficult to make – to have any kind of analysis of it. I felt that I was part of that group. I did like all the artists that were involved in it. And I am still very – I feel very close to them in spirit. And I think, basically, you can't wipe this out.

I know that a number of artists asked me a couple years ago in Boston, when I was on another one of those other interviews, that – they said, "Well, don't you think abstract expressionism is dead?" And I said, "I don't think so. I don't think anything is really dead."

I think people attempt certain things. They exclude other artists. There are a lot of things that happen. Many museums and dealers will show a certain kind of art. But I don't think that, if it has any validity at all, if it's – if this is a vital group working together and their ideas certainly have stood the test of time, I don't think it's dead.

But what is happening now is that this base is broadening. Instead of becoming an exclusive group of 30, the base is broadening into – now to include various artists that are working with a figure and expressing themselves in a new way. They are not necessarily academic in the way, because they're working with a – they're attempting to express the figure in a new way. So the base is broadening. Nothing is dying, but the base is broadening. And the fact that the base is broadening will eliminate a lot of the novelty and the kind of industrial thing we were talking about earlier, comparing the, you know, industrial art to fine art, and this kind of minimal thing that is being done by industry.

I feel that if – most of this is out of the hands of the artist, you see, and this makes the artist nondescript or unimportant, he loses his own identity, his individuality, letting other technicians do the work, and I think this is what's bad about it. The fact that the base is broadening will bring – and I think a greater awareness of art, and I think this is a healthy sign in the present day.

MS. SECKLER: It was an interesting digression, bringing it up to the present. But you get back a bit to this period around the – well, the early 1950s, at the end of the 1940s. And then, in terms of what happened to you, was there any particular impact on your career as a result of that show on Ninth Street? Did anything – did your work take any change in the next few years that would tend to either bring it closer or further apart from those others who participated in it?

MR. GRIPPE: No, I don't – none of this has ever had any effect on me, really, one way or another. I have always been an individual artist. I have never followed any groups or trends, or anything else. I know that I have made it terribly difficult for myself because of that. But I always felt that it was very important for me to express myself in any way I wanted to. I didn't want any restrictions, I didn't want any exclusive clubs or anything. I felt I wanted to go my own way.

Now, the thing that I showed, strangely enough, was a city which was called "The Angry City" at that time, the – which was a work that I had done several years before, so that it was now – I was certainly not showing there in order to relate to the group, but the fact that the group felt I related to them.

When I left the pictograph group and Barney Newman asked me, that was a similar – another situation which I felt I was moving in a new direction, and which they followed later, anyway. I was [inaudible] in a new direction in the early 1930s, which they picked up five or six or seven years later.

I was always moving – well, the pictograph group –

MS. SECKLER:  Oh, mm-hmm.

MR. GRIPPE:  – decided that they wanted me to join their group when I had developed those pictograph ideas seven years before, you see.  So when I –

MS. SECKLER:  That would have been after – in 1944, was it?

MR. GRIPPE:  1945.

MS. SECKLER:  1945.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  And you did them seven years before –

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  – [inaudible] what, late 1930s?

MR. GRIPPE:  The late 1930s, yes.  That's when I began the first cities.  But you see, I have always been an individualist.  But, as I say, my spirit and my sympathies have always been with the abstract group.  And it still is.  I don't think people realize that what – you know, being abstract, for example, to most artists means a kind of – that is an area in which you can dictate and exclude everything else for this particular style.

Now, I remember Sid [Sidney] Gordin came to me.  He was doing a number of sort of Mondrianesque kind of sculptures when he was first shown at Grace Borgenicht [Gallery, New York, NY].  And he talked to me one afternoon about them, and I said, "Well, I know exactly what you're doing."  And he said, "Well, you don't.  These have a – they're engineered, and they're calculated, and I have certain proportions that I work with."  And I said, "You know," I said, "you're talking to the wrong person."  I said, "You know, what I feel is that you're just 20 years too late."  I says, "You're just rehashing something that you saw 20 years before.  I understand perfectly what you're saying," I said, "but the trouble is that it's already been done."

Well, there are a number of artists working in the style of the neo-plasticists.  Some of them, the constructivist style, taking a lot of the ideas of Gabo Pevsner [Naum Pevsner Gabo], and Milayvitch [phonetic], and many of the others.  I think the –

MS. SECKLER:  You mean now?

MR. GRIPPE:  Right now.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.  So that I feel I can't criticize them, but I feel they're wasting their time.  It's already been solved.  And I think artists are not artists because they are doing something new or something old, but are attempting to express themselves.  And if something has already been done, it would be kind of foolish to repeat it over and over again.  I think many of the things that I see today are influenced by Piet Mondrian.  However small the variations are, this has been done now for the past – I would say certainly the past 30 years, since Mondrian's death, or – let's say that there is [Theo] van Doesburg, there is the Bauhaus, many experiments that were conducted by the Dadaists.  Many of these things being done today seem to me repetitions of the things of the past.

And I think this is where I would criticize it.  If they are doing something new, attempting to solve a problem, which is what art is about, then I am for it.  I don't feel there should be any restrictions.  If you are going to do a head or a figure, and you are going to solve a problem, fine.  But you can't do it the way it was done before, you see.

MS. SECKLER:  To get back again to you and the period of the early 1950s, you were continuing to work with the wax, then, I gather, for a bit of a time.  And with spatial ideas that were – where forms were fairly open and rather complex.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  Now, were you still working in New York all this time?  How did you make a living in those years?  Were you teaching at all?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, it's – I hate to tell you how we made a living.  We made a living out of pottery.  We, my wife and I, set up a little kiln in our studio on Thirteenth Street, and we made a living from selling our pottery all

those years.

MS. SECKLER: What's wrong with that?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, we had to make it and then go out and go to stores and try to sell it, you see, to make a living. I preferred to do that than to teach. I felt that – I didn't start teaching until after 40, so that I had enough time, really, to think about myself as an artist, define myself. I think this is what most artists don't often succeed in doing. And I had plenty of time before I began to teach. I think a lot of artists begin to teach as soon as they get out of school, whereas I didn't start until after 40, so that I tried to make my living, you know, in this way, both of us trying to exist from selling our pottery, which is not an easy thing to do. But –

MS. SECKLER: When you did begin to teach in 40, where were you teaching?

MR. GRIPPE: I started a part-time thing at a private institute, and I finally got a job working in afternoons, weekends –

MS. SECKLER: And teaching sculpture?

MR. GRIPPE: Teaching in a design course in the architecture department. I think Molinaji's [phonetic] widow has it presently. Then Phillip Johnson [phonetic] had it one year, I think. It was a design course in the architecture department.

MS. SECKLER: Now, were you continuing with the wax work – sculpture at this time?

MR. GRIPPE: Oh, it's very interesting now. If I could go back just a – for a few minutes –

MS. SECKLER: Yes.

MR. GRIPPE: – to the – sometime around the middle 1940s and the late 1940s. I think this is very interesting, because at that time I was interested – involved with these new space concepts. And I had several possibilities on how to work them out. I felt that they could be worked out in three dimensions, and then – or continue along these flat methods that I had used to flatten out the sculpture in order to achieve these – a sense of transparency, which I – that is, I call transparency – in the early days. And then, really, it evolved into these new space concepts because of the open spaces and so on, the negative and positive value.

And as far as I know, I think I was the first to do it. And I hadn't seen it anywhere else. And I began to get more and more involved in it. And Tony Smith became interested in these ideas. And he was teaching at New York University [New York City, NY] in those – in the middle or late 1940s, and he used to bring all his students to my studio on 13th Street to go over many of the experiments that I was working out in those days. Most of it was, I think, working in wax, direct plaster, making mini-constructions of wood and terra cotta. I used all the mediums that were possible, even using some plastics and other things, and a little bit of very crude soldering in those days, and welding some things that I still have photographs of.

MS. SECKLER: So you –

MR. GRIPPE: Trying –

MS. SECKLER: Would you [inaudible] objects for the things that you soldered together, or –

MR. GRIPPE: Yes. They were, in a sense, some kind of found objects. I used tin cans and wires and so on. I say that it's funny that Tony Smith and I became very, very close friends on the basis of these early experiments of open structures, which developed all the – many of the ideas of open structures came into prominence many years later. But Tony and I worked out the early experiments. He was an architect. Many of the things that he did, these other structures, these large minimal structures now, he didn't at any time call them sculptures. They were structures. They were very similar to some of the things he was teaching at New York University. And they now are called sculptures, you see. But we were working out those experiments quite early.

MS. SECKLER: Well, was – at that time was he making them as – for his sort of design course, as a kind of demonstration of spatial – ways of thinking about space, or some kind of thing?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, he – the fact is that they were very objectively known to me that they were open space structures, but I don't know whether they were – that Tony was aware of the fact that they were space structures, because we didn't talk of them as such. We called them open structures. And we were trying to achieve, in an abstract way, some of the early cubist – experiments of the early cubists, which were, I think – some of them relating to some of the open things that [Jacques] Lipchitz had achieved in the early 1930s. And the late 1920s and the early 1930s, his transparent sort of – you see? Then, a lot of these ideas came from the influence of Lipchitz in those days.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.  Was Tony working in clay or bronze too, or was he constructing things in –

MR. GRIPPE:  Mostly direct plaster for school.  They were all very large, complicated open structures in direct plaster.  And we were all working this way, and the students came down to see what we were doing, what I was doing.  And I went and paid visits to New York University to see what – even criticized some of the things for him, some of his students.

MS. SECKLER:  And, of course, most of the structures were – of Tony Smith's that we now see are not open, but they are plainer constructions that move simply into space.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, yes.

MS. SECKLER:  So these must have been quite different.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, because I think in order to – you have to think about the median again, and this is – we've been talking about this all the time.  These are large plywood constructions.

MS. SECKLER:  Plywood?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, plywood constructions –

MS. SECKLER:  You mean the ones now or later?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, yes, the –

MS. SECKLER:  Now?

MR. GRIPPE:  The ones that he is doing –

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.

MR. GRIPPE:  – presently.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.

MR. GRIPPE:  Or has done for the past few years.  But the medium, of course, and then the time, they are hard-edged, so to speak, and they're simplified, and they have within them no spatial concept, they're just structures, you see, as such.  Very solid.  And they – the spaces or the openings work because of the volumes, not necessarily because of the – any concepts of space behind them.

And I feel that this is a rather unfortunate direction, because he had all those early years of experiments and might have gone to this idea, these new space concepts, and maybe changed the forms and made them open and you know, transparent and light, introducing these space concepts that we've talked about, not in terms of space, but I suppose some sense of the transparency, the volumes.

I don't remember whether he talked about space at that time, although Stamos seems to remember it as such.  He said, "Yeah, I remember the early days when you and Tony Smith and we all discussed space."  He says, "We were the first ones to develop this idea of space."  He says, "I remember this in the very early 1940s."  And I think that is quite a compliment, for Stamos to say that, volunteer that.

MS. SECKLER:  So whether or not – Tony apparently did not continue to develop this, but you did during –

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  – going on.  And even through the 1940s and into the period of around 1950s.  Were you still thinking of these in any way as related to the city thing, or had they taken on other connotations?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.  I – one of the things that happened then was that I felt that the city had limited this spatial concept to architectural forms, and I was taking these from the so-called – the architecture around me in New York City.  And I felt that the sort of spatial – the possibilities of spatial idea was limited to the silhouettes of all the buildings.  And I began to go into figures.  And of course this changed – when I began to think of negative and positive volume, I began to change, my forms began to change.  My material had to change.  Everything else had to be expressed in an entirely new way.

And so, I was attempting, then, in the early 1950s, to change this whole format of sculpture in that – you know, in terms not only in volume – because I wanted to include volume as well as flatness – whenever the space

entered in and became flat, and whenever I wanted to do some – I juxtaposed the volume and the space, you see, together.

And I remember Winslow Haynes [phonetic] having seen these for the first time, "Is Tony revolted by the – this juxtaposition of form and space?"  And he totally misunderstood it.  And I said to him, "Well, I'm sorry you feel the way you do, but you know, I am working out these new space concepts.  And if forms seem distorted to you, they seem out of place, then the idea – it's a problem," I said, "which I can't explain in a few minutes to you."

And I had this problem now with Lipchitz, because, after all, I had known Lipchitz for many years, I – when he first came to this country I met him, and he only spoke Yiddish in those days.  My wife used to translate in Yiddish.  We took him to Harlem and all over New York City, introduced him around to the young artists and so on.  And I had this terrible burden, you see, of being under his influence for so many years, and at the same time trying to find my own identity as an artist.  And I could not go along – that is, follow his style or his method, because I had to do my own.  And this was a terrible burden, because usually young artists meeting a man as formidable as Lipchitz would tend to work along many of his experiments, you see, and many of his ideas.  And I felt that he misunderstood many of the new space concepts that I was working with, many of the figures that I had experimented along these lines, which were, I think, revolutionary.

One of the last of that series was in a show at the Whitney Museum [Whitney Museum of Art, New York, NY], an annual which was called "Space Study."  It was a figure done in cardboard.  And the reason I work in cardboard – and I think I developed the many – even influenced a lot of the European stuff is when I went there in 1964, working out many ideas in cardboard, because they were – it was a very simply way to build the structure and with these space concepts in a flat, dimensional way, because they did develop kind of three dimensions in this flatness, and –

MS. SECKLER:  One thing I haven't been able to get clear, I think, is the way you developed figures in relationship to these – just going back a little bit, before we got to the cardboard things, what – would they have been very small figures juxtaposed against facades that would relate to the city idea, or would the figure dominate a space?  Could you give us –

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, the – there are two approaches.  I gave a talk at the Artists' Club – I think this might explain it to some extent – it was a series of panels based on concepts of space.  And I – be on one of those panels.  And the first 10 minutes of when I was on with this – I began to talk about space.  I knew that, in the first 10 minutes of my talk, that I had lost an audience, and lost the artists on the panel.

Because one of the people on the panel said, "Well, I don't understand what you mean about space.  Do you mean the space above the people in an elevator?  Or do you mean the space, the holes and [inaudible]?"  And I says, "No, I don't mean any of these things.  It is not a physical space."  And some of them even alluded to the space men going up to the moon now, thinking that am I talking about that kind of space, and I said, "No, that's" – and I was shocked that no one seemed to understand what I meant by space.

As far – the only way I can express it is to say that if you have two objects next to each other, you make a space, you see.  So that you work with the space itself, done by the periphery of the  – you see the outside volume makes the space.  And so that when you're making still lives of bottles of fruit, you can – I played with the space, rather than the object.  And there are times when I like to include the object in the space, you see.  But in order to do that, you have to have a very good background of drawing.  You have to know how to draw the object in order to introduce it, whenever you want it, into the space.

So, you are working with a very negative substance, you see, that is around all objects, you see, that almost – but dominates almost everything we do.  And if we want to work with the negative side of the volume, the negative space, then this negative space becomes more important than the volume, you see, so that it's terribly complex, because you never know when – you do need volumes in order to delineate the space, and space is nothing, really.  You have to have the kind of volumes that make a space.

For example, if you follow the line of a head and the outside line of the head and the arm, and use that space alone next to another space, let's say, that's being developed between two figures that are standing next to each other, and take and form the silhouette of that space on the left, and the space of the figure on the right, you have very peculiar shapes.  And those shapes become volumes, you see.  So if you want to play with those volumes alone, you can lose the objectivity of what you are trying to express, you see.

So, occasionally I would introduce the objectivity, which is the figure itself, which means the realism, isn't it, because the other becomes very abstract.

MS. SECKLER:  Well, you know, I – in trying to make a career for myself, I think back to, for instance, the kind of thing that artists were doing in classes up here with Hans Hofmann, which is drawing your model.  Okay, we're really drawing the space around the model.  To set your points sometimes you have to look twice to see what –

where the figure was –

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  – because the series of –

MR. GRIPPE:  [Inaudible.]

MS. SECKLER:  – points of tension between various points moving forward and backward in space, rather than simply a series of – denoting volume.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  I mean does that kind of – when you actually were creating figures in your sculpture, would one see a complete figure?  Or would there be just this sort of clues to spatial figurations?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, what I would – it's very interesting you brought that up.  The – there are a number of artists teaching that method, which comes directly from Hofmann.  What – as far as I've been able to gather, there is an article written by Paul Valery on Leonardo da Vinci's triangulation of space, you see.  And then Beauchamp Vione [phonetic] takes that up, and almost – if you look at a recent issue or – I think it's a paperback of Beauchamp Vione's drawings – and you will see this triangulation of space, which is similar to what you said about Hofmann.  And Hofmann was doing something that Paul Valery initiated, that Beauchamp Vione had worked with for many, many years, does not –

MS. SECKLER:  I understand it came from cubism, didn't it?

MR. GRIPPE:  No, it – well, it was – no, I don't think so.  I think this was – they were trying to prove that many of these points of tension in the space, you see – the space and the figure – were triangular, these points.  That is, they were moving to a point, you see, toward us, toward the spectator, and away into two angles, you see, that made this triangular space –

MS. SECKLER:  – [inaudible] beyond that.

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, this is what Paul Valery did with – now, I am not involved –

MS. SECKLER:  That didn't interest you, though.

MR. GRIPPE:  No.  That I'm not involved with, you see.  Because what they are trying to do, really, is to try to introduce the background and the foreground on one, flat plane.  And these are, you know, points of tension, I would say, between trying to make the artist away that – that is, perhaps the painter, not so much as the sculptor, but the painter – that there are points of tension beyond the figure in the space, and then trying to activate the space around the figure, you see.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes, exactly.

MR. GRIPPE:  So that –

MS. SECKLER:  But you were not interested in that.

MR. GRIPPE:  No, that isn't –

MS. SECKLER:  This doesn't –

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, not necessarily, because I know about it.

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.

MR. GRIPPE:  But I – but what I was interested in, really, is not the idea of the position – let's say the figure in the space, but rather the space itself.  You know, when you have two figures together, you have objects together, I am interested in the spaces that those objects make.

MS. SECKLER:  But did you, in fact, make in wax little figures incorporated into sculptural backgrounds, or were those figures just figures without a sculptural background, where they –

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, they were taken totally from – I made literally thousands of sketches of figures in the subway.  I was relating these figures not only to the columns, but background, and so on.  They were pure space figures dealing with the negative space, so called, and they were very distorted in nature.  They seemed very odd to most people who looked at them.  But they were pure space.  But these figures did not become figures

that seemed recognizable at first. There were times when I had to introduce some symbol to make them look like figures so that people could identify them as figures. But they were pure space; it was nothing to do with what Hans Hofmann was doing at all.

MS. SECKLER: Well, where you made them in sculpture – I mean I understand you were sketching the subways, though – but when you made them in sculpture, they had to be solid forms.

MR. GRIPPE: Yes.

MS. SECKLER: They could be hollow forms. I mean you could make your figure look hollow, instead of like a cylinder, let's say. But I just can't get a picture of, I mean –

MR. GRIPPE: The space?

MS. SECKLER: – how they – you don't have photographs here of what you were doing?

MR. GRIPPE: No. The only –

MS. SECKLER: I'm sure I've seen [inaudible].

MR. GRIPPE: The only thing is that I think we know objects if we just delineate them, you know, as we see them. But we are not aware of the very peculiar shapes they make in space.

Now, you take the periphery of any volume, I don't care whether it's the silhouette of a building that you seen in New York next to another building. They make a very peculiar space volume. And it's what I call a space volume. And they do make very odd shapes. They're very unfamiliar to us, because we're not used to looking at spatial volumes – that is, volumes that – since they are in sculpture or you're using a medium, a solid medium.

And in order to interpret this idea of space, one needs a solid in order to get the feeling of the space. And since I'm concerned with the space, I'm always delineating the space, you see, or making – using these as periphery volumes for the space. So they become transparent at times, you know, because they – you have open spaces and closed spaces.

Well, I have since gone on – in recent years, gone on to several kinds of space, you see. It becomes very, very complex now because I have dealt with this for over 25 years now. And I notice a lot of young people working with it. [Michael] Mazur is presently up to his ears in it. He doesn't know that I did it 25 years earlier.

MS. SECKLER: Who is that?

MR. GRIPPE: Mazur, who is a printmaker. He is working all these new space concepts at this point. Right now there is – very many young artists are doing it.

But I feel that many of the spaces I've used – I've used a closed space and an open space because the – I feel that in order to express an open space, one can do it with a volume because you're working with the dictated shape that happens in nature, you see. I mean two people standing together, or trees, I've done the openings in trees, and what not. I did a whole series of space landscapes here in Provincetown, which started around 1945 to about 1952. And those are things which very rarely have been seen anywhere. And I remember all the years that I came to Provincetown, Hans Hofmann says, "You must show them. It's a shame to keep it to yourself" –

MS. SECKLER: Where are they?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I have – a lot of them have gone to various collections, and most of them I have at home. They've never been –

MS. SECKLER: In what medium were they executed?

MR. GRIPPE: They were in [inaudible], with emulsion, they're almost – they're done in a very complicated medium, they look almost like oils on paper, really. They are very, very complicated. And they were called space landscapes and movement in those early days, and I've done them over the years. And Hans Hofmann was crazy about them. He said that he thought they were the most original things he'd ever seen. But those things were done with the spaces and the trees.

Now, if I were to go into, let's say, the literally millions and millions of things that are in nature, and one were to interpret the space that these objects make, well, it's very complicated. It's the space that is dictated by the objects that gives you this odd shape. So, in order to express it, if you're going to do it in sculpture, then it has to be a solid which is being expressed. Or, perhaps having two solids and repeating nature and having two

solids repeat to have another space. So you have a closed space and an open space that you're working with all the time. But not necessarily the object itself, you see, so to speak. You're doing the outside, or the outline of the object, not the object itself.

MS. SECKLER: And then the kind of – you said that sometimes you had to add symbolic elements to make them identifiable as figures. What kind of thing would you then –

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I would introduce an arm, for example, and really, you know, draw an arm –

MS. SECKLER: Did you introduce eyes and –

MR. GRIPPE: Eyes occasionally, yes. I did a series of paintings about 1945, 1946, that were – that had eyes and, you know, a nose occasionally.

MS. SECKLER: But in sculpture, did they have at all eyes or specific –

MR. GRIPPE: Yes, I did a number of things relating to my cities in about 1946 or 1947 that did have eyes. There were times when I eliminated any semblance of the human form at all –

MS. SECKLER: About how high would the figures have been at that time?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, many of those early cities, again, ranged from, I would say, about 14 by 20 on, 10 by 18 or –

MS. SECKLER: So that was the sort of complex –

MR. GRIPPE: They were – yes.

MS. SECKLER: – the figures were rather small.

MR. GRIPPE: The figures were rather small.

MS. SECKLER: Yes, that's what I remember, I just wanted to –

MR. GRIPPE: Yeah. Those were – that series of the early bronzes and the early cities were quite small. Because, don't forget, I had – we lived in a coldwater flat in those days, and I had very little money to cast. I did all the casting on my own –

MS. SECKLER: You did?

MR. GRIPPE: – and I had to pay for everything I cast. It was very expensive in those days. So that limitations of a kiln and so on. Not that I couldn't have worked large, but it's – you know, it was a question of money or whatever that prevented me from doing large.

MS. SECKLER: We must put into the record where you were showing these things, your first –

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I had my first show, I think, in 1942 at Marian Willard [Neumann-Willard Gallery or Willard Gallery, New York, NY], who showed my first city. It was called "Sculpture and Movement," and I had several one-man shows there in 1942, 1943, 1944, 1946. And the large transparent bronzes, the large space transparent bronzes, were shown. The large symbolic bronzes at that time were shown at Marian Willard in 1946. And then this had already hit Paris, and one of them had this show of many of these new things. And those were quite large bronzes. The Benin bronze was about, oh, close to five feet tall.

MS. SECKLER: So when you say Benin bronze, what does that mean? Were you – was it like a Benin bronze, or –

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I tell you why I called it a Benin bronze, because I love Benin bronzes and I used a set of cage-like technique around the neck –

MS. SECKLER: Yes, [inaudible] –

MR. GRIPPE: – which reminded me of Benin bronze. But it had nothing to do with Benin bronzes, really. It was a space structure of a kind of warrior, you know. It was about the time of the war when that was done, just after the end of the war, in 1945.

And this other one was called *Symbolic Figure No. 4* [1946], [inaudible], and that was an attempt to work out many of the early city things that I had done in a cage-like structure that – it was very transparent. And many of the images were broken up in a fragmented way. I think this is the beginning of this fragmented series that I started early 1944, which I continued until almost the early 1960s.

MS. SECKLER: And what [inaudible]?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, Marian Willard was attempting – some dealer in Paris wanted to show them there, and Marian was dickering with them. And then, somehow, didn't want to spend the money for them to send them to Paris. We had them all ready to go to Paris, and the – they had already done photographs of the pieces that would have been shown in Paris in 1946 and 1945. And somehow, it just didn't materialize. We were all set. They were going to do the catalog and the shipment to Paris, and then they didn't have money to do it, and they asked Marian Willard to do it. And somehow it fell through at the last minute, they didn't do it.

It's a shame, because the photographs had already been published and everything else, the magazines, and they were waiting for the show in Paris and it never got there.

MS. SECKLER: Well, did you – after leaving her gallery, where did you show next?

MR. GRIPPE: Let's see. I left Marian Willard about 1949 or 1950, and I went with Grace Borgenicht for a couple of years. So – and from there to Nardis [phonetic] and then on to – not to Nardis, but to Paradeaux [phonetic] after Marian Willard –

MS. SECKLER: Paradeaux roughly what year?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, Paradeaux represents [inaudible] that year of the Bounty series that I did. We had a whole series of bronzes – I did the whole [inaudible] bronze or terra cotta, about 35 pieces in all, incorporating, you know, the – many of the techniques that I had used over the years, the city style, the transparent style, the space ideas. All of these things were incorporated in the [inaudible].

And the reason they were done in the style they were is that we had gone to Europe, you see, and I had gone to Europe for the first time –

MS. SECKLER: What year?

MR. GRIPPE: – in the early 1950s, and was totally influenced by the [inaudible] that I'd seen, the churches, the influence of the French sculptures, [inaudible] [Auguste] Rodin, you know, and just steeped into French – [Jean-Baptiste] Carpeaux was the strongest influence. And it was the result of Carpeaux that I became – used a very deliberate kind of realistic style, which I had not done for many, many years, and just sort of relying on my academic background and training that I [inaudible] able to do it.

MS. SECKLER: And these were – some of that realistic manner also included in the Bounty series that you showed at [inaudible].

MR. GRIPPE: Yes, that was a whole series which culminated in the *City of Desolation* [1958], which is the largest bronze of all of that. It's a very large bronze, very transparent, very difficult to cast, was almost a hopeless task to try to get it cast, it was so complicated –

MS. SECKLER: I think I saw that –

MR. GRIPPE: Yes.

MS. SECKLER: Doesn't that swivel around a central axis in some way?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, it's – I think it's in the form. There are just hundreds and hundreds of figures and animals on it. It's in the form of a cross, really, like a basic architecture design for many of the cathedrals. I had that in mind, because I'd gone to Europe at that time. So it is in the form of a cross. And it's called *City of Desolation*.

MS. SECKLER: And was that [inaudible]?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, I think I was involved in the Bounty series from about the early 1950s to about 1958. And that last, *City of Desolation*, was done about 1958.

MS. SECKLER: And you were still living in New York all this time, I assume.

MR. GRIPPE: Yes. I had a studio on Second Avenue at that time, Second Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets. So we got into that area. There is an old Jewish theatrical section, the old Café Royal and the theater and the old [inaudible], a beautiful section. And then the Phoenix Theater opened up about the time –

MS. SECKLER: Yes.

MR. GRIPPE: – that we were there. It was beautiful, as we were going into a new area, leaving Thirteenth Street,

and then about the same time I think that even Lassaw left his studio and went to Long Island, and we went to Second Avenue.

MS. SECKLER: Were you teaching at all at this point?

MR. GRIPPE: Let's see. I started teaching sometime around – I think about 1953, 1954. Yes, I started at Brandeis at that time. And while I was doing – I had a – I think I taught a day a week, I think, one class. I used to commute from New York in 1958. I refused to do more than that. I said I would come up and do it one day a week, and that's what I did. And I continued this series of bronzes.

And then I think – which is – after this series of open bronzes that I did earlier, I began to work along the – these new – this new direction, a new way of approaching the sculpture by working out this series on automatic images. And the reason I did them is not so much that it was – that I wanted to do something in an automatic way, but I wanted to prove that no matter how automatic artists become, how loosely they work, it always ends up by becoming an image. And if it doesn't become an image, I don't think it becomes art. And I wanted to prove to myself, as well as to other artists, that no matter how – that even in this automatic direction, that it was possible to still maintain the image of the figure. And this I attempted to do over a period of two or three years, and was very successful in it.

MS. SECKLER: In what –

MR. GRIPPE: These were all done in terra cotta, strangely enough. I went back to terra cotta, feeling that this was the most pliable medium. I think it was the most direct medium to use. It was even more direct than [inaudible] or plastic. And they were all done in terra cotta.

MS. SECKLER: And when you say utterly spontaneous, or –

MR. GRIPPE: They are spontaneous.

MS. SECKLER: Well, how would you go about beginning one, or shaping it?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, they're done rather quickly, and directly, and the shape is done – the shape evolves, I'd say, from the way you manipulate the clay, the way it's squeezed or cut. And it – generally, you may do 20 of them before you finally get one that's successful.

And I suppose they have this kind of [inaudible] you know, that we identify with on top, and it's the way he painted –

MS. SECKLER: But you were speaking of clay.

MR. GRIPPE: Yes. But, you know, like you manipulate –

MS. SECKLER: Oh, I see what you mean.

MR. GRIPPE: – throwing the brush at the canvas, and –

MS. SECKLER: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. GRIPPE: – manipulating it, trying to get a result. And –

MS. SECKLER: And how large would these have been, Peter?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, the largest of that series in terra cotta, about 20 –

[Audio break.]

MS. SECKLER: – with Peter Grippe in Provincetown on August 27, 1968.

At the conclusion of our first reel, you had noticed that we had left out something important, Peter. Would you like to fill that in now?

MR. GRIPPE: Yeah. Well, I think that the one thing we hadn't discussed is the fact that all of my years of print-making, along with my sculpture –

MS. SECKLER: Oh, yes. I meant to get to that.

MR. GRIPPE: – and I would like to just mention just a few minutes of the background of the Atelier 17 and the art –

MS. SECKLER:  Yes.

MR. GRIPPE:  – which began about, oh, I would say about 1944.  And I was quite involved with the workshop in those days when Bill Hayter –

MS. SECKLER:  Yes, yes, yes.

MR. GRIPPE:  – William Stanley Hayter was the director of the workshops.  He was on Eighth Street, I think, something like 43 West Eighth, I think, somewhere along there.  And all of the important printmakers of the world were there at one time or another.  You know, you consider Tangi [phonetic], Massam [phonetic], Nero [phonetic], Lipchitz, Salvador Dali, all of the surrealists, plus all of the European artists that were on the scene in those days came – Andre Rax [phonetic], Pederdi [phonetic], Karl Schrag [phonetic], Fred Begger [phonetic], they were a host of very important print-makers that all had their own workshops today and working at various universities around the country.  And in working there all those years, I learned the whole craft of engraving and etching and printing, color – multiple color processes, which seems to be lost to a great extent today.

But going – when Bill Hayter finally went back to Europe in 1950, he turned it over to me and I reluctantly decided to take it, because I thought it was a tremendous responsibility to take over the workshop and finance it and so on, get people to finance it.  And then I decided that I would do it, only because I felt I wanted – there was something important I wanted to do with it.  I didn't want to just go into it and just have a print workshop.

And fortunately, Dylan Thomas came on the scene in those days.  He was doing a series of readings at the Y up on Ninety-Second Street.  And I decided that since I was at the workshop, why not start a poetry edition?  And I remember having a meeting with Dylan Thomas and with [inaudible] at the White Horse, and saying to them, you know, that had we recorded [William] Shakespeare walking across the bridge, you know, and talking for 15 minutes, we might have had a wonderful historical record of Shakespeare, you see.  And this would be wonderful now, to have a wonderful record of Dylan Thomas by – if we could get him to write out a poem for us, and we would record it on a plate, a copper plate, since this was an etching workshop.  It would be a great way to get a number of poets and a number of graphic artists together and start this poetry edition.

And so, the moment I get into the workshop, of course, that's what I did.  I went out and financed it totally on my own.  It took me 10 years to do.  And I got a hold of 21 poets and 21 graphic artists.  And it was listed in the [inaudible] book as one of the most unique publications of its time since 1860.  We did it all in script, you see.  All the handwriting was done backwards, very complicated techniques.  We used the poets – it was the first time it had ever been done in this country.  I got a hold of [Frank] O'Hara, who gave – who illustrated – rather [inaudible] illustrated his poem.  Harold Rosenberg [phonetic] for [inaudible] [Willem] de Kooning, another poet who is at Holyoke [Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA], Peter Viereck, who worked with Esteban Vicenti.

Now, many – almost all of the plates I did myself.  I did all the technical work.  Lipchitz was in it.  And that was – became a historical document.  You know, after 10 years of hard work – because there was a lot of bickering going on between the poets and the graphic artists.  Some graphic artists decided that they didn't like other graphic artists because they were too realistic.  The realistic group didn't like the abstract group.  And then the poets decided that some were semi- or quasi- Communist, and the others were quasi-Fascist, and so on.  So I had a great time with it for 10 years.  And finally we published it, you see, and it became one of the historical documents.

And then, of course, in subsequent years, O'Hara has been given credit for doing the first collaboration between artists and poets, and everybody's been trying to get into the act.  But the fact is that I did it first, in the early '50s.  It influenced O'Hara and Larry Ritter, because most of them were included in our edition, anyway.  I was the first to bring O'Hara together with Franz Kline to collaborate in this edition.  This influenced all the young painters and the young sculptors, and we did subsequent editions in later years.  And this, I think, started, I think one of the great moments of collaborations between artists and –

MS. SECKLER:  How many copies were published, and where are most of them now?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, we sold – they're all sold.  There – a limited edition of 50, and sold to all the museums and libraries around the country.  Of course we could have sold much more, but we decided to limit it to 50, and it's become a very important edition because it's been limited to 50.  And I crossed out all the plates after we printed our 50, so no one can republish it in any way.

And we sold it for the low figure of $300 at that time, because we had very little money, we were trying to recoup our finances, because we had to have it printed on the outside.  And you must remember that these original etchings and – they're all done in scripted handwriting.  So it's not a printed edition that you see in many other editions.  We are the only original edition in the book.

MS. SECKLER:  Did Dylan Thomas do one?  Did he –

MR. GRIPPE:  Dylan Thomas gave me one of his poems, which had already been published, which he wrote on an old piece of paper one night when he was sober enough to do it, gave it to me, and I illustrated it.

MS. SECKLER:  All right.  I'd love to see that some time.  I suppose the Museum Modern Art Library [New York, NY] must have a copy of it.

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Public Library [New York, NY], the National Art [National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.] – I think almost any – Brandeis [inaudible] around the country, anywhere you go.

And the strange thing about it is that today it's easier to finance a complicated thing of this sort through a foundation.  But I did it all on my own steam and our own money, and –

MS. SECKLER:  And you managed to live during those 10 years?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.  I felt discouraged at times, but I managed to survive it.  Because what it did, in the end, is limit people like Ezra Pound], because he was considered – you know, he was in – [interruption to recording] – we had many poets from Europe.

A lot of the artists like Abe Ratner [phonetic] refused to come to the edition if Ezra Pound were in it, and we had [inaudible] artists.  And of course, this took weeks of writing letters and all these negotiations going on.  It was a long, tedious process.

MS. SECKLER:  Well, when was this completed?  What would have been that year, when you were finished with it, Peter?

MR. GRIPPE:  I would say it was probably September of 1957 or 1958.  And Morris Wheatonthal [phonetic] was the publisher, and he [inaudible].  Then we had a difficulty by [inaudible] many of the people who were dying on us.  You see, [inaudible] died, and [inaudible] died, and this was [inaudible], you see, trying to get rights to the poem or the etching.  And it is rather complicated when you consider that you're dealing with 42 people, you know.  That's a lot of people –

MS. SECKLER:  Forty-two, including both the poets and the artists –

MR. GRIPPE:  And the graphic artists, yes.

MS. SECKLER:  Had this been your main project in the print field during this time, or were you doing other –

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, it seemed to dominate anything we did at the workshop.  I gave a lot of scholarships to young painters in those days – Will Kahn [phonetic], Ghandi Brody [phonetic], [inaudible], and Mike Ruther [phonetic].  There was a man by the name of Robert Parker, a young painter who did some very interesting things there.  Louise Nevelson was also – I gave a scholarship to – had no money at the time, and she worked at the workshop.  And never gave me credit for the fact that she learned her etching and engraving there.  But she did come for a year-and-a-half.

And, well, Louise Bourgeois came up occasionally.  Many of the print people that are known around had all at one time or another come to the workshop.  There was many people teaching graphics at the workshop.  I gave scholarships to many, many young artists.  I discovered Will Kahn here at Provincetown, and gave him a scholarship –

MS. SECKLER:  How long did you go on with the workshop, then?

MR. GRIPPE:  I would say about seven years, six or seven years.  I turned it over to a man by the name of Katz [phonetic].  I've forgotten his first name.  Louis [phonetic] Katz.  Turned it over to him when I felt it was too great a responsibility to carry the workshop – and I was at Brandeis at the time.

MS. SECKLER:  Did you go on to print-making and some other way in any case?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes, I had my own press and I had my own set-up on Second Avenue so I could make – you know, I went on making my own – matter of fact, I finished Franz Kline's plate, Esteban Vicenti's plate, de Kooning's plate, all in my studio on Second Avenue.

I [inaudible] many of the – I was highly complimented by Lipchitz for the kind of aquatints that I had on his plate.  He said it was just fantastic [inaudible] –

[END OF REEL 1, SIDE A.]
[Most of the dialogue from this point forward was too low and the background noise too loud to distinguish the

discussion.]

MR. GRIPPE: [Inaudible.]

MS. SECKLER: Well, in the case of Lipchitz, you had been making the bronze [inaudible] relationship at some point [inaudible]?

MR. GRIPPE: [Inaudible.]

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE: No, on the plate itself. And then I –

MS. SECKLER: One plate?

MR. GRIPPE: Yes. And then I did all the other [inaudible]. It was all done – we called [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE: Well, there is one [inaudible] very valuable [inaudible] but in later years with any artist, was this [inaudible] technique that I invented, which was glue, India ink, and glycerin, and it – you could work on a plate with a pen [inaudible] mixture was so light and almost of a kind of density that with ink you see, so that you could work with a pen on a plate. And then a clear brown was put over it, and it was immersed in hot water. And this would lift, you see. The design itself would lift through the brown, and the rest of the brown would remain.

And so when you printed it, it was black. The lines were black, just as they had been when you used the pen with the lift brown. Since we were using India ink, this medium sort of lifted in the hot water. And that was the unique thing about it. But any design you put down – it was printed just as you had made it in the original sketch, you see. But in any other technique it's just the opposite. When you engrave the line or you etch the line, it's – the black is white or the white is black. It's different parts of the die. This lift brown enables artists to see exactly, in the finished print, what they had done in the original drawing.

MS. SECKLER: And – [inaudible] – The ink from the pen made the line. It wasn't a matter of incising –

MR. GRIPPE: [Inaudible.] Using a pen right on that pipe. So that that – when that was exposed to hot water that would leave that line open to the end. [Inaudible] – and you would put it in the acid, and that would bite that black line [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: – But that would be even [inaudible].

MR. GRIPPE: [Inaudible.] – because the ink goes into that line, you see. [Inaudible.]

MS. SECKLER: Do you still use that technique very much itself [inaudible], or have you –

MR. GRIPPE: Yes, I've used it. I've used it quite frequently I've used it over the years. [Inaudible]. I've seen more of it. And, at times, usually half-subtly, it's a wonderful technique [inaudible] – to be able to do it

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE: India ink. Predominately India ink. [Inaudible]. A bit of ink and glue. And a little bit of glycerin [inaudible]. The pipe is very shiny [inaudible] so that it sticks to the pipe.

MS. SECKLER: Wouldn't it dry at the same time?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, if you draw with your own ink, it's not [inaudible]. It's the glue and the ink, it becomes the lift brown, you see.

MS. SECKLER: Oh, I see. What you're putting your pen into is the lift brown [inaudible]. Just covering the whole surface.

MR. GRIPPE: No, no, just – you're just making your design, like you're doing, making a – on a pipe, you see.

MS. SECKLER: That's not too different a process that William White used.

MR. GRIPPE: Well, yes, William White used [inaudible] drawings and loose-leaf

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE:  [Inaudible] –which is done on paper, though.  The design is done on paper, you see.  Then very carefully transferred to a pipe.  [Inaudible].  Once it's done [inaudible].  So you're turning around the [inaudible].  Hayter, William Hayter, and [inaudible] experimented with [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, I've done a lot of pipe.  [Inaudible]. Since I came back from Europe, I got involved in a whole new series of sculptures, which are really the victims of Hiroshima.  They deal with that subject.  And for the sake – I don't want to get too literal about the subject, but that is really what it's all about.  It started a whole new series of sculptures about something like 30 or 40 feet high. [Inaudible] – he technical ways in which they're done.

MS. SECKLER:  [Inaudible.]

MR. GRIPPE:  – in complicated plaster.  They're done in clay and at times direct plaster.  There are various methods.  I've used all the methods that I've learned from my early days of learning to cast, of working [inaudible], which is working in direct plaster.  At times the technique very complicated.  The idea of course is motivated by the subject [inaudible].  I am able to evolve these figures into [inaudible].

They have a [inaudible] a kind of loneliness about the figure.  They remind you [inaudible].  We're in St. Paul; we're in the area [inaudible].  So if you want to talk about the subject, name any subject.  They're very transparent, they're very individual.  [Inaudible]  They're not realistic in any sense.  [Inaudible] – very crisp – [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER:  How large are these structures?

MR. GRIPPE:  Well, one of those is about nine-five, about seven or eight feet high, understand, and the others range in size from very, very small things to about eight and a half, [inaudible] 20 inches, 36 inches. [Inaudible.]  The structure incorporated again a lot of the early city series I did, many of the space concepts that I worked with.  All of these things are incorporated in this now what I call kind of style that has come together out of all these early experiments.  I think it's [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

MS. SECKLER:  No I have.  I did a series of 24 bronzes or more, something like 26 bronzes, in Europe, when I was away on the Guggenheim [Fellowship].  Had them all packed and put them in storage.  I would like to have an exhibition of those in New York when I came back [inaudible].  When I got started, I just moved here, I decided I would keep the others in storage and not show them and have a showing of these.  So I'm still toying with the idea I might eventually show them in separate shows[inaudible].  If anything, I might have a series of shows [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: Was 1965 the year the Guggenheim [inaudible]?

MR. GRIPPE:  Nineteen sixty-four.

MS. SECKLER:  Then you came back in '65?

MR. GRIPPE:  Yes.

MS. SECKLER:  How did you transfer your activities to Boston then?

MR. GRIPPE: Well, we decided to move – [inaudible] university.  I was commuting from New York in 1968.  About 1968-9, I decided I better find a new job.  I'm glad I did because those years that we were commuting up there [inaudible] resolve all these [inaudible] talk about much in Europe [inaudible].

MS. SECKLERS:  You still have a connection back to the New York community.  Sometimes down in the summers –

MR. GRIPPE: We go to New York occasionally.  It's not too far away.  It's a little less than four hours.  I have a key to the club, if I want to see the sculptures.  I find I want to be away [inaudible], get away from the conflict that most artists have about the current state of things, this feeling of "non-art" that is prevailing [inaudible], cynicism.  Many artists are affected by it, but I don't have to be involved in it.  I'd rather do my own thing.  In the end, that's what all artists do anyway.  They just have to do their own thing.  They do what they believe is right. I decided that by being [inaudible] away from it, I don't have all those distractions.

MS. SECKLER: [Inaudible] more to come back to next week [inaudible].

MR. GRIPPE: Really?

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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