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Oral history interview with Anne Rorimer,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Anne Rorimer on November 15 and 16, 2010. The interview took place at the Artist's home in Chicago, Illinois, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G Foundation.

Anne Rorimer and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The transcript has been heavily edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Anne Rorimer at her home in Chicago on November 15, 2010, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Anne, I'd like to start by asking you to talk about your family. And in fact, go back to your grandparents or even further if you wish, and then talk about your parents, and then we'll get to when you were born—

ANNE RORIMER: Oh, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: —but starting back with your family

MS. RORIMER: Well, let's see. Starting with grandparents, I didn't know the two probably more interesting grandparents on either side. My grandfather—I'm just actually starting to do some research about him because he was fairly prominent. I think you would call him an interior designer for—

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MS. RORIMER: His name was Louis, L-O-U-I-S, Rorimer. And as we're sitting here, I'm looking at a book written about him.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was he born?

MS. RORIMER: In Cleveland, Ohio. His firm was called Rorimer Brooks Studios, so Rorimer, as in my name, Brooks—B-R-O-O-K-S. And maybe I should just say now—because people get this wrong in all kinds of recent writings—that he changed his name to "Rorimer" from "Rohrheimer," which I can't even spell now, but it had two Hs in it.

MS. RICHARDS: R-O-H-R—

MS. RORIMER: heimer—H-E-I-M-E-R.

MS. RICHARDS: Looks good.

MS. RORIMER: And it wasn't because of being Jewish. He changed his name in 1917, at the time of much anti-German sentiment because of World War I, as well as to shorten it for business purposes.

MS. RICHARDS: So he was born in Cleveland, and his—

MS. RORIMER: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And his father, your great-grandfather, was also born in Cleveland?

MS. RORIMER: I believe he emigrated from Germany. He, my grandfather, that is, was the youngest of seven children, all of whom kept the name Rohrheimer.

MS. RICHARDS: So he was an interior decorator—interior designer.

MS. RORIMER: Designer. I wouldn't want to say "decorator" because he designed furniture. I can show you one or two pieces. I think his real love was the Modernism of the '20s, '30s Art Deco, but he was working in a very conservative environment in Cleveland. There's research to be done here, and there's—by other people—and there have been some little exhibitions recently in Cleveland, and a certain amount of interest in his career is brewing.

MS. RICHARDS: And who did he marry? Who is your grandmother?

MS. RORIMER: And he married Granny. Her name was Edith Joseph, one of 13 children—yes, the good old days—from Cincinnati, and—

MS. RICHARDS: How did they meet?

MS. RORIMER: In Cincinnati.

MS. RICHARDS: Was she involved professionally in any field?

MS. RORIMER: I'm not sure, exactly. So where were we? On grandparents?

MS. RICHARDS: So he married Edith Joseph. I was asking if she had a profession. Before we go to your father's generation, let's talk about your mother's side of the family.

MS. RORIMER: Mother's. Oh, okay. So I knew my grandfather, Edward Paul Serrell—S-E-R-R-E-L. But I didn't know my grandmother, although she was pretty interesting. We still have some paintings she did in the Impressionist manner, and, actually, they are really very good. Also to mention, she was a friend of the artist Pauline Palmer here in Chicago, and, according to my mother, she founded an arts school in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Something to look into at some point.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MS. RORIMER: Her name was Otilie, O-T-T-I-L-I-E. Now, I forget her maiden name, but it will come to me later. She painted under the name of Otilie Serrell, if I'm correct. I just remembered that her maiden name was Hallensleben.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did they live?

MS. RORIMER: In New Jersey, so—in the house that my grandfather built himself.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did he do professionally?

MS. RORIMER: He had some sort of a silk business, but I think he got ruined in the Depression, a silk business that came through the family from the 17th century. So the Serrell family is pretty interesting, too. The Serrells were originally Huguenots.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they come directly to New Jersey from Europe?

MS. RORIMER: From France.

MS. RICHARDS: How did your mother and father meet?

MS. RORIMER: Now, we're to my parents? Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. Well, I don't want to rush you.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, but that's easy. My mother liked to tell the story of commuting after her B.A. at Wellesley [College] into New York City, where she had a job at the Metropolitan Museum as a secretary to the head of the library then, Mr.—his name is escaping me.

MS. RICHARDS: She grew up in New Jersey and went to Wellesley.

MS. RORIMER: She went to Wellesley. She actually did an M.A. at the Institute of Fine Arts [New York University] with all the old famous people, you know, [Erwin] Panofsky, for example. And Robert Goldwater was one of her classmates, all the people that would be either one of my professors or be very well known in the field. And—oh, so one day she came into the library—no, I'm getting it reversed. One day, my father came into the library.

MS. RICHARDS: At the Metropolitan—

MS. RORIMER: At the Metropolitan Museum, where he was a curator. He went—am I jumping? He went directly from Harvard B.A. right to the Met, to work in the decorative arts department, which I think included medieval art at the time. Anyway, one day, my father went into the library looking for a book, and there was my mother, instead of the older woman with a bun who was usually there. And, apparently, so the story goes, he backed up to sort of look—I don't know—and fell down some stairs. They didn't get married for about 12 years after that because he was very sought after and very—

MS. RICHARDS: By women or by just other professionals?

MS. RORIMER: No, I would say simply that he was invited out a great deal as a good-looking, available bachelor. And so they met at the Met, and then my mother did work down at Princeton [University] at the Index for Christian Art. They stayed in touch over the years, and you can read all this—somebody can read all this in my mother's oral history that she did for the Met when she was in her 80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have aunts and uncles? Did your parents have brothers or sisters that you knew and were close to?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yes. I had my father's sister, my Aunt Louise, who was married to Samuel Dushkin, who—

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. RORIMER: Like Pushkin, but with D. D-U-S-H-K-I-N. In high school I was going to do his bio of sorts because he was extremely interesting—he was Stravinsky's accompanist. And he had amazing stories—an amazing raconteur. Too bad you're not recording him, but he died at least 20, 30 years ago, at an advanced age. And so I grew up hearing quite a lot of anecdotal stories about Stravinsky. I hung out with him a fair amount in high school.

MS. RICHARDS: And your mother's brothers or sisters?

MS. RORIMER: There were two brothers. One was a rancher in Colorado, who was killed early on in an auto accident when I was a child. And then her other brother was a doctor in Greenwich in Connecticut.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MS. RORIMER: Howard Serrell.

MS. RICHARDS: So it took him 12 years, but your father and mother finally got married. And they lived in New York to start out with?

MS. RORIMER: Yes, because my father had been living in New York while working at the Met and developing the Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you the first-born?

MS. RORIMER: Yes, three years before my brother.

MS. RICHARDS: What's his name.

MS. RORIMER: Louis, as in our grandfather.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were born in New York City?

MS. RORIMER: I was born in New York City in a snowstorm, and yes—

MS. RICHARDS: And you went through elementary school and high school in New York City?

MS. RORIMER: I spent kindergarten at [the] Spence [School], and then I went to the Brearley School grades one through 12. And did you want to know about how rigorous the Brearley School was?

MS. RICHARDS: If you'd like.

MS. RORIMER: —which is where I guess I learned to write. It was a very rigorous—

MS. RICHARDS: Are you—

MS. RORIMER: —program.

MS. RICHARDS: —saying it was also —

MS. RORIMER: So it was good.

MS. RICHARDS: —very competitive? Is that what you were —

MS. RORIMER: Competitive, well—

MS. RICHARDS: —alluding to?

MS. RORIMER: I think I was just—there were some very good students, but no, I never felt competitive, I don't think. Competitive just with myself, I'd say.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were very young in elementary school and, well, in the early years at Brearley, was there something you knew as your favorite subject in school?

MS. RORIMER: Let me think. At the time, I liked science the best.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any teachers at Brearley who were particularly influential to you?

MS. RORIMER: I was just trying to remember all that. There were some excellent, excellent, memorable teachers. It's hard to name names. There was the one, though—well, there was the Latin teacher, Ms. Tolles.

MS. RORIMER: T-O-L-E-S?

MS. RORIMER: T-O-L-L-E-S. Oh, now, there was another one—what was her name; oh, my gosh, I should have thought about this ahead of time—who tended to often call on me in class to translate the *Aeneid* by sight. She thought I was so excellent at reading Latin. I thus was a little bit the teacher's pet in Latin class even though I didn't particularly like Latin any more than anyone else did. There were just some wonderful teachers. Let's see—there was the one—oh, I can see her now.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RORIMER: Mrs. Hearst, that was her name. She took me aside one day and started shouting at me and telling me I was a mouse, that I had so much to offer and I was so smart and blah, blah, and much smarter than anyone in the—well, maybe not anyone else in the class, but that I was a mouse. And she kind of roared at me, so to say, to tell me I was a mouse and I better just come out of my shell and my shyness.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you like her for it or hate her for it?

MS. RORIMER: I was just taken aback, I guess. So I'm just thinking back to Mrs. Hearst telling me I was a mouse. There were other teachers worthy of mention in my memoires. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Were there friends who you maintained friendships with long after?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. I'm in touch with classmates who at the time I wasn't particularly friendly with. And then there were really good friends at the time with whom I'm still in touch. For example, there is someone named Ciannait, whose father was the first director of the Guggenheim, before he went to Houston.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell the name?

MS. RORIMER: It's a Gaelic name.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you —

MS. RORIMER: C-I-A-N-N-A-I-T Sweeney.

MS. RICHARDS: With an E-Y, right?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. She's married to someone named Alan Tait, A-L-L-A-N [sic] T-A-I-T, who's a prominent architectural historian. I could also mention Abigail Angell. Actually, her brother wrote the book I have in the other room, Roger Angell, who wrote about—

MS. RICHARDS: Is it A-N-G-E-L?

MS. RORIMER: A-N-G-E-two Ls. And—

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a time in high school when you started to be particularly interested in art history?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, heavens.

MS. RICHARDS: You must have been going to the museums—

MS. RORIMER: —we didn't have art history.

MS. RICHARDS: —throughout your life.

MS. RORIMER: Well, do you want to hear about the turn to being interested in art history?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, we're in high school. If it didn't happen—

MS. RORIMER: But this was high school.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Sure.

MS. RORIMER: I was supposed to have lunch with my father. He forgot he had another appointment—he double-booked himself, not only with me but somebody else as well. So I was assigned to take Professor Whitney Stoddard from Williams [College] around in his wheelchair, because he'd broken his leg skiing, and—

MS. RICHARDS: Who assigned you?

MS. RORIMER: My father. At this point, my father was the director of the Metropolitan Museum. So I took Whitney Stoddard around in the wheelchair all through the painting galleries—and we went from Petrus Christus all the way to [Josef] Albers. I don't think—

MS. RICHARDS: I forgot to ask you, on the record, your father's name.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I—we didn't really talk about my parents. We jumped from—

MS. RICHARDS: True.

MS. RORIMER: Did we?

MS. RICHARDS: True.

MS. RORIMER: And I'm happy to back up, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Let's back up for a second.

MS. RORIMER: But let me finish this story.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, wonderful.

MS. RORIMER: No? Because—

MS. RICHARDS: Whitney Stoddard, yes.

MS. RORIMER: Whitney Stoddard. You might have heard of him—he was a well-known, even beloved, professor at Williams, along with Lane Faison.

MS. RICHARDS: Spelling, Faison?

MS. RORIMER: F-A-I-S-O-N, who died relatively recently at age 98 or 99. Whitney predeceased him. So I'm taking him around in the wheelchair, and it was just—

MS. RICHARDS: Taking him around the Met?

MS. RORIMER: The Met, because he wanted to look at the collection that day, and he could take advantage of this kid pushing him around. I was probably in ninth or 10th grade; I was about 14 or 15. And I never before then had realized that art was so interesting. And I've heard since that Professor Stoddard inspired a lot of his students to study art history.

So my parents never tried to push me into art. I loved the museum as an atmosphere, but I didn't particularly want to have anything to do with art per se. I was going to be a curator in a natural history museum. That was my goal, a pre-college goal, and—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you envision what area you'd specialize in? Anthropology or some other —

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I had a romanticized idea of what that would involve. I loved looking at the gems and minerals and fossils and—I wasn't that specific. I just knew I liked going to the natural history museum more than the art museum. That was just like going to daddy's workplace.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. How old were you—what period of your life was it that he was at the Met? He was at the Met for about 10 years?

MS. RORIMER: From 1927 until he died in '66, minus several years during the time he was a Monuments and Fine Arts & Archives officer in the War. And he became director of the Met in '53, I believe.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. We'll go back to your father and mother for a moment, and ask you when and where he was born.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, okay. This is a good lead-in since we're mentioning his directorship. So let's see. He was born in Cleveland.

MS. RICHARDS: And his full name?

MS. RORIMER: James. Do you need the middle name? It's Joseph. He grew up in Cleveland, went to Harvard, went to the Met. And I—I'm not going to get into his history at this point.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. And did your mother continue working as an art historian? She got her master's at the Institute, you said?

MS. RORIMER: She got a master's at the Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Did she continue after having children?

MS. RORIMER: Then she—I would have to go find her obituary to remember, because I wrote it all up with the right dates, but she went to the Sorbonne at about the moment the Second World War broke out. This was presumably after her secretarial job at the Met. And then she went to Princeton to take a job at the Index of Christian Art. After my brother and I were born, she pretty much had her hands full, being a museum director's wife, with many social obligations, including giving dinner parties at home for illustrious guests.

MS. RICHARDS: So would you say there were very high expectations in terms of scholarship in your family, with your father and your mother's achievements?

MS. RORIMER: Not stated, by any means. Probably just my own self-manufactured pressure, aided by the high academic standards at school. I'd say there were more expectations from the school than the parents, as far as I can remember.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you go to college, and how did you decide?

MS. RORIMER: I went to Bryn Mawr College.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide on that school?

MS. RORIMER: Well, many of the people in my class were applying to—at the time, Radcliffe [College], and my mother wanted me to go to Wellesley, and I did get in. But I chose Bryn Mawr since it was closer to New York City—I was a homebody, in a way.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there things that you did all through growing up in the summers or after school, extracurricular activities or summer activities that were important to you?

MS. RORIMER: The most memorable summer activity was working at the [Museum of] Natural History. That was in high school. And one of my assignments was to sandpaper a plaster *Dinichthys* until its surface was smooth. I doggedly applied myself hour after hour to the task..

MS. RICHARDS: Can you spell that?

MS. RORIMER: I have no idea. It's a prehistoric huge fish. So that was in high school.

Mainly summers were spent on a family farm.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it an urban or rural kind of atmosphere?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, country. Country, totally country. Wilderness at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a working farm?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. I was surrounded by farmers. I had only one friend that had any idea of the same sort of—

MS. RICHARDS: A local girl?

MS. RORIMER: A daughter of friends of my parents. And so during summers I was mostly surrounded by people

who knew nothing about art. I had a split kind of existence that revolved around a sophisticated New York existence, with curators from the museum coming for dinner on many occasions, and then summers just hanging out, helping milk cows or clean barns. Oh, I did go to camp for two summers. I was sent off to camp because it was thought I needed to mix with people my own age more readily.

MS. RICHARDS: So you said that when you were a teenager and took Whitney Stoddard around the Met, that was the beginning of your thinking about pursuing the field of art history.

MS. RORIMER: No, no, no. I never thought of pursuing a field. It just was enlightening, the fact that there might be something worthy of consideration about paintings or sculpture.

So then—well, fast-forward to what was I going to major in, and wise Mother said, "Well, why don't you major in art history?" I did terribly in geology, which I thought was going to be my major. I wasn't so good at understanding the Wissahickon mica schist—and I can't pretend to spell any of that—around Philadelphia. So my mother had said, "Well, how about art history? You can always use it." By which she meant, you'll always know what you're looking at if you go to a museum.

So I walked into Professor Mitchell, Charles Mitchell's office and said, "I'd like to major in art history." And he said, "Well, will you be going to graduate school, Ms. Rorimer?" And I said, "Oh, I hope not." I don't know if I actually said that, but he didn't admit people who weren't going to be incredibly serious about the field, and so I might have waffled a little bit.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his specialty?

MS. RORIMER: Renaissance. So I ultimately majored in art history, just so that I'd have something to use, at least in some personal way.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a minor in anything?

MS. RORIMER: I don't know if we did minors. I can't remember at all. Maybe. I don't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: And were there particular professors at Bryn Mawr who were particularly influential in terms of what you ended up focusing on in art history?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I wanted to do Modern, which—

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think you did?

MS. RORIMER: And that was early to be wanting to do Modern in those days. So I was always a little ahead of my time, which has had its down side, actually. Anyway, I ended up doing Renaissance—no, well, we had to do special themes senior year. So I did Renaissance tomb sculpture.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you end up wanting to focus on the Modern—

MS. RORIMER: Well, actually, to backtrack for a minute, I did get very interested in Modern art in high school, not to pursue as a career, but to understand why everyone was so down on it. When I say everyone, the people in my life, like curators in earlier fields. And actually, really till recently, even colleagues 10 years ago were still laughing at the art I was writing about and that I was considering to be a scholarly endeavor.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you a regular visitor to the Museum of Modern Art?

MS. RORIMER: To some degree—

MS. RICHARDS: Or the Guggenheim?

MS. RORIMER: At the Guggenheim, I remember going to the Kandinsky exhibition. In high school, one didn't get out that much because of all the homework we had. But back when I was in high school, there was a curator at the Met named Robert Beverly Hale, and he was doing paintings, abstract paintings. This was back in the—well, ages ago.

MS. RICHARDS: Fifties?

MS. RORIMER: Late '50s or early '60s, for sure. He was making paintings with a long stick. So he made these paintings that rather horrified many people. I thought, "Oh, that's so fascinating, a different way of painting, and I want to know why he decided to do that." Also in high school, I somehow remember a Theodoros Stamos exhibition that I was taken to—



MS. RICHARDS: Stamos.

MS. RORIMER: Stamos. What did I say? Stamos. And a good friend of the family, a curator, took me to it, I think, and railed against how terrible abstract art was. So I immediately thought it might have some interest.

MS. RICHARDS: In high school, do you remember specific artists who you really loved or were intrigued by?

MS. RORIMER: I don't remember specific artists except Pollock. Are we into college?

MS. RICHARDS: So, sure. When you were at Bryn Mawr, you went back to the city during breaks. Do you remember going to galleries?

MS. RORIMER: I would go to the Leo Castelli Gallery. That was one I was particularly interested in, and I was totally fascinated by Pop art. Again, people were saying, "Oh, that's just neo-Dada. That's nothing new." And —

MS. RICHARDS: What about Abstract Expressionism even? You mentioned Pollock. De Kooning? Any of the others? Or was Pop art really the first—

MS. RORIMER: I think the Abstract—

MS. RICHARDS: —period that you personally felt akin to?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I was able—can I bring in Henry Geldzahler at this point? I was able to know Henry because he was hired as a young curator at the Met when I was in high school. He gave me a book on Duchamp, which I prize to this day. And, memorably, he took me to a Happening.

MS. RICHARDS: So he took you to Happenings?

MS. RORIMER: One Happening, at least. It might have been a famous one. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the artists who were participating in it?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I have no idea. But, maybe I could mention here that in college I wrote a paper on Roy Lichtenstein. And—

MS. RICHARDS: What was the imagery that you were focusing—

MS. RORIMER: My first art history paper on a contemporary artist was on Pollock. And at the time, that was considered quite advanced. What did you ask me? What was—

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember, when you were writing about Roy Lichtenstein, what was the period of work that he was doing at that point that you were writing about? That was relatively early in his career.

MS. RORIMER: Well, we're in the '60s. So I think I wrote about—there were landscapes and sunsets, and I specifically wrote on those, and I didn't get the greatest grade. But then when the prof lectured on Lichtenstein not long after, I thought to myself, Hey, I said that in my paper. In any event, my classmates had said, "Oh, you're going to write about that stuff?"

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Were there art history professors at Bryn Mawr who encouraged that interest in contemporary—

MS. RORIMER: Not really. They were mainly pushing medieval art and Baroque art and—well, actually, now that I'm thinking of it, there was a rather inspiring visiting professor. He was a Baroque specialist, and I forget when he died, but Stephen Pepper gave a fascinating seminar about contemporary art.

MS. RICHARDS: He spoke about contemporary art even though his specialty was the Baroque?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned that you didn't get involved in any of the political things that were happening in the '60s.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, you mean in the marches.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I just meant—I didn't say I didn't get involved in the political. I went to rallies, but not so much to marches, the way I did recently against the Iraq war.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated, you mentioned the fact that the head of the art department asked you if you'd go to graduate school, and you privately said to yourself, no. What did you think about going graduate school as soon as you graduated and after that?

MS. RORIMER: I didn't want to have any more academic ordeals. I wanted to get out and do something.

MS. RICHARDS: It seemed like you were very good academically. You were very strong.

MS. RORIMER: I was always at schools that were very academically demanding.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think that you wouldn't need a graduate degree professionally?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I hoped I wouldn't. Let's say that. I hoped. It was rather presumptuous. We're talking about the '70s, when you didn't necessarily have to have an advanced degree. There were people working at MoMA that only had B.A.s, not that many, but they were doing important exhibitions, like Alicia Legg doing Sol LeWitt—you know the Sol LeWitt show in the late '70s.

So—oh, graduate school. Anyway, I just thought I could somehow make my way and get hired somewhere or try—but—so I actually went to London.

MS. RICHARDS: Right after you graduated?

MS. RORIMER: After I graduated, because I wanted—I don't know —

MS. RICHARDS: Had you traveled in Europe before then?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. I had—

MS. RICHARDS: In college?

MS. RORIMER: In college a little bit by myself.

MS. RICHARDS: That's—

MS. RORIMER: I was adventurous.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. To go completely by yourself.

MS. RORIMER: My parents were—they let me go, but they were sort of aghast when I came back with scary stories. I guess scary to their ears, adventures.

MS. RICHARDS: When you went to Europe when you were an undergraduate, by yourself, did you go for the purpose of looking at art?

MS. RORIMER: Art. That was it, yeah. I went—I just combed the museums. I sort of had to look at everything, not so much Modern or contemporary. It was just—

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any particular places—

MS. RORIMER: —all these Masters.

MS. RICHARDS: —that were your absolute favorites?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, gosh. Certainly, I went to the Louvre and the Uffizi. I went to the main places. I was in Munich one time by myself over Christmas, not long after graduating from college, where I visited the Alte Pinakothek, for example.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated, you went to London?

MS. RORIMER: Yes, London.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you go thinking that it would be open-ended, and you didn't know how long you'd be staying?

MS. RORIMER: I went thinking that if it didn't work out, I could come home.

MS. RICHARDS: Work out in terms of getting a job?

MS. RORIMER: Getting something to do. And I was able to get an internship at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you live in London?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I first just met up with some strangers, and then I had the good fortune to run into a friend from school who actually figures strongly throughout my life.

MS. RICHARDS: From Bryn Mawr?

MS. RORIMER: But now I'm going to burst into tears talking about her, Anne d'Harnoncourt, not from Bryn Mawr, but from Brearley. I ran into her on a bus, one of those double-decker buses, after I had just told my roommates that I couldn't stand it with them any longer. I phrased it much more delicately. I was wondering where I was going to live. And, rather miraculously, I happened to see Anne on a bus, and she said, "Oh, you don't by any chance know anybody who's not too tall and would sleep on a windowsill up in our attic in the house that I'm sharing with other friends studying at the Courtauld [Institute of Art]." And I said, "Oh, how about me?" So I lived on a —

MS. RICHARDS: What neighborhood?

MS. RORIMER: —in a house on Hasker Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Hasker? Do you remember—

MS. RORIMER: It was H-A-S-K-E-R.

MS. RICHARDS: What part of London is that?

MS. RORIMER: That's in South Kensington. Bertrand Russell had lived across the street. There were five people in the house, sharing the nominal rent.

MS. RICHARDS: Were they all students?

MS. RORIMER: They were all students at the Courtauld. No, one wasn't. Sarah Jackson, whom I'm still in touch with, was not an art historian. I was so lucky to—

MS. RICHARDS: Wow. Terrific.

MS. RORIMER: —live with—well, share an apartment with—likeminded people.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you do at the V&A?

MS. RORIMER: What did I do? First, I worked for someone who was doing experimental programs with children. She was really wonderful, Renee Marcuse, spelled like the philosopher, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Renee with two Es?

MS. RORIMER: I guess, yeah. M-A-R-C-U-S-E., And she was somewhat of an international figure involved with ICOM [International Council of Museums], in education. And then I said I wanted to do something more curatorial, so she sent me over to—I'm forgetting the sequence, but I—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, you moved from the education department—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, then to architecture and sculpture, which—I can't remember what I did, but I remember it was the first time they allowed a woman in the department. I don't know how much I helped them. I don't remember what I did, but then subsequently I did have quite a long stint—at least six months or more—in the department of drawings and prints.

And I actually wrote a catalogue. I catalogued their William Mulready drawings. I wasn't even going to bring this all up because it's so long ago. And William Mulready, he was a genre painter, did anecdotal, sort of Dutch scenes, and taught some of the Pre-Raphaelites. And they published it, with illustrations. I don't think it was exactly a best seller.

MS. RICHARDS: You said something interesting a second ago about women in the museum, that you were the first—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, in the department. There were—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. At what point did you start getting the sense that there was going to be a challenge in

being in the field, or accomplishing something you wanted to accomplish, as a woman?

MS. RORIMER: You know, it's funny. I didn't think so specifically. I just wanted to work and be involved in—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, Bryn Mawr certainly—nobody said anything to you.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, that's possible, but I'm not so sure, really. At Brearley, in any case, it was assumed that women were as capable as men, and to be treated as such without question, and that they—

MS. RICHARDS: —could accomplish whatever they wanted to.

MS. RORIMER: That's the whole point of Samuel Brearley founding the school. I think it was 125 years ago.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a girls' school, right? Or it was?

MS. RORIMER: Girls'. It's for girls.

MS. RICHARDS: And Bryn Mawr is a women's college.

MS. RORIMER: It still is for women, but they share classes and dorms with—

MS. RICHARDS: When you went there, it was just women, right?

MS. RORIMER: It was just women.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that part of the reason you went there? And you talked about Wellesley. I mean, you're talking about women's colleges. Was that important to you, to go to a women's college?

MS. RORIMER: No, I had fantasies of going to a big school and meeting men—since I didn't know too many in high school. And, don't forget, at that time, many good schools were not yet coed.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that you found it easier to excel at a women's college?

MS. RORIMER: I didn't particularly think in those terms.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were at the V&A and you—

MS. RORIMER: I just wanted to get through school, get my education, and go out and try to figure out what I wanted to do.

MS. RICHARDS: You said you were at the V&A in this one particular area for six months, which was quite a good amount of time. Did you imagine wanting to get a permanent job there?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I did love London, but I was realistic. I knew expatriates, and I looked at them, and I thought, I don't want to be like them; they're neither here nor there. And my wonderful uncle told me, "You'd better come home and be a part of your own context."

MS. RICHARDS: That's Samuel.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So how long did you end up living there?

MS. RORIMER: About a year, and then I went back again.

MS. RICHARDS: And when was that, about?

MS. RORIMER: Late '60s. About the King's Road extravaganza time.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. What was going on there in the London art scene?

MS. RORIMER: And—oh, I was going to contemporary exhibitions by then.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get to meet any artists?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, no. I don't think so. I wasn't that connected at all. I didn't meet artists till later on.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any people who Henry Geldzahler told you to see in London?

MS. RORIMER: No, I don't think he would have thought to give me any names—no.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you decided to come back, when you moved back to New York, were you living with your family again?

MS. RORIMER: Soon before I left, I met someone in London who wanted to share an apartment. She was coming to work at the Met.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, what was her name?

MS. RORIMER: In fact, she just called—Tessa Greig, before she married John Craib-Cox. I didn't know her beforehand, but we shared an apartment—Greig, G-R-E-I-G. She had an internship at the Metropolitan Museum in the decorative arts department.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, but she was English.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So she was coming to New York to have an internship at the Met.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. And needed a roommate to share the expenses. I didn't really want to be at home particularly.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was your apartment?

MS. RORIMER: Where were we? East 85th Street, between First Avenue and York.

MS. RICHARDS: Upper East Side.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. Pretty far east.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you come back needing to find a job, thinking, Okay, the first thing you have to do is find some kind of job?

MS. RORIMER: Exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: You weren't able to start looking while you were still in London, I imagine.

MS. RORIMER: No. No—

MS. RICHARDS: When you were thinking about a job, you were thinking about a museum? You weren't thinking about teaching or doing something else—

MS. RORIMER: No, because I only had a B.A.

MS. RICHARDS: Or working in an auction house or a commercial gallery?

MS. RORIMER: No, I wasn't interested in the commercial. My first idea, way back before I went to London, was to be a magazine editor. That just—again, the fantasy—

MS. RICHARDS: Art magazine?

MS. RORIMER: Art magazine, because I thought, Oh, that would connect me with art. And I wanted to be connected with contemporary art, Modern art. Anyway, that didn't anywhere near work out. But I was lucky enough to get a job at MoMA.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that happen?

MS. RORIMER: And then I was unlucky enough to be laid off.

MS. RICHARDS: There was an opening, and you just applied?

MS. RORIMER: I think it was because somebody I knew knew the director then.

MS. RICHARDS: Who was that at that point?

MS. RORIMER: Bates Lowry.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you end up in the museum?

MS. RORIMER: I ended up working for Anne Coffin Hanson, who had been a professor of mine at Bryn Mawr, as it so happened.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it Hanson, S-E-N—O-N?

MS. RORIMER: I think it's O-N. And she was—

MS. RICHARDS: Anne with an E?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. They initiated a new department, called the International Study Center, and I was her assistant, but eventually—to make a long story short—she—

MS. RICHARDS: This was in about 1969, '70?

MS. RORIMER: We're into '70 by now, I think. She ultimately stepped down, and so I had to leave as well, which was really lucky because she said, "Go get your M.A."—I was going to the Institute of Fine Arts part-time already.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you were?

MS. RORIMER: I—yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had decided, I'm going to go back to graduate school. I should get a degree.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. I decided I should, while also going to work.

MS. RICHARDS: And you got your master's degree?

MS. RORIMER: I got the M.A., yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your thesis on?

MS. RORIMER: There were two. We had to do two qualifying papers. I did one on William Mulready. I just rehashed my essay for the Victoria and Albert Museum. And then, more interesting maybe, while I was working at MoMA, I met someone who was the assistant to Tony Smith, the artist Tony Smith, and she said, "Oh, would you like me to introduce you? Maybe you could write about him for your paper." So I met Tony Smith, and wrote my other M.A. paper on his work.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a hard time at the Institute to be allowed to write on a contemporary artist?

MS. RORIMER: Well, you couldn't write on two contemporary artists. But by the early '70s I didn't have any trouble.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other students whom you were close to there, who were important to your development as an art historian?

MS. RORIMER: Marcia Tucker was there, but we weren't particularly close friends. Later on, we sort of knew each other through the field. But she was much more—she was somewhat awe-inspiring and very articulate, and I was still the wallflower self that I have grown out of finally.

But—well, who were some of my classmates that I'm still in touch with? Phyllis Tuchman would go on the list. When I write my memoirs, I'll try to remember who my friends were.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were going to school more or less full-time at the Institute?

MS. RORIMER: For that year after I no longer had the MoMA job.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated with your master's, was that in 1970 when you had the New York State Council internship and the Albright-Knox—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, well, thanks to—

MS. RICHARDS: Or were those before?

MS. RORIMER: No, no. I graduated, and in the process of complaining that I would never find a job, a fellow student named Judy Schub, who was a departmental secretary over at the Metropolitan Museum—

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her —

MS. RORIMER: S-C-H-U-B, I think. I'm hoping to track her down one of these days. I've lost touch.

But she was in the department of prints and drawings and had had a phone call from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery [Buffalo, NY] asking her boss, John McKendry, the curator then—asking him if he knew anyone who would want to apply for a yearlong position there.

MS. RICHARDS: John McKendry.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. This must be part of another history. He died at a young age a long time ago. McKendry with a K.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. RORIMER: So anyway, she took the message and relayed the information to me, asking, "Should we give your name?" And I said, "Sure." So off I went for an interview in Buffalo, and they hired me.

MS. RICHARDS: So your master's degree paid off.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. It did. And it gave me—

MS. RICHARDS: What was the job at the Albright-Knox?

MS. RORIMER: Well, they ultimately called me curator of prints and drawings, but it was an internship to do work with prints.

MS. RICHARDS: But it was a paid job?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. It was a funded internship. They had a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MS. RORIMER: And MoMA was paid. Everything was paid. Not everything, but starting with MoMA.

MS. RICHARDS: So you left your roommate who you had the apartment with on the Upper East Side to go to Buffalo.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, she had already jumped ship to get married. And I was sharing the apartment with other people. And then ultimately sublet it, and ultimately lost it. It would be nice to have held onto it.

MS. RICHARDS: You said you were called the curator of prints of drawings?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, it was—I never had such a title again.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a particular project that was already established that the person who came to this position would be involved with?

MS. RORIMER: There was a little room, as I remember, with lots of boxes that needed organizing, and I hung a Jasper Johns exhibition. I was hired by Jim Wood, as a matter of fact, having just been to his memorial service two weeks ago, sadly. And so what did you ask me? What was—oh, what was I supposed to be doing. The museum needed some order put into things, and then there were one or two exhibitions that came under my aegis.

MS. RICHARDS: You knew it was a one-year appointment.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. And so then the year was coming to a close—oh, first, I just want to say, I worked with someone named Bill Burback. I'd just like to get some of these people in here—William B-U-R-B-A-C-K, who was at MoMA and then in Boston.

MS. RICHARDS: So you worked with him at the Albright-Knox?

MS. RORIMER: He was in education, and he would help me with ideas for installations, and told me about artists I'd never heard about, like Bruce Nauman, believe it or not. I really learned a lot from other people, I have to say, along the way, much more than from *Artforum* or other art journals—as much I love *Artforum*. And I would be in the midst of trying to install something on the wall, and he'd come into the galleries and say, "Why don't you do something more speculative?"

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about your experience in Buffalo. Was there anything else you wanted to say

about it before we move to the next—

MS. RORIMER: I did think of something, but—well, I—

MS. RICHARDS: Who was the director at the time there?

MS. RORIMER: The director was someone named Gordon Smith. And again, one could give a whole discussion of the dynamics at Albright-Knox, which was—it was great because it was small. Oh, I know.

So then I got a call in what I would call the middle of the night—Buffalo was really hard as a single person in those days, so I was home, although, I did end up having some friends as I was leaving—and it was James Speyer from the Art Institute. I had heard that Anne d'Harnoncourt was leaving her position working for him. She was the assistant curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, and he was devastated because she was leaving to go to the Philadelphia Museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Do I have his name spelled right? S-P-E-Y-E-R?

MS. RORIMER: James Speyer, like the cathedral, Speyer, S-P-E-Y-E-R, yeah. And I guess Anne had suggested that I might be available. And when people had said, "Anne's job is now available," she was leaving to go to Philadelphia because she was marrying a curator from the Art Institute, Joseph Rishel, and they couldn't be married and stay in the museum. And I said, "What? I would never get a job like that." How nice for Anne, but that's nothing to do with me.

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you say that?

MS. RORIMER: It never occurred to me that I would go to Chicago and get a job there. I just thought—

MS. RICHARDS: Because of the job, because of the institution, or because of the city?

MS. RORIMER: Because of me. I didn't think of myself as—

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't think—

MS. RORIMER: —up to snuff.

MS. RICHARDS: —you could get that job.

MS. RORIMER: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't because you didn't want to go to Chicago.

MS. RORIMER: No, it didn't even occur to me that I could get such a wonderful job. That is the point. Anything I've gone after aggressively never worked out, but things seem to have often come my way by fate or chance: running into Anne on the bus when I was living in London and then finding a place to live, and then that led to—well, anyway, so Jim Speyer ultimately hired me.

In Buffalo, there was the associate director who you may know, Robert Buck, said to me, "Oh, you'll be a small fish in a big pond if you go to Chicago. You can do much more here. Stay another year with us," because the museum had received another year of money from the New York State Council on the Arts. But it was time to head to Chicago.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the title that you were being given?

MS. RORIMER: I was assistant curator. I was filling that position.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. RORIMER: And then I was promoted to associate later on, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Was it all Modern, or Modern and contemporary?

MS. RORIMER: The department at the time—this is somewhat relevant—was called 20th-Century Painting and Sculpture. Relevant meaning it was the whole 20th century that we had to take care of—we, the department—and that it was relegated only to painting and sculpture, and not prints and drawings or photography and video—well, that comes later into the story. But no, there was no video department.

There were fairly strict boundaries between the departments, and the curators were quite territorial. I remember I had a dream one night, and I answered the phone in my dream as we always did, "Painting and sculpture



department." And the voice in the dream said, "Oh, I have a drawing that I'd like to know about." And I said, "Oh, that's a totally different department." Anyway, times have changed. I'm a little jealous of how they've changed, but it was interesting to be part of—somewhat of the old days. Okay, so that's that.

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved. It was a huge move to go to Chicago. Did you have any friends in Chicago or family?

MS. RORIMER: No. No. But Jim Speyer was very hospitable and would include me in dinners, and I knew one or two people beforehand. I don't think I had too many personal friends at the very beginning.

MS. RICHARDS: But was it a relatively easy transition?

MS. RORIMER: Relatively.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, you found a place to live and—

MS. RORIMER: Well, thanks again to Anne d'Harnoncourt. She not only gave me her job, but her apartment as well. She had kept her apartment. So I just took over her apartment. And—

MS. RICHARDS: That's great.

MS. RORIMER: —again, so that was easy. It took awhile to make friends, although the job was very social. So, lots of social life, but often lonely weekends too. It wasn't so easy. It was hard being a young person before cell phones or email. It was hard to find people my own age. I knew older people and also eventually got to know my curator colleagues pretty well and spent many good times with them during lunch, over dinner, or sometimes on weekend trips.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 1971 that you first went there.

MS. RORIMER: Very late '71. So more like '72, I'd say.

MS. RICHARDS: When you went, were you and Jim Speyer the department? Were there other people in the department?

MS. RORIMER: We were the department, with a secretary. And then a couple of years down the road, we hired a research assistant, Courtney Donnell, who eventually became associate curator and was there until recently.

She was using the Art Institute library and had signed in as being from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York. One day the person at the sign-in desk took it upon himself to send me over to her, asking if I knew her, since he somehow had picked up the fact that I was from New York.

MS. RICHARDS: What were your responsibilities in relationship to the curator? You were the assistant. And did they involve acquisitions as well as creating exhibitions from the permanent collection and creating special exhibitions? How much of that was in your area?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, we spanned the Modern and contemporary. With the advent of the 21st century, the department was chronologically bifurcated. James Rondeau is now the Curator of Contemporary art, which begins sometime after 1945, I believe.

MS. RICHARDS: On the museum floor plan they call it 1960, I think.

MS. RORIMER: Well, when I was there, we were responsible for both Modern and contemporary acquisitions, exhibitions, and loans. The first exhibition that I helped with was a Georges Braque exhibition, guest-curated by the late Douglas Cooper.

MS. RICHARDS: Douglas Cooper was doing this as an independent project?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. He was at the time. But I would say, for me, what was particularly interesting about my job was the contemporary side, the cutting-edge aspect. The department had a long tradition of showing the latest American art, and there was something called the American Exhibition that went back nearly a century. The intent of the show was to bring the latest art production to the Chicago public.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the McCrory Corporation collection?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved?

MS. RORIMER: I think we did have some interaction with them, but I'm forgetting what it was.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm forgetting the name of the woman who ran it for so many years—Celia Ascher

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. And I think they were right across the street.

MS. RICHARDS: I know you did an exhibition in 1974 that was about two or so years after you got there. You curated your own exhibition—*Idea and Image in Recent Art, 1974*.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. That was—

MS. RICHARDS: That was your first exhibition you did on your own? Were you supported in doing that, or was it a struggle to push to get—

MS. RORIMER: No, no. It wasn't—it was Jim Speyer's idea. I was already—

MS. RICHARDS: For you to do a show?

MS. RORIMER: —getting a little restless for some reason, already after a couple of years.

MS. RICHARDS: So he encouraged you to—

MS. RORIMER: He definitely—it was his idea that I do the exhibition. And I was going to try to find the—I was looking for the catalogue before you arrived, and I don't know where it's gone, just to show you, tell you who was in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the first major exhibition you did there, or maybe was it the first major exhibition you had done anywhere?

MS. RORIMER: Anywhere, yeah. I never did exhibitions. But it was—well, I combined newer artists with—when I say older artists, like Warhol and Jasper Johns.

MS. RICHARDS: And then there were Conceptual artists, I imagine, based on the idea.

MS. RORIMER: And Nauman was somewhat new at the time, and then so-called Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, the [Bernd and Hilla] Bechers, Giovanni Anselmo.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was an international exhibition?

MS. RORIMER: It was international. Mostly I learned about the artists from going to galleries in New York, Castelli and Sonnabend. But I learned a little bit in Europe. Well, that was before a later show we can talk about in a minute

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, do you remember your curatorial process? And then later we'll talk about how that has evolved.

MS. RORIMER: To choose?

MS. RICHARDS: —determine the thesis of the exhibition, and then how did you develop the idea and select the artists?

MS. RORIMER: Well, the whole point of the show, actually, was to do a corollary, small corollary, exhibition to be shown at the same time as the Marcel Duchamp exhibition in '74, organized by MoMA and by the Philadelphia Museum.

MS. RICHARDS: But you had free rein to pick the artists that you wanted.

MS. RORIMER: I had free rein, and I just tried to make it somehow connect with Duchamp. And some of the artists clearly did, like Nauman, Rauschenberg, I mentioned Johns. But I don't know about Lawrence Weiner. He probably wouldn't want to be connected with Duchamp. But it was very loose. My idea of connecting with Duchamp was in terms of innovation and the use of new mediums such as language and—

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a very exciting moment for you to see that project realized and have done your first major museum exhibition?

MS. RORIMER: It's so funny, no, not really, although certainly I was happy about it, and friends said they thought it would open up a few people's eyes to what was going on. Because '74 was somewhat early. It wasn't totally early. There were other people who knew about these artists much earlier, like Lucy Lippard and people in New

York and in Europe who were more in the know and more in the forefront than I was.

MS. RICHARDS: And then what led to—

MS. RORIMER: But there was something I wanted to say about that, and now I forget, about the *Idea and Image* exhibition. Oh, well. I forget.

MS. RICHARDS: When you did that exhibition, how did they address education? How did they address the challenge of presenting more difficult contemporary art to the Chicago audience, and was it your responsibility to write text, to try to explain what Nauman was doing or any of the others?

MS. RORIMER: Let me just think for a second. To backtrack with what I did want to say about that exhibition is that I included video in it—videos by William Wegman and Vito Acconci. Also a film by Nauman. The inclusion of time-based mediums with painting and sculpture was quite new at the time, at least in this country. Now I've forgotten your question.

MS. RICHARDS: It doesn't matter.

MS. RORIMER: But no, it was an interesting question, but I was going to tie that in. Turn it off for a second.

[Audio break.]

Oh, about education?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Well, for one, I wrote a little catalogue essay. So I thought of the catalogue as my way of aiding the education process. I don't remember interacting with the education department, but I do remember teaching a class right in the show.

I think I was always hoping that new ideas in art would reach a larger public by virtue of having put new ideas and visualizations of ideas out for—I don't like the word "consumption" in this context, but out for intellectual consumption. So that was always on my mind, but not as education in the form of labels and giving lectures. I'm not even sure I gave any lectures at this stage of my career.

Actually, now that I think of it, I did give lectures early on in my career at the museum. I gave a lecture in connection with the Claes Oldenburg exhibition that came to the Art Institute in 1973 that was organized by Barbara Haskell when she was still at the Pasadena Museum. After the lecture, which was probably fine as a lecture, I remember somebody in the audience at the question period saying, "Oh, that was so interesting. I really learned a lot. My favorite artist is Andrew Wyeth." So I thought, "Oh, they thought it was interesting, but they didn't get the point that this is different." So that's all about education. I didn't think of it as education; I thought of it as promoting—again, "promoting" is not a good word either—of bringing new ideas to a larger audience.

MS. RICHARDS: When you finished that exhibition, was it then part of your job to create a series of exhibitions for the museum?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, my job, well—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you need to spend a certain amount of time working on aspects of the permanent collection? I assume that some of the works in the exhibitions came from the permanent collection, but it sounds like, in terms of the exhibition we just discussed, most of the works were lent from other sources.

MS. RORIMER: If anything, it was the other way around. Works that were exhibited sometimes were able to be acquired for the permanent collection.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a role to play in those acquisitions?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, that's a whole topic that—

MS. RICHARDS: Should we leave that toward the end of the Art Institute—

MS. RORIMER: I think we should leave it because it's sort of a—

MS. RICHARDS: —and talk about acquisitions?

MS. RORIMER: —sore point in an interesting way because—

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, well, we'll talk about the exhibitions, and then we'll get to the acquisitions.

MS. RORIMER: Acquisitions and the whole problem with that. Because I'd like to talk about that because that's part of the reason I finally left the Art Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, okay. We'll definitely—

MS. RORIMER: Ultimately, and I didn't leave in a huff, by any means. I had to—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. We'll definitely get to that.

MS. RORIMER: —move on.

MS. RICHARDS: The next exhibition, I think, chronologically, was the American Exhibition; 1976 was the 72nd?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yeah. I have the catalogue here. Let me remind myself. Could we take a break for a second?

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: We were talking about, or I was asking you about, the exhibition, which I think was your next one that you did, in 1976, two years later, called the *Seventy-second American Exhibition*.

MS. RORIMER: Okay, let me just tell you about the American Exhibition in general, and when you said that I did it, I have to say, I helped Jim Speyer. And '76—I'm just going to look right now to remind myself—1976? Oh, okay. That was the 72nd American Exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: You did one, I have from your bio, in '79 as well.

MS. RORIMER: First, I just want to mention what the American Exhibition was. And it's definitely a “was,” because the Art Institute isn't doing it anymore.

I started telling you earlier, actually, about how it was part of the museum's mandate to show the latest of what was going on in American art. And in the very early years of the museum's history that meant going to Europe and seeing all the painters working there. But anyway, we're going to fast forward to the 1970s. So it was basically an exhibition that was curator's choice and didn't have to have a theme—it hardly ever did. And Katharine Kuh before Jim Speyer. She's a whole other discussion. She was wonderful. I met her toward the end of her life.

MS. RICHARDS: I'd love to talk about her.

MS. RORIMER: It would certainly be fun to talk further with regard to people I met later in life that made an impact on me, would we had eons of time, wishing we had eons of time. So the American Exhibition was supposed to be a biennial, along with the Carnegie and the Whitney. It was Jim Speyer's exhibition, really, but as the assistant and later associate curator, I was involved with the choice of works.

So let me start with 1972 [*Seventieth American Exhibition*], just for a second, because I have to remind myself. Now, this was mostly selected by Jim Speyer, but I have to say, there were artists in here that I was particularly interested in, along with artists I really was not interested in. So we had Dan Flavin in there. Oh, that's when I met Dan Flavin. That's another story. But remind me, okay? Because I'm going to keep going about the American show.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RORIMER: Eva Hesse. And that's important because that would come in later under the discussion of acquisitions. So that was the—okay, I'm glad I'm looking at this. So '72, I had basically arrived and was supposed to give ideas, and I did, as I remember. But then when it came to 1976, now it seems that that's a four-year jump, isn't it?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you did the—

MS. RORIMER: Usually there were three-year jumps.

MS. RICHARDS: You did *Idea and Image in Recent Art* in '74.

MS. RORIMER: Well, that was my exhibition. That wasn't the series of American Exhibitions. Seventy-four was totally mine, to keep me interested in the job. So that doesn't really count.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you were working on the American Exhibition in '72 and also in '76, it was a collaboration with James Speyer? You were, in a way, co-curating it?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I was—yeah, I guess we just didn't use those terms.

MS. RICHARDS: Was he called the curator, and you were called the assistant?

MS. RORIMER: He was the curator, and I was assistant. And I forget when I became associate.

MS. RICHARDS: But I mean for the exhibition, the credit you got on that exhibition.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, let's see.

MS. RICHARDS: Was he considered the curator, and you were his assistant, or did you get credit?

MS. RORIMER: Well, okay, we'll have to take that one at a time, because in the 1976 exhibition catalogue, I wrote a little introduction, which was the beginning of my writing—not the total beginning, but in terms of contemporary art. So here's my essay about all the artists that I had been interested in—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that it was important to speak to the artists yourself in preparation for writing?

MS. RORIMER: At that point, no—later on for sure. That's the way I got much of my information. But I don't think I really knew them particularly well at this point. Not in '76. That's what—but definitely later for sure, absolutely. But not here. I guess I must have read some articles. I don't see any footnotes, though. Oh, yeah, here are some footnotes. I got it all secondhand mostly. Like doing a term paper or some sort of art history paper. So I was the one who became the verbalizer in the American shows. So that was in '76, and—

MS. RICHARDS: Did that happen easily that James Speyer said you should write about the contemporary work?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I think he—

MS. RICHARDS: He felt more comfortable—

MS. RORIMER: —wasn't particularly a writer. He came from an architectural background. In fact, he had an important—he was a significant architect before he took the job in the early '60s as a curator. So again—

MS. RICHARDS: So in a way, then, that was—

MS. RORIMER: —so many people we could do special—

MS. RICHARDS: —very good for you because you had your own area in there that you could excel in, and you weren't really competing with your boss in that regard.

MS. RORIMER: Right, because in his area of expertise that he felt territorial about in a sort of literal way was the installation, and he was really known for his approach to installing art. Although, I think—I did install some shows, some exhibitions, when he was away for the summer. He went away every summer for three months.

MS. RICHARDS: Those days are gone.

MS. RORIMER: For sure—you're so right. That's where the writing—I never thought of wanting to write. I didn't like writing, because in the past I was always being corrected by professors. But it was a way of trying to understand the art, for myself. So this show had some really good artists in it, like Sol LeWitt, who did a wonderful piece. It was at this point I started meeting a number of internationally prominent artists.

MS. RICHARDS: This is the 1976—

MS. RORIMER: We're in '76. So I'll just single out one or two artists that—that's possibly when I met Vito Acconci, and Carl Andre was in the show. There was Jennifer Bartlett, and let's see—Mel Bochner, who had been in my *Idea and Image* exhibition in '74; now that I think about it, I met him then. Also by then, Lawrence Weiner and William Wegman, who were also in the '74 exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point in the mid-'70s, was there a particular aspect of current developments in contemporary art that you were most intrigued by, that if you could have done a one-person show—and I know you did one in 1980--

MS. RORIMER: What was that? I don't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: I think Daniel—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yeah. We'll talk about that later. That was a real coup for him and me. We'll get there shortly.

MS. RICHARDS: There's a range of artistic practices in this exhibition, but was there one particular one that you were most intrigued by?

MS. RORIMER: I would say as much as I dislike the term—although I've come to use it for lack of a better historical designation—was Conceptual art, and that started with the *Idea and Image* exhibition, when I learned about artists working with photo and language, text and image. So as I—just as you asked me that, I have opened the page with the Douglas Huebler entry here in the '76 exhibition catalogue. So some of these artists were my ideas, but I mainly thought of myself as helping out, insofar as the selection of artists for the show was never spelled out as a collaboration.

MS. RICHARDS: But it sounds like you curated at least half of the show.

MS. RORIMER: Well, much of it—we would go to New York and certainly—

MS. RICHARDS: Together?

MS. RORIMER: Sometimes together; often Jim Speyer just went by himself. Now and then, I think I tagged along. But here are some of my entries: Huebler, [Joseph] Kosuth; I forget if LeWitt would have been chosen by me or him, because a lot overlapped. I mean, Lichtenstein could have just been both of us, for sure. Here's Bruce Nauman, [*Double Steel*] *Cage* [1974]. Here's Peter Saul. Didn't I just read something in the *New York Times*? This was definitely a Jim Speyer artist he knew personally, and was an artist that had shown in the Allan Frumkin Gallery here.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So again, there are so many histories that I'm just touching on. You could do a history of the galleries in Chicago, of the artists that were living here—but just to give you an idea—oh, here's a Robert Ryman and here's Lawrence Weiner. And then there were overlaps in our aesthetic leanings, like Lichtenstein or Richard Serra. Later on, there was a show that was viewed as being half mine and half his, in that it was quite clearly bifurcated. But we'll get to that in a moment. In this case, this is where my Conceptual—

MS. RICHARDS: When you were doing this, it was a biennial, but somehow there was one in 1979.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, well, that's a good transition. Was that the next one on my bio?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, from '76 to—by that time, how had your curatorial process evolved from the very beginning five years earlier when you did *Idea and Image in Recent Art*? And as you were taking more responsibility for the exhibitions, how did your process change and develop?

MS. RORIMER: My process?

MS. RICHARDS: How you researched which artists should be in the show, how—

MS. RORIMER: Seeking out artists?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. How you determined which artists to select, which works by the artists, how it would all come together in the exhibition in a cohesive way.

MS. RORIMER: Maybe to answer that question, we have to step back a couple years to the European exhibition that was—well, it was a collaboration.

MS. RICHARDS: *Europe in the '70s: Aspects of Recent Art*.

MS. RORIMER: But that was—

MS. RICHARDS: Nineteen seventy-seven.

MS. RORIMER: It would be easier to answer your question with reference to that show.

MS. RICHARDS: Good.

MS. RORIMER: And then we'll come to the 73rd American, and whatever year that was—

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-nine?

MS. RORIMER: Oh right, '79. After the 73rd, then we have the 74th, in '82. Each show had its unique aspect. So should we talk about Europe in the '70s right now since it preceded the 73rd and 74th American Exhibitions?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Because that I like to think of as my claim to fame, certainly a feather in my cap. The *Idea and Image*, nobody ever really knew too much about, but people did know about *Europe in the '70s*, which opened in October 1977 and traveled. It came about following a courier trip to Europe. I went to London just for fun after taking a painting to Paris and, among others, saw Richard Morphet, curator at the Tate [Modern].

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me his last name again.

MS. RORIMER: M-O-R-P-H-E-T. He had been a good friend and colleague of Anne d'Harnoncourt's when she was in London. So these things all sort of tied together. During lunch at the Tate, he said, "What? You've never heard of all these very good artists here in London? Here's a list. Here are their phone numbers." So I went running around doing studio visits. I think this was in maybe—well, '75.

MS. RICHARDS: At least two years before the show opened.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, and—so then—

MS. RICHARDS: Can you mention some of the artists you met?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, gosh. Yeah. Except now that—can you turn it off while I just—

[Audio break.]

Okay, so I'm trying to remember the artists I went to see. I'd have to think a little further, but I especially remember going to see John Hilliard, and he said that Dan Graham was—we'll talk about Dan later, but was coming to see him later that afternoon. Did I want to meet him? And I said, "Oh, too bad, I have another appointment." So I missed meeting Dan at that time. And then I met Barbara Reise, R-E-I-S-E, who was an American living in London and writing for *Art in America* who knew a lot about European art and berated me for being an American who would be, in her mind, simply interested in Clement Greenberg artists. And I remember thinking, Hey, what is this?

MS. RICHARDS: That's not you.

MS. RORIMER: She told me about an Art & Language exhibition that was just opening. So I got introduced to the fact that there were other artists that were not necessarily in this country.

And when I was back home, I mentioned to Jim Speyer. I said, "Oh, I wish there was some way we could do an exhibition that included European art." And he said, "Oh, great idea, great idea. Let's propose it to the committee." So he took the ball and ran with it and we proposed a European exhibition. And then members of the committee asked, "Will the show be more painting or more sculpture?" And I wanted to say, "Oh, none of the above. There's work that isn't necessarily categorized as such."

MS. RICHARDS: When he proposed it, how did you define it? Did you define it chronologically, not by medium, but define it chronologically, or were you thinking about geographically, that it would just be Western Europe? It would just be recent works?

MS. RORIMER: We thought of it as recent. I got sent off—I think I combined some research trips with some—with courier trips, and it basically was defined geographically. We did think about Eastern Europe, but then it became—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you include Italy and things that were going on there?

MS. RORIMER: So the countries were England, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany. There weren't all that many artists ultimately in the show, and the artists were not unknown, by any means, in Europe and, of course, not totally unknown here.

Galleries had shown their work in New York. Kynaston McShine, for example, had shown many of the artists at MoMA in Project shows and in his famed *Information* exhibition in 1970. I can't claim that we discovered any artists. But, perhaps to say, Gerhard Richter was hardly known here. I did a lot of the traveling and interviewing—well, basically, artist studio visits—and Jim Speyer did some as well.

MS. RICHARDS: It seems like he was a very supportive person, that he supported your ideas about the exhibition and the artists you were selecting, that it was a positive work environment that you had to do things that were,

professionally, possibly a little risky.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: You would have—

MS. RORIMER: We were sort of—

MS. RICHARDS: You would have wished that he had said, "You can do this on your own." You get all the work and all the glory.

MS. RORIMER: And all the glory, right.

MS. RICHARDS: But he didn't do that?

MS. RORIMER: But—well, why should he, no. But totally supportive and, yeah, it was a really good —

MS. RICHARDS: —working relationship.

MS. RORIMER: —working relationship, yeah, for sure. I was really lucky to have ended up with him as a boss.

MS. RICHARDS: Skipping just a little bit, did doing that show in any way lead you to do the Daniel Buren?

MS. RORIMER: So, okay, you want to jump to Buren and then go back to the American shows?

MS. RICHARDS: Let's talk about the exhibition that—the 73rd American, which was 1979.

MS. RORIMER: That was next, and at that point I had been at the Art Institute, what, eight years or something, seven or eight years. So I was coming into my own a little bit and thus quite heavily involved in the selection of this exhibition. I made some really important—I wouldn't want to say "discoveries"—that doesn't make sense—contacts for my future. I don't want to call it "career," but my future endeavors, especially in writing.

So that exhibition included Michael Asher and Dan Graham and On Kawara, as well as Sol LeWitt, whom we had already shown in '76. That gives you some idea. I won't go through the whole list. Lawrence Weiner again. That was about the third time we'd shown him. I was sort of a Lawrence Weiner fan, I have to say, but a fan of many others as well. I'd say the 73rd American Exhibition in '79 was important for my—

[END CD1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Anne Rorimer at her home in Chicago, on November 15, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

So we were talking about—

MS. RORIMER: The European—

MS. RICHARDS: —the European exhibition that you did in '77, and then, of course, you did the other—the '79 American Exhibition—but I asked about the Buren and the focus on Buren in the 1980 show, how that came about, perhaps, from the European show.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, it absolutely did, because at that point I had met Buren and I was totally intrigued by his work and fascinated. And how did this happen? He—oh, so as you know, he has to come—at least he did—had to —

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sure still.

MS. RORIMER: —to work in situ—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —that is, he has to come look at the space, and thus needed to come to Chicago. He had already been in Milwaukee for a show. So, anyway, he came and looked at the Art Institute, and he had this fabulous idea that just—he called me down from my office and said, "Come look with me out the window." There was a large window. There still is, and it's in the Morton Wing, where there is a big picture window with mullions—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: —looking almost like a huge transparent stretcher bar, and Buren asked me, "Do trains go by



here?" So I pulled the curtain aside and said, "Well, I don't know." And a train, a commuter train, trundled by. I said, "Why?" And he said, "Well, I'd like to do my work using the trains. I'd like to put a little patch of stripes," because, as you know, Buren was working with white and colored stripes within his chosen context. So I said, "Oh, well, that's really interesting." Well, that didn't work out in time for the exhibition because one had to first be in touch with the Regional Transportation Authority, as Metra was called at the time.

When that fell through, he did an amazing work that led to many other works by him using staircases. So he did a work on the museum's Grand Staircase—amazing, fabulous work—but this idea about the trains, he couldn't get it out of his mind, nor could I.

And I got to know him pretty well for some reason, and so I would see him in Paris, and we started talking about the train idea. Again, that's a whole other story, but, eventually, we were able to meet with the right person at the RTA. It took some doing, I have to say. I can't take the whole interview telling that story—but only to say here, I think it was because Daniel was so charming that we were actually able to realize the work, which came to be titled *Watch the Doors, Please!* [1980]. And he called it not only a work in situ, but a work in motion—it was an exhibition, but it took place on the trains, but not simply as a patch on one train.

That was a little bit naive of us to think that would work. All the train doors ultimately were striped, with five different colors, and one could watch for them to pass in front of the large, mullioned window. And there was a schedule to see when the train doors would come by, like moving paintings. And then ultimately, with a friend, we recorded the work in a film. It was just an amazing feat. That's all I can say at this point.

MS. RICHARDS: How long did it run?

MS. RORIMER: It ran literally—I think it was just over a year and they—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, well, much longer than your usual exhibition would run.

MS. RORIMER: Right. I don't know if—it was an exhibition, but it was also a project. I could talk about it all night, but—

MS. RICHARDS: So was it actually, then, the first such artist project for the Art Institute?

MS. RORIMER: I think later they started doing whatever those—

MS. RICHARDS: Commissions?

MS. RORIMER: —Focus shows. Focus exhibitions they're still called. I had always wanted to do little shows in the galleries, and I had that idea early on. It fell on deaf ears and then it became a regular part of the schedule.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it difficult for you to get this through the museum—besides the difficulty with the Regional Transportation Authority—to get the museum to agree?

MS. RORIMER: It was sort of—

MS. RICHARDS: Was James a champion for you, or did you have to—

MS. RORIMER: No, no. The person who—I don't mean no, but I think he was away a lot of the time. But I just wouldn't let up. Suddenly my stubborn streak got hold of me, I guess, and the director at the time, who was very difficult and would obstruct anything our department would do—

MS. RICHARDS: Who was that —

MS. RORIMER: Obstruct? Is that the word?

MS. RICHARDS: —the director at that point?

MS. RORIMER: John Maxon.

MS. RICHARDS: John Maxim?

MS. RORIMER: Maxon, M-A-X-O-N. He was not at all partial to contemporary art. I don't know, but he—I don't want to sound light, because we were very shocked at the time, but he—that's when signs demonstrating the Heimlich Maneuver were brought into restaurants, because he choked at dinner one night after an opening. I was just coming back from Europe and I was a day late and, of course, I said, "Oh, please tell John Maxon that I'm working on the European exhibition and I'm a day late and I hope that's all right." Well, I heard that morning that he was no longer with us. Therefore there was still no director right then. Jim Wood arrived after the train

doors had been striped.

The person, Larry TerMolen, who helped me the most was the head of the development department at that time, because this piqued his imagination, trains. Not particularly an art person, but he really liked this project and he would go with me to meetings. He gave kind of an institutional ballast when we talked to the people at the Regional Transportation Authority, who were thrilled by the idea, and then Buren would come to speak with them, and then that's when the RTA people said, "You can't just do one train. You have to do the whole fleet."

MS. RICHARDS: It was their idea?

MS. RORIMER: It was their idea to use all 165 train car doors, and they were really excited about it, luckily, because—but I'd say I sort of took the ball and ran with it.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe it was fortuitous that there was no director at the time.

MS. RORIMER: There was no obstacle. I remember Jim Wood had just arrived when—the day—or soon before, not long before, for the opening, which was the train coming by the window and stopping for a few seconds. And we all had, I don't know, some coffee and drinks in front of the window—but it was an actual train with commuters. So they were wondering, like, Why is our train stopping for a few minutes behind the Art Institute in front of its big window?

MS. RICHARDS: Just at that moment, not any other time in the schedule?

MS. RORIMER: It went by. They went by, yeah. So it was amazing, but again, I don't want to take the whole history to talk about it.

MS. RICHARDS: And Daniel was happy with it?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, thrilled. Yeah, thrilled. So I have to say—I have to pat myself on the back that it was really, really my thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a sense when you were starting out, or was there a point when you felt that one of your missions as a curator at the Art Institute was to, say, break new ground?

MS. RORIMER: I could tell you what it was.

MS. RICHARDS: You define it?

MS. RORIMER: It was to open up new possibilities for thinking about art—I obsessed over it, especially with Buren's work.

MS. RICHARDS: To present challenging work to audiences that would really open their eyes?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, then there was the point at which I wanted us then, the Art Institute, to acquire, to buy the *Staircase* work. That's another story in itself because how do you buy something that—the registrar at the time was really upset because there was no place to put an acquisition number on a staircase. So, many were the moments spent in Jim Speyer's office saying we absolutely have to buy this, and he's giving—he's keeping to his original price but getting ever-more high profile, he—Buren, and so Jim Speyer finally agreed and presented the piece.

Actually, we didn't have to put it through a committee, and I won't talk about acquisition problems till later. I mean acquisition challenges. We were able to pay for it with something that didn't require us—what do you call it—a sitting committee? A standing committee? A committee—

MS. RICHARDS: Committee approval?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. So that's—but I was obsessed, because I wanted that to be there for people to try to think, What's this about? And I ultimately wrote about it in—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: —for the museum bulletin.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, it's 1980. You've been at the museum almost 10 years. Do you recall if you were thinking, How much longer do I want to stay here? Is there somewhere else I'd rather be? Were you thinking career-wise what move you might want to make, or did you sense that you would be perfectly happy to stay there for the rest of your career?

MS. RORIMER: No, I was getting restless, not that I could think of any other job. But I wouldn't say I'd been there almost 10 years. It was more like eight.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. When you start—

MS. RORIMER: I don't know, 10 just sounds—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So I started—I'm trying to think when I really started getting—

MS. RICHARDS: Putting your feelers out for other jobs?

MS. RORIMER: Well, not even that, but wondering—well, we'll get to this in a minute. About then, I started thinking I'd like to write a book, which was rather presumptuous, and maybe we'll get back to that when we talk about my book—

MS. RICHARDS: Back to scholarship—

MS. RORIMER: —when that started brewing—but that—in fact, the person who was—the secretary in the department in '74 reminded me about how she ran into me on a bus one morning and I said I want to write a book, and that was in 1974. She said, "Yeah, I think there's a book in all this material." That—so it was premature for anything I could handle, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, but that was the other thing—

MS. RORIMER: —I was getting worried that I was doing too much busywork. What do you call it?

MS. RICHARDS: Administrative work.

MS. RORIMER: Administrative work, and it all—not all, but most of that fell on me. Most. And in those days, no voicemails. You had to be at the phone. You had to take—

MS. RICHARDS: So you had to write all of the letters asking for loans?

MS. RORIMER: Or, no, people asking us for loans and all the—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —lots of processing of loans. Going through the—asking the conservation department if they'd approve it, writing to people saying, "The conservation department turned it down and sorry we can't lend," and then—

MS. RICHARDS: Then the pleas.

MS. RORIMER: And then, of course, one knew the people or one didn't, but you just somehow hated to be the one saying no, but—so there was quite a lot of that. Just lots and lots of day-to-day work, which I loved. I just loved running up and down the stairs to other departments and for meetings. I loved it, but it wasn't—when I say, getting me anywhere, it just started to feel, metaphorically, like shoes becoming too small in terms of further growth. I did start writing a little bit in my free time, if there was such a thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And that didn't work out too well, but I did work—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I see that you wrote—

MS. RORIMER: Two articles, and much to my surprise, because I never thought I could write a whole article.

MS. RICHARDS: This is the article you did for the Renaissance Society on Dan Graham that you're talking about?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, no, that's later.

MS. RICHARDS: That's '81.

MS. RORIMER: *Artforum*—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, earlier?

MS. RORIMER: —it was Blinky Palermo. Are we going to do that separately? My writing? But just to throw it in now—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, let's—sure.

MS. RORIMER: Well, while we're on the subject of—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, articles, Blinky Palermo and Michael Asher—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, so Blinky Palermo—

MS. RICHARDS: —in *Artforum*.

MS. RORIMER: —came out of not showing Blinky Palermo, as he should have been in the *Europe in the '70s* exhibition, but it was a mistake, but also I think he was either ill or had died. So it just didn't happen.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: As it happened, I received a grant to go to Europe for three months, an NEA grant to travel in Europe, in '77.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Your article was in '78. That would make sense.

MS. RORIMER: And my excuse was to do research—an excuse to myself. I didn't have to have an excuse for them. I just sort of hobnobbed through Europe, visiting collectors and artists that had been in the show, but my focus, I should say, not my excuse, was to write an article on Blinky Palermo. *Artforum* took it, and that's the beginning of the writing and also getting a little restless because it was too hard to do for me—I can't multitask much—to write and be in a full-time—overtime—job where one was expected to be available on weekends when there was a push, or go out to dinners.

And then the Michael Asher came out of the '79 exhibition, because I got totally fascinated by his work and the work he did for the show and I wanted to learn more about it. And then since I had a—I guess I had a little tiny in at *Artforum*, so I did it for *Artforum*. It was my way of just expanding my understanding and the whole idea, as you brought up, of communicating beyond the exhibition itself. I just wanted to share my excitement about all this. It sounds kind of silly now, because everybody's so excited about contemporary art, but it was a hard push.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And we could go back to that later, but I was always actually—well, I'll throw it in now. I just was always being—when I say "laughed at" somewhat by friends, even in the days of growing up with the curators who said, "Modern art is for the birds," to friends in college when I wrote about Lichtenstein, saying like, "What?"

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And now contemporary curators are just everybody's darling—and I don't mean that badly, but I think it's different.

MS. RICHARDS: Very.

MS. RORIMER: I'm sort of on a roll here talking about the loneliness of being a little bit ahead of one's time, not totally, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: What was I going to say? Oh, just to interject about when I was teaching in the early '90s, I would emphasize to my students something like, "This work of 1968 I'm showing you was very new and difficult for people to grasp at the time. Now work like this is taken for granted."

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, there's—

MS. RORIMER: And even more so now. I mean, we're now in 2010.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, within our field, but just step two feet out of our field, and they're still difficult ideas.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, you think? Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, the general population has no idea why Daniel Buren is an artist—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, the general population.

MS. RICHARDS: —or Ellsworth Kelly—a general museum visitor—

MS. RORIMER: Right, but I'm just talking about—

MS. RICHARDS: —to the Art Institute. People who should've been—

MS. RORIMER: —well, colleagues in other fields of art history, but now it's fashionable, and now all the other fields are competitive. People aren't rehiring their Renaissance specialists because all the students want to do contemporary. But anyway, I just had to put that in.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RORIMER: But I think it's important, when we're talking to me as opposed to somebody a generation or so younger, that it was a commitment to try to deal with these ideas and—

MS. RICHARDS: To take on Blinky Palermo and Dan Graham and Michael Asher.

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: People like that.

MS. RORIMER: And Buren and—I mean, I wouldn't go back and not do it.

MS. RICHARDS: Of course, it seems that that was what motivated you, what propelled you, what excited you, and that's why you were doing it, because it was exactly what you wanted to be spending your time on.

MS. RORIMER: But I didn't know that in advance, because it never occurred to me that suddenly I would be propelled into all this material. It was little by little, just—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] How did those articles and that involvement inform the American Exhibition you did in '82?

MS. RORIMER: Okay, let's get to that. Yeah, that's interesting.

MS. RICHARDS: —which I think you told me you curated; you chose about half of the artists.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I think that's—

MS. RICHARDS: And those were again younger, less well-known artists who might have been receiving their first presentation at a major museum. You mentioned Jenny Holzer, for example, or—

MS. RORIMER: Did I mention—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I read.

MS. RORIMER: Oh.

MS. RICHARDS: Or someone like Dara Birnbaum, a video artist.

MS. RORIMER: Well, you're picking just the right names for—

MS. RICHARDS: And women. And maybe you could talk about championing the work of women.

MS. RORIMER: Let's see. Now, I just thought of 10 different things at once. Okay. This was the show that I mentioned earlier on in our conversation that was kind of considered part my show and part Jim Speyer's, only because—

MS. RICHARDS: This is the 1982 edition?

MS. RORIMER: It's the 74th —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, it's 1982, summer of '82. That duality of sorts was only noticed, I should say, because there were two separate spaces allocated for the exhibition, the big space in the Morton Wing and then a wonderful smaller space that, quite sadly, no longer exists as a gallery for temporary exhibitions. It's important

to note that it was never spelled out that there was my show and Jim's show, but it was—it's interesting, right?

MS. RICHARDS: And you said that he was very much involved in installation. So did he actually choose to—

MS. RORIMER: I think he installed both.

MS. RICHARDS: —install them, yours and his, in a way separately?

MS. RORIMER: I think it's just the—I don't think he was thinking his and hers, by any means. I think it's just the way it worked out.

MS. RICHARDS: The way installation of the idea separated—

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —into two?

MS. RORIMER: And the reason I heard about these artists that—well, that's somewhat early for them, right? Early '80s? Dara Birnbaum and Jenny Holzer. Oh, there's another one.

MS. RICHARDS: Sherrie Levine?

MS. RORIMER: Sherrie Levine. And another one that—well, I'll think of her name in a second—anyway, a number of these artists came to my attention through Dan Graham. Oh, I've got it, Barbara Kruger. Also, we showed video works by Martha Rosler.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: You can see here from the list how younger artists were included with, by then, old standbys like Sol LeWitt and Bruce Nauman. So they were all woven in together. It was a patchwork exhibition, in a really lively way.

MS. RICHARDS: Everyone we mentioned just now is American.

MS. RORIMER: These are Americans.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, these are American Exhibitions.

MS. RORIMER: Remember, that was the whole point of—

MS. RICHARDS: Of course.

MS. RORIMER: —doing the *Europe in the '70s*.

MS. RICHARDS: Because it had been neglected—

MS. RORIMER: Well, just—not neglected; recent European art hadn't been part of the program of the museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So Dan suggested certain artists, and I think I went and met them or—anyway, they turned up in the show and are still—

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about the issue of including women in the exhibitions that you were doing?

MS. RORIMER: Okay, that's a good—can I just finish about some of the people in the exhibition?

MS. RICHARDS: Certainly.

MS. RORIMER: And then remind me again of the woman question, because I'm going to forget and it's important.

So I just want to mention briefly that Christopher Williams and Stephen Prina were my, I guess you'd call them, discoveries. By then, people were inviting me to give talks, and I gave a talk at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts, Valencia] and did studio visits and met Stephen, who had just graduated, and Christopher, who was still a student.

Anyway, I was totally intrigued by their work, and now, they're big deals. In fact, at a dinner two nights ago, a

curator from Canada—I don't know why he asked me, but he said, "Do you by any chance know Christopher Williams?" And I said, "Oh, I discovered him." And then, of course, I felt guilty for claiming so much, but he was still in school when I saw his work, and subsequently invited him to be in the 74th American Exhibition. And actually, there were some fun issues-problems that maybe could wait for another time to mention, but I don't know when.

MS. RICHARDS: Problems? What kind of problems?

MS. RORIMER: Dealing with the newer ideas of these younger artists. What was I going to say?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, what was it about dealing with the work of the younger artists and their ideas, and why was that problematic? Was it problematic in the context of the little-bit-older artists, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger, or was it—

MS. RORIMER: Not that I remember.

MS. RICHARDS: —difficult for the institution?

MS. RORIMER: Well, with Chris Williams, he had a new idea of how to deal with his work in terms of how it would be installed, and that caused quite a ruckus.

Oh, okay, so I had given a talk at CalArts. I wasn't looking at work for the exhibition, but suddenly I was in a position to suggest works for it. So the artists I suggested once I was back in the office were referred to as "Annie's"—because I was referred to as Annie as opposed to Anne—as "Annie's"—what was it, "brood," or something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: The artists at CalArts?

MS. RORIMER: My proposed selections.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that—

MS. RORIMER: —I think Chris was 25—so, to continue, there was a problem with how he wanted to be represented, in terms of where he put the label for his work, which was not in the conventional place, and how he would be represented in this catalogue I'm looking at here. It was stressful at the time to be in the middle, between artist and boss and other institutional staff, but it all, obviously, worked itself out.

MS. RICHARDS: Something curators run into frequently.

MS. RORIMER: Anyway, it's the same—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —probably still with the institutional—

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RORIMER: So that's why it worked out so well with the Buren. The institution just really wasn't paying attention.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: They didn't pay attention.

So, you asked me about women. Now, how many are in the catalogue we're looking at? Well, I just think that the times were changing by the later '70s, and women were getting higher profiles. I wouldn't say thanks to me, not all, but thanks to many other people and to the society in general, I would say.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there ever a point when you made a conscious—

MS. RORIMER: I never made—

MS. RICHARDS: —effort to include more women in exhibitions?

MS. RORIMER: It's always—

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously—

MS. RORIMER: —it's been hard—

MS. RICHARDS: —assuming that you respected the work—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —and felt that it belonged, but to take an extra step to look further or to—

MS. RORIMER: I like to think I was looking at the work. I don't think I ever wanted to say, "Oh, this is a 'this' artist or this is a 'that' artist," and—it was sort of—what's the word? Not color-blind, but gender-blind?

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: Is there such a term? Of course, if someone was a woman, all the better and that—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, at that point in time, there was a lot written about the issue, and women's groups and all kinds of individuals and informal organizations were pointing a finger at museums if they weren't showing as many women as it was assumed they should have. Do you remember grappling with that?

MS. RORIMER: No, I don't think I had to because, first of all, I wasn't in a contemporary museum, which—so the eye wasn't really on us —well, I think the challenge for us at the Art Institute was to show work that was, as much as I hate the term, cutting-edge..

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Did you ever have any pressure to show more artists from the Chicago area?

MS. RORIMER: There was always that pressure for sure, and I didn't particularly like those pressures, no. But, well, important to point out, we did an exhibition every other year, in between the American Exhibitions. It was called the Chicago and Vicinity Exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Who curated that?

MS. RORIMER: We did, our department. It was sort of a combined organizational nightmare and a labor of love because it was a juried exhibition and we had to hire people to help bring endless numbers of works into a large warehouse and—

MS. RICHARDS: Did that exhibition continue?

MS. RORIMER: Continue after I left?

MS. RICHARDS: —until you left? Was it going on throughout the time you were there?

MS. RORIMER: I think it petered out. Yeah, I was really annoyed that it petered out after I left. So all the things that I did sort of petered out.

MS. RICHARDS: You were annoyed because you wished it had petered out while you were still there?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. It was tons of work and almost a thankless task, because we were always criticized, but in retrospect, I did learn a lot about Chicago art, and so I forget what you asked, but that was always a consideration to—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —include—definitely. Definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: In fact, it was definitely on our minds, all the time, to include Chicago artists in the acquisition and exhibition programs of the museum.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I might just mention here that there was an exhibition, which opened up a few nights ago at the School of the Art Institute, a show of the work of Ray Yoshida and—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: His generation of artists from Chicago is coming into its own. So it's all taking its course.



MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And probably, in part at least, because we did make acquisitions and—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —and Jim Speyer was especially supportive of the Chicago community, because he'd been friends with the artists from way before I arrived, and Anne d'Harnoncourt, too. She helped a lot with that in her two years. She sort of took Chicago by storm.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this a good moment to go back and ask you if, in retrospect, there was anything that you brought to your work as a curator that might have come through your father?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, you mentioned that earlier.

MS. RICHARDS: I know you were too young when he passed away. You weren't even thinking about being a curator, but in retrospect, is there anything that –

MS. RORIMER: I think the passion. That's so corny. The involvement with art and wanting to exhibit art, acquire art, understand art—

MS. RICHARDS: Devote your—

MS. RORIMER: —devote your life to art over almost—I don't mean that he wasn't a good father, but probably if he had to choose, he would have chosen art over—I mean I don't mean that badly, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —I had to choose, ultimately, because I couldn't do—as I maybe said earlier, I can't multitask. I just sort of had to choose. I don't think I could have dealt with a family. So the involvement with art and the commitment. Commitment. Maybe not involvement simply.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: A real commitment that I'm starting to understand about my father through reading some letters I discovered. And, of major relevance here, he was very excited about the idea of acquiring a Jackson Pollock quite soon after it was painted, and he was excited about hiring Henry Geldzahler for the Met. He, my father, was open to the idea of involving the supposedly fuddy-duddy Met in contemporary art.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: —totally committed.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if this is an odd question, was that aspect of your past, and Anne d'Harnoncourt's past, part of your closeness?

MS. RORIMER: Oh—

MS. RICHARDS: That she had also—

MS. RORIMER: —well—oh, let me think about that. I didn't mean to—

MS. RICHARDS: —a father who was a museum director—

MS. RORIMER: Well, I didn't really know her till later.

MS. RICHARDS: Till you lived in London together?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, and even then, she was kind of high-powered then, and I was—no, we had dinner parties, or she had dinner parties. She's the one who knew all the people, but I would say more after London somehow. Well, you know, I had her apartment and I had her job.

MS. RICHARDS: Since you weren't in the same field as your father—you were in contemporary—you didn't face the problem of having your work compared to his.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, if I had become a medievalist or something—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Well, let's see about Anne. These are things that I have to think about.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you share a special closeness that you consciously realized because you had fathers who were very accomplished in the museum field?

MS. RORIMER: Maybe. I don't think it was anything—it's hard to say, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't something you talked about.

MS. RORIMER: No, we didn't talk about it. I remember meeting her father when he came to London, and so that was sort of exciting because he—

MS. RICHARDS: You could also have said you shared kind of a burden, that everyone would say, "Oh, I know your father. I respect his work so much."

MS. RORIMER: I don't think Anne was burdened by that. I think she was her own person early on, and she was a huge success in school. I don't mean to be putting Anne on a pedestal, but it was different. She had a real sense of herself and accomplishment and—which I think allowed her to be intellectually and professionally very generous.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: She wasn't worried about who she was.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I'm just thinking this off the top of my head—whereas I had more of a complex. Now it all seems rather silly, now that I've succeeded in doing my own thing over time.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

Well, going back to the Art Institute, after you did that '82 show, and you started teaching in 1980—and we'll talk about that—and you were thinking about wanting to write, what led up to your leaving in 1984?

MS. RORIMER: Oh.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this a good—

MS. RORIMER: At the time, it was really hard to decide to leave. I'd complained to a few people in my inner circle, and one day they—

MS. RICHARDS: Complained about what?

MS. RORIMER: That I was feeling that I wanted to leave because I couldn't do the writing and—

MS. RICHARDS: It was because you wanted to do independent scholarship that you wanted, or specifically you wanted to—

MS. RORIMER: I wanted to write a book.

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't want all the administrative tasks?

MS. RORIMER: Right, and I found out I couldn't do both. I applied for a Guggenheim grant and, of course, got turned down, and of course, I couldn't have written a book in a year. And I asked for a year off, and everyone—well, that was considered unacceptable.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Why lose somebody for a year?

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Right.

MS. RORIMER: I finally announced that I was leaving, and Jim Speyer, I have to say, tried to hold on to me. He didn't just let me go. He said, "Oh, what about part-time? What about"—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So—

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't want to think about part-time?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I was realistic. Part-time would be full-time with part-time pay.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't think you could actually walk out the door and not come back until the next Tuesday or whatever it was?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, and I knew I couldn't, because when I had my leave of absence, I kept—I had three months off after, and in addition to, the NEA grant when I traveled around Europe.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I kept turning up in the office—hard to stay away. I think that's when I did my first teaching. But anyway, it just became more and more necessary to make a choice. Also, Jim Speyer wasn't well, and I could see that I was not going to be on the top of the list to replace him. I could just—

MS. RICHARDS: Would you have—

MS. RORIMER: Wanted it?

MS. RICHARDS: —would you have wanted it, or would that have made your—

MS. RORIMER: Probably not—

MS. RICHARDS: —crisis even worse?

MS. RORIMER: —but my ego probably wanted it. But luckily, fate decided—

MS. RICHARDS: When you thought about leaving to write, did you think about how you would support yourself?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. Well, here's what I really thought. First of all, I had a lot of money stored up from never taking my sick leave. I mean a lot at the time. Also, to tell you the truth, I thought I would just be leaving for a year or two, although not that I would come back to the Art Institute, because nobody offered that.

MS. RICHARDS: You would leave museum work?

MS. RORIMER: I would leave my Art Institute job and write this book, supposedly, and then another job would turn up.

MS. RICHARDS: So you felt you could support yourself for two years, say, on your savings, to write the book, and then you'd go back to full-time work?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, that it would all sort of work itself out, and so anyway, I gave nine months' notice, which I always think is sort of amusing, and it was all top secret because I didn't want to be a lame duck or—and whoever heard of nine months' notice, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I've heard many instances of that.

MS. RORIMER: But somehow I felt I was very attached to the job and to Jim Speyer, and he just said, "Oh, can you wait till I come back from my summer vacation?" So it would have been six months, but then I waited a summer, and I was in no huge personal hurry to leave, but I just thought, I've got to do this. And then everyone thought I'd been fired, because they'd never heard of such a thing, and then other people started becoming so-called freelance and leaving their positions. And then things began to come up, one after the other. Well, we could talk about that.

MS. RICHARDS: What were you thinking that you would miss the most about the museum?

MS. RORIMER: The Xerox machine. I remember somebody saying, "That's not important." I didn't think that, Oh, I'm going to be lonely at home—but, well, I did think, Oh, I won't have any collegial interaction, because I met so many people through my job.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So I worried about losing touch, but I think, ultimately, I kept more in touch by doing my own thing than—

MS. RICHARDS: When you left, did you have a particular book project defined in your mind, even maybe outlined?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I think before I left, well before I left, I had written an outline, but it was turned down by readers that said—I don't know. They just weren't interested in—

MS. RICHARDS: What was the subject?

MS. RORIMER: Sort of Conceptual art. It's basically what the book ultimately turned out to be, but more—what's the expression—fleshed out, and with much more—I had no idea what would be involved.

MS. RICHARDS: Which book was that, that it ultimately—not the book you published in—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, my one and only—

MS. RICHARDS: —in 2001?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. And the paperback came out in 2004.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. *New Art in the '60s and '70s[: Redefining Reality]*.

MS. RORIMER: It took a while. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: We'll go back to that.

MS. RORIMER: —go back to that.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, just wondered if that was the book. Okay.

MS. RORIMER: It took a while. Luckily, because I was able to write shorter texts that I would be asked to do, and sometimes texts I wouldn't have thought of doing on my own, which helped expand my knowledge.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's start talking about the issue of acquisitions—oh, no, that's a big subject.

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Katharine Kuh. You wanted to talk about her. And you knew her when—you were at the Institute when she passed away?

MS. RORIMER: No, no, I didn't know her, because she had long since left the Art Institute and been replaced by Jim Speyer in the early '60s.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever meet her?

MS. RORIMER: I did eventually meet her, and I started going to have drinks with her at her apartment in New York. Drinks would at times turn into staying until midnight—

MS. RICHARDS: Was this while you were at the Institute—

MS. RORIMER: —in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: —or afterward?

MS. RORIMER: Now, that's a good question. I think right after I left the museum. I had to contact her for some reason while I was at the Art Institute. When I would go to see Katharine, I just wished I had a secret tape recorder in my purse. She was so fascinating and amusing, the way she told stories about the past and—

MS. RICHARDS: You've read her book?

MS. RORIMER: Well, actually I haven't, but—

MS. RICHARDS: *My Life in Art [My Love Affair with Modern Art: Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator,, 2006]*

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. She was writing her book at the time, and I told her about some of the artists that I was writing about. So it was after Art Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And I told her about the work of Ian Wilson and—who doesn't make any objects—he does what he calls "Discussions" instead. She just loved that. She said, "Oh, I'm going to put that in my book. Oh, that's

so interesting." Now, I don't know if it ever got in the book.

She died not long thereafter, but she identified with me, perhaps, somewhat because I had been at the Art Institute, as had she, and was similarly interested in new art, at least then-new art. Plus, I think she had a little bit of a rivalry with Jim Speyer. I don't know. So—I think maybe she saw me—now, this is my pop psychology coming up—as a kind of a continuation of her earlier self with respect to Chicago and her younger years at the museum. Anyway, she was quite marvelous. Quite marvelous.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else you want to talk about in the next few minutes about the Art Institute? I know we don't want to get back into the acquisitions yet because it's too big a topic.

MS. RORIMER: One thing I'd like to mention about the Art Institute—

MS. RICHARDS: I'm going to ask you other questions when we get to museum practice kind of issues, but—

MS. RORIMER: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —in terms of your exhibitions and—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, in terms of me and the Art Institute?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, whatever you'd like to say.

MS. RORIMER: I'd just like to say that I forgot to put on my CV that I helped with organizing—well, working on, I should say—the Morton Neumann collection exhibition. First it went to Washington, where it had been preliminarily selected by the National Gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was that; do you recall? [1980]

MS. RORIMER: I think it was '82. I have to go look on my shelf.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was when he was donating the work to the Institute?

MS. RORIMER: Donating? We should have been so lucky.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. I'm thinking of someone else then.

MS. RORIMER: The other thing is this could fit into the general context of living in Chicago, with galleries and collectors, and it was such a part of the the job.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RORIMER: I could go look for my catalogue, but I know it was early '80s, and I wrote a little text about some of the works in the exhibition that I'm not sure were in Washington or not, but some of the "younger artists." I have to find that text because I—that's when I learned a little bit about Piero Manzoni and—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. RORIMER: —I mean Morton bought some amazing things, but on a broad scale.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. RORIMER: And then I remember him talking—when Joseph Beuys came to Chicago—talking to Joseph Beuys.

MS. RICHARDS: Morton Neumann talking to Joseph Beuys?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: Well, anyway, I'm sort of going off on a tangent a little bit, but just to say that there were other parts of the job that led to memorable encounters with both art and people/characters. So maybe this is a good place to stop for a minute.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[END CD2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Anne Rorimer in Chicago on November 16, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three for today. I mean for the whole interview, disc three.

Anne, we were talking yesterday and left off around the end of the time that you were at the Art Institute, and I meant to ask you—which was 1984—your title changed from assistant curator to associate curator. Did you then become curator? Did that title change again while you were there?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I wasn't expecting this question. I thought we were going on to—

MS. RICHARDS: —and then we'll talk about acquisitions.

MS. RORIMER: I did become associate curator quite early on, I think, in the '70s.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there ever a possibility that they could hire an assistant who could do some of that paperwork, freeing you to do—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, well, people were added to the department, but it was a bottomless pit of paperwork. Anyway, more to the point, I remember Jim Speyer saying that he had talked to the director about making me curator and told by the director he didn't think that there should be more than one curator, title curator, per department. So of course, what happened is—I wasn't ever trying to have a title, necessarily, because I was in it for the—not so much the glory as the involvement, but, anyway—and then just some sort of—what is it?

MS. RICHARDS: Respect?

MS. RORIMER: No, the reason—cause—the cause of, let's say, art and new ideas. I don't want to sound too highfalutin here; however, I have to say that I do feel resentment in retrospect. It has always annoyed me, irritated me, that, of course, the person who was hired to replace me, wonderful as he was and is, almost immediately got the title of curator some short time after joining the staff as the associate, whereas I had been there 13 years and been very productive, I now realize. So my lesser title didn't really contribute to the decision for—the decision for leaving was to expand horizons—

MS. RICHARDS: Right, because you—

MS. RORIMER: —expand horizons—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, explain that.

MS. RORIMER: —before it was too late. And I explained that when—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but I do think it's a case in point of discrimination, and of course, the salary for the others, men, later on was presumably much higher, even with inflation or whatever —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —that all works. So I'm not dwelling on that because—but I just—I'm not totally unaware of how I was treated because I was a woman, I would think.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You mentioned yesterday that you wanted to speak about acquisitions and that whole area.

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So why don't we do that now?

MS. RORIMER: Now, that's perfect because I really didn't want to harp on the title situation, and not so much the title, per se, but again, the idea of wanting to make way for professional growth.

This ties in perfectly with your question about the acquisitions, because that was often such a frustrating part of my job, not just to me personally, but I think it's a problem throughout museum history. I don't know so much if it is anymore. I can't say, because there is such a groundswell of interest in really contemporary work, but at the time, it was very, very difficult to acquire work by newer or younger artists—and not just in my own experience, but in the experience of our department before my time.

It was Jim Speyer's experience that he had presented a really major, early painting by Jasper Johns in, I think it

was 19—well, early on, early on—and the committee said—and/or the head of—who knows—but it was said at the committee that, "Oh, no, we can't afford that for a younger artist." And I think it was some pittance, maybe \$10,000. I don't know the exact price, but, "Oh, no, we can't afford that."

And then we would sit in on the committee for the department of what was then called Earlier Paintings, the Old Master paintings, and this committee would authorize \$100,000 for something at the drop of a hat, and throw in something for \$20,000, and just like, "Oh, that's so cheap."

So it was just a different mindset concerning what could be paid for younger artists. And now, of course, the curators have to go out and beat the bushes to fill the coffers for contemporary and Modern works. It's still not a piece of cake, but the institution readily supports this, it seems to me. So there's been much progress since my time there.

Just to add that there wasn't active support for what I would have liked to acquire, and facing what looked to be impossible [resistance, I] wanted to continue to put my talents to use rather than knocking my head against the wall for too much longer.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved in any kind of writing of policies or procedures concerning acquisitions in your department? Was that something that you and James worked on?

MS. RORIMER: We prepared for committee meetings together, but I was not usually the person who spoke up at the meetings. Now I often think back, wondering if we could have thrown a hysterical fit and said, "You are absolutely crazy, you committee people, that you're not buying this Eva Hesse." So Eva Hesse was presented twice while I was there. Both times turned down. Once it was a piece called *Tori* [1969] that did find a good home. I think it's in Miami now.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the date of that piece at all possibly?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, gosh. We could look it up later.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, I'll look it up.

MS. RORIMER: It's just in the book behind—and I hate to sound silly, but it was sort of puffy—the committee just couldn't see beyond the fact that it kind of looked like exploding baked potatoes or something of the sort. Well, not exactly. Anyway, the committee couldn't understand it, and we were getting it at a special price from Donald Droll—and oh, just to interject, there are just so many people from the past one would want to talk about, like Donald Droll, and he's—

MS. RICHARDS: What about him?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, well, he was just wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't want to interrupt the discussion about acquisitions, but I would love to hear these stories about collectors and dealers and artists who you knew. So let's go back to—

MS. RORIMER: I don't have any anecdote about Donald Droll, but he was involved with the Eva Hesse estate.

Anyway, I think the price was something—with the discount, special discount—was something like \$18,000. I could be wrong by a thousand or two. Anyway, the committee turned it down. And I actually am not somebody who—we all get depressed, but I was really upset for days when they had turned that down. I didn't realize I was so invested in—why should I care? But I felt that was a huge loss for the Art Institute, and it wasn't a huge price. And then later on, after, *Contingent* [1969] by Eva Hesse was shown in the American Exhibition; we talked about it yesterday, in 1972, I guess—I forget which came first. I think *Contingent* came first and then the possibility for *Tori* came later.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I'm pretty sure. Well, *Contingent* ultimately went to Australia, and it found a good home. So in a way it doesn't really matter, although being kind of USA-centric, I thought, Oh, it should be in Chicago. But that was turned down. I think the committee was afraid of the materials deteriorating, although *Tori* had no conservation issues to speak of.

I remember I wanted us, the committee, to buy a piece by Robert Smithson, which I think has ended up in the collection after all. And there is an Eva Hesse, a very good Eva Hesse, now in the Art Institute's collection. So these acquisitions came later, but at 10 times the cost. I saw the Smithson at an art fair, one of the Navy Pier art fairs.

I guess it's been helpful that I put in my little plug for such works, which were waiting in the wings until ready for other people's efforts to buy them for the museum. But, who knows?

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know any of the board members or people who are involved now in acquisitions, and do they ask you for your advice or thoughts on potential—

MS. RORIMER: I don't think so, except in one or two cases, where collectors like to ask my opinion. Actually, I do get some calls for advice. But, in large part, people have their own agendas. Not always, but mostly.

MS. RICHARDS: At that time, were you in touch with museum colleagues at other institutions who maybe were experiencing the same kinds of frustrations—

MS. RORIMER: Probably, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —with challenging work that the board members—

MS. RORIMER: I can't think right now exactly, but it could be. Yeah, it was part of the time, although I wondered later if I hadn't been aggressive enough with the people of influence.

MS. RICHARDS: In answer to your question, what if you had been more aggressive, they may have been more aggressive and to no end—I mean, to no affect.

MS. RORIMER: I would have been thrown out on my ear. You just don't know.

Oh, there was a funny story about being offered, as a gift, a Lawrence Weiner. It was offered by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, and the committee almost turned it down because they didn't know what it was, being simply a written text. And there was one vociferous person on the committee who shall go nameless, even though she is no longer with us, and she kept saying, "What's this? What's this? I don't know what"—and I distracted her. I happened to be sitting next to her and I just said, "Oh, well, you mean"—I said, "Oh, you know, it's sort of something new and unusual," and blah, blah, blah, and while I was talking to her, they put it through, because, of course, there was no money involved. But they still questioned its suitability for the permanent collection.

Then I acquired a Bruce Nauman piece, by the skin of my teeth, in fact. That did work out because we were going to pay for it with a fund that didn't need a committee, but the head of the committee at the time said he wanted to come in and see it before he signed off on it, because somebody had to sign the check to pay for it and Jim Speyer was out of town, but had agreed that we should buy it before he left. I didn't run off with the discretionary fund money by myself. So the committee head phoned and I got the piece out of storage, an early Bruce Nauman. It's an untitled work from 1965.

So, anyway, he called, about a half hour before he was to arrive, to cancel his visit, saying, "Oh, I'm tied up in a meeting, just go ahead and buy it. I don't need to see it. I'll sign the check tomorrow," which was incredibly lucky. If he had seen it, I highly doubt he would have agreed to sign the check.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you describe the piece at all?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. It's *Untitled*, 1965, a piece in fiberglass and polyester resin, and it looks like—sort of like a hairpin shape on the wall.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that that's your most memorable acquisition that you were involved in and supported and that went through?

MS. RORIMER: No. Probably the Buren staircase [*Up and Down, In and Out, Step by Step, a Sculpture*, 1977], I would say, was, for me, the most memorable. The other was memorable, too, because nobody was that interested in Nauman at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year it was acquired?

MS. RORIMER: It was probably early in the '70s when it was acquired.

MS. RICHARDS: Early in the years of your being at the Art Institute, in the early '70s?

MS. RORIMER: It more likely was later in the '70s, as I come to think about it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. RORIMER: I can't exactly pinpoint the year. It might have been later on, relatively later on within my 13



year—my lucky 13 years at the Art Institute, but a lot of these things happened by chance, not by proposing something to the acquisitions committee.

MS. RICHARDS: Should we move from acquisitions, or is there something else?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I just want to say that the acquisition I really wanted to make—and was one of the deciding factors to leave my job and get on with doing things for which I could see results—was I wanted to acquire a work by Michael Asher. I proposed it, not at a committee, actually. It was at a special meeting at which curators from all the departments were asked to present one thing they really wanted. I was competing with other departments, of course, and I remember the curator of American art, who I thought was pretty stodgy, supported me at this meeting. Probably he felt sorry for me proposing something so, in his term, bizarre. Anyway, we ended up showing the work in an exhibition, but it was never acquired. But in recent—not so long ago, James Rondeau showed interest in acquiring something by Asher.

So, again, time goes on, and it's what my friend and colleague Judith Kirshner—I don't know if you're interviewing her—and I think it was my metaphor, but she always reminds me of it. It's called "trying to get the lid off the jar": you turn and you turn and you turn, and you can't get it off, and then someone else comes along and says, "Oh, what's your problem with this jar?" So I always felt that all these efforts, and we're talking now about acquisitions or whatever, were like trying to open the tight lid of a jar, and then somebody else comes along and succeeds.

MS. RICHARDS: But it wouldn't have happened unless you had—

MS. RORIMER: Myself and other people—

MS. RICHARDS: —created the—

MS. RORIMER: —in the whole art world system. I'm not saying I stood alone.

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RORIMER: Although I felt professionally lonely, I didn't stand alone, by any means. Maybe the frustration of not being able to acquire certain things pushed me in another direction. Instead of hitting my head against the wall, I must have said to myself, Oh, how can I get over this wall and find some other walls and challenges to confront and contend with, like trying to write sentences and paragraphs and essays.

I thought of one other thing and it just went out of my head. Can you turn this off for a second?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, now I remember it, the other work that was never proposed, but I did mention it verbally around to the higher-ups: I would have loved to acquire the *Winter Garden* [1974] by Marcel Broodthaers, which we had shown in the *Europe in the '70s* exhibition. It was sold much later on to a museum in Belgium or Holland, and is probably more where it belongs, since the artist was Belgian.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And so that's enough. That gives you a flavor of—

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Actually, before we go on to the projects you did when you left the museum, or outside the museum before you left, let me ask you a few things about museum practice since we're still at the institution.

Did any of the exhibitions that you created provoke any controversy that you had to deal with, unanticipated or anticipated? How did you feel about negative responses, if there were any, to the exhibitions?

MS. RORIMER: To the exhibitions, negative responses?

MS. RICHARDS: Whether from the press or the board or the public or—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, that goes with the territory. The press—I remember Hilton Kramer coming to write about the—I don't think I'm giving away any state secrets—was coming to review the *Europe in the '70s* exhibition, and I remember Jim Speyer said, "Oh, I won't be available on Sunday morning. You have to go take him around." Well, of course, he thought maybe he'd be a little more charmed by just—by a young lady. I don't know, but he—and I thought, oh, of course, just no problem. I'll take him around and these works are so fabulous, he can't not love it. Well, of course, he hated the whole show, and he thought the Bechers looked like real estate photos, which in a funny way—they would have probably been happy to hear that it didn't look like "art."

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And then I showed him the room with *Particolare* [1972], the word "detail" in Italian, that was projected about 11 times around the—a room, a little room, by Giovanni Anselmo, one of my favorite works in the show. Well, I loved most of the works in the—all the works. And I took him in and I said, "Oh, isn't this just so poetic," and he's looking at me like, "Who's traipsing around here with me?" He didn't respond at all, but that was par for the course. Critics often didn't get it at that moment. The public certainly—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, especially him.

MS. RORIMER: —the general public, whatever that is, found it challenging. When I would go into the galleries, I'd overhear people say, "Oh, what's this? This is terrible." But let's see. Press, public. Who else?

MS. RICHARDS: When you heard that people didn't get it or you knew that people weren't getting it, what did you think should be done about that, about people's experience in museums, perhaps giving up on understanding contemporary art, when the purpose of your presenting it was to share it with them?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I think first you present it, and then it's available. And then there were the open people, and then I remember I had to give a few tours, not through the education department, but special groups that would, say, want the curator. And I remember being a little bit harassed by eminent people in the community. So names, no names, even though they're no longer alive, would say, "Oh, that Sol LeWitt. Well, that just—I can see that out there when I look out in the street and I can see construction going up. What's the difference between that and"—and I can't remember how I answered those questions, but I think that was part of the challenge.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that's the proper role of the museum, to allow viewers to find their own answers?

MS. RORIMER: No, no—I was—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, if you hadn't been with them, and you were there for just a small period of time giving a lecture, what do you think—

MS. RORIMER: Well, it's —

MS. RICHARDS: —the role of a curator is in terms of reaching these people?

MS. RORIMER: I think the curator has to first present, and hopefully choose relevant works. I actually don't totally believe in wall labels, but they can be helpful if they are well done, I suppose. That's why I went on to want to write—

MS. RICHARDS: But not to present extensive wall labels in the effort to help people understand the work?

MS. RORIMER: Well, it's something I have to think about. Maybe if I were on a symposium about wall labels, I would really think about this, but I think—

MS. RICHARDS: But when you were there, you were more interested in minimizing wall text, it sounds like.

MS. RORIMER: It wasn't so aggressively negative. We just didn't do them so much in those days, but actually maybe—I might not be agreeing with myself. I'm not saying there shouldn't be anything, or that you should mystify the public. In fact, sometimes I find wall labels helpful, too, just to get a little handle on what might be going on in a specific work, without thinking the label has said it all and you don't have to scratch your head further.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And of course, now the public is much more informed, I think. I don't know. Maybe not. With some friends recently we were talking at dinner about if you went up to the man in the street or the woman in the street and said, "Have you heard of Gerhard Richter?" Even though that was somewhat of a popular show, that they would say, "Who? What? What the heck?"

MS. RICHARDS: Even if you went up to someone visiting the Art Institute and asked them, they'd—

MS. RORIMER: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —probably say no.

MS. RORIMER: So back to the curator, I think the curator's role is, first and foremost, to make available what he

or she presumes to be of quality and interest. We're not going to get into words like "quality," but to present material not otherwise available to the public

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And I think many people are really interested. So little by little, information and ideas seep into the broader social fabric..

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I don't think everybody has to understand contemporary art. And then there are always insightful people who are open to trying to understand something, and what about collectors? They get interested. They're not from art history fields.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So actually, I think maybe the collector is the one who has an important role. And I don't mean in terms of giving art to the Art Institute, but in thinking about ideas and putting their money where their eyes are, not where their mouths are, but saying, "Wow, I think"—I'm not talking about investment either, because I don't know how that works on those huge scales. But people who might say to themselves, Oh, this is really worthy of consideration.

This makes me think of Morton Neumann when he was speaking with Joseph Beuys, who came to the Art Institute to speak in 1974. He was saying to Beuys, at a luncheon I organized, "Oh, yeah, what are you trying to do? What are you trying to do? Oh, I get it. Oh, sculpture. Oh, a new kind of sculpture." So I think the collector, the nonprofessional, maybe has to come into the picture. But it's the curator at the museum who has the wherewithal to start the whole process of thinking, of thinking about what might be going on visually for anybody who wants to engage in this process without having to acquire or own art themselves. In a broader conversation we'd also have to consider the role of the art dealer and exhibitions in commercial galleries.

MS. RICHARDS: While you were at the Art Institute, did you develop any relationships with collectors where you were able to introduce new ideas to them and they were responsive and you felt—

MS. RORIMER: No, that was my great fantasy. I wanted to meet somebody that would come in and say, "Tell me what to buy," and I would walk around with them or go with them to galleries in New York or elsewhere. The collectors I knew were much older than me and already formed.

MS. RICHARDS: Already converted.

MS. RORIMER: And collecting what was very challenging in their time, whether it was Abstract Expressionism, in the case of Muriel Newman.

In the case of Muriel Newman, she tried to keep up with what was happening even though her area was Abstract Expressionism. But she had parties. She would have parties after the opening of an American Exhibition, for example. In fact, I have photographs. Hopefully, you don't want any photographs of Jim Speyer and me with Carl Andre and Frank Stella, everybody looking incredibly young, like babies. And she just adored Daniel Buren, and she said she felt she had some special—what do you call it? Not karma, but communication with him. And he was charming. So—and Morton Neumann, he was always out on his own. He didn't need the curators to say, "Go do this."

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: They were very independent.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And so we had—"we," the staff, the curators—had good relationships with the collectors. Now and then I would meet somebody who had a collection, someone maybe not necessarily in Chicago, and they'd say, "What do you think is new and exciting?" I remember one collector quite some time ago to whom I mentioned Lawrence Weiner's work. I don't think she followed through on buying anything, but I'm just saying the collector is sort of the next avenue toward getting the work out into a broader sort of social arena. So, no, I never—I don't think I ever worked with collectors except in the most informal, socializing way.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Maybe now it's different. There are many more, younger collectors and maybe—I don't know how that works, but not in my case.

MS. RICHARDS: We talked about your wanting to spend time really thinking and writing and curating and not so much doing paperwork and all that. You actually did, I assume with the blessings of the Art Institute, do some curatorial work outside, including two exhibitions at the Renaissance Society.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, my moonlighting? Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: I understand that there was an exhibition you did of Dan Graham's work in 1981 and John Knight in 1983, both at the Renaissance Society.

MS. RORIMER: That was my escape—what do you call it—my safety valve, thanks to Suzanne Ghez. I guess she asked me if I would—

MS. RICHARDS: She probably knew that you would love to.

MS. RORIMER: I can't remember the exact circumstances, but she asked me, and I was thrilled and was able to get permission from the Art Institute. I didn't think it would take that much time away from museum duties. Museums are now very open if you do something outside their walls that brings attention and fame and glory to them. So, the Venice Biennale—

MS. RICHARDS: So Suzanne—

MS. RORIMER: —but this was just the Renaissance Society, albeit internationally known as it has now become.

MS. RICHARDS: So Suzanne asked you if you'd like to do a show. How did you decide to do Dan Graham and then John Knight?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I know. Now I'm beginning to remember. Going back to Judith Kirshner, actually, she at one point—I guess it was late '70s, 1980, late '70s. Anyway, she asked, Would I be on a jury to choose a sculpture for a university that had some money that—no, I know, it was for Argonne Lab [Argonne National Laboratory], not a university, out in Argonne, Illinois; they had money to do a sculpture, on their property in relation to a new building, by Helmut Jahn. And I essentially said, "Oh, I am so tired of being on these juries, since nobody I ever suggest is selected." My suggestions were at the time people like, oh, big names now such as Donald Judd or Sol LeWitt.

A Sol LeWitt did come about downtown because of me. The Oldenburg was thanks to me working with the architect of the building commissioning the sculpture. In the '70s, the choice of this artist was still highly controversial. I'm just saying—

MS. RICHARDS: Which Oldenburg?

MS. RORIMER: —in retrospect, I did have quite some influence, more than I realized at the time. *The Baseball Bat* [Batcolumn, 1977].

I won't tell all the stories related to it, but on the subject—we're just sticking with the Dan Graham. So Judith Kirshner said, "Well, that's"—I said, "I'm going to put in names that I'm sure we won't—nobody will listen—will agree to." And she said, "Well, that's why I'm asking you." I said, "Oh, okay, here we go again."

This time there were very good people on the jury, and somehow I said, "Well, I want to suggest Dan Graham." Suzanne Ghez was on the jury and I forget who else for the moment, but I know Suzanne was there for a fact, and maybe we talked about it ahead of time. Maybe we plotted in advance, could be. You'll have to ask for her side of the story.

So now there is a significant Dan Graham piece out at Argonne, just a little hard to get to, and you have to have permission to go in there, but it's just fantastic, one of his early, and probably the first, of his Pavilion/Sculptures begun in the late '70s. I won't wax poetic about the Dan Graham right now, but simply say that was pretty early on for Dan's public sculpture, right? I had met him when working on the American show in which he was included in 1979.

The Ren[aissance Society] exhibition came about as a result of Suzanne wanting to pursue Dan's work further. I worked directly with Dan to choose the works, and I wrote the catalogue essay during the summer.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you how you found time to write.

MS. RORIMER: Well, I—

MS. RICHARDS: —and the answer is—

MS. RORIMER: I didn't really. Oh, the answer is—what were you going to say?

MS. RICHARDS: That you had to do it in the summer.

MS. RORIMER: I had to try to take advantage of summertime or weekends, and then, ultimately, this just didn't work at all because I was too slow.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned at one point yesterday Dan Flavin, and am I wrong, it seemed like it was something you wanted to talk further about, meeting him or your relationship.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, since we're on the subject of the Dans—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —only that when Dan Flavin came to install his work in the 70th American Exhibition, of '72, we had the chance to spend a fair amount of time with him. When I say "we," my friend John Vinci and I took him around and showed him—

MS. RICHARDS: —Chicago or—

MS. RORIMER: —showed him Chicago. Later he had an exhibition in the print and drawing department of the Art Institute and he seemed very fond of Chicago. So only that I got to know him, and now it seems very memorable. So nothing particularly special, except that he was a special and unique individual, despite a rather ordinary demeanor on the surface—that's all. He wrote me a letter, not long after designing his work for the exhibition, telling me I should be spreading my wings beyond the Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there artists in those years when you were at the Institute, or even after—were there artists in Chicago who you became close to, or [were] important to you in some way, or were they mostly artists who lived elsewhere who you got to know or work with when they visited here or you traveled there?

MS. RORIMER: Now, that's a big subject. As I mentioned yesterday, I didn't know any artists before working at the museum. When I was in college, I happened to meet Andy Warhol at a party one time in New York. I didn't know who he was till the next day when I went to MoMA and saw the painting of Marilyn Monroe. I got to know artists, of course, once I was at the Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I met American artists from the start, and then the European artists who had to come to install their work in the *Europe in the '70s* show. So, for example, Mario Merz and Giovanni Anselmo from Italy, the widow of Marcel Broodthaers, Niele Toroni from Paris, and Buren, whom I'd already met.

Now, I forget if I mentioned my NEA grant, which was thanks to Richard Koshalek, who came through town while he was at the NEA and told me I should apply for a grant to get out of the Art Institute for a bit. At that point, I was able to travel in Europe after the exhibition and meet artists and collectors or re-meet artists again.

I had already met Gerhard Richter when I was organizing the *Europe in the '70s* show. After deciding on the works with Richter for his participation, I had gone back to my hotel room thinking, Now what do I do with myself here in Dusseldorf? Then the phone rang and it was Gerhard inviting me to dinner. "Now, what kind of food would you like to have?" he asked, and when I said, "I'd like some German food," there was a bit of silence and he said, "Hmm, that's a bit difficult!" But, more to the point, when he first met me, he had asked, "So, what is an American doing here?" You know, "What are you here for?" I was a little ahead of my time in going to Europe and meeting artists, even such renowned ones now, and taking an interest in their work.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: Over the years, I got to know quite a number of artists, and I'd have to go one by one through—

MS. RICHARDS: Were there curators at other museums in the U.S. that you were friends with? Possibly did you take part in AAM meetings or know curators on the curatorial committees with whom you could talk and compare notes and support each other in some way professionally? Was there any kind of network or friendships—

MS. RORIMER: Camaraderie?

MS. RICHARDS: —in the field, if not in Chicago?

MS. RORIMER: There were absolutely no organized get-togethers of curators, that's for sure. So, no, I was never

part of any kind of official networking. Such organizations didn't exist, that I remember. In fact, now I just found out I could join this curatorial—you know what it is, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —I wasn't able to because I was freelance, but now I guess independent curators can join, and I must look into that, but back in the day, as they say, we met each other through professional interaction, mainly, and often formed lasting friendships.

MS. RICHARDS: So you, in a way, were somewhat isolated professionally as a curator—not isolated, but—

MS. RORIMER: Let me just think, because I have to think, but I knew—somehow I got to know quite a lot of colleagues in the field. No, can't say I was isolated, really. People came through town to do research or look at works in storage, so I actually got to know many curators in this country and in Europe that way, or else in the course of my travels. There is Marja Bloem, to mention someone I met quite far back. Do you want me to spell it? B-L-O-E-M, was a curator at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

MS. RICHARDS: Maria?

MS. RORIMER: Marja M-A-R-J-A. And she was traveling by herself with her backpack on holiday, maybe on a bus, across the United States. She phoned our department from the information desk to find out who had organized the '76 American show since she had liked it. I spontaneously invited her to stay at my place instead of in a youth hostel or whatever. By the way, no email or Facebook in those days, just letters and phone calls for keeping in touch.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And she had said she hadn't planned to look up curators on her trip, but she was inspired to find out who had done the show.

Later on I visited her, and so one just made contacts, and that led to other people. I knew a lot of Europeans at the time and to this day, as well as having professional friends in different museums in this country. I could mention my friend that I had met when I was working briefly at MoMA, who is still there, Cora Rosevear. We could, and can, go to galleries together and discuss works, et cetera.

So that's just one example of somebody I actually could pal around with, and then later on, up to this day, there's a friend in Brussels named Birgit Pelzer. I think I mentioned her the other day, but I met her when I was in Dusseldorf.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it P-E-L-Z-E-R or—

MS. RORIMER: Z-E-R. She was a professor of art until very recently, not a curator, but somebody to talk to about art and visit exhibitions with. I met her in '78 when I was on my NEA travel grant. So one thing has led to another, and it's been a cumulative process spanning many years and still continuing up to the present.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me move a little bit sideways and talk about teaching.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned yesterday that you taught a course in 1980. That was the first one I know of, "Art Since 1945"—

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

MS. RORIMER: Well—

MS. RICHARDS: Were you seeking to teach a course? I think you talked about it a little yesterday. Did you imagine that maybe the answer to the problems at the museum is to get a full time teaching position for which research and writing would, obviously, be important?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I was never that deliberate in my thinking. Again, one thing has often quite serendipitously led to another. Even from the start, I never thought I would even get a job in a museum, [nevermind] mind in contemporary art. So the teaching came up when I had a little period of time off, sort of a paid mini-sabbatical. I got a phone call—no emails in those days—saying Professor Somebody, whose name just escaped me, was taken ill and could I fill in for the second half of the course, to which I agreed on a moment's notice.

I never thought of myself as being able to teach. I had fantasized, Wouldn't it be nice to be in the academic world as well as the curatorial one, but there was quite a schism in those days. There was hardly any communication between, like, the Art Institute and the University of Chicago, as I remember. Moreover, I didn't have a Ph.D. and thus wasn't eligible for a tenured position.

MS. RICHARDS: You never thought after you got your master's, One day I'll get my Ph.D.?

MS. RORIMER: Well, around this time, I was looking at possible escape routes. Thus, when I was in London, I did go speak to Professor John Golding at the Courtauld. I said, "Well, I'd like to get a Ph.D. I don't want to go to school in my own country because I would have to take so many classes in other fields. I want to focus, the way you do here in Britain, on contemporary art, and I'm interested in Marcel Broodthaers and artists such as that." And he looked at me and said, "Well, that's a little too contemporary for the Courtauld."

He continued, "Actually, the next generation of students will probably put what you might write in their footnotes, but you can't study that now, or we don't recommend it." Maybe there was somebody doing a little bit of work in that area and '70s artists, but he pretty much discouraged me from that route, or I got discouraged. And I thought, Perhaps I should think about writing a book and doing it somehow on my own and it'll be free. I mean, in terms of any—

MS. RICHARDS: Tuition?

MS. RORIMER: —tuition, right. It was helpful to investigate other routes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And of course, it's turned out that students at the Courtauld are now able to study the artists I wanted to study, if not also the artists of their own time as well. I'm just as—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —glad.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So you substituted for that course, and then it wasn't until 1991 that you taught again. Were you to teach a course, or did that happen in a similar way, that somebody called you?

MS. RORIMER: I think it was in a similar way, because I never proposed myself to anyone. Nancy Troy was on leave, and I'd have to think back who actually called me. And by the way, when I jumped into the 1980 course at UIC, it was a challenge I lived through. and in the process, I found out I could express myself, or even better, I could ask questions and get the students to express themselves.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: By the time the Northwestern [University] invitation came along, well, I was ready to try out teaching again.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: This class covered the entire 20th century. The students liked my anecdotes, of which I had quite a few. There was the one about going through airport security with a Jasper Johns after exhibiting it at the museum, and the security person asking me to open the heavy wooden box with many screws holding it shut that was packed by the Art Institute for a look inside. They looked in at the *Savarin Cans* sculpture [*Painted Bronze (Savarin)*, 1960], and then they looked at me and very patronizingly said, "Oh, is this something you made?"

MS. RICHARDS: And then another period of time went by until—I guess it's 2004, 2006, 2007, when you taught a graduate seminar. Is that something that you wanted to keep doing?

MS. RORIMER: Fortunately, the requests—again, they called me; I didn't call them—came at times when I wasn't occupied with any sort of writing deadline. I'd finished my book.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. We're almost finished with the teaching, and then we're going to go to that book.

MS. RORIMER: To the book, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I couldn't do anything while I was writing the book. We'll get to that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. I see.

MS. RORIMER: So actually, Judith Kirshner comes back onto the stage. She was dean by then at UIC and she wanted me to give a class. So I did, and then a couple of years later, in '06, in August, the phone rang and it was Marty [Martha] Ward at the University of Chicago, then head of the art department there, asking would I do a graduate seminar. These requests came because of the need to replace other people who were on leave or not yet hired.

MS. RICHARDS: But they're all focused on the area that I assume you were happy to teach.

MS. RORIMER: Right. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Conceptual art, or the '60s and '70s.

MS. RORIMER: Yes. They—well, we won't go into the course titles, per se—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but that period. And then—

MS. RICHARDS: So it sounds like you enjoyed teaching.

MS. RORIMER: I really did.

MS. RICHARDS: Didn't want to turn it into a full-time—

MS. RORIMER: No. It was—

MS. RICHARDS: —anything, but you enjoyed the teaching.

MS. RORIMER: When I was doing it, it was full-time and I found it very rigorous. In the later courses, I used much of my own material and my own slides, And doing a seminar, of course, was different from a twice-a-week, hour-long lecture.

Some of the students I still know, and they've gone on to become scholars in their own right or artists of interest. So it was a good way to, as we said earlier about working in the museum, to communicate in a different way. And so I did like it, but I don't think I could do it full-time.

MS. RICHARDS: And teaching three or four courses at once?

MS. RORIMER: I'm happier writing than speaking off the cuff, when I can't think out carefully what I want to say. But I'd hear later, through the grapevine, that the students really liked the classes. As well, certain students came up to me later at the university, when I was there for an event or lecture, and say, "Oh, your class was so helpful." So, yes, I liked the teaching.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's focus on writing for a little bit. We talked about when you had time to write.

[Audio break.]

Would you say that there's a particular audience that you were thinking of writing for?

MS. RORIMER: So the audience, let's see—I guess I just thought it would be an interested audience with some art background. I got the impression over the years that even clear, straightforward texts were hard for people that aren't in the field to understand, but I'd say my writing, as far as writing goes about art, was pretty understandable.

I wanted to write for an interested audience, but I also was thinking, really, of students, because this material on these artists was dispersed, although it wasn't not available. I was thinking of art and art history students or even of their professors, because so many of my friends and colleagues, art history friends and colleagues, had no idea about the '60s and '70s. They probably wouldn't have necessarily heard of Gerhard Richter at the time—or my friends who looked down their noses at what I was writing about. I mean, not Old Master—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.



MS. RORIMER: —or the Impressionists. So the Thames & Hudson people, who eventually published my book, wanted me to write for—I forget what they called it, a "general audience." I don't know if there is such a thing. So I wanted to write for a somewhat professional but uninformed—uninformed about contemporary art—professional. How's that? I think that makes a new adjective.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started writing this book that Thames & Hudson published, titled *New Art in the '60s and '70s*, did you have a publisher?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, well, I—

MS. RICHARDS: Did it start with defining the subject, searching for a publisher, getting one? How did that all evolve?

MS. RORIMER: Well, there was the outline I made for Yale University Press, where I was turned down. I read the reader's remarks, one of which was that I had no sense of humor, which struck me as rather bizarre, I must say. That was shortly before leaving the Art Institute. However, I thought a lot about how to construct the book and how to choose artists and—you know, you can't just sit down and write a book—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —and, then, once I was out of the museum and had left, presumably to write a book, lots of requests for texts and projects kept coming up, and I wondered if I would ever get to the book.

I was going to London one day for some reason in the early '90s, so I wrote some letters to various publishers and was invited to a meeting at Thames & Hudson—did I mention my editor's name?

MS. RICHARDS: No, I'd like to get that.

MS. RORIMER: He was pretty well known and beloved, Nikos Stangos.

MS. RICHARDS: Nikos—

MS. RORIMER: Greek, K, Nikos Stangos.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that right?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. So he met with me and was somewhat encouraging, and asked me to send a chapter, and then another chapter, and then finally I got a letter saying he and his colleagues thought I was up to the job. Nikos Stangos at Thames & Hudson turned out to be a wonderful friend and advisor. But it took years for me to find the publisher, just at the turning point when the material was becoming interesting to people. I think it was a timing thing.

MS. RICHARDS: When you then had the commitment from Thames & Hudson to publish the book, did you have an outline that was, in fact, the outline for the book, or did you—

MS. RORIMER: Well, my earliest outline—

MS. RICHARDS: —refine it and—

MS. RORIMER: —I had to, of course, refine it, and then I had to write actual chapters, but the basic structure stayed the same. It took a long time for me to figure it out, and also, new artists came into my frame of reference, which was good because I could include them in the book.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have complications with rights to reproductions, images of the work or—

MS. RORIMER: I was lucky. No. I had to do a certain amount on my own, and T & H helped me to some extent, but I don't think I ever, ever want to write a book again, just because of how hard it was to—

MS. RICHARDS: To get the images?

MS. RORIMER: —not to get them, but to organize getting them, and the permissions from artists' rights organizations, in many cases. One situation comes to mind—well, I don't even want to go into this, but maybe I'll just mention it quickly. I had permission from all of the artists as totally necessary, but then MoMA went through the really tiny print list of photos, oh, quite some years after the book had been published, and came after me with a bill, saying I owed money for reproduction of one or two of the images in their collection, maybe just one or two, and it was so funny, I—

MS. RICHARDS: Why you? Why not Thames & Hudson? Why would you owe it?

MS. RORIMER: I remember being upset, so I must've been the one paying. Anyhow, I was upset, not because of the money so much, but by the idea that—again, back to your idea of education and communication—that I was trying to make works in their collection understandable to whomever their audience might be. I wrote a blasting letter, which I never sent, but I got my frustration out of my system, and then I paid. But I was in tears. It was just the whole idea of being charged. Plus, writing the book demanded a huge amount of personal commitment and time—and then to be charged! I understand the economic necessity, but I took the charge, unjustifiably for sure, very personally at that moment.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —the idea of being charged for something that I had put my life's—I don't know about my blood, but—so—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I don't remember any big problems, really, beyond the overall stress of procuring some 300 photos and securing reproduction rights without an assistant.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were writing that book, were there theories, other writings by art historians, critics, people in the field that you wanted to correct? Were there ideas about some of the artists whom you were writing about, ideas about their work, that had been published that you felt were wrong, an incorrect interpretation, reading of the work? I don't mean that you were contentious about it or were argumentative, but did you have a goal in this writing to correct other art historians' interpretations that had come before?

MS. RORIMER: Just off the cuff, there weren't so many at the time, and what there was, I found useful, something to go on.

MS. RICHARDS: There's always been critical debates between one camp and another camp of art historians and theorists about interpretations and influences, et cetera.

MS. RORIMER: You know, I'd have to—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that you were in any kind of a combat zone in writing that book, or even any other works, and that you might get letters from people disputing what you said, or that you were involved in some kind of fight?

MS. RORIMER: Well, first of all, I was ever-apprehensive that the artist would not like what I wrote, which was always the opposite. For any major text I would, and still would do, pass it by the artist to make sure the facts are correct. And I know other scholars have had problems with artists saying, "Oh, no, I was not influenced by Surrealism; take that out," but I don't think I've had to deal with anything like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You commented that when you were working, writing, you would show the work to the artist to make sure you were—and that they could say, "That's not correct," but did you ever find yourself in a situation where you believed there was a certain reading of the work that was true or deserved to be discussed and put out there that maybe the artist didn't necessarily agree with? Did you feel restricted in that sense, that if they didn't agree, then you couldn't talk about your own perceptions?

MS. RORIMER: I'm really thinking hard, hoping I haven't repressed some difficult encounter with an artist, and I never had anyone—any one artist—disagree with what I said, but I think it's a bit in reverse. I'd say that I took a lot from each artist, sort of went right to the source, right to the horse's mouth. I've relied to a great extent on what the artist says. So I didn't try to do a critique. I was always just trying to understand and articulate the underlying ideas of any one artist's oeuvre and then try to fit it in—in terms of the book—fit it into a larger framework of the issues of the period.

MS. RICHARDS: Did artists ever say to you, "My God, that's right. I never thought of that. It's so interesting that you see this in my work or you made those connections"?

MS. RORIMER: I'd say the most effusive artist maybe recently, in my recent memory—well, there are a couple that have really liked what I wrote. There's Ian Wilson, who I was shocked to find out, and I might have—I mentioned him earlier in relation to Katharine Kuh. I just wrote a—maybe it's two years ago by now—an introduction for a catalogue raisonné [2009] of his *Discussions*, published by the Eindhoven Museum [Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands], also MACBA [Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona], and somewhere else [Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva]. He made numerous suggestions of things to put in, not about ideas of what his work was about, but certain things he wanted to have mentioned. But I loved getting his

phone calls, because he would be so flattering about how I, he said, had a way with understanding his work and expressing it.

And then another artist I could mention is Maria Nordman. She was somewhat wary about having anyone write about her, but she seems to have liked what I wrote in my book. We spent three days together, closeted—or I don't know about "closeted," because we were on the beach in Malibu—talking about her work. The only way I could understand her work was to talk to her about it. When I expanded my book essay for an essay for her exhibition in Porto [Portugal], which still hasn't been published, she made a number of changes related to phrasing, things she wanted to be put in a certain way.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that okay with you?

MS. RORIMER: It was fine, yeah. Things need adjusting and tweaking that the artist can understand the best, I would say.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So to answer your question about problems, no. I—

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if I understood correctly. You mentioned that you have actually gotten negative feedback from other art historians about how much you listen to the artists?

MS. RORIMER: I wouldn't say negative. I would say comments, sort of. Over the years here and there, people would say, "Oh, you really rely on the artists quite a bit. That's where you get your information." I don't know if it was meant negatively—

MS. RICHARDS: As opposed to—

MS. RORIMER: —being some sort of a criticism—

MS. RICHARDS: —repeating what someone else had written?

MS. RORIMER: Yes, or making some sort of—I don't know, because that wasn't my mission. My mission, that's the word I was trying to think of earlier today, having a mission. I couldn't think of that word earlier with regard to—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —being at the Art Institute, but I guess my particular—what I have to offer—and other people have lots and lots else to offer—was to lay the groundwork for understanding what the artist presumably is, was trying to get at. So I wasn't trying to—I just can't think right off the bat of trying to correct anything for the record.

I was trying to put down more of the record for someone else to come and maybe critique me or use it as a jumping off point. That's how I thought of the purpose of my book, and I thought of my book as incredibly superficial and just a beginning. I'm sure there are lots of areas to be—I don't know about corrected, but to be continued.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it correct, then, that most of the monographs you've written, articles, have been about living artists, and therefore you had that opportunity? Were there times when you decided to write about an artist who was no longer around, and did that then present a greater challenge?

MS. RORIMER: Blinky Palermo, for example, wasn't around, and thus I met with people who had known him and/or had works by him when I was in Germany.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: Marcel Broodthaers. Who else? Let me think.

MS. RICHARDS: Anselmo was still around, right, when you wrote about him?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He was very helpful with regard to a later essay for which I visited with him in Turin.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Yes, I think those are the—what did I say? Palermo, Broodthaers, and who? Somebody else.

Maybe that's it. I didn't put down every artist, by the way, that I—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: I thought of some later that are perhaps lesser known and/or younger. If you ever needed to know, I could tell you.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I think it would be interesting to ask you who you wrote about, artists who were less well known.

MS. RORIMER: I can just tell you right off the bat, there was an artist here in Chicago named—when I say "was," he's still very much with us, but left Chicago long ago, Mitchell Kane.

MS. RICHARDS: K-A-N-E?

MS. RORIMER: K-A-N-E. There was also Rainer Ganahl, who was still living in Vienna when I met him there in the early '90s.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. RORIMER: G-A-N-A-H-L, and I wrote a little brochure for his exhibition. Where was it? I think it was the Dallas Museum [of Art]. There's Caroline Van Damme as well.

MS. RICHARDS: Did I spell that correctly?

MS. RORIMER: Caroline Van Damme, D-A-M-M-E. She lives in Belgium. Beautiful work, but relatively unknown.

Not long ago I wrote a very short text on an artist living in New York and represented by the Paula Cooper Gallery, who was from Chicago and died some years ago [inaudible], a really good friend of mine: Michael Hurson, H-U-R-S-O-N. And when asked for the text, I kept digging my feet into the ground saying, "I can't write anything," because I can't write anything personal. It just doesn't work. I could never write anything personal—

MS. RICHARDS: By "personal," you mean from—

MS. RORIMER: —to me or my relationship to an artist or about an artist personally that would include their biographical information. But I ultimately wrote something brief. It was just a page or two.

MS. RICHARDS: Because he had passed away, you wrote about it after he died?

MS. RORIMER: Exactly. There was a catalogue put together a couple years ago, and they wanted mostly old friends of his. There were artists writing, and I think Jennifer Bartlett wrote.

MS. RICHARDS: Kind of an homage to him?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. And so anyway, I thought maybe the curatorial input from my side of things would be interesting, because I had met him soon after I got to the Art Institute, and then he became a good friend. So although I didn't think I could do it, I finally wrote something, but it wasn't my kind of thing. It wasn't an analysis of his work—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but I was happy that I did it, albeit at the last minute, as the catalogue was about to go to press.

MS. RICHARDS: How would you describe your relationship to editors, copy editors? Every time you write something, it goes to an editor, I presume, and every place has a different editor, and they may have different—

MS. RORIMER: —editors who might ruin one's text ?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, they may threaten to ruin—

MS. RORIMER: Well, in my early days I got upset about certain editings because, I don't know, I sort of liked my idiosyncrasies, but in all truthfulness, I'm just so grateful now to editors. They might take out a certain amount of character, but I think it's a necessity, and most editors have told me I didn't need editing much. "Oh, it's very lightly edited," they would all say over the years, and then I'd see all these marks and I would think, "This doesn't look light to me; it looks like my old college texts." Now I feel insecure if I don't have somebody read it before I give it to the official editor.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have a favorite editor, if someone asks you who you'd like to use?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, I couldn't think off the top of my head—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —because it's been so varied, and you just hope that it's not someone who just doesn't understand. I've been very fortunate with regard to assigned editors.

Most editors not only say I didn't need much editing—not most, but a number—but in the past, editors often would say, "Oh, thank you for being so nice to work with." And I would reply, "Well, I'm so grateful for what you did." So for the most part, although I was very suspect of editors in my younger days, in my older and wiser days, I'm completely indebted to editors. How's that?

MS. RICHARDS: Good. I noticed that you've written many essays in catalogues, including a couple for MOCA, LA, 1989, *Forest of Signs*[: *Art in the Crisis of Representation*]—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —and 2004, *A Minimal Future*[? *Art as Object 1958-1968*]. Is there somebody at MOCA with whom you had a relationship that brought about those contributions to those catalogues?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, absolutely. In fact, we have to talk about Ann Goldstein—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —who is now the director at the Stedelijk, as you know, but had been a curator at MOCA, I think from the start of that museum. She had been an intern at the MCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago], but I don't think we'd ever met when I was at the Art Institute. I just remember meeting her at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery one day in the late '80s, and she said, "Oh, yes, Mary Jane Jacob and I are"—I might be shortening this, but—"are hoping maybe you could write for our exhibition that's coming up."

MS. RICHARDS: This was *Forest of Signs*?

MS. RORIMER: This was *Forest of Signs*. And I also liked to—we make a joke about this. I pretend to take credit for introducing her to her husband, Christopher Williams, because she had seen his work, prior to meeting him later on, in the 1982 American Exhibition, and, well, the rest is history. She said, "Oh, that's so funny that you would take credit. For someone who doesn't take credit for anything, you're taking credit for my getting married, my goodness."

So there are all these interconnections, but the first connection with Ann was—and I already knew Mary Jane—was to write an essay, which was about the Conceptual art precedents for her show, which was about the '80s, and I wrote about the '70s. That's basically it, in a nutshell.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And then not long thereafter, she said she'd like me to think about doing an exhibition together, co-organizing an exhibition, on Conceptual art. And I thought, Oh, no, I'm supposed to be working on my book, but then maybe this will contribute toward the book. So it overlapped with working on the book. It both hindered and contributed to the book, and was really a wonderful experience, but it took—

MS. RICHARDS: That's the exhibition *A Minimal Future*?

MS. RORIMER: No, no, no, that was later.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I guess I'm jumping—

MS. RICHARDS: No. I know what you're talking about.

MS. RORIMER: The exhibition was called *Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-75* [1995].

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And let's talk about it under my exhibitions done after the Art Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: Good.

MS. RORIMER: That was the beginning of our full-fledged working relationship. She kept doing shows that were going back in time. So from her '80s show, for which I said I wrote a catalogue essay, she went to the '70s, with me as co-curator.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And then, after that, she did a show on Minimal art.

MS. RICHARDS: *A Minimal Future?*, 2004.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. Here again I wrote a catalogue essay.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So all the Anns in my life—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but she's Ann without an E —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —and when we were working on the exhibition, which we can talk about in a minute, we couldn't come up with a title for the longest time, not to mention how to go about conceiving the show, how many artists and such. Should I just talk about that for a minute?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, we're just on it.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a show from 1995—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —*Reconsidering the Object of Art, 1965-75*.

MS. RORIMER: And it was only shown at MOCA and I was the guest—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —co-curator with her. So we had many, many a conversation, and it took—we thought it would take place in the early '90s, and before we knew it, it wasn't—didn't happen until '95—which at the time we thought, Oh, it's been so delayed, and other people will do the same show, or the interest will die down in Conceptual art. Notice we didn't call it "Conceptual art" in the title—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —but in conceiving the so-called not-called Conceptual art show, we discussed, in our own metaphoric terminology, as to whether it should be a dinner party for eight or a cocktail party for 25. We were thinking in terms of how many artists to include, how to define it, how to focus it. And we ended up with about 50 artists and didn't cover the whole territory at all, even though when I would speak to people about my interest in the '70s, people would say, "Oh, the '70s. Nothing happened in the '70s." Well, a lot happened. So we did a pretty big—

MS. RICHARDS: How did you—

MS. RORIMER: —major exhibition that—

MS. RICHARDS: —how did you divide the work?

MS. RORIMER: How do you mean "divide" it?

MS. RICHARDS: How did you work together?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, oh, I thought you meant the choices and how we—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, everything. How did you decide what you would do, what she would do? What parts did you do collaboratively, and did you divide other things?

MS. RORIMER: Well, first of all, she was in an institution that had all the departments that could organize loan forms and shipping and all that kind of thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: We had quite a number of meetings. She would come to Chicago and sit here as we are now, because I had a lot of books. So we could go through catalogues and get ideas. We also made at least two trips together to Europe and a number of trips to New York to visit artists and collectors.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was a real dialogue throughout the time, the two of you deciding —

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: And then not only the process of defining the show and selecting the artists, but also selecting the individual pieces that would be in the show, and that everything was done together?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, or with many of the artists too. There were certain artists that maybe I would never have thought of myself, and maybe the same for her.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And then there were the artists we had to agonize over as to whether they would fit, literally and figuratively. We would have liked, in the best of all possible worlds, to include many others. Yeah, it was definitely, I would say, equitably shared, given that I was just on my own and on the loose, and she was part of an institutional structure.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't remember, did that show travel beyond the—

MS. RORIMER: No, that's a sore point. We asked a number of institutions. Subsequently, years later, the very curators who turned the show down said, "Oh, that was such a fabulous show. I can't believe it didn't travel."

MS. RICHARDS: So it was museums not being responsive to the idea rather than lenders who didn't want to loan for an extended period of time?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I don't think the lenders—because often they were artists or—I don't specifically remember lender issues. There might've been some, but I think everyone was pretty forthcoming and generous. Of course, I always remember the positive things.

MS. RICHARDS: I think that exhibition was very positively received in the press.

MS. RORIMER: Really.

MS. RICHARDS: In fact, it might have received an award. Didn't it get—

MS. RORIMER: Maybe it did. I—

MS. RICHARDS: —an AICA [International Association of Art Critics] award?

MS. RORIMER: —I can't remember—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but it was large, so museums said, "Oh, we can't fit it," because MOCA, the Temporary Contemporary, oh, it's not called The Temporary Contemporary anymore, but the Geffen [Geffen Contemporary at MOCA], is that what it's now called?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: That's the big exhibition space?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And we had something like 35,000 square feet at our disposal.

MS. RICHARDS: You'd have to cut off half of it for other—

MS. RORIMER: Well, we said we could. We could've. We thought we could have tailored it to, I don't know, MoMA or somewhere like that. I think, basically, curators wanted to do their own shows, but maybe they never

did or—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —it doesn't really matter. I think it would have been quite cumbersome to travel it, but the sad part is it became so well known through the catalogue, rather than people seeing the actual work. So many a person, even people in the field, would say, "Oh, I couldn't get to LA." And I understand the problem because I've not been able to get places, but it was a pity that the actual works weren't necessarily seen by people who should have seen them, and—but everyone to this day said, "Oh, yes, the catalogue was wonderful. I'm so sorry I didn't get to see the show." But it's on the—how should I say? It's a well-known show.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: We pulled it off, I would say, and it was—I'd say it was quite impressive just because we got really good works and—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Shall we move from here then to other independent projects—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, let's just—

MS. RICHARDS: —you did? Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —quickly go through that.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's talk about that.

MS. RORIMER: Could you remind me what—there weren't so many.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, there was an exhibition—Tony Smith's work at the—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, no. Let me lay a few errors to rest because—

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RORIMER: Well, somebody wrote a little bio before I was going to give a lecture because I didn't get around to sending them one. So they pulled it together from the Internet, and they said they thought I had done these shows that somehow got on the—into the Google or the Internet, for which I only prepared the checklist, after quite a lot of work, but the shows themselves never happened. So Tony Smith exhibition, since I had written my little—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —M.A. thesis—when I say "little," it was—well, it wasn't that voluminous, but I had been interested in Tony Smith early on. Anyway, I was asked by the Brooklyn Museum and Charlotta Kotik, who was the curator there at the time. We've known each other from when I briefly worked at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, where she had previously worked.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: She and I worked on preparing the Tony Smith checklist, and I have lots and lots of material and photographs and—

MS. RICHARDS: Why didn't that exhibition happen?

MS. RORIMER: It was probably a budget issue, maybe, and it would have been an expensive show.

MS. RICHARDS: Was this when Bob Buck was the director?

MS. RORIMER: Yes. You know, big pieces. I think it was not meant to happen at that moment, and then I guess it was Rob Storr—was it Rob Storr, who a little later did the MoMA Tony Smith—

MS. RICHARDS: I'm not sure.

MS. RORIMER: —Smith exhibition, really nice exhibition at MoMA, and somehow—I can't tell you exactly what happened, but I'm quite sure it was budgetary. And then the other exhibition that I was asked to work on by an institution in Holland, which was providing a grant for the Philadelphia Museum [of Art], was—I cannot pronounce Ger's—



MS. RICHARDS: Ger van Elk?

MS. RORIMER: —Ger van Elk, but to say his first name in the true Dutch manner, I'd have to really go into the depths of my throat. So, yes, the Ger van Elk exhibition was ages ago, in about '86.

MS. RICHARDS: Nineteen eighty-six.

MS. RORIMER: And I recently wrote an essay on him, and I went back to my file from the time. I didn't remember how much work I had put into thinking about the show and putting together a checklist and again, maybe—I'm not sure what happened between Philadelphia and the funding agency in Holland.

MS. RICHARDS: But it did—you mean it didn't happen?

MS. RORIMER: It did not happen—

MS. RICHARDS: Did not happen at the Philadelphia Museum.

MS. RORIMER: —even though it says I did it on the Internet.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, yeah, [inaudible] prepared the checklist only, meaning it was—you did everything except—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —request the loans.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, and there was another one I didn't put on the CV you have that fell through, a Lawrence Weiner exhibition for the—was it Federation of American Art?

MS. RICHARDS: AFA [American Federation of Art]?

MS. RORIMER: AFA, yeah. And that didn't happen, but again, I did a lot of work on it.

MS. RICHARDS: Working as an independent curator all the years that you have been, did you have a standard contract that you used? This is getting into the nuts and bolts—

MS. RORIMER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: —but many independent curators have spoken about the challenges of working independently with big institutions and maintaining the kind of curatorial control that they feel they should, and obviously, being paid appropriately and all the rest. Did you ever have any issues in that regard, and did you just take each institution's contract, and were there—

MS. RORIMER: [Inaudible.]

MS. RICHARDS: —pieces that you always had to fight for or not?

MS. RORIMER: By the way, just about the Lawrence Weiner that didn't happen —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —there was an exhibition at the Arts Club that did happen. Weiner did a series of five works, which are now owned by Dia, but we always call that piece at Dia, titled *Five Figures of Structure*—I could show you the catalogue with my essay—we call it—"we," Lawrence and myself, refer to it as the "Arts Club piece." So I just want to mention it now because—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I see, 1987.

MS. RORIMER: Contracts? I don't know. I've always been a little bit trusting, sort of relying on gentlemen's agreements. Pardon the expression of gentlemen, ladies' agreement. After all, I was working with people I knew well and—

MS. RICHARDS: And trusted.

MS. RORIMER: —trusted, and I'm not good at saying, "That's not enough money," although I might turn down a request if it's not.

MS. RICHARDS: Or, "That's not part of my job"?

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: In each exhibition that you've worked on, you've also written in the catalogue, and so there's—right?

MS. RORIMER: The exhibitions that I organized and, yes, wrote for the catalogue were Dan Graham, John Knight, Lawrence Weiner, *Reconsidering*. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, definitely it involved writing.

MS. RICHARDS: So the writing and the curating just worked hand in hand. If you could say, what's the most—the more rewarding activity?

MS. RORIMER: Well, now that you're bringing it up, I think the reason I did these exhibitions was mainly to have a chance to write about the artist in some depth. I welcomed any opportunity to write monographic articles where possible. By the way, I did write on Broodthaers for *October*—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —at the request of—

MS. RICHARDS: That was in 1986.

MS. RORIMER: —Benjamin Buchloh, who figured importantly in my life, and I thought he was—is there an expression, "the cat's meow"? I don't mean this only in the past tense. I still think he's fabulous—but in those days—I can't remember if I talked about his essay for the *Europe in the '70s* exhibition. Oh, we don't have enough time. There are so many things to talk about, but anyway, what was I talking about? Benjamin Buchloh?

MS. RICHARDS: How you did an essay on Marcel Broodthaers.

MS. RORIMER: Marcel—oh, at his invitation—

MS. RICHARDS: For *October*.

MS. RORIMER: —for *October*. So I was pretty flattered because, I don't know, that he would even think I was up to something like that, although he always had said he liked my 1978 Palermo essay.

And now—speaking of setting the record straight—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —I read somewhere in the—oh, in Dia's Blinky Palermo publication, they were speaking about the authors, and I submitted an essay for that, and it—

MS. RICHARDS: This is the one that's coming up?

MS. RORIMER: No, no, not the exhibition. There's some writings on Palermo that came out a couple years ago. I was amused to find that I was identified as being a student of Buchloh's. And I guess the confusion came in that I went to one of his lectures when he was a professor at the Dusseldorf Academy, that year in—that I said I was in Dusseldorf.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Not to see Richter, but on my NEA grant.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And I was sort of a Buchloh groupie, not that there was such a thing then. I was sort of, again, ahead of my time, and he was the first person I came across that knew about the artists that I was getting interested in, like Stanley Broun. So he was very important for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: We could do a whole other interview just about the people I have met that bowled me over, artists and a few—

MS. RICHARDS: So when did you meet Buchloh?

MS. RORIMER: I met him about the time I met Richter, but I met him in Cologne. He was working at, or had just worked for, the Zwirner Gallery, and I happened to wander in there and they said, "It sounds like you should meet Benjamin Buchloh. He knows all about Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren." He had been the editor of *Interfunktionen* journal, and I think it was just coming to an end because of funding. That's when I had the idea to invite him to write an essay for Chicago. This was at the time I was working on the European exhibition. And why am I talking about him? Oh, because he asked me to write on—

MS. RICHARDS: And because he—

MS. RORIMER: —oh, I know, because of the connection with Palermo.

So it just so happened when I was back in Germany on my NEA grant that he was giving a lecture to his class one of the days I was in town. He told me I could attend. I didn't know too much about Palermo, although I was doing research on him for a possible article, visiting museums and collectors to see actual works. While listening to Buchloh's lecture at the Academy, I thought I understood what he was saying in German, but I can't be too sure. However I saw his slides and I took some notes on what I thought he might be saying to his class.

MS. RICHARDS: How could that have been interpreted as your being a student of his?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I'm thinking—I'd have to look at the *Artforum* article. I acknowledged him. I know what happened: I acknowledged him because I'm always terrified of plagiarism. So there was always this fear that I would take somebody's ideas without even knowing it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Fear of plagiarism as well as not giving to credit to others. Therefore, I acknowledged him at the end of the article because I had attended his lecture at the Academy in Dusseldorf. So I guess one could very possibly infer that I was a student, whereas I was just an itinerant of sorts.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you were a museum professional.

MS. RORIMER: A curator—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —trying to learn about something early in my career.

MS. RICHARDS: And you've kept in touch with Buchloh over all these years?

MS. RORIMER: I stayed with him and Louise in Paris when Felix was about two years old.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I visited them in Nova Scotia, but then life got pretty busy. But I've seen him recently, and it's always inspiring. He was here in Chicago for a Marcel Broodthaers film showing at the University of Chicago. He gave a keynote address.

So we were talking about Marcel Broodthaers. Benjamin is one of the major scholars, although there's a new book out and I just wrote the little—what's it called? The support—the squib on the back.

MS. RICHARDS: On the back, yes.

MS. RORIMER: So that's exciting to be considered worth—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Who's written that new book?

MS. RORIMER: It just came yesterday. It's—

MS. RICHARDS: Let's see. This new book that you mentioned, *The Absence of Work, Marcel Broodthaers, 1964 to 1976* by Rachel Haidu [2010]

MS. RORIMER: —by Rachel Haidu. It's very scholarly. And she was a student of Buchloh's and she was at the symposium. Anyway—

MS. RICHARDS: And there's your quote at the back.

MS. RORIMER: —the press asked me for—

[Audio break.]

[END CD3.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Anne Rorimer at her home in Chicago on November 16, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, disc four.

I wanted to talk about the projects that you've been doing the last decade. We've touched on some of them, but let me go to the exhibition that you curated on Michael Asher's work at the Art Institute, and how did that come about and—

MS. RORIMER: Oh, good. I'm glad you asked since—

MS. RICHARDS: —describe that project.

MS. RORIMER: —Michael's one of my—I don't know what you would call it.

MS. RICHARDS: I remember reading about that exhibition, wishing I had seen it.

MS. RORIMER: Well, it was based on a work Asher had done in '79, and it was a revisiting of sorts, but it was a new work. And it came about thanks to James Rondeau, who was some curatorial generations after me at the Art Institute, and he's Curator of Contemporary Art. He heard Michael give a talk out in LA and was very impressed with what Michael was saying, and I think I'd also talked quite a lot about Michael and—

MS. RICHARDS: You were involved in that—

MS. RORIMER: —work on Asher.

MS. RICHARDS: —original project at the Art Institute?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: You're the person who he worked with.

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I was one of the—and that's so interesting in itself, but we're not talking about the specific work, per se, because that can all be read about. I think I mentioned earlier that my goal, or dream, had been to acquire a work by Asher, and that had never worked out. So this was almost like a dream, being brought back to—I don't know if you can say dreams brought back to consciousness, but anyway. So James, knowing that I was such a Michael Asher fan-enthusiast—

To diverge a moment, I've written quite a lot about Asher. Awhile after my *Artforum* article, I wrote for the Renaissance Society, for Suzanne Ghez. I didn't curate the show, but I wrote an article in the catalogue, with other essayists, about his 1990 work at the University of Chicago. So I've been following Michael for a long, long time.

Anyway, this was an opportunity to work again with Michael, in hopes of—again, I was hoping for a museum acquisition, but that never came about. But I did write, along with the assistant for the exhibition, who did much of the work on the exhibition, Whitney Moeller.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her last name?

MS. RORIMER: Moeller, M-O-E-L-L-E-R. She also wrote in the book that the Art Institute published on the revisiting and reinventing of Asher's 1979 work in 2005, using the bronze cast of George Washington by the 18th-century French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon that once graced the façade of the museum and now is installed in City Hall.

MS. RICHARDS: Whose idea was it to—

MS. RORIMER: So it was James's idea, James Rondeau, but it was also his idea to involve me, and then he had his assistant, Whitney Moeller, helping. And there was a lot of archival work to be done in the Ryerson Library.

We brought out a lot of documentary material related to the exhibition taken from the files of the 73rd American Exhibition. And that was quite fascinating, to see all this correspondence in the Library's cases. Also, in a way, it was rather sad to think that one could never do an exhibition like that in this day and age, since typed or handwritten correspondence has been given over to email, and all sense of paperwork's texture has been lost in

the process.

MS. RICHARDS: True.

MS. RORIMER: Back to the piece itself, a problem arose when Michael wanted to place the bronze cast of George Washington by Houdon in another curator's galleries. I don't think there's time now to go into it here, but I really should write it all down before I forget all of the institutional intrigue involved in securing permission.

MS. RICHARDS: But you prevailed? You got what you wanted?

MS. RORIMER: We did. We did, but it was touch-and-go and stressful, stressful. It was very stressful, although also, perhaps one could say, exhilarating in some way that's hard to express.

So, yes, we prevailed, which leads me to think there could be a whole discussion at some point about the internal politics when working with an artist such as Asher, or Buren, or working outside of conventional institutional and installation practices.

Okay. So that was that. Was that enough, or just enough to pique somebody's interest in the situation?

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved at all with the Michael Asher show at the Santa Monica Museum?

MS. RORIMER: No, not at all. I was happy to be able to see it, but [had] nothing to do with that. I didn't write an essay. Miwon Kwon did.

MS. RICHARDS: There's a couple of things you've worked on that haven't opened yet or been published yet. Did you mention there was an essay on Conceptual art you did for the Stedelijk that hasn't been published yet?

MS. RORIMER: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that something Ann Goldstein—

MS. RORIMER: No, pre-Ann Goldstein. I hope she likes it, because she's inherited it.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it being published in conjunction with their opening?

MS. RORIMER: With the reopening. They invited something like 40 people to write on their areas of expertise, and they assigned me 10 artists that they called—oh, it was such a funny title. Oh, well, I can't—we can come back, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Was that odd to be assigned the artists or did you mind that?

MS. RORIMER: I had to think it all out and how to make a coherent essay, but I didn't mind it, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever say, oh, "Take this one out, add this one"?

MS. RORIMER: No. I try to do what I'm asked, if possible, of course.

MS. RICHARDS: So you finished writing this essay for the Stedelijk. It hasn't come out because they haven't opened.

MS. RORIMER: It hasn't come out yet. There were some—and—oh, I was just one of something like 40 outside writers, and they assigned me 10 artists, and I—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —put it together. Actually, there was a little bit of a critical aspect. I guess I wasn't theoretical enough, or as much as all the other writers. They were a little bit upset, I'd say, that I talked about the specific works in the museum's collection, which I thought was what was required.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: So I—and that's the way I write. It's very—oh, the word that starts with E that I can never remember, where it's just—

MS. RICHARDS: Not "erotic"?

MS. RORIMER: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RORIMER: That would be more interesting. Turn off the recorder for a second.

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. So you were talking about the essay and how they had a problem with it because it wasn't theoretical enough.

MS. RORIMER: Something to that effect, and I must say, I did fix it up a little with a little more of an argument in the introduction and the conclusion, and they were seemingly very happy with it after that. But my *modus operandi* is empirical, I would say. I should have said that earlier about my writing – that's the E word I was looking for.

So, anyway, my, so-called empirical essay was maybe too empirical or whatever, given that critical theory was not a part of my educational background. I had to catch up with Structuralism and Post-Structuralism on my own. For me, theory reveals itself within the confines of aesthetic practice when closely observed and considered. I think I made a contribution to a book focused on a museum's collection nonetheless.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So it was mostly, well, artists working with language, photography, and then I ended up with the Stedelijk's site-specific piece by Daniel Buren.

MS. RICHARDS: When you talk about an empirical approach, and a kind of a generational shift, you alluded to, perhaps, art historians being more involved, or curators being more involved in theory in their writing. Do you think there's also a divide between American versus European curators, Americans maybe taking a more empirical approach and the Europeans taking more of a theoretical approach in general?

MS. RORIMER: I'd have to think that all out, but possibly. I have to think about specific exhibitions that—well, there were some exhibitions that I never actually saw, but they were maybe somewhat theory-based—

MS. RICHARDS: It seems—

MS. RORIMER: —exhibition at the Pompidou or—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —I think you could be right.

MS. RICHARDS: When you think about curatorial training now, if a young person came to you and said, "Now, I've just got my B.A. in art history and I want to be a curator. Should I go to a curatorial studies program," which now exists in many—

MS. RORIMER: Many.

MS. RICHARDS: —places, "or should I get my master's or Ph.D. in art history and be a curator from that point?" Which would you advise?

MS. RORIMER: Well, in terms of posted job descriptions, I think you now have to have an M.A. at least, if not a Ph.D. in art history. My job was advertised as "M.A. preferred," but those who followed me, starting with Neal Benezra— he was the first before Madeline Grynstejn and then James Rondeau—might all have Ph.Ds. I know, for sure, that Neal had a Ph.D. In terms of curatorial studies, it certainly can't hurt. I never did a museum studies program, which I could have done at the Institute of Fine Arts.

So what was the question? What I would advise? Well, I'd advise the art history route, just because I think it's solid and, with curatorial, you learn—if you ask me—you just learn—what is it—initiation—

MS. RICHARDS: On the job?

MS. RORIMER: —by fire?

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MS. RORIMER: I'm not saying one shouldn't do the curatorial studies, and also, there's not only contemporary art. I'm a strong believer in one's being informed about a range of periods of art.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: Knowing about older art contributes to thinking about and understanding the art of one's own time.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So, without doubt, I would say do as much art history as you can, because once you're in the museum, you probably won't have a minute to think about art again—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —except in terms of selecting artists for acquisition or exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: Another professional question. Sitting here in your home, surrounded by thousands of books, I wanted to ask you how you came to build such a library and how it helps you with your writing, as, obviously, it must. Was this a dream that you had, to create such a library, or did it come about in a more surprising way?

MS. RORIMER: No, the opposite. It's somewhat the nightmare I've come to live with. I don't know how many thousands of books there are, but probably a few thousand, right? I haven't actually counted, although I did have to figure how many feet of book space I would need when I moved from across the street, where much was on the floor. So I had to measure the piles of books to figure out how they might fit on shelves. I've lived in Chicago for a while now, and books seemed to have accumulated as if of their own free will.

Over the years, I would go to bookstores, like everyone does. In New York there was Jaap Rietman in SoHo, remember?

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: If you really want some ancient history.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And there one would see a book that possibly looked of interest, something on Douglas Huebler or whatever, and add it to the purchase. Now some of these things are totally unavailable or—

MS. RICHARDS: Right, they're rare.

MS. RORIMER: —rare. And then after I realized I had somewhat of a collection and found out that it was—once I had left the Art Institute and had all these books to deal with, I realized they were going to be really useful, and then I guess it's a little bit of a—not a disease, but when people—

MS. RICHARDS: An addiction?

MS. RORIMER: Addiction, that's the word I need. It makes things easier than having to go downtown to the library, if they will even have what you might need.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you do all the cataloging/categorizing yourself? Do you have anybody in here to help you?

MS. RORIMER: When I moved, many from more recent times were only loosely arranged according to when I might have acquired the book. So I was luckily able to find various students to help me, often on Saturday mornings or in their spare time, to organize them with some sort of system in mind.

MS. RICHARDS: And what did they do?

MS. RORIMER: First we put the monographs on one side of the room alphabetically, so that was easy.

MS. RICHARDS: According to author?

MS. RORIMER: Author. No, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Subject?

MS. RORIMER: Subject from—

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. RORIMER: —by artist. I remember I tried to—

MS. RICHARDS: So that's the monographic side.

MS. RORIMER: And then behind you is the category side; so we made some categories like Modern, Abstract Expressionism, Minimal—

MS. RICHARDS: And what about in the other rooms?

MS. RORIMER: —Conceptual. Oh.

MS. RICHARDS: What are those subjects?

MS. RORIMER: Now, don't make it sound like the cartoon on my front door, which makes fun of rooms and rooms and rooms of bookcases.

So besides the shelves here on either side of the dining room table, where there's no place to eat, there are some shelves in the bedroom and study. The study has mostly non-art books, like literature or dictionaries, as well as books on Deconstruction, Structuralism, and philosophy, some of which I've actually read.

So, no, the dream was to be mobile and nomadic and move on to the next job. These walls of tomes is the last thing I ever planned on, and I sometimes marvel at how they got here, little by little.

MS. RICHARDS: So and you continue to add to the library?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I'm trying to do it—

MS. RICHARDS: —on a regular basis?

MS. RORIMER: —a little less, but as you can see, there's a lot of—

MS. RICHARDS: See, you need to add some more new shelves.

MS. RORIMER: So I might need another Saturday assistant, and some new shelves, and then I have to think how to divest myself of everything eventually, unless I become immortal. And I do worry, not that I won't be immortal, but that nobody will realize that there are some valuable things wedged into the shelves.

In the course of working on my book, to elaborate further, I came to know a wonderful—how should I say—out in San Francisco, a book—

MS. RICHARDS: Dealer?

MS. RORIMER: —book dealer, Steven Lieber, who would phone quite often. This is before email, so I don't think I would have done the same thing with email.

Steven Lieber would always have intriguing questions about things that I think he knew more about than I do. Moreover, he would enthusiastically let me know about items he thought I'd be tempted by, in addition to publishing extensive catalogues detailing what he had for sale, which I combed through whenever they arrived in the mail.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have a sense of what you want—

MS. RORIMER: —for my research.

MS. RICHARDS: —besides for your research, that you want it to be complete for the sake of being complete?

MS. RORIMER: That's hard to say exactly. I do like to keep up on certain artists. Yes. For example, now suddenly I have a pile over there of books on Marcel Broodthaers, because I have a good collection of Broodthaers's books.

MS. RICHARDS: And you wanted to continue—

MS. RORIMER: So I want to keep up to date as much as possible, but it's just—

MS. RICHARDS: Do you spend almost all your—

MS. RORIMER: —hard.

MS. RICHARDS: —free time reading then?

MS. RORIMER: I never seem to have a chance to read. That's the irony of it all. I don't read unless it relates to a project, and then there are all these books, wonderful books that have come out by young and old scholars,



that I have, but I can't say I've read them. I probably shouldn't admit this or—

MS. RICHARDS: Join 95 percent of everyone who collects books.

MS. RORIMER: So the last thing I would have wanted is this situation, but I'm in it and eventually will figure out what to do about it—

MS. RICHARDS: Some—

MS. RORIMER: —I mean when I'm old and feeble.

MS. RICHARDS: —energetic assistants.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, no, but I mean when I—a friend of mine asked me, "What are you going to do with your books when you die?"

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: It's not an age thing necessarily.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: So I do worry, and probably have to get more organized and leave notes as to what's—

MS. RICHARDS: What are you working—

MS. RORIMER: —valuable.

MS. RICHARDS: —on right now?

MS. RORIMER: Right now? Okay. So can I just tell you what I've recently finished?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. Love it.

MS. RORIMER: —because unexpectedly I was asked by the Zwirner Gallery to write for their Dan Flavin book and —

MS. RICHARDS: The one that Tiffany Bell is—

MS. RORIMER: She was the curator of the show, gorgeous show, and she wrote in the catalogue. I don't know if it's being distributed yet. But anyway, there are three copies they sent me this summer.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So I was happy to have a chance to think about Dan Flavin a bit.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they leave it up to you what aspect of his work you would address?

MS. RORIMER: That was the hard part. In my empirical way, I ended up writing about the specific works in the exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And then I want to put this in before I forget—that I did write a catalogue essay on Maria Nordman. Did I mention that already?

MS. RICHARDS: I know you talked about—

MS. RORIMER: You said, I think, that almost all my artists were men and—

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned that you worked with her. You sat on the beach and—

MS. RORIMER: For the book.

MS. RICHARDS: For the book.

MS. RORIMER: And then I wrote again for a catalogue, to be published who knows when, but for her exhibition in Oporto about three years ago, three or four—

MS. RICHARDS: A museum exhibition?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, Oporto, the Museo Serralves [Oporto, Portugal].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And I don't know what's become of that. I'm not aggressive enough to say—they paid me, so I don't see that I can push them any harder—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —but it would just be nice for Maria and for me, because I would like to have—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —a woman in my résumé. Also, I've written on Hanne Darboven. It was a short text for the German Guggenheim about four years ago, five maybe, and mostly taken from my book, but still, even to rework things from the book —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —is hard for me, but I already said that. I've also finished an article on Roman Opalka that a Polish friend of mine asked me to write.

MS. RICHARDS: For a magazine or a—

MS. RORIMER: No, a catalogue for a show she was curating.

MS. RICHARDS: In a museum or a gallery?

MS. RORIMER: In a museum in Poland.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Do you have any issues with writing for a commercial gallery catalogue versus a museum catalogue?

MS. RORIMER: I would prefer a museum, but I have written for galleries that are very scholarly in their endeavors.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: At this point, Dan Flavin doesn't need promoting anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: And I wrote on Gerhard Richter, before my book, for Marian Goodman. That was back in the '80s. So I don't really write to promote an artist in a gallery. It's not so much an issue as it might've been way back when.

MS. RICHARDS: So after you've done those things, what are you working on now?

MS. RORIMER: I just finished a catalogue essay for a show being organized for exhibition at Berkeley, your alma mater, at the Berkeley Art Museum, and in Newport Harbor at the Orange County Museum. The show is being curated by Karen Moss, who works there—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MS. RORIMER: —and also by Connie Lewellen, whom I knew when she was was a curator at the Berkeley Museum in the '80s, I think it was.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: It was nice to work with her and get to know her again from the past. She asked me for 2,500 words, and my text came out to over 5,000. They have a lot of artists in the show related to California Conceptual art, and I agreed to write, after much arm-twisting.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did they need to twist your arm?

MS. RORIMER: Because I didn't want to take on any more—

MS. RICHARDS: You were too busy?

MS. RORIMER: —writing at that point. But I did anyway because I always think, Oh, you know, that'll be quick.

MS. RICHARDS: Twenty-five hundred words?

MS. RORIMER: And then it's hard to write about somebody else's selections and make some sort of, what I call, an argument or have an angle on the material.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So that's at press, we think, and so then—right now I'm supposed to be reading over the comments that just came back from the editor at the Art Institute, on the Minimal and Post-Minimal works in the Judy Neisser Collection—I should say Judith Neisser, N-E-I-S-S-E-R. James Rondeau was the one who asked me to write. There are extraordinary works in her collection, all extremely high quality. Then again I thought, Oh, that'll be easy. And again it took much more time than I thought it would.

MS. RICHARDS: I almost hate to ask you this, but is there another book that you have in mind to write—

MS. RORIMER: Well, that's—

MS. RICHARDS: —that won't take that much time?

MS. RORIMER: — a good question. The one I'm trying to get to and continue on is a book for Afterall in London. Do you know that press? They do a wonderful series. I can show you some of the ones I have, small books; they're called One Artist, One Work.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes. Yes.

MS. RORIMER: And so they've asked me for a book on Michael Asher, which is—well, something I really want to get—I have a deadline, so I really want to get going on that. I still have time and I've been working on it. So that'll be a little book, but —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —a book nonetheless. That's like writing five articles and so I'm a little nervous about that.

But in the meantime, Matt Witkovsky, the new curator of photography at the Art Institute, is doing a show about photography in relation to Conceptual art. It's called *Light Years: Conceptual Art and the Photograph, 1964-1977*. And again, some more arm-twisting, and it's hard to say no to one's so-called alma mater.

At first I wasn't included in the list of essayists and I was thrilled. I said, "Oh, let the newer scholars take over," the younger generation, and then somewhat later, Matt said, "Oh, no, we need your voice." So I have to figure out what my voice will be.

But going back to your comment on the difference between European and American art, he suggested that maybe I focus on the European artists in his exhibition. So I have to find out what distinctions might be made between the use of photography by European—if you want to call them Conceptualists—and American—I don't know. So I have no idea what I'm going to do. I would have been starting on it now except for meeting with you and finishing up the Neisser editing.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So the big project for me will be the—the big project, but little book—will be the Asher.

MS. RICHARDS: In that instance, they came to you and asked you. What if someone came to you and said, "You can do a book about anything"?

MS. RORIMER: Oh. Well—

MS. RICHARDS: Would you have a ready answer?

MS. RORIMER: I've always wanted to do a book on Daniel Buren. So my dreams, as you would call them, earlier on, were books on Dan Graham. Well, that's been covered very well recently by others. And this was before—Marcel Broodthaers, that's not necessarily fully covered, but there's still quite a lot on him. There's a whole younger generation of scholars with academic credentials. I've suggested the Buren to publishers who've asked me to do something on one artist, and I don't know, it hasn't —

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think they would hesitate because a lot has been published?

MS. RORIMER: Not sure. They're always worried about the bottom line and I don't—

MS. RICHARDS: I see. They're questioning about the audience; how many people would buy such a book?

MS. RORIMER: I don't know why, because he's really well known and—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it's hard to sell art books sometimes.

MS. RORIMER: Well, the publisher the other night from Uof C [University of Chicago] Press was talking about how difficult it is, and monographs especially have always been difficult. So I can't tell you right now what I'd like to do. There are so many subjects I really would like to investigate, but I think it might have to be in another lifetime. There have been areas that I often think about, but I don't think I have the time and wherewithal, but we'll see.

MS. RICHARDS: They would involve deep research? They would involve a lot of—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah. For example, I've been interested in, oh, something like concrete [shape] poetry, but I don't know really much about it, and there are other scholars working with art and literature—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —or poetry.

MS. RICHARDS: When you have free time to go to galleries, let's say in New York, or museums, is there a particular kind of work or a certain artistic practice that is of most interest to you now, thinking of new artists or artists of the last couple of decades?

MS. RORIMER: Oh, in the galleries?

MS. RICHARDS: In the galleries and museums, too.

MS. RORIMER: I find it's difficult. First of all, I haven't kept up nearly enough with the galleries, but when I have had a chance to go around in New York, a lot, with some exception of course, has often been less than interesting, or that's what I've tended to think. So I don't get it. And then there are those whom I've known personally over the years for one reason or another who have hardly any exposure, certainly not in galleries or— and the museums seem to follow the party line to a certain extent, and they all—it seems the little I've seen, and I don't want to be the last word, but there seems to be a sort of consensus of what to buy.

And then this whole idea of sharing works, which I totally don't agree with and I've had arguments, or disagreements with friends who say, "What do you mean? Why don't you agree?" I feel there's a tendency for too much consensus in the art world.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think that's a change in the art world over the past decades that you've been—

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, the commercial is so heavy, but on the other hand—this is the other problem for me—there's so much, and I get all these emails from galleries that I've never heard of, and I think, Who are these artists, and how am I ever going to keep up with it all? But even people more tuned in—I mean, even someone like Suzanne Ghez has reassured me that it's even somewhat hard for her, and she was a—

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. RORIMER: —documenta curator. I have never been in that position. So actually, I'm thinking of doing a little show, maybe if it works out of—in a gallery here maybe—of just artists I have known, or still know, that are interesting to me, but—

MS. RICHARDS: And deserve more recognition?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, plus they're not part of the system. So I just find the art world very system heavy, and it's hard to see it all. I traipse around Venice, and then it's still hard to remember everything or get—I don't know. I'm sort of overwhelmed by it, I should say.

MS. RICHARDS: You make a point of going to [the] Venice Biennale each time?

MS. RORIMER: Well, I've missed only one in the last decade or so. I never was able to go when I was at the Art Institute—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I mean now. Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but now, I've missed one. I've been to about three.

MS. RICHARDS: And to documenta—

MS. RORIMER: And documenta, absolutely —

MS. RICHARDS: —do you also go to art fairs in Basel or—

MS. RORIMER: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. RORIMER: I haven't ever done the Basel art fair.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: There's Navy Pier here, which you know is here in Chicago—so, no, since I'm on my own, after all, I have to limit—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —people get sent over there—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, it's very expensive.

MS. RORIMER: —or they're in galleries and—

MS. RICHARDS: —in terms of money as well as time.

MS. RORIMER: —ideally, I'd like to do it all, but there is a limit. So I've eliminated art fairs unless somebody invited me for some reason.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: So are we winding down?

MS. RICHARDS: You obviously have a number of projects you're working on, some that you're just beginning to work on, and out into the future. It sounds like you just keep working on projects, and mostly writing, but curating if it comes up.

MS. RORIMER: Yes, it's always been one thing at a time. I remember when I was in whatever school and I couldn't imagine what would happen next, and now one sees a backlog of what one has done, but there's still the problem, What's going to happen next? And I keep hoping maybe there'll be a letup.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you be happy if that happened?

MS. RORIMER: I just need to organize all these papers, although the books are relatively organized, but there's still a lot to do, and also, I have my little mini art collection, and I would like—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I'm going to ask you about that.

MS. RORIMER: —I'd like to just hang it on the walls.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you acquire it?

MS. RORIMER: Again, being sort of upset that I couldn't acquire things for the Art Institute that easily, so in traveling. Could have probably handled more than I did, but I thought, Well, in high school I didn't buy the Lichtenstein because it was \$300 or the Stella print because it was \$100, but you just don't—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —or the Jasper Johns, it was a drawing of—what was it—a coat hanger, things like that. But I just didn't think of myself in those terms or particularly want the responsibility, since I thought I was going to be this nomadic person going from job to job around the country and—oh, so I just bought mostly prints, and have some gifts from artists, sometimes in return for writing about them.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I actually bought the Stanley Brouwn, which I love, from Steven Lieber for an incredibly reasonable amount.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] What would you like to do? When you say organize it, would you like to install it differently? Do anything else with it?

MS. RORIMER: No, just—well, some of it is up. Ann Goldstein actually helped me some time ago. She said, "When are you going to install your art?" and she came from LA and did it for me. She didn't hammer or nail, but she laid it out.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So that was great.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: And I have, well, just things that would be fun to have on view, not that I have that many people over at this point, and when they do come over, they ask, "Oh, what is this? What does this mean?" So mainly I need time to organize tons and tons of papers and —

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —just so—

MS. RICHARDS: And it's hard for you to do that when you have a project that needs to be done with a deadline?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, and friends—unhelpful friends—are saying, "Just do one hour a day or get an assistant for"—and I reply, "But a helper won't know what to do, and I can't do one hour a day. I don't multitask." Maybe there will be a moment—so I'm not out beating the bushes for things to do. Plus writing is really, for me, even though that's what I seem to do, it doesn't come all that easily.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that it's easier as the years go by, or harder, because you have higher standards?

MS. RORIMER: Different.

MS. RICHARDS: Different.

MS. RORIMER: It's easier in certain ways because I know the material now and the arguments and the ideas.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: So I can come up with an approach much more easily, but sentence by sentence, even if I'm taking it out of my own book, it's, Oh, that could've been written much better.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel like you're a perfectionist?

MS. RORIMER: I've had to overcome that. I remember when I was in sixth grade and my mother—when we would use pencils in those early years, she'd say, "Stop erasing all the time." I'd say, "But it's not right." So I think that's bad, but my desire to be perfect or absolutely correct never totally, totally held me back, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —enough so that I can't just toss things off as much as I like to think I can. So it'll be nice to be like some of these—well, of course, they're retired or they don't write or they have other jobs, but they travel.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you picture yourself retiring—

MS. RORIMER: I can't, or don't, go places for pure pleasure, it seems.

MS. RICHARDS: —at some point in the future? And what would that mean?

MS. RORIMER: Yeah, I don't know. I don't want to get disconnected—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —but it would be nice just to go to Japan, as I've been invited a number of times by friends, not

officially—or I wasn't able to go to Munich this year to see Herman Daled's collection that—

MS. RICHARDS: Who is that? Herman—

MS. RORIMER: Herman Daled, D-A-L-E-D. He's a collector in Brussels—supportive to me over the years. Somehow he's always liked my writing, from the beginning, and it was so sad that I missed seeing his exhibition in Munich, but it was in the summer and I had things—deadlines plus traveling in the summer is hard, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —it was the deadlines.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I was invited to Poland for the opening of the Opalka exhibition, and I said, No way. I could have combined the two if—in the summer—could have flown from Berlin—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. RORIMER: —to Munich. So I don't know. Time always feels squeezed, but it's probably better than having time, as they say, on one's hands, and maybe that's a good stopping place. No, it's up to you.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, no, I think we're nearly finished. Have you felt that your approach to writing, your empirical approach, has had an impact on other writers or other curators? Or have you seen the field move toward a more theoretical direction and you feel more singular, in a way, in your empirical approach?

MS. RORIMER: Maybe a little bit of both, but it's difficult to say. People very often tell me how much they like the way I write, which is always gratifying and makes it all worth the effort.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, admire that approach.

MS. RORIMER: And there are people writing who are able to tie art together with theory even if it can be rather dense reading.

MS. RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. RORIMER: I'm apt to think I'm old fashioned, but then I also think, Well, I'm doing what I do and other people can do what they do, and this is my little contribution to whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Not so little.

MS. RORIMER: It just doesn't seem like a lot, even though it's been a huge amount of work for me in the larger scheme of things.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like you've never missed being at the museum at all and that you're enjoying the freedom of going from project to project.

MS. RORIMER: More than I ever imagined. I thought I would be miserable not having my colleagues and not having the institutional support—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: —literally and sort of socially. But I've found a great freedom in being my own boss, which has its liabilities, too. But I must admit it took a good year to figure out how to stay put at a desk and how not to rush out for lunch every day for fear of losing contact with humanity, and I don't know, things little by—

MS. RICHARDS: That's a huge accomplishment to do that.

MS. RORIMER: And someone I was telling my life story to, a sort of new friend, was so impressed that I gave up my job to do a book, and I said, "Oh, really? That's impressive?" But it did take a certain amount of guts, probably as a result of my underlying rebellious streak, which took its form in thinking about art that was new and difficult for people at the time. No longer so new.

MS. RICHARDS: To a lot of people it still is.

MS. RORIMER: Oh, and, well, to—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. And staying with this mission all the years.

MS. RORIMER: I suppose my mission has been to keep ideas related to art moving a little, for one, by endeavoring to understand them and, in turn, to try to communicate this understanding.

Maybe this is a good place to mention my old apartment, where I had many piles of papers and books all over the floor. I had a doorman—well, a night doorman. Somehow he got really interested in talking to me when I'd come home in the evening, and he'd often say he'd like to read some things I had written, which never occurred, actually. But, I remember my saying to him one time something like, "I worry about my apartment, hoping there isn't going to be a break-in or a leak," or a this or a that, and he said, "Oh, yes, that would be terrible, what with all those ideas up there." And I thought, Oh, my goodness, all that stuff on the floor upstairs is ideas.

Maybe this is a good place to end.

MS. RICHARDS: Great.

MS. RORIMER: Are we, perhaps, coming to an end?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. RORIMER: I'll be thinking about what I should have said, but—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I don't know. It was great. Thank you.

MS. RORIMER: —that's the way it is.

MS. RICHARDS: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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