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Oral history interview with Robert Taylor, 1980 March 13-1990 June 7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Robert Taylor on March 13 & 27, 1980 and June 7, 1990. The interview took place in Marblehead, Massachusettes, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

REEL 1 [Copy tape: 1, side A]

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview with Robert Taylor in Marblehead, Massachusetts. This is March 13th, 1980. Robert Brown, the interviewer.

Could you think back to say when you were in your childhood when you first became interested in the arts as a writer, your interest in the visual arts even? What was your childhood like and where was it?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, my childhood was essentially a middle-class, suburban childhood. I was born in, uh, Newton and grew up in Arlington and, uh, growing up in suburban Boston usually means being exposed to, well, a large academic and cultural community. And while, ah, you know essentially, I didn't come from a family of artists or people who work (professionals) -- in fact my father was a traveling salesman -- they were, ah, interested in the arts to a degree that, for example, I'd go to the theater and go to the Museum of Fine Arts and... I remember when I was ten going to the Gardner Museum and seeing the same objects d'arte that are there today and going to the MFA and seeing a post-- and some reason that made an impression on me, that particular painting...

ROBERT BROWN: Would you have gone to these places on your own? Or would you have gone...

ROBERT TAYLOR: No I...

ROBERT BROWN: ...there? Would your father have taken you in the museum...

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. I wouldn't have gone on my own because I wouldn't have known that they existed to begin with.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you go with your parents probably or with school groups?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I started going with my parents when I was, you know, around ten years old -- around nine or ten years old. And by the time I was going into Boston (that is when I was about twelve or thirteen). I would go into the Museum of Fine Arts which was then of course free... and open and I would, you know, just go wander through the MFA and...

ROBERT BROWN: By the time you were twelve, that was a stop?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah...

ROBERT BROWN: One of your... on your routine when you came into Boston?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah. It was a very early experience with me. I was quite familiar with the Museum, ah, really. I mean, I think the great watershed of people, like myself and my generation, in World War II (and I was quite familiar with it before World War II) and, then after World War II, of course, well I went right back to it.

ROBERT BROWN: What is it there that appealed to you do you think when you were twelve years old, let's say?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, what appealed to me was the paintings, certainly. And the kind of... the kind of, I think, way of looking at the world which you nominally get from paintings. The kind of visual experience, the quality of that experience. I was much impressed by the Impressionists and, of course, you know, they had a great collection...

ROBERT BROWN: Sure... what is there in Impressionism that you -- do you think appealed to you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, as a child?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeh.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think its appeal is very direct. I think its appeal is very sensuous. I think the whole Impressionist School is -- well with its ability to catch the moment and also to give you a particular quality of vision -- that is the sense of light in -- on objects and the way in which light dissolves objects. Although, as a child, of course I didn't think about those things.

ROBERT BROWN: But your own life was a fairly happy one as a child?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I'd say it's fairly conventional. And, although I did, you know, I started in as a writer much earlier than I ever did as a ah...

ROBERT BROWN: Even in high school years you were -- were you writing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I became a professional writer at the age of fourteen. That's when I -- I started sending out -- actually wha what happened was that I was a great frequenter of the Public Library in Arlington and ah... which is a great place to get an education, as you know. And I would go down there and spend whole days down there and I came across a book in the public library which was essentially a kind of writer's marketplace type of thing. And, you know it's a quick route to hackery, but the scales fell off my eyes at the age of fourteen. I realized that I could, you know, make money from writing or try to make money from writing. And, ah, I started sending out poetry to various publications and I sold my first poem to... well, my first publication appeared in the Portland, Maine Evening Express, and that was through the intervention of my father who had [laughing] gone up there and given it to the man (he knew it) and I got paid for that. But at the same time I sent a poem, strangely enough, to the Portland Oregonian and they accepted it on its own and it was printed in the magazine and I got a couple of dollars from
that. So, yeah, I continued on doing that throughout my adolescence.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that make you feel that writing was a profession? It was something you could eventually...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh...

ROBERT BROWN: ... support yourself...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Fundamentally. And, also too, I learned everything I was to know about metrics and ___in poetry from the time I was four -- well, between the time I was fourteen and nineteen. Because I never went back to it after -- you know
I then went away to in the service -- to the war and I never came back to writing poetry. That was the...

ROBERT BROWN: But in those days, by writing, by studying, by reading about poetry... Could you read a lot of poetry?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh, I read a lot of it. And, I've since taught it. It stood me in good stead, actually, you know...

ROBERT BROWN: What were your poems like -- do you recall -- those early ones?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, my early poems were all very traditional. I was dealing with, actually, forms of poetry and ways of, you know, dealing with form in poetry and I sent some poems to Mary Ann Moore's magazine -- which I can't remember the name of -- and she sent me back, you know, I mean some ideas about poetry she, ah, influenced me. I had a curious experience when I was sixteen. I submitted some poems to a magazine that was run by the Manuscript Club of Boston. And, they met at the Hotel Vendome and -- was a group of women who were Boston dowager types -- and they met at the Vendome and when I submitted these poems they asked me if I would come in and talk to them and, of course, I was sixteen and [laughing] very flattered by this whole thing, you see. I turned up to give my talk to the ladies -- I think they were somewhat taken aback -- there was one other speaker on the program and it was Stacy Baxter Southworth (then in his sixties) and he was headmaster of Phillips Exeter, you see, I mean [laughing] I suppose it looked like the headmaster with one of his students, you see.

[Both laughing.]

ROBERT BROWN: And how did that go over? What did you talk about?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I talked about poetry to them. And the writing of poetry. I was there as a visiting lion, I felt, and could do this. So, you know, they wanted me and I did. And they were very kind about the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: It was all very genteel and...?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was.

ROBERT BROWN: And how did it effect you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: How did it effect...? Well I remember the incident but it didn't effect me much one way or the other as far as from a psychological standpoint.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, did you begin to meet other people in this area who were writing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Who were poets? No, I never did. I don't think I ever met another -- a live poet -- until I -- during the early fifties when I was working for the Herald I was the assistant to Eleanor Hughes in the theater department. And, he covered most of the plays and Dillon Thomas was coming to make his debut, in fact, at the Decordova Museum and I did not review him then but I reviewed him the next night at the Brattle Theatre. And this was completely new concept to the Herald that we would cover poetry reading and I think he was almost the first poet I ever saw read.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was you at the public library and at your home writing...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Well, the private conception of the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You feel that poetry is necessarily a pretty private under- taking?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. I do. You know, I mean there are public poets -- poets who attempt to write public poetry -- like Robert BLY and Robert Lowell. But, even Lowell, I think, after the 60's and the attempt to consider the poet as a maker and shaker in society in that sense, to put it ____And I think that most poets are private poets -- take Robert Frost, after all he didn't get started until he was well in his forties. So, he had to spend all those years in essentially a private kind of writing in which he wrote poems like *My Butterfly* or *Rotary*, -- gatherings and things of that kind. And poets usually tend to be like that, but I really never... I stopped considering myself a poet about the time I was eighteen.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, through high school, was then your writing career one of the most important aspects of your teenage...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yeh. I consistently wrote and since I was trying to make money from it, that is the way a kid would by -- mowing lawns or something like that, you know...

ROBERT BROWN: Pick up pocket money.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, fundamentally

ROBERT BROWN: When you were in high school were you also involved in much else at your school?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Do you mean in writing?

ROBERT BROWN: Or were you more private? No. Just in general. Were you the gregarious sort?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. I was on the school newspaper, for example.

ROBERT BROWN: A fairly gregarious person?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I would say, you know [laughing], no more so than anybody else. But, I was a -- I would think -- again, _____as a fairly conventional despite the fact that I did read and write, I would consider myself as a fairly conventional high school student.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the school stimulating -- the high school?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Arlington High School at that time...

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you weren't in Newton. You were in Arlington?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh. I grew up in Arlington. I was born in Newton, but when I was three years old my parents moved to Arlington and I grew up there. No the high school at that time considered itself -- I gave a talk not long ago to the Women's City Club in which my old social studies teacher from high school turned up. And it was interesting to me to meet Miss Fitzpatrick again after all those years because [laughing] she had a slightly different -- you know it was a view of the faculty of that high school. It was one that of course students didn't really think of. She considered the school a kind of private school run on public funds. It was very elitist kind of attitude they had. And the high school prided itself in turning out students for Harvard and of course I wasn't that good and in fact I was a wretched math student [both laughing]. And, you know, I mean, but fundamentally the standards of the school were good for high school.

ROBERT BROWN: Pretty demanding place.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I would think so. Yeah. I would... you know, as I look back on it, I think it was a good high school.

ROBERT BROWN: You finished at Arlington -- what year was that?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I finished there in 1942 -- in June of '42 -- and at that time I was accepted... well I went and I was accepted by Colgate University in .....and Hamilton.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you take that right away?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your interest going to be? What did you hope to do by going to college?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, that actually ties in with my interest in poetry. I had come across Earl Daniels' book called *The Art of Reading Poetry*. And he was a teacher of -- a wonderful teacher -- wonderful professor in English at Colgate. And this was in fact the textbook -- I didn't know it was the textbook that was used in the course. I'd again come across it in the public library. And it struck me as being the best book I'd ever seen of its kind. And I thought I could get a lot from studying with him. And I wanted to go and study with him primarily.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to from the start? In your freshman year?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah...

ROBERT BROWN: Begin working with him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I was because of the accelerated program, fundamentally. This was war-time and everything was speeded up at that time. You will find that -- I think if you look at alumni magazines -- that people who went to college about this time as undergraduates feel very few ties with the college because you will see the notes from the alumni in the back of the college publication and it will always... there's usually a big gap that ends in 1942 you see, because (from 1942 and then you'll see it pick up again about 1948 or 9) all those classes in between really don't feel any sense of community or ties with the college largely because they were either scattered to the winds by the war or else they had to accelerate so fast that they...

ROBERT BROWN: What did that mean accelerating? You took more than the usual course load?

ROBERT TAYLOR: You doubled-up.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, really?

ROBERT TAYLOR: In order to...

ROBERT BROWN: You would take eight courses, let's say?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, you would take quite a few and they would have courses in...well, you would take as many as you could. That would be the way it was done. And then they would have semesters. For example, they would have extra semesters coming and they had us -- for example my Winter semester, as I recall, my freshman year ended -- it ended in March, for example. Then between March and June was another complete semester.

ROBERT BROWN: What did they think that you people might be drafted -- snapped up so they wanted to give you as much as they could get you...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, exactly. That was the idea behind the whole thing and it was quite a bit different. It was interesting in a way now that I look back on it from a sociological standpoint to be in a college that was fundamentally a small men's eastern college that had all the appearances ...if peace time. That first semester I was there was so completely different. I mean it was almost a hangover of colleges from the 30's and you know the attitudes of the students and faculty were those of civilian college in the 30's.

ROBERT BROWN: Which were what?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well kind of eastern. It had a lot to do with why class [dog barking] -- class I think that eastern was being stuck in that time warp to some degree. At least when I first came...

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think [difficult to make out because of dog barking]

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, kind of a country club feel really. That changed completely almost overnight I would say as the...

ROBERT BROWN: What in early 43' or so?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, as the influence of the war became more and more marked and it became obvious that in order to survive the college was going to have to in some way become a part of the war effort at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the students were being drained away?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No more students for one thing. And they were going fast.

ROBERT BROWN: So what was the college's solution?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I remember reading Kurt Vonnegut was then the columnist for the Cornell newspaper and he was about to be drafted and he, at that time, would write frequently on that subject...

ROBERT BROWN: What would the college do? They cast a broader net for students or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, they cast about as broad a net as one could cast for getting students and then it became plain that the only way they were going to get students was to get themselves involved in government programs of some kind or the other. So -- which they did, you know, through the V-12 program and the army program and the marine program and all the rest of that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you caught up then in some of those programs?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh, I was caught up with a program. I was going to go through mid-shipman's school. But I was -- I washed out of the thing because I couldn't pass the... you see I intended to be an English major and I couldn't pass the physics [...?] even for my -- I was terrible at that stuff. And, [laughing] you know I was not the universal genius that was... actually you needed people who were doing technical and scientific things. I was interested in taking Chaucer and a liberal arts program, fundamentally. Really the last thing that society needed at that point. And, so, I just say simply -- you know after a semester of that I simply went into the navy which I intended to do anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: So you left college and...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I went to Sampson. I was already in the -- see I enlisted in the... when I was 17 in Albany. It almost sounds inacquinist, well sounds like a terrible period piece to say you enlisted in an armed service, you know. I mean everyone was doing it then and it was a different kind of atmosphere and one perceived the whole thing in different terms.

ROBERT BROWN: You felt that the need perhaps was for a young man's...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, you felt that the country was being menaced for one thing and that there was an external threat. You didn't feel as though it was an abstract issue of morality the way the Vietnam War was. And -- not so abstract, but you did not feel that there was a...

ROBERT BROWN: So in the -- what -- half year or so you were at Colgate...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well during the half year that I was there I got in, I think, two and a half years of college. So...

ROBERT BROWN: Gosh, you had no time to savor things to speak of. Were you constantly studying -- reading, reading -- doing reports, exams?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh, it was fundamentally that kind of a thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Yet, was it to some extent satisfying? Were you getting...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I enjoyed it. And I couldn't conceive of going to college any other way at the time. And because simply -- because that was the only way anyone went. And so I then (when I got kicked out of that program) became a sailor in the Navy.

ROBERT BROWN: When was this? In 43'?

ROBERT TAYLOR: 43' -- in the middle of 43'.

ROBERT BROWN: Where did you go? What did you...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I went to -- well, I went to a number of places. I went to the South Pacific for three years and was -- where did I go? I went to...

ROBERT BROWN: But did you have any specialty or was it the...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I was a radar man. They had trained me at radar school and...

ROBERT BROWN: You could learn that much?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I could learn that much. I was a radar operator -- not a radar technician or anything of that kind. I spent the war doing -- reading -- a lot of good books, I must say. [laughing] *Magic Mountain* I remember reading and the... let's see. What else did I read? I read *Vanity Fair*, *Tom Jones*, you know books that it would take a great deal of time to read.

ROBERT BROWN: And you had time?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: [...?] routine just to sit by the machinery and you went into action only periodically?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, fundamentally. I remember I was reading *Tom Jones* during the invasion of the Phillipines [laughing] and the whole thing -- you know those things are terribly boring if you're not being attacked directly. I mean the whole thing is the ships are laying down their covering fire. The troops are going ashore and all the rest of that. If there's no response there's nothing to do except to go over when you're off watch and sit down and read which I did.

ROBERT BROWN: You were just in a large ship out there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I was on a destroyer escort and we spent... we spent about the first six months going back and forth between___and Lady -- after the battle of the Lady [...?]. And we just go back and forth, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: You found that very boring.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh, it was very boring and -- it was all very boring until the -- they started using kamikaze and then they became less boring because they -- you know they were sinking a lot of ships that way [...?]before you were going to dive into the bridge of the plane. In fact, several of them tried. Bridge of the ship. But I wound up -- the war ended and we were in Borneo working with the Australians. And the West Coast of Borneo going down to Sarowak and after the war I went to China. I mean when it ended. [...?] In fact I was, well, I was in China for about six months in Shanghai and Shingtao and...

ROBERT BROWN: What were your duties then?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Same thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't very emotionally involved except when you were under fear of attack? So that you could read literature and whatever to relieve the boredom?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, well, yeh. Nobody is emotionally involved, I mean in those things. I mean... unless, you see if you are a foot soldier and you're headed for Berlin or some other objective that a general has, you have no... your whole lifestyle is that of battle. You are constantly either digging a fox hole or getting shelled or something of that kind so you have to devote all your time to it. But if you are in an operation where your part of the operation in a ship, why it's just, you know, routine stuff, really. So that even though... I didn't have, after all, the professional eye that somebody like JohnP. [...?] had who was in Iwojima and could tell the whole thing was being badly handled at Iwojima because he had been on a staff in World War I and could perceive the military side of the operation. I was nineteen years old and unable to do anything. [laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: It was just a big mish-mosh as far as you were concerned?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh, fundamentally. But it was an interesting experience. I never would have seen the Far East as I did at that point.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you feel in some ways you matured?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, one is bound to. It's a, you know, it's a different kind of late adolescents than you get these days and I found myself in place like [...?] and Sumu and Selebese and Zamboing and Sumatra and Java

and places like that.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you mean you found yourself there? You mean you were there but I mean you got some experience...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, it's an experience, quite simply, of another culture, another people, and different attitudes and certainly when I was in China there were... it was certainly interesting to see, for example, the number of Russian emigres who were there and that whole Russian emigre lifestyle to which [Vladimer] Nabokov has written so eloquently and to actually see people living in those circumstances because it disappeared. It vanished -- no longer exists. And a good deal of that, a good deal of the China that I saw was nationalist China and that doesn't exist anymore either. You know the traditional China that under Chang [...?] the war was going on... the -- when I was in Shingtao, of course, Shingtao was a staging area but the fighting was up north at that time with the Communists. And...

ROBERT BROWN: But it was fairly quiet where you were, then?

ROBERT TAYLOR: In China?

ROBERT BROWN: Where you were.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, sure. And...

ROBERT BROWN: As you look back were you a keen observer? Were you very interested in these cultures and Chinese...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yeh, you know one is bound to be if you're there. First of all, the war effected the currency to such a degree that you had a rampant inflation at that time. And, I remember eating at the Palace Hotel which is near the [...?] -- the waterfront section in [...?] Shanghai and going in there and there was a -- you see we'd been in the Pacific for so long that the idea of having a meal in a place like the Ritz was, you know, very attractive. And we'd gone in there and sat down and the meal from the time we sat down to the time we finished had increased a thousand dollars. There was an increase of a thousand dollars in the meal. Just from the time we sat down till the time we finished. And they were chalked up on the little blackboard at the end of the room -- the price of the meal -- as it was... as you were eating [laughing].

ROBERT BROWN: You had enough money to pay for it, did you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, it came to something like four dollars American money and -- but the Chinese national currency (CNC) was quite out of control and you always -- if you were carrying that around, you'd need a wheelbarrow. [laughing]

But, I -- in March of 1946 I left Shanghai and came back to the States where I was discharged in New York City.

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ROBERT TAYLOR: [...] went back to Colgate and finished at Colgate.

ROBERT BROWN: How long were you there then? Just another year or so?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Ah, well, that's all I had to go because I, while I was also I had taken some mail-order courses from the University of Washington in anthropology, primarily.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? Was that a new interest or just that was the easiest...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I thought it would be something interesting to study since I was there in places that where one could study [...?] and so I took the course and got some credits for it. And altogether I spent about twenty-two months in higher education there at that point. Then I finished at Colgate in June of 47' and went to Brown to graduate school were I was going to get -- where I was going to get my MA.

ROBERT BROWN: In what? Was this...

ROBERT TAYLOR: In English, yeah. And I -- I had -- well I finished the... I finished the academic requirements but I still had my thesis to do and my thesis was going to be on John Wilson and [...?] and I -- since I was finished with the academic requirements and I would need something to keep me going while I wrote the thesis. So I -- was looking for a job at that point.

ROBERT BROWN: They wanted a fairly elaborate thesis, did they, for the MA?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I -- the thesis for the MA at that time was as elaborate as the doctoral thesis is now and in fact, you know, I mean I would see a great many of them and...

ROBERT BROWN: What was your interest then while you were in graduate school? What was your, in terms, academic -- was it mainly an academic interest? You were going to be a teacher?

ROBERT TAYLOR My field, you mean?

ROBERT BROWN: Uh, huh.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I was, fundamentally, that. And I assumed that I was going to be teaching Romantics.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd come to like them best?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, my thesis advisor was a man named I.J. Kapstein. I don't know. Did you know him?

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, I know him.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. He was my thesis advisor and he was an English professor at Brown and he -- his particular field was the novel -- modern novel -- and Romantics. And he got me interested in, you know, in Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and so forth, and this fell into that particular area, since, you know, Blackwoods was prominent critical organ at the time and the [...?] still haven't been done to any real degree of scholarship and it seemed like a good idea. So, while I was writing that thesis I needed a job and I looked in the want-ad section of the paper and I saw that there was a job open for a copy boy at the -- at the Traveller -- at the Herald Traveller. I was to come in and in fact it mentioned something -- it had something to do with literary assistant was the way it was phrased. Some ionist [...?] on the paper had this idea. So, I, ah, I had written a children's book which I was trying to sell at that time. And it was about -- it was a book that was about... set in the Elizabethan times. It was called "Jacopo" and, ah, I had gotten the idea, you know, from the title from -- the title came from Jacopo Bellini, the Renaissance painter. But I had -- I was trying to sell this book so I took the manuscript of the book with me assuming this would make some kind of impression when I went in there. Of course, it was the worst possible thing I could of done, because at that time in journalism there was a great prejudice against college graduates.

ROBERT BROWN: There was?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh. The change that has occurred in journalism among other things over the years has been that you had at that time a group of interesting eccentrics who were more or less -- they were autodidacts who ran the -- who were the reporters and editors and all the rest of them. A lot of them had serious personality defects. They were the drunks and whatever they were and, yet, I thought, fundamentally, they were brilliant in lots of ways. Whereas today, you see, I mean, in order to get a job as a copy boy, you have to have a doctorate and you find that the young reporters are virtually inert -- that they don't meet the kind of standards that you had when it was being maintained by these ritual tramp printer types. You know from...

ROBERT BROWN: Tramp printer? You mean they were...

ROBERT TAYLOR: They had the kind of Mark Twain, kind of journeyman printer mentality. But, ah, they had one thing. They had craft. Whereas, today, you know, you can get people in who are very intelligent -- far more intelligent than these men ever were -- but they were... they're far less competent as journalists because they just can't do the kinds of things that the... the autodidact, for one thing, knows one thing usually extremely well. Gets himself immersed, interested in it -- knows nothing else, but knows that one thing backward and forward -- and some of the most fascinating people that I ever met were the, you know, journalists from kind of hangovers from the nineteenth century. Now that I'm on the cusp of the twenty-first, I [laughing] I find that, you know, that the nineteenth appeals to me more.

ROBERT BROWN: Well these men would know the city politics, say, very well or the theatre scene, or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeh. Yeh. They did and, ah, and they were men of broad ranging interests. But, well, in any case, I took my manuscript, went into the Herald Traveller and found a line there. It was right after the war. There were many veterans who were looking for jobs. Many veterans in the schools and many of them had, ah, had experience in small papers. And there must have been (applying for this job of copy boy) there must have been 150 there. And here was I. I had no experience whatsoever in newspapers and I was simply looking for Summer job. And, I sat down with the city editor -- was a man named Steele Lindsey -- and I sat down and I showed him my manuscript. He was not interested in my manuscript and he started talking to me and he was about to dismiss me and he asked me routinely about my war experience and I told him that I had been on this particular destroyer and his eyes lit up. It seems that he had been in my destroyer division. He was an officer on another ship. He was a flag officer or an exec on another ship and, so, he sat me down and regaled me -- of course, I had been in the same places that he had been because a division of six destroyers always travelled

together, so...

ROBERT BROWN: But, nevertheless, he...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah...

ROBERT BROWN: ... he could recapitulate...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. I heard all about the war all over again from him and then I left and three weeks later a phone call came and I had the job, you see. [laughing] The lack of experience didn't make any difference.

ROBERT BROWN: And had you been able to talk it up so he had any idea of whether you'd pan out? Or did he figure -- was the idea he would train you or your superior would train you? Is that the traditional way?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he, actually he had a good idea because it's produced results in contemporary journalism. That is, that he would take recent college graduates (which was a revolutionary idea for the paper at that point) and train them as journalists.
They would learn as copy boys and get on the staff. A lot of his program -- let's see, out of that prog wram he trained Dave Wilson who is a columnist on the Globe, ah, Don Murray,ho was chairman of the English Department at the University of
New Hampshire and who later won a Pulitzer. Ah, the, ah -- let's see who else did he train? He had -- I mean there were all kinds of people who were working around in the whole thing. Now, Ian Forman who was the editor of the Globe Magazine and Bill Buchanan who was another writer on the -- another reporter on the -- the paper. But he got very good results out that program.

ROBERT BROWN: You were coming in at the time he was doing a program?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, the program didn't last...

ROBERT BROWN: What did it consist of?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, what it consisted of were -- was that we would all work as copy boys and when, at the end of eighteen months, an opening came on the staff, we were to -- we had a four month trial period. If we passed the trial period, then we would go on staff. If we failed the trial period, it was unfortunate, but there it was. In fact a couple did.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd work with Lindsey quite a bit? Now as a copy boy how would you work with him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, a copy boy doesn't have much to do, so, you know, it's all menial stuff. But you would have to, in addition to attending the teletype machine, which a copy boy does, the copy boy really keeps the paper going in a way. Because he has to know -- you have to know in those days where certain stories came over the teletype went to. And you had to rush out and go to the right places with those stories. Yeh, the -- and you had to know all the taboos of the paper. For example, the publishers son was [laughing] I shouldn't say this. This is not for publication. The publisher's son who was Robert Show Jr. at that time, he had a scape grace youth (?) and was -- evidently got drunk and drove up a sidewalk on fifth avenue and it came over the wire. I simply brought it up to the telegraph editor and he was looking at it and he was almost going to put it in the paper and then he did a double-take and started calling newspapers between here and Albany to keep it out of the paper. And the only paper he couldn't keep it out of was the Monitor which ran it because of its anti-liquor bias. And [laughing], so, he managed to -- you couldn't do that in modern journalism. But they kept it out and quite successfully well. Young Show eventually grew up and matured and now he's the man who testifies against sugar in cereal.You know, I mean it's just a case of somebody who...

ROBERT BROWN: Today you can't suppress things so much. Reporters would...

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, you can't do it on family grounds the way you could then. Reporters would -- just would be impossible.

ROBERT BROWN: So, you were measured as a copy boy and how efficient -- how well you learned to take things to the right place.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Exactly. And you were supposed to generate stories yourself. That is feature stories or things like that.

ROBERT BROWN You mean write them or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Write them, yeah, and submit them.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, in other words, you had to go out around the city as a reporter?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. And I had no I had no intention of staying with it. As soon as I finished John Wilson and Noctase, Ambrosiana and Blackwoods ? I intended to, you know, then continue on to the -- take the rest of my GI bill and continue on with the PhD program. But I never did.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you finding you could write on the thesis while you were working at the paper?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I could work pretty well. You see the thing is that working for the paper as a copy boy as I did was that I had the six to two shift. That is, I would go to work at six o'clock at night and work until two in the morning -- the morning paper. And then go home to Arlington where I was living with my parents. And that meant that all day -- I had all day which to do nothing but write. You know, so I was making good progress on the whole thing.

Well, just about the time that I was going to do that I went on staff or I had my trial period came up. And of course that was different because even though I was working (I had the four thirty to twelve shift all that six to two shift ?) it involved other things. For a time I had to work the eight to twelve shift. That is... well I began as an airport and waterfront reporter. And, it meant I had to go over to Logan Airport early in the morning and cover things over there and various people from over there. And then go down to see what kinds of ships were leaving, get on the ships, interview the captains and whoever it was.

ROBERT BROWN: Quite extensive coverage then of that.

ROBERT TAYLOR: There was of that, yeah. Then I would go to the federal building around four or five o'clock to get the arrivals and departures on shipping. And then I would have to go back to the paper and do it all. Well, you see I didn't have the time for my thesis that I'd had before. And I got caught up with, you know, as a journalist will with what you're doing and...

ROBERT BROWN: It appealed to you, what you were doing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was exciting, you know, and very -- I thought it was very rewarding as a lifestyle. You know, not in terms of money it never was...

ROBERT BROWN: What did you like about it as a lifestyle?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, it was informal... today it's -- well it was a way of making a living without going to an office for one thing. You weren't hedged in by the bureaucracy. I had seen enough of graduate schools and the academic life to know the horrors that were involved and the kind of bureaucracy that came there. Even though some of the people I went to graduate school with had done very well. Eleanor Blistein is now still at Brown and he teaches Shakespeare and down there and that's [inaudible]

ROBERT BROWN: When you saw this option, this other career, you preferred it at the time?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I did because the -- I felt that, you know, it was leading to an academic backwater. It was leading to a really a dead-end as far as your life was concerned. You know, what I saw in teaching was an opportunity to write. That is, I saw it as a fundamental anchor that will enable me to make a living while I wrote. That's what I wanted to do.

ROBERT BROWN: But when you went on staff at the Herald Traveller you found that this had more appeal to you.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I thought it would be a better anchor than the academic business because first of all there isn't the sense of competition you get in graduate school. In graduate school you have, for example, a number of high school English teachers. This is their great opportunity. After the war you have a lot of very serious veterans. It's not exactly the, you know, the light hearted way in which -- who considered this? They were fundamentally very very committed to this vocation. They had a vocational commitment.

ROBERT BROWN: Where as, as a reporter you were the one man covering two or three things.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well it was a different kind of competition. You weren't competing against somebody personally for a post. You were competing against somebody from another newspaper for a story or for, you know, what some kind of journalistic thing. Bio, or what ever it may be.

ROBERT BROWN: And then ultimately whether your story panned out whether the paper sold, you were part of that weren't you? In that sense you were being measured?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your supervisor still Lindsey? Was he the...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. He left while I was during my trial period he inherited some money and went to [...?] [laughing]. But, he in fact had followed much the same kind of pattern that I had. He had -- he was, his big enthusiasm was [...?]. And he had done an
MA thesis -- he had an MA and he had done a thesis on the
Double Villa ? of [...?].

ROBERT BROWN: He was exceptional for his generation, wasn't he?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, he was. And in fact I think that his interest in getting more educated types in the business was largely came out of his own experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you like the rough and tumble of competing with the other reporters?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I thought I could do it well and was able to. You know, I mean there wasn't really, after seeing the kinds of things that you went through in graduate school you could easily in graduate school do a good job and miss out on something because of the kinds of politics that were involved. But...

ROBERT BROWN: You mean things weren't told you, let's say? Something you were supposed to be doing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, you know. You know what graduate schools are like.

ROBERT BROWN: One influence of your teacher and so forth.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Well did you develop as you...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Although I'd done well in graduate school, you know academically I'd done well.

ROBERT BROWN: As a reporter did you develop certain - as you look back on it - where there certain ways you developed to out-do the competition? To get...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. There were techniques, always.

ROBERT BROWN: What are some of those?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, knowing where to go and what to do. And...

ROBERT BROWN: The person to see...

ROBERT TAYLOR: And the person to see.

ROBERT BROWN: The right person.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Exactly. [laughing] And how you handle a story is -- I see this for example with many young, today, many... we're getting, for example lots of instructors who didn't get tenure today. And they turn to journalism. And so on. And a lot of this business is working out very well. You know Richard Dyer, for example. Richard Dyer, he couldn't possibly have gone that whole academic route because it's booby-trapped with all kinds of preferments and things of that kind. Since he has been working for three years on the paper he has, certainly has more influence at Harvard than he would have ever had had he been a graduate student trying to become an instructor. Because he's now -- he's now Boylston Professor of Rhetoric there for the next three years. It would have never have happened if he hadn't been writing for a newspaper which is very unusual.

But, you see, you see young people -- young instructors -- coming in and their lack of experience in handling this type of writing is quite evident. Because they don't know how to do it really. It takes some time.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you have to learn as you look back? What do you have to learn to do it right? Do it well?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It's really hard to say because a lot of it's intangible. You have to learn how to do a great... First of all you have to find out about a great -- a lot of formula stuff. A lot of convention. And there are many conventions involved in writing a story that can be learned in twenty minutes. But the application of them is another story.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, what are the basic kinds of facts you should get?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I mean I think that has something to do with it. And there is a tendency on the part of young writers to get themselves involved with stories. And to take a subjective view. And they don't remain detached from what they're doing. And there's a judgmental character there very frequently. Which you can't really afford.

ROBERT BROWN You were able to overcome that fairly early on?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I think that, you know, since I had been a -- I had written before I'd gotten into journalism. I had written at least three book-like manuscripts, you know. And sold all that poetry -- not all that poetry, you know, but I had sold poetry.

ROBERT BROWN: But I mean when you came to cover a story that was of a controversial nature, let's say. I don't know, something to do with the waterfront or something, your first assignment -- did you have to pull yourself back occasionally, emotionally? You'd get -- someone would bend your ear in one direction and someone in another?

ROBERT TAYLOR: My original stories were fairly easy stories. I remember one of them was an interview with Eddie Rickenbacker, for example. Now that was a fairly easy story to do. And another story that I did was... Frank Sinatra at that time was leaving his wife to fly to Spain to join Ava Gardner and there he was sitting forlornly on a bench in the Logan Airport. So I talked with him and I did that. But had I to do a story, for example, on the expansion of Logan, what it meant to East Boston, and all the rest of that, I couldn't have done it. I wouldn't have known enough about the issues and all the finances involved, the... I mean, I could of easily familiarized myself with it after a the time, but that kind of thing was always done. There was a distinct hierarchy. That was done by the chief airport and waterfront reporter. I was just being broken in.

ROBERT BROWN: That's the way that it'd always been done and that's the way it continued in your early years?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Sure. Except that when my trial period was over Rudolph Ely was then a columnist for the Herald, had read me during that time and liked my work and they -- Eleanor Hughes' assistant was about to leave and he asked me if I wanted to come in into the theatre department. I rejoiced in the idea.

ROBERT BROWN: That that would get you into the literary?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Back into that and into the cultural scene again.

ROBERT BROWN: About when was that that you began?

ROBERT TAYLOR: That was in 1950. September, 1950 to be exact [laughing].

ROBERT BROWN: What kind of assignments were you given? Was theatre coverage quite extensive then?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well there were three of us. There was Eleanor and Rudy and myself. Rudy was a columnist who was also the music critic. And this is the way things would happen in newspapers. The way they do. Rudy had been a script writer in Hollywood. He'd gone through the Depression and he'd been -- gotten himself involved in WPA theatre and then gone to Hollywood where he was writing B movies and that just dried up. And he came back. His great ambition was to become a music critic. His father had been a professional musician, classical musician. His brother was a professional musician. He wanted to be the music critic. So he was hired as Eleanor's assistant, my job there as the assistant music critic, and then the war came along. The music critic of course was drafted. Rudy then became the music critic and became what he had wanted to be on the paper. But because it was war time you had to do everything else, they made him a war correspondent. Sent him out there and he sent back brilliant war dispatches and war ended. Well they wanted him to stay on as the columnist. But he said, "I want to be music critic." The music critic had not come back, you see. So the job was still open. So they combined the two jobs. You see, now this extends further on, you see. It extends further on meanwhile, to the end of Rudy's life. When Rudy died, 1958, see these two jobs are indissolubly linked in the Herald mind. That the column and music critic.

ROBERT BROWN: This was a general feature column he would write.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, it was a personal essay. It was about twelve hundred words. And when he died I inherited that job, but I inherited it along with all the other jobs I was doing. You see I was then the art critic. So I was then the art critic, the music critic, columnist and everything else. And, you know you become a fact totem ? as they gradually, on a sinking newspaper, tend to bring the jobs together in order to consolidate them. They have one person do two or three things.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, I wanted to ask about that paper, it was loosing competitively, was it?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It had been right from the time that I came on it.

ROBERT BROWN: What was its, in terms of its - I don't know what you'd say - level of intellectual or educated public -- on what stratum did it lie in the greater Boston area?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well the thinking behind the Herald Traveller combination of newspapers was that the Traveller was the lunch pail newspaper.

ROBERT BROWN: What does that mean?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well it means that it goes to blue-collar worker and that it was suppose to have broad appeal on a popular basis and was more oriented toward bringing in Democrats. The Herald was firmly identified with the Republican establishment. It had picked up the Forum Transcript [...?]readers, twenty-seven thousand of them.

ROBERT BROWN: And that had failed in forty-seven or so?

ROBERT TAYLOR: The Transcript had failed in forty... maybe even earlier... forty -- forty-one I think it was. But the Herald was identified with business, with Yankees, and with Republicans. And it was a highly conservative paper.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were writing for both, is that right? Your articles did double-duty?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, they did not. The two papers were kept separate as entities. In fact were, the Traveller was the older of the two. One of the country's oldest papers. But they were yoked together in order to give them the broadest possible appeal. One appealing to the business community and to the conservative interest and it had a higher quality of writing on it, certainly. I mean the stars on the Herald were people like Bill Cunningham and Rudy and Hayden Pearson and a number of other writers and in fact Ed O'Connor who wrote The Last Hurrah was a television columnist. The Traveller tended to be more like a Hearst newspaper. It was not a place to demonstrate your virtuoso writing skills.

ROBERT BROWN: So on the Herald which you were on, right?...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: ...you had a chance then to write when you got under Eleanor Hughes and began music criticism...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, yeah I did.

ROBERT BROWN: You had a chance to write pretty learnedly and cogently didn't you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I did, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: A good deal of detail and...

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's a different kind of writing. But I found myself in that department, to begin with, I had to cover art -- not art. I had to cover -- I had to cover films. See I was a second string film reviewer. I was a second string theatre reviewer.
I was the second string music reviewer. I was the [tape ends]

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(Copy tape 2, side A)

ROBERT TAYLOR: ...first string dance reviewer. I was the antiques reviewer. I was the...

ROBERT BROWN: All of these things you were somewhat familiar with when you were given these assignments?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Dance?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not the dance. Unfortunately [laughing], not the dance.

ROBERT BROWN: You had to school yourself pretty quickly?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah. And the -- I had -- no the dance I was terrible at. And I covered Jose Limond and I must say the early Merce Cunningham and see, Boston was just beginning to become immersed in modern dance at that time. So, but, fundamentally, I worked for Eleanor and it was a day that would usually begin at ten thirty in the morning with a screening of a film. And, after the screening of the film, you would usually go to the

Ritz for a meal with -- for lunch with one of the stars or directors or whoever it was from the film. You know, I mean, this is hardly done anymore. We use to do it five days a week.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean now things are much more pigeon-holed or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well they very seldom set up these mass press things the way they use to. It's all done through private arrangement, really. Oh, well, and we would do that then we would go back to the paper after the lunch at about one thirty -- lunch at the Ritz.

ROBERT BROWN: [inaudible]

ROBERT TAYLOR: [laughing]

[Recorder turned off.]

ROBERT BROWN: So Eleanor Hughes, then your boss -- I mean in your department. What was she like?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Eleanor was a -- she was a very well-known woman in the theatre and, for example, when "Porgy and Bess," she had all kinds of reminiscences of the theatre of the past. And when "Porgy and Bess" opened at the Colonial in 1935 she and George -- she interviewed George Gershwin who was walking briskly up and down. He was so excited by the -- by the opera (as it really was) that he couldn't sit down to be interviewed. And she had to interview him walking along Tremont Street, on the run. And she of course knew everybody in theatre and had been there on the Herald since 1925.

ROBERT BROWN So her background was that of a journalist?

ROBERT TAYLOR: She had, well, she had as a young girl been influenced by Walter Hampden, seeing Walter Hampden in "Cyrano" and she knew that she wanted to be in some way involved with the theatre. And at that time on newspapers the post of drama critic was like most cultural writing way down on the list of values. And Eleanor went to Radcliffe [College] where her father taught and when she was eighteen years old her father arranged for her to become the theatre critic through Philip Hale who was then the great music critic and head of the department at that time and who knew Eleanor's father. And the father arranged for this, but, you see the paper would take her only on one condition. They didn't pay her. So for ten years she worked from say around 1925 -- twenty four/twenty five -- to about 1935 when the guild was organized without pay. And they loved to get somebody who was, you know, highly trained and who was had the right background for it and who was rich enough to work for nothing. And the paper liked...

ROBERT BROWN: So she had.

ROBERT TAYLOR: So she had. And in fact opposed the opposition of the guild - - she opposed the guild.

ROBERT BROWN: Opposed the formation of the guild.

ROBERT TAYLOR: The formation that, oh, came in around 35'. And Eleanor was one of the strongest hold-outs. By a strange irony at the end of her life she was replaced by the man who, by Sam Hirsch, who she found sitting in her desk one day when she was in her sixties, if you can imagine, after she'd been there forty years, and she had recoursed to the guild, won her case and they had to pay her salary until the paper pulled her. Interesting. But, in any case, Eleanor had -- Eleanor had known virtually everybody in the theatre of her day and had written a book called, *Passing Through to Broadway*, which was published by a small house called Waverly.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that essentially the role of the theatre in Boston? The things you mainly covered were on their way to Broadway? Or they were the reverse. After they would pass Broadway and come back on the road?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. At that time the tryout system was working very well. It was not the kind of theatre we see today where you get things that are not only revivals but returns. That was inconceivable. [...?] more theatre. And whether it was a good quality or not it certainly was more of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well you said that the cultural things were down...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: ...went down on the hierarchy and yet the Herald's conservative readership, were they quite interested in theatre? They were fairly well-educated?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. The Herald had a managing editor named George Minor who knew how important this was to his readership. And, though it was necessarily down, well down on the scheme of things, it certainly took a much higher priority I think than has been my experience since.

ROBERT BROWN: Was the old Yankee Bostonian quite interested in the theatre? They were accustomed to going to it?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was considered part of their elitist image I would think.

ROBERT BROWN And they in fact went to the theatre a good deal.

ROBERT TAYLOR: They went to the theatre and the subscribers to the paper were people who would be theatre guild or something like that. So, anyway, it was very [...?]. Actually, it was very hard work but I liked it because it began at ten thirty with that screening then on to the lunch then back to the paper to do -- to write the whole page. You see you'd write everything except the reviews. Or you would write maybe the review of the film that you had just seen or some other film that you had seen at the screening. That's why they screened them in advance. And you would do that and then in the evening I would either be at a concert or covering a play or something of that nature which would get over around eleven thirty, you see.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you'd have to write your review.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Then I'd have to write my review. So there I was at mid-night going back to Arlington about to get up again for, you know, you worked and you went home and you worked again.

ROBERT BROWN: Well were you given much space for the reviews?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes there was a lot more space than there is today.

ROBERT BROWN: And then the piece you wrote after your lunch, what were those like? Can you remember any that were particularly memorable? These noon-time sessions with a movie star or with someone else?

ROBERT TAYLOR: You mean who? Well I interviewed all the movie stars of that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there any that were particularly memorable? Any that, for what you wrote or for what they were like?

ROBERT TAYLOR: What I wrote about them?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, or what you recall of meeting them or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well the ones that I recall meeting sometimes are the ones that -- the ones that stick out in my mind are sometimes not the best-known ones. I -- it was always -- I always enjoyed interviewing Alfred Hitchcock, for example. He was always very amusing interview because he would have his stock responses about actors being like cattle or something like that. And, yet at the end you knew you were going to go through the formula, all this. But there'd always be something different about an interview with him. For example, on about the third or fourth time I interviewed him he was doing "Psycho" at that time and he said, "Come on I want to show you something." And we went down to the Paramount Theatre on Washington Street where the movie was opening up and he just stood beside a cardboard cut-out of himself and the -- it was there beside the box office -- and people would be walking along the street and they would see him standing there and they would burst into spasms of laughter. He didn't have to do anything. Just have to, you know, stand there beside that. I -- the early ones I remember interviewing were -- some of the more interesting ones were Robert Sherwood. I remember Sherwood was coming in with, he was re-writing a PhilipBARRY play, Philip Barry's last play, "Second Threshold." And Arthur Miller who was, at that time, just -- he was still working on his "Witch Trial," I don't think he'd even begun the "Witch Trial" thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Would these interviews, would you be with them for quite a while? An hour or two?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, sure. At least. You know you're there with them throughout lunch and afterward it was customary for the people who were at the lunch to...

ROBERT BROWN: Oh there were a number of people at the lunch, were there? The various papers.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. The way it would be done would be to -- the star of the occasion would be sitting at the head of the table and would be questioned en masse and then anybody who wanted to talk to the star would then do it on a one-to-one basis.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you trying to find out, usually? What did the paper want you to do?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well whatever we could use to get a story out of them, you know, in some fashion. What we thought our readers would want to find out about them.

ROBERT BROWN: What do they usually want to know? The circumstances of making the film or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, it was usually connected with a specific thing. Now that I think about it, Arthur Miller was right after "Death of a Salesman" that I interviewed him. And he was, you know, you always go on to their next project but you talk to them about their techniques and about their philosophy and the way they stand in relationship to what they're doing. I remember some of the ones, you know, Paul Henreid as a wonderful interview. You know here he is in hack films with Bette Davis and some of the most articulate people were the ones that, you know, are least successful in the business.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when you're saying he's a wonderful interview that means he was expansive he...

ROBERT TAYLOR: It means he's articulate, literate, and witty, even.

ROBERT BROWN: Some weren't. Some were pretty flat, were they?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. And, particularly, and sometimes this turned out to be actors who were quite good actors because they were use to immersing themselves in a role. And the role that they -- they weren't really interested in playing the role of somebody who's being interviewed. Some were and could play it quite well. Gilbert (Billy or John) for example, wonderful interview. You know, wide-ranging mind, intelligent, sensitive and, you know, I mean you always got more than... And I always enjoyed Howard Dietz. You know, he was certainly full of ideas and all kinds of... But the theatre people were in general far more interesting than the film people.

ROBERT BROWN: They were use to projecting themselves, do you think?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not so much. They tend to be more introspective and they're more concerned with their craft and with the art of the theatre than I think the people were in film. You know, men like Jimmy Stewart, for example, would come and his big interest was in the theatre because, fundamentally (even though he had long-since left the Falmouth Players [University Players at Falmouth, MA]) he had an opportunity to act on a stage. You don't have an opportunity to act in films. You're acting for two minutes and the rest of the time you know the director is doing everything.

ROBERT BROWN: Well that was an error of the director's being extremely dominant, wasn't it? And then the front office...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Ah... Well, of course, you know, we dealt mainly in the films with commercial people. Starlets. Debra Paget or somebody like that. And, yet at the same time it was mixed in with other kinds of people who had more thoughtful appreciation of their medium. And I had, while I knew there were people who were making films like Stan Brakhage and you know experimental film makers, these were not newsworthy...

ROBERT BROWN: Weren't covered.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, they weren't newsworthy. They're probably covered today, much less. You know, I mean news is always a consensus and you decide what's going -- it's pretty easy because the decision, if you don't have much space, and the decisions are made for you by what goes on there.

ROBERT BROWN: Were the decisions made for you also by the editors at the paper? Would they sometimes suggest "don't touch this" or anything like that?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. No. They don't do things like that. There's no reason to. But sometimes they would... Sometimes if they have somebody that they think should be a special -- is especially noteworthy they might call your attention to it. That's all.

ROBERT BROWN: But otherwise they were trusting you because you proved yourself through trial period and so forth.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well they assume if you know -- it's more or less routine, really. I mean there is a very very limited amount of space in any news hole [...?] even -- no newspaper can hope to be comprehensive. It's not like an archive. [both laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: You can't get yourself -- dig a too deep a hole or trouble for the newspaper in a small space? No. [laughing]

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. No, no, that's true. Although you can get yourself into plenty of trouble. I remember when Jan Shmenter, the Polish pianist, was about to appear and we had a Saturday paper. He was to give a concert on a Friday night. Well, I was going to cover the concert and space was very very limited (space always is on a Saturday paper -- you know how thin the paper is) There aren't that number of ads in the Saturday paper. So, George Minor, managing editor, came in to me and said, "Oh, we're going [...?] forget Smetner, we've done

Shmetner thirteen times." It turned out that Shmetner had all kinds of Boston ties and we were bombarded by mail. There must have been forty letters that came in [...?]. And you know we were in trouble on Shmetner. We hadn't covered Shmetner's concert at Jordan Hall, even though we had covered the previous thirteen Shmetner concerts that were [laughing]...

ROBERT BROWN: You were expected to every time he came around.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. And he had a number of people like Dorothy Edinborough who were influential and who could write to the paper who did not hesitate to do so. But you're always running into that. But, you know, I did fascinating interviews with some of the most interesting -- Stravinsky was an interesting interview. Stravinsky was not interested in talking about music. He was interested at that point in talking about weight-lifting. Which was a thing that he was specializing in at that point. And body-building and [laughing]...

ROBERT BROWN: Did he strip for you all to show you a display? [laughing]

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, no. We did talk about -- we talked about the way it's progressed. Which at that -- Sarah had brought him in -- it has been done at the Venice, in Venice [...?], I think. Well this was in 53'. But he was an interesting interview when you would get him to talk on music. But he talked about everything else -- bridge, body-building...

ROBERT BROWN: When he talked about music, would he talk about craft or opinion of other musicians?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Uh hum. Very much as in the craft dialogue. And he was certainly most interesting.

(Recorder is turned off. End of March 13, 1980 session.)
March 27, 1980 Session

ROBERT BROWN: This is the second interview with Robert Taylor in Marblehead, Mass. and this is March 27th, 1980.

(Recorder is turned off.)

ROBERT BROWN: To continue talking about the music scene in Boston in the early fifties. You were just speaking of Stravinsky. Could you perhaps describe some of the other leading figures, either musicians or patrons?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well the leading entrepreneur in Boston music during the 50's was Aaron Richmond who was the impresario who was in charge of the Celebrity Series which still exists today. And he would - - he would bring in virtuosi and orchestras and following much the same path that it does now. It's now the B.U. [Boston University] Celebrity Series and...

ROBERT BROWN: Well was that his business? That was his career?

ROBERT TAYLOR: That was fundamentally his business. Yeah. And I can remember during the early 50's interviewing such performers as the legendary Eisler Solomon who had a stroke very shortly thereafter and ceased concertizing, but he was quite interesting. And Sir Thomas Beachem was uproarious kind of interview. He was -- he, ah, talked extensively about his interpretation of [...?] and how he conceived the opera in very vivid terms.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, for these men, was Boston simply a stop in a road-show for these international figures?

ROBERT TAYLOR: For most of them, yes. There were people like Gina BackhourR and her husband, Alex Sherman who would play in Boston and be off to Chicago or San Francisco wherever it was. And they were cosmopolitan international figures. That's still a lifestyle that pertains today as far as their concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: And what were you trying to learn from them when you'd do these interviews for the paper?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I was interested in them as people. I was also interested in learning more about music. And, certainly, I think that were youth is -- with somebody like that, that you can always learn something new. After all, when you do talk for an hour or two with somebody like Ernest Ansomay you know you're talking with a man who not only is a great musician but who is also a philosopher - a professional philosopher - mathematician, among other things, who was known in the field as a matematician. Or when you're talking with somebody like Sir John Barbaroly you're talking about a piece of western cultural history that's extremely significant and fascinating. His career with the Hally Orchestra and with his relations with Rayvon Williams and British composers, extremely fascinating kind of experience, really.

ROBERT BROWN: What about people locally that were coming up at that time? You got to meet or at least interview several of them, didn't you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I did. And whether they ever achieved fame or not they were interesting, certainly, and promising as young performers. I remember Harold Faberman about that time had formed an orchestra in Brookline [MA]. Now I notice in the dictionary -- the, ah, what do you call it? -- the listing of musicians he's now in San Francisco and has his own orchestra out there. But he was giving some interesting concerts at that time. And there was Roland Hayes who was local.

ROBERT BROWN: What about him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: HAYES had -- Hayes lived in Brookline in the vast baronial [...?] kind of place and, of course, he was a -- when I met him -- he was a well known performer who had concertized extensively and he had been the subject of a best-selling biography by McKinnley Helm which dealt with Hayes and his mother. I think it was called, Angel Moe and Her Son Roland Hayes. And it was about her life -- she'd been a slave -- and it was about her life and his and he talked to me about his early days as a performer. He'd been a messenger boy in an insurance company and some of the executives had taken an interest in him and had sponsored him and had given him lessens and had enabled him to -- launched him on his career. And that's why he settled in Boston. They'd sent him up here to study at the, I believe -- think it was the New England Conservatory but I may be wrong on that point.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he an expansive person?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I remember it was the first time that I ever heard the term Afro-American.

ROBERT BROWN: He used it?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He used it. Yeah. And I think it -- you know he was very insistent upon the use of that term. Because he was very much aware of the influence of African culture on his own cultural outlook. But I must of -- he must have been close to seventy years old when I heard him give one of his last concerts and he was marvelous. You know, I mean the voice was a mere husk but the art was still there. It was an amazing performance.

ROBERT BROWN: You also interviewed Leonard Bernstein when he was a young composer?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. At that time Brandeis [University] was just, just starting and hadn't graduated its first class and he came up. He came up to Brandeis to -- for the world premiere of his opera, "Trouble in Tahiti," which I covered. And he -- I remember talking to him about contemporary music at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Expansive and outgoing. I used to see his father lunching in Schrafts everyday when there was a Schrafts right around the corner from the old Herald Traveler and there would be Leonard -- the elder Bernstein would be in there having lunch. [laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: But he was a -- Leonard was reachable, I mean he was still...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. He was still, I mean, you know, he was involved in Broadway. He was involved in all sorts of activities and I think that -- I think that it was just about the time he was doing "Wonderful Town," and you know, as well as his more serious efforts. And he -- and "Trouble in Tahiti" was originally conceived as a television opera. And he was involved in almost every kind of medium you could think of at that time.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he looked at with disdain by serious performers or did they admire his universality?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think that he was considered to be a man of great talent but facile by a good many musicians. I think today he's regarded by younger people with, you know, they're not as close to him and they don't tend to have the kind of condescension that sometimes characterizes people in a milieu like that and where there's a great deal of jealousy and striving. And I think they tend to look up to him, to revere him more as an older statesman. But in those days he was something of a wonderkin, still. And when was he ever going to be doing something serious was the general idea. [both laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Well you also said -- what was it? June of 1952 that you began covering visual arts for the Herald?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. I did, yeah. My...

ROBERT BROWN: How did that come about?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well my predecessor was a man called Lawrence Dame and, who ran a column called "Regarding Art." And he had a falling-out with the managing editor because he wanted to go to Europe and write

it on art in Europe. They weren't interested in stories from Paris and so he resigned. And they were suddenly all left with the task of getting somebody to be the art reviewer. Now, you would think that this would be easy to do and today there'd be all kinds of people would be glad to take such a post. But you couldn't give it away in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: Why was that?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Ah, well for one thing, they'd had very traumatic experiences for journalists getting people outside the newspaper, experts, coming in to do the -- to do things. For example, there was a composer named, Theodore Chandler, very able composer who later published an opera with the un-lovely name of "The Potted Fat," [laughing] and Chandler had been hired by the Herald in 1932 to cover music. And he was a fine theoretician and published extensively and was very well known as a musician. And Chandler covered Paul Wichtenstein, Ludwig Wichtenstein's brother who had lost an arm in World War I. And he had a -- he was a piano virtuoso and so he commissioned a number of composers to write concerti for one hand and he commissioned Richard Strauss and Ravel and that's why you get what amounts to a repertoire for one-handed piano. Well, Chandler covered Wichtenstein and he was playing I think, maybe, I think it was the Ravel and he blasted his playing in the paper. And at no time in the entire course of the review did he mention that the performer had one arm. You see, there's this rather basic kind of repertorial fact was omitted from the review completely. They said, "Why didn't you put it in there?" He said, "I didn't think it was important." Well, you see...

(End of copy tape 2, side A)
(Copy tape 2, side B)

ROBERT TAYLOR: ...what was important to him was the, you know, the musical basis of it all...

ROBERT BROWN: The quality of the performance.

ROBERT TAYLOR: The quality of the performance. And he completely ignored any obligation he might have had as a reporter, as a documenter of the occasion so that this very very significant fact that the performer -- in fact it's central to the thing. You know, I mean how're you going to discuss the concerto that he played unless you mention that he had one arm. And, so, he was eased out as a result of many subsequent episodes which - which - which more or less indicated that - that he really lacked a basic kind of feeling for reporting. So they tended to put in people in those slots that were already journalists. They figured that they could then learn while they were on the job and so that's what happened to me really. And, ah...

ROBERT BROWN: This goes back to what you said last time that most reporters had been trained on the job -- that very few had been educated
to it or even had a basic, ah, liberal arts education.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's true. Well, you can't be. Well, for one thing, you can't be educated to it.

ROBERT BROWN: It's got to be on the job, huh?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It has to be on the job because of the nature of it. You see the nature of the job is breadth. It isn't depth. Ah, what you're talking about when you're talking about -- when you're talking about doing cultural, is somebody who will be doing something different every night. That is, if you're doing music you'll being doing a violin soloist one night. You'll be doing a soprano the next night. And, you'll be doing a Chinese nose flute performer on the third night. Well, you may well know, for example, literature, the violin. This means that supposedly you're an expert on the violin. This means that you're probably not going to be an expert on the vocal side of it and certainly there going to be all kinds of people at the nose flute performance who know more about nose flute than you do, you see. So that in the [...?] you can't possibly cover any one field as an expert because somebody in the audience is going to know more than you do about it. And, yet, you know I mean the fact of the matter is that you're specialty is breadth not depth. You have to be able to go out and discuss what went on intelligently and I think that's really all that's demanded of the cultural reporter.

ROBERT BROWN: You don't attempt to compare it with other performances or with...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think that's the job of the critic. You know, and the critic will have a book for the kind of medium that, you know the extensive -- the learned essay. Or, there will be a medium that permits the critic to make this kind of comparison. You can do it in a publication like TLS [?] or some kind of relatively, ah, professionally oriented publication. But, you can't do it in a newspaper, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, when you came to -- what is this June of 52'?

ROBERT TAYLOR: June of 52'.

ROBERT BROWN: What was to be done? Dame had been eased out?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I was -- I -- well, Dame hadn't been eased out. He had resigned in a huff. And there was [chuckling] -- he found himself triumphant as a matter of fact, because on the way to Europe (he was going over there on a -- with some -- he'd some how promoted a trip for himself with the Navy) and it was at the time of the Destroyer called the Hobson was sunk due to somebody's ineptitude out in the middle of the North Atlantic. And he was the only reporter in the entire place, you see. So, the managing editor who had fallen out with Dame, said, "Get Dame. Get Dame back!" you know [laughing] and they were willing to do anything to get, you know to get him back. But he didn't give them. He gave it to the AP and continued on his way to Europe. But, the -- I found -- I had done it. I had taken courses as an undergraduate in art, but it had never occurred to me that I would be an art reviewer or an art critic. I had studied with Alfred Krusant (I don't know whether you had ever heard of him) at Colgate. And there was no reason why you should have. But, and had taken some courses in Indonesian painting there, but these were art history courses.

ROBERT BROWN: Well were you, when you arrived at this new job, where you were already at the newspaper of course, was there a backlog of things to be covered, or was there -- had your editor, did he sketch out for you the kinds of things...

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. He just told me I was going to be doing it. And, so I then had to go and find out what I ought to be doing.

ROBERT BROWN: And what did you think you ought to be doing when you set into this?

ROBERT TAYLOR: The first thing I did that I recall was I had been to the -- I had been, of course, to galleries and I had been to the Wiggin Gallery at the BPL [Boston Public Library] and I had noticed the printing -- you notice there's a printing press up there and I went up there and talked with Arthur Heinselman about the press itself which had belonged -- I think the name of the printer was (he's a very well-known printer) named Dulatra and he had done printing for Whistler and so on. So I had a nice story there on him and...

ROBERT BROWN: Was Heinselman -- what was he like to talk to?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Heinselman was the most charming man and had many reminiscences his days -- student days -- and early days in Paris. He had lived for a long while in France. And he was great on discussing prints from a technical point of view. I remember talking to him about the Hundred Golda print of Rembrandt and he would show -- he would point out to me passages in that particular etching where different kinds of techniques were used. Where, you know, different handling of the plate had happened and where it'd been scored over or had been changed in other ways. It was, you know, an education really to hear him on that subject. And there weren't many galleries, you know, Doll and Richards was there at the corner of Newbury Street and Dartmouth Street and I remember one of the first shows that I covered was -- consisted of the color woodcuts, I think, of Alan Rohan Crite. There was Boris's down the street.

ROBERT BROWN: Boris Mirski, yeah.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Back to Doll and Richards, who was -- was there a person you talked with there or would you simply go in and look at what they had on display?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I'd simply go in and look at the works and then write about them. I found it an advantage not to know the artist. And that wasn't just a question of my own ignorance but it's never, it's never very wise for anybody in journalism to get close to your sources to that extent.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were able -- what you're saying is you were able to judge Crite's prints on their merits?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I though I could [laughing].

ROBERT BROWN: When you were beginning, o.k. Do you recall what you said? Did you like them? Were they...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, I recall I did, yes. I, you know, as I recall it was an enthusiastic review. But I can't say that, you know I mean reviewers are, as John Cannaday says in his new book on What Is Art?, you know, reviewers always or critics have terrible records as prophets. As oracles -- as evangelists they're quite good but as oracles they have a sorry record. [both laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Would you get to know, say at Doll and Richards, would you get to know the owner or anyone like that or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I would -- and I can't for the life of me I can't remember...

ROBERT BROWN: I think there was a Thomas MCKEEN around at that time.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Yeah. Mr. McKeen was there and with his [..?] assistant, whoever he was, I can't remember him. I can't remember his name. But he was a young man who wore false eyelashes. [laughing] Velveteen.

ROBERT BROWN: Now that place was fairly conservative and stuffy? I mean it had a long reputation.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. It was and they -- there were always revivals at Doll and Richards of people who had been prominent on the Boston scene around the year 1910 or maybe even earlier. And people that -- well, like Hazelton or, you know, I mean were very very minor figures and who were constantly cropping up at Doll and Richards.

ROBERT BROWN: But presumably there was a steady interest in such things.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. I remember Gino Fererra showed there. Occasionally people would show, that is Boston -- cold-roast Bostonians with cultural inclinations would...and you know some ability in painting would turn up and have shows there. It was at that time I made the acquaintance of the elder Vose, Robert Vose, Senior, who was...

ROBERT BROWN: As a new reporter you went -- you met him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Because, they were then active on Copley Square. They had their gallery there. And there were the two boys, Morton and Robert, distinctly subservient to the old man.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, were they?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Who was then in his nineties and who had -- it was his father Seth M. Vose who had opened the first gallery. It might have been the first gallery in the country.

ROBERT BROWN: Well it was at least one of the first in Boston.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Certainly the first in Boston. And, ah...

ROBERT BROWN: How did he treat you?

ROBERT TAYLOR: The old man?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well he knew that I was writing about his shows in the newspaper and so he treated me very deferentially, but he was -- in fact he was a grand old character. And had been -- he had been, I understand, the model for Booth Tarkington's series on an art gallery owner in the Saturday Evening Post. I think it was called "Rumbin Galleries" [...?] or something of that nature. But some of the characteristics of the, of Mr. Vose, Senior were in there in the ah...

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of those characteristics as you remember?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Vose, Senior was -- first of all, he was, as I say he was in his nineties and it was for me, you know, it was rather difficult, you know I had a full day of doing other things besides art.

ROBERT BROWN: You were still covering other things.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I was covering everything else. You see, I was following that schedule still that I described in our last interview. Mr. Vose, Senior, of course loved nothing more than an audience, you see. And so I found myself going to this gallery and getting in the little elevator down at the ground floor level and the thing would creep up from one floor to the next and I'd go by Mr. Vose's office there and if Mr. Vose spotted me coming into the gallery, you see, he would immediately rush upstairs -- he would hear me getting off upstairs -- and he would rush upstairs and he was extremely agile for a man of ninety. And he would keep me there for the next three hours. Regaling me with stories of coos and grand times in the art scene of fifty years ago how, he would repeat stories about Corot, how he had brought Corot to this country and had... He had met many of the artists who were active in Paris in the 90's. You know, figures like Renoir and many modern masters.

ROBERT BROWN: Well this didn't give you much time to look at what was on the walls, huh?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well not very frequently, you know. And it was my idea to go in there, see the art and go back to the paper. But, it involved every time Mr. Vose, Sr. was there, wonderful four hour conversations which would have been, I'm sure, should have been taken down by the Archives of American Art. But it was a tremendous

experience to go in there when he really had a painting such as the Gainsborough that's now at the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]. I've forgotten what the name of it is. It's the -- they purchased it very shortly thereafter. It was Mr. Constable -- W.G. Constable and I were ushered in to the second floor gallery to see the Gainsborough and the gallery was swaddled in chocolate colored drapes and we all sat there -- three of us, Mr. Vose in the middle and Constable on one side of him and I was on the other side of him all in leather chairs. And the two boys. And the boys of course were in their fifties [laughing]. Morton and Robert. And there would be lots of fiddling with the lights and Mr. Vose, Sr. would say, "I want to get -- now, now we've got to have the right lighting." And he would -- Morton would rush around and adjust the light and Robert would say -- he'd get up there by the drape and say, "Now father." And, "No, no. Not now." And then, finally all the circumstances would be right. Mr. Vose is sitting there with his cane and he would thump the cane down on the floor and say, "Now!" [both laughing very loudly] And the curtain would part and of course it was a beautiful painting that... [laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you hadn't even scene the painting? And you and Constable had to, ah... [both laughing]

ROBERT TAYLOR: But he certainly gave it the full treatment when he was showing it to you. And, ah...

ROBERT BROWN: Had you just happened to come in when Constable was going to view it. Had you become...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, no. He had arranged, ah, Constable...

ROBERT BROWN: Had you become Mr. Vose's favorite reporter by then?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well I was Mr. Vose's favorite reporter because I was his only reporter. Nobody else reviewed art except Dorothy Adlow who was of course the doyon of the profession at the -- at the NM [...?], absolutely, you know the model for, for me anyway of what somebody should be. But Dorothy, you see, was paid space rates by the -- by the Monitor. She was...

ROBERT BROWN: What does that mean?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, the Monitor tended to look with a kindly eye on Christian Scientists, naturally. They, in fact, have a staff of Christian Scientists now. And Dorothy was Jewish and of course didn't qualify to be on the staff, really. I mean to be in the inner circles there. And she was doing this art criticism and getting paid space rates for it. She was doing it every day. But she wouldn't -- well, see she would more or less do the show and she'd never turn up for things like the news events. That is the acquisition of the Gainsborough by the Vose Galleries was a news event. So in effect, although, you know Dorothy was the best reviewer in town, I thought, I was the only one that Mr. Vose, Sr. had so I was there along with Constable.

ROBERT BROWN: Did Constable make any comments or...

ROBERT TAYLOR: He did. He did. You know he talked extensively about the Gainsborough and how it was painted. And we looked at it and he mentioned a little bit of the history of the painting and, ah, that, you know I mean what a -- mostly expressions of amazement were uttered by us. And, Mr. Vose was a great man for superlatives. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but around 1950 I did a show of China port painting that he had up then. And, you know I had been covering his shows at that time -- it was 1960, I'm sorry. I had been covering his shows at that time for about eight years. And I open this -- I received a letter from him. And I thought how nice of him to send me a letter, you know thanking me for reviewing the show. And I open it and a check for fifty dollars fell out of the letter and [laughing] and I sent him back the check, you know I couldn't accept a check. I sent him back the check and he then called me up. He said, "But why didn't you take it?" And he said, "It was standard procedure with Philpot [...?] [both laughing]. Just to leave that off the tape.

ROBERT BROWN: No, no. Yeah, but what did your editor think? Not of that but of you're -- the three hours you would spend? You had to...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well he didn't know. He didn't -- you see he didn't know where I was and he didn't mind where I was...

ROBERT BROWN: As long as you covered all bases...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. But I could not, you know, I mean I could not get, you know I had a schedule to keep and I couldn't cover all bases if I was there listening to Mr. Vose talk to me about his coos with R.H. White, you see. R.H. White would pluck his sleeve or he had some kind of signal at an auction that enabled Mr. Vose to make some kind of a move that would out-bid his competition. I would have to hear all this. You know, hear about Agnew, all the...

ROBERT BROWN: Fellow dealers.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. The New York scene and, or if, he would then trot out some wonderful paintings and

show them to me. The Blakelocks -- nobody could paint moonlight like Ted Blakelock -- and, or you know these bituminous cracked paintings, but still they were quite lovely. And, Monticelli [Adolphe] crustules -- I could almost go through the epitaphs that I would hear during...

ROBERT BROWN: Crustules. Was that the way he'd describe them, huh?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Crustules. This was the Monticelli. And the Blakelock we were going to get into the discussion of moonlight. Or if he had a Copley he'd talk about the painting textures in Copley. Or a Smibert [John] he would -- he was very strong on Smibert. And some of the early Colonial painters. And he had a -- of course he had that marvelous store room of paintings and he'd keep coming up with paintings. You know, great scenic views of Niagara that had been in, you know, carried around and shown on tour during the 19th century.

ROBERT BROWN: And of course those things, the buyers weren't around in the fifties for that sort of thing, were they?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: So he had an awful lot that was just gathering dust there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I imagine he must have sold a lot to Karolick, ah, you know and a good many of those pictures I'm sure went to...

ROBERT BROWN: Robert Vose, Sr. then was certainly the dominating presence in that gallery, right? The sons were...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You would hardly talk with them? I mean he was the one...

ROBERT TAYLOR: The sons were, yeah, very very -- there was no doubt that it was patriarchal kind of business. I though of it as being a, you know, very charming in some way, because you didn't -- you didn't see that anywhere else. I mean it's a kind of thing you might expect to see in an English firm or something like that. But it was to me a little too severe. I wouldn't like to live in that situation, of course, but the -- to come in as an outsider was very interesting. And the evolution of the Vose Galleries today, you know, I mean after all I'm sure this is where Robert learned a lot from his father.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, certainly. Because they were in attendance on him at all times, sure.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: So, what were you -- what would you write up when you went back? Typically whatever the special show was?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I would, you know -- I remember I did, ah -- what's his name? Larry, ah... He occasionally had contemporary artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Sisson?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Sisson. Larry [Laurence P.] Sisson and he had Jakalev in there at that time. And some of the other -- who's that watercolorist from Middlebury? Arthur...I've forgot it.

ROBERT BROWN: But you would write up an exhibition rather than write up some of these anecdotes that he told you? Or would you...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, no, the anecdotes were useless to me unless I -- I never did get around -- I never did do the old man and I suppose I should have. He would have made a great profile. But the, no, the anecdotes were irrelevant. In those days one didn't run that kind of profile in newspapers.

ROBERT BROWN: You wanted -- you had to look for the newsworthyness which was the...

ROBERT TAYLOR: The event itself.

ROBERT BROWN: ...the contemporary -- the exhibition that's going on.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Right. And, and, ah...

ROBERT BROWN: Through Vose did you meet people that would come in?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I met Karolick, I remember.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned Karolick, yes, did he...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. The -- Karolick at that time was -- there's a very funny thing that happened with Karolick. He still -- of course he had been in the St. Petersburg Opera and he was born in Thesarabia [...?] and had sung as a baritone in the St. Petersburg Opera before he married Martha Codman. And -- or tenor, I'm sorry, he was a tenor. And he gave his last concert at the -- at Jordan Hall in this period. And I had known Karolick from the -- as a -- from his connection with the world of music rather than the world of art prior to that. His last concert was something like this: we all walked into Jordan Hall; there was a tape-recorder in the middle of the stage. And it -- the concert consisted -- there was Karolick sitting down in row one. The concert consisted of them putting on -- Karolick on tape. And the audience would applaud after each -- after each aria. Karolick would get up and bow [laughing].

ROBERT BROWN: But he was no longer going to risk a...

ROBERT TAYLOR: A natural performance, no. I have... [dog barking] I have it as a matter of fact on a recording over there that he presented to me. [dog barking and both laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a very approachable, was he? Very outgoing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Karolick was full of -- he was very amusing.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever interview him for your column?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. I did. I did. I interviewed Karolick I think, ah, well it was about the time he decided to issue that record. And I interviewed him for, ah, for the Herald around 1959. I remember it was over in the -- over in the Ritz where he usually breakfasted. And the -- he was there with his -- I don't know -- his cousin, Rusell Codman, the Fire Commissioner wearing a bright red necktie. And Karolick -- Karolick, more or less talked about his discovery of nineteenth century American art. That in Russia he was very much aware of the folk heritage of Russian art and that this had made him very conscious of a similar kind of heritage in American art. And then he sent me what he considered to be a landmark article he had written in The Atlantic concerning the art of this period. It was published in 1940, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he strike you as being really perceptive? About his art?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. I think that it -- you know, I think that he was a great -- I think he was a great connoisseur. I don't think that of him in a -- as being a scholar of the arts. But he didn't pretend to be.

ROBERT BROWN: Connoisseur in what respect?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Responding to the art itself and seeing things in it that would probably be rejected by people of his class and type. And I, you know, I mean he was able to see things in the folk tradition that perhaps were dismissed by people of that time.

ROBERT BROWN: But his class and type. You mean other collectors? Other wealthy people?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: They saw it simply as crudely done; whereas he saw the...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I think so. I think they found it rather hard to relate American art from seventeen, you know from 1783 to 1942 anything.

ROBERT BROWN: They gave the preference by and large to European work?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I think that's the case of places like Providence and Boston. [laughing]

(Recorder turned off.)

ROBERT BROWN: So Karolick was -- struck you as a notable, rather independent...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, he's described I think in (most fully) in Brian O'Dougehrty's wonderful Art in America piece on him. That's a great piece of character drawing.

ROBERT BROWN: Would you, as a reporter, also get to know some of the museum people? You've mentioned

W.G. Constable. Did you get to know him at all?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I didn't to any great extent. I would see him at museum openings and I knew of him. And he was in effect an acquaintance.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he talk about many things with you or was he fairly expansive?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, we talked about art, yes. You know, I can't remember the kinds of -- I think I last saw him at the opening of the Rembrandt portraits at the Museum. You know it was early Rembrandt paintings; the two full-length portraits of the Berbers.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this in the 60's? 1960's or something?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. It was just before his death.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he strike you as being very acute in what he said and very articulate?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Yeah. He was, you know, I would think of him as being certainly highly trained, highly disciplined and a man who had certainly steeped himself in his field. He had been trained as a lawyer, you know. And had come, I think, to art scholarship as a rather late vocation.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was quite a notable figure in the Boston art scene say in the fifties?

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(Copy tape 3, side A)

ROBERT TAYLOR: ...so, I would think of that as a reasonable assessment. I new the curators at, you know, at the MFA.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some that you got to know in your early years as a reporter? I mean as an art reporter.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Constable then was the painting curator and, let's see, at that time, ahm, in prints we had ah...

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Rossiter?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. He was there. And of course I knew Eleanor Sayre and...

ROBERT BROWN: She was just in her fairly early years at the Museum of Fine Arts, wasn't she?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, she was. And...

ROBERT BROWN: Was she quite obliging to a reporter when you would come around to...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, extremely so.

ROBERT BROWN: I mean, I take it you would go around only when they had an exhibition?

ROBERT TAYLOR: She was very gracious and certainly -- yes I would come around when they had the exhibition and she would bring out the prints that, you know, that she'd want me to see. And, let's see who else did I meet in those days? Can't remember, off- hand.

ROBERT BROWN: When you began, George Edgell was still the Director. Did you ever get to talk with him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Edgell was the Director. No, I never did.

ROBERT BROWN: But did you get to know Perry Rathbone, then?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, well there was no mistaking Perry because -- Mr. Edgell was a remote presence. And one seldom saw him and he was off in some administrative burrow somewhere. Whereas when Perry came along was with a great clashing of cymbals and certainly one knew that he was -- there was a new Director at the Museum. And it was a new era, you know, a modern era had begun there and Perry of course had...he came in with all the enthusiasm of someone who was going to bring the institution into a contemporary era. And he was often criticized as being, you know, too public relations conscious but -- and mistaking the gods and flummery of the whole business for the more substantial kinds of things. But I think that in fact he was not as certainly...I think he was, you know, certainly very much committed to art and, as a showman, was trying to make the institution a

viable one in the mid-twentieth century.

ROBERT BROWN: Was his showmanship apparent when you would go to visit at the Museum? Would he take you around?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Perry was the most charming guide in the world to art and he would -- but he was -- his trouble with him was that he would occassionally, like everybody who was involved in publicity in some way, shape, or manner, he would occassionally get involved in publicity stunts. And the opening of the Confederate show, for example, was a good instance of that.

ROBERT BROWN: When was this? In the 50's?

ROBERT TAYLOR: This was the late 50's/early 60's.

ROBERT BROWN: The Confederate show.

ROBERT TAYLOR: He had a show of Confederate paintings -- Civil War painting. And it -- I think he was aiming for -- it might have been 1960 or 61'. It was the centennial in any case. And he had some civil war cannons that were out there on the lawn of the Museum which were loaded with all kinds of blanks. And set to set the thing off Perry had some pageantry you see with the -- with the Confederate soldiers, people in Confederate costumes there and so on and so forth. And at the grand climax of this thing he was going to do his own 1812 overture and fire off the Confederate cannon which he did and shattered the windows of every apartment house... [laughing] in the area. But that's a good example of a publicity stunt. Actually, Perry would do far more substantial things such as, I remember he had a symposium there at the Museum about the direction the Museum should take to which he had invited a number of artists and...

(Recorder turned off.)

ROBERT BROWN: So we're talking about Perry Rathbone and the new wind that he represented when he came to Boston.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Perry made shows exciting. I think that his personality was dynamic and that he got people involved in the Museum to a great degree. His approach was not that of the 60's. I think that he'd come out of the Fogg and certainly had -- his great enthusiasm for art was aimed at popularizing it. He wasn't concerned with things like the adhoc report of later vintage, that is a museum is an institution for out-reach or something of that kind. I think that he was interested in making art; in popularizing it as much as he could. But I think that he was also interested in maintaining some kind of standard of integrity.

ROBERT BROWN: And connoisseurship?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Connoisseurship. Yes. And, yet he had been, of course, very conversive with the kind of politics that go on in the museum world. I think you must know that. [..?]

ROBERT BROWN: Things were fairly, ah -- I mean he put on some shows that were first in Boston and you mentioned Naum Gabo, the symposium.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. And in fact the only time I ever saw Nam Gabo, it was the symposium. He brought over the work from the Peabody Museum and intended to show primitive art at the MFA. And ah...

ROBERT BROWN: What was the response to that? Do you recall?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Somehow it never got started. Never took off. And the MFA originally intended to do something about forming a collection with the Institute of Contemporary Art. You see there was that great gap between the beginning of the nineteenth century and let us say, nineteen...well the time 1950.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the beginning of the twentieth century?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. Right. The beginning of the twentieth century in 1950 when nothing was collected. Here you have a collection that, you know, was a wonderful collection up until about the year 1903. And then just as contemporary -- as twentieth century modernism is coming in, the Museum of Fine Arts ceases to collect. And Perry was, I think, acutely concious of this lack and the question was how should these pictures be acquired (I mean, some of them were of course) but...

ROBERT BROWN: You mean, the question was really what? Affording them, or finding them or persuading these trustees...

ROBERT TAYLOR: [inaudible] Yes. All these things combined. And it...the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art,

Boston] had no collection and at one point the idea was that the ICA would collect these pictures. And they would -- the Institute of Contemporary Art collection would somehow be involved with the MFA's collection. It was at the time when the ICA, I believe, was located in the Museum School during its parapetanic [...?] progress across town.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you interview various people about this potential situation and the lack of..?

ROBERT TAYLOR: At that time, yeah. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you recall any people you talked about this with?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well it wasn't considered a critical issue, really. Things didn't move as fast then as they move now. And there wasn't as much going on in a lot of ways. It's aproximately the same kind of scene today that it was then. But somehow there wasn't the...

ROBERT BROWN: You mean fairly quiet? Or just a time of refining...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I think fairly quiet. Boston's never been a...center of the viual arts.

ROBERT BROWN: But Rathbone was interested. Did he express to you his interest in making up for lost time?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He did. But it was a question of how to do it -- of getting it done. And, as you point out, he had to persuade his trustees. He had to raise the funds. He had to do all these various and sundry things that were neccesary.

ROBERT BROWN: Then he did acquire some twentieth century things, didn't he?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He did. Picasso's The Bathers. You know, not the greatest Picassos.

ROBERT BROWN: When these were acquired, were these newsworthy events that you would cover?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Yeah. He would hold news conferences as he did with the fatal Raphael which...

ROBERT BROWN: Well, news conferences, were they something new? I mean for you to cover in the visual arts?

ROBERT TAYLOR: They were new. Mr. Edgell was horrified at the mere idea of a news conference. You see, I had the whole field to myself in a scense. [inaudible] Perry had a broader vision. At the Vose Galleries it was just Mr. Vose, myself and Constable. Perry saw the thing as being a true press conference. That is, he would get in myself and the other newspapers, but by then he had television come in and he had other kinds of things. As a matter of fact, they wanted me to do that television show that [inaudible] Brian O'Doherty that he did on channel two [Public Broadcasting Station]. But I'm strictly a print reporter and I...

ROBERT BROWN: You never did any television interview?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I did appear in a couple of things with Perry. [laughing]

ROBERT BROWN: Were they on the scene at the Museum or in the city?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. These weren't connected with the Museum as such. They were -- I've forgotten what it was. They were channel two things that involved other things.

ROBERT BROWN: As you could see from the time he came in -- say about 1954 or so -- through the 50's was there a perceptible increase in interest in the arts or in what the Museum was doing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I have no way of knowing whether there was any factual evidence for that. I mean, I suppose the attendance figures at the Museum would reveal whether there was.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had no feeling that things had changed much?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Well, partially it was in the spirit of things. Ah, don't forget that when we're dealing with Edgell, we're dealing with essentially somebody who was extremely conservative if not reactionary and who's mired back in the nineteenth century somewhere. Perry at least took the institution into the twentieth century and was involved to a much greater degree with the media, with the whatever you may think of that. It was neccessary. It was neccessary in order for him to present through these techniques the institution as a place where a contemporary Bostonian would want to go. And I think he succeeded. As I say, what did the downfall of Perry was that he was too enthusiastic. He was carried away and the cannon would go off or the Raphael would be acquired [laughing] and it would un-do the good work that he had already accomplished. I think he was a

very fine museum director.

ROBERT BROWN: Was there a certain sector of the public that wanted someone to champion -- to make the Museum more active? He must have had some public backing.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's hard to say. That's hard to say. I mean whether the public -- whether those things come from the public or whether they come about as a result of cultural evolution or whether they come from above and filter down to the public is...a way of looking at it.

ROBERT BROWN: This would touch base -- relate not only to the Museum, but generally, the political climate at least we hear about so much now in the early 50's was supposedly rather repressive or at least people were on-guard in terms of doing anything innovative -- or many things innovative. Did you perceive this at that time? Effect your work or the artists you were covering?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, you mean the McCarthy era?

ROBERT BROWN: The McCarthy era. That kind of thing.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, yeah. It had no effect whatsoever on Boston art because Boston art was, you know, pre-McCarthy, so to speak. I mean it was -- Mr. Edgell was living in a Sienese dream and he was not about to get involved.

JUNE 7, 1990
TAPE 3, SIDE A

ROBERT BROWN: I'm concluding, after a lapse of some years, my interviews with Robert Taylor, a writer and art critic of various Boston newspapers; novelist. This is Robert Brown, the interviewer. This is June 7, 1990. In our earlier interviews, we talked about your career as a writer and critic, I'd say into the 1960's. We've got a little terrain to cover. I'd like to just throw out some general questions, and I think I'd like to focus mostly on the visual arts, as you were a critic of the arts mostly I suppose in Boston, but not exclusively by any means. So that, maybe we could begin with people and events that you felt were significant. And maybe after discussing that, we can begin to draw some conclusions, or you'll make them along the way. You've known, naturally as an art critic, you got to know a lot of art dealers, I suppose particularly in Boston.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And there were some, a number, say, in the '60's, rather notable here were no longer around, like Hyman Swetzoff, for example. Did you know him a bit?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I, well I knew Swetzoff very well. He was in Huntington Avenue when I first met him. With Carl Siembab as his framer [telephone rings] in the back room. Excuse me [answers phone]...[Continuing] That would be about Swetzoff?

ROBERT BROWN: Oh please do, please, this is for the record [both men laugh].

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Swetzoff was, I think, an educational force, as well as a dealer. Extremely sensitive and he was quite interested in Redon at the time when I first met him. And there was, thanks to Hyman Bloom a lot of interest in what I would think of as school of Boston mysticism, of Boston mystics, and it showed up in their work. That kind of psychic element that you got in Redon and the kind of atmosphere of mystery of things that were super- natural and in nature, and so on...And you've got that in a
whole number of artists who were very active at that point.

ROBERT BROWN: Um hmm. And do you think, you mentioned Hyman as an educational force, do you think he played a role in the...

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. He was always bringing artists to my attention that I hadn't heard of until that time. For example, I think he was Harold Tovish's first dealer here. And I had never heard of Harold at that point. And he brought a whole, a lot of
painters to my attention who were not as "common coin" as they are today. I remember Ensor [James] was one of them. I had never seen any Ensor at all, and my first encounter with Ensor was at Hyman's gallery. Another artist that he showed was Edward Burra, you know, the English artist. And he had wonderful taste, and an adventuresome kind of way of presenting his exhibitions. Sometimes he would...well, Bresdin [Rodolphe] was another one of his enthusiasms, naturally.

ROBERT BROWN: How was he, was he fairly successful at this?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. In fact I think that he sometimes treated his gallery less as a commercial venture than as

a miniature museum really. It was in a sense an educational experience, although it was a commercial gallery as well. He had some
artists that he was interested in, like Reba Stewart.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know her, know of her work?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I knew her work and I knew her. In fact, I met her at a party once or twice at Steve Trefonides's.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your estimation of her quite good, as an artist, or?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Uh, yeah. I don't know how she would have developed, but she certainly had gift, a talent.

ROBERT BROWN: She died fairly young.

ROBERT TAYLOR: She died before she could really fulfill it.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Swetzoff's personality like?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, let's see, he was, he used to wear these aviator jackets, I remember, these leather jackets from World War I or II, and he was a kind of shy, low-key, muted type. In the gallery, he was always very quiet. It was quite different from, let's say, Margaret Brown, where there was usually a lot a activity going on. I wondered how he ever

ROBERT TAYLOR: sold anything, because he certainly didn't have the salesman's
temperament or the commercial temperament. But, after you've been talking with him for a while, you could sense his enthusiasm for what he was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: At this time, you were writing for the Herald. And were you
given quite a lot of latitude by your paper?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I was writing for the Herald. The paper, the editors on the
paper, weren't familiar with either the art scene, or any of the things that were concerned with it. So, I could pretty much do what I wanted to do, and that is, to talk about art.
That wouldn't be so today. Today, the whole kind of thing has shifted, and you can see it happening in the New York Times. Editors are aware that they ought to be interested in
art, but they're not interested in art issues. They're not interested in what I would call the "critical aspects" of art. They're interested in managerial changes, if a curator goes
somewhere else. Now, in my days at the Herald, curators were simply not news. But today, of course, they've superceded artists as news.

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think that tells us, possibly?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I think it tells us, of what I think of as a bureaucratization of American art; that it has become more professionalized, but it has created a whole class of middle- managers who are now the most prominent people on the scene. Whereas before, artists were. Now, artists have to "make it."

ROBERT TAYLOR: They have to go to some place like New York. Or, if they stay
in Boston, they have to be some kind of a media celebrity.

ROBERT BROWN: That wasn't the case, at least through the 1960's?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Ah, no it wasn't. I found that the artists that I knew were
very serious, very dedicated, and the managerial or the bureaucratic aspect was scarcely even a thought. I could not get--one thing the Herald wouldn't print would be, for example, if I had talked about a change of staff at a lesser known museum, they wouldn't do it. They would certainly, they'd do a story on the Museum of Fine Arts, but even that
wasn't very important. After all, the Museum of Fine Arts, up until the'60's, had one press person, William Germain Dooley. He did everything, and he handled it all very well.

ROBERT BROWN: But then later came a lot more elaborate press staffs at the
museums.

ROBERT TAYLOR: They became more elaborate, they grew, they subscribed to the
"Peter Principle," or they expansion of work. And, you've got these enormous staffs.

ROBERT BROWN: That has made them that much more visible in turn to the

press and to the public.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, but I don't think that it's a--I still think the art issues remain: the issues of representation, the issues of style, of aesthetics, of any number of things.

ROBERT BROWN: So Swetzoff was an important, though quiet, figure?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think he was. I think that he would think of himself as having--he was kind of, in a way, a turn-of the-century

ROBERT TAYLOR: figure, somebody like Fred Holland Day would relate to him.

ROBERT BROWN: Very sensitive. Somewhat eccentric and a bit mystical himself.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, all these things would apply. And certainly even Jack Levine was doing a number of Old Testament themes at that time that related to the mystical experience; and of course, David Aronson, with the kind of Hasidic pictures that he was doing.

ROBERT BROWN: And these men, they wouldn't have been very well known locally, is that right, in general?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, they were...

ROBERT BROWN: To dealers, collectors.

ROBERT TAYLOR: They were well known. As a matter of fact, I think they were better known then they are now. I mean, certainly, you had, after all, Aronson who had appeared in the "Young American's" show at the Museum of Modern Art, and Hyman Bloom, of course, was very well known, a national figure at that time.
The 1954 retrospective at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Jack Levine Retrospective 1953) was certainly a high point there. And, of course, Levine was extremely well known.

ROBERT BROWN: As opposed to them, were there glimmerings of the New York, what we now call the New York School [of] abstract expressionists?

ROBERT TAYLOR: You found nothing else but, after a certain time.

ROBERT BROWN: But in the later '50's, early '60's in Boston, was there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was, certainly, virtually every show that I went to. That was at the time of the Nova Gallery, was that it? The one that, there was the predecessor at Harcus-Krakow [Portia Harcus,Barbara Krakow] that was on Stanhope Street. They showed a number of abstract-- all the young artists coming out of school were painting like Jackson Pollack or De Kooning. There was a good deal of that going on. I was glad to see Pop Art arrive, because we had a number of minor Pollacks, we had a number of little DeKoonings, and they were followers, they were imitating the masters. It was, in a sense, a relief to see that some other philosophical issues were being brought up.

ROBERT BROWN: Such as, "What is a work of art?" Or if something is so much like a real object [how can it be art]?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, yeah, the Brillo boxes of Andy Warhol. And I think what Arthur Danto has pointed out was a real issue there.I mean, when Brillo boxes, when the authenticity of Brillo boxes is questioned in this fashion, you open up new ways of looking at art.

ROBERT BROWN: So you might say the art life in Boston, and elsewhere of course, was being enriched as these various streams came in.
Or, would you say that it was getting a bit chaotic?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. I think it was getting enriched. I think it was perhaps a little chaotic, because also in the early '60's you had environmental artists coming in--the Earth, Air, Fire, and Water at the Museum was one that reflected that particular

ROBERT BROWN: strain of thought. There weren't many art dealers in the '50's and '60's, particularly in Boston.

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, not at all. When I first used to do the street with Ed Driscoll and Dorothy Adlow, I think there were no more than four galleries, four or five galleries. And Vose was one where we always used to go. You see Vose, with the spread of galleries, became just another gallery as far as the news aspect of it was concerned. Because they were

showing Impressionists, or minor Impressionists, or whoever it might be, and who were already quite familiar in terms of the art.

ROBERT BROWN: Whereas before Vose had it somewhat to itself? The coverage?

ROBERT TAYLOR: The whole thing; we couldn't have gotten along without them, but, they very seldom presented a contemporary artist. They had a few: they had Robert Bliss, I remember, and they had Xavier Gonzalez for a while. But by and large they were showing Old Masters, or somebody who was a certified artist.

ROBERT BROWN: So, was your mandate, I take from this, largely to try to cover showings of contemporary artists?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Since I had my own way in those days, that's what I went for, and it was more interesting anyway. A changing and evolving art scene is by far more interesting to cope with than the one that is already in place.

ROBERT BROWN: And the Vose, to a large degree represented that, the status quo.

ROBERT TAYLOR: To some degree, yes. I would say about fifty percent of it.

ROBERT BROWN: You got to know the Vose's a bit, maybe you can dilate a bit

ROBERT BROWN: on that. Old Mr. Robert Vose was still around.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, he had many reminiscences of his father, Seth M. Vose. One of his clients, I remember, was Booth Tarkington, the writer, who put him in a series of stories in the Saturday Evening Post. He took great pride in that. But, he was a patriarch, with all of a patriarch's mannerisms. And certainly, whenever he would sit there in the back room at Vose Gallery, surrounded by--the walls draped in chocolate and he'd be sitting there with his cane between his knees...He was in his mid-nineties at that point, I think just looking for somebody to talk to, in a way. The reviewer was the perfect audience. [Both men laugh]

ROBERT BROWN: What seemed to be his outlook? Did he rail against the present?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He did, yes, but he was interested in his great art coups of the past, and he would very frequently speak about the pictures he had sold to various tycoons. Or, he would talk about things like his Brangwin [Frank] or Zulouga [Ignacio] shows, things that he had organized.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a kindly person?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I thought he was, yeah. Certainly, he was oriented toward his business, but his business was art, and so that made him very unusual.

ROBERT BROWN: And his sons, Morton and Robert Junior?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, they were always on the premises at that point. And, they would bring out the art, but he would make--anything he

ROBERT TAYLOR: handled, I remember, immediately had a cache to it. For example, Blakelock was unequaled as a painter of moonlight, but that was because he had a lot of Blakelock's in stock at that particular moment. He tended, I think, like Du Veen, to think of his paintings as "Vose's" or "Du Veen's," rather than Blakelock's.
Monticelli was another great favorite of his. "Crushed jewels," he would speak about in terms of the pigment.

ROBERT BROWN: There were rivals coming along by then though, in the late '50's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Other galleries were starting to open up.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned Swetzoff, that he was down on Huntington Avenue.

ROBERT TAYLOR: He was, but then he moved to Newbury Street, right opposite Boris Mirski. So you had, what was in essence a sociological split there. The Mirski, Swetzoff galleries were largely urban, immigrant, Jewish in nature, whereas Vose was part of the Yankee establishment and had

many of the same kinds of attitudes--had been collecting Barbizon painters and had helped the interest in Corot around the turn of the century. It was pretty much a traditional kind of gallery. The others dealt with a new... [Interruption in taping]

ROBERT BROWN: These other galleries had a new sensibility.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned a little earlier the Margaret Brown Gallery.
My impression of that gallery, judging from the records, is that she covered quite a broad spectrum.

ROBERT TAYLOR: She did. She sat in the back room of that gallery, surrounded by George Grosz drawings of Berlin. And her shows ranged from Franz Klein, whom I first saw there, to Conger Metcalf who was a popular painter of the day.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know her [Margaret Brown] a bit?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, yeah. I would go in there, once a week, or when she changed her show, and chat with her.

ROBERT BROWN: What was she like?

ROBERT TAYLOR: She was an effervescent person. She worked for Grace Horne, I think, prior to that.

ROBERT BROWN: Back in the '40's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. She was more socially oriented than some of the other people, than let's say, Swetzoff or Boris [Mirski].

ROBERT BROWN: You mean she was more interested in the cultural elite, or the "establishment," so to speak.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, in a social sense. Not that she wasn't interested in art, but it was just an attitude, really, more than anything else.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, the broad spectrum of things she showed there was rather unusual.

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was, and she took chances on some of them. I mean, I think that showing Steve, Steve Trefonides, was taking

ROBERT TAYLOR: a chance. He was a young artist who had no standing of any kind. Yes, she was very venturesome in what she did show.

ROBERT BROWN: What about, you mentioned Boris Mirski. Did you get to know him fairly well?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I got to know him very well. Boris--I thought it was one of the saddest things, at the end of his gallery career, when he was forced to move downstairs in the, it was a little framing shop, because he had shown some wonderful things upstairs. He was a, as I say, his sensibility was more or less oriented toward what I think of as an urban school of Expressionism that came out of there. Boston had an opportunity, I think in fact, the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston) under Jim Plaut was prepared to go forward with that. I don't know why it didn't happen, to take exception to the conventional art history involving the school of Paris painters. It was presenting a view of contemporary art as one in which the contemporary scene had developed out of northern European influences as well as the school of Paris.

ROBERT BROWN: And Mirski was in line with that.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, very much so.

ROBERT BROWN: Had he been in business quite a long time when you started reviewing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Well, he had begun down on Charles Street.

ROBERT BROWN: I know he did framing as well in the early days.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he was oriented, toward northern European art. He had grown up in Lithuania. His father had been a timber merchant in Lithuania, and they used to float the

logs down to Germany every year. I gather, being
comfortably well-off, he had developed a taste for art, but, when he immigrated over here, of course, he was in a position that most immigrants are: without any cash or anything like that. What had inspired him, as I recall, was seeing a movie on America, and the pograms were taking place in Russia at the time. So he decided to come over here. Almost from the beginning he decided he was going to be an art dealer.

ROBERT BROWN: What was his personality like? What did you see?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he was sort of a short, rotund man with a thick
eastern European Jewish accent. Lovely man. He would go into rhapsodies over a sculpture, or whatever it was that he had in front of him. His enthusiasm was infectious.

ROBERT BROWN: He was also noted for being outspoken, wasn't he? or at
least his unguarded expletives and so forth, earthiness.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he was very outspoken. He was more earthy than the-- If Margaret Brown was more oriented toward society, and Hyman Swetzoff was more aesthetic in a sense, he was kind of a conventionalist, [then] Boris was a kind of sincere, down-to-earth kind of person.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, [who were] some of the people he showed, can you recall that say something about Boris's taste?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he showed Jack Levine, and he showed Henry Schwartz.

ROBERT BROWN: Schwartz, was he getting to be known then? He taught for
years at the Museum School [School of the Museum of Fine Art, Boston].

ROBERT TAYLOR: He was. He later had a nervous breakdown and ceased painting
for many years. He had a very promising career, and I still think he does now. But, let's see, he [Mirski] showed Nathaniel Burwash for example, a sculptor that he liked. He showed any number of people--Esther Geller, who was one of his enthusiasms. He showed--I can't think of them all- -Carl Nelson, I remember.

ROBERT BROWN: Carl Nelson was a departure from these others.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, he was.

ROBERT BROWN: A Swede from the middle-west.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. It shows you the wide range that Boris had. He showed the early Michael Mazur, the "Locked Ward" series was the first Michael Mazur drawings that I can remember. They were extraordinary.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Boris very keen to promote all these people?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Again, he would promote them in a very vigorous fashion.

ROBERT BROWN: There were only, you said, four dealers that you could
think of at that time.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Were each of these galleries sort of meeting places for artists at all?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, they definitely were. Certainly Boghosian [Varujan] and Trefonides and the younger artists like that would go around the street,

ROBERT TAYLOR: just seeing what was being done. They would follow the various developments that were going on, simply because I think they had this great cultural passion at the time. Today, the passion is to be successful, or to achieve some kind of ambition. But, I think they did it really in a way that was out of their own enthusiasm for art.

ROBERT BROWN: And then these dealers you mentioned were all fairly direct,
plain-spoken people.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, and they were vivid personalities as well. Even though
Hy Swetzoff was a kind of Fred Holland Day type, he was somebody whom [once] you met, you wouldn't forget very easily.

ROBERT BROWN: These are the years a slightly different vein--the attempt to reach the masses, I suppose--of the Boston Arts Festival. It started in the early '50's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That came in 1955, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: What are your recollections and evaluation of that?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, this was an attempt to become popular. In fact, it was the only time that I can recall in my years at the Herald that they put the art review on the front page. They always did that because they felt it was a communal effort, more than anything else. As for the actual organization of it, I don't know anything about that. I used to go to the shows and review them, and I have very pleasant memories of them. In fact, I have a few pictures here that I bought at those festivals. As to how it was done, I am completely in the dark.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have the feeling when you started reviewing that art was for the precious few? Was the public quite limited?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I never felt that. I always felt that art, if written about intelligently, would be read by people. You always assume, after all, there's a certain degree of literacy on the part of your audience. I don't consider that elitism at all. [Phone rings]

ROBERT BROWN: These art dealers you've just spoken of, none of them in themselves were particularly elitist. Some had connections to one element of society.

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, I never found them elitist at all. Not in the sense--I [have] met many art dealers since in New York. I find there was something about the idea of having a small community here that militated against that. You couldn't be very precious if [Phone rings] you were...

ROBERT BROWN: In New York, in distinction to Boston, was rather different?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I found it to be more aloof and perhaps more conscious and more in-bred. It was a funny thing--in a provincial place like the Boston art scene, you would find more tolerance of ideas, at least at that time. It was the great era of the polemic authority, somebody like Clement Greenberg or Harold Rosenberg, and they all had very strong, distict points of view, but I don't think you had that here. What you had instead were a multiplicity of things that more or less

ROBERT TAYLOR: resembles the post-modernism of today, in a sense. It was much more easy-going kind of scene.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there other critics or academics who were quite involved in the art world in Boston in the '50's and '60's?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I think Dorothy Adlow of course, I think she was the supreme critic of the daily press, and the Monitor [Christian Science Monitor] would publish her reviews of shows, you know, one by one as they occurred, and Dorothy was a wonderful critic. Among the academics, I can't remember- -I remember that Benjamin Roland would occasionly appear, or Peter Wick would give a talk, or something of that kind. But, aside from their scholarly involvement with it, I didn't see them very much in the gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the impact of local institutions on the visual arts in the '50's and '60's? The principle one would have been the Museum of Fine Arts.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, that was the principle one.

ROBERT BROWN: When did your acquaintance with it begin, in the sense of getting to know some of the personalities and people there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Karl Zerbe, when he was head of the school, I remember interviewing him and talking about the school. Of course, this was before David Aronson had split off from the Museum School and had gone up to B.U. [Boston University] and created a department.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, Zerbe was there for about 15 or so years at the Museum School.

ROBERT TAYLOR: He had not--it was just before he went to Florida, as I recall.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? What was your estimation of him and his impact?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, he had the influence of a teacher more than anything else, and at the period he was very, very highly regarded. Shortly thereafter, when he decided to take up an Abstract- Expressionist style, I think he lost a lot of his energy.
Certainly, his reputation was not as high. But certainly, he was involved in polymers, I think, as I recall, in Expressionist modes. He was quite successful at that. His
conversations with me mainly involved formal points: how he would compose a picture, or how he would do this or that. And, I of course found them very enlightening.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were going to school.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, that's what being a reviewer is. [RT laughs]

ROBERT BROWN: He was one of the dominant figures in teaching until Aronson starts B.U.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, and then I think Jan Cox came in.

ROBERT BROWN: Jan Cox taught painting at the Museum School. Did you get to know him a bit?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I got to know him a bit. I didn't really know him very well personally. I met him once or twice, but mainly he would conduct correspondence with me.

ROBERT BROWN: What about Aronson? You talked about, mentioned Aronson several times. Do you think what he did was a good thing,

ROBERT BROWN: setting up the B.U. art department? Was it an essential accomplishment?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I thought it was. There is no institution of higher learning that doesn't have a similar department today. I think that it was a very good idea that a professional artist should head that department, and that somebody who was
as committed to it as David was should do that. Now, I concede of course that one can argue the B.U. school is overly devoted to figurative painting or whatever. But those
are questions that I think don't have anything to do with the actual question of whether there ought to be a school there or not. I think that was a very good idea.

ROBERT BROWN: At the time there weren't particularly many that offered full art school training attached to an academic institution in this area.

ROBERT TAYLOR: As I recall, no, because Harvard was notably chary of that kind of thing, wouldn't have anything to do with it. It was not academic.

ROBERT BROWN: As far as you could tell, did the B.U. art school develop a reputation quite quickly?

ROBERT TAYLOR: It did, because David brought along some good people with him. He brought Reed Kay and I've forgotten some of the other people he brought from the Museum School. He turned it into a very good school. Of course, they've had problems since, but that's not--they weren't his making.

ROBERT BROWN: There had been set up earlier, but not as an art school at Brandeis when that was founded. Mitchell Siporin Taylor, Robert

ROBERT BROWN: was brought in to head the art department. Did you get to know him very well at all?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I knew him well, knew him well. I didn't have a car in those days and he would drive me out to Brandeis and back to Brandeis [means Boston]. I somehow associate those with the shows Edward Du Buron had in Waltham at the same time at the Grover Cronin store. He had Mestrovic [Ivan] and a number of other extremely good artists from that period. Mitch was involved with the great art show up at Brandeis that was based around the theme of humor. You can imagine, it was the first
graduation at Brandeis and they decided that this was going to be the theme of that whole ceremony there. They had Perelman and Fred Allen doing an evening. And they also had this large show in which they had Rowlandson and any number of comic artists, Gilray and so forth.

ROBERT BROWN: That wasn't particularly characteristic of Siporin though, was it? He wasn't a serious social commentator?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, no not at all. Exactly, and he had done the St. Louis post office before that [mural project]. He was a very warm, outgoing, again plain-spoken man, I thought. He reminded me a little bit of Boris in many ways.

ROBERT BROWN: Rather ebullient.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, and certainly I think that, again, he was committed to that northern European view of things.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he given to talking about his past, or more about what his plans were?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, not really. I mean, he would explain the paintings to me, but we never talked about his past. In fact, I found out more about his past when I went to his retrospective show, the one that Carl Belz did at the Rose Art Museum [Brandeis University] that he did when he was actually alive.

ROBERT BROWN: What were his interests as far as, from conversations?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, his interests were in the figure and in color, and he he a fine draftman. He would talk about those aspects of his work.

ROBERT BROWN: Harvard, you mentioned, sort of down-played its art program.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Harvard had wonderful historical shows. I mean, they had a terrific Reubens show, I remember. Then later on Eugenia Parry Janis did the Degas monotype show [Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University], and shows of that kind. I mean, they were first rate, they were shows of museum caliber.

ROBERT BROWN: But their own teaching program you wouldn't have...[voice trails off]

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, they didn't connect with their pedagogical aspect.

ROBERT BROWN: The Carpenter Center comes in the mid-'60's or so.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right, '64 as I believe.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that have considerable impact in various ways?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Albert Alcalay taught over there and Robert--what was his name? Newman.

ROBERT BROWN: Robert Newman.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, and I think it did [have an impact]. Their problem, it

ROBERT TAYLOR: struck me, was that they had no tradition of teaching there. B.U. knew what it wanted, and I think that was quite clear from the start. They were stressing figurative art, they were stressing the kind of art that they liked there.
There was more of a distinct point of view. The Carpenter Center was a center of design, and being a center of design that rather limited the whole aesthetic aspect of it.

ROBERT BROWN: So, over the years, they had a variety--no coalesced point of view but a variety of teachers, Mr. Alcalay, Newman, Mirko [Basaldella Mirko].

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, and I remember Helen Frankenthaler would come up there and talk. But these aren't artists that you can really see as having a distinct relationship to one another, whereas at B.U. you could see that.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was a distinct strength at B.U., and a strength that you admired?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I would think so, yeah. I would think so. There was a focus there, and whether you agreed with it or not, it was there. At the Carpenter Center, there was no focus.

ROBERT BROWN: Back to the showing of art and the study of it, local museums--you mentioned the Fogg. The Institute of Contemporary Art, you said, under Plaut--whom I think stepped down about 1953 or so, didn't he?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I did see his correspondence when I worked there, and I think it must have been...

ROBERT BROWN: There was a move toward getting away from the received Paris

ROBERT BROWN: school, to the northern European. After he [Plaut] went, did the ICA have consistent points of view?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. When the Herald folded in 1967, for six months I worked for the ICA. Again, there was no distinct point of view. The idea was to get the art across to a broad public, if they could. And so, consequently, you had decisions being made by the board, the director that were essentially aimed at creating a public for this. There had been some resentment against the ICA before I got there because there was evidently a fund-raising thing in which the director had asked us to contribute, and the artists were angry because they were under the impression they were going to be shown there. Their point of view was that this was a local museum and they should be shown in this context. Well, when they weren't, when it was decided that it was going to be a museum of contemporary art in general, then of course you alienated large numbers of artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Particularly the local figures.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. Always the problem with museums. Museums very seldom show them [local artists] to begin with, for better or for worse; I think for worse.

ROBERT BROWN: So, in a sense it's rootedness in the community, among the largest [group of artists] at least, was slipping in the '60's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, by the time I came there.

ROBERT BROWN: Well I recall, just before that, their showing big name artists, New York, and also had some elaborate symposia on issues of the day.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, it struck me that under Plaut, you could reconcile both aspects of it. That is to say, the mission to make an audience aware of developments in contemporary art, and at the same time to show worthy artists from the region. And I think he did this by mixing together artists. He mixed together Milton Avery and Hyman Bloom. This could be done, and it was done, and I found that the shows had a lot more coherence to them. There were some wonderful shows that he did. The trouble with the...

END OF SIDE A
TAPE 3, SIDE B

ROBERT BROWN: ...it moved from Newbury Street [the Institute of Contemporary Art].

ROBERT TAYLOR: It moved from Newbury Street to the Museum School, and was in the top half of the Museum School for a long while. Then it moved down to what is now the Christian Herter art gallery on the banks of the Charles River, and that's where Tom Messer [Thomas M. Messer] was the director.

ROBERT BROWN: It's a very isolated building.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, the idea there, as it was described very enthusiastically to me by Messer and others, it was to link up the suburbs with the city, and that this was the perfect place to have this. The automobile had made a great deal of impact on the art-going habits of the public. The idea was that you could come in from the suburbs, either by automobile or take the subway to Harvard Square and then go over to the museum. In fact, what it demonstrated to me anyway was that it was an inner-city oriented thing. That you had the museum, you had the art galleries in the city, and that when you shifted the center of gravity out there to the banks of the Charles River, particularly the disasterous theater and the opera house that never happened...

ROBERT BROWN: It was to have been a more elaborate thing.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right. It just died on the vine. It was isolated.

ROBERT TAYLOR: It had no connection with the life of the community. After that--that was disasterous, because it created a huge burden of debt under which the ICA struggled, and probably is still struggling with to this day.

ROBERT BROWN: Had Messer been involved in that decision, or did he come in at...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I don't know to what degree. He was the director, and a very able director of the ICA, but to what degree he went along with this, I have no idea.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get to know him somewhat while he was there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I got to know him, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And he became a very respected figure in the museum world.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But he's a European himself. Did he think to bring, to internationalize, the showings?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, he did in many of the exhibitions they had. It was just- I think that the whole thing was supposed to have been a complex. Each part of the complex was supposed to support the other. I think the art did pretty well, relatively speaking,
but the idea that you were going to have a viable year-round theater there, and an opera house and everything else was grandiose. So, you had that [for], I forget how long that
went on. That went on maybe to 1963 or 4.

ROBERT BROWN: That would be, the last Boston opera pretty well folded by then. Was this an attempt to revive that? The old building was gone.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes. You mean the Boston Opera House. The Boston Opera House was owned by the Schuberts who announced in 1957 that it structurally unsound and proceeded to tear it down. Well, it wasn't structurally unsound, it could have served as a theater for all kinds of purposes.

ROBERT BROWN: So this attempt, this failed finally.

ROBERT TAYLOR: This did fail, unfortunately. It was disasterous, as the Arts Festival proved in the long run. It created a mountain of debt that made it almost impossible for the fine arts to flourish for several years afterward. So that, while we had
wonderful experiences then in the 1950's, we had to pay for them in the 1960's.

ROBERT BROWN: People just weren't willing to support such things.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, the merchants, for example, who had supported the
[festival] weren't going to come back. They had lost a lot of money. They had been burnt by the festival. What ruined it were the enormous costs of the theatrical productions that
they brought in. They were doing all kinds of things that were, that required very large casts. It brought in things like The Ballad of Baby Doe, Beverly Sills, and so forth.
It was really not--the art itself was relatively inexpensive to bring in, even though you did have, as I recall an Edward Hopper in one of those shows. The art itself was not expensive, but the theatrical side was extravagantly produced and created debits and a sea of red ink. And you couldn't get--what it also created was loss of

ROBERT TAYLOR: confidence on the part of the patrons, the merchants mainly, the banks, the people who should have been supporting this. It was just, it got the reputation of being something that was simply not fiscally responsible, and that was disasterous.

ROBERT BROWN: And that had an effect right through the '60's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: It did. The failure of the Arts Festival, combined with the
failure of the MBAC [pronounced MEE-BACK] project as it was known, the Metropolitan Boston Arts Commission, the MBAC Project all these two things were inter-matched, they came together. As a result, you had what I considered, a rather
depressed art scene here throughout the '60's.

ROBERT BROWN: Can you talk a little bit more about that MBAC? Was it a combination of public and private?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. It was a combination of public and private things. It
was to present--it was to be a theater there on the banks of the Charles, on Soldier's Field Road, that would include restaurants, that would include theaters. It would have an opera house probably, probably one that would be all purpose and you would be able to put theater in there. And it had the ICA Gallery there, and I think

that was--I can't remember who designed it, it might have been Nelson Aldrich who designed the structure.

ROBERT BROWN: Barkley, I know, and Nathaniel Saltenstall were involved.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right. He was involved in that [Saltenstall]. The dream of that was to be an all-purpose arts thing. I remember that it opened with a production of Twelfth Night. It was a

ROBERT TAYLOR: lavish production with Tammy Grimes and Zachary Scott as the Duke. You had a cast of thousands. [RT laughs] It was done in a tent there, and the tent could accommodate large audiences, if you could get them. The thing is, they were doing Benjamin Britton's The Turn of the Screw in that tent and couldn't fill it at all.

ROBERT BROWN: It was too far out for those in town.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, so even though they did have all kinds of promotional gimmicks like running a boat up the Charles, this was obviously not the best long range thing you could do. And, the ICA had to move from there to quarters in the New England Mutual Hall. New England Mutual Life Insurance then became there landlord.

ROBERT BROWN: In that sense, it was the merchants who bailed them out.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not "bailed them out," kept them going, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: During those years, Sue Thurman was director.

ROBERT TAYLOR: She was the director, yeah. She took it on, and she was the first woman, I believe, in that kind of a post. But, everybody else had turned it down. It was a disasterous time and there was a post that contained all kinds of built-in trouble for the administrator, and that's what happened with her, I'm afraid.

ROBERT BROWN: She really couldn't do much.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I don't think she really was able to do very much. I remember that when I was there and she was the director, we'd had a Canadian show. She brought down four Canadian artists: Guido

ROBERT TAYLOR: Molinari, John Tousignant, I've forgotten the other two. They're well known. Anthony Lorraine, I think, the filmmaker, was one of them. But, she brought them down for a panel and we had an audience of six people in New England Life Hall. That was how difficult it was at that time. I think if you did a similar thing today that had the proper kind of publicity and everything else, that you would be able to attract--The idea was that these were artists that were going to be shown at Expo in Montreal, but not enough people had gone up to Expo to get interested in them.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, this perhaps gets to a more fundamental thing, with Boston sort of turned off to art in the '60's, to a degree.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I don't think you had the public for it that you do today because one of the things that has occurred, in terms of the mushrooming of art schools, has been the fact that while it hasn't made art any better, or hasn't certainly increased standards or anything of that kind. What it has been to create an audience, people who consume art, rather than artists per se.

ROBERT BROWN: One erstwhile student, a one time artist, and their family and their friends.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right. That's right exactly. So that it has created an environment that's certainly broader than it was forty years ago. Forty years ago, you had an elitist group of people. I don't think of them as elitist, but let's say they were people who had common interests, more or less. I can't imagine somebody like Swetzoff or possibly Boris, you know,

ROBERT TAYLOR: flourishing in the present climate. There's just too much competition.

ROBERT BROWN: And their method of work was too painstaking. They weren't about to change just to suit fashion.

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, I don't think they were. No, not at all. They were more like private collectors. You know, somebody like Charles Childs, for example, would be more like that.

ROBERT BROWN: A little bit more like the salesman. Well, he was, I guess, reasonably flourishing in the time we've been speaking of.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right, and Charles gallery was one of the places where one would go to cover the scene. He had been at Goodspeed's earlier and then had opened his own gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he sort of a gallery of interest, or had he mainly dealt with earlier things?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Uh, yeah. Every now and then he would have a show of an artist who should be covered. Let's say Agnes Abbot, the watercolorist, was one of his artists. Again, I think he did Kupferman [Lawrence] at one time, and George Biddle. His artists really tended to be oriented toward graphics and toward books, literature.

ROBERT BROWN: His earlier training. Did you find him, was he pretty open to comment?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh yeah, he was delightful. I've had many long conversations with him.

ROBERT BROWN: It's impossible to have a short one. [they laugh] You also,

ROBERT TAYLOR: at that time, had been witnessing the last years of a, perhaps

ROBERT BROWN: one of Boston's oldest galleries Doll and Richards. Which was pretty much a shadow of itself by the '50's and '60's.

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was a shadow of itself when I first started to go there. It had lost a good deal of its steam, but it was still showing people like Eliot Porter, the watercolorist--the photographer's brother, Eliot Porter.

ROBERT BROWN: [corrects RT] Fairfield Porter.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, there was Fairfield Porter. Who else was at Doll and Richards? Oh, I did see from very interesting nineteenth century art there by minor Americans of the nineteenth century. They would show people who were long since out of style, but who painted in the style of, let's say, the Guild of Boston Artists something circa 1910. William Stanley Haseltine was, you remember, one of their discoveries.
They showed Ives Gammell there. It was much more "old Boston" oriented. Vose was relatively cosmopolitan. But, Mr. Zoehler was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Wendell Zoehler.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Is he still alive?

ROBERT BROWN: He may be.

ROBERT TAYLOR: He was there, and there was a lot of squabbling usually when I went in there, between the staff. You would hear about all kinds of disputation going on in the place. But, it certainly had--every now and then one could get and interesting glimpse into the artistic past really, at Doll and

ROBERT TAYLOR: Richards. It belonged to that period in Boston when things were fairly stagnant and nothing happened.

ROBERT BROWN: And then when it happened, something happened that [Doll and Richards] didn't move into.

ROBERT TAYLOR: No. They weren't able, I think, to assess what was really going on, and when there old customers began dying off...I don't know where they would go.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned in passing, the Copley Society and the Guild of Boston Artists. Would those have been cooperative organizations of artists that merited your attention, you thought? Were they involved with critics, or were they pretty much out of base with you.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not the Copley Society. The Copley Society has come back more vigorously in recent years. In those years, it was simply a quasi--mainly amateur artists who weren't going to take it too seriously. The Guild, on the other hand, consisted of professional artists, and they would have shows in their back room, as they still do. And you would see, people like Forrest Orr there, or A. Lassell Ripley, or Marguerite Pearson, or whoever it may have been. Sometimes, you

would see Paul Sample there, and sometimes they would have interesting shows. Most of the time not.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the Museum of Fine Arts in the '50's? I mean, when did you first get to know it? I mean, you started working in the art field only in the early '50's, right?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Right, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that part of your steady beat?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I had first gone to the museum of course when I was a child. It became part of my steady beat when I first started to do it. In conjunction with the museum itself, as with so many other things that were going on, I never actually had anything to do with the actual workings of the museum or anything of that kind. I would just go up there, and you could go in, you didn't have to pay anything in those days. You'd just go into the museum and see the show, then go back and write about it. It was only when Perry Rathbone took over that I began to see the museum from the "inside" as it were.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that happen? Through him?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Perry was much more oriented toward publicity and I think he was a wonderful museum director because of his enthusiasm for the art. I don't think he was necessarily intended to be a scholar, I think what he intended to be was an evangelist, and he was very good at it. A man of great charm, sensibility, and somebody who would get across that message to them. And I think until the disaster of the Raphael he had been a fine museum director there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he hit the ground running when he got to Boston?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He did, because he went out of his way to charm everybody and to charm the press, and he took some pains to do so, and he made it important. He made it something that somebody like Dr. Edgehill, a Siennese scholar, would have just let stay there [remain the same] as an institution. Perry moved it as

ROBERT TAYLOR: an institution, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: What are some of the first things that you recall about his time?

ROBERT TAYLOR: A conference on art, which struck me as being quite interesting, because I found myself seated at a table--it was an all day affair. It was in a sense like a symposium, only it wasn't a symposium. And I found myself seated at a table with Naum Gabo, who you know, I never would have seen him or heard his theories, or anything of that kind, that is--direct from him, if Perry hadn't given this. He was active, very much active in that sense, in bringing together various aspects of the art community. Of course, like most museum directors, he didn't show local art, but there he was.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was a running point with local artists.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. I mean certainly when Merrill Rupelle was there, he didn't do it either.

ROBERT BROWN: Perry pioneered the use of television, of televising shows.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, in fact he asked me if I wanted to do that, but I didn't want to do it. I'm essentially a writer, and I didn't want to get involved. But then he got Brian O'Doherty and that was wonderful. It worked out very well. I remember when that was being launched. That whole idea of the television was a new one then for the museum, and he was very receptive to it. I think it was the kind of idea that he would respond to immediately.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it have, as far as you could see, any impact, much impact?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not as far as I could see, but that doesn't mean that there were...certainly Brian was wonderful at it. How good you were as the host or the describer, or whatever you call the person, didn't really matter. I don't think it created that much of an audience, to tell you the truth. To me, it does not have the impact, even today it's very difficult to present art in any kind of entertainment way on television without somehow debasing it. Even if it's not a question of vulgarizing it, you're not getting the audience for it. I mean, a documentary of an artist may have some effect. I think what's had more effect on the total scene has been the proliferation of things that are connected with art in some way. The growth of the bureaucratic aspect of it, the growth of schools, all this has created a much bigger public I

think then just watching a television show.

ROBERT BROWN: So it's not necessarily through the televising of art, or the televising of a museum show, nor is it necessarily the publicizing of what's at a museum...

ROBERT TAYLOR: I don't think so, no.

ROBERT BROWN: It's been just indirectly through the [bureaucracy].

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, I would say by and large. Of course, you know, there are some artists who, for example Perry with Andrew Wyeth. I mean he had lines standing out on Huntington Avenue, which I haven't seen since that time. I mean, now we do it with Ticketron and all that. Certainly, somebody like that is already in the public imagination, so you don't really have

ROBERT TAYLOR: ...to sell Wyeth.

ROBERT BROWN: But those you have to sell now couldn't be sold in those days. Wyeth was the exception.

ROBERT TAYLOR: You could, for example, sell Van Gogh very easily almost any time. You had Kirk Douglass who was Van Gogh [RT laughs]. There were certain artists who are easy to get across and others who aren't. At that particular time, you could, artists might respond to Claes Oldenburg. I remember they were talking about him at that time, but nobody else in the general public was. Or Jasper Johns, Jasper Johns is known today because of a whole combination of circumstances. His career has coincided with a whole lot of media exposure. I still don't think he's a popular artist, in the sense that Wyeth is.

ROBERT BROWN: But don't you think, however, that you'd get pretty sizable crowds?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think so, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: The general Time and Newsweek rising of some of these figures.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Don't forget "Is he the world's richest artist?," or "Is he America's best artist?" in Life magazine for Jackson Pollack. And then underneath that the prices of his pictures. The whole thing, you see, was linked up with commerce. That is to say, if people pay these prices for Pollack he must be good.

ROBERT BROWN: So we'll go see him. He's one of the icons of the day.

ROBERT TAYLOR: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you thought at all--this was just beginning in the '60's [about art being linked with commerce]?

ROBERT TAYLOR: That was just beginning and you certainly didn't have that in the previous years. I mean, I saw a lot of things actually during the early part of the war, down at MOMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York]. I don't think that these were, you know, mass things. I wonder how many people went there. You know, I remember that Lumier there at the Museum of Modern Art with the greatest of affection, but I wonder how many other people do [RT laughs]. And whether it ever had any mass appeal. Hard to say, you know, what popularity really consists of.

ROBERT BROWN: You covered also, in the later '60's, the turmoil which affected also the art world, or at least the art world created for itself.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Which?

ROBERT BROWN: Anti-war, alternative this and that.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh yeah, yes. Well, I remember again the Canadian show that I was doing for Sue Thurman. We brought down the editor of Arts Canada for the panel, a man named Barry Newman, I think. He didn't turn up for the panel because he was arrested for protesting the Vietnam War, en route to Boston. He had indulged in a demonstration at the Toronto airport.

ROBERT BROWN: But what about at the Museum of Fine Arts, the men's room was

occupied and that sort of thing.

ROBERT TAYLOR: [coughing] That's right, that's right.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you make of that? Did you write about that sort of thing?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I didn't. That happened actually at a time when I was between the ICA and the Boston Globe, and so I didn't really cover it. I think it's a very symbolic kind of a action that arose out of the frustration of local artists and their inablity to find outlets. And I think that was the reason for it.

ROBERT BROWN: It was not something however then embraced by the Museum, really. Did they give them, they gave them briefly I think some showing here and there.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah. It didn't have any media effect. I think it's had a long range effect though. I think that, even though, bad as it may be today, I still think there's more opportunity then there was, at least to show the work.

ROBERT BROWN: You had to, at the end of the '60's, early '70's then cover the Raphael?

ROBERT TAYLOR: That I covered, yeah. In fact, I went to Rome and interviewed the man who was involved in the whole thing.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean the police?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Siviaro [Rudolfo Siviero] was his name. He was in charge of the export of antiquities, or he was the policeman whose beat was to see that no Italian antiquities left the country. Well, I think it was undertaken with the best motive in the world. Again, I think Perry's motives were unexceptionable. He was doing it for the museum, but he didn't take into

ROBERT TAYLOR: account the fact that it was a crime. It was a crime under Italian law, and you can't take out a Raphael in Swarzenski's suitcase with a false-bottom and expect anything but trouble lying ahead. Of course, when they unveiled it here there was immediately a row about the whole thing. Because of course it was recognized as being something that Bossi [Ildebrando Bossi, Italian art dealer], who was the black-marketeer involved in the whole thing, had stolen. Then, the money went into a Swiss bank account, never seen again. It was just catastrophic for Perry, and it was too bad it happened to Hans Swarzenski whose career was I think blighted by this. I mean, as Medieval historian. Behind this again loomed the trustee who was involved in it, and that's Robert Goulet [means John Goelet], described by Perry as a vigneron, which he was, but also was a--and still is I think- holds large tracts of Manhattan Island. I think he was encouraging them to do this. But I think the whole thing was done out of naivete, more than anything else. How can you expect them to assume that a Raphael, of all things, is going to suddenly turn up at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts when it was stolen off a wall in Florence? Impossible. I think, again, that that whole thing shouldn't have happened, but of course Perry's career was wrecked on that show.

ROBERT BROWN: And it marred the centennial...

ROBERT TAYLOR: ...of the museum, who wanted to have something smashing to go with the centennial.

ROBERT BROWN: I wonder if Perry also thought as you did, perhaps, that as you said, the Boston art scene was rather restricted in the '60's by debt, for example.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think he thought, was Perry then somewhat of a community spirit?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, and I think we all regarded him this way, and I still would. I think that he was very community minded. But the problem, from a journalistic point of view, was that you couldn't feel that way about art that was going on. I found out about this story, you know, with the Raphael right away. I went to, again it was just before I was covering art for the Globe. I was working for them, but not covering art.

ROBERT BROWN: And some informer called the paper, or called you, or?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Ah, yeah, somebody at the Tavern Club as a matter of fact and told me about it. That's a jungle telegraph down there. They told me this and I went to the then- arts editor of the Globe and he wouldn't print it, on the grounds that you could do this because it was bad for the community. He sat on one of that committees in fact at the MFA, which would be a real conflict of interest, but he quashed

the story. We didn't run
that story until it had gotten out of hand. I couldn't get to Winship with the story because there was a chain of command at the newspaper. I mean, even if you know that these things are happening, that the excessioning is happening, in those days you couldn't. Of course, you can now. I mean, it would

ROBERT TAYLOR: ....be the first kind of thing, because art is regarded journalistically today. It would be the first thing that would happen. But no, he effectively quashed it and sat on it and I just gave up. But then, Tom Winship, also a member of the Tavern Club, heard the same rumor, and said, "What are we doing about Perry Rathbone? You know, he's been strip- searched at customs, you know, and what's going on here?" Well, what was going on was out of hand by then, so we ran the story. I don't think Perry, of course, was very happy with it. But, it's like anything else, you develope relationships if you're covering something exclusively and you hate to do this. I think he probably regarded it as a betrayal. There was no other way of handling it.

ROBERT BROWN: And when you went and talked with Siviero in Rome, that must have underlined the severity of this thing, sort of no nonsense.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah. He was a policeman who wanted his Raphael back.

ROBERT BROWN: Right.

ROBERT TAYLOR: And who would have willingly had the two of them prosecuted
had he been able to do so, but it did go back to Italy anyway.

ROBERT BROWN: You ran, in fact, some expensive stories on it back then at that time.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, at that time. I was forced to resort, as I recall, even
before when I knew about it...there was a magazine called Bostonian and I was forced to do it in this magazine because I couldn't get it into the Globe.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it become a fairly big story through that magazine?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, by the time the magazine, see magazines have a long lead time. [RT laughs] By the time it [the story] appeared, it was all over the place.

ROBERT BROWN: When you had it in the Globe, when Winship and the Globe broke the news, or had it been broken elsewhere as well?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I think it had been broken in the Times of London, because,
I've forgotten, somebody from the Courtauld Institute had done an extensive piece about the history of the painting. Then, they sent Peter Hobkirk and their investigative
reporters down to Italy and Switzerland to look into all this, and found out about the Bossi connection and Perry and Hans Swarzenski and the other things. So the whole thing came out in a rather unsavory way.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the impact of your stories immediately?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I don't think the...I don't think our stories had the...
I mean it was simply to inform the public of what was going on. But, the impact of it was, well, as you know, Perry resigned not long after that. But I don't think that was the
impact of our stories. That was the impact of a cumulate of stories that were happening everywhere, in the New York Times and in the American press.

ROBERT BROWN: Well then you did follow then I guess what followed, the
denouement of Perry's resignation and so forth.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yeah, and then came Rueppel after that.

ROBERT BROWN: And you were involved, rather, on top of the search for a
successor to Perry?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Um hmm. Well, I didn't know about that until later on. Of
course, Cornelius Vermeule filled in for about eight months.

ROBERT BROWN: The curator of classical art.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yes, as the director. Then, Merrill Rueppel came in and there
was no reason for us to have any kind of vendetta against Rupelle. I mean, he came in from Texas and so forth. In fact, George Seybolt had taken me to breakfast at the Harvard Club, along with the art editor who would

quash the story on the Museum.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this Driscoll, the art editor?

ROBERT TAYLOR: No, this was Greg MacDonald. He served on the education committee and was strongly in favor of promoting the museum, which I think a laudable ambition, but you can't, it doesn't create any critical ground. Anyway, Seybolt had me to breakfast at the Harvard Club, and I know why he had me for breakfast, because I knew it then--because he wanted to leak to the Globe the news of Rueppel's arrival on the scene. Well, fine, if he wanted to do that, it was okay with me because I assumed he would do this again with subsequent stories that went on. Well, Rueppel of course was...he then proceeded into his tenure with the museum. He was obviously George Seybolt's man in the museum and he was there. As I recall, the powers that be at that point were

ROBERT TAYLOR: Seybolt and John Coolidge and maybe Nelly, I think was there at that time. Suddenly, we started getting all these stories from curators about the way in which the museum was being run by Rueppel. These things first came in as complaints, then you start getting phone calls from people who presumably are in the scene somewhere, and you're forced to follow up on them. And in this case the accusation was being made against Rueppel that he was running the museum like the ham company--the Armour Ham Company--whatever company--"

ROBERT BROWN: Deviled Ham Company.

ROBERT TAYLOR: They had, the curators had for example been all herded into an auditorium where they saw a new movie on deviled ham and how it's made. Now, this is Cornelius' report to me, and Jan Fontein had his bags packed and was prepared to go back to the Rijksmuseum. There was unrest in the museum, to put it mildly. So, we ran a series that said essentially that, because this had been leaked again to us. We found that in the course of this, while we were preparing it, Seybolt had short-circuited the search committee that the museum had sent out because he happened to like Rueppel who was in town for an art director's and museum director's convention, and who had come up to the Museum of Fine Arts and had spoken with Seybolt who happened to be in. After twenty minutes, he decided he was the man for the job. In fact, he said this on tape, and we had the tape. That is, we had the tape until Otile McManus, who was working on the story

ROBERT TAYLOR: with me, decided that she'd have to go down to Dallas to see what Rueppel's reputation was in Dallas. She grabbed the tape and it was the tape with Seybolt on it. [RT laughs] She erased the tape! I had to, for subsequent six or seven months, say that this did indeed exist, that we have it. Of course Seybolt knew it existed, but we could not produce any evidence because the tape had been erased. It was like Watergate that was occurring about the same time.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, your having--there was no problem with your having the tape for the time being, was there?

ROBERT TAYLOR: He wanted us to surrender the tape; we wouldn't surrender the tape.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see.

ROBERT TAYLOR: We wouldn't surrender the tape because we said it contained this damning admission. Now, he knew damn well that it did too. But, on the other hand, he wanted the tape and by that time, we had erased the tape. We had no way of backing up our allegations when that happened. I had heard it once, and he said this, and of course we had sent a reporter up to interview Seybolt at the museum, and he was saying, "No, you shouldn't say anything against Merrill Rueppel because, you know, he's one of the most dynamic men in the museum world today." Then, he explained why he was dynamic. He had come, from the time he had first set eyes on Rupelle that he had known this after twenty minutes. Well, all you had to do was to put this together with the search committee

ROBERT TAYLOR: which was then going around and interviewing people, to see what happened.

ROBERT BROWN: Looks dynamic to me [both men laugh].

ROBERT TAYLOR: Yep, yes.

END OF INTERVIEW

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