

ORAL HISTORY OF WALTER NETSCH

Interviewed by Betty J. Blum

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Chicago Architects Oral History Project  
The Ernest R. Graham Study Center for Architectural Drawings  
Department of Architecture  
The Art Institute of Chicago

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## PREFACE

To be with Walter Netsch in his home, both unique and interesting because he built it as a maquette for future Field Theory projects, to be surrounded by an art collection in which each piece was carefully chosen and many express the creator's struggle that Walter feels parallels his own, and to listen as he explains the underlying motivation and intention of his distinctive design approach, is to begin to understand the why of Walter Netsch's architecture and to appreciate his unrelenting search for an appropriate form to express that why.

Walter's career at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill for more than thirty years has been remarkable and enviable right from the beginning. It began with a big design job for the United States Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, and was followed by some of the most coveted commissions of the day. Among these have been the University of Illinois at Chicago campus, the United States Air Force Academy and Chapel, libraries at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University, and the East Wing at The Art Institute of Chicago. His questioning mind—always seeking the meaning of things and looking for a better way—led him to solutions in a direction different from those of his colleagues. With the emergence of the Field Theory, a process that orders space, Walter became irrevocably committed to this methodology and pursued and developed it from then on. Within SOM Walter offered another option to the prevailing Miesian mode of the day.

If, as it has been asserted that, Netsch's use of Field Theory is as important as Le Corbusier's Modulor or Buckminster Fuller's dome, why has he been almost singular in this pursuit? Like Frank Lloyd Wright, he has few, if any, followers. Walter is either blessed or cursed in that, despite serious health problems, he has lived long enough to bear witness to changing social and technological demands sufficient enough to bring alterations to his, when designed, state-of-the-art buildings. He regrets some of that and finds it difficult to accept that his original design concept is often misunderstood and violated. Walter Netsch's work has been recognized by his peers, he has been the recipient of many local and national awards. In his narrative Walter speaks about his solutions and why and how these took shape. What emerges is a profile of an architect deeply committed to trying to meet the

program of his clients while addressing the needs of the present and anticipating those of the future.

Our sessions were recorded in eleven sessions between June 5 and June 28, 1995, on sixteen ninety-minute cassettes. Readers may sense a slight shift in emphasis and tone on the subject of Walter's first job in the office of L. Morgan Yost. This information was recorded on one tape with Walter on May 10, 1985, when I was gathering information in preparation for an oral history with Yost and an exhibition of his work. It seems fitting to insert the previously recorded material in this narrative in its appropriate chronological slot within tape 2. All recordings have been transcribed, minimally edited and reviewed by Walter, Bob Bruegmann and me to maintain the tone and spirit of the narrative as well as to give clearer definition to some topics. Netsch's work has been widely published in English and foreign language journals throughout his career. References I found especially helpful in preparation of this interview are attached. This oral history is available for study in the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at the Art Institute of Chicago.

I am grateful to Walter for, despite his uncertain health condition, he was cooperative in scheduling our sessions, articulate and thoughtful in presenting his ideas and experiences, responded with patience candor to my questions and carefully reviewed the draft of this manuscript. Robert Bruegmann deserves thanks as well for his helpful suggestions in reviewing the manuscript with Walter. Special thanks go to Skidmore, Owings and Merrill for sponsoring Walter Netsch's oral history, an architectural firm whose renown reputation Walter helped establish. For her contribution in shaping and bringing this document to completion, Joan Cameron of TapeWriter, Inc. deserves my appreciation.

Betty J. Blum  
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## Walter Netsch

Blum: Today is June 5, 1995, and I am with Walter Netsch in his home in Chicago. Walter was born on February 23, 1920, in Chicago, and attended the Chicago public schools. He studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, after which he served in the Army for several years. When he was discharged he found a job in the office of L. Morgan Yost where he stayed for one year. Walter left Yost to work in the architectural office that was known to seek the best young talent of the day, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill where he stayed for the next thirty-two years. Walter has had a distinguished career during which time he developed some remarkable alternatives to architecture of the day by pushing the existing boundaries of design to find what he considered to be a better way. Walter developed the Field Theory, which, since the early sixties, has been his design system. Using this process he has found innovative and creative solutions to the problems. His has been an uphill battle, and he has been called an exile at home because his work has been so distinctive and often controversial. But Walter says what he has done is only what Frank Lloyd Wright advised architects to do: Find a set of artistic principles and work within them to find one's own solution. Walter, may we begin as far back as you can to trace the path of your remarkable career?

Netsch: I think we can go back to my family. It starts always with family. I was born in the bedroom, second floor back, one block south of Jackson Park on Paxton Avenue, not with a doctor but with a midwife. My mother, who was painstakingly loving and sincere, had come from wealth and was a very devout Christian Scientist and a practitioner. My father came from the other side of the tracks and met my mother while he was waiting tables when he had a scholarship to Dartmouth. He got himself out of the ghetto in Manchester, New Hampshire, the German ghetto, and was a self-made man. By the time he arrived in Chicago, they arrived in Chicago, he was just



starting to work for Armour and Company. He had made the decision not to take a job in my mother's father's packing business because with it was a commitment to work with my mother's brother who was an alcoholic. Father just couldn't believe it would work out and therefore refused. So you have some idea of the German kind of doctrinaire honesty in my family. They had both decided to be Christian Scientists. Neither one of them had been before. It was sort of their new career, their new world. And Christian Science was one of those very avant-garde things at that time. They were married in 1917. So you have these two people willing to try new things. That's why I went to the Art Institute drawing class. That's why Mother and I went to the symphony to hear Frederick Stock conduct. It's why I was encouraged at home in those kind of arts, and I made palaces and houses and opera houses and villages for my sister out of containers that Father would bring home from the packing company. I also worked in pastels, and I remember doing a portrait of my sister on brown wrapping paper that Father brought home from the meat packing plant, about six feet long, in a gold quill. On the other side of the fence, my father was very worried about me being pampered by my mother, I was very bright in school but I was weak and I was ill. Then 1929 came and the collapse. What happened was that my uncle was really the heel that my father thought he was and had taken all of my grandmother's money and everything, and so she had to come and live with us. So you have this "Abie's Irish Rose" economic story where everything is reversed. Father is now the success—I mean, my mother's inheritance was over a million dollars. The meat packing business had been sold to Swift. So here I am, arriving in high school, my father saying—this is my father's side now—"You will do the four years of Latin and the four years of math and the two years of science, and you will do all of these things so you will have no trouble going to any college or university," and in 1926 I signed up to go to Dartmouth. I remember as little boy going up to there and signing the booklet to go to Dartmouth.

Blum: Walter, before we get into your college years, could we step back for just a minute? You went to the Art Institute, you went to the symphony. During those early years, what was your hope for a career?

Netsch: I saw myself as an artist. In those days we played marbles, and I had a marble collection. In those days people used to dance for seven days. Do you remember in the Depression the marathon dances? We used to roller skate in the backyard—whirr! whirr!—and we had the noisy kind of roller skates, not the rollerblades you have today. We went to the circus, and I tried standing on my hands on my bicycle because I saw them doing it on the backs of elephants and horses, and I broke my arm. I would practice pitching, with my father because we maintained a connection through getting a haircut and baseball. Going to get a haircut together was one of those things you did as a kid. You went down to the local barber shop, and the local barber shop was also a bookie joint. It was just a quiet—you think of it all as very sophisticated. No, this was not. This was very simple.

Blum: Was it on Seventy-first Street, which was the shopping street in that neighborhood?

Netsch: On Seventy-first Street, right up from Mrs. Snyder's candy store. And I learned, therefore, to pick horses. So I would pick horses, and I got pretty good at it. Father would encourage that because he wanted me out of the artistic realm. Father had horses out at the stockyards, and so I learned to ride. I would ride with him. I learned to ride bareback with the National Guard. Our horse was named Tommy Boy, a beautiful, gelded-late horse that looked like a handsome stallion—a five-gaited horse. I used to ride him bareback with all of the bony horses from the National Guard who would nip him because he was an outsider—you know, the outside horse—so it was quite a ride. I'd come home and sit in the bathtub. It was something. So I had this two-sided life. I spent a summer in Kentucky buying lambs, theoretically. Mr. Weil was a very fine, old, wealthy Lexington man whose son, incidentally, wrote me a letter during the my wife Dawn's campaign for governor, wanting to know if I was the Walter Netsch that stayed at his father's house. But we would then go out and buy lambs—pseudo. That's what my part was, as you know—quite irrational. It was to, again, encourage me to go into the meat packing business. It was beautiful. You'd drive over

the countryside, you'd go to Paris, Kentucky, and all of these little towns where they would auction off the lambs. The lambs were auctioned off by the tobacco auctioneers—"Dubba, dubba, dubba, blubba," and so forth, and, "Sold, Armour and Company," or "Sold, Swift," or, "Sold, Jake," or, "Sold, Mr. Weil," and, "Sold, Hershel." I think the auctioneer's name was Hershel Weil. Then I'd take my little Prince Albert tobacco can with little stones in it and chase the lambs that we had bought and load them on a train to go to Chicago to be made into meat. And then the next summer I spent in high school at the stockyards, driving sheep to slaughter—all of this, Father hoping, would make me settle for that. In the meantime, my teacher had some sort of connection with Princeton—either my room teacher Miss Bridge or Miss Shoesmith my math teacher. I guess I got recommended, and I saw the Princeton Triangle Club show, and I remember the song, "East of the Sun and West of the Moon." I'll never forget it. I decided I was going to go to Princeton and study architecture.

Blum: So you went from art to architecture, under the influence of these teachers in high school?

Netsch: Well, and the fact that it was a profession and not just a business. I would not be in the bread lines, you know. The amazing naïveté, my naïveté, was the fact that my father, having gone to Dartmouth, was appalled at the thought of my going to Princeton, another Ivy League school. It really was a deep hurt to him. He couldn't understand it, that Princeton had architecture and Dartmouth didn't. You've got to remember, if you're a second-generation American, life is really quite honorable in a blue-collar working man's way. So he and I, we fought about it, and I spent an extra year of high school deciding how we would resolve the problem. So I went to Leelanau for Boys as an extra year of high school. I was awfully young, anyway.

Blum: Where was that school?

Netsch: Leelanau for Boys up in Glen Arbor, Michigan. Actually, I did some teaching. I taught a little math and, of course, didn't work at all. The school was

primarily, I think, for wealthy misfits. People like Ralph Meeker, the actor, was there.

Blum: Was it like a prep school?

Netsch: It was a prep school. They'd go up in the woods and make hootch and I wouldn't get invited, and I was really—not goody two-shoes, but I was the faculty's lover, you know, in the sense that they liked me. I was a good student. I taught math, I taught geometry.

Blum: Was there anything like mechanical drawing in either high school you attended?

Netsch: Oh, I made mechanical drawings, yes, and I made doorstops and stuff like that. It didn't have any—but I wrote a book. Wait a minute, I wrote an article—it's somewhere around here—on modern architecture.

Blum: In high school?

Netsch: In high school. That's probably when I was making the drawings. I went down to the library downtown and sat in that big reading room and went up to the desk and gave in those little slips. Sheldon Cheney's book was a major crib sheet, you might put it. Well, at that age. You've got to remember, I've told you this before, I used to deliver water in my wagon when I was in grammar school from the water treatment plant, which was two blocks east of us, because in those days you might even get a minnow through your faucet as well as sand occasionally because the whole purification process—you know, this is the twenties. We were lucky in Chicago to have good Lake Michigan water, even though it got a little silty. It was good, clean sand. So I would deliver these bottles of water, mostly to people from church, and I would get a quarter per bottle or a dime or a nickel or something. A quarter sounds awfully expensive.

Blum: It does, for the twenties.

Netsch: So it must have been less. Therefore I had to earn my allowance. That's my father again. So you get this dichotomy going. Later on in high school I delivered clothes for a dress shop on my bike. The point is that I had to work. But as I delivered the water, I went by Barry Byrne's apartment house between Paxton and Crandon on 69<sup>th</sup> Street. It is, I learned later, really the first modern building in Chicago. Barry Byrne, you know, worked so hard with Wright, and he took over when Wright went to Europe with Madame. He did a lot of running of Wright's office, but he did this apartment house on his own. It's still there. It's a yellow brick apartment house. It has this Iannelli sculpture at the door. That didn't interest me, but the building did, its octagonal windows, bays. It has a great detail around the window frames, which I remember, and it looked different than all of the other buildings. We lived in a sort of Georgian co-op, a fancy, supposedly fancy, building. It was the fanciest building on the block. But it had all of that red brick and the stone and a little soft bay window and all that. Marketing hasn't changed from 1926. It may get a little more vulgar, but it's the same. Anyway, so I had that, and then I got to high school, Hyde Park High School. Then I discovered Robie House and the Blossom House. If I couldn't get something at my library at Seventy-third Street and Exchange I would go over to the Blackstone Library, because the Blackstone Library was acquainted with the University of Chicago kids and had a better collection. And so, going over there on my bike, of course, I would go by the Robie House or the Blossom House. So I wrote in my junior year "What is Modern Architecture?"

Blum: And what was your conclusion?

Netsch: Oh, of course, I was enamored. I can't remember what I said, but I went down and I did little three by five cards, my notes, my references, my page numbers, the quote and so forth. I learned to do that in high school and did it all through college. I even did it in the fifties. I had an AIA thing on defining modern architecture. I've still got those downstairs. We had a meeting and defined the qualities that define modern architecture from classical architecture or traditional.

Blum: Walter, you are talking about being interested in modern architecture in the late twenties. Is that how you sort of found yourself?

Netsch: No. I was born in 1920, so it must have been from 1927 on when I was pulling my wagon, and I saw the Barry Byrne apartment house and I only knew it as something different that I liked. You see, I've got my mother pushing my aesthetic corner, my father making me work for a living, and I wasn't unhappy. I wasn't an unhappy kid. I was a privileged kid. We went through the Depression, and we still had a maid. Money wasn't our problem.

Blum: Do you have recollections of already having this interest in 1933 and 1934 when the Century of Progress International Exposition was in Chicago?

Netsch: Oh, I bicycled to the fair. Chrysler Motors had a competition on the air flow, and you wrote a report. I did my entry, and I had a drawing of the knee action, the spring of the car in the background, and typed my report on top of it. So I was already doing presentation drawings in high school. Since I was eight years old, I knew where I was going as only a child does, you know. It's not "next year I'm going to do this and next year I'm going to do that."

Blum: Do you remember seeing some of the more modern or almost futuristic buildings at the fair?

Netsch: Well, you see, the only modern buildings at the 1933 fair were... I remember, of course, the tension building, the Travel and Transport Building, that had the roof that went up and down. I didn't know that Nat had been involved in all of this, of course, and that's where our circle came together again. But I was enamored, and my father got me a pass so I could go down to the fair. As a family we went often. We didn't go on the commercial rides, we went to see the exhibits. My father's packaging company had an exhibit there, and we must have seen it a hundred times—not really, but a lot of times. The skyride, we took the skyride across. It was a wonderland. It really was. Oh, and I remember, of course, Keck's house.

Blum: Which one?

Netsch: I'm talking about the second one, the Crystal House. So Chicago was really the home of architecture. Then, of course, downtown there was Carson Pirie Scott, and there was Louis Sullivan and the Auditorium.

Blum: Did you know about the Chicago tradition and the Chicago School?

Netsch: After I wrote this report, I did. So by the time I was a freshman entering MIT, I sat down with my other classmates and tried to start a discussion about Le Corbusier, and they said, "Who's he?" They had made the decision to become an architect very late and hadn't really done any preparing. I thought you should come prepared, so I was already. I was one of those kids—probably a bright, nasty kid—that pushed his knowledge to being obnoxious.

Blum: Living in Chicago with this interest during the thirties when war was threatening in Europe, did you know that many talented people came to the United States and two settled in Chicago, Moholy and Mies?

Netsch: I really wasn't aware of that. See, I didn't know that till I got—Moholy didn't come then until after the war.

Blum: No, he came in 1937 to head the School of Design. He called it the New Bauhaus.

Netsch: Well, I saw the New Bauhaus when I was in college. You see, I wouldn't have gotten a chance to see that in high school. But we would come home, and we would go down there to the lectures. And Serge Chermayeff was there and that long coat he wore from the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish war was my first knowledge, really, my first liberal, international exposure.

Blum: So you became aware of Moholy and Mies after the war?

Netsch: That's right. You're asking me about the world collapsing on you, well, my first world was the Spanish war. Of course, literature was a very important part of my life. Thomas Wolfe was a major hero: *You Can't Go Home Again*, and *Look Homeward Angel*, that marvelous scene with Piggy Logan's circus, which was Calder. Then, of course, there was Hemingway, and there was F. Scott Fitzgerald, the alcoholic who went to Hollywood. In those days if you were interested in the arts, you were interested in literature, you were interested in what was going on at the Art Institute. I happened to like quattrocento painting at the Art Institute because it was geometric and colorful, and I liked the Impressionists. I was not spellbound by the classic art. Oh, and in high school I had four prints in my bedroom from MoMA: Gauguin's *The Spirit of the Dead Watching*, a primitive—it was in a series; you bought the series. I'm trying to remember what the third one was; there were three. But can you imagine that I had painted my room elephant gray? Father let me do that. I don't know why, but he said, "You'll learn," and I had these three things stuck on the wall, plus Toledo.

Blum: The view of Toledo?

Netsch: The view of Toledo—you know, the famous one. And so, I was encouraged. I don't remember if our music was concerned—until I got to MIT that I became so enamored with the modern musicians, but that, I think, was the war and Koussevitzky, because I was given my Christmas present in August. It was a twenty-five-dollar season ticket to the Boston symphony, and you had to get it in August or you wouldn't get a seat. And so four of us would go to the symphony every Friday night.

Blum: With war looming in Europe and Moholy coming in 1937 and Mies coming to Chicago in 1938, did that make any impression on you?

Netsch: See, in 1938 I was at Leelanau. I started MIT, I think, in 1939. So I was away that year, and if anything happened in Chicago I wouldn't have known it.

Blum: In 1935 Le Corbusier was in Chicago on a celebrated tour, and he spoke at the



Arts Club and the Renaissance Society on the South Side.

Netsch: See, I wouldn't have known anything about it. My parents would not be related to the Arts Club or the Renaissance Society. It was the Art Institute, the symphony hall. It was the standard middle class exposure. No, I didn't have any privilege of participating. Everything I did on my own. It was going to the library, and what I saw with my eyes. It wasn't intellectual.

Blum: When I looked at the makimona that you were given on your birthday, the author of that, Don Ohlson, mentioned when he inserted the part, he called it "Leenau School" and I quote what he wrote there: he said, "It strengthened your resolve for a career in architecture."

Netsch: That's right.

Blum: Were there any things that you especially remember that happened there that strengthened your interest?

Netsch: Well, it was my determination to win over my father. My father had hoped I would give up and go to Dartmouth and go to business school. I was put out—it was partly punishment.

Blum: A holding action.

Netsch: The holding action, right, and MIT was just a happy compromise because it was New England. My mother was happy I was going to school in New England. My father was, I would be able to get up to Manchester and see Grandmother Netsch, who was still alive and lived in the ghetto still. She was deaf. She lived at the corner where the streetcar made the most awful grinding noise. She never heard it, but everybody else that stayed with her heard it. I would take her up to the cemetery, and we'd sit and overlook the river and the town. She would talk about Manchester, and how proud she was that her son had gotten that scholarship, and how hard he had worked. He went to German school and had a job at the drugstore, and after his father

died early and his sister became a violinist, and how proud she was of her children and how sad it was that her husband, Herman, never saw them grown up. It was typical, and then she'd say how angry she was during the First World War that she couldn't play and hear Beethoven. America didn't allow German music during the First World War. We were a young nation. We were a very proudful nation. We were here to save the world. We had the same problem in the Second World War. We play a lot of Russian music, a lot of Shostakovich, a lot of Prokofiev. We weren't enamored with playing the Beethoven cycle. As I recall, we didn't play those things on the radio at that time.

Blum: And was it actually prohibited?

Netsch: I don't think it was legally prohibited. That was Grandmother's extension of her anger at not being able to hear it. She was getting deaf. She wasn't as deaf at that time as when I saw her. See, I was seeing her in the late thirties and the early forties, so she was talking about the First World War. She could probably hear then, and the radio was an important part of everyone's life in the twenties. You have no idea. The radio was to us then what television is today. But you really had to concentrate because all you got was words, and you had to stop and listen—so that brought the family together, to listen. Of course, we listened to "The Fire Chief," we listened to "Amos 'n' Andy," we listened to Fred Allen, and we listened to Madame Schuman-Heink every Christmas because Madame Schuman-Heink was German. That was the one time Father got cultural, and we would all have to be very quiet while she sang "Silent Night" in German. Father was a very strange guy. He really was softer than he wanted to believe.

Blum: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Netsch: I have a sister?

Blum: Younger? Older?

Netsch: Younger. That's who I painted. She was eighteen months younger, and I did all of these things for her. Unfortunately, she was not a good student in school, and following me it was tragic for her. She had to be taken out of public school and put in private school because the teachers were really mean. They would say, "Why can't you be like your brother?" Naturally, it added to our having a little difficulty getting along occasionally.

Blum: Her name is Nan?

Netsch: Nan. She is a redhead, or she was a redhead, and just as fiery. Like we learned to dance like the famous dancing team at the Empire Room. So we used to try to do that. We would dance, and Mother and Father would have to judge whether we were doing it properly, with the radio playing the music. Of course, the Charleston was the thing, and I got to be very good at the Charleston. I'm surprised you haven't asked about minorities, because there were obviously no black neighbors, but we did have a black laundress. In those days there wasn't an easy laundry machine. You scrubbed, and you had a tub over a gas flame and you had a stick and you worked it around. You know, things have changed dramatically technologically since the 1920s.

Blum: Wasn't there a large black community west of Cottage Grove?

Netsch: Yes, west of Cottage Grove, and that's where this lady came from. We wanted to improve our Charleston, so her daughter would come over and teach us how to Charleston. But she was dressed to the nines. She was a beautiful little girl, as I remember. We were all young. The maid was from Wisconsin, a girl who had been sort of thrown out at home. She was Norwegian—you know. Mother always disapproved of the men she met when she went out to the dance halls. Well, how else was she going to meet someone? She'd go to the dance halls and she'd meet—and Mother insisted that she bring the men home for approval. That's getting a little mixed up, but we were a very religious family, you see. We didn't go to the movies, we didn't swear, we had Sunday dinner, we went to...

Blum: Did you go to church regularly?

Netsch: Oh, absolutely. I went to Sunday School while they were in church, and I would dash up to get the coats out afterwards and I was there early to put the coats in. We would go to Wednesday evening service, occasionally. Mother went ardently, but we would go occasionally. Father began to drift away from this. Actually, by the time I was going to college he had a mistress.

Blum: How did you know that?

Netsch: Well, a certain aloofness appeared between Mother and Father. And it really was that Father was appointed to the National War Meat Board and became sort of part of the war. Important, you know. And Mother stayed home.

Blum: Her world didn't enlarge as his did.

Netsch: Her world did not enlarge, and she didn't want it. She didn't want to go to Washington. She didn't want to drink. She didn't want to be doing that. And so, it naturally happened. I wasn't aware of it in detail. It never entered the household until college, and my own romantic world. That's all.

Blum: Walter, how did you happen to select MIT, as this compromise you talked about?

Netsch: Well, it's a Boston school of architecture, and had no god.

Blum: No god? What do you mean?

Netsch: Harvard—of course, I couldn't go to Harvard anyway. But Harvard had Gropius, and Princeton had a Frenchman, who was Beaux-Arts. MIT had a Beaux-Arts man too but he was dropping, falling off—he wasn't teaching. He was retired. But the faculty was still Beaux-Arts. Anderson and Beckwith were the first modern faculty people, and the art teacher, whose name I will

remember, he did schoolhouses out in California. Reid—John Lyon Reid. John Lyon Reid was the professor. No, there were no women professors at MIT in those days. Anyway, John Reid, Herbert Beckwith and Anderson were the three modernists, and they were brought on board.

Blum: Just before you went?

Netsch: Just before. And so, in my first year I had a man from the classical office in Boston, and we had to do a colonial house. Of course, I wouldn't do a colonial house, so my house wasn't selected to be built. But we built a colonial—well, the one we built wasn't really colonial either, but my classmate tried much harder to make his colonial than I did.

Blum: So a student design was selected, and you actually built it? What an unusual opportunity.

Netsch: So we would learn how things happen. It had a sloping site, and I did one that fit the site, you see.

Blum: That walked down the hill?

Netsch: Yes. A colonial house was built on flat land. It was a box, you know, and it had corners. It didn't change elevation, and you started from about two feet up before you put the wood clapboard on. We painted it yellow, I remember, and we all learned from it.

Blum: Were you a rebel among your classmates?

Netsch: Then, in the very beginning. First of all, I knew more than the rest of them about all of these people. Then I knew about Mies and Corbu and everybody by the time I had gone to school, and I knew their work and I expected to have these discussions, debates.

Blum: Did you have some of that?

Netsch: Well, eventually. But freshman year was just—and I, of course, rebelled by doing the wrong house. But I was a bright student. I was an A student.

Blum: You say that Beckwith and Anderson...

Netsch: They were teaching second- and third- and fourth-year design.

Blum: But what was the overall orientation of MIT at the time? Was it Beaux-Arts or modern?

Netsch: It was shifting. I was doing color, Beaux-Arts. I had a Beaux-Arts history professor. Professor Seaver was my Beaux-Arts history professor. Mathematics was mathematics and physics was physics so only color and history would be Beaux-Arts. And they were taught by the leftover people. They were in their sixties and seventies. We thought they were dead, doddering.

Blum: Did MIT have an emphasis on design or on engineering?

Netsch: No. when I went there was the first year that they built the new wing over in Cambridge. Up until that time people still went to the school in Boston, which is part of the old school, and if you're a Beaux-Arts school you're interested in design. If you saw Gordon Bunshaft's drawing in the MIT traveling exhibit, he did a beautiful watercolor. I never knew he'd even horsed around with that, and I never knew he would acquiesce to do that kind of thing or that he had that kind of ability. And here, my puny little drawing labeled "Cairo" next to his. It was funny, the two of us in the traveling exhibit. Here was this lush watercolor of his, and my typical presentation for competitions in the thirties—the elevation, the plan and the little perspective. But, I would say, thinly drawn.

[Tape 1: Side 2]

Netsch: Gordon wasn't even at MIT when I was there. He had already graduated, so he had gone through the whole bit.

Blum: So he was really trained with the Beaux-Arts system.

Netsch: He was trained with the Beaux-Arts, with a flashingly modern—you know, the Beaux-Arts by that time was doing their version of modern, and you know that the architect in Philadelphia, Paul Cret, was doing his version of modern. So those are the kinds of things. By the time I got to MIT Lou Kahn's partner, George Howe, had done that beautiful house in Maine that overhung the water. Of course, Anderson and Beckwith were products of the Scandinavian order, and their god was Aalto, and they brought him to MIT. That's how I had Aalto as a teacher. We all had him. He was taken out of the war—the Russian-Finnish War. He was brought to America, and he was amazed. We were then preparing for war but we weren't in it yet. And so, we were doing things with four-by-eight pieces of plywood, we would develop houses that could be dropped from airplanes.

Blum: Like prefabricated?

Netsch: Prefabricated that could be assembled for refugees who were being damaged by the Germans and Russians, before we got in. And the Russians were beating up Finland, and then Aalto being there. I remember Aalto with his dollar bills stuck in his shirt, and giving lectures with his marvelous accent.

Blum: Why did he have dollars stuck in his shirt?

Netsch: I don't know why. Probably separating dollars out from five-dollar bills by sticking them in his shirt. Something very simple. I'm sure it was his filing system. And he was, of course, working on getting the job on Baker House. MIT did a real neat trick. Of course, Sert was being helped at Harvard, and Gropius was there. I'll tell my story about Gropius, myself, and our *enfant terrible* of American architecture.

Blum: Who was that? Philip?

Netsch: Philip, when we were students. He was a student at Harvard, and he was doing his thesis, which was his prefabricated house that he had some very fancy New York firm build for him.

Blum: Was this his glass house?

Netsch: No, no. This was the house in Cambridge. It's a wood house, a Gropius-style house. No, this is the Gropius period. Well, anyway, we used to do weekend sketch problems. It was their turn to do it, and the judging was up at Harvard. Afterwards we'd have baked beans or something—not pizza. It wasn't popular then. You had a big bowl of this, brought in from the kitchen, and you ate that. I was sitting at a table with a paper plate, and there were two people opposite me. One turned out to be Walter Gropius and another turned out to be Philip Johnson. But the war was on, and I'd had a difficult experience at MIT. But the war came up, and I was telling them that I played tennis with a student at MIT who was from Germany who insisted I was pure Aryan, and I got so angry at that. He was forced to go to Argentina to get out when the war started. This was before we had entered the war. We got into a discussion of the war, and it got into a discussion of fascism. I got into an argument with Philip, obviously, and then he got up and left. We were ten, twelve years apart, and I didn't know who he was. I just held my ground. The elder man said, "That was an interesting conversation. What is your name?" I told him my name, and then he said, "Well, my name is Walter Gropius."

Blum: Weren't you surprised?

Netsch: I was embarrassed. I had dominated the discussion, I had been my angry, liberal self.

Blum: But that was Philip's pro-German period—pro-German, pro-Hitler period.



Netsch: That's right.

Blum: Which he regrets today, I understand.

Netsch: Yes, but I have a personal story which our friend Franz Schulze, who wrote the biography of Philip, didn't ever bother to ask me about.

Blum: He probably didn't know you had one to tell.

Netsch: No, and I don't think Philip remembered, because we've been on juries and things together, and he always would identify me with SOM and with Gordon, whom he hated. He would always say that. "You know I don't like Gordon!" We'd always start off that way.

Blum: When you were at MIT, as long as you had these professors that favored modern, did they recommend that you read Corbusier's *Towards Modern Architecture* or Giedion's book, which was new in 1940?

Netsch: Giedion's book *Space, Time and Architecture* was part of our history course by then. I think it was introduced by Anderson and Beckwith. When we did modern, we had to. Giedion was the bible. The great advantage of MIT as a design school was it was design, period. I remember a sign we put across our design room in third year called "Space is Glass."

Blum: Space is glass?

Netsch: A big sign, "Space is Glass." That means you see through it.

Blum: Transparent, like our preoccupation today?

Netsch: Yes. The "in" word wasn't "layering" in those days, and so that was our motto at that third year. That was Herb Beckwith's year, I think. We had Herb Beckwith. At MIT in my third year I also had arthritis, and I would come to class and my leg wouldn't work or my elbow wouldn't work. Of course, I

was still going to Sunday School at the mother church in my second year, but not in my third year. In my third year I had a little arthritis, but then this happened. So I had to get up about three o'clock in the morning at the fraternity house and stand under hot water to be able to get my joints to move. One of my classmates, Betsy, saw that I was in trouble and was worried about me, and Herb Beckwith came over, and they sent me to the infirmary. I was immobilized. I mean, my joints just froze. I had whatever kind of arthritis that that's called, and I was there, then I was shipped home, and I missed about nine weeks of school. I was told to get lots of red meat, which wasn't very difficult in our household—it shifted from lamb to steak—and bedrest. I went back to school, and no one made me make up anything. Father decided it was another sign that maybe I was going to be an architect. He was looking always for those signs of security that I hadn't made an emotional decision. He probably thought it was in rebellion against his world—you know, denial of his world.

Blum: The struggle between father and son and growing up wasn't always easy.

Netsch: That's right. So that happened, but in the third year also we began—I had my sixty-cycle 1937 Ford that I was allowed to take to school. My sister and I bought it together but I took it. So we were able to go up to New Hampshire when they were building a dam and moving a city. We were able to go out and see the Gropius house being built in Lincoln. We were able to go out and see things happening because of the mobility of the car. And my class only had nine students. That's the war, you see. Of them, two were women, Molly and Betsy. One man was American, but he was from the Philippines—Fletcher. He appeared to be wealthy, and he seemed to treat it as more social—you know, he didn't take it very seriously. Frank Mabbit was from Wisconsin, and he was as energetic as I but even more obnoxious. Then there was a red-headed kid—I can't remember his name—who was very bright and very good and very hard working. He came from Georgia. That sort of gives you the flavor of the class. The class ahead of us had about thirty in it. It was a big class. I was 4-F.

Blum: Because of your arthritis?

Netsch: Well, I've forgotten. I had enough problems. I weighed one hundred twenty-eight pounds.

Blum: And you were six-something?

Netsch: Yes. There are photographs that I can show you that even when we got married I only weighed one hundred fifty pounds. "Gaunt" was the word that people would use to describe me. During the service my roommates on the islands said they were going to build a cage and take me through Tennessee as "the original Aleutian atrocity," and we'd make a fortune just exhibiting me.

Blum: What was the attitude among the nine of you about the war news and everything that was happening in the world? America was going to war. That was the good war.

Netsch: That was the great war, and when Pearl Harbor happened on that Sunday afternoon, we all knew that we were going to go to war, that we were all going to participate.

Blum: Did any leave school?

Netsch: We all knew that because we were at MIT that we would probably finish.

Blum: Why were MIT students treated differently?

Netsch: They were doing radar domes on the roof. MIT was influential in the war.

Blum: In developing new systems and things?

Netsch: Yes. Herb and Andy did photographic review of bombing in the war, and still taught. Where there was destruction, as architects they could tell what

happened from aerial photographs. And so, all of us ended up in the service within a month after graduation, and we were pushed ahead. We had to go all summer the fifth year. We were pushed ahead so we graduated in January, and we were all in the service by March or April.

Blum: I thought you were 4-F, weren't you deferred?

Netsch: I was 4-F, but that didn't make any difference. They were glad to get anybody by them.

Blum: Did you have a senior project, either a class or individual project that you did?

Netsch: We all had a thesis.

Blum: What was yours?

Netsch: We had a fourth-year thesis and a fifth-year thesis.

Blum: What were they, fourth first?

Netsch: My fourth year's thesis was "Renewal of Public Housing in South Boston," and my fifth year's thesis was "The Evolution of the House and its Application to Storage." That doesn't sound like it makes sense to you, but what happened is, as the family changed form and size, the storage requirements changed form and size. Therefore, the form of the house was based on enclosed space and open space. Both of them were terrible, but they're somewhere at MIT. I don't know whether they've retired them or not.

Blum: Was modern evident in your work?

Netsch: It was an interchangeable shell. You see, it changed over the life cycle of the family. This was the one time I took dope to try to stay awake. I was trying to find this evolution of this house. I was working on all of these drawings. I

was looking for the wonderful panacea that everyone looks for that would bring order out of chaos. Here I had all of these separate drawings of the evolution of the children's room and the evolution of the family room and the evolution of the adults and the evolution of the kitchen and the evolution of—ahh!—and it was all modular, and these things all moved back and forth. And so they were different houses. One night I decided I just had to get this solved, and someone suggested that I take something to stay awake. Well, anyway, I took something to stay awake and, all of a sudden, I got the most marvelous idea. I drew it up, I thought, and fell asleep at the drafting table. I was just exhausted. I woke up four or five hours later with a terrible headache and a drawing that was absolutely incomprehensible.

Blum: Did you remember your idea?

Netsch: No. The whole thing was a figment of hallucinations. I finished the thesis. The other time when Professor Anderson was my instructor—I think it was fourth year—I was doing a sanatorium. I guess we were doing Aalto-like things. Anyway, I got in a fight with Anderson and walked out of the class. It must have been fifth year. I walked out of the class, I went across the street to the graduate house—we could live in the graduate house—and did the whole problem by myself. But I did a rather handsome drawing in black ink on dark red paper. He had to let it into the classroom and let it into the jury room, and I got an A or something. I got a good grade. Anderson never, never said a word about that. That was more humiliating than having it—he was a great teacher. But I was a rebel, yes. In order to graduate I had to take a sculpture class, which was in clay, and they locked me in a room to do a problem. I did two fascistic sheathes. They were all neat looking so they passed them, but I was really angry.

Blum: Angry because they locked you in, or angry that you had to take an exam?

Netsch: Angry that I had to do it. So, I was a difficult student in that respect. I had a very strong sense of right and wrong, and a very strong sense of, where I thought I was going.

Blum: Was your interest in modern design furthered at that time?

Netsch: It was never a decision. You can't imagine it not being a decision. You're saying, was I going to pick between Mies and Corbu and Aalto? Frankly, Mies didn't exist in Boston. Mies was a Nazi! So he was discredited in Boston, and Gropius, of course, didn't help it along. Gropius was the hero and Aalto was the hero and Corbu was the hero, strangely, although we never knew much about Corbu's problems. And Sert was here. We knew of Moholy and enough people had already come. Artists had come from Europe and into the New York-Boston arena. We were very happy with the immigrants we had, and a lot of them were Jewish. A lot of them really had been brutalized by the Germans. I expected to end up in Germany—you know, "Netsch"—but they found out I didn't even speak German. They couldn't care less.

Blum: Walter, what was it about modern that made sense to you that traditional design didn't do?

Netsch: You just look at that Barry Byrne apartment house. Just look at it. It's clean, it's geometric in detail, it's interesting. The things at the 1933 fair were geometric, clean, without any style. The wonderful things about them—see, MIT didn't teach us a style; they taught us modern. Modern was supposed to be, as Gropius said, a rational interpretation of social, physical, material needs, so it was not the time of form-giving. We were worrying about housing people after the war. We were worrying about what happens to cities. Aalto, when he lectured, never lectured on aesthetics. It was social need. I had a pretty good innate sense of proportion, and that's what really justified our buildings. They were proportioned. I think the word was "composition." It wasn't firmness, body and delight. That was the age-old period before. Even Gropius at Harvard, by that time, wasn't doing stylistic buildings. The buildings, they came later. The Sert, Gropius buildings came after the war. You see, you're approaching the educational process as it is now and it's so involved with Deconstructionism and form and icons of relatedness, and that didn't exist.

Blum: Well, based on what you said, that MIT was at that time in a transition period, so I wondered, how did the struggle express itself?

Netsch: The struggle was against Royal Barry Wills. Royal Barry Wills was the popular architect at the time, doing those awful, colonial houses that symbolized to us bourgeois comfort and social irresponsibility.

Blum: But for some of the MIT faculty it was a good reliable way.

Netsch: Remember, those people taught history and color and those courses. They taught the ephemeral courses. You see, in the color course you'd have these charts, and you'd color in the chart, and you got a grade on whether you had done it sequentially by colors. I didn't always get a good grade because I didn't always follow the rules. That was Professor Harry Gardner, a nice old gentleman. He sort of accepted Anderson and Beckwith. You see, John Lyon Reid taught freehand drawing. We had life class, and we drew from the model, and we also drew still life. We did watercolors, and I received a couple of watercolor prizes at MIT. I'll never forget it, because the choice was twenty-five dollars or a book.

Blum: And what was your choice?

Netsch: The dean was—we went through several deans, but this was the last classical dean—Dean Emerson, and he said, "Walter, of course you want the book." I said, "Of course, Dean," and it was *Brick Bridges of France*. It's still here somewhere. Dean Emerson had a little red rosette given to him...

Blum: From the French Legion of Honor?

Netsch: Yes, the Legion of Honor, and he was the classic gentleman. So we were exposed to everybody. Then we had a businessman dean for a while who was atrocious and didn't last very long. MIT would all of a sudden try to get very pragmatic. Then we had Belluschi. I'm not sure whether I ever had

Belluschi or not. I can't remember, really. I had him as a client later on, so there is a little confusion in my mind on time.

Blum: Was Bill Hartmann or Harry Weese at MIT when you were there?

Netsch: Bill Hartmann was a graduate student when I was there—no, just the year before. I saw his drawings, which won in the Roche Travelling Fellowship. They were very handsome, but they were Aalto-ish buildings. By that I mean cubic, a cubist building, if you want to call them anything. But they were essentially flat facades. And so all I knew of Hartmann was his winning the Roche and those drawings.

Blum: And Harry?

Netsch: Harry was the year after Hartmann.

Blum: So he was closer to you.

Netsch: Harry's class was responsible for the party that year, and Harry has always been known as a good guy and man about town. With him was Bedroom Eyes—I've forgotten his name at the moment—and another graduate student, all of whom were frequenters of Scollay Square. And so, for the party they invited the tassel queen.

Blum: Who was she?

Netsch: Sally Keith, the tassel queen from Scollay Square. They all put on white sheets and masks and came out, and someone played honky-tonk music on the piano, and out came Sally Keith with her great tassel dance. She could make them go opposite ways. It was really something. The faculty was just really flabbergasted. The next year was the fifth year the graduate year. It kind of collapsed, that fifth year, because the war was beginning.

Blum: This was 1943.



Netsch: Yes. In that class was a Frenchman who was a great friend of mine. It was a very small class that year, and in it were people that, like the rest of us, were being allowed to finish MIT before they were going to snap them up. A couple of them became important officers in the service. I don't mean generals, but I mean they did a good job somewhere. One of them became the dean out at Utah, a classmate, and his wife is a painter, a very Albers-like painter. So the fifth year they gave us the responsibility of doing the party, and I was president. We knew that we couldn't outdo Harry, really.

Blum: You should have hired Harry.

Netsch: Well, none of us were great lovers like Harry or drinkers either. Harry had started off early. But we decided we would throw a little scare into the group, so we said, "Fifty girls fifty. Come to the show. Fifty girls fifty." Before I knew it, I ended up in the dean's office, and I said, "Don't worry. We're the fifty girls." And so, we borrowed dresses and evening gowns from the girls in the class. And I remember lying on the piano doing, "I Brought Culture to MIT in the Forties," which was a big song of Mabel Mercer's called "I Brought Culture to Buffalo in the Nineties." So it's like the law school show, rewriting, doing new lyrics, and so it turned out to be a fun evening and everybody had a good time.

Blum: And you in drag?

Netsch: I was in drag. I wasn't the only one, but I remember my responsibility was to get on top of that piano—I was so skinny, you know—and lounge across that whole thing. It was an upright piano.

Blum: That's so funny.

Netsch: It was a great hit, so we got by and became famous for a while. What else could we do? We had to do something. We weren't going to let Harry get away with it completely. But MIT was a friendly place in those days. We

insisted that we have an acoustics course. We insisted that we have a materials course. We changed our teaching program—the students.

Blum: The students had input into the programs?

Netsch: The faculty had no choice. Don't forget, we were about to go off to war, and they didn't know what was going to happen to their school; whether or not the whole thing would close down.

Blum: Was there really a concern like that?

Netsch: Oh, I'm sure of it, especially in architecture. The classes behind me, I can't even remember them. I do remember them, because I had a boy, a young man, who really liked my work. Ralph Coburn stayed on at MIT and became the designer of the booklets and things, the programs. You will know about him if you've ever read the book about Ellsworth Kelly in France because Ralph and Ellsworth spent time together over there. Ralph became a painter, in other words. He really did become a painter. But in those days you "niggered" for somebody. That's a very unacceptable word these days. It was not used as derogatorily as people think. It was the phrase meaning, "I'm going to help this upperclassman." You learned a lot and the upperclassman got a lot better drawings because you'd get more work out. The poorer students didn't get one, you see. I could produce three or five drawings where someone else was struggling to produce two.

Blum: So did you draw for some upperclassmen, or did lowerclassmen do drawings for you?

Netsch: No, I started off, I guess, having the lowerclassmen help me pretty early. I didn't help anybody. I'm trying not to make it sound conceited, but if you were a good student you sort of got unwritten advantages—let's put it that way.

Blum: But I think that happens today, too.

Netsch: Betsy, in my class, and I were probably the pampered students.

Blum: Betsy who?

Netsch: Betsy Moutal, at that time. She eventually became Betsy Beckwith. And Ralph Coburn was two classes behind me, but he was the only one in that class who was any good at all.

Blum: So did each student know other students' work?

Netsch: Oh, yes. You really wandered around. Our class was so small. There was, say, a large class ahead of us, and they went on.

Blum: Did you work summers, evenings?

Netsch: Everyone was required to do summer work, between either the freshman and sophomore, or the sophomore and junior year.

Blum: What did you do?

Netsch: I got a job with an architect named Faulkner, I think, and he did Christian Scientist churches.

Blum: In Boston?

Netsch: No, no, in Chicago. And I would go downtown.

Blum: For the summers I would come back and work in the city?

Netsch: I would come back. My father, because he had to work so hard to get through Dartmouth, the one thing he said was, "Walter, you are not going to work and go to college. You are going to go to college. You are going to get the most out of MIT and not have to struggle." And he kept that promise, but this

work was a requirement. Then the next year I worked for Fisher and Patton, the architects who were the architects for Carleton College back in those days. So if you look at it, it's a Gothic college.

Blum: Where is it?

Netsch: Carleton College, up in Minnesota. Carleton College is a well respected liberal school. There was absolutely no one in their drafting room. The drafting room was maybe thirty by ninety feet long, all full of black oilcloth covers on the boards. I went downtown to this place, this office, and there was no one there. He would come out and talk to me. I guess I didn't work for Faulkner, I just worked for these people.

Blum: In what capacity did you work in the Fisher and Patton office?

Netsch: Well, what would you say the capacity for a person was who is working in an office that has no work? And you are an unpaid participant in the use of an empty drafting room, so I drew and I drew and I'd listen to the men talk. That's where I think I designed a modern something. It was terrible. It had glass block in it, and it had this. He was not a modern architect.

Blum: Were you unpaid that year?

Netsch: Oh, yes, absolutely unpaid.

Blum: You were, so it was easy for him to hire you.

Netsch: That's right, times were tough. I mean, this was the war, or up to the war. Maybe it was through Faulkner that I got into this other office because Faulkner did our church. There are two childhood influences we didn't talk about earlier. One of them was the church. Mr. Faulkner, who did all the Christian Scientist churches in Chicago and was a specialist in any style that you wanted, he built for our group, which was an up-and-coming congregation. In retrospect, it's a little bit like Robie, one of Wright's clients

who was a nonaesthetic and allowed Wright to do whatever he wanted. I guess Faulkner wanted to do this medieval, romantic church. I suppose it's the closest thing I could say to the inside of a mosque. Anyway, it had all this abstract ornament, and it had "God is Love" on one side and something about eternal life.

Blum: This is the Christian Scientist church your family attended?

Netsch: Yes, at Seventy-third and Coles. It would be interesting to go into it now and see how much of it remains. It's now Baptist or some other traditional or semi-traditional religion. It was like a big auditorium, like some of the Jewish synagogues are. It's a big auditorium with plush seats, and comfortable. Everybody had a view of this rostrum where the readers read, and it had an organ. But anyway, it was not classical. There is not a classical piece in my history except my memory of the Japanese teahouse that was really a classical teahouse. It was built for the 1933 fair. It was on the Wooded Island. It was in a rose garden. You could come and have Japanese tea if you made arrangements ahead of time you could do the tea ceremony. That building was destroyed by some nasty white kids in the fifties. The Wooded Island, of course, is still there, and there is a so-called Japanese garden, which is an atrocity visually. It's nothing. But this was really remarkable, because it was imported from Japan. The whole teahouse was shipped over and rebuilt here.

Blum: Why do you think that made a deep impression on you?

Netsch: First of all, it was structural, and the things I saw at the 1933 fair were essentially structural. Secondly, it was elegant. It was really elegant. It had a wonderful relationship to nature, and it was abstract—the relationship of the white walls to the columns to the beams to the frame. Those two buildings, out church and the teahouse, were a contrast to me, but they were once again a reinforcement of what I had in my eye. The teahouse I had selected, but church I had to go to. That was an *a priori* decision. But they were important to my life. Automobiles also were, the design of automobiles. We had a Hupmobile, which is an unbelievably ugly car.

[Tape 2: Side 1]

Blum: You were talking about the importance of cars in your life.

Netsch: Cars were truly important because when we grew up there were very few cars on the street, and we had a car and a garage. Mr. Mix lived on the first floor. He owned the Mix Milk Company, and you could see the horse-drawn Mix milk wagons go by. Many things were still done with horses, when I was child, and the streets were empty. You see Paxton Avenue today, cheek-by-jowl parked automobiles. There was seldom a car parked on the street. It was a great street to play in—no danger—and when it was icy you would watch the horses as they slipped and tried to go around the corners or the man selling watermelons and the people asking for old clothes. Unlike the end of the Second World War, which was this rush to technology and the rush to modernism, the end of the First World War was that marvelous rush in the stock market that caused the collapse. It wasn't the man in the street gaining from it.

Blum: Because of the technology?

Netsch: All of the three-flat apartment houses that are in South Shore were built in the twenties. They were built then. And that was just housing middle-income America, to work somewhere in the factories in Chicago, like my father out at the stockyards, or someone out at the steel mills or someone out at Florsheim Shoe Company or someone somewhere else. That was what was happening.

Blum: And there was this passionate interest in the automobile.

Netsch: Well, it was new. It was the one new thing. My mother had the fourth car in New Hampshire.

Blum: The fourth car!

Netsch: Yes, and it was a flashy car.

Blum: The Hupmobile?

Netsch: No. The Hupmobile was Grandmother's. You see, when Grandmother came to live with us, it came with Grandmother. The Hupmobile was an ugly car. It was marvelously dark blue, and it had a bathtub back end—a really ugly car—but it was big and comfortable. I don't think we had a car before then.

Blum: As a child or even into college, did you have an interest in designing a car?

Netsch: I don't remember, but I'm sure I did draw them.

Blum: Did you see Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion car at the fair?

Netsch: I don't remember the car at the fair. Of course, I do remember the Dymaxion House, and he did the technological bathroom. He was one of the idols of the new world. I mean, he was a representative of what was going to happen. It's interesting, since there wasn't television and there weren't a lot of publications on art. There were not many, but *Pencil Points* was... Oh, that's the other thing I should mention is that I had a pseudo uncle from church. He and his wife would come to dinner on Sundays. He was an engineer, and he brought me his copies of *Pencil Points*, so I had those to look at. That was my extra exposure, but *Pencil Points* was hardly a breakthrough or avant-garde magazine, I can assure you. It had very elegant drawings on the cover, pencil drawings, pencil renderings, you know. It's still a part of the past.

Blum: When you graduated from MIT, what did you perceive the role of an architect to be, considering how quickly the world was changing?

Netsch: We didn't think about it. We were all going to war. Would we come back? Where were we going? Did we really have to kill somebody? What was our tomorrow going to be like? Three of our guys practically got commissioned immediately because they went to flight school or advanced engineering

school. My father offered to get me a commission in the Navy, through his Washington connections. I said, "Father, no, thank you. Anything I get I will earn." And so, I went down and was inducted. My number never came up. It was never an issue, but I just went in and registered and went up to Fort Sheridan. They gave me my mechanical aptitude test, which was unfortunately terribly high, and an intellectual, which was also very high. But I expected that. I didn't expect to be sent off to be an engineer at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Blum: Why did that surprise you?

Netsch: They sent me down to Fort Belvoir to the Corps of Engineers and basic training. Basic training in my company, ninety percent of us were college graduates because we had all been pushed ahead. We were all fighting for that chance to go to Officers Candidate School, OCS, and ours was probably the brightest class they had in training. I was very good at map reading because of my background, and so I was made a point guard, which meant you ran around up in the woods and spied for your squad and saved your squad from getting annihilated. And I caught pneumonia.

Blum: You caught pneumonia?

Netsch: I caught pneumonia. Remember, 138 pounds didn't exactly make me the star of the class physically. I was lousy on the spirit of the bayonet. But anyway, at OCS there were eleven of us chosen, and I flunked the physical. It didn't surprise me. I could have left the service, because I had gone through basic training and had graduated from that, I had gone to the next step, and had failed that. I said, "Not on your life! I'll just be an enlisted man." They sent me back to Belvoir, and they made me a corporal to train other people, so I became a noncommissioned officer in cadre. I was part of the cadre. And then the time came to ship all of us overseas, but while I was cadre my French friend also ended up at the graduate school in the Corps of Engineers. He was a French citizen—I couldn't figure out why he was there—but he was also a Communist. We won't go through all of that, my relationship with that



end of the world—exposure, I should say; not relationship. Exposure. But he and I would see each other again down in Belvoir. He went on to Europe. Got to Europe, went to London, got to meet de Gaulle, and he offered himself to be intelligence for the Free French. DeGaulle said, "What's your name?" and he said, "Anatole Kopp," and he said, "That's not French." He was a Sephardic Jew. So he became intelligence in the American Army.

Blum: But you say he was a French citizen. So why wouldn't de Gaulle take him, even though he was a Jew?

Netsch: Mr. de Gaulle has quite a reputation for being quite anti-Semitic. Anyway, my friend, who was also, as I said, a Communist, which at that time should have held him in very good stead, I think he fought a little bit with the french volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.

Blum: The Communists in France helped the Resistance fighters a lot. Many of them were in the Resistance.

Netsch: I know, but he had also fought in the Spanish Civil War, that's why he was older and got to graduate school in America late. That's what I meant. But that's how I got to know him. Later on he wrote a book on Russian architecture, *Constructivist Architecture in the U.S.S.R.* Kopp was one of my best friends. But anyway, we met at Belvoir, and parted again. He went off, and I was sent back to Fort Sheridan. Then from Sheridan I was sent to California, and from California up to Canada.

Blum: In what capacity, as a corporal?

Netsch: As a corporal, but just fodder.

Blum: To do what?

Netsch: Whatever they wanted me to do. I was a number. I was just a plain, old GI. I got up to Canada, and they sent me to Alaska. I found out they sent me to

Alaska as a Caterpillar tractor operator. I got there, and I went in and saluted the colonel, and I said, "I am really embarrassed. I am a city rat from Chicago. I have never sat on a Caterpillar tractor. I haven't the faintest idea how to run one, and I would endanger everybody if I tried."

Blum: Did you know how to drive?

Netsch: Yes, but that has nothing to do with the Caterpillar tractor. Oh, no. These have extra shifts and gears and boxes and everything. And he said, "Damn it! I need a Caterpillar tractor driver." So he sent me down to the chain. They sent me down the Aleutian chain as a cold storage operator, which meant that as a corporal I knew how to repair cold storage machines. Which, of course, I didn't know. But see, I had that terrific rating on mechanical aptitude, and so by this time the Army considered, if you were mechanical and had a good mechanical aptitude, you could do anything. They needed you for anything. So I went down the chain and went to Adak and landed on Atka, which is a very large island with only thirty people. We had an emergency landing strip, and a prefabricated hospital that had been built in case the Japanese ever attacked again. They had already left Chemya. So I spent my time there. If you want, I can add the story of how I got kangaroo-courted by the enlisted men for playing chess with the lieutenant.

Blum: What was wrong with that?

Netsch: I crossed a line.

Blum: You mean you were a corporal and you should only play with corporals?

Netsch: Yes. Then later on the captain who ran our outfit had psychological problems, and he made a boy act like a dog—roll over, bark and so forth, and some of us took umbrage. He also made us throw all of the washing machines off the end of the dock if we did something wrong.

Blum: It sounds like *Mr. Roberts*.

Netsch: It was. He was our Queeg. It's a whole example of that. That's when I ran the Armed Forces Radio. He'd call up and ask me to play a program over, and I said, "I can't because we've had this poll, and this is what everybody has asked for. I can rerun it for you tomorrow morning." I got away with it. He liked me. He and I were the only college graduates on the island, and therefore, we were kinfolk.

Blum: Are you saying that tongue in cheek?

Netsch: I say it sarcastically, because we had a couple of kids who couldn't read or write, except they could play poker. They could tell the queen and the jack and the king and the numbers. And the card stack—you know, the red ones and the black ones. That they could do. So I offered to try to help teach them to read because we did nothing, really, during the daytime except maintain ourselves, except the people on the listening post. The radar people, they had work to do. Otherwise, we were maintenance. If a plane landed we would try to patch it up. I was the engineer. My problem was to keep the dirt off the runway, so I had a shovel and a wheelbarrow, and I would take that shovel out and knock the tufts of grass off the steel mat runway. So that was a highly technical job.

Blum: Walter, your story has been told by many others in many other situations, but it sounds typical. How did we win the war with this going on?

Netsch: I think what happened was, when we reported this captain we expected to really get in trouble because we had to sneak the information off the island to another island to get to the inspector general. In fact, we had a choice of doing that or putting sand in the machine, because he would take these grounded aircraft up—he was a grounded pilot—and buzz us. He had problems. We stayed up all one night, three of us, deciding whether we would kill him. You laugh, but it was deadly serious. It was very easy, because the crew chief could do something to the airplane, and he could take off and he just wouldn't come back down. Well, if you're thirty men on an

island, it's just about like *Mr. Roberts*. The boat is small—the island was very big, but we were very small. We all lived in little Quonset huts, separate, around. I didn't know the cooks, and the cooks didn't know me. I knew the crew chief because I had the responsibility of that, and then Armed Forces Radio. I didn't play poker with the gang. They played poker all the time. I designed and built a movable privvy. I did it in the Harvard Design School with horizontal siding.

Blum: So your MIT training served you well.

Netsch: That was my commission. That was my first commissioned work. Anyway, so they sent a general over to apologize and took the captain off. A major came and helped straighten out things. Everybody took credit for doing this, you know. It was kind of fun watching all of a sudden what happened. The three of us, scared to death, we never admitted we did it. Well, it was dangerous. Fragging was a—do you know what fragging is?

Blum: Fragging? No.

Netsch: Fragging is the phrase in the Second World War where you shot the guy ahead of you you didn't like, whether it was the lieutenant or your sergeant or your corporal. It's called fragging. You didn't know that?

Blum: No. I didn't think that could happen.

Netsch: Well, it happened in Vietnam, too, and it happened in Korea. Things get so tense and so tight. It's the only time in my life when I ever thought of killing somebody, and it was a very serious discussion. But we decided to gamble our own lives by getting this information off the island. When the war ended, finally, I got sent to Fairbanks. Because we hadn't really been in the war, we didn't have any points to get out, so they stuck me in the fire department in Fairbanks, Alaska. The center of the city burned down, and by that time I had been moved to the emergency switchboard. It's a job that took some intelligence. There were a lot of people in the Army, leftovers of the war, who

really weren't terribly bright and were very personally directed and learned to avoid as much work as possible. These guys in the fire department, they learned how to shack-up with some poor Eskimo girl. It was really sad because the girl thought she was getting a ticket for her future. And it wasn't going to work that way at all. But anyway, so I filled out my time and ended up in Edmonton, Canada, and then to Great Falls, Montana, and was discharged. But I had to go through a meeting with a young sergeant who said, "Let us talk about re-enlistment." I said, "How long have you been in the service?" He said, "Thirty-five days." I said, "You will have to wait a little longer before you ask me that again," and I came on home.

Blum: Well, quite an adventure, and you spent, what, three years doing this?

Netsch: Three years, three months and twenty-six days I say, but that's not really the accurate number. But over three years. It was a good chance to read. They sent good books at the bottom of the trashy books, and since I ran the Armed Forces Radio, I got the books first. We read, and we got the good books in our hut. We had a college man, he wasn't a graduate yet. The crew chief was in college, and there was a kid about to go to college from Holland, Michigan—a nice kid.

Blum: So the three of you were the brains of the outfit?

Netsch: The three of us were buddies in there, yes. And so we had the books to read, and I had the symphony orchestra because they would send these records, you know. The Armed Forces Radio, they would send thirty-three rpm records, and my crew chief set me up with two turntables so I could shift from one to the other, and I could play "Grand Old Opry" on this one, and the Boston Symphony or the Cleveland Symphony on the other one. I don't think the Chicago Symphony made it. New York, Boston and Cleveland, I think, were the three orchestras we got, so I had that resource. When I got to Fairbanks I didn't. I designed a house. I got the drawings out for a man I met, a nice guy, an enlisted man who was waiting his time like I was. The only time he and I ever had a drink was in Fairbanks in a bar on Christmas

morning.

Blum: You designed a house for him. Did he live in Fairbanks?

Netsch: No. He was in the service. He lived in Connecticut. I designed this house, and God knows what ever happened to him.

Blum: Was it ever built?

Netsch: I have no idea. He took the drawings. But I did a three-point perspective just out of sheer boredom. "I'm almost out of here. I can be an architect again—hopefully be an architect. I'm going to make it. I have done my service. I have saved a guy from being brutalized." I drank from black fountains and had black friends in Fairbanks in the service. I did my civil rights bit. I had done everything that I could within the boundaries of my opportunity, and I was glad to get home, but I was certainly glad to do that house. I spent time on it. It has big drawings. They're about twenty by thirty. I can't remember, really, how I got to do them—you know, to draw them up. I can't believe I did them after I got home, because I got a job with Morgan Yost so early, so I must have done them in Fairbanks.

Blum: Did the war experience change your attitude about your own role and the future?

Netsch: No. See, I never could be angry at being an enlisted man because I had made the decision to stay, so I could blame no one but myself. So I didn't have that kind of anger that many enlisted men had. I had made some friends in the service, like our little group and our book club.

Blum: The good book readers.

Netsch: And we could talk about life seriously. I did watercolors. I sat on the floor and did watercolors. I've shown some to Bob [Bruegmann]. That's in the Aleutians, not in Fairbanks. That was a big military base. The Aleutians was

just a ship alone, only it was an island. The Aleuts came back, finally, and I used to show films for the Aleuts. The Aleuts took the films so seriously. If Harold Lloyd was in a movie, the old people were afraid he was going to fall off that clock, or something because they took it seriously. I'd have to stop the movie and they'd go home, and the young people would see it to the end. It was exposure to a culture, though, that I would otherwise not have known.

Blum: I understand.

Netsch: I had drawn sketches of their graveyard. I hadn't really met them. The Department of the Interior came in and built houses for them before they came back. See, they were taken off the island and moved to the mainland.

Blum: Why? Was it just too unsafe?

Netsch: Why? We didn't want the Japanese taking them on. We didn't want spies. You're never really certain of an ethnic group. Because they fished and they hunted seal, and the Russians and the Japanese were the other fishermen and hunters in the area, they were evacuated off the Aleutians very quickly. We did the same thing interning the Japanese in California. It was the same thing. So they were all moved to Juneau or Ketchikan or somewhere—not even to the main island, but down in the little band next to Canada, the little, thin strip we own. It's the first time I had lived with regular people whose language outside of our hut was foul-mouthed and derogatory towards women and blacks and anybody—"Japs" and everybody. It was a good cross-section of the American blue-collar world. It was like the novel I am reading now *Continental Drift* (Banks, 1980) that's supposed to be so important that I heard about on Channel 2 yesterday.

Blum: So it was growth for you to know what the real world was like.

Netsch: It was a reality check, absolutely.

Blum: What was your attitude as you returned to civilian life, hoping for a career in

architecture?

Netsch: Well, when I got home, first of all, I was still undernourished. I was still 138 pounds. My mother was appalled at my looks. Father said, "You ought to get some meat on those bones." Aside from that, I would like to have seen my classmates and to know what happened to them. I kept in touch with a couple. Frank Mabbitt was one, the guy from Madison. I did see him. He died an alcoholic. Oh, that was sad. He was bitter. He came out of the war very bitter about the fact that if you didn't have a silver spoon in your mouth that you got a dirty deal. Well, I was a living example of making it, I guess. I didn't do a catch-22; I didn't try to fink out. I did whatever they told me to do, and I tried hard. I defended American rights and values in the only way I could. So when I got home I was kind of tired, physically and emotionally. For example, recently when they kept talking about the death penalty to my wife when she ran for governor, I asked her, "Can't I tell this story about the service?" She said, "For heaven's sake, no." I said, "I think it would help. It would make people realize that we're real people," but she said no. Anyway, so the problem was how to get a job. Work wasn't that easy yet. Things hadn't really picked up. Even though I was late getting out.

Blum: This was in 1946.

Netsch: Retooling America was not an easy job. You just don't stop making tanks one day and start making cars and making washing machines the next because you'd say, "Well, maybe I should make a washing machine." There was all of the technology that had been developed during the war, especially small machinery. We have no idea how these small motors had gotten into tanks and tractors and what effect that had on retooling America.

Blum: Did you have a first-hand experience with the change?

Netsch: When we built the Air Force Academy in 1954 we had people falling right off their chair if they could help us. We designed six new materials out there. We provided a market, we provided the know-how. Industry wasn't ready yet to



form research and development teams. They didn't know which way architecture was going. We were the last to get started, and the architects hadn't made any big explosions in the postwar world. There were those Hugh Ferriss drawings, but you know those weren't real. They didn't show a detail at the corner. Let's see, when was the New York World's Fair?

Blum: In 1939.

Netsch: That was the last hope for the future, and so you had to jump from 1939 to 1946—seven years, almost a decade. All of these people had quit work and had gone to war. They had to come back and reorganize. Would they get their jobs back? In the meantime, someone had their job, and so there was a whole series of adjustments that occurred in the American economy that no one writes about although there was a pent-up demand.

Blum: Well, maybe it was a good time to start your career.

Netsch: Yes, right. It was. It was a good time.

[Tape 10 May 1985: Side 1]

Blum: What was your first job?

Netsch: I should tell you in general a little bit about working for Morgan Yost and what we did. First of all, it was my first job after getting out of the war. I sat down with my father, who was a successful businessman, and he said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to get a job." "What kind of a job? You've got to get a job that will get you the most experience you can get." So we talked it out and decided that I should work for an architect with a small practice, to get as wide a diversity as possible. I saw in the paper an ad for a job, a draftsman, for Morgan Yost in Kenilworth. I lived on the South Side of Chicago, so I got on the Elevated and traipsed up to Kenilworth. In those days you could transfer and go on up. His office was right above the fire station in the village of Kenilworth. I got the job at forty dollars a week, which was a dollar an hour. Yost said, "You

should accumulate your overtime and we'll see about that in the future." Now, working there, I was expanding his office, there were three people. This was 1946. I got out in early spring, April or February or March. I was starting early in the year in 1946. I stayed there a year. Also working there was Robert Cohlmeier. Bob's wife's father was a famous architect up in the vicinity. His name I can't remember, but he was also part of the Chicago School. So Bob had a knowledge of the area and the time. The third person hired was a marvelous little blond guy, Don Reinking, who had no education. He was a nice guy who came from the West Side. But this man was an exquisite draftsman, really exquisite. Both Bob and I were college graduates, versed in architectural history. The three of us really sort of made up this office. Morgan Yost would get an assistant once in a while, but it never seemed to work out. We all brown-bagged, you know, carried our lunches. We sat out in the garden and talked about architecture. We were all full of it, of course, because we were coming out of the Second World War and these were our first jobs. I think Don was too young for the war. That's why I remember him being young. We weren't very old, but in our parlance, he was a young man. He had experience drafting all through the war. We'd arrive at the opening of the office, eight o'clock or eight-thirty, whatever it was, and get to work. There were just three of us and we worked. We were sort of expected to get through the working drawings of a house in a week. Morgan had sort of established a schedule and so we had a kind of a work program set out for us and he didn't have to worry about us starting in the morning. Morgan, well, we called him Mr. Yost, he would come in at about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock. He could have been doing all sorts of things. He could have been superintending, he could have been meeting with clients on the job somewhere, he could have been designing. Mr. Yost would design at home and bring the product into the office. This was not unusual—even in my own career later on, working quietly without pressure, and then bringing it in. We were really, using Wright's term, "the pencil in his hand." You know Wright said that in his famous speech on Sullivan, "I was the pencil in the master's hand." We didn't quite have that royal an attitude towards Mr. Yost, but we acknowledged his superiority in things architectural. We would work on the drawings and do the working drawings. That was the regular professional work. The other kind of work we would do were those other kind of jobs that actually gave Mr. Yost his

livelihood. He had a job providing, "Modernizing Main Street" for the *Plumbing and Heating News*, which meant months and months of work. They'd write a letter to him saying, "I own a plumbing store on such-and-such a street. I want it modernized." We were talking about the kinds of jobs that really made Yost's income kind of stable. You were talking earlier about how he was editor of several house magazines. Every month he used to have a house in the magazine. Those working drawings were just four or five sheets. You could send in ten dollars and you could buy those plans. This was a very important piece of income to an architect after the war. Don't forget that he had lived through the war, in which everything had stopped. He had developed these connections, doing these very nice modest houses, these very good, straight-forward little houses. These were not the normal commissions. This other job, I said, was for *Plumbing and Heating News*. It was to modernize your plumbing store—do a new facade. I would modernize the store and do a rendering. Then it would come out in the magazine. I was not extremely prideful—they were not especially contextual in any sense of the word.

Blum: Were these hypothetical stores?

Netsch: No, these were real stores. Someone would send a letter in and they would give you dimensions and a picture. Then you would modernize it. You've got to remember that this was a different time. This was before all the media—this was before television—communication was really through magazines. It was rather slow. "Modernizing Main Street" were two main competitions in America. The glass-block people did a major competition in "Modernizing Main Street" using glass blocks. You could go through small towns in America and see those so-called *moderne* additions to the Victorian buildings, that everyone now abhors. It was a sense of getting in the swing, getting up-to-date, marching on with the victory that we were all celebrating forty years ago. It was sort of an up-beat time. Anyway, Morgan had developed these resources, which supplemented his professional income by supplying these drawings for people who would write in. That was part of our job, to supply these drawings to be mailed. I do recall that for extra money he would make some modifications, if you so desired it. We

had that kind of a job. We had the housing work, we had the stock floor plans, and he had the fancy houses which he was developing for his own clientele.

Blum: Like the Norman Deno House in Highland Park?

Netsch: No, there was a much fancier house right in Kenilworth, a great big, three-story shingled house, for which I superintended some of the backyard. I don't think I got enough coloring in the backyard cement, as I recall. He was not very happy about that. Mr. Yost was a stern task-master, but he was very nice. Occasionally he would come in and talk and we would have kind of a seminar. He was an expert on Wright, Greene and Greene, and spoke very lovingly of the West Coast. He would go out there frequently. There's a lady in the West who's being currently lauded for the books she wrote about this period. She wrote about all these people.

Blum: Esther McCoy?

Netsch: Yes, Esther. Morgan Yost's relationship with Esther was a somewhat tempestuous one. He was trying to get a book out and she was trying to get a book out and there was, shall we say, competition on it. I'm not sure of the background, I was not privy to it. There was less than a friendly relationship in these discussions with her.

Blum: What was it that he was trying to write about?

Netsch: Greene and Greene. He published several articles about Greene and Greene, and he was really hopeful about getting a book out. And he really loved these two architects. It was that love of the whole Prairie School that made working for him so worthwhile. I got to the point where I could do floor plans that would please him for house plan publications. But he didn't like my elevations, except for the housing development he did for *Western Homes*, whose client was Booz, Allen and Hamilton.

Blum: Do you recognize your hand in any of these drawings?

Netsch: Yes, that one looks like my drawing. Well, these are the kinds of things that Bob Cohlmeier and I would do. These are really Morgan's buildings. He would allow us a certain latitude that would allow us to explore some of the *au courant* ideas that young architects were thinking about. We always had the experience of Morgan in doing these houses. If you look at these houses, they're really good, practical houses. They're small by today's standards, but I think you could find any one of these houses very livable. For example, the use of the storage rooms in each of these houses was a very fresh addition to the small house of the time. Morgan was realizing the reality of doing this. This was the big hope for everybody. These were, I think, good houses.

Blum: Are there ideas in some of these drawings that were new ideas at the time?

Netsch: I'd say these were new ideas at the time. They were the postwar ideas of America being able to, in a sense, go to the suburbs. This was fleeing the city. You've got to remember that the racial turmoil and change in, for example, Chicago, didn't occur right after the war. It occurred soon after that. For example, South Shore's transition from a white neighborhood to a black neighborhood occurred probably ten years later. It occurred primarily through the pressure of the lack of living space for the black communities that moved to Chicago. They had been ghettoized into areas. The demand for space and the affluence of the white middle-class and this dream of the suburb became reality. I can remember as a child, my mother still demanding that my father take us for a ride to Beverly Hills—we lived in South Shore—and look at these houses. Her dream was to have one of these houses and not to live in the co-op that we were living in. It *was* the American dream and it still *is* the American dream. With this burgeoning opportunity of no construction for almost eight years, the extra money that people had made and put aside, and the very convenient loan opportunities for veterans returning home were conducive to this explosion in houseing. The statistics on housing starts around Chicago for the ten years after the Second World War will show an amazing explosion. Well, all these nice houses, the Deno House, and so on, that were being built were the result of the opportunity to participate in what used to be the very stable, conservative, North Shore.

These houses were considered by some an intrusion into the traditional environment. Morgan Yost learned to develop some sort of traditional techniques that made his houses acceptable to the community, even though he would never sacrifice and do a traditional house or a colonial house, per se, in his private work. Gradually, he got larger commissions, like additions to the church that was done up there in Kenilworth, which was done while I was still in practice with him.

Blum: What were some of the features that he used?

Netsch; First of all, he never in his really big houses did many strip windows. He used the punched-window technique, more or less. He never used the shingle materials. The roof and the eave overhangs recognized the Wrightian tradition. Wright did this also, which made his early houses more acceptable in the community. Yost's own kind of personal life, his wife, his family, his own house, all reflected his acceptance in the community, even though his special desire for collecting Packards was his way to relax, I guess, instead of playing golf. He never really shared that very much with us. That was his private little world, his love of the automobile. I never really thought of him as being a tinkerer, so I don't imagine he worked much with the engines. It was an aesthetic, and so, like I have a house full of paintings, he had a yard full of Packards. He liked them for their modernity. They were continuing a tradition. Wright had a tradition for liking super cars, although he didn't collect them. Yost collected older cars, they were elegant in design. Anyway, we'd work long hours, we'd work hard, but he was not a tough taskmaster. As the volume of the work increased, he brought in several people over us who had more experience. We were just starting out. Remember that forty dollars a week is hardly a huge salary; it was the minimum wage. There weren't the service industries that there are today. We were all just happy to get the experience. I was doing drawings, renderings, working drawings, designing, supervising, doing specifications. We all had models to work from—his work was already done—we were not charting new waters.

Blum: Did he ever allow you to try?

Netsch: Not in doing a free thing. I never did that myself in my own studio. We accepted the fact that it was his senior studio. He would let us try our hand on these house plans, but we accepted his critique of them and his ability. What we brought to him was our freshness of youth and the exuberance of a postwar world. He brought us the love of Wright and of wood, and the Chicago School, in the sense of the Prairie School. Oh, I'll tell you, Harwell Hamilton Harris was a friend of his, in some way. I remember that Harwell Hamilton Harris was a kind of a Michael Graves of yesteryear, so to speak. Harwell Hamilton Harris was a California architect who was a friend of Morgan Yost's. He was one of Morgan's connections, a contemporary architect, one of the stars of the day. He was one of the people that Morgan Yost communicated with. We didn't share Morgan Yost's world. He liked us, but we were never invited to these parties at his house. Ours was a professional relationship. I know because when I left, he offered me a junior partnership, but I discussed it with my father, and he suggested that I put in a bill for the overtime and we'd see what the response was. Of course it was negative. My father, who was much more astute than I, said, "That means you would probably have the same kind of relationship that you have now," which was true. So I started over in a big office.

Blum: Were you tempted to stay?

Netsch: Not really. My goals were for a larger world. I was very grateful for the experience with Mr. Yost. I actually got the opportunity to leave from one of these senior people who had gone to work for Mr. Yost, but who hadn't worked out. He left and went to Skidmore, Owing and Merrill and then later he stole me and then he stole Bob Cohlmeier. He knew us and our work and that's how people move around. Bob Cohlmeier left and came later—we didn't all just walk out together. The other thing I had done was that I had gotten my license during that time. I studied for my exam because that was another thing my father warned me about. He thought I should get it before I tried my efforts in a large office. The rhythm of a small office can be established. The rhythm of a large office, if you're at the bottom of the heap, is unreal. Therefore, it was a wise decision on my father's part. Then when I finally moved, I was ready. The young man I referred to earlier, Don Reinking, was there at Yost's office for years, and I

think he may have stayed his whole life. I think, eventually, he may have been a junior partner. We did not communicate afterwards. I saw Mr. Yost later on at an AIA meeting, but neither he nor I were great AIAers, in terms of going to all the meetings. Then I got my breaks very early, so I was working eighty- or ninety-hour weeks. The rest of the world existed only on my drafting table. That was essentially true for Morgan. Morgan spent most of his life in his practice. I don't really know of any extra activities, except in discussing his knowledge of the Prairie School and the West Coast. It was his love of real architecture that kept Bob Cohlmeier and myself enthusiastic about our work. It spilled over on us and gave us that dedication. We were not that overly intrigued. Morgan Yost was not a radical architect. This was an experiential event, not a master-student event. I think Morgan was aware of that. Bob Cohlmeier is now a professor in Albuquerque, at the University of New Mexico. He went to SOM and then he saw the opportunity to teach and he saw he was not going to make the hierarchy of SOM, so he went down there. This other man who hired us, Bob Ward, became a partner in Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett. Then Mr. Yost did have a partner, Deming Coder Taylor. He started off as a junior partner—he didn't come in in a senior role—but he was able, because of his relationship with Mr. Yost, to establish a true partnership. Part of it was our age. I think Coder Taylor was probably older than we were. I have a feeling that Mr. Yost could communicate better with him after having gone through the experience of being with us. I doubt that he ever would have been able to have any of us as a partner because of the generational difference, even though a professional generational difference is shorter than a natural one. Although we would sit and discuss things—the seminar system I really brought into my own office. I used to have something called required reading, where if I was reading something I would bring it in to the office to get people to share it. I think that the sense of that really started with the experience of working in Mr. Yost's office. It was a *very* small room. I want to describe the room to you. It was about eight feet by sixteen, which allowed three drafting tables in a row, some work benches behind, a door to Mr. Yost's office, and a bathroom down the hall. It was the second floor of the fire station, which was rented out. Yost went on to other spaces, but that was after this period. We were there in the beginning of the early explosion of work. I can't even tell you what he did during the war. I don't know if he was in the service or not. We



never shared much wartime experiences. Most of us had had some complicated experiences in the war and once we shared that, it was forgotten. It was not a part of our life. Bob Cohlmeier was a socially responsible person and I had developed a sense of social responsibility. Therefore, we kind of shared things.

Blum: During the war, Yost edited the *Small Homes Guide*, helping people plan for the postwar boom.

Netsch: I think that was how he eked out a living when there was no work. It was a tough time. The postwar period was when we came in. I've known architects who live and work in the suburbs who were extremely social. Morgan never came across to us as being part of that elite, country club set. He didn't come across as the blue-blood. He was an intense professional. A little bit roly-poly. Not an athlete. He came across more as a professional. I mean the postwar image of the professional, not the yuppie image. He spoke slowly. He spoke with care. He was not loquacious. He was stern but not hostile. He was friendly, yet aloof. It was a kind of relationship that—after those of us had been in the service, especially those of us who had been enlisted men—we really relished it, because it was what we had hoped the professional world would be. You have no idea how, after having been away for what I used to call three years, three months, and twenty-six days from my love of architecture—it was a great feeling of deprivation, having lost those years and those experiences—working in Morgan Yost's office was really something. It made my rise in SOM so much easier. I had this experience. I'd actually superintended. When I did the Deno House, and they found out I was leaving, they wanted to hire me separately as their superintendent. They thought everything was going so well. I've got to tell you, this is the honest-to-god truth, I wasn't *that* great of a superintendent. I was an earnest young architect. I would go out to that job and I would ask the plasterer a question and he would show me how to do it properly. The man laying the tile in the bathroom would show me. So in their desire to show me how to do it properly, they would do it properly themselves. I learned and the house benefited from this training of this young whipper-snapper architect by the building tradesmen. Mr. Yost had the sensibility to realize what I was doing, because he knew I wasn't a great superintendent. I was just hoping for any little

thing that would convince my father that I wasn't headed for the bread line. I had sense enough not to offer to be superintendent, because I knew I was just learning. We had so much to learn. In those days, the house was still a hand-crafted item. You didn't have general contractors and all of this. Mr. Yost was the general contractor. He would take sub-bids from all the separate individuals. He would lower some of the overhead costs the owner had in those days. This was before high-tech. In terms of combining business with construction methodology, high-tech invented a different way in which houses were built. This is why architects are not in the building field. Yost's role, that he played then, was as the master architect and the master craftsman. You'd go out to the subdivision today, and all the walls are all laid on the ground and then lifted into place, and there's a standard size and everything is pre-cut and supplied from a central place where they're doing twenty-five houses at once. Yost's were individual houses, crafted by individuals. I was being trained by a group of bosses. The guy who was laying the tile might have been the owner of the tile company. It was just a very different world. Those of us who had this initial training and went into practice had gone through this experience that was really dying out and becoming part of the housing industry. I have a feeling that it was the luck of the dice, or really my father's care and caution, that started me off with this small architect. Stanley Tigerman's firm, for example, when it was smaller, would be similar to Mr. Yost's, but different at the same time, because they're small firms. But he's part of the industry. You take Howard Allen, who's a smaller architect, and who's a protégé of Bruce Goff, and therefore has his own kind of idealistic attitude and has a very small private practice. Allen has to go out and do things himself, he would be closer to Mr. Yost's practice today. His struggle to develop details spoke in sympathy with his ultimate goal, and at the same time, were consistent with Yost's concept of a burgeoning tomorrow. This discussion today makes me realize why Morgan Yost never developed a specific aesthetic. You recognize a Yost building, but partially it's because there were so few buildings going up and Mr. Yost was the architect of the community. As for developing an extremely unique style, I think Mr. Yost was aware of what Mr. Wright had gone through in his life. I think he was probably building on the Prairie School tradition and keeping it up to date, rather than developing a new aesthetic. I'm sure that his editorials in the magazines were not about aesthetics.

Blum: They weren't. They were about how a young family could have a new house with many convenient features and that everyone could have a little part of that American dream.

Netsch: His was an early independent entrepreneurial concern. He was not a radical architect. He was in the American system. He believed in it and he practiced it well. It was a system, really, that passed him by in the sense when it became an industry. He was probably very concerned, later on, by how the factor of the industry.

Blum: In the fifties, he sensed that. In the 1950s, he was chairman of the Home Building Industry committee at the AIA. He would work out a system where the architect had a place in the system of home building.

Netsch: Then my intuition was correct. The reason it would happen was that he really loved the right things—the proper things and the Wright things. He aware of Bruce Goff and Greene and Greene. But Bruce Goff was never a favorite of his. We may have discussed him among ourselves, but never with Mr. Yost. Goff was a superstar in the postwar years, throwing bricks at his glass and having it form these abstract patterns in the glass. He did things that were kind of abstract expressionism in architecture. I was always sort of an aesthetician. Working for Mr. Yost was the perfect job for me. He was patient with me when we made mistakes. I'll never forget not getting enough coloring in the cement for that Kenilworth house. I was afraid of getting too much and I didn't know that it dried lighter. I had much to learn, but I did the best I could. He just told me what I did wrong. He didn't make me dig up the concrete. It wasn't a disaster. It just wasn't to the taste of Mr. Yost—it wasn't what he had in mind. I don't think the client ever knew. This was the kind of thing, I'm sure that happened later in my career, when something wasn't up to my standard. But it wasn't necessarily the client's business to know. That was a professional problem, not a critical, urgent problem.

Blum: You talked about Yost and hand-crafting. He also used a utility core that was made in the factory and then the house was almost built around it.

Netsch: That was the hot thing in architecture. That was the Ionic column of its time.

[Tape 10 May 1985: Side 2]

Netsch: Borg-Warner developed this utility core. They tried to market it and to get all the architects in the world to use it. Well, every time we sat down to the drafting table, we said, "Could we use this?" It had a toilet, backed up to a kitchen. It's in all the *Western Homes* plans, I believe. You wouldn't use this in big private houses, but it's in every one of these *Western Homes* houses. These *Western Homes* houses are variations on the theme of the utilization of this kitchen/utility/bath unit. This also had the capacity to put the heating in this little room that's adjacent to it. What you see here is our joint effort to prove to the world that this little kitchen/bath thing—you can see it in all its variations. All of these plans were very different; they had the capacity to appeal to different kinds of people. But they all had this common denominator of this very economical system. What it did was brought what Mr. Yost thought was the proper kind of industrialization to the house. This is piping—not a beautiful door or a weld. Morgan Yost had his own baseboard that was milled for him—like I have in my own house. That baseboard is *mine*. I had it milled and designed the way I wanted it. Mr. Yost's baseboard was not a stock item out of the catalog. But he was perfectly willing to have this plumbing unit put in. I think he had a proper attitude. I think those things are marvelous. I'd like to see them back today. Houses are now costing an average of \$100,000. That's partly because we're now doing sybaritic bathrooms and gourmet kitchens. We all had a social consciousness of a very different kind then. Some of us have kept it, I'm sure Morgan has kept it. I've kept it. But we represent a different time. We represent two things. One, we went through a damnable war. And two, we went through a damnable Depression. All of us can remember the effects of terror and the effects of poverty. Therefore, we were more interested in the other guy than people are today. So the *Western Homes* houses represented an ideal to bring a better world. This was happening all over. There were house competitions all over. If you look

them up, you'll see that Charles Eames and others were doing really interesting houses without all the affluence factors that you pick up in a magazine today. I think when you look at Morgan Yost's work today, you ought to see some of the magazines then and some of the magazines today—the ads of some of the magazines then and some of the magazines today. You've got to realize the affluence factor—most private architects today don't do houses unless they cost a half-a-million dollars or more. It's an entirely different world than trying to do a \$50,000 house. I've got to walk into an exhibit and try to understand what was the real world then. It can be only compared to the real world today. I'm sitting here, and Mr. Yost would be happy to hear this—this is for you, Morgan—I'm working on a thing called "housing in the year 2000." I'm developing an aesthetic and a system and I could darn well use that kitchen system from *Western Homes*. Maybe a little different version. But I'm interested in doing this so that people will go home and design their houses on their computers and order the parts and build them. I'm interested in a \$35,000 house; I realize I could never reach \$15,000. I just want you to know that some of us keep the dream alive. There are many more people in America than just the wealthy that have the right to this new Reagan world. I just wanted Mr. Yost to know that his lessons have been remembered. I am grateful to him. I've learned a little bit about Morgan that I didn't know from working with him, because he was a private person. Unless we read all those editorials—you see we were full of the energy of our future. For example, Morgan knew Paul Schweikher. Schweikher's houses were a little more unique than Morgan's were, but that was the luck of the dice. I wonder if Schweikher's life had moved Morgan's way, would their lives have been interchanged?

Blum: But their personalities were very different. Do you think that Paul could have done what Morgan did and the other way around?

Netsch: Yes, that's true. But we never sensed the moral part of Yost—we did sense the practical parts of him. He ran a good, tight ship. We got working drawings out in a week. Also, when I came to do my house, after the first house was too expensive and I had to forget it—my first house came in at \$110 a square foot and I was appalled. I thought I had designed a \$20-a-square-foot house and I

went to the contractor and said, "I've designed a \$20-a-square-foot house." And he said, "Yes, you have if you want five hundred." I was doing an industrialized house, you see. I thought I could do one, but I couldn't—you had to do a lot. So I said, "What do you have to do?" He said, "You have to use the materials everybody else uses." So if you look up at my windows, those are sliding patio doors. Every window in my house is a sliding patio door except for the few specials that I've got that are the same size as paintings, so they work fine. I used brick and concrete block and wood floor. I had a ceramic tile floor in the other one. I'll tell you, it was a lesson because this house cost \$34 a square foot. There's a real lesson to be learned and still to be learned. I got part of that from Mr. Yost. But the most important thing is when I did this house over, I left my studio, I went to another floor of SOM, and I did the working drawing for this house in a week. I said, "I've got to do it for Morgan. I've got to do it for myself." By Friday afternoon, I brought down nine sheets and had the staff letter them. By this time, my lettering was not very spectacular because it had been a while since I was on the drafting board. So the working drawings for this house were drawn by me, lettered by my studio.

Blum: But the discipline to produce them in a week came from a long time ago?

Netsch: The discipline came from Yost. It was twenty-eight or thirty years ago. I think that Mr. Yost would appreciate that.

Blum: A term used frequently, in the printed material of the time is "zoned house." Was that a new concept at the time? Was Yost responsible for that concept?

Netsch: No. This was in the air. I think social and private responsibility were in the air, whether you're talking about Charlie Eames, or Morgan Yost, or Paul Schweikher, or the Kecks, or Breuer and his "bi-nuclear house." The concept of having a living and a private end was part of the dignity of man that was coming out of the Second World War, when democracy won. I think you have to understand that there was an ethic involved with the time, just as much as with the Vietnam debacle, that influenced America and changed everything around. The ethos of our culture affects our artifacts. You should be playing the kind of

pop tunes that we were singing in those days when you do this show. It's real, those times were real. When I'm teaching school, I always remind people that when I graduated from high school, there was half as many people in the United States as there are today. That means a lot about the kind of decisions we made. This was the kind of world that Morgan Yost grew up in and Morgan can say the same things about when he graduated from college. I don't even know what college Morgan Yost graduated from. I'm just trying to point out that we shared a lot of things except intimacies. It was not important. We didn't have this elitist problem of going to *Harvard*—I went to MIT—the elitist problems of Harvard, Yale, Princeton didn't exist because we didn't have as many people. We were not fighting at the same level for recognition as they do today. A young architect today has all sorts of elitist problems that we didn't have. I was thinking about the kinds of plays that were going on at this time—Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of our Teeth* and *Our Town*. I think if I have any complaint about the Department of Architecture at the Art Institute, you're too precious in treating us. We're real people in a real world. The Postmodernists have pushed aesthetics. They did it for a revolutionary purpose. The Postmodernists did it to turn over the tables. It was the easiest way to turn over the tables in an affluent society, to appeal to the elite. The revolution in America was not going to occur at the bottom, it was going to occur with the elite. In our case, with the revolution in 1946-7, was for America, for a democratic society that had won a war and preserved democracy. The evils of the Holocaust were not shared evils at that time. They were the evils of Nazism. We didn't know about Babi Yar, in which the Russians had done the same thing. Shostakovich did the music later on. That didn't come out right away. And we didn't have the media exposure we have today. You've got to remember that Edward R. Murrow reported from London, but it was by radio, not by television. There wasn't an instant image. We don't have this burning child running up the street from napalm in Vietnam. We had Edward R. Murrow on CBS. He told of the horrors of the death camps. Pictures gradually got over but they didn't get over by satellite in twelve seconds. I was listening to part of Reagan's speech this morning and he lost his place. I turned it off because he lost his place three times. I thought, "Oh my god, it's going to be a catastrophe." I didn't know whether his papers were blowing away, or his prompter wasn't working. There'll be comments tonight on the news. That would never happen

years ago. No one ever took pictures of Franklin D. Roosevelt in a wheelchair. You couldn't find a photo of the president of the United States, while he was getting on or off the stage. There was a certain kind of decency then. You've got to remember this was an absolutely different time. It was a naive time. I'm not saying it was the better time; it was different. The intensity of the difference has to be understood.

Blum: There was optimism about a better world to come. That we're going to build it and it will be better. Did you share that hope?

Netsch: That came out of Gropius, and the Bauhaus, and Wright. I still believe in Sullivan's words on a democratic architecture. The social message was there in my training. We worshipped the concrete block. I still build my houses out of them. We didn't have to do it out of solid plaster and gorgeous materials. The reality of life was in the simple things.

Blum: What I was referring to was the idea that architecture could make people's lives better.

Netsch: It wasn't until affluence took over. You've got to remember, when we had the burgeoning population explosion that occurred—they called it the baby boom after the Second World War. The baby boomers came twenty years later. Instead of 1946, it was 1966. It was in the sixties when the earth fell in. Those kids were the kids who revolted suddenly. And now they're forty years old and part of another world, an affluent world. The promise didn't materialize as fast as people thought. It *had*, to a great extent, but people had forgotten. It materialized more physically than intellectually. You had the suburb and the private house, but you had the boredom. Those kids hadn't realized what it meant to grow up and have the bicycle and the dog and the private house. They were bored. They couldn't see the future. Their horizons fell in. I think they're expanding again.

Blum: Late in the 1940s, Serge Chermayeff, said, "The cost of urbanization that we're going to pay, that we are *now* paying to expand the suburbs, is monumental."



Netsch: He was correct. There were loads of us who wanted to see it happen within the city. But it was more difficult because the confrontation of the racial question had not occurred. The ghettoization of America was not really understood. We were living separate lives. I'll say this on the record, but off the record: I grew up in fortunate middle-class circumstances. We had an assortment of live-in maids who came from Wisconsin, who wanted to live in the city. But that disappeared. So then we had black maids who came. I had never really seen or known a black child my age, I had never had a black friend. I remember our laundress bringing over her daughter and her daughter dancing the Charleston on top of the cedar chest and showing us how it was really done. I'm still a pretty good Charleston expert. It was a kind of oddly shared middle-class experience. It wasn't hostile. But then I went into the service, and having to be in opposition on the black and white issue. Drinking fountains—you've got to remember that there were black and white drinking fountains in the Second World War. Chermayeff was really aware. But he was also part Marxist. So his social sensibilities were real—I'm not saying this negatively. Please understand that. I had a Communist girlfriend in college, and that really was a help. My middle-class exposure, before I went into the Army, was jolted. And I needed that. The problem is that most of America wasn't jolted. So that's where Chermayeff was talking about the flight to suburbs. We thought everybody was participating in this dream. We forgot about the 200,000 blacks in Chicago who were having a hell of a time getting along. They were being hemmed in and were being forced to encroach upon our turf. Instead of planning ways of living with it, we fled. Jews fled from South Shore to the North Shore, you know. That was in the 1950s. That was after the pressure had occurred. When Prairie Shores and Lake Meadows were done, blacks moved back in under a quota system.

Blum: Lake Meadows succeeded to integrate in that way.

Netsch: Lake Meadows did. Prairie Shores didn't intend to, but Lake Meadows did. I was involved in Lake Meadows, so I know there was a quota system. That was an effort to make living together work. It wasn't supposed to be an evil. It was supposed to be a way of making it work. I think it probably has to some extent assisted in the assimilation process. The black community was forced to expand

into South Shore. They had no choice and they were exploited terribly. The housing was misused but is now being restored as the black community becomes more affluent. The ideal of the location becomes apparent. If you're poverty oriented, location is not important because your job has nothing to do with downtown.

Blum: Did you ever have the feeling that Mr. Yost understood this?

Netsch: No. He was even more isolated than I, because he was in the suburbs. All the black ladies who came in the morning and left in the evening, and were lovely to their children, were nice within the frame of reference of the eight hours that they were together. But it was role-playing.

Blum: There were other things—open plans—that were noted when the features of Yost's houses were published.

Netsch: Part of that was our defense of economy. By breaking down the norm—even like the Postmodernists, or going after Mies—we went after the formal dining room. By arguing the open plan, we wanted to shake up those damn colonial houses with their sense of etiquette. By having the dining room in the living room, aside from the fact that it got rid of a lot of walls and partitions and allowed the plan to flow more freely, we also broke down a certain sensibility. Behind these changes is usually an ethical reason and not just an economic one. It was a combination of events. Therefore, we could appeal to a wider market. You'll notice in *Western Homes*, or even in the Deno House—the Deno House was a very interesting house because it was an affluent house. It had a master bedroom and bath, and the other two bedrooms and bath. But you'll notice that it doesn't have the extra toilet at the door. The 2 1/2 baths that are now advertised in the country are so that your guests can go to the bathroom without using yours. It's kind of unbelievable. You'll notice we don't have one in my house. *No way* was I going to put a toilet in the front hall. I consider it the kind of aberration and a little disgusting, actually. It really is! They think the most important function is to put a toilet by the front door. None of these earlier houses had that. But you see, there was this nice, private wing with its own view. Then the living / dining room

moved out towards the bluff. Then there was the terrace and outdoor grill. There was plenty of social living space. In the old colonial houses, there was this pass-through between the garage and the house. This was really an exotic house. But it was zoned. It was really zoned. You compare this house with the *Western Homes* houses, and you realize how much tighter everything had to be there. The Deno House was really loose and free. Some of the details of the Deno House that relate to the interiors were developed by Mr. Yost as he was talking to the clients. We didn't talk to the clients. In the design phase, he would sketch them up and we would incorporate them into the drawings. That's really important, because that's the role he played as the master architect with his client. The lack of hardware on the casework, where each shelf hangs out with no hardware—that was hot new contemporary detailing.

Blum: Was it his own idea? Or again, something that was in the air?

Netsch: It was something that everyone was doing, like these Postmodernist columns that everyone is doing. It was a kind of idiom, in the air. The split-level, this up-down business, really only could have been done in postwar times; it couldn't have been done in prewar times.

Blum: Did you work on all these drawings for the Deno House?

Netsch: I can't remember. You'll probably find my name, Bob Cohlmeier's name, and Don Reinking's name on them.

Blum: Did you work on the Morse House? Apparently this house didn't get built.

Netsch: No. I don't remember this project. This has some cutesy details that were not so traditional of Mr. Yost.

Blum: Apparently the client had certain needs; she was a concert pianist.

Netsch: I see shutters in the doors. This was 1944, before Mr. Yost had a lot of freedom. This Morse House was before Mr. Yost was independent. I sense in this house

the need to compromise for the client with shutters on the windows and the little nooks. It was an effort to get the job. It's not a typical Yost house. Except he was always doing things with the roof. This little quirk up here was Yost saying, "No, really, I can do nice things if you just let me." The inside living room is fine, with its built-ins. He was very good at built-ins because he had a carpenter who would do this for a reasonable price.

Blum: Wasn't this also something that was new?

Netsch: It was new at the time. There were a lot of carpenters available to do it, you see. We had both the market and the capacity. Today, it's too special. We're almost back to no built-ins. If I was designing today, I wouldn't put a closet in. You'd go out and buy your closet at the home store and take it with you when you moved. It's much more like the old houses in France, where things were less equipped.

Blum: Here is a Yost house published in *Household* magazine in 1944.

Netsch: Do you notice how things have changed gradually? These are rectangular houses. This must have been something he did for the magazine, to push an idea. It's not really like him. It's not really a typical Yost house. It doesn't have the intimate scale. He usually designed living rooms that were very friendly. He followed the Frank Lloyd Wright tradition. The built-ins for Yost come from Wright more than anyone else, then from Greene and Greene. It was part of this whole concept of being a responsible architect for the environment, the living environment, and not coming into a blank, white plaster house that you then bring in all the furniture for. It comes from his training and his aesthetic attitude.

Blum: You describe Yost at that time as trying to be sensitive and trying to be responsive.

Netsch: He was also *the* master architect as we understood it to be. Don't forget, we had that horrible book, Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. I took it with me in the service. Howard Roark. You go blow up the building. You really are *the* architect. I think Mr. Yost projected that role completely. It had an aesthetic side, it had a business

side, it had an organizational side, it had an office side. Most young architects today will never be able to practice that way because it has all changed. Some of it is so specialized.

Blum: It sounds like the year you spent with Yost was infinitely beneficial for you.

Netsch: Absolutely. I have no regrets at all. In fact, it helped solidify the way I was going. But I was never Mr. Yost's protégé like I was Nat Owing's protégé. We never had that kind of electricity between us.

Blum: But you learned from him. And what he got from you, obviously, benefited him.

Netsch: Well, I have never thought of it that way. I never went home at night and said, "Boy, Yost is learning from me." It may have happened, because he had a lot of people working for him.

Blum: When you teach, do you learn from your students?

Netsch: Absolutely.

Blum: Without him actually saying it, it is very likely that that was true for Yost too.

[Tape 2: Side 1 continued]

Blum: Walter, is there anything that you would like to add about your time with Morgan Yost?

Netsch: Well, as I said, my father told me, "Ask for the overtime, and if he doesn't give it to you then you will know you will never be a real partner." And that was the kind of care and concern that my father always expressed for me. It was care and concern, which is a German father's way of looking at you. And I appreciated it. It is a good description of my father. It also was his sensibility in testing a man. Morgan was more willing to let me go after my request for overtime. He was more willing to say goodbye. So there were no

hard feelings. If anybody, he was a little bit angry at Robert Ward.

Blum: For what?

Netsch: For stealing people, for the idea that I might get the job. You see, I hadn't gotten the job with Skidmore yet. I didn't get the job with Skidmore and then go back and tell Morgan I was quitting. I had talked to Bob Ward, or Bob Ward had talked to me, and he said, "There is a job for you if you come down for an interview," and he told me to go down and ask for an interview.

Blum: Was he working for Yost at the time?

Netsch: No, by this time he was working for Skidmore. See, he first left Yost, went to work for Skidmore, and then called up and said to me, "I have a job for you at Skidmore. They are starting work in Oak Ridge, Tennessee." I went downtown, and I was not interviewed by Mr. Ward, I was interviewed by Mr. John Merrill. John Merrill was a marvelous, fatherly gentleman with a marvelously red, flushed face—a handsome man with a mustache and looked like an engineer, which he really was. He interviewed me and offered me a job at sixty dollars a week. I was making forty with Yost, so I considered that was a fifty percent increase, and I accepted it. I was told to be in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on a certain date in the fall. It was to be after Thanksgiving because I was taking my exam, my licensing exam, or had taken it and I wanted the report. I had my Raymond Loewy yellow convertible with a propeller on the front—it was a joke; it looked like it could take a propeller—and set off for Oak Ridge. I got down there and talked to Ambrose Richardson. "Who hired you?" I said, "John Merrill." "He had no right to. I'm head of design here in Oak Ridge." So I was put in a new drafting room as a draftsman. It was, again, another empty room—a huge, empty room. I was the only one in it, and I was told to detail a coal bin because they used coal for heating the houses in Oak Ridge. You know, it's a West Virginia/Tennessee coal town. I had never done a coal bin in my life, but I used logic and detailed the coal bin, and then I sat there. Then Am Richardson took pity on me and moved me into the design team.

Blum: Do you think he was just testing your ingenuity by giving you a coal bin to design?

Netsch: I have no idea. I never asked Am why he did it this way. So I moved in, and the design team consisted of himself, Johnny Weese, Tallie Maule, Carl Russell, and myself. The young engineer was Jack Train, and Jack Train and I have become friends over time. We really are close friends. We are part of the Oak Ridge reunion that we have every Christmas, which is now down to seven people. But the important thing was, it turned out to be just a little bit larger office than Yost's, you might say, because the design team was separate. We were working on the garden apartments. I was given the over-and-unders, as it was called.

Blum: What does that mean?

Netsch: You drove a car under the upstairs bedrooms, and then there was a long bar of units. So it was called the over-and-unders. The other apartments really are still very elegant expressions of contemporary modern in the true Bauhaus tradition. The linkage was a screen porch with a party wall, another screen porch and then apartment block, screen porch and so on. But if you know the weather of Tennessee, that wind could sweep through and give you natural ventilation. Remember, this was before air conditioning, we're talking about 1946. We'd been making bombs and guns and tanks, but we hadn't been making air conditioners and things like that. So this apartment house was designed for natural ventilation, and it fit the hills very nicely. It was very handsomely done, and Tallie Maule with Am Richardson were really responsible for it. Nat would come down to talk to us, and that's where I met Nat. He ran the Oak Ridge operation. Mr. Leroy Jackson was the Oak Ridge contact in the government and evidently he was a very tough administrator. He and Nat and Am, I guess, huffed and puffed occasionally. But I want to just report that it was a small group. We had summer parties. We had parties at Jack Train's, and once I mixed up a lot of ice cream and it all turned out gray when I mixed the different colors.

Blum: Gray to match the walls?

Netsch: It made some of the women ill. I said, "Well, it's contemporary gray." But it was there, of course, that I worked with a man who came from IIT, Bill Priestley. Bill and I worked on the shopping center at Oak Ridge. We worked on the master plan. Our assignment was the design of the garden apartments, which were the first permanent housing. Remember, Oak Ridge was built for the war, and it was temporary housing that had been invented at MIT. This is where these circles get smaller. John Burchard was the head of the Bemis Foundation that developed these houses, and in developing these houses he and Walter Severinghaus, my partner in New York, and Nat offered them to the government during the war. So they built all of this government housing. But we were doing the first permanent housing. We were also doing the first shopping center—real, permanent. We were also doing the first permanent high school. And we were doing the five hundred permanent houses. So I worked on the shopping center with Bill Priestley, but I worked on the five hundred houses myself. I headed up that team, and I designed three house types: standard concrete block; tilt-up panels, concrete panels, precast panels; and le Tourneau, a French, prefabricated, great big egg-laying house.

[Tape 2: Side 2]

Netsch: The concrete would be poured in, and the frame would stay there for two days, and then it would pop up and go to the next house.

Blum: How amazing!

Netsch: So these three postwar systems were at the beginning of prefabrication, the brave new world. But you see, my experience of doing the houses at Morgan Yost's—these simple, straightforward, plumbing back-to-back, no corridors...

Blum: You talked about a utility core that Morgan Yost was using.



Netsch: That's right. Everybody was interested in the utility course.

Blum: Was that used at Oak Ridge?

Netsch: No, the location, the system, was organized—you know, less piping. I even did my house, this house, with minimal piping. I hate to waste money on HVAC and piping and things like that. So my experience there with these very simple houses, and there were five hundred of them, is where I learned grading.

Blum: Grading?

Netsch: I, with the civil engineer and planner, graded five hundred houses.

Blum: You mean leveled the land?

Netsch: How you put each house on the site, on the land, and grade it out to the roadway making certain the water didn't run into the house. But it was essentially a flat piece of land. It was a great experience, and Al Goers is one of the gentlemen that we still have the Oak Ridge reunion with. He is now blind but he was a marvelous teacher. There is nothing better in the way of learning how to do engineering grading than to sit down and have to do five hundred. And the Oak Ridge High School was designed by Tallie. Since I was the bachelor in the group, I was sent back to Chicago to head up the working drawings for the high school. It was then that I first saw the big office of Skidmore-Chicago, the first time I saw the big working drawing shop of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and the first time I met the man who was in charge. There was a man in charge who was older, but the man who was really running the show was Johnny Dinkeloo. He was a tough taskmaster, and we became great friends. John and I and a designer in the office did the competition for a central office down in Kansas for a junior chamber of commerce, or something like that. It was a national competition. We did it in my parents' party room at 68<sup>th</sup> and Paxton, sent the drawing in, and we got honorable mention. And so, our first effort out in the competition

world was an honorable mention. I remember it because we carpeted the ceiling instead of the floor because we wanted to use a richer material on the floor, but we had to have acoustical material, and we didn't want those damned tiles. Well, I can somewhat remember the rendering. It had two levels. That's about all I can remember. It was a non-iconic solution.

Blum: When did architecture become iconic for you?

Netsch: I keep trying to define the time when architecture became iconic. Actually, it was the Air Force chapel for me.

Blum: That was the turning point?

Netsch: That's right.

Blum: Can we back up for just a minute? You said that you were hired by Skidmore and they sent you immediately to Oak Ridge. Was Oak Ridge still all very secret?

Netsch: This is postwar. It was now an open city, although it had no liquor and you had to go to the next town to get your liquor on the weekend. And you couldn't just drive into Oak Ridge. By the time we finished the Oak Ridge High School you could just drive in, but by that time they had the controls around the manufacturing areas well secured, and there was a difference between the housing area and the manufacturing area. Up until then they hadn't worried about it because everybody was under security control.

Blum: So you were really called in to make a real city out of a wartime city.

Netsch: Right.

Blum: And then you returned to SOM to see the office for the first time. What was your impression of the office, other than its size?

Netsch: Well, I can't honestly give you an impression, because I don't know when I got introduced to the design floor. See, I was just sent up to the working drawing floor. I worked with Johnny Dinkeloo, and Bruce Adams who was the designer. He also taught at Yale later. Bruce Adams was the third member of this design team. Somehow I got to see the design floor. It was an office next to Hartmann's which Owings used when he was there. So I did working drawings, and Tallie got angry at me several times because he didn't like my detailing. But Tallie was a Princeton graduate. He was older. He was very mature. He went on to head up the design for the transitway for San Francisco and died at a very early age of thirty-four—tragic because he was really talented.

Blum: As you came to know the office in those early days, how do you remember it?

Netsch: I remember Johnny Dinkeloo because he was sort of a sarcastic member of the firm and a tough taskmaster. I discovered that by being sort of mobile. By being a bachelor, I'd go back and forth and I ended up pretty soon in Chicago working for Am Richardson on Lake Meadows. So I worked on Lake Meadows. I came up one Christmas for my holiday and Am put me to work all Christmas down at the office on the Lake Meadows Shopping Center.

Blum: I thought you were transferred to Oak Ridge.

Netsch: They needed to do the working drawings. We did no architectural working drawings for the high school in Oak Ridge. We did that in Chicago because we were doing the garden apartments in Oak Ridge, and the five hundred houses. The residential work stayed in Oak Ridge. The high school work moved to Chicago for working drawings.

Blum: Did the group that was working on it move with the work?

Netsch: No, just me. Tallie did the design, you see, and it's a very handsome building. It had a kind of Princeton flair. Today you would look at it twice. It's still a

good building. I claim no major aesthetic contribution to the building at all. It was a great learning experience. I did working drawings, eight sheets in one week for a house, and to suddenly be sitting down, doing a high school with an auditorium and a gymnasium and umpty-ump classrooms and a beautiful bridge going down a hill, which Tallie designed. Rem Koolhaas would like to build it.

Blum: In Nat Owings's book he said that Oak Ridge, for him, was the job where he discovered—how did he say it?—"gold nuggets of pure design talent" in you, Am Richardson, and some others.

Netsch: Right, Nat came down there, and he loved to come out to the design room. Tallie was a much better renderer than any of us. He had that Princeton flair. And I wished I could be—gee, if I had gone to Princeton instead of MIT. And Nat really liked them. But I was flexible. Also, Nat was very pragmatic. He found out I lived at home, and I could be shuffled back and forth. I was living in the dorm down in Tennessee, which is a dorm that they used during the war for the scientists and everybody. Nat had a chance to feel a kinship with design; he always considered himself a great designer. He was a good critic but a terrible designer. And he got to know us. And so, I guess Am Richardson was brought back to Chicago somehow—Nat could just order, you know, here, there, everywhere, so I guess he got Am back, and Am got me back because he was working on Lake Meadows. When I got back, I got in the design room. My memories of the design room were that it wasn't much bigger than the one in Oak Ridge, but it was right next to power, meaning Bill Hartmann. He would come out and look in. He didn't talk to us, he would talk to Am.

Blum: Was he in charge of the Chicago office at that time?

Netsch: Right, and when Nat was here he was the national partner, you might say.

Blum: And was Nat then in San Francisco, or still in Chicago?

Netsch: I think he was still in Chicago. I know he was, because I was in the famous trade "Netsch and cash for Owings," the baseball trade. You've heard of a player and cash for another player? In other words, he's not as good so you have to give money with him. I was in the "Netsch and cash for Owings" deal when Owings got in this scramble in Chicago and went out to California. That's when I came back to Chicago in 1954.

Blum: Lake Meadows was one of the first—it was *the* first urban renewal job that SOM was involved with. Didn't they have to requisition land to build that?

Netsch: Nat got in trouble on Lake Meadows because he was also on the Chicago Plan Commission. I wasn't really privy to all of this, but he closed Stony Island in order to give Lake Meadows this grand parcel that went right out to the lake. And we were also the architects.

Blum: So it was a conflict of interest.

Netsch: It was a conflict of interest, and he got caught in it. There was a big hullabaloo, and that's when he left town. He went to California and started, I guess, running the California office. He was also getting a divorce, and it was kind of sloppy. I never really was involved with all that. I drove his wife's car out to California, to Santa Fe. I said, "Father, Nat wants me to drive his car to Santa Fe, because he has a house there, on my way to San Francisco, and I want to take my own car to San Francisco." Father said, "You do what the boss says. Your mother will drive your car out and follow." So Grandmother and Mother drove my convertible out behind Nat's convertible, and then we transferred. I dropped the car off. He was then married to his first wife, and we saw his house in Santa Fe and then went on to San Francisco. Then my mother came home.

Blum: Let me digress. You were talking about your mother driving a car which reminded me of something that Morgan Yost said. He said that one of the things he admired about you was not only your talent, but he was impressed that you thought so much of your job that you were willing to take two trains

to get from the South Side of Chicago to Kenilworth, and you did that every day. He said that sometimes your mother would come in the car with your sister and pick you up. I thought you might be amused to know how he observed you.

Netsch: We may have been going somewhere then, you see.

Blum: But to bring you back to where you were, you drove Emily's car and your mother followed you in your car.

Netsch: Right. Emily is a very lovely lady, and we have good memories. I hear from Emily once in a while. I also hear from Mrs. Yost. I meant to tell you that.

Blum: What was her first name?

Netsch: Winogene. She sends a Christmas letter out, and I'm included in the Christmas letter. And I'm sending her a copy of the Air Force book and *Architects' House Themselves*, if I ever get around to doing it.

Blum: So after Oak Ridge you were relocated back to Chicago?

Netsch: I was relocated back to Chicago, and it was there that I worked on Lake Meadows. Jack Train was brought back to Chicago, and he and I—if I've got the schedule of timing right—worked on many small jobs for United Airlines for Nat. It was one of his jobs. Nat knew the president of United, so he had a very personal relationship with every client. And so, the client said, "I've got a hangar out at Midway that I can't fit my planes in," and Nat said, "I know just the man who can solve that." Jack Train was hired to redo that structure and did a very fine job, so that gave us other small jobs. Nat would often start with a major client in a very minor way. Then he asked us to do what turned out to be the first automated gate in the aviation industry. We designed a finger, the first finger out, and it was a single finger. Then it had the ramp thing that went out to the door. It was a DC-6. Jack Train designed the automated baggage removal that went off there. But it was a mock-up, and so

you just drove up, gave your bag at the ticket window, it went on the little machine out to the plane, and then you went out on the finger and into the airplane. It was the first try. Nat didn't have sense enough to patent anything. Jack Train did an awfully good job because, remember, the baggage has to turn to go somewhere else. I think it should be recorded historically, the kind of things that Nat encouraged us to do, and that for his Oak Ridge design team, Jack Train was the right engineer. So I worked on various jobs like that and did some other minor buildings for UAL.

Blum: And when you worked on Lake Meadows...

Netsch: Well, I was a designer of all trades. I would be asked by Nat to do this, or asked by Am to do that, and so I didn't get assigned. Life was much more informal then.

Blum: Was the Skidmore office more informal then?

Netsch: Well, at 100 West Monroe, the design offices were more informal. As I told you, Johnny Dinkeloo ran a tight ship on the sixth floor in the working drawings section. It was very much separated. Design and working drawings were separated. Johnny Dinkeloo did like the designer to come down and work on the working drawings, and that was the beginning of it. There were no studios in that sense of the word. I really started the studio, for entirely different reasons, much later.

Blum: Was there a sense of cooperation, or was it a competitive atmosphere?

Netsch: It was a very friendly design group. This is where I first met Chuck Wiley. He told me how to win house design competitions—always undersize your furniture.

Blum: To give a feeling of more space?

Netsch: More space. So, all of his double beds were just a little bit smaller. Chuck was

- winning competitions at this time, as were Ralph Rapson and Harry Weese—a lot of house design competitions going on then. I did a modernized main street. It was a perfectly awful design. Sometimes you can remember the awful ones better than the good ones. You're so embarrassed.
- Blum: Well, wasn't a house the realization of the American dream for all of these people coming back from the war?
- Netsch: That's right. By this time it was really getting organized, and modern houses were acceptable. I mean, Ralph Rapson's designs were good and Harry Weese's were good and Eero Saarinen's were good.
- Blum: Were these designs for suburbia?
- Netsch: Yes, they were all for inexpensive land outside the inner ring. But they were not for elaborate subdivisions. They were more for, really, the lower middle class. No one did these competitions with the idea that they were for Lake Forest or anything like that.
- Blum: Did you ever have a sense at that time that with the fascination with the automobile and developing land with these house designs that cities would develop the ring of suburbs that they have? This is hindsight, but can you remember what you were thinking at the time?
- Netsch: Nat was the one who really brought us up on what was happening. He had the social sense of that. He was much more alert to those problems.
- Blum: After Lake Meadows you were sent to California to work on the United States Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.
- Netsch: I was called to California by Owings. I was sent out there because Nat fired Chuck Wiley, and I was asked to come out to San Francisco.
- Blum: Well, in 1947 until 1949 you were at Oak Ridge. And by 1951 you were in



California doing the Naval Postgraduate School.

Netsch: Right, but I was sent out there, really, though, just to take over the design thing in the office. Jack Rodgers and John King were the partners in charge of the office, and Nat Owings was the major-domo. I had a very difficult time. It was the first time I was ever imposed on somebody. I was imposed on the design staff out there in San Francisco.

Blum: Did they resent that?

Netsch: Very much so. There was a large resentment. Then, of course, my being a bachelor who could work longer and harder, and I brought my—what do you want to call it?—dynamic work ethic or whatever it is.

Blum: Your tenacious work ethic.

Netsch: Tenacious work ethic to the office, and it took them quite a while to accept me. Now, the first job we did, actually, was for Greyhound. I did the Greyhound service garage, which is a nice, three-point truss, in downtown San Francisco. I assume it still exists, though it may not. I did that with a structural engineer that we had. It was the first time I had any experience with earthquake design and also with a good, a really good, outside consulting engineer. Then the opportunity came up to do the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, which Louis Skidmore had gotten somehow through his relationships with somebody in Washington.

Blum: Well, after Oak Ridge he knew who was who.

Netsch: Yes, but we had an apartment in Washington, and he shared it with the people who drive piles—Raymond Concrete Pile. Skidmore and Raymond Concrete Pile had a joint apartment in Washington. It was through these contacts that the Navy somehow got involved, and we got the offer to do the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. But it was a job that was given out by the Navy, and the plan was already given to us. We had the plans and we were

to do the working drawings, and that was all.

Blum: Who had designed the plan?

Netsch: The U.S. Naval staff—it was a barracks-like plan. It was a typical military cantonment operation. It was to be located on the famous Del Monte Hotel grounds that the Navy had taken over as a place for R and R during the Second World War. The hotel had beautiful grounds. Well, I took one look at this plan, after going down to look at the hotel and realized that all of this historic landscaping was going to be destroyed. So after going down there and looking at the trees and taking pictures and having the drawings, I put the Navy scheme on the site that they told us to, and I went to Nat and I said, "Nat, we can't do this. We can't possibly do this. We will destroy the beautiful landscape of the Hotel Del Monte." He said, "Well, what am I going to do?" I said, "Maybe we should go to Washington, or you or Mr. Skidmore should go to Washington and convince them that we can do a more sympathetic design." He said, "Well, go ahead and design one." I said, "I have no program," so what I had to do first—and this program got published in *Pencil Points*—I had to take these silly drawings and analyze the drawings for the number of students and come up with the number of rooms that were needed. So I had to do convoluted research.

Blum: So you worked backwards.

Netsch: I had to work backwards for a basic scheme, which involved development of the classroom wing, this wing, that wing and that wing, and then I could place these little objects between the trees. So I made a model of the site. In those days it was a cardboard model. It was probably three feet square but it weighed a ton. It had all of the trees on it, and in order to do the Navy scheme I had to pull out all of the trees, you see, so that was my effective visualization of the destruction of the Hotel Del Monte. Nat decided that my plan was pretty good, so he arranged with Skidmore to go to see the admiral in Annapolis. The project manager, Larry Lackey—a very fine friend—he and I carted this heavy model to that apartment in Washington, D.C. That was the

first time I met Mr. Skidmore. Mr. Skidmore took one look at this huge box, took one look at me, and he said, "You're worse than Gordon Bunshaft. Sit down and have a drink." He and someone from Raymond Concrete Pile were sitting in this living room having a drink, and the project manager and I were sitting at the other end of the room with this box. I kept pouring my bourbon into the plant because this was my chance. I was going to go over to Annapolis the next morning.

Blum: Do you mean into a plant that was sitting in the apartment?

Netsch: Yes, remember, I was raised in a family in which liquor wasn't very prominent, and at college the night I was made a full member of Beta Theta Pi they fed me Scotch and I got terribly sick and never drank any Scotch after that. So I really wasn't a drinker. We all liked martinis. That was the drink of the day. But we had not yet arrived, so we were not the sophisticated martini drinkers. We might have a glass of wine with our spaghetti al dente out in San Francisco, listening to classical music.

Blum: Well, Nat had a serious problem with alcohol later.

Netsch: I wasn't really aware of that. When Nat got married to Margaret, I gave them crystal martini glasses. I think Margaret must have thought I was absolutely nuts, but I just didn't know. I was really pretty naive about all of that, and I didn't know. We'll talk about Nat. We should talk about that because Nat really liked us, and he would take the design team from Chicago up to the Tavern Club on Saturday afternoons and give us lunch and ply us with drinks and get us talking about architecture. He considered me his Communist.

Blum: Because you were a little more liberal than the rest?

Netsch: I was liberal, and I was socially responsive, and he just like to exaggerate. But we would have these talks and discussions. It made him feel young and part of the scene. He was a very unusual man. He would go from that to sitting

down with businessmen and doing all of that chatter, and then come back and chatter with us.

Blum: He has a reputation, both by word of mouth and in the literature, for being a very vicious man and at the same time being very soft and gentle, like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Netsch: Vicious? It's viciousness, if that means when he fired people off the top of his head.

Blum: Not only. It is also known that he set up situations so one person's vulnerability was open to another's, and this kind of thing.

Netsch: I was not really a part of that, so I wasn't in on any intrigue. The only thing I was asked to do, after I was a partner, Nat wanted to be sure that I made David Childs a partner. As you know, no one ever formally votes in a partnership. It's sort of brought up and discussed and discussed, and it's sort of a consensus.

Blum: Would you describe the process?

Netsch: Well, that's it.

Blum: Someone has to become first an associate partner?

Netsch: Occasionally you might jump from participant to associate to partner. No, I'm talking about the classic time of the firm, not today. It's quite different now. For example, I was a participant, and I was brought to Santa Fe to a partner's meeting, or asked to come, and it was there I met Gordon. I was working on the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and Nat evidently thought I should get some exposure. I was his protégé. So I trotted down to Santa Fe, and I had these sketches of the project that I didn't do but a very nice young man did. I sat down and very seriously talked to Gordon about this, and Gordon, who is patient with himself but not with anybody else, was kind of anxious for me

to get through my little spiel so he could go back to talking to the partners. I had my brief moment of glory talking to him for a few minutes.

Blum: What was your official capacity?

Netsch: I was a participant. Nat had made me a participant. Each office can make you a participant. They are allowed to make participants. Associates are made by general consensus of the partnership.

Blum: In the local office or in the national group?

Netsch: No, no, in the national. All of the national partners would discuss what each office had recommended for associates. For example, I was still a participant when I came back to Chicago.

Blum: But then weren't you made a partner soon after?

Netsch: I was made an associate for a very short period of time before I was made a partner.

Blum: Were there people who were made associates who never became partners?

Netsch: Oh, yes. There were associates who served long, long years of service, but they were just never considered partnership material. They were administrative material or technical material, or they didn't appeal to the partners as partnership material, or to some one partner. For example, I was told by Bruce Graham that Ralph Youngren would never be a partner, and he was my prize associate. I told this to Ralph, and so when it came time, Ralph left. I said, "As much as you and I like working together, I'm not going to spoil your career by hemming and hawing about your partnership—you know, come next year, next year." It hurt him, naturally, but he went on, you know, and he is a partner and runs Smith, Hinchman and Grylls. He's still there. He's retiring now, backing off, but he became a major partner, and then

he became the whole show. Obviously, Ralph is talented. It was a mistake on Bruce's part.

Blum: Why do you think...?

Netsch: Bruce didn't want me to have an ally. He had his. That's my interpretation anyway. Actually, Gordon also thought Ralph was too elitist. He was always sort of formal and elegant. He never got his hands dirty, so to speak. That didn't appeal to Gordon. Gordon knew him from the Air Force Academy because I would bring Ralph to New York when we would present things on the academy. We'll talk about that when the time comes. But anyway, we're in Annapolis, Maryland the next morning and I couldn't understand how Skidmore could stand up, but there he is, articulate, giving a very short, very friendly speech to the admiral, saying, "Now, this young kid from San Francisco will show you how it should be done."

Blum: And you've brought your model.

Netsch: Then I got my model out, and I took the scheme that the Navy had given us and I took all of the trees out to put it down, and he said, "Walter, that's enough. They understand what you're talking about." Then he said, "How long would it take you, Walter, to design a scheme? A month?" Then I gave them this beautiful site plan.

Blum: But you showed where buildings were.

Netsch: I'm recollecting now. I think I just took along their building. And I said, "We can do it without destroying the beautiful Del Monte grounds, which is what the Navy owns." He said to Skidmore, "How long would it take you to do it?" You can do it all in a month, can't you? You can move to Annapolis, can't you?" So yes, yes, you know, and there I was. We had the job. I moved to Annapolis to meet with Admiral Herman, who was to be the head of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School. They gave us a little attic room, and Johnny Hoops and a man whose name I can't remember and I sat up there, and it

was there we developed the technical programming for the school because we now had access to the client. I really developed this whole system on use of space and efficiency, and so forth.

Blum: Were you to design your own buildings, or you were going to use theirs sited differently?

Netsch: Oh, no. I had won that battle. I didn't have to do those cantonment buildings. I was to design Skidmore's buildings. We had won the battle of the site, and we had a month to prove it. There we were at Annapolis with the real client, the man who was going to head it up. Admiral Herman was a very fine gentleman. He would come up every night, and I would show him what we were doing. He became quite enamored of us, and he could provide us with information. We developed an electronics building, an aviation building, a classroom building, and a general technical...

[Tape 3: Side 1]

Netsch: And, sure, I was working with this great engineer from San Francisco on the problem of earthquakes. That tall building, the upper floors are suspended from the roof down so that we were able to develop sheer walls for his floating facade. I can remember that later on as we designed the building—well, anyway, in one month, we got it detailed, we got the basic part done.

Blum: How did your plan or design differ from the one the Navy gave you?

Netsch: Well, I'll explain. The Navy gave us a building which had a long head house and lots of fingers going out all the way down the line, and not much room between the fingers so you had to clear the whole site to build it. I redefined it by the intellectual use of the program. This was for electronics, this was air, this was general for classrooms, they move back and forth. This was another kind of chemistry, and so forth, and these top elements allowed them to put all of their radar and stuff that was shooting out all over every place. We hung the top two floors from these main walls going across. Nat Owings

hated that top. He said, "Walter, you've got to do better than that." I said, "Nat, you've got to understand that this is the whole design of this building; that these walls are allowing us to give one floor clear. The middle floor on this building has no columns, you see, essentially, except on the outside.

Blum: Was designing a columnless space something that architects at that time were striving to do?

Netsch: You've got to remember, I'm a Chicagoan. I grew up in the environment of the Chicago School, I went to MIT, which may not look very structural, but I had Aalto and Anderson and Beckwith as my teachers. And so "form follows function" was a part of my character, and this is the first group of buildings that established an attitude. Bill Dunlap, who later became a partner, was working in the San Francisco office at the time. He was a graduate of IIT, and he detailed the wood windows that fit in between all of these grids, and did a very handsome job. The project was a success. It got published in *Progressive Architecture*. Elizabeth Thompson was the West Coast editor, and she took an interest in me and my work, and I got this very good spread. It actually moved Skidmore into a new field, and it gave me my entrée into a noncommercial environment. So I was not competing with other designers in Skidmore to get the office building or to get this or to get that. I had, in a sense, made a niche for myself. No joke—"Niche Netsch". But that's really what happened.

Blum: In the makimona Don Ohlson made for you he says that with the Naval Postgraduate School you humanized a military project and put SOM in favor for the Air Force Academy job. That was his assessment of what this project meant.

Netsch: It was a major help

Blum: But you also saved the natural environment.

Netsch: And I came across as an environmentalist. The buildings are informal in



scale. They're not pompous.

Blum: I haven't seen the campus. I have seen photographs in *Progressive Architecture* and in other publications. It looks to me like the buildings are rather Miesian.

Netsch: See, that's a word with which I'm going to take great umbrage. I'm really tired of the fact that every time anybody exposes a column, Mies gets credit for it.

Blum: Let me say it has a "Miesian vocabulary."

Netsch: No, it was the vocabulary that preceded Mies. It came from Sullivan. It came from Wright and the high-rise in Buffalo. There were cores on the end.

Blum: But was his facade as clean as yours? Was his facade undecorated?

Netsch: But so? So that was true with Corbusier. I could show you Corbusier's grid. In Chicago you all have a fixation on Mies. Those of us who are not a part of that fixation have to always take umbrage with Mies being credited with everything. We should start off with the fact that he is a fascist. And his vision was very hard edged and gridded.

Blum: Do you think his politics describe his design?

Netsch: Yes, it did, except for his houses, and he gave up on his houses. His houses that he did in Europe, the Tugendhat House, is one of my favorite buildings, and as a young student I would look at that building. If that looks like a grid, I'm a monkey's uncle. The other pavilion he did in Barcelona hardly looked like a grid. So Mies came to Chicago and adopted the Chicago School frame. If you study the history of the Chicago School you study the history of the evolution of the grid. Home Insurance was the first high-rise, grid structure, and I will argue with anybody that gives credit to Mies for something that started in the Chicago School prior to him. He refined steel-exposed construction.

Blum: Walter, do you think maybe when Mies came here his architecture changed because he was influenced by the heritage of the Chicago School?

Netsch: Absolutely. I think it's one of the important things that Mies did was to, in a sense, "elegantize" the simple. My favorite architect of the Chicago School that's not always recognized—he was really the first architect who was post-nineteenth century, as Sullivan and as Wright embellished the first floors of their high-rise buildings, and the tops of their buildings had ornamentation reflective of the whole work of the romanticists of Europe. This man was really an engineer/architect/planner/landscape man, and I believe is the man who is credited with—he was the architect of Home Insurance.

Blum: William Le Baron Jenney?

Netsch: Le Baron Jenney, yes, William Le Baron Jenney. He is terribly important in the whole history. He is very seldom taught in school except in passing. No one has ever shown the difference between his plan for Humboldt Park and the way Jens Jensen scrambled it up and impacted his style on Humboldt Park. There are a lot of design lessons to be learned in landscape that I learned, waiting two and a half years to be confirmed as president of the park board because of council wars with Harold Washington. I was able to do a lot of research, and then later on Ed Uhlir discovered the original drawings and showed them to me because he finally found a sympathetic boss. We really rode that beautiful event, the discovery of these drawings, which are now sitting over in the Chicago Historical Society.

Blum: Was this the Chicago Park District basement archive that had been long forgotten?

Netsch: Yes. Then I pursued it. There is a thesis done on Le Baron Jenney at the University of Michigan, which I got and read. He really is an important figure. To me, he's one of my heroes and mentors, you might say, as a designer. So if you take a look at the Naval Postgraduate School, you will

find a grid, yes. You will find, however, the auditorium sitting down, being depressed so that as you look out you look out at the trees. You will find that the concrete structure is exposed, the trusses are exposed, but they aren't in the manner of Mies's methodology. Mine comes from, I would say, MIT's pragmatism and the Chicago School's historicism. I would say that's where. I agree they're gridded. I won't argue they aren't gridded, but they aren't Miesian.

Blum: It's interesting to hear your explanation because to my eye it looked to be...

Netsch: No, it's your Chicago orientation. That's fine, but it's localized. Well, anyway, this gave me my big break.

Blum: And it was also "a very heroic struggle," I understand, to quote one of your colleagues.

Netsch: Right. Well, I had this naive courage—let's call it that—the courage of having faith in architecture, and telling Nat that "you just can't do that. Skidmore can't do that." I had such faith in Skidmore as a symbol of the Holy Grail, you might say, that I couldn't let them. I couldn't fail them.

Blum: Well, Skidmore certainly had a reputation at that time for being *the* firm to do things with creative, young designers who designed in the modern idiom.

Netsch: Yes, that's right, but they had no one, really, on the West Coast who had done anything.

Blum: Was Chuck Bassett in the office at that time?

Netsch: Oh, no, no. He was much later. But I also did Murray Matthew's house in Monterey at this time with John Merrill, Jr. If you really want to see what a romantic little house looks like. It's also from my Morgan Yost period; a simple, straightforward, one-story house. They were crippled, so I had a bridge that came across from the bedroom that lets you back to the living

room. It was before atriums, and the landscape grew up in it. Bob Bruegmann said he's never found the house because, of course, the Matthews are no longer living. We haven't found any drawings that give us an address. But it's a nice little house, and John Merrill, Jr., and I worked on it together. This was one of those kinds of projects...

Blum: Who is Murray Matthew?

Netsch: A cousin of Nat, and that's how it happened. But that's the only house I ever did for Skidmore that actually got built. But it was happening at the same time. And then, of course, we were working out in San Francisco, doing whatever job we were doing, when the word came up on Japan. I really bucked for that job. I really did. I really wanted to go to Japan, although I was very angry at them for causing my delay in beginning practice for the war. I was perfectly willing to have the experience of going to Far East.

Blum: Did you have to convince them?

Netsch: Well, Nat had decided where I was more useful to him. He wasn't vicious, but he sure put himself first.

Blum: You were the portable item.

Netsch: I was the portable item, and he decided. In fact, Carl Russell, John Weese and I, and Ralph Youngren were on—well, not Ralph initially, but the three of us I know were on the initial team going over there. I can't remember whether Tallie was or not.

Blum: Nat has a very funny comment in his book—perhaps you remember it—about this job.

Netsch: Well, this job, we arrived the day the Korean War started. We arrived in Tokyo, and it was very strange. It was the most eerie arrival I ever remember. They still had charcoal-driven taxis. There was hardly an automobile on the

road. We had fire-bombed the hell out of Tokyo, and Tokyo had reconstructed itself, mostly in wood. We were staying—or rather John Merrill was staying; he was put as the partner-in-charge over there. Any time Nat didn't want a permanent location he would put John there. John went to Oak Ridge, John went to Japan.

Blum: Was John married, with a family?

Netsch: He had a wife. John went to Colorado Springs, you know. John was the name partner; a nice, grandfatherly character, and he loved it and his wife loved it. And so, they stayed in the Imperial Hotel. We stayed around the corner at the Dai Ichi, and I remember going over as a major. My civilian status in terms of the contract with the Air Force was as a major, so my accommodations would be as an officer. I would not have to live as an enlisted man. So I suddenly, finally, got my promotion in the service. I was the equivalent of a major, and I was staying at the Dai Ichi, which had been designed for the Olympics that never happened because of the war, and it was a room about seven feet square with no windows and a very small bathroom, and a houseboy who took care of that floor. He took my bonsai tree up to the roof every day so that it got air and sun, and brought it down every night for me. We worked up the street from the Imperial and the Dai Ichi in what was an old gasoline station. We had an admiral for a draftsman, and it was a wonderful experience. We worked in Japan for some of this, and then did the master plan. It was not only Sukiran.

Blum: Is Sukiran an island or a town?

Netsch: No, no. Sukiran is an Army base. Kadena was the Air Force base. Naha was the Navy. Machinato was the warehousing area. We did master plans for all of these areas, and buildings for all of these areas.

Blum: This was all on the island?

Netsch: You've got to remember, we took over in Okinawa as the largest aircraft

carrier in the world. In other words, we had a nonsinkable aircraft carrier in case Japan ever thought of revolting. So, the Air Force was half an hour away from Hiroshima, for example. Rather than taking Japanese property—it was very clever of MacArthur—he took this island, this huge island, which the Okinawans had wanted freed from Japan.

Blum: So it worked to everyone's advantage.

Netsch: They were really unhappy. They had very famous turtleback tombs that we visited.

Blum: Were they like earth mounds?

Netsch: In stone. Turtleback, like a hard stone. It was an amazing experience. Nat, for example, insisted that the housing in Kadena have tile roofs.

Blum: Clay tile?

Netsch: Native clay tile roofs. Now, that was not a Skidmore detail. Skidmore was doing flat roofs. So at Sukiran we had flat roofs.

Blum: Did you say "flat roofs"?

Netsch: Sukiran had. Kadena had tile roofs, so there was a difference between the two. Then we designed a shopping center—Johnny Weese did that—he did the chapel there.

Blum: Was this also an earthquake area?

Netsch: Typhoon area more than—earthquake, yes, but we were only doing two-story buildings so were not involved with a major problem in earthquakes like the Naval Postgraduate high-rise, or the heavy equipment in the aeronautics building, or the big spans, or in the Greyhound. These were—except for Machinato warehouse—just a big warehouse with great, big

trusses and columns and masonry walls. But it was a great experience, and it gave us a chance to live in Tokyo. Then we moved to Okinawa. That's when Ralph joined us, in the second wave, and then Bruce Graham was in the third wave of young designers that came over. It lasted through three waves of design.

Blum: And you were there for all three?

Netsch: No. I was never there with Bruce.

Blum: So you were there for the two first?

Netsch: The two first ones, yes.

Blum: Owings's comment was, if this was any forecast of the project—obviously, it was a very successful one for you, as you look back and think about it—he said, “In our first official Japanese dinner in Tokyo,” he watched fish-allergic Walter Netsch turn green as he settled his six-foot-six frame into the approved Buddha squat, eyeing a dead fish on his plate.

Netsch: Nat always used to joke. When we would be invited out somewhere, he would always say that “Walter wants a trout,” so I would get this...

Blum: You don't eat fish?

Netsch: I eat fish, but I ask to have the head removed. See, when I was a child, my uncle, that alcoholic uncle I talked about—little boys had holes in their pockets. I always had a hole in my pocket—shorts, and they had the hole in them—and we were at Lake Winnepesaukee at Grandmother's, as children, and he and his family were up, and Mother and her family were up. You'd catch little fish along the fresh water. These are the days of non-pollution, and little fish would swim around. He would catch them in a net and stick them in my pocket. To extricate the fish from my pocket the head always went one way because of the gills, and I would get the other. And so, I've

always had this tactile feeling of fish. It's really a sensitive, tactile feeling. That's what I have. Like the other night at Greek Islands, Dawn asked for red snapper. She got it with the head, and I had them remove the head before I could eat my lamb chops. But the important thing is—and Nat doesn't tell this story in his book *The Spaces In Between*—he came over with a \$10,000 letter of credit, and the first thing he did, he and I—I know Tallie was there—he and I went to the Ford agency and bought a gray Ford convertible. We had no gas—of course, this was a rationed country—and so we all, Tallie, Carl Russell, John Weese, Nat and I, got in this car and drove up to Nikko. Every time we'd come to a small town Nat would say, "All of you stand up," so we'd stand up like MacArthur.

Blum: In the car?

Netsch: In the car as we drove through this little town. And all of these people who hadn't seen—you know, there had been no victorious army—here are these civilians, these young kids, standing up, looking around as we'd go through these towns. And we got to Nikko. We stayed at this marvelous inn. Money was a problem there. Getting gasoline on the way home was a problem. Nat said some sort of lie about our importance in needing the gasoline, and we got back. He got back to the Imperial Hotel, but we had a car and we got gasoline, and that allowed us to get around and get up to Fuji. Different groups would take the car on the weekend. But you really didn't need it very much. We took the train to Kyoto.

Blum: If things were so spare and sparse there how could you get a Ford convertible?

Netsch: Well, we were the conquering country.

Blum: And they had those things available for people to buy?

Netsch: I have no idea why that Ford convertible was sitting in that showroom. I have no idea whether it was four years old. It was a new Ford convertible, as



far as we were concerned.

Blum: But that's where part of that \$10,000 went.

Netsch: We just spent it. Nat wanted to be able to get around.

Blum: He was a very flamboyant man.

Netsch: Very flamboyant, and it was a great introduction. He came in with style and power, and we had a great trip to Nikko. There was some sort of an event going on, with people dressed as warriors, marching, and these beautiful cryptomeria trees over to the temple. Nat wanted us, culturally, to get out of Tokyo immediately. Of that I'm certain. We were not going to just bog ourselves down. He was here for an Air Force contract, yes, but we were in Japan also, and it was a cultural experience for all of us. He was going to be sure we started off on the right foot. I think that was intuitive with him. I don't think he planned it at all. But I remember going with him to buy that car.

Blum: So this was a job in Okinawa, actually, that came to SOM from the Air Force.

Netsch: Yes. Don't forget, we were also doing something in North Africa—the New York office was.

Blum: For the Air Force?

Netsch: For the military. We used to say "for the military." See, we actually worked for all three down there in the Pacific. I don't know who was in charge for the island. Whoever was in charge for the island, whatever branch of service was in charge—I think it was the Air Force. But we had to design for typhoons—that's what we were talking about—so we had these sliding shutters. You didn't have to go hang them up. We slid them along and closed off the windows. It's hot and muggy, and air conditioning wasn't common, except for a specialized area.

Blum: Was there anything that you saw in the native structures that you incorporated into your work?

Netsch: Not at the scale we were working. We would do five hundred houses. They were hiring Japanese contractors to come down, too.

Blum: Why did that make a difference, if it was five hundred or one?

Netsch: Well, a single Japanese house is done by a little guy with an ax who is shaping the tokonomo in the living room and is fitting all of the tatami mats to work, and there were going to be no tatami mats in a house where an Air Force sergeant and his two kids and his bride from Tennessee live

Blum: But structurally there was nothing that you could adapt?

Netsch: No, nothing we could adopt. The only thing we did, we did get to a geisha house. I remember knocking myself out, walking in. I wasn't six-six, I was six-three, but I walked right into a beam and knocked myself out. Everybody thought it was funny. "Hee, hee, hee, tee, hee, hee, ha, ha, ha." You know, that sort of thing. The one thing I remember about Japanese women is giggling most of the time.

Blum: Just like in *The Mikado* behind their fans?

Netsch: The greatest honor we got, of course, was to be invited to a geisha house for dinner. Our women got invited.

Blum: I thought it was traditionally only for men.

Netsch: But we were not traditional Japanese men. None of them were our mistresses. We were being entertained by the Japanese in the only way they knew how to entertain, which is at their club, you might say. We would have a very nice dinner, we'd have a little geisha girl behind us or beside us to give us saki,

they would get up and do their dances for us, and then we'd all go home. It was perfectly platonic. We were invited to dinner, and it was usually by some contractor, I guess. I was still a designer. I wasn't very high on the totem pole. I had done this thing, but I wasn't even a participant in SOM. Remember, I was being interviewed, shall we say, in Santa Fe. We had one guy along who collected antiques. I've forgotten what his job was with us. He was an American. I wanted to buy this cold water vessel. It was a very beautiful cold water vessel for the tea ceremony. So I sent him, and for three months he would go and haggle with the man who owned the shop. I would go once a week and have tea, and we'd look at the vessel and we'd hold it properly and take the lacquer top off. I'd have tea, and then I'd go home. This is the way one bought something if you were not a typical GI coming in, "How much does it cost?" and that sort of thing. It was a ritual you went through. And so, we learned these rituals. We learned the tea ceremony. We went to concerts. We heard Brahms and Beethoven, because they were now doing that again, at the famous symphony hall. We heard some miserable performances because they were just starting up again. Remember, they weren't playing classical music during the war, even though they were tied to Germany. Everybody was busier with other events. We would see the Kabuki. I bought a Canon camera, and I would sit in the Kabuki theatre, second row. Men play all of the parts. I would just click my camera because I learned the ritual, and I can show you several Kabuki plays downstairs that I have in slides. As they developed their pattern, there are times when they stand still.

Blum: They stop and hold a pose, yes.

Netsch: And you caught that rhythm, and so you were able to photograph. I've got a marvelous shot where a man turns into a tiger or something. Or the old woman turns into something. They were marvelous. Later on the third wave would go to the Takarazuka. The women do sort of like a musical performance. What's her name, doing the man's part here—our famous musical star? This troupe was all women, and they played men's parts. This is the third wave by now, and this had become popular—they were musicals,

and there were dances. The Japanese girls would fall in love with one of the women who was playing the male part. They became very famous. That wasn't our cup of tea. We were earlier and more historically minded and entertainment minded. We also saw Noh dances. So the Kabuki and the Noh and the tea ceremony, that was our cup of tea.

Blum: I have a sense that you were very sensitive to what you found there, and their customs and theater. It doesn't sound like the typical "ugly American".

Netsch: No, we were not.

Blum: Is that true for everyone who was there from SOM?

Netsch: Oh, yes. Some of them went even farther than I. They would go out at midnight and eat anything. They would eat hot food and everything, and they'd get hepatitis. I didn't risk that. That's one thing I must admit I was chicken on. Maybe that's my trout attitude, not knowing what was in it. No, I would say the SOM crew behaved quite well. I don't know of anyone—I say, by the third wave, though, the stories had gotten back, and I'm certain that life became less formal. Nat was less interested, too, of course.

Blum: Did you use the Japanese as workers, or did you bring in Americans?

Netsch: No, we didn't bring anybody. We just brought the design team. As I say, a Japanese admiral was one of our draftsmen. Johnny Weese would walk down to the drafting room in the morning and say, "Hi," saying hello, you know. "Hai" means yes in Japanese, so we used to kid him. He'd walk down in the drafting room and say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And he said, "Well, I can speak Japanese as well as you can," and none of us spoke it well. His idea was "concreto."

Blum: Does that mean concrete?

Netsch: That's what his way of speaking Japanese would be.

Blum: It sounds a little like Spanish.

Netsch: But our drawings were good. They were being paid practically nothing. We weren't being paid very much either. Another reason Nat always sent us over, we were not the New York contingent.

Blum: Were they considered more elite?

Netsch: They lived in New York, and it was more expensive. It really was. The rest of the world was much less expensive than in America, and our tastes were more Middle Western. But it was a great time. Going to Kyoto was a tremendous experience, to go to those inns. I would study up and take a trip to a shrine. Kiyomizu was my favorite shrine. It's a shrine that's up a little village street, an incline, and it's set in the side of a hill, with great, big columns coming out of the hill to hold this temple. It had this joining of the city and the country. But I discovered the monks didn't come that way. They took a journey through the hill and arrived. It's like the sacred ways of Greece that what's-his-name wrote about, which I also followed. Anyway, I found the sacred way to Kiyomizu Temple, and I happened to start back to the hotel. We stayed at the famous hotel there, and we would take this route to the side of the hill to Kiyomizu. I don't know how to pronounce it correctly, but to me it's one of the great shrines. People like the golden pavilion or the silver pavilion, they didn't interest me at all. I was interested in Katsura Imperial Villa and Kiyomizu Temple and the big national palace. I've forgotten what they call it. It was equivalent to the summer palace.

Blum: Perhaps you knew at that time, that Frank Lloyd Wright had been very much influenced by Japanese prints.

Netsch: Oh, of course.

Blum: Did that interest you as a collector?

Netsch: Well, John Merrill stayed at the Imperial Hotel, so we would see him. The Imperial Hotel went through an earthquake. Some of the one-story, private dining rooms had walls that sloped. They had collapsed, partially. If we got high on wine, or if I got high on wine, I would start at one end of the wall and climb up, and down the other end. I said I didn't think Mr. Wright would mind if I did that. I was sensing the wall. But that was for a private party. We did not tear anything apart. It wasn't anything awful.

Blum: Did you find anything appealing about, say, the ukiyo-e prints?

Netsch: See, the thing we really liked was the Japanese. Wright's Imperial Hotel was nice, and I was glad that we were able to see it. John Merrill's room was terribly cramped, but he and his wife enjoyed it. I went on a weekend with Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, and we stayed at a Japanese inn in Kyoto which was really luxurious, in the sense of being very simple and plain, but the room was a decent size, and it had its own garden. I had mine and they had theirs. It had that awfully hot bathtub that you got into.

Blum: The large wooden soaking tub?

Netsch: Yes. It had all those, or it had one down the corridor, one where you could go bathe with everybody else. We fell in love with the real Japanese, the great Japanese culture of the late period.

Blum: You were there so soon after the war ended. Did you feel any resentment against Americans?

Netsch: Oh, yes, we did.

[Tape 3: Side 2]

Netsch: The resentment I mean is that occasionally—we were having such a wonderful time, why couldn't we have gotten here three years earlier? That's what I mean. You go through the Takashima department store, and you

would look over a sea of black heads. Everyone over there, you see, had not had good nutrition, so people were all about five-eight, five-ten. It's not like today where their nutrition is the same as ours, and a Japanese could be six-three or six-four, like I was. It wasn't until the second tour when I was over there for the library for the university—Sophia University for the Franciscans—that I saw things. I don't remember whether we saw things—I think we maybe went to the famous wrestling matches both times. I have photographs, slides, of those. These are the kinds of things that were popular entertainment. But we were guests and we would sit in a box, and we would watch the matches. We could take our camera along and shoot pictures, and no one would stop us. We were not rude, but we were presumptive—let's call it that.

Blum: But were you that way the first time you were there?

Netsch: I didn't feel that we took advantage of our role. There were probably some Japanese who did, but they would never say anything or do anything. It wasn't like being in Egypt when an Egyptian took us aside when we were watching a Nassar parade, and said to my wife and I, "Come with me. People are saying unkind things about you and your country. I suggest you go back to the hotel.

Blum: Did he think you were in danger?

Netsch: Yes. So we had nothing like that, ever. The Japanese were really badly beaten. It was a terrible dishonor, and they're a great exponent of importance of honor. The buildings in Okinawa are not great buildings. They're good. They're better than most military buildings. It would be fun to take a flying trip. When I do an oral history like this I would almost like to take the book along on a super-fast jet and visit Atka and all of these places to see if you can go home again to some extent. It would be kind of a marvelous experience. If someone wants to give me \$250,000 to take a trip and someone can come along with a camera, we can do it all.

Blum: Would you like to visit all of the sites you once worked at in?

Netsch: Yes, right. Or I could go back to Fairbanks, because I did a hospital there from the San Francisco office. When I got back from Okinawa I did a hospital up in Anchorage, Alaska, for the military. That was again with Tommy Thompson, and it was a grid in a grid; in other words, I had a two-story grid and then a one-story grid inside so that I could make it more delicate. I had to build for earthquakes, so the major structure was heavy. Then the infill structure was light. It went through an earthquake. We had the earthquake in the, what, sixties or something.

Blum: Was the building damaged?

Netsch: I kept watching the paper to see—evidently it went through, but I don't know how much damage was done—I understand the damage was pretty severe. We put all our wiring in conduit in the slabs, and if the slabs cracked the conduit could crack, and therefore it would not be serviceable for electricity. I have a feeling it was structurally serviceable, but I'm not sure if it was technologically. That's why I'd like to go back to see some of these. To see what happened to them. But it was a great experience, Japan was, and again, I'm grateful to Nat for taking his team along. Then back to San Francisco and working, and then suddenly I was sent back to Chicago, Netsch and cash for Owings, because Nat has caused great struggles in Chicago and was being canned from the Chicago Plan Commission, and he was in trouble with his wife Emily. He moved out there, and Margaret was out there—Margaret Wentworth was out there—and I was shipped back to Chicago. Again, I was still a bachelor, movable, so I was shipped back to Chicago to take over the design in the Chicago office.

Blum: Is that when Inland Steel presented itself?

Netsch: And that's when Inland Steel presented itself. I had just done the high-rise building in San Francisco.



Blum: The Crown Zellerbach?

Netsch: Yes, the Crown Zellerbach, and it was finished, I think, by Chuck Bassett. So Chuck Bassett arrived in San Francisco and I arrived in Chicago. I'm sure Bassett didn't want to go to Chicago for anything.

Blum: Well, he was from the Middle West.

Netsch: That's correct, but he did not want to go to Chicago. He also knew from Saarinen's office the history of Skidmore.

Blum: Which is that it was very competitive?

Netsch: And the tough Chicago climate, architecturally, and San Francisco is a lovely environment. I was shipped back here, you know.

Blum: Was it a good trade: Chuck going to San Francisco, Nat going to San Francisco, but you coming the other way?

Netsch: Well, I wanted to come home again.

Blum: Was that a fair trade, in your opinion, for you?

Netsch: I was called a "Netsch-and-cash-for-Owings". I really didn't know Chuck. Nat had it all planned out—I wasn't aware of that. I've never held it against Chuck that he wanted San Francisco. I never thought of it as his replacing me in San Francisco. I thought of us as peers.

Blum: Nat Owings says about you—regarding the Inland Steel Building, he says, "This was one of Walter's endless ideas which forever tumbled in profusion out of him. It was evidence of a spirit and a talent which almost consumed him." Does that accurately describe you at the time?

Netsch: That's accurate, especially about Inland, because this was a chance to build in

the master plan of downtown. I was going to build in the spirit of the original design of the master plan of Burnham. I was going to follow Burnham—I was facing Burnham's building, which was the First National Bank, it was going to be nineteen stories tall, and that was it. I was going to keep Dearborn Street as *the* street. I tried to do so many other schemes than that. None of them could match the demands for that. There was a similarity to this and Crown Zellerbach, but it was not that I wanted to repeat Crown Zellerbach.

Blum: It was a similarity in the sense that you had the service tower and then the free space for the offices.

Netsch: Right, but this one was much more sophisticated. See, I didn't get to finish either one, really, and Chuck Bassett put his stamp on Zellerbach. He never liked the plan. He would have done it very differently, and he did the bank down on the corner. But he didn't feel it fit the triangle at all. It had problems, I'll admit.

Blum: There was also a similarity between Crown Zellerbach and Inland Steel with the separate service tower. Gordon had done, or was doing, two buildings in New York that also had a similar plan. Pepsi-Cola had a separate tower for service, and so did the Hanover Trust.

Netsch: Well, I have a feeling that was all coincidental. I had no idea of what Gordon was doing.

Blum: Well, I'm asking, with these partners' meetings were ideas shared?

Netsch: No, it had nothing to do with the partners' meetings. The other thing is, I had Inland Steel as a client this time. As you know, I did the first model. The Art Institute has that model. Unfortunately, I gave it to them.

Blum: Yes, it's in our department.

Netsch: No one told me that you don't have to give things to museums. I mean, when

you're as naive as I am, you get used. I wanted it back. I wanted to give it to the Chicago Historical Society because the Art Institute misused it badly in their exhibit "Mies Reconsidered: His Career, Legacy and Disciples." It was viciously used by Tigerman & Company over there. I was very hurt by that. I had that little model made at a machine shop, and I wanted to explain why I had glass on the outside and glass on the inside. That was an expression that had nothing to do with San Francisco. It had to do with a Japanese house, with the shoji screen at one side and the next screen on the outside. It had this environmental screen, and I was going to bring all of the air up and down through this environmental shaft. I couldn't show it on the model, except I do in that one red and blue thing. The risers come up. And I wanted, of course, the steel to be clear and concise, and the span to be a free span. So I made this model, and it had a free, open first floor and a little entranceway that seemed to slide back and forth in the model. It didn't get held down, and it's loose. It rattles around in there if you pick it up. And way down to the garage. All the parti is there—the cantilever at the ends, which I again did on the high-rise at UIC. How do you end a building? I often ended a high-rise building with a cantilever rather than the box.

Blum: How much input did the client have in the design?

Netsch: None. The Blocks liked me, and they liked Dawn. They were very gracious to us. Leigh and Mary. The art, they knew we were interested in art. It was a different art than they collected.

Blum: Were you a collector at that time?

Netsch: Oh, I was a collector—no, not really. I had a few things, but nothing much. It wasn't until the Air Force Academy that I—I was just on the verge of—maybe I had a couple of things.

Blum: They were established collectors at the time.

Netsch: Oh, yes. That was probably part of the influence on me also. But that was

primarily Gordon giving me that opportunity. It's interesting, Bruce Graham and I never sat down and talked about the Inland Steel building. He immediately took away the double glass and exposed the columns in the Miesian tradition. I remember after his design was approved by Mary, she said, "Well, you see, Walter, you don't have to do an all-glass building." It had that very small stainless steel base with the glass above. But it still stayed as a highly engineered building. The heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) work was very carefully done by Sam Sachs, and the bids came in horribly high for that time. Nat fired the estimator. Oh, it was very embarrassing.

Blum: Did you have a contract with Inland Steel to stay within a certain price?

Netsch: No, no. But you had honor. SOM was *the* firm in Chicago. We provided an estimate, and said that would be it, and that wasn't it, you know. It was missed by a mile, and so Bruce and Bill had that problem of getting it back into shape. I missed all of that because I was already doing the Air Force Academy. I had moved. Once Bruce took over—I was either getting the job; you know, helping get the job. And don't forget, if you've got a big job like that you got moved out into cheaper work space. I did the Air Force Academy in the Carson Pirie Scott office building. I did the University of Illinois, UIC, in 22 West Madison.

Blum: You're saying your group of people, working on these jobs, although you were in the Chicago office you were physically at another location?

Netsch: We got moved. They moved us out into a cheaper space because we were big, we were going to get bigger, and we were going to shrink at the end of the job.

Blum: When you were working on Inland Steel you left and then Bruce took the design over.

Netsch: Bruce had moved into being chief of design. Remember, there would be two

chiefs of design, Bruce and Walter, and so Bruce took over. I had my office in 22 West Madison.

Blum: So you were not working together at all?

Netsch: No, never. We never worked together.

Blum: Did you ever discuss your concept and how he would treat it?

Netsch: That's right. We never discussed it. He didn't want to. In fact, it was denied for a long time that I had even worked on it.

Blum: It's been very unclear to us at the Art Institute until recently.

Netsch: And that model is where I got off the trolley—clearly. That's one of the reasons I think it got blasted when the time came for the Art Institute to exhibit it. I don't have very good memories of the Art Institute, you see. That's my third offense now, as we go through this.

Blum: But Walter, that building is a Chicago landmark.

Netsch: It is, right, and it came out fine.

Blum: Beautifully. You might be interested to know that about a year or a year and a half ago we gave some tours of some of the landmarks buildings in Chicago, buildings from the fifties, sixties, that have come to be respected and Inland Steel is truly one of the best.

Netsch: Today?

Blum: Today. It's as if it was built yesterday. It is in pristine condition. It's a loved building, and it's been cared for very well.

Netsch: Yes, it's a loved building, even if it's owned by Chinese or whoever it is that

owns it now.

Blum: Whoever owns the building, they respect it.

Netsch: They respect the building and the location. It can't be better. And Xerox across the way looks fine with it, but Thirty-three doesn't look quite so hot with it. But that was Bruce's chance to do it from scratch. The buildings show a big difference. When Bruce had to work on Thirty-three he had to work with a developer. I worked with an institutional client. I didn't fill the site to a hundred percent of capacity. I gave everybody a window, in a sense—in that skinny building. It was the last real institutional building, except for U.S. Gypsum, the one that Perkins & Will did that was just torn down. Remember the rotated square one? It literally disappeared. It went through several names. It was Gypsum originally. But that building, Larry Perkins said was done to do better than Inland. Oh, Larry always had a competitive spirit with Nat.

Blum: Yes, I have heard stories about the First National Bank job when they worked together.

Netsch: And Larry loves to tell them.

Blum: Yes. But even though you say that you and Bruce didn't share ideas, didn't cooperate, didn't actually work on the building at the same time, you still share today's honors as if you had, even though it's separate but equal.

Netsch: That's right. We share the honor, right. But the important thing is, again, this is where I feel that Skidmore and I would have gone different ways together. If Bill Hartmann had more faith in me, because I was always pushing an edge, like the HVAC on Inland—not only the clear span but this too. Listen, it would have been an early Richard Rogers building, long before he ever put pipes out front. I mean, I was way ahead of the parade, and I scared the bejeezus out of Bill all the time. He didn't know, really, how far to go with me. That, of course, is evidenced by my design for the stairs at the Art

Institute. My only regret is, when you take Inland and you look at the model, it had everything going for it. It had the layering of the big glass on the outside, and the thin mullions to put the partitions in on the inside. The mechanical exhaust system was located between the glass and acted as ducts to provide extra cooling by absorbing heat. It was to come from about the mid floor and go up, and top down, and down, and from the ground floor up. So it was to be a very delicate grid of vertical. The supply, the exhaust was to be the plenum—the glass thing was to be the plenum—because at that time the HVAC laws permitted that. This building wouldn't be permitted today.

Blum: So I understand, yes.

Netsch: But it was really avant-garde, high tech. You see, this is where I'm coming out of MIT. I'm not coming out of IIT. I'm coming out of my background and my training, and looking for my aesthetic basis with the Chicago School—Le Baron Jenney and Walter, you know. It wasn't with a background in Mies—I mean, Mies, hell, it was with Sullivan and Wright and Barry Byrne.

Blum: But can you look at the building now and admire it?

Netsch: Oh, yes. It is one of *the* beautiful... It and 333 Wacker are my two favorite buildings downtown, and I think they looked at Inland before they did 333, the green glass building. It's not called the green glass building.

Blum: Kohn, Pederson & Fox did that.

Netsch: Yes, Kohn, Pederson. It's the only decent building they have done in Chicago. It's a very beautiful, handsome building, too. It has the same sort of style to its character. No, I think Bruce did a fine job. My regret is that the firm didn't have the courage to pursue my aesthetic technology. Bruce was more willing to fall back on the IIT idiom.

Blum: Would you have preferred the building to have been built as you envisioned

it?

Netsch: I would have preferred that at least the design had been followed to a point to see whether it was feasible or not. You see, that was a schematic design. There was no engineering done on mine, it was just Walter with the idea, and talking to Sam Sachs and saying, "Sam, can we do it?" And he said, "Well, you can do it, Walter, but it's going to be difficult." It's my fault for not showing the idea more concretely, but that's my only regret. It has nothing to do with Inland. It's a regret that SOM, which had the engineering and the design capacity to do what Rogers and other people did twenty years later, that we were beginning to—I wasn't, but the firm was beginning to fall back on the past. It was beginning to be a Chicago, Miesian firm rather than... Even Bruce was to do that, yes. That's what he did. It was an honor for him. Myron Goldsmith was brought in. And Bill was happy with it. When I did the Galvin Library and the student union at IIT, that was done sort of over Bruce's dead body and over Bill Hartmann's dead body. It was Nat Owings who said, "The only non-Miesian in the Chicago office is Walter Netsch, and he's going to do those buildings at IIT," when Mies got fired. It was Nat who said, "We will not do Mies's working drawings," when we were offered to do them. He never forgave—who was the friend we talked about, the jazz musician?

Blum: Bill Priestley?

Netsch: When Bill Priestley was designing the dorm at IIT, he used to go down to Mies for a crit, and that sent Nat into absolute tremors. Nat felt very strongly that SOM had an identity.

Blum: Your work on the IIT campus came about ten years after Inland Steel and the Air Force Academy. Because Mies was dismissed in 1958.

Netsch: What do you mean, IIT came then? Oh, my buildings, you mean; my two buildings. I jumped ahead because we were talking about Mies, and so forth.



Blum: But with the IIT project, I understand that Hartmann was on the board of IIT at the time, and then SOM was offered the job. Did the issue of a conflict of interest come up?

Netsch: It never bothered Hartmann, whether it was the Art Institute or IIT.

Blum: It was thought by almost everyone to be an unfair dismissal of Mies. He didn't resign, he was dismissed. And the architectural community was in an uproar about it and whoever was going to inherit the commission in SOM was in a very peculiar position.

Netsch: That's correct. I know, and then when Nat said that "Walter was going to do it," that was it. Period.

Blum: I understand that Gordon...

Netsch: Objected?

Blum: I don't know if he objected, but I understand that as a courtesy, he called Mies to see if Mies would collaborate or cooperate with SOM in the continuation of the campus.

Netsch: See, I wasn't aware of that.

Blum: Mies said no, and at the same time I understand that Bill Hartmann was in contact with the IIT people, and they said, "No. Take it or leave it." They said, "SOM can do less damage than other firms," so SOM took it.

Netsch: And they gave it to me because I was non-Miesian. It was the one time in my life I really had to go in and look at another architect's work in detail. I wasn't a Miesian man. I had to go through and see how did he put a corner together. How did he put a window together and do everything. So I would not necessarily copy his window, but I would not do anything that was hostile.

Blum: Well, SOM had issued a statement, apparently, at the time they took the job to say “it would be in the spirit of Mies.”

Netsch: That’s probably what Nat meant. It is in the spirit of Mies.

Blum: So it would keep the consistency of the campus.

Netsch: Yes. You go down there now, and people don’t know that it isn’t a Miesian building. The average lay person that goes down there doesn’t understand that those two buildings were done by SOM. I’ll tell you why. I did go to Gordon for approval of the building because I had a chromium space frame over the student center.

Blum: Was the student center the first building you did?

Netsch: Yes, and it was beautiful. I was doing it in the spirit of Barcelona Pavilion and the Tugendhat House. I went back there. I had mirrored glass, which I had invented at the Air Force Academy, and the idea was to reflect Mies’s buildings. All you saw was Mies. It was the same thing I did when I did the late entries to the Tribune Tower. I did it on a mirrored paper so you went up and saw yourself, and you had your fifteen minutes of glory in the Tribune Tower. That’s twice I’ve done that, and neither time was it—well, the glass was not acceptable by us and by the manufacturer, and so we canceled that. They were talking about \$200,000. I had all glass windows put in my penthouse up in 1360 Lake Shore Drive, and we experimented and everything. It was to be a great contribution, I thought, to the campus, and a great honor to Mies because you wouldn’t see my building at all. It was going to disappear into the brick and steel buildings across the way.

Blum: Isn’t the student center very close to Crown Hall?

Netsch: No, the library is close to Crown Hall.

Blum: Isn't this also just around the corner?

Netsch: No. Here is the student center, here is the library, here is Crown Hall, and the brick buildings of Mies's are on this side.

Blum: I see.

Netsch: I did take it to Gordon. And I worked very hard, but Gordon said, "You will *not* put a space frame on the top of the student center."

Blum: Why?

Netsch: Well, I think Bruce and Bill Hartmann didn't like the space frame. They didn't talk to me about it. They knew I had worked with Gordon on the academy, so they said, "You go to New York."

Blum: Oh, they told you to go consult Gordon?

Netsch: No, Bill did. Never Bruce. Bruce never did anything directly with me.

Blum: In the hierarchy of SOM was Gordon the head for design?

Netsch: Of course.

Blum: So if there was any consultation, Gordon was the person.

Netsch: I don't know if Bruce ever consulted Gordon on anything. I have no idea. Or Chuck Bassett. I doubt if Chuck Bassett did, because Bassett did very different work, and Gordon didn't always agree with Chuck's work. But he always let him do it.

Blum: Could he have stopped him from doing it?

Netsch: Gordon could stop anything if he wanted to.

Blum: You're talking about a lot of power within the organization.

Netsch: Gordon and Nat were the firm, and rightly so.

Blum: Do you think it was Nat Owings's idea that SOM work should be distinctive on the IIT campus?

Netsch: Oh, no. No.

Blum: There was Bill Dunlap, there was John Weese, there was Myron. They are all IIT products. Why weren't they chosen to do the work?

Netsch: That is correct. I told you, though, that Bill Priestley went to Mies for approval of his scheme. I said there were tremors over that. Bill Priestley was practically fired over that. Nat felt very strongly that we were equal in design to Mies; that we were Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. He didn't know what I was going to do. He knew I would be serious. He knew I would do it in a sympathetic spirit. It was the trustees that raised my library four feet out of the ground because they didn't like the idea of maybe risking water getting in the books. And my detailing is not copied-Mies, but it is in the Miesian spirit. I think the buildings came out very well. You go down there and look at them now—I was down in the faculty dining room lounge, overlooking that little courtyard, and it's really a very nice space. I'm certain that Bruce would have loved to have done it. But Nat Owings said, "No Miesian student is going to do this building." Mies was fired. We were hired, and I, unfortunately, got the job, and I was hated by people. People criticized me. They criticized every detail for the first five years. The mirrored glass, they never understood why I was doing it. They couldn't understand or accept the idea that I was honoring Mies. And so, I couldn't do anything right, but the buildings have worked out well. They certainly have not dishonored the campus.

Blum: Don Ohlson in the makimona says that with this job, "IIT was in shark-

infested waters.”

Netsch: That’s correct. I really was in shark-infested waters. But I honestly had the confidence that I was not bringing my idiom to IIT. I had no intention of doing two buildings that Mies had planned as the center of that campus plan and doing something incompatible. No way. Myron later on did the gymnasium [Keating Sports Center].

Blum: He did several buildings.

Netsch: I don’t think they’re any more distinctive than mine.

Blum: I sense that Myron didn’t want them to be distinctive. He wanted them to be good, solid buildings, sympathetic to Mies’s design that was already there.

Netsch: Yes, but they weren’t even as sympathetic as mine. I mean, one of them, the gymnasium, was a curtain-wall building, but he did it in this glass, frosted glass, which athletes hate. They can’t use the building. You look into the light and the ball hits you in the face. Myron is not an athlete, so he doesn’t—in a way it’s a typical Miesian building. To hell with the client.

Blum: Is that part of what you think “Miesian” means?

Netsch: I think they have been arrogant in their resolution of things. I think that Crown Hall turned out to be environmentally very complicated to work as a building. You know it has.

Blum: But very handsome.

Netsch: But very handsome. I think you’ll find that my two buildings are very handsome, closer to the spirit of Mies than anything that Myron did, and workable.

Blum: What did you think of the more recent changes to the library, such as the

- little garden, the ramp, and the canopy, which was there for one moment and then removed?
- Netsch: I haven't been through that. I was never asked. I had no idea when anything happened.
- Blum: The brightly colored canopy went up over the entrance a few years ago. It was done by Miekus Johnson. It went up, it was noticed because it was very brightly colored, and it came down.
- Netsch: That's fine. Someone is watching, and trying to do as much as I did.
- Blum: But there was a ramp that was installed. The entrance to the building is different now.
- Netsch: Well, it had to be made because of the Disability Act. I have not seen the ramp. And also, it was a double library. Remember, IIT had lost a collection. The Crerar collection went to the University of Chicago. When the Crerar went to the University of Chicago, it had to relocate inside. I was not a participant of the reorganization.
- Blum: In your opinion, should you have been consulted?
- Netsch: I'm always happy to be consulted. At Grinnell my library had a third floor added by Larry Booth, which I understand is a visual bomb. I was not consulted. There is no tendency on the part of architects to extend that courtesy.
- Blum: So it's more competitive?
- Netsch: No, they think they know.
- Blum: Well, years had passed, too, and maybe the needs had somewhat shifted.

Netsch: Yes, but for the Grinnell Library I had consulted the librarian at Harvard, and it was first sort of a postwar, small library that contained all of the intellectual ideas of Harvard. I worked very hard with that man, and we really worked hard. He was very proud of the building, and I was very proud of the building. It was the first time that we used the equivalent of rooftop air conditioners. I wouldn't put them on the roof. I designed them and they fit alongside on the ground. I was trying to design an undulating wall that would take the ducts that came up. It was turned down. That was after Inland, you see. I was still trying to get my HVAC into the aesthetic of a building. And so, I don't know what they did, because I know they took those air conditioners out when it was changed, so I know that kind of a change had to occur. I'm thinking this summer if I'm in good enough physical shape and we get a new car this fall, that we will make a tour of Grinnell and the University of Iowa, and also see some Sullivan and some Wright things and the famous Rock Crest/Rock Glen development over there at Mason City, Iowa. I would like to do that if Dawn can find the time to do it with me. Otherwise, somebody who is interested will come along. They won't trust me to go alone. I'll fall asleep at the wheel or something. I've done that already. When I was teaching at Purdue I fell asleep and went off this highway and went down into the gully and woke up and came back up again on the highway. Fortunately, there was no one else on the highway, otherwise it would have been a mess. Once when I was on the same highway, one of the dogs jumped on my gearshift and knocked it into neutral. That was a time. So usually I travel with someone as a precaution. And I willingly let them drive now. It would be a stupid way to die.

Blum: Well, we've sort of moved out of chronology. We were just finishing with Inland Steel, after which you went to the Air Force Academy.

Netsch: Of course, that was another job, like the Japanese jobs, that I really wanted to be a participant. Nat had great faith in me. Nat told Bill, "Let's use Walter to put together the presentation documents."

[Tape 4: Side 1]

Netsch: It is here my U.S. Naval Postgraduate School loomed hard and high in Nat's mind. We had all of these military contracts that we had done in the New York office and then in San Francisco. We had done the Moroccan air bases that I referred to earlier. We had done the Okinawan air bases for the military, and we had the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School.

Blum: Were there other firms that were considered for the Air Force Academy?

Netsch: Well, I think you ought to refer to the book... The reason I say that is, I was really involved with... I think *coup de grâce* is probably the wrong word. What I should have said was I got the golden palm for having done the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School because other architects had done a lot of military work, but none of them had done a school that had the reputation that the Naval Postgraduate School had. Bob Bruegmann's new book, *Modernism at Mid-Century*, went into a lot that I really never knew. Remember, I was, as Wright said, "The boy in the back room," or the bird man in the back room, or whatever he called us. Again, it was tunnel vision. I prepared this document to go down to show the history of Skidmore in visual form that would show why we should be considered as one of the final architects. And we were selected as the final architect. In fact, until that book was written I wasn't quite sure who all our competitors were. Not too long ago a friend of mine gave me the layout for Frank Lloyd Wright's group, the Kittyhawk group. A year and a half ago was the first time I really saw that, and so I gave that to Robert. So a lot of this material that was done—I knew, of course, about anything to do with the presentations and the design and the meetings with consultants. It was there I met Eero Saarinen and saw Pietro Belluschi again and Wally Harrison and Roy Larsen. But getting the job, I gather from the book, was as much due to Gordon knowing somebody and Skid knowing somebody and Nat knowing somebody, as well as the other architects also knowing somebody. So it was a question of everybody knowing somebody.

Blum: A network of connections.



Netsch: So the question is, how do you make a decision when everybody knows everybody? It finally came down to two things: one, that we could get the work done on time; and two, we knew something about military education. So I think that's how SOM finally got selected.

Blum: It was supposed to be "the greatest opportunity for an architectural firm at its time." So it was a coveted commission.

Netsch: It was absolutely a coveted commission. Wright thought he deserved it, and I felt very guilty because in my heart of hearts thought that he probably should get it

Blum: Why, because he was older—because he was the most famous American architect?

Netsch: Because he was Wright. The most famous, yes, and he would probably do an absolutely complex job that would never get finished. But anyway, he really messed it all up for himself and his group and accidentally assisted us more than once. I would really like to refer people to the book on all of the preliminaries because I would be giving it second-hand. I can tell you that when we got the job and we got down to Washington, I had decided I could put a team together. One thing I could do is call up on the telephone and talk to the dean at some school, and say, "We got the Air Force Academy job. Who is your brightest student, and would they like to come and work on the team?"

Blum: Is that what you did?

Netsch: Yes. So I got some young people, and used people that I knew who could lead up a team—Ralph Youngren, Johnny Hoops, Gertrude Peterhans. These were people I knew.

Blum: And they were practicing architects at the time, weren't they?

Netsch: They were at Skidmore. They moved them to my design team.

Blum: Which was located...?

Netsch: Which was located in the Carson Pirie Scott building, but we first started out in Building E in Washington, D.C., to review the program with the client.

Blum: What was that like, having the government as the client?

Netsch: Well, everybody was enthusiastic. Everybody wanted to do a good job. We approached it from my experience at the Naval Postgraduate School—the academics—fairly pragmatically to get to know what they were going to offer. We also at the same time were getting to know the site.

Blum: Which must have been spectacular up in the mountains.

Netsch: Twenty thousand acres of cattle ranch with these fingers of mesas coming out, which the book informs me that I never should have called mesas to begin with. They have a much more technical name. And the mountains rising behind them—the Rampart Range. There is a 2,000-foot cliff right behind you. I mean, you just salivated every time you thought about it. And so, working in Washington on the programming gave us a chance to meet some of the people who would be involved.

Blum: Do you mean the Air Force people?

Netsch: Yes, Air Force people. It also brought out to us the fact that there were going to be some problems of competition between the Air Force and the Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers had done every major project of the military from the Second World War, and this was a chance for the Air Force to establish its identity as a construction agency.

Blum: For the Air Force.

Netsch: The Air Force Academy Construction Agency—AFACA. Colonel Stoltz and Colonel Erler, were very determined to make it theirs. And so, I really wasn't a part of all that because, really, it came up more as a hassle in the construction period than in the design phase. In reading the book, I always had the impression that Nat got the consultants. The book seems to say otherwise, but I shall always think of Nat as somewhere putting a bee in some bonnet that "what the Air Force secretary needs is the runners-up to act as the advisers to the secretary on what should be done in the design of the Air Force Academy."

Blum: Why do you think Nat would suggest that?

Netsch: We all knew from experience, if we had to sit around in front of five generals it would have been a disaster.

Blum: So you wanted someone with some experience on that panel.

Netsch: With architectural knowledge. You've got to remember, the famous story when I talked to the generals on the cadet quarters, they said, "Why are you providing bathrooms on every floor? They should run down to the bottom and bring the water up and put it in the basin, because that's what we did."

Blum: A hundred years ago.

Netsch: Yes. And so, it was that kind of problem. And, "Can't you put a little tile edge around this 1,200-foot-long cadet quarters?" So this was very important, and it was a great experience. Somewhere I have a letter that Saarinen wrote to NCARB. I asked him for a recommendation for NCARB. In his letter he said, "The academy would not be what it is if it had not been for Walter," which is a very nice thing for him to say. I really came to appreciate Eero. Eero and Gordon were the two critics I listened to.

Blum: Did Gordon have much input in all of this?

Netsch: Of course. I had to bring everything to New York, and Gordon was a good critic. No, it was my design for the over-and-under—you know, the idea of the dorms going up and down. It was my idea to open up these passageways. They don't look like Gordon's buildings. If you look at the book you will see the renderings, which were made in New York for the presentation in Colorado Springs, and they look like Bunshaft buildings. As built, they do not look like Gordon's buildings, they look like Walter's buildings.

Blum: Did Gordon design buildings for that presentation?

Netsch: Gordon designed some pretty pictures for that presentation that had nothing to do with reality.

Blum: Just to give people an idea.

Netsch: To give people an idea. Gordon worked from what he knew and what he did. He went over and talked to the renderer in New Jersey, and we talked. The scheme of the buildings, you could see on the models, were mine and looked like it. But the renderings were fanciful—let me put it that way—in the New York tradition.

Blum: Well, it was that presentation of the chapel in the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Museum that caused an uproar.

Netsch: At the end of that presentation, everything had been going along so well, and all of a sudden the senator from South Carolina said, "Everything looks fine, except that chapel. I don't hear the rustle of angels' wings." And some senator from the North Dakota said, "It looks like a bunch of tepees to me." All of a sudden the earth fell in on that poor little chapel design. I was in tears in the back of the room, and Nat came back and said, "What's wrong with you? Everything is approved but the chapel, and you can always do another one"—that sort of thinking. So I got my father and we took a ride around Lake Michigan.

Blum: Was that to cool down and get some perspective or what?

Netsch: So I could get some perspective on what was going to happen, because Nat said, "You're going to have to go to Europe, because you've never been to Europe, and you must design another chapel." And they said, "Have you ever seen Notre Dame in Paris?" And when I said, "No," he said, "Then we're dead."

Blum: What was your father's counsel as you drove around the lake?

Netsch: It was just that we went fishing. We didn't discuss architecture. He was glad to do it. It was sort of a special privilege for him to help me out at that time. There was nothing for me to do for a little bit after this presentation. A week off was all right. I remember I took along a book of Plato and one of the American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. I would row the boat, and he would fish for muskies. You know my enthusiasm for fish was not great, so I would be very happy to sit in the boat and read philosophy, and Father would be very happy to cast for muskies. He caught one or two. They were mostly undersized and had to go back. He was retired at that time so he was glad to do it also. He had been sort of forced out by the younger contingent at Armour. He was a vice-president. He wasn't going to make president, and so he had been sort of forced out, My father and I never shared close thoughts, like most fathers and sons. We could probably talk baseball. I'm sure we talked baseball. We talked food—what to eat that night. We stayed at very simple places—motels—and we made the tour. And I was refreshed. I slept at night, I was outside, I rowed the boat. It was a very good break.

Blum: It sounds therapeutic.

Netsch: It was. Then I went back to work.

Blum: What was your frame of mind when you went back, facing the prospect of redesigning the chapel?

Netsch: Well, you see, the prospect was that “we won’t do that now. We’ll concentrate on the dining hall, the cadet quarters, the academic building. We will concentrate on those buildings and what is known as the court of honor end,” which was still a planning problem. So with the consultants we were redesigning the court of honor location. About the only building that stayed was the administration building, which we all thought of as the gateway. You looked under it, or through it, and you saw—if anything looks like Gordon, that building does in the sense of, it’s a long, skinny building and quite elegant. I put the balcony on for the superintendent to look out, and someone said it looked like Hitler’s balcony. I got upset about that. We had to redesign the social hall, and that moved into my genre from what it had been on those sketches, and we had to relocate the chapel. So with the consultants, they concentrated on that, and then we developed the dining hall and the cadet quarters and the academic building. We would bring to the consultants the plans and elevations of those. Eero missed a meeting on the elevation approval for the cadet quarters. I’ve forgotten—I think it was Welton Becket who didn’t like it. Maybe he is the man who wanted the tile roof because some general had told him he’d like a tile roof. And I was really nervous. Anyway, when we got through that then Belluschi said, “Why don’t you try something?” and before I knew it I had about seven things I was to go home and try. I did these elevations ten feet long—beautiful, big elevations. I did all of them, plus the one we wanted.

Blum: “We” meaning Gordon, Nat, you—the SOM group.

Netsch: Right. SOM agreed that it was the best to do. We presented, and Eero came to that next meeting. He saw all these crazy things. There were shutters, and it would never close. There were louvers made in lieu of windows opening. There were all sorts of things. Eero had a private meeting of the consultants. They selected our proposal, gave it their recommendation, and then Eero made a simple statement that in the future—“a policy statement is being made today that it is not the consultants’ role to design the buildings. It is the consultants’ role to act as critics to be certain the buildings are designed in the best way that Skidmore can do.” And that ended the facade crisis that I

had to endure on the quarters. That settled that forever. Eero's wife, Aline, would come. We had these parties afterwards at the Garden of the Gods, which is a private club, and she would do marvelous things. She had little log houses she found at some store as centerpieces for the tables. Ralph and I would get invited to the dinners. No one else would. And then the team came out, whoever was involved—if it would be out at the cadet quarters it would be Bill Rouzie. If it was the service area it would be Johnny Hoops. If it was the dining hall it would be Gertrude. But they'd all be left somewhere downtown in a hotel. There was a strict hierarchy. Then, of course, Ralph and I were often out there alone, and then we'd be scrambling to respond to the criticism that had come in the afternoon meeting at the next meeting the next day. But it was a great experience. And to talk to Eero... Eero was then designing that dorm at the University of Chicago, and he was very unhappy with it. He was very unhappy with the client. I don't know whether he's ever admitted it, and the University of Chicago should be embarrassed by what they made him do. It's right opposite the Robie House. It's a dull building. Right across the street.

Blum: Eero's building?

Netsch: Eero's dorm. Not the law school. He did the law school building, again, on his own. No one told him. That's a different building; that's on the Midway. Much later on I designed the building that sat catty-corner from the Robie House. We'll tell that as a separate story. But I learned to respect Eero very much. He also took his responsibility seriously.

Blum: Didn't you and Eero sort of share a passion for what you did?

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: From what I've heard of his work habits, he was very intense. Ideas just came to him like it came out of a fountain.

Netsch: That's right.

Blum: It seems to me that would describe your work method, as well.

Netsch: For example, his criticism on the court of honor I'll never forget. He said, "Walter, you've somehow got to pull this together." You see, I'm the one who put the chapel up on the hill. I'm the one who had the romantic—the cadets marching up, and there's the chapel. That was my fault. I hadn't been to Europe. It was a part of my thoughts. I want to add some things from the very beginning, in fact. Fortunately, I was able to read Gordon's beginning, opening statement, for two reasons—one, I had forgotten that his immigrant past was a dominant part of his world and my little-bit-farther-along immigrant past. I was the second generation rather than the first generation. But the fact that we both had these immigrant pasts which were very important to us, and how both of us got to go to MIT—both of us had automobiles, both of us had those privileges because we had fathers who were very determined that we were not going to start at the bottom on the hill, and how also at MIT it wasn't competitive. You just wanted to be first. That was a great desire—sort of the honor of the institute and your own honor were at stake. I was glad to hear him talk about that. I didn't realize he made furniture. That was very interesting. But it did remind me. I have a couple of tools of my father's that he had, because Father was very good at repairing things, and the old tools, whether you were holding clamping clamps for holding things together, or whether you were shaving off a piece, they were these solid blocks of wood. I had a Westerman piece of sculpture which was made from one of these, and he reminded me of this kind of craftsmanship that started at home for both of us. We both had this thing, but he actually made furniture. I made dollhouses and things.

Blum: For your sister.

Netsch: Yes, right. And then he talks about his father as I have talked about mine. I have talked about my mother also, but I want to stress one thing I've forgot about my mother. We had a large seven-foot-long Knabe concert grand from Grandmother, and, of course, Mother played the piano. Of course, I had



piano lessons from Juna M. Todd, a very fat lady with pudgy fingers who sat at the end of the piano with the metronome going. The most marvelous thing about these lessons is that—I really wasn't very good at the piano. It wasn't that I didn't like it or it wasn't part of my classical music training, which it was. I could do Schumann's *Scarf Dance*, but I really stumbled on Rachmaninov. I had to do Rachmaninov at a concert, which I believe was in Orchestra Hall. The teachers in those days—remember, this was the Depression, and they'd rent it out for anything, probably, and there were very few people there. I got up there to do my Rachmaninov, and I just absolutely blew it.

Blum: That was your recital?

Netsch: The recital. I can remember just sitting there at the piano and just getting up and walking out of the auditorium.

Blum: In the middle of the...?

Netsch: Just quit. I understand later that my mother was frantic. She thought I probably walked east until my hat floated, and Father said, "Well, you know better than that. He's not going to do that." And, of course, I didn't. But it was a great embarrassment. It was the end of the piano lessons anyway. The horseback riding continued, but the piano lessons stopped. I just wanted to bring up the fact that we did have music in the house, and the piano was a beautiful dark mahogany. In our apartment on Paxton there was a reception room, and you looked into the living room and there was that piano—that symbol—and the Philco radio which was very, very small—that wonderful arched thing.

Blum: Did that piano remain a symbol to you of a failure?

Netsch: No. At that time it was a disaster, but I was young and those things aren't important.

Blum: Did your sister play the piano?

Netsch: No, she didn't try it at all. Nan had the problem of following of me and not doing the same things. I think that—going back to Gordon for a minute, I remember when Gordon and I met in Paris once, during the Air Force Academy days, and he took me to Brasserie Lipp. He didn't really reveal as much then as he reveals in this book of how much it meant to him. I had \$600 with me to buy something, and by this time he was taking me on his Saturday walks at the art galleries. We went and saw Dubuffet, and I saw a very beautiful Dubuffet collage, and it was \$1,200. We got back to New York, and he said, "Why didn't you buy that? You liked it. Why didn't you buy it?" in his gruff way. And I said, "Well, I didn't have \$1,200. I only had \$600." He said, "Well, why didn't you ask me for it?" It had never dawned on me to ask him for money. Then the Haniwa head that you see over here we both saw, and he said, "My priority." So he bought the head, and he designed the base. He took great care in doing the base. Then later on he said, "Would you like the head? I'll give it to you at the same price, including the base." And so I said, "Thank you, Gordon, I'd love to have it."

Blum: What a nice offer!

Netsch: He said, "I've got a whole horse."

Blum: Yes, he does.

Netsch: So it just reminded me of Gordon as a person, because, you see, I'm talking about people this minute—my mother, my father, Gordon. And I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the team on the Air Force Academy, and then we're caught up. Bill Rouzie came from Oregon—one of those young students who worked with me on the cadet quarters. Bill was quite romantic, and I think he would have done pitched roofs on the academy if he were responsible. It was kind of a struggle for him to work with us. He had come from a Western school, and he was one guy I picked up from the West. Robertson Ward was working on UNESCO in Paris. He was working on

those glass louvers, and I got him back to head up the research section. He was brilliant, and stuttered a little bit, and would do this research and knew all of these people in Europe. He had kind of a strange relationship with his father, which I never quite understood, who was an architect, and was a good friend of some of the people on the staff. Then, of course, there was Ralph Youngren—trained at Harvard, very gentlemanly, and he and I could really talk and we could work together. We would sit on a DC-6 going out to Colorado Springs, and I would sketch and he would talk. He would listen. He was a great listener. He was my kind of balance wheel to keep me from just going over the end. And in New York when I would take the stuff to Gordon he would help. Gordon would always fuss around with the buildings, and before I knew it none of the columns matched. The thing was unbuildable. He was trying to express something. He'd push this together with that and do something, and I'd have to go back to the little old dark—we lived in what were the maids' rooms of the Plaza Hotel, when the help came. We had separate little rooms about ten by ten, with an old bathroom. That's where we stayed. SOM wasn't going to waste any money on us, but were in a nice hotel, and it was very close to the office. We'd sit there and get things straightened out and have a little sketch for the next morning to show Gordon before we went back to Chicago. "See, Gordon, I understand what you're talking about, and we could do it this way."

Blum: Did he agree, usually?

Netsch: He'd say, "Yes, that works. That's right. That works, doesn't it."

Blum: After he rearranged it you had to rearrange his rearrangement.

Netsch: Well, that's fine. I was thinking of the academic building on that.

Blum: Was that a cordial relationship?

Netsch: Oh, yes, that was very cordial, and on the site plan on the master plan he would have gray pieces of paper that were the proportions. He had no

objection to my seven-foot module—seven, fourteen, twenty-eight, fifty-six, and so forth. That was my extension of having lived in Japan beforehand. Their module was about six-six, and it was too small for me every time I stayed in a Japanese inn, so I enlarged it to seven feet. I didn't go to the plywood eight, I stayed at seven. He had no objection to that. So we had these pieces of paper, and they were in the proportions, and he'd move them around on the site plan, and we would sit and talk. He had a big, fat belly and his pipe, and this beautiful marble tabletop—travertine with all the holes in it, you know, so you had to use a tablet. I don't think his was filled. We'd sit in his office. He'd see me for about an hour, and then he would have to do other things. He'd say, "I've got to go to a meeting," or, "This is as much time as I can spend on this today," and so forth. But he wasn't going to come to Chicago to do it. I was so proud of our working with him, and I brought him to meet the design studio. I think it was on the sixth floor in the Carson Pirie Scott building at the corner of Monroe and Wabash. There were offices above the store, and I brought him there. He walked in the room with that big belly and his pipe, and the first thing he did was belch.

Blum: What a greeting! In some cultures that's supposed to be a mark of hospitality.

Netsch: Well, it was just Gordon defining himself, period. I didn't ask him to say anything. Then I introduced him to some of the people there. All right. Then, of course, there was Peterhans—Gertrude. Gertrude was one of the two wives of Walter Peterhans that we had at Skidmore. She was the first one. So I had women, you see. I had women on the team. I had a black architect, Don Ryder, on the team. He worked not in the academic area, he worked for the officers' club and the officers' housing. He went on to New York and was very famous. His wife was a very important actress in a Negro ensemble. He went into partnership in Atlanta. And, of course, the Air Force officers really had a hard time when I would bring this black architect to a meeting.

Blum: How did they respond when you brought Gertrude?

Netsch: Gertrude—she was so straightforward, shall we say, or frank or what have you, that Gordon told me to not bring her to meetings. He said, “She’ll just cause trouble.” In fact, her memory of the design of the dining hall is a little more ego-oriented than fact because I remember Gordon finally—Gertrude and I were trying to do a space frame and the computers were not strong enough to give us the material we needed. There were too many unknowns in the equation. The structural department could not design what we wanted, and so we had to go back to a double truss system. But in her memoirs she was feeling very competitive with IIT about the fact that the roof of the dining hall was done before Mies did the Bacardi project and the museum in Berlin. That was a most important part of her memory. It’s in Bob’s book. And I said to Bob, “Her little battles with her friends at IIT were never a part of our world.” It was part of her private world and did not become an issue on the Academy. And so we had Ralph on the academic building. We had marvelous people on the master plan whose names we will have to get out of the book. There was one went on to do the master plan for the first O’Hare Airport. He went from my team to Carter’s.

Blum: Oh, was that Stan Gladych?

Netsch: Stan Gladych, yes, it was. And Stan, oh, he was marvelous. He’d be willing to spend all night with me, working away.

Blum: Why did he leave?

Netsch: His job was through. And he didn’t want to stay at Skidmore. He didn’t want to. I had no jobs at that time.

Blum: After the Academy?

Netsch: After the Academy there was nothing waiting in the wings for me. You’re just lucky that you get something relatively quickly. That was the kind of job that you cleaned up on things. It wasn’t a question of my not doing anything, it was just a question that there was no new client waiting. Of course, it

turned out to be the University of Illinois. That was the next major job.

Blum: Walter, you mentioned the computer not being strong enough, and, of course, what you've done since the beginning of the sixties has been very much connected to the computer. When did you, and when did Skidmore, begin to use computers?

Netsch: When Fazlur Khan decided that he needed the computer for wind stresses for hundred-story-high buildings, etc., etc., he convinced Bruce and Bill Hartmann that we should spend a million dollars to buy a computer. Back in those days that was an enormous amount of money. I sort of hemmed and hawed because after the Academy—and it didn't work for me then—I didn't see any relevance to spending a million dollars for the work I was doing. But I agreed to go along with it because they needed the support—the full support of the Chicago partnership. So at the partners' meeting the New York partners and the San Francisco partners, including Gordon, agreed to our spending a million dollars, because they all used consultants. And so, here we were, spending a million dollars for our use in Chicago.

Blum: So then Chicago would serve the other offices?

Netsch: Well, that's what we said, but we said, "Well, we don't want you." Gordon was perfectly happy with his engineer. He was a very bright guy. But we did. We sort of pushed all the engineers along to getting their computers to keep up with what Fazlur Khan was doing. Now, my Field Theory was occurring at this time, so they would try and do my Field Theory. It was mainly Algeria—very complicated geometries—because it would give them a chance to see how their machine would operate. But you'll see in the book on SOM, *SOM Architecture and Urbanism 1973-1983*, some beautiful computer drawings in the back.

[Tape 4: Side 2]

Netsch: I did use the computer for "Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower

Competition" with Nick Weingarten. So we started, then Bruce discovered how important it would be to develop financial programs working with developers. And so with IBM, Fazlur Khan and Bruce developed these very complex programs which are a part of the—I don't really know the story. You'll have to ask Bruce about the evolution of the computer programs for Skidmore.

Blum: But the way you're describing it, it sounds to me like it would be timed in the early sixties?

Netsch: Yes. But I was a supporter of what was going on, and occasionally we tried to use it. But it was used primarily for engineering and economics.

Blum: When did you personally become a believer in computers?

Netsch: Well, after I retired I decided—see, I didn't have the time to work on—the only time I worked on the computer was with those late entries. I had a young guy with my studio who knew how to use the computer, and he would sit there and do it. I had this formula for the square root of two proportions, and they worked it out. I could sit down there beside them and watch it happen. I'm still not a star at the machine.

Blum: Well, I don't know. You've got a bunch of them downstairs.

Netsch: I've got a bunch of them, but I'm not the star on the keyboard. But a lot of young people have worked with me because they like the toys. I have good toys so I have help.

Blum: I understand.

Netsch: My facility is improving on the machine, but I don't really want to become facile with the machine because it's like any drafting tool—it takes time to do it. To do a really elaborate drawing takes a lot of time and patience. I'd much rather use it for my thinking and theory and do—like you do sketches—

cruder drawings that then can be developed. And also, I'm writing a diary—for example, what I'm working on now—and saying—I went down this morning and said what I was doing and then why I had been off of the machine for a week and a half; that I'd been sick and getting ready for this and reviewing the movies. So the diary sort of reflects—and also that I had discovered that something I had wanted to happen in a solar way was not going to happen on this site plan. But I know another piece of property nearby in which it will work, so I shall develop this scheme. These are all theory things. I have no clients. I'll develop this theory drawing for this other site, and so I'll have two sites very close together. At the same time I'm working on a house for the twenty-first century out in the woods somewhere.

Blum: Something you're going to live in?

Netsch: No. I've done that. That house is already in the avant-garde architecture, the Wisconsin house, the Silver Petals, which will never get built. Dawn never wanted to move to Wisconsin. I never realized it. Dawn has a habit of just sort of delaying a decision until something else changes it. And so there is never a confrontation.

Blum: Walter, I think we left the Air Force Academy. Can we get back to it?

Netsch: Okay, well, anyway, I got some of those people. First, Johnny Hoops worked on the service and supply area, and he was a very bright guy and a very hard-working guy—pretty pragmatic. Service and supply for an airfield was just his cup of tea, and he was great to work with. He went on to the Portland office and worked there. He developed a couple of high-rise buildings, and I just don't know what happened to him. Then there was Carl Kohler for housing, and Johnny Weese. Johnny Weese was given to me in the crisis on the housing to do the colonels' houses. The colonels' houses were a separate group of fifty houses for the faculty. The permanent faculty were colonels who would never make generals. They were willing to give up any future assignment to be, in other words, tenured at the Academy. And Johnny Weese did them.



Blum: Why did you say there was a crisis on the housing?

Netsch: Well, I'll explain. There was a crisis on the housing. Carl Kohler and I worked on the housing for everybody else, and we had two valleys, Pine and Douglas, and between them a mesa on which we put the community center. I believe Johnny Hoops worked on the community center as well as service and supply, and Carl and I worked on the housing. Two beautiful valleys. And if anybody was more intense than I, it was Carl. If anybody was more stubborn than I, it was Carl—anybody more difficult to work with, it was Carl. Again, another German name, Kohler. And Carl, I don't know where he came from, but I hired him, a bright guy and unfortunately another one who died early. A lot of people we've been talking about died early—Tallie Maule. The man who worked on the master planning died early—Gladych. Johnny Weese died early. A lot of these people died early. Well, Carl and I had a great connection with Buckminster Fuller. We both admired him tremendously. Gordon and I admired Corbu together. As I noticed in Bob's book, as I was arguing with you, I am glad that Gordon verifies my fact that Mies didn't exist when we were in school, and it was Corbu and it was Aalto and Gropius. So Carl and I worked, and I also had a book that inspired me—this is 1947—called *Communitas* by Percival and Paul Goodman. Percival Goodman was the architect, and Paul Goodman was the writer and leftist. And this came out of the University of Chicago—part of the leftist bit of the University of Chicago. And it was the idea of a brave new world in which it had a ring of high-rise units. But you see, here is discussed Gropius, and this had Mies and this had Corbu. And Bucky Fuller is in it. So this is part of my being—unlike Gordon, I read and I bought books. The philosophy of architecture I think was the difference between being born in Chicago and coming from the Sullivan/Wright idea that says you had to make a contribution. You just didn't do somebody else's work. That affected my approach rather than the Eastern one where you're part of a huge metropolis in which selecting something is like buying a painting or buying an architect or whatever it was. Carl and I had decided that we'd go out in Pine Valley and Douglas Valley, and decided these were just too beautiful to destroy.

How could we do a whole town of housing in the woods, and the woods would remain and the valley would remain?

Blum: But this was an old problem for you. You had just finished the Naval Postgraduate School.

Netsch: Well, no. This was housing, and how would we do houses? These were little houses for enlisted men and their families, and houses for majors who had been assigned to other posts all over America or Europe or wherever—Kadena—and were going to come for assignment here at the Air Force Academy. And so we thought, well, we'll really do it. So we designed this house which was a square—a cube, in a sense. It was a one-story house, raised up over about a ten-foot square entrance which was in concrete and which had a door and a staircase and a storage area. And cantilevered from that, on the basis of seven feet, were twenty-eight-foot-square or thirty-five-foot-square houses of different sizes. We had them arranged in a pattern, usually that marvelous staggered pattern that forms a square, and you would drive into a courtyard and you would park your car under each one of these houses. Much of the site plan concepts remain because they did work with minimum grading. Remember my grading, now, from down in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We were very proud of them. We can't find any record of them because they hit the fan probably so early—probably with Nat first—that we redesigned the houses on grade; nice, neat houses on grade; again, the post-war enlisted man's house, not what Johnny Weese was doing in those fifty houses which matched the site, and each house was done differently. They were all very elegant, Miesian houses.

Blum: Why do you think Nat objected to them?

Netsch: To what? To Johnny Weese's houses?

Blum: No, to your houses. You said they were redrawn in a very traditional way.

Netsch: Well, it was political. You know, "Walter, this is too much."

Blum: He just didn't want to have to fight for it.

Netsch: Didn't want to fight for it. No one wanted to fight for it, so Carl and I were sort of left adrift. Then we did these other stepped-back house schemes. They were neat houses, but they didn't have pitched roofs, they were modern. The windows went to the floor in the living room. They weren't punched, you know. We presented them. There was a tremendous furor with the officers who went to the superintendent and said, "We want houses like we've always had at every post in America." It got to be quite a mess. Nat, I guess, tried to defend me, and something happened. Anyway, we almost lost the whole job over this housing.

Blum: Oh. They wanted Morgan Yost's houses.

Netsch: No, no. They wanted Royal Barry Wills's houses, or terrible offshoots of them that you would find on every military base. So, it was decided that we would use Capehart housing. Capehart was a federal housing program that provided the money for the housing, and that I was to cooperate with a firm called Clark & Enerson in Omaha, which the Corps of Engineers had a relationship with from doing housing at bases. Well, Carl—I think we put him on something else, because it was disaster for Carl. I mean, he just couldn't. And Clark & Enerson were sort of afraid of Skidmore. I don't blame them. We did impose as much as we could on the schemes. They did the presentations on that. We did the design site planning, which is in Bob's book, I think. So much of the site planning work—but everything got moved down to grade, and therefore the earth had to be pushed around. When I was out there five years ago, after not having been out there for fifteen years, I couldn't find Johnny Weese's houses. They had been dolled up and changed so they were just unrecognizable. Pitched roofs were added to them, and the floor-to-ceiling windows, which looked out in the woods and you could see the deer go by, had been changed to little bay windows. Everything was just a disaster. And the other houses had been made into little pitched roofs, and the windows were taken out. I found four houses that remained from our

group, and they belonged to the Athletic Department. The Athletic Department had to put up some money to change them, and they wouldn't, so there are four houses out there that go back to the SOM-Clark & Enerson days. Clark & Enerson was not trying to do a lousy job—don't misunderstand me—but they didn't have them same aesthetic goals that Carl and I had.

Blum: What does it tell you—what is the message for all of us, actually, in the fact that these houses from the early sixties, thirty years later are now almost unrecognizable to you? What does that mean?

Netsch: Well, unrecognizable to me. I'm sure that other people will go out there and see they look like other Army bases.

Blum: Are you saying it's just mediocre taste or quality?

Netsch: Yes, mediocre. I think what it shows you is that we never really convinced America to do modern architecture in housing; that it's still reserved for East Hampton or some place in California or Big Sur. The current, very expensive houses are very ugly also, but they're a pastiche of mannerist architecture, which has nothing to do with this period and concern. It also shows you that the GI and the officer needed to have, in their mind, an environment that they could call home.

Blum: That was familiar to them.

Netsch: That was familiar to them, and no matter what base they landed on, whether it was Randolph Field or up in Wisconsin or somewhere, they would recognize it as home. They told the superintendent that Skidmore, Owings & Merrill could do anything they wanted to up in the academic area, but down here in the housing area they weren't going to have the right to make a series of statements. I understand rumor has it that they've spent more money sort of fussing around with those houses to please people over time. The Capehart housing wasn't a really permanent solution anyway, which turned

out to be one of those marvelous things that—there are a lot of books about architecture at mid century, even the U.S. Air Force Academy, that can be written if you just move out of the academic area.

Blum: From reading *Modernism at Mid-Century* it seemed to me that the big problem for the Air Force people to accept was the chapel, and not necessarily these other buildings on the campus. There was some discussion, but the big problem focused on the chapel.

Netsch: Actually, what really happened was the official Washington Air Force accepted, one, the master plan, the location of elements; two, concentrated on the image area, which was the Academy proper; and three, of course, had to face the fact that I had done a controversial chapel. So actually it becomes a part of the book only because it became a media event—a very early media event. The only other thing—I think in the book that comes up—is the location of the airfield, which is a marvelous story because it shows the ignorance of the secretary of the Air Force as a businessman on the fact that the diurnal winds determine the location of a runway, and that we had to move the highway in order to get a runway that would not kill pilots. He just said, “Just change the runway. Keep the highway.” Fortunately, moving the highway allowed us to do a hundred-year flood prevention planning at the southeast corner of the twenty thousand acres, and so we had support from the Corps of Engineers. Eventually the generals prevailed upon the secretary to allow the runway to be built in the proper orientation. But that was an internal crisis that became public only, really, with the book. It never made the newspapers.

Blum: So your strategy for the entire project was to avoid a confrontation immediately about the chapel, and to build the other buildings. Figuring that it would simmer down.

Netsch: That was Nat’s and the Air Force agreed, and the consultants evidently convinced the secretary of the Air Force that we could go ahead with these other things while this particular area was being resolved.

Blum: Didn't the senators actually withhold some funding when they objected so much?

Netsch: They threatened to. There were two objections on the budget. We all found very early that the \$125 million or \$126 million, whichever it was, would not build everything that was listed, so an effort was made to raise that with a new estimate including the whole program. That was denied, and so we had to come back with a revised schedule of what would be built. Things like the railroad station and the visitors' hotel were canceled.

Blum: Canceled or canceled from the first phase?

Netsch: Well, I've forgotten what the jargon was, but it was eliminated from our contract and not included in the \$126 million. We had prepared preliminary drawings for much of it, but it never went further than that, and located them. The chapel, I don't remember it affecting the total budget except for some legislators I'm certain who didn't like the building and would want to deny the Air Force everything they could. But the Academy was built by then, you see.

Blum: The first part—I mean, the part without the chapel.

Netsch: Yes, and the housing had gone ahead, and everything had gone ahead, so they couldn't very well stop that. The whole court of honor area had been approved and built, and the social hall was under construction. About everything made it, except the chapel, for completion. They had to be ready for the first graduation, because the first graduation was in the social hall as I remember now—the big auditorium, the three-thousand-person, but there was no chapel.

Blum: So how did Nat's strategy work?

Netsch: Oh, it was fine.

Blum: When it came time to present the chapel design again, what happened?

Netsch: Again? Oh, well, as I have said, Nat told me I should go to Europe and take time off. I was making \$250 a week. He didn't offer me an extra penny. I was to do it on my own. It's a wonder they didn't charge me for the vacation time. I took, it must have been three weeks and maybe five weeks, because I started in England, and the first thing I saw was the famous Druid ruin. So the first thing I did when I got to England was to go out and see Stonehenge. Of course, this was in the late fifties, so there was no fence around it or anything. You could wander all over it. I saw it in the mist in early morning, and it was a great start.

Blum: How romantic!

Netsch: A really romantic start. Then I made this journey by myself in a car—I rented a car—and did the perpendicular English Gothic. I remember I was impressed with Wells Cathedral, but English Gothic architecture was not my cup of tea.

Blum: Too fussy or what?

Netsch: Yes, too fussy. So I went from there to France. Of course, I landed in Paris, and the first building I saw was Notre Dame, and the second was St. Denis, the earlier church in an earlier version of Gothic and Sainte-Chapelle. Sainte-Chapelle made a tremendous impression on me being flooded with colored light, and the fact that it had a chapel on two floors. I also saw St. Francis of Assisi when I got to Italy, and Gordon remembers it as his inspiration on his having decided that the chapel at the Academy should be on two levels. I can remember Gordon and I discussing both buildings.

Blum: Sainte-Chapelle and St. Francis of Assisi?

Netsch: Sainte-Chapelle and St. Francis of Assisi. I remembered St. Francis of Assisi

not only having a church on two levels, but there was a promenade of the women of the town, and that was still an acceptable thing. The women paraded and the young men looked them over in the traditional way in which women were introduced in Europe. This is an old cultural habit of the promenade in the afternoon.

Blum: Where did this take place?

Netsch: On the square on the upper level of Assisi towards the town. Let's go back to Paris. From Sainte-Chapelle and from Notre Dame I took a car and drove to Chartres. I can remember to this day of seeing Chartres arise over the wheat fields.

Blum: As you approached it?

Netsch: As I approached it. It was sense of place—you know, the Air Force Academy out in the middle of nowhere—the idea of the sense of place that it had. I got into the town, and it had all the guts and strength that I didn't see in Notre Dame. It was tremendous. I walked inside and there was an organ playing. It felt like—the air shook, actually, not the building. It vibrated. There was a little wedding of a townsman and a townswoman, just a few people in a side chapel, getting married, and I was just breathless. I was under one of the towers. I had just hardly gotten in the building. I just couldn't believe it. I retreated, because I felt like I was intruding on a special moment, and walked around the building and just became so—I found a restaurant that faced the church so I could look at the building and eat. I started in the morning, by noon, I was hungry, I ordered something, and since my French was so bad I didn't know what I had ordered. I had no idea.

Blum: You got a mystery lunch.

Netsch: And what came was the head of a sheep.

Blum: Oh, Walter!



Netsch: So, shock on shock. Here I'm looking out at this great event, and I suddenly am confronted with this cadaver. I didn't mind all of the structure being exposed on the chapel, but this quick decision by just pointing at something just was not what I had in mind. I have no idea what happened. I think I probably fussed around with the food a little bit and ordered a dessert and then got back to the building. But it couldn't really spoil my day because the building was so terrific. I could walk around the outside. I have done since a lot of research on Chartres and where the workmen stopped and started, but I didn't know that at the time. It wasn't important to me. What was important to me was, one, that it had been built over time and still had order. There wasn't a momentous change in style or anything at Chartres. And it had the early windows and the later windows, and you could see the structural density that was required for the original rose window and the later open rose window which was much glassier. You could see the evolution of structure in details like that. Then you realized that all of these people were putting this together out of what they knew, but with great skill—*great* skill. All of the skill that I had heard about in the lectures at MIT was nothing compared to what I was looking at. I just thought, how can I do this in Colorado? How? I don't have stone masons. We couldn't even get them to open the marble quarry for the stone. We had to use Vermont marble because industry didn't see a great enough market so they just wouldn't do that. I couldn't even do that. Robertson Ward had found the quarries and had done all the research, you see, but that was impossible. But the Gothic form, this soaring form, the complex geometry, was something that was inspiring. How could that be in the final result? So then I went on and saw other buildings—some of the modern ones, the concrete ones, that had been built in the thirties and forties around Paris, and then I flew to Rome. There I would see Michelangelo. I would get up in the morning, and I'd say, "Mike, what of yours am I going to look at today?" and I would look in my Baedeker and I'd go either look at a plaza—I'll tell a funny little story that shows my naïveté and my concentration. I was in the Piazza Navona, just terribly impressed with the way it was organized and how he was able to take these buildings of various periods and make the geometry of the floor pattern

work. I was really worrying about it and was really impressed. Some young lady came by and started a conversation. We had lunch, and then we went to look at other things, more ruins that afternoon. And then she said, "Gee, where do you live?" I was living at a good hotel at the top of the Spanish steps. I wasn't going to go to a pension in Europe. I was going to have a reasonable trip because I had a goal and was not going to worry about what my meal was going to be or where I was going to sleep. I could arrange it all before I left America where I was staying, when I was staying. "Oh," she said, "I'd love to have a bath." So I said, "Sure, come on." I took her up to the room, and she went by her pension and got some clothes, and she got the bath that she was so pleased with. Then we went to dinner and we got in the carriage and we went back to the Piazza Navona and rode around the Piazza Navona at night. That was my good deed for the day and the one break I had in the whole trip. Otherwise I didn't speak to anybody, and she was a nice...

Blum: It sounds like it could have been the beginning of the end of your mission.

Netsch: Oh, no, it wasn't going to, because I had scheduled the next day I was going to go to the famous funerary place, and I was going to see the Laurentian Library. I had my schedule all worked out. Then I was going to, of course, do the hill towns and go on up to Assisi and to Florence and then Milano and then home. No, it was just sort of an aberration that occurred and doing someone a favor, you know. No, it wasn't a big romantic tryst at all. I was too concerned about what I was doing. She was someone who needed a bath, that's all. I'm confessing a kind of naïveté. I was not out to make her at all. I was out to make architecture. But then, of course, I got to Venice and I got to Florence. The next most important place to me was Florence, and then I came home. And so, I had this great experience, and as I say, Assisi, I kind of liked the out-of-the-main-city buildings—you know, like Chartres. Sainte-Chapelle really was sort of tucked away. It wasn't prominent, and Assisi wasn't. I was just interested in how complex the geometry could get in all the Renaissance architecture of Italy. The Pantheon was a tremendous experience. That's the one building I do remember, but I also remember being there much later with Dawn and a sculptor and his wife. We all got a little high and sailed little

rubber, elasticized airplanes in the piazza, in the fountain there. But that was a gay evening. That isn't the proper word to use—a joyous evening. You have to define the words these days. But my first European trip was tremendous. I didn't take any pictures. It was all for my head.

Blum: Did you make some drawings?

Netsch: I did not keep notes in that sense of the word.

Blum: What did you come home with?

Netsch: I came home with this tremendous feeling of how can I in this modern age of technology create something that will be as inspiring and aspiring as Chartres, and with the light of Sainte-Chapelle and the light of Chartres. The issue of Sainte-Chapelle and the two chapels, and Assisi and the two chapels came about quite differently. I should probably explain. First of all, I did an original scheme. We did a whole series of studies on the relocation of the chapel proper, and to do that Bob's book shows us using very abstract, nonrepresentational forms for a single building. But I did do one scheme that had the Protestant chapel and the Catholic chapel, and a Jewish chapel in between. Not three separate buildings. It was an ensemble. It was rather nice, but it was huge. Gordon and I looked at it, and it really dominated. We suddenly had a monastery on our hands, not an academy. And so we decided that it had to be one building, but we didn't know how. While we were doing all of these site things—in other words, the small site planning was just big enough for one building. In the meantime, I had gotten this idea here in Chicago, working with my engineer, of the tetrahedrons and compiling the tetrahedrons together—you know, piling them up so they inverted. You get two tetrahedrons, one on top of the other, and you get two tetrahedrons—you see, one on top of the other—and you get the inverse. That is an inverse tetrahedron, so inside you get the reverse. That just sent me. That was really terrific. So it really came very quickly. Over lunches and talking—I think it was a matchbox, actually—then the idea of running the glass in between everything and then having the window. I thought it would

be absolutely tremendous if these tetrahedrons were all made of onyx.

Blum: Onyx?

Netsch: They were all to be made of onyx and so they would be translucent, white tetrahedrons.

Blum: Like Gordon's Beinecke Library?

Netsch: Gordon used this afterwards.

Blum: But he used alabaster or something—the same kind of translucent material.

Netsch: He had seen me go through this experience.

Blum: That's interesting.

Netsch: And the College of Surgeons down here has this onyx on it. But I just thought this white, translucent building, sitting up here, and then this colored glass weaving its way through would be just tremendous. Well, Robertson Ward soon convinced me that that was an impossibility.

Blum: Because of the Air Force Academy? Or structurally it couldn't work?

Netsch: No, because it was extravagant beyond means, the pieces would have to be very small, there would be thousands of joints, all of which could leak, and it was just unbuildable but it was to me the image I wanted; this sort of ghost-like event up there. As you would see it, you get different depths of where the pieces came together, and the thickness—it was a very sophisticated idea—and then with the glass running through.

[Tape 5: Side 1]

Netsch: So I made this model—we made this model. It was about two and a half feet

high. I decided I would have to convince Nat first, and so I got on the airplane and went out to California, to Big Sur, and showed him this model. He thought it was tremendous. He said, "You've got to show it to Gordon," so I went to New York and I showed it to Gordon. He looked at it and looked at it, and he said, "Walter, I think it would work,"—the two levels with the Catholic chapel below.

Blum: You had put it all in one building, the three chapels?

Netsch: Yes. We didn't discuss Assisi and all of that. It had all been in one building. We had had the discussion earlier when we tried the site planning, and that ended that. And so I saw Gordon, and Gordon said, "Maybe you should show this to Eero," so then I went to see Eero. In the meantime the Chicago office had heard about this "thing" because we worked in separate locations. Bill Hartmann had seen it, and Bruce had seen it. I think I went to see Eero, and Eero liked it. They said they'd have to see the whole design. There was a sketch of the whole thing. Things were really looking good. There was no detail of the windows or anything like that. No detail. If you see the model you'll see little dotted dabs of color showing that there was colored light coming between. But it was the early sketch of the concept. I didn't know it, but there was an internal crisis in Skidmore. "Walter is doing a non-SOM building." "Walter is doing a crazy building," this all being led by Bruce. I understand that Bruce went to New York to convince Gordon that the chapel design should not go ahead. I didn't know this was going on. Gordon was very protective. He didn't say anything about it. My team, of course, was terribly excited. We had something this time. We had Bucky Fuller, we had our geometry, our tetrahedrons; we had technology with Robertson Ward and all these pipe columns. This was a very contemporary thing and in a sense it was Gothic in its form. We couldn't fail.

Blum: There was something for everyone.

Netsch: It was everything that we wanted, and it was beautiful to boot. And so, then we went ahead with the drawings and the presentation to the consultants.

We've never been able to find the results of that meeting, but it was approved right away. Then the discussion was how to make it public. I think that's in Bob's book but I have not read that section. I can't really remember. I was so involved with the building that the peregrinations and the crises that happened—the next thing I knew was that the Congress received on their table a booklet of all the great churches in America all made of brick. It was done by the representative from Rhode Island who was a former bricklayer and a member of the bricklayers union and felt that there was no brick on the Academy—there was brick other places, but not at the academic area—and that he was going to stop it. That, then, became a media event. Then we had the congressional hearing all over again, and it was Margaret Chase Smith, who just recently died, Senator Smith had me rush out and get an example of Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion at the Brussels World Fair, which was a tent form. I thought she was going to equate it to how marvelous this young architect was to have a form that—there is this famous architect. But no, when it was introduced, she said, "You see, it isn't as crazy as that." But she won her point.

Blum: Corbu's pavilion was her whipping boy.

Netsch: Yes, Corbu the whipping boy. That's sort of funny. But actually, the person who saved it was Secretary of the Air Force Douglas. He made a beautiful speech, testifying that he had gone to Princeton, and the church he attended at Princeton, and I think he had gone to Oxford or Cambridge, and the church he attended there, and where he lived on the North Shore, and the church he attended there. Each one of them was different. Each one of them was beautiful. Each one fit their community and their needs, and this building would do that for the Air Force Academy. By the imprimatur of being the secretary of the Air Force—Eisenhower stayed out of it, as far as I could figure—my memory is—and it just went as far as the secretary. It never got to a full vote of Congress. The objections died in committee. The AIA testified lukewarmly. Pietro testified very well. Eero, I think, wrote a letter, a very good letter. There was no dissent on behalf of the consultants for approval, which, of course, was very good. The architectural press had a

great time, pro and con.

Blum: Did Frank Lloyd Wright have anything to say about this as he had with the first stage?

Netsch: I can't remember, but I do remember other architects who were famous at the time coming out in support, because the press would ask them, "What do you think of Netsch's chapel?"

Blum: There was an article in an issue of the *Architectural Record* where many of these people who were interviewed were quoted.

Netsch: Oh, yes, right, and most of them were positive, and so we went ahead. The Air Force was none too pleased that they had a controversial building on their hands, and my next problem was to present the windows. I had in the meantime sat at home on my own and done some windows. I picked four points: I did the Creation out of Genesis; I did Saul to Paul, the famous event on his horse when he is converted; and the Apocalypse, which is Revelation. I guess three. I did three windows. I'm sure I did four, but those are the three I remember. The first one, Genesis, the waters under the sea and the waters above the sea—now you know my Christian Science background coming back, having gone to Sunday school, and the Bible. Nothing about Jesus. There wasn't anything about the human Jesus. So I remember doing the window for Genesis, and the waters under the scene, there were blues and different kind of blues, striped blues going and gradually turning into red for the sun. Some people kid me—it looked like a Jewish cape that they wear in the service. In the Jewish service there is that strip that the rabbi wears. What's it called?

Blum: The prayer shawl is called a tallit.

Netsch: People kidded me that it looked like that. I didn't really mind being kidded because it was the Old Testament. I said, "Gee, I have accomplished something." And then I did the conversion of Saul to Paul, which occurred

on his famous journey. And so the design was Matisse-like. It was a story. You had a beginning and you had a crisis, and you had an end. It happened again and again and again—beginning, end, beginning, end—and it was in different colors. Revelation was, again, very abstract. I showed these to the chaplains, and they thought, well, they had me. These were absolutely unacceptable.

Blum: Because they weren't figurative?

Netsch: Robertson Ward and I talked about what we were going to do, and Bob came up with some samples by talking to different glaziers of how you could glue things on glass and everything, and I had done some research on it. I then tried to see if they would hire somebody, and the answer was, "Absolutely, no. You've gotten us into this, you get us out of it"—that sort of attitude. I talked to Robertson, and Robertson came up with a very practical idea of inventing a window frame one foot wide and, say, three feet long, divided into panes. Then he said, "Well, you know, Walter, we can do the dalles"—that's a thick glass that we were going to use—"and this would fit in the frame," and then there would be another one, and then you would have another dalles. This is where his genius comes in. He said, "Walter, don't worry. We'll have the workmen just sit around with their hammers and chip this off."

Blum: Chip the edges off of each piece?

Netsch: Chip the edges off of each piece randomly and then be faceted.

Blum: So that it could fit the frame?

Netsch: No, no, so the light as it filtered would do all of these wonderful things. So we had the system of how to do it, and I wanted the windows to, in a sense, start from Genesis, being dark colors, and go to gold over the altar and the other. Since I had a mile of this glass to do, I then had a pallet of blues and purples and reds and greens and then yellows. I would sit in my living room



of my little penthouse at the top of 1360 Lake Shore Drive with little chips of colored pencil and a drawing of a facade of the building. I would make that blue and that red and that purple and so forth and so on, and as the window went up towards the apex it would get lighter so you would see this transition of color horizontally and vertically. Since the tetrahedrons crossed, they would meet and come back again. And so, I did all of these windows. I showed them to Gordon, I think. I don't remember him taking much interest in it once it happened. He was very good about that. That wasn't his—as he said, he didn't design it. He would crit. But he saw it would work. We had a sample, but we didn't have the full scale, see. We only had my little colored drawing.

Blum: In his book Nat Owings says two things about this: that the chapel was designed, laid out on brown paper that you drew and colored on your living room floor, and that you carried around a small case containing a model of the chapel with Christmas lights, ready to plug it in if anyone wanted to see it.

Netsch: That's right. It was a major turning point in my life because there are certain things like, the Jewish chapel and Catholic chapel were on a twenty-one-foot module. The Protestant chapel was on a fourteen-foot module. I was layering and criss-crossing. I was making very complex geometries. Not only was it tetrahedrons and triangles, but also the regular, straightforward, horizontal geometries were being changed. And the Jewish chapel was a circle, to represent the tent. There I used purple glass, very differently glazed. I did panels in the Catholic chapel, and they had their own artist do the stations of the cross. One thing that is a little out of sequence, but the idea of getting some color in the whole Academy—Gordon said, "It's very important we get some color in," and so these open plazas that I had planned—covered plazas for the cadets to walk in, in the course—where the tesserae exist, are yellow, blue and red—pure Bauhaus. And it was Gordon who knew that these tesserae existed in Venice. It was Gordon who brought up this texture; this marvelous texture of these little quarter-inch pieces of things all matted in. You know, they'd come in about twelve-inch squares, all the way from

Venice. He suggested that. I thought that was terrific. I said, "Gordon, we're going to use yellow, blue, red and green," and he said, "If you use green, I quit the job."

Blum: He wanted only primary colors?

Netsch: He only wanted the primaries. And so I said, "Okay, Gordon." Eero thought that was a terrific idea, and he supported that. So that's the case where we could get something from Europe. We could get all this stuff, and we needed acres of it, all the way around and these weren't small buildings. And so Eero and Belluschi would follow along. Belluschi was more a follower. It was Eero and Gordon that for something like that would express enthusiasm, and everybody then kowtowed. But back to my windows—I did one window, which I call "Hell to Heaven," which is on the Catholic chapel. It's one of faceted glass, the whole window. It must be about fourteen feet long and seven feet high at the entrance. It's blue to red. I remember showing it to them when I showed the other windows going beside the stations of the cross. Everybody liked it, but then over the years the area was used for storage. There are hymnals up there, so I've been trying to get Duane Boyle, the architect out there now, to put some nightlights on it so that at night you see it. You'd walk around the chapel and you would see this lit up. The Protestant chapel is lit, so why not do this? I don't know whether it will happen or not, but it's a very nice window. It is a complete window. It is a window rather than this very complex geometry. It's a five-thousand foot linear strip of glass which encloses the Protestant chapel. One small aside on the chapel about the battle between the Baptists and the Episcopalians—the average soldier, the GI, came from more or less fundamentalist religious background, believe it or not even then—and the Baptists wanted an immersion tank for baptismal purposes. I could just see at the end of my cantilever at the far end of the chapel this forty-foot-long tank of water that people would be brought through and baptized. I just didn't see it—I saw it as sort of an anthropomorphic event that I was not enthusiastic about. See, I had designed one little extra chapel. There was one extra chapel in the building that could be used for anything.

Blum: For all denominations?

Netsch: Yes, like Christian Scientists could use it. It ended up being a Buddhist temple for a while, a Muslim mosque for a while, and I understand now it is possibly a Seventh-Day Adventist church. And so during the Vietnam War it was Buddhist for the Vietnamese pilots. They are all happy with it now, but it went through these crises. The Episcopalians won. The battle always was, if it goes to the Pentagon and the Pentagon takes it to the secretary, then the chief of chaplains who is a part of an ordained order—he's either a Catholic monsignor or a high Episcopalian. He's not a fundamentalist preacher from Arkansas. So everybody knew that if they tried something too folksy, it would get turned down. That is one of the problems with the chapel, is that I understand from rumor that the reason it did not get the Twenty-five Year Award is because it's considered religiously out of date. I can't believe it. I was really hurt when I found out that architects made that judgment. It's got to be like either Fay Jones out in the woods, or it's got to be for five thousand people, a fundamentalist thing with twelve guitars and an organ and everybody sitting around as a clan. That's the rumor I heard, and I was really disappointed. [Editor's note; The United States Air Force Academy Chapel was awarded the Twenty-five Year Award by the American Institute of Architects on 30 January 1996.] In fact, I've been so worried about it I am thinking about designing a common space outside of the chapel for strumming their guitars and having their—they can kill their chickens, shall we say.

Blum: This is a fantasy project on your part?

Netsch: This is a fantasy project, oh, yes. I have not been hired to do anything. I'll show you the sketch. I had done it for another purpose, but I'll show you a sketch of that. It's bringing the tetrahedrons forward, just out in air, so everybody participates. And using the staircase as the altar—you know, nondenominational, so they can have Billy Joe Caldwell, a preacher from so and so and so and so, talk. You know what I mean. It can be an ecumenical

event. I'm serious. I really got upset about this accusation that the church was too formal. But I can't imagine this really being true. Would you deny Notre Dame recognition because there were some exotic priesthood in those days? And if there were priests that were not a part of Rome having a service out in the woods somewhere, would that deny Chartres the honor? So I really was upset.

Blum: Well, whether it received the Twenty-five Year Award or not, it certainly is a well-visited monument.

Netsch: Oh, yes, right. But you sort of like to be honored by your own peers.

Blum: Isn't it on the Register of Historic Places?

Netsch: That is a big debate on the part of the Air Force Academy because they don't—I have advised them against it because it doesn't allow any change whatsoever.

Blum: To the facade?

Netsch: To the facade. For example, what I'm talking about now might not be permitted, even though it doesn't touch the existing building. But it's with mixed emotions. They're going to go through that someday because they've done additions to the Academy, you see, without my approval or knowledge, that spoiled the basic concept. We haven't talked about Dan Kiley. Dan Kiley, the landscape architect, was a little *contretemps* between Eero and Gordon. Eero said, "You people use landscape architects to do all of these plazas in front of all your buildings, but you really need a real landscape architect at the Air Force Academy, and you ought to hire Dan Kiley." Evidently Gordon went home and thought about it, and the next thing I knew Dan Kiley was on board. And it was fine. Dan and I hit it off from the very beginning. We were soul mates. The Air Garden appeared as a part of that design. He did some gardens down at the cadet quarters which he says he would not do today. They were very romantic gardens. They were curvilinear. They were what

the boys would expect when they come home—that sort of thing.

Blum: If I understand that part of his planning correctly, wasn't it to allow the natural setting to come in among the buildings?

Netsch: Right. Water was going to come through these courtyards. I thought they were very handsome. I had no objection to it.

Blum: It didn't look very military, but it looked beautiful.

Netsch: No, that was part of the glory on our part. But now they go down there to sunbathe, so it's kind of a private place to strip and sunbathe. I don't know how they handle it now that there are men and women, but that's besides the point.

Blum: But hasn't the Air Garden been paved?

Netsch: Oh, no. The Air Garden was this beautiful, formal garden between the dining hall, and during the energy conservation days the superintendent, in all his superciliousness, decided to fill all the fountains.

Blum: With...?

Netsch: Just dirt, so he planted them all with dirt. Duane and I have had—the previous superintendent, not this one—a very good relationship. I recommended that we restore some of the fountains, and the major fountains have been restored. We have the big, hundred-foot-high shoots of water, and maybe some of the others can get done. The current superintendent—there is a tendency in the military, or I guess in any CEO, not to do what the previous CEO has done and concentrate his efforts somewhere else. So we're not pursuing that area. It could stay in there because it's a fundamental fact of life.

Blum: They want to make their own reputation.

Netsch: Right, their own presentation. So often the mistakes of the past seem like real decisions, you know. It's kind of marvelous. In fact, where they located the extra twenty-five hundred cadets in the cadet quarters was not as I had designed it. That is an important story. I had designed it, taking seriously the contract that said we should design to expand to five thousand. The overhang on the dining hall actually permitted them to move the glass out and put five thousand cadets in, which they did. I wanted them to do two servings, and I fought for it and I lost. They went ahead and did the second cadet quarters right south of the chapel, which was all natural woods, where Dan Kiley and I had natural environment in front of the chapel so the snow when it fell—it was out in the country. It was Chartres, you know. We included a haha wall so the deer couldn't jump in, and it was a beautiful thing. And they tore it all out when they put the cadet quarters in. I wanted them to shoot the long building out longer and have it get even deeper so it would have been a very dramatic thing at the eastern end. Gordon and Eero said, "I think we ought to present for review the expansion to five thousand." Gordon and Eero said, "Don't worry about it, Walter, it will never happen."

Blum: At the time you built it did you want to present it for approval? Were thinking of the expansion at that time?

Netsch: For approval so it would become a fact at the time I was doing the original master plan. We could do everything. And they did expand the academic building, they did expand the dining hall—not the way I wanted it, but as it could be done without spoiling the building too much. But with the cadet quarters they did not. The natural landscape coming in has disappeared, and that's one of the real losses, in my mind. You walk from the visitors' building through the woods and come out behind the chapel, so you have done your walk in the woods, and then you see the chapel, and then you see the Academy, so that is the substitute, you might say, for the real event.

Blum: It seems in the literature that the Academy is known as the work of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, but the chapel is known as the work of Walter

Netsch of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Netsch: Right.

Blum: Why the difference?

Netsch: Why the difference? Partly, as I told you, there were some people in Skidmore who were partners who wanted to disown it. So Walter did the chapel, and Skidmore were the architects for the Academy. I was the designer for the whole damned thing, but what it did was break the recognition factor. It helped Gordon. Nat had been a firm believer in anonymity. Everything was SOM, and it wasn't until I did this controversial building—really controversial building...

Blum: The chapel?

Netsch: The chapel, that some of the partners were very happy to have it named Walter's work. So it's Netsch's chapel, and that's what broke the hold of it. You'll find that Gordon's buildings got identified as Gordon's buildings after that.

Blum: Well, even before then there was a review, I think in the *New York Times*, of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, and I think this was as early as 1950—and I think Aline, who became Aline Saarinen, was the writer. She raised the question at that time, Why does SOM not identify the designers?

Netsch: I have a project in that exhibit. Did you know that?

Blum: In 1950?

Netsch: I had a small model of a shopping center at Del Monte.

Blum: Well, she said then, she said, "Because it's becoming easier to recognize Gordon Bunshaft's work and Richardson's work"—you know, the

differences—she said, “So why be anonymous?”

Netsch: For two reasons—one, Nat wanted it that way because none of them would be an Owings building.

Blum: He wanted this crew of anonymous medieval workmen—craftsmen—that idea?

Netsch: That’s right. That’s what he wanted. The partners, like Walter Severinghaus and Bill Brown, already labored under a difficult cloud because they were Gordon Bunshaft’s project managers, but they were co-equals. They were partners as Gordon was a partner. There were touchy times when very emotional things would occur out of the blue—“But Gordon, what I’m doing is just as important as what you do. You wouldn’t be able to get Connecticut General built if it weren’t for me!” It was also to keep egos happy that this thing—and I say, it wasn’t until *contretemps*, until we had a building that some people didn’t want to be identified with, that the designer got named. Isn’t that funny? I never expected to be the cause of all it.

Blum: Well, Nat said in his book that SOM personally lost a million dollars on the Air Force job, but he says he has absolutely no regrets. Was it just over budget or more extensive than originally planned?

Netsch: No, I didn’t keep to all the budgets. That is true. But we were underpaid for much, and we did sue.

Blum: The government?

Netsch: We sued the government, so that’s one of Nat’s generalizations which is not quite clear—Jack Train and Gross Sampsell handled all of the detail, much of the detail, in the request for funds to supplement the original program. I testified for seven hours on the chapel alone, and we put in a request for extra fee, and we won. I don’t know how much. You’d have to look up about how much money that I helped get back for the firm, but we won. But it was



a harrowing experience. These aren't formal, public trials. These are hearings, as they call them—contractual hearings for requests for reimbursement, and that sort of thing. It's all done in a very dignified way; the military, of course, objecting to any penny that we were going to get, in their terms, and our working very hard to be paid for what we thought we deserved. First of all, I think everybody underestimated what the role of this project was going to be, except me. They really felt for \$126 million they could get a cantonment at a school.

Blum: But wasn't there also the factor of time, from the first planning session in, 1954 until the chapel's dedication in 1963, that was...

Netsch: It was even worse than that.

Blum: That was what, eight years?

Netsch: But from 1954 to 1957 we had to get the cadets in. They had to be able to graduate. We promised the cadets, and we promised the Air Force that we would get the Air Force Academy open in time for the first class to graduate.

Blum: But from the beginning to the end of the project eight years elapsed.

Netsch: That was one of the reasons we sought reimbursement, because of time. And so, Nat's statement about our losing a million dollars, I'm not certain. You'd have to speak to Jack Train to find out how much, in a sense, we really lost. But the whole firm gained so much in how to do things. It gained so much in national reputation. That's when I began to go on the Aspen circuit, as I call it.

Blum: What is that?

Netsch: I was invited to talk at Aspen on the Academy. I began to be invited in the sixties to conferences. There would be Paul Rudolph and Yamasaki and me. We'd be invited to do this on panels.

Blum: You became a celebrity?

Netsch: Yes, this was the time that I became a celebrity. I also had to carry the burden of SOM along because all of these other people would say, "I'm the genius all alone, and here Walter has all of this support."

Blum: You said earlier that this job, this commission—the chapel, in particular—was a turning point for you personally.

Netsch: Yes. Let's talk about that. After the Academy was done I talked with Ralph, who was my best friend as well as my cohort, and I said, "Ralph, I'm not going to just redo the Academy forever. I'm just not going to do it. This was a special time, a special place." Ralph agreed, so we took some trips. We took a trip over to Detroit to see what Yamasaki was doing at Wayne State, and saw that "steamboat Gothic" building and decided that that was not the way to go. We went to see some more of Yamasaki's buildings, which we decided we'd call "sweetness and light." Paul Rudolph's buildings we decided were good buildings, but they were also getting beaten up just like mine were. His architecture building really got lambasted like my Architecture and Art building at UIC. So there was no answer out there. Mies didn't come up as a solution for me. The idea of adopting someone else's style—Corbu, Mies—that was not going to be it. The chapel lingered in the background, but I didn't know how to use it. So the first designs for the UIC were very tentative steps, and it's too bad that now they have destroyed the central plaza because it was the one place where I used geometry with the auditoriums below. The columns were twisted and the capitals were very special geometric capitals, which I don't think has happened since Gaudi on the park, which I had seen, incidentally, after the Academy. And so there were just these little tentative steps working with geometry—little pieces. It wasn't until Will Rueter and I began to tackle Art and Architecture on the University of Illinois Chicago campus that we began to pursue the geometry of the rotated square. That was the next step from the tetrahedron. See, the tetrahedron was a three-dimensional enclosure object. It was nothing you could plan with. But the

rotated square became something out of history that you could join. You could develop complex geometries.

Blum: To make sure I understand what you are really doing, are you taking one square and overlaying it with another square on a diagonal? Is that how it works?

Netsch: And originally they were done at absolutely right angles, so that's why it was called the rotated square. Plus, of course, with the chapel as a success—see, in 1963 it was finished. It was a success.

Blum: Did you do the chapel on a computer?

Netsch: No, all by hand, and all of this was done by hand.

[Tape 5: Side 2]

Blum: Walter, there is one statement that I would like to read to you and hear your comments. It comes from Nat Owings's book, and he said, "The chapel at the Air Force Academy remains a reminder of a time when architects were optimistic about proposing answers to issues of tradition, symbolism and cultural values." How do you respond to that?

Netsch: My first response is, it's just a great statement from Nat, who is not an intellectual and is a very emotional guy. And that's so true, what had happened, as I described to you. How could I in the face of the symbols of our Western religion create something? I had done two different churches in the past—oh, no, one in the past. I did a Lutheran church over in the valley in San Francisco, across the bay—Trinity Lutheran. It is a modern church. It had nothing to do with the chapel. I commissioned Mrs. Owings to do the doors.

Blum: Margaret?

Netsch: Margaret. She designed the doors, and I just thought that for the record that

should be in here. Then, of course, as you know, I've done the little church down here in Cabrini, St. Matthew's. But that was after the time we speak about.

Blum: I had a sense that Nat's statement was not only related to religious structures, but he was talking about a time—a frame of mind—that architects were in where they were hopeful and they were looking towards the future.

Netsch: Absolutely.

Blum: How has that changed?

Netsch: This is the thing we are facing. A little thing I'm working on now out in my computer room is, I'm trying to ask myself, how do we get to this point of reaffirmation again? How do we, after being beaten up by Vietnam and then the Postmodernists—and believe it or not, I was beaten up by the Postmodernists. I was an example, an image, of all that was wrong with modern architecture. Stanley Tigerman did an excellent job of promoting that.

Blum: You share the spotlight with Mies, then, in that way.

Netsch: Well, but other people suffered, too. I don't mean this as a personal thing. My point is that we all went through a great swing in which instead of building on modernism and saying, What is the next step? America chose to go in all these different ways. There was pop architecture, there was *Learning from Las Vegas*, which was a sense of, I guess, democratizing architecture and taking it out of the eastern seaboard, as they liked to think. And then there became this business of Hollywood architecture—you know, Disney and what have you—seriously. I mean, they hired very fine architects to promote an icon. Then there was the evolution of icons. We had icons in the modern movement, but they weren't so blatant in terms of their search for their fifteen minutes. Then, of course, we have had all of the social change—the new freedoms that have occurred. And so, how do we? You've got to remember that marvelous picture on the cover of the exhibition brochure of

housing after the Second World War—the idea of a future together.

Blum: It was *The Postwar American Dream* and the home was used as a fulfillment of the American dream.

Netsch: And it was architecture in context. I think we all got off the trolley when things became so wealthy. In the eighties we got a lot of money. I'll just say, when I was made a partner in Skidmore, I first didn't know how much the partners made.

Blum: That was in 1955.

Netsch: Yes. I didn't know what was going to happen. I did know that the partnership was a closed partnership.

Blum: What do you mean by "closed"? Did people had to be elected into it?

Netsch: No, it wasn't public information how much money was in it. I can remember hearing first that Pietro was making \$250,000 a year in his small practice, and I can remember some of our partners saying that we should each be making a million dollars a year. I, in my naïveté when I first came through, said, "Shouldn't we put a cap on salaries of \$125,000, and anything over \$125,000 we spend in some kind of way—in research or in building an experimental building or a foundation?" Of course, even Gordon looked at me and said that I was absolutely barmy. I didn't know how much money he was making. It was more than that, but it wasn't a lot more. But he didn't like the idea of a cap. So I've got to admit that times change, even for the firm. I think when the developers started doing the buildings and they were no longer clients—there was no Leigh or Mary Block or Joe Block or Inland Steel. There was a nonentity. There was a committee, a building committee. Even when doing the addition to the Art Institute, it was the board we talked to, not some building committee.

Blum: But you must have been pretty used to that. You had all of these government

and these university jobs.

Netsch: But all of my academic university things—the most marvelous thing is to have an academic client, because they are professors.

Blum: Why do professors make such fine clients?

Netsch: In dealing with professors, they're not like everybody else. They're tenured. They're not going to make an extra million dollars. Some of them, who were big shots—I did a biology thing that didn't get built for a professor that they were trying to keep at a particular university. So things became money-power oriented. We lost the common dream—let's put it that way—and in losing the common dream we also became enamored with the new technology, the computer, and the ability to handle things separately. You've got to remember that all of our beautiful colored drawings of the Air Force Academy are done with colored pencils. We would draw a line, and at a sixty-fourth of an inch next to it we'd draw that same color again. That was before we had Bourges paper, which we then could lay down. So everything was done by hand at the Academy in the beginning, and then came the different tactile papers in colors that we could use. We developed—I could show you some photographs of very handsome drawings we did by going to the printer and saying, "Send this through at ten percent; send this through at twenty percent; send this through at thirty percent."

Blum: Percent intensity, is that what you mean?

Netsch: Yes, intensity, and the intensities would get darker and darker and darker. Then we would cut out these things, and we'd get depth in perception, which we had seen, of course, in the Japanese prints. The old guys in their woodblock prints did this. Well, we did it with a printing machine. It was a big change when all of these things became available to us. But I think what else happened was that the firm grew.

Blum: Do you mean it got too large?

Netsch: Well, the large firms lost a sense of identification with the American dream. They became, as you know, experts in building types—schools or hospitals or airports or academia or museums or what have you. I did about fifteen libraries in my lifetime, and I really enjoyed doing libraries. But talking with a librarian is a lot different than talking with a CEO, I can assure you. Our studio became isolated from Skidmore simply because our clients were so different.

Blum: Your studio?

Netsch: We didn't need the car and the chauffeur. We didn't need lunch at the Chicago Club. We'd all go out to a beanery to eat. It wasn't a problem. We still had a common touch, you might say, in our studio. We made the most of our studio; for example, if I bought a set of prints, like I've got a set here called "The New York Ten," a very early set of prints. I bought two sets, and they would be about between fifty and a hundred dollars apiece, each print. We'd have a drawing in the studio, and if you drew number three and there were ten prints, you'd get the third choice. All of the prints were up in the studio, and you could decide whether or not you wanted to put a hundred dollars down for a print. I didn't take any profit or anything. And so, we would have these events. Also, we were all very interested in the social change occurring at this time. When they had a fire on the West Side in a black neighborhood I convinced the partnership that we should close the office, and that we should invite our black co-workers to sit down and tell us what it's really been like to be black, and why this has happened.

Blum: Black co-workers from where? SOM?

Netsch: SOM, yes. Charlie Duster, a son of a very famous woman and the grandson of Ida B. Wells, came and talked to us in our group because he was in our studio. I had a lot of books, and they're still out in the garage, I'd buy three copies. We'd have what is known as required reading for the course. There was no course, but it was just to educate ourselves and so there would be a

couple of copies of *Manchild in the Promised Land* or a whole bunch of societal-social works. And I would let people off to go march with Dr. King. We wouldn't tell anybody, and they would fill in their timecard by working at night or a Saturday. If they were off on a Wednesday afternoon, they were out on the job.

Blum: This was at your discretion?

Netsch: My discretion.

Blum: And if you discussed this with Bill Hartmann...?

Netsch: I would get a "no," so I wouldn't discuss it. The seminar was something that the whole firm did. See, my studio was beginning to drift away from the general pattern. We've talked about the change. I was still existing in the past. We were still hands-on. We were designing buildings for specific purposes. We were not doing anonymous office buildings.

Blum: But in the hierarchy of the firm were you Bill Hartmann's equal?

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: You were a partner, and he was a full partner.

Netsch: Yes, and very soon, even in the partnership, Bill was a ten-point partner when I was a four-point partner. And there was a time when I was a ten-point partner and he was a ten-point partner. I did reach the top rung in the senior partnerships. The euphemism is that Bill Hartmann was a senior partner in Skidmore and that Walter was a partner, you see. The euphemism was that he had been there longer, he had contributed more, he was getting more salary. These points were percentages of the take.

Blum: Did it depend on the jobs you brought in?



Netsch: Not job by job. I mean that Bill Hartmann was a ten-point partner, and Gordon was a ten-point partner. Nat was the first ten-point partner to reduce his partnership, and I bought some of his points.

Blum: Oh. These points had to do with the amount of stock you had?

Netsch: They had to stay to a hundred. They were based on the value of the firm each year, until they got so valuable by the time Bruce became a partner they had to devise another system of giving out points. I'm talking about the old days, the original days when the partnership was small and you could divide up a hundred points rationally among the people who were partners. I never was on the committee that determined points. I don't think there was a committee that determined points. I think it was Skidmore, Nat, Gordon and Walter Severinghaus, probably, and Bill Hartmann who did the distribution, let's call it—the partnership distribution. But you had to buy your points. The points that Nat sold had a value, and if you were awarded the opportunity to increase your points, let's say, from four to six, those two points had a certain value and you would pay for those. That would, of course, go to Nat Owings who was selling his points.

Blum: When someone like Jim Hammond resigned, and he was a partner at the time, where did his points go?

Netsch: That's right. He was only a four-point partner.

Blum: Did his points go back into the pool for others to acquire?

Netsch: Right. We assigned them. In that case maybe the partnership pool paid Jim Hammond's value in a check to him, period—that was it—so he didn't have any decision-making role in who got those points.

Blum: Yes, I understand.

Netsch: Oh, Nat did. He got the decision of who got his points. He was doing it, as he

saw it, for the future of the firm, so his vision of the future would involve, say, me. Most of my points from four to ten came from him, and some from a few others.

Blum: You've talked about your connection to various people, such as Gordon and Ralph Youngren, but you haven't formally addressed your connection to Nat Owings. How do you remember him?

Netsch: It was so personal. I can remember Nat came here and stayed one night. That large plant you see there, that schefflera, was a gift from Nat and Fred Kraft. They said, "You've got to have something green in the house." It was a pretty good-sized schefflera even then. My bathroom downstairs, which is also the guest bathroom, has this sunken shower which can also be used as a tub. Nat is the only person who tried to make it a tub. It took so long to fill the water that the water was cold by the time—and it was so hard to just put in hot water because you couldn't get over to turn it off. Anyway, he always kidded me about my tub that wouldn't work when I would visit them on the West Coast. When they took my apartment in the West Coast—I had a lovely apartment up on Telegraph Hill—I had a blackboard wall, and I drew a sketch of his site at Big Sur on it to make him feel at home so they could look at it and think about what they were going to design. I didn't try to ask to design the house. I knew them too well.

Blum: Who designed his house?

Netsch: He hired someone outside the firm—I've forgotten his name; a West Coast architect, pretty well known; sort of offbeat because he did an A-frame house. But when we were in Japan I saw Nat a lot. Later on when he got into his drinking habits he didn't see anybody because that was one of those secret sorrows. I saw him one night with Senator Moynihan from New York, the big senator. I recall one time when I was in Washington and he was in Washington, and Nat said, "I want you to come to this certain club for dinner. The senator and I are going to have a discussion." Senator Moynihan from New York is still there. He is very famous. He had recently made

statements about the problems of the black family—the disintegration of the family—and had gotten himself into a lot of trouble over it. He was way before his time. But he is also known as a great drinker, and Nat was a great drinker by then. This was a public-private club, but they were in the lounge. Nat at this time was trying to convince me to develop a master plan for the infrastructure of the United States.

Blum: Just a little task!

Netsch: Yes—that somehow planning would proceed more logically if we could develop a series of major and minor elements. Sort of like the hubs that airplanes now have, these different places around the nation where their aircraft end up. The hub system—major and minor hubs. Well, Nat had this idea, and this would tie into the national highway program, it would tie into an airport program, it would tie into a conservation of resources program in the national parks and other areas he thought deserved to be resources and to be kept. It was a very high-flying dream.

Blum: It sounds like his vision was all-encompassing.

Netsch: It was often that broad, and I was a person who would listen. Gordon would probably listen about thirty seconds and say, “Come off it, Nat. I mean, what are you asking me that for? You know I’m not interested in that.” And he was right. I would listen to him and go home and struggle and try it out to see what I could do. Well, he wanted me to meet with Senator Moynihan and himself because he was going to try this out on Senator Moynihan. But the two of them were very jocular, and they kidded each other very heavily. These are the times I felt like a schoolboy, even though I was a full partner and everything. It really wasn’t almost until I retired that I felt peer-oriented, partly because our studio has been isolated. And when I left my people were ignored.

Blum: But even though your studio was separate from the Chicago office, I have a sense...

Netsch: Oh, I was very loyal to SOM.

Blum: Was Nat the sort of friend you could always go to?

Netsch: Oh, absolutely.

Blum: And Gordon?

Netsch: But I wouldn't bring a personal problem in the Chicago office up with Gordon. I had a major crisis once and I even dragged my wife with me. We sat at Bill Hartmann's kitchen table one night and I cried and I tried to explain to him what my problem was. He said he would look into it, but nothing ever happened. His wife was kind of delighted that I had been forced to that sort of embarrassing low. My wife was very supportive. See, there are many times when the firm began to change when I began to question whether I should stay with Skidmore. I was taking a different design tack, and with this conflict within the firm and this nonreinforcement—the project in Australia should have been a great project if Bill Hartmann and everybody had gone down and supported it to the hilt, but that didn't happen. There was always the feeling that, well, "Walter may have blown this one, and do I want to be a part of this strange aberration he's got?"

Blum: And Nat with his power couldn't pull it together somehow?

Netsch: Nat could always prevent me from being fired in times of crisis. Nat could always prevent me from being publicly persecuted by the Chicago contingent. Gordon supported me up to a point, but he did not support my Field Theory. He thought, why did anyone go off and try to develop a separate aesthetic? I said, "Field Theory can be done by anyone, Gordon. I'm not developing an idiom that could be used only by specialists." That was the whole purpose of it. It was an extension of an aesthetic system, only I thought richer and more involved with twentieth century mathematics and

everything from chaos theory to other points, rather than someone just putting on a beret and slapping it on the wall. But I couldn't really convince people. I also discovered it was a lot of work.

Blum: The Field Theory?

Netsch: It was a lot of extra work. Those of us who took it seriously, we spent hours of extra time on our own searching for an extra little shape—the orphanage we did up in northern Wisconsin—I like to use that word because of Newt Gingrich—Sunburst Homes that we did up there—three beautiful, little buildings that Will Rueter and I did. That was Will's growing up build project, and he really went ahead after that. Will did a project for them on his own, on the side, which I say, "Okay, do that." Will left the firm and got a chance to go work on the new towns in England. I said, "Gee, that's a great idea, Will. You go do that, and when you come back maybe we can..." Will came back, and he applied for a job at SOM. He was a participant at that time. I said, "Well, when are you going to come to work?" He said, "They won't hire me."

Blum: SOM?

Netsch: "SOM won't hire me." I said, "Why?" "Bruce Graham told me that any participant who left this firm, left this firm." The hostility was there and there was nothing I could do about it.

Blum: Would he have said that to someone in his own studio, had they done the same thing?

Netsch: No.

Blum: Was it because it was your studio?

Netsch: It was because of Field Theory, really. We chose different aesthetic roads. I think, to be honest to Bruce, he really felt I was taking Skidmore down the

primrose path, and he wasn't going to support it. The fact that they were using my buildings to get jobs—Wells College Library, and everything, I found out later that they were on their slide list.

Blum: For presentations?

Netsch: Presentation list. There was never any acknowledgement. But you have to give Bruce credit. He really believed in what he believed in, and he also believed, in a sense the way Nat did, that the firm was an anonymous firm, and you shouldn't know who was doing what.

Blum: But yours was too distinctive not to recognize.

Netsch: That is correct. I had broken the vow, in a sense. I understand Bruce's point of view. The fact that we never got together, the fact that we couldn't discuss it, was probably my fault, too. I'm not arguing that it was all Bruce's fault, but Bruce was in a position, being number two to Hartmann in the main office when I was off in some studio in another building, I just never would know what was happening. And jobs would come in the office. I remember a client later on said, "You know, I didn't realize—I wanted you to do this job. I didn't want Bruce. Bill Hartmann gave me Bruce." I said, "Well, you see, if you brought the job in the front office, Bill and Bruce would decide how it was to be done." I never got a job through the front office. I ended up having to get my own work. So I was really an independent variable within the firm and I could do that as long as I was healthy. That was before the first open-heart surgery convinced me that I wasn't going to be able to continue—that I was going to have to retire early. The pressures of the Chicago office on me—Bruce would watch the time sheets. We were on the computer by then, and I remember one Christmas towards the end. I always got up very early for the Monday morning partners' meeting and sort of had a moment of transcendental quiet so when I got down to the meeting at eight o'clock and Bruce would bound in, screaming and hollering, that I would be able to listen, because I was the other ten-point partner besides Bill. Bill would, of course, keep his mouth shut. If anybody was going to raise the issue after

Bruce had brought it in as a *fait accompli*, it would be me. And so, I tried to get myself into an emotional position where I wasn't screaming when he was screaming, because I felt that would be my undoing, frankly. So, as I said, I would tell my wife that maybe it was time that I left. She, in her logical way, would say, "Well, where are you going to get the computer? Where are you going to get the star HVAC Sam Sachs? Where are you going to get the star people?"

Blum: Who are the star people?

Netsch: Well, I mean the real pros.

Blum: Oh, you mean good professionals.

Netsch: Yes. She would say, "Where are you going to get them? You don't want to run a firm. You don't want to do all of the accounting and everything. You don't want to be responsible for all of that." My project manager was Don Ohlson, who was an associate partner. Fred Kraft was my other project manager. He was a full partner, but he never got above four points. He was always considered a handyman by some people, including Bill, and so he would get my projects, which would be long-term like in academia. You know, you have a client for ten years. You don't want a big-overhead partner as an administrator. So they were very happy to have me have low-paid—and I was very happy, too, because we were all friends. So you can see that along with the growth and change in society there was growth and change in Skidmore. Chuck Bassett could do work out in San Francisco, first of all, because even though Gordon didn't like it all the time, he understood it. Gordon would say, "I don't understand your buildings, Walter." They are different. I accept that fact, and it does take an effort to understand them. Look at my house and compare it to Gordon's house.

Blum: Quite different.

Netsch: His is very readable, as the saying goes. So with what was going on in the

firm, and then as the partnership got bigger people like Nat lost his authority. He couldn't go to a partners' meeting that had fourteen partners, like it was when we started off with three and got up to about fourteen, when it suddenly jumped to twenty. Then cliques formed, so it was the same thing as going on...

Blum: Do you think Skidmore got too big?

Netsch: Not too big, it just got big. I don't know how it could have avoided that. As long as the work was there, Skidmore's system worked fine. It wasn't until the late eighties when the earth fell in, and no longer was the business client able to spend \$300 million on an office building. And so, Gordon gradually withdrew. I had to withdraw because of my physical pressures inside and outside the firm. I think that the younger people, like Bruce, for example, want us to invest, to take pieces of projects. I remember on the building across the street from Inland that he was doing, he said, "How many want to go in, \$25,000 apiece, with the developer?"

Blum: He wanted you to finance SOM's work?

Netsch: Yes, right—his work, actually. But I was not about to do it for anybody. I said, "Bruce, I just don't believe in that. You'll have to count me out." He said, "Well, Walter, you don't understand the way things are going today. You just don't understand business." I said, "Maybe not, Bruce. Maybe not." Then, of course, the firm finally got itself in trouble. We had a large overhead. We had thousands of square feet of office space, and suddenly empty drafting rooms, like I was talking about earlier, and all of the people fired and gone. And debts, and people being sued, because when things get tight everybody sues everybody to try to look for every nickel they can find. I'm not talking only about Skidmore. It could be any firm. There are five firms that I know of that went under—major firms that just went belly up.

Blum: Well, the architectural profession was no different from other businesses and professions in hard times.



Netsch: That's right. We all stumbled into the hard time, and everybody had a different system. And a lot of us, for once had equity. It used to be a pencil sharpener and some colored pencils. Now we had computers, and we had programs, and we had software specialists. We had a very elaborate engineering staff in Chicago under Fazlur, and we had expensive clubs and memberships and everything. So I don't know how Adrian Smith will feel when this is read by young people because a lot of the people they hired at Skidmore are hired under contract and don't get health benefits or retirement benefits.

Blum: Well, that's certainly what the school systems have done to avoid an additional third of someone's salary because benefits are very costly.

Netsch: That's right. So it's a different world now. Today you can belong to a small office, and you can assume they're not going to pay your health. But when you get to be a participant in the evolution of the firm like SOM and things aren't coming down from on high...

Blum: Maybe that's the kind of direction that Nat Owings foresaw when he wrote his book in 1973.

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: But he was looking back to the time of the Air Force Academy as one being very different, which you well remember.

Netsch: That's right, yes. We all remember. It was a halcyon time. Gordon thinks of it as a halcyon time. It was the last of the architect, not with the beret but as a direct participant in the form-giving of a society; of the environment. It wasn't a splashy, single building. I think Pepsi-Cola, for example, is a very elegant building, and fortunately many of the people who did the addition did a good job. But if you compare Pepsi-Cola with Gordon's first high-rise in New York, Lever House, you'll see a great sophistication in the way

architecture is put together from that early window wall. You'll find that at the Academy. That's why if people go out there today, it still looks fresh. It doesn't have a catalog look, because we didn't use anything out of the catalog. Sweet's catalog had five volumes when we did the Air Force Academy, so they were looking for things to put in. We got put in the catalog.

Blum: You created your own catalog items?

Netsch: Yes. Miami of Ohio is still in the limestone catalog today, and that was done in 1988 or something.

Blum: While you were working on the Air Force Academy, you have been quoted in some articles as saying that Gordon Bunshaft helped you take a major step towards collecting art, which we have all around us now in your home.

Netsch: Well, that's very true. As I told you, like most young architects I had prints of things from MoMA on my wall. I did not have originals. We must have been working on an Air Force Academy project of some kind on a Friday, and Saturday morning came, and Gordon said, "I'm going to go to the galleries. Would you like to come along?" Of course, who wouldn't? So I joined Gordon at ten o'clock in the morning, knowing full well that the galleries he was going to were the galleries I could not afford, essentially. But he went to Castelli, he went to the Pierre Matisse gallery. He would do the major galleries, including one that no longer exists that I ended up buying paintings from—Sam Kootz. I remember him going into Sam Kootz's gallery, perhaps it was that Saturday, big tummy sticking out and the pipe that sort of followed the shape of his tummy. He made kind of an image of himself that you can imagine as occurring in a British cartoon—very carefully done. That's a quick one. He would walk in, and he would say, "Sam, what's good today?"

Blum: Like he was buying a piece of steak?

Netsch: As if he was buying a piece of cake or some meat, and then he would just march into the back room. He had already probably seen the current show that was on, because he had been there already. This wasn't the first time he had been out. But, this was the first time I had been with him.

Blum: Well, he was an established collector very early.

Netsch: Oh, yes, very early. He was older, you know.

Blum: But not much. He wasn't much older.

[Tape 6: Side 1]

Netsch: Gordon had the great opportunity and advantage of being a New Yorker, being there in the beginning of MoMA, and liking all of this, and being a bright, young architect. He could buy these Dubuffets and other artists at very reasonable prices—the same equivalent prices as I was paying, in time. And so, we've got to accept the fact that he really was not only knowledgeable but he was really an expert, and he had a decade ahead of me. And so, when he took me on that was really quite an honor, to be taken on, because he had all of those people in the New York office he never invited.

Blum: Were you sort a protégé of his?

Netsch: No, I was never his protégé, but he knew I was really dedicated to art. We talked art. We talked art as well as architecture. We probably talked more art than architecture.

Blum: Were you a collector, even in a very small way, before you began to go to the big-time galleries with Gordon Bunshaft?

Netsch: Not really. I bought the Richard Hunt in 1954—about the same time. He is a Chicago artist and I bought him here. I was buying some things, but it was

really through New York, opening these galleries. So I would go to these galleries with Gordon, and I'd sit in the back room and listen to him as he would talk, banter, with these people. He would never discuss money with me. I got to see some fine Dubuffets and some Picassos, and the British sculptor Henry Moore. We would discuss the MoMA show or what was at the Met. He would express a distaste for much of Abstract Expressionism. He was not a fan of Abstract Expressionism, and so when Pop Art came—he understood a man like Youngerman, and he liked Youngerman. The curator at MoMA was Dorothy Miller, the curator that assisted with the exhibition *Sixteen Americans*. When all the architects were buying art for their clients, it had to be contemporary and it had to be American. MoMA was the resource, and she was the resource. She would get all of these paintings together for Gordon to look at to show to David Rockefeller, and so Gordon began to know American artists very well. But they would be the Robert Indianas, the Josef Albers—those kind of people. He never really discussed them with me. We used to joke and say, "I don't know why you buy all of that stuff. Why don't you buy real paintings?" Occasionally he would joke with me on that. I said, "Gordon, I just can't afford what you can buy. I have to go out and buy painters who are my age, doing their thing as I am doing my thing." Actually, I began to realize that pretty quickly, and like when we went to this place where the Haniwa head was, it was a gallery with Chinese screens and antiquities. I knew I wasn't going to be going there every Saturday, so I began to look on my own on a Saturday. I'd say, "Gordon, I think I'd better try my own," and I found the Green Gallery. Now, the Green Gallery was an avant-garde gallery that was being sponsored—I didn't know this at the time—by one of the collectors of modern art in New York, Robert Scull. He was a very wealthy man who had a very strange reputation, like buying a whole show for a low price. But anyway, he supported the owner of the Green Gallery. That Green Gallery had people like Jim Dine and Oldenburg and more avant-garde people. I'd go in there, and he'd say, "Netsch-face, what are you doing here in New York?" I said, "I've come to see some paintings," and he'd say, "I want you to go a studio and see thus and so." It was there that once in a while I would find an artist whose work I liked. I'd come back to see the owner of the Green Gallery and I'd say, "I think I would

like to buy this painting." He'd say, "I'll tell you how much it is," and then I'd either say yes or no. It got to the point where I got to know the galleries—Emmerich and all the galleries that had modern artists; contemporary artists, I should say. Ralph and I would go to New York in the spring on a three-day art binge. We might go there on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and we might see twenty-five galleries. I'd be getting, to my surprise, maybe a bonus that I had gotten the month before, in September—this is October, see—\$20,000, which was a windfall for me. They could give me a bonus when I wasn't a partner, you see, without anybody else knowing what I was getting. It was a check. The first time I got one I went to Gordon, and I said, "I don't deserve this. I should divide it up and give it to all the people who work with me."

Blum: In your studio?

Netsch: And Gordon said, "If you do that you'll never get another one."

Blum: Was this as a partner or as an associate?

Netsch: No, as an associate partner. We weren't paid much, but if you did a good job—and I was doing a good job—and I'd get this. I don't know who decided the number. So I would have money in my checking account. And then I got to be partner. I made more money and had it in a checking account, and on September 30 I would know what my income would be for the year. I would go there and I would, on Saturday or Sunday before I went home, I would write down five paintings that I wanted and the prices. They were \$3,000, \$1,500, \$1,000 or something like that. Or there would be a painting, like a Lichtenstein painting, which I didn't know the price of. I'd have to call Castelli and say, "Gee, I like this Lichtenstein brush stroke drawing. Let's see, I bought a painting from you last year for \$900. What is the price this year?" "\$4,000." I'd say, "What?!" on the telephone. He'd say, "All you people are raising the prices." I'd say, "I'm sorry, Leo. It's raised beyond my limit. You're talking about someone else," so I'd have to scratch that one off, you see, and then I would buy maybe five or six paintings and they would be sent

home. And I'd buy what I could pay for or see within a reasonable term. I bought one painting from Sam Kootz for \$7,500. I said, "Sam, I don't have \$7,500." He said, "But you've been looking at that painting for a year. I know you love that painting. I can wait a year."

Blum: Isn't that often what dealers are willing to do?

Netsch: Yes, and so I bought the painting. It's *Blue Spell* by Hans Hoffmann, which is a very handsome painting that we gave to Miami of Ohio. So between buying some art, going on these art binges, getting to know some artists and their studios, like Robert Indiana, if we liked an artist I'd buy two or three. My wife had the right of refusal, which is hardly correct, because if I'd bought them before I came home she wouldn't know what was arriving. But she once told me a "no" on a painting, and it had some pink in it. I said, "Why don't you like it?" She said, "It's pink." I said, "What's wrong with pink?" But she was pretty good about it.

Blum: There is not much wall space left for too many more so maybe that wasn't such a loss.

Netsch: No, this is what's left, in fact. We're down to this. We really enjoy living with art. It's part of architecture. The only thing I have found that probably has aged me is that I don't really dig some of the very contemporary artists. I'm not great on representational art. It has dirty pictures in mind. Dawn and I don't have to go look at somebody doing something. We do not mind social paintings—Peter Saul, or someone like that—and I bought some Peter Sauls, including one my wife really detested, and we've just given them to MCA, the Museum of Contemporary Art. So it wasn't that we were adverse to it, but traditional representational art was not my cup of tea. But it was a great opening. It opens your mind. It opens your vision when you went to a—and so while all of these guys were doing all of these things—this is from 1950, up to the early seventies and some beyond that. We continued to buy the Lichtensteins. I have that famous story of buying that first Lichtenstein from the first show at Castelli's. Castelli wouldn't even talk to me when I first went

in. The Lichtenstein show was just taken down. They were sitting on the floor. I didn't know who Lichtenstein was from Adam. *The Girl with a Beach Ball*, that Philip Johnson had already bought, was lying there. Richard Brown Baker had already bought *The Washing Machine*. It was lying on the floor. And I was looking at it, and I saw *Black Flowers*. I tried to speak to Mr. Castelli, and he said, "I'll have someone speak to you." It was a man who was his assistant who went on to have his own gallery and is very famous. He said, "It's \$600." I said, "I'll buy it," period, just right then and there. Of course, that's the painting that we sold for \$2 million. Actually, that's the painting we've been living off of for a long time.

Blum: You have a very good eye.

Netsch: Well, I had a good eye, and that was also the market prices, because that painting sold last year for \$1.4 million, so that's quite a decline in percentage for art. Lichtenstein is one of the top painters, and he declined. Most of the art has declined from the high period of their value—well, I know one painting that was a zero up there. I was offered \$125,000 for that painting as close as six years ago. Today I think I might be offered \$20,000.

Blum: Oh, that's quite a drop!

Netsch: Yes. This art has dropped. You see, sixties art has got to wait another twenty years.

Blum: But you didn't buy this for an investment, did you?

Netsch: I didn't buy it for that. That marvelous *Moby Dick* painting up there is just about to be loaned to the University of Kansas for a *Moby Dick* show, and something else is going out on loan. So we loan things all the time. No, I never intended to sell anything. It wasn't until we realized that men were not going to support women running for office that we realized that we were going to have to do it on our own. [Editor's note: Dawn Clark Netsch was a candidate for governor of Illinois in 1994.] Dawn spent a lot of time. She

raised over \$3 million herself, but it was hard, hard work. She had many small gifts from people. You see, I don't know whether young people understand the extent of our commitment. Our commitment has been not only to modern architecture, our commitment has been to modern society. We were involved in the civil rights movement. All the campaigning. I served as Harold Washington's president of the park board. We were totally involved with society. I think some of the partnership really objected to that—and Dawn doesn't quite understand it because I was inhibited getting some projects because of her association. I mean, she was a politician who was not a politician. She was a politician who would not grease a hand or say something nice or do something like that, so it was kind of hard for Bill Hartmann to talk to some people about getting a job. You follow me? I'm not accusing anybody of anything, but it made it difficult, so they wouldn't come to SOM. That, of course, would make Bruce and Bill angry because it did limit opportunity. I think that with the paintings, though, the main enjoyment was that the studio could come here, and we'd have a party, and there would be a new painting and they could see it up. We were loaning these things all the time. They were out on exhibits. They went to Australia, they went to Sweden, they went every place. We had one painting which was done by a schizophrenic. Sweden likes schizophrenic art. So we had a painting that they wanted to borrow, and it went up there. We had angry paintings that went to shows, and we had abstract, geometric art, which you see mostly here now. But it was all a part of it, along with the books we read for required reading for the course. It was a totally different time, and the art was just a part of it.

Blum: You had two exhibitions of your collection that I know of. In 1971 you had an exhibition at the University of Iowa.

Netsch: I did, right, and we gave some paintings to them—some very fine paintings.

Blum: And again in 1983 in the Miami University Art Museum.

Netsch: Yes, "Living With Art II." Then we had "Living With Art III," when we



loaned paintings to Notre Dame for a show.

Blum: You have given paintings from your collection to various libraries and museums.

Netsch: Oh, yes, right. I also commissioned a piece of music for the Air Force Academy chapel. It was the time of the male chorus, so it has to be rewritten or something, or the organist can do it. Paintings were given to the Northwestern University library. We'd do it, or we would commission the work for ourselves.

Blum: Did you? Which work was that?

Netsch: Well, it was one, unfortunately, that we just sold. Donald Judd was commissioned, and I just did two shelves in honor of him.

Blum: Two shelves?

Netsch: Wood shelves following his same geometric system, and I built them. So, Gordon built furniture, and I'm building furniture now.

Blum: By Walter Netsch, after Don Judd.

Netsch: Right. Coenties Slip was a place in New York where a group of artists worked because it was cheap loft space. Ellsworth Kelly was there, Robert Indiana was there, Jack Youngerman was there, and others. They are three artists that I got to know. I liked their work, they were from different galleries. I remember sitting in Ellsworth Kelly's loft one day. He was a struggling young artist. He had Campbell's soup cans that he'd take the wrapper off and he would bend in those beautiful shapes of his very small maquettes—they were really small—and he would have them on the table that he was working at. I remember being in Robert Indiana's studio one time when a client of his came who had ordered a money painting, which intrigued Robert no end because that meant it was vulgar and everything an

artist disliked—and so he had done a money painting. This man arrived, and Robert said to me, “You hide in the back and listen.” So I hid in the back, and the owner of the painting—or the to-be owner of the painting—brought in all of his friends to see how the painting was coming. “Robert, how is the painting coming?” “Fine. Would you like to see it?” And he walked back. I couldn’t see it. He’d look at it, evidently, and he turned to his friends and said, “What do you think of it?” Someone said, “Well, I don’t understand this kind of art.” He said, “Well, it’s a good painting.” So I listened in on this strange kind of thing. I remember Jack Youngerman. He was married at that time to that beautiful French actress, one of the really beautiful women. He had met her in Paris, and they had a little boy. I would ring the bell sometimes at the wrong time, and she would appear dressed in a coat because her hours, evidently, were all mixed up with his. Some of these people painted all night, as you know, and slept in the daytime. I didn’t know what the schedule was, so once in a while I would meet her, which was very elegant, but it was always, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bother you”—that sort of thing. Some of the artists I would meet I didn’t like—really didn’t like. They didn’t necessarily like me.

Blum: Did that influence you regarding their work?

Netsch: No. I had bought this artist’s work, but he was just very difficult. He had a very high impression of himself, and he just didn’t want to—I just wasn’t his cup of tea. He didn’t know me. Sometimes I guess I would come off, with a shirt and a tie and a coat, as a corporate individual, I guess. Robert understood me. I had lunch at Robert’s. I’d sit down with his current boyfriend, and we’d all have lunch. And his cats. He had oodles of cats. And Robert would talk. He was a great friend of the much-older sculptress who did those black sculptures.

Blum: Louise Nevelson?

Netsch: Nevelson. They would tell a little bit of stories once in a while about art and parties and artists, and they would say who they got along with and who

they didn't. A little booklet was written about the Coenties Slip group. They were a special breed at a special time, and I was a member of a special breed at a special time. We all felt a part of this American dream, and this was our sophisticated, in a sense, version. One little anecdote: After Gordon gave me enough courage to do art galleries, when I was traveling around the country for the Air Force Academy, Colonel Noonan—he was my seeing-eye dog that saw to it that I didn't get into trouble—and I would go visit the consultants. Of course, one of his favorite places to visit was Hollywood, to see Welton Becket when I had to see Welton Becket to show him drawings. Occasionally there would be a gap in the meetings, and therefore I would have to go around and personally see Becket, Belluschi, all of the advisers individually. And he loved to go to Hollywood. Becket provided him with a big limousine, and I think a driver, and he went his way. I would do the galleries.

Blum: In Hollywood?

Netsch: In Hollywood, the art galleries, and one of the first paintings I ever bought was from one of those trips is the Robert Motherwell. I saw this in a back room of a gallery. It was a Robert Motherwell, *Ile de France*, and a Diebenkorn. And there were two, and this was an abstract Diebenkorn because, remember, this was back in 1954. I liked them both. The gallery owner became very confessional, and he said, "I am in monetary straits. I would like you to buy both of them." Each of them was only \$1,200, and that's not a lot of money, but he said, "I'm having an affair with Hedy Lamar"—speaking of name-dropping—and of course, by this time she was, you might say, "over the hill." Both paintings were sent to Chicago for me to review. In those days they would ship them off inexpensively. I couldn't afford both, so I had to send the Diebenkorn back. But it's an interesting Hollywood-type story of the kind of galleries and the relationship between the movie star world and the galleries, and my just roaming through the back room. See, neither painting was on exhibit.

Blum: But I think it's also interesting that the Air Force Academy job provided the opportunity for you to begin to do this in a very knowledgeable way.

Netsch: That's true. When I got to Detroit, for example, I could see Mies's project over at Lafayette Square, and I could see the museum there, so I would take the time and use it while I was waiting. Usually you fly out, you have the meeting—Colonel Noonan would fly from Washington, and we would meet, so that meant there was a gap in time between the meeting and the flight arrivals so you had some time to do things. He always wanted a good meal, so we had a good meal and then flew back. One trip we took to New York for a meeting. Gordon still remembers it. I'm surprised he didn't tell you. He was so angry at me. The one time that I relaxed too much. I went to see *Three Penny Opera* with Lotte Lenya, and there was a bar across the street. Colonel Noonan and I would go to the bar during the intermissions and back to the play, and I had a terrible hangover the next day. Gordon saw that I had a hangover, and had to do the meeting, and he was so angry at me for making him do the meeting. That's the only time I remember not being prepared for an Air Force meeting.

Blum: Was it usual that you did the presentation at these meetings?

Netsch: At the advisory meetings, yes. Gordon would do the introduction. He would sort of set the agenda of what we had been talking about and what we had been thinking. Then he would say, "Now Walter will show you what's going on."

Blum: So you really did all of the detail presentation.

Netsch: Well, first of all, Gordon had projects at home, you know, that he knew in detail, and he didn't know the Air Force drawings in detail. So, say if Becket wanted to know how the HVAC was going to work or if the bathrooms were properly designed—some very pragmatic questions could pop up. The personality of the adviser would show. He was probably representing economics.

Blum: The Air Force Academy was one of the big jobs that brought a lot of attention

to SOM and to you.

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: There was an article in a French magazine, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, and they identified quite a few young, talented architects from the United States, and you were among them.

Netsch: That's right. That's the one time I got sort of an international popularity spread, yes, "Young Architects of the World," out of *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*. And it was on the Academy.

Blum: Well, it was on the Academy and the Naval Postgraduate School and also Inland Steel.

Netsch: And actually, they were the three important things at that time of my work.

Blum: And the comment was, "Here is an example of a young architect whose work is greatly enhanced by all of the support services behind him."

Netsch: And that's what we talked about. When I said I thought I maybe should leave, Dawn reminded me I had all of those support services, and I should be grateful for them. Accept the problems. She was very pragmatic and very practical about it.

Blum: That was certainly a plus in many situations, to have a big firm behind you.

Netsch: No question. When I talk about "what if," the question of if you have a really original idea like I had with Field Theory, it's very hard to put that into the corporate boiler. That you have to understand. In fact, if you know anybody who is doing individual work today, it's his own practice, it's a relatively small practice, and the attitude has been carefully nurtured, although they may have worked for a large office. I think it's an important philosophical idea. I don't know if the large firm is ever going to come back again.

Blum: But isn't that relative? Isn't SOM still one of the large firms even though they've downsized?

Netsch: No. I think our reputation leads people to think that we are large, but we're not. I think most of the major big firms are much smaller. They're like Lester B. Knight here. They're huge. I think there are nameless firms today who are doing work, especially abroad like the A. Epstein firm that associated with Kleihues, the German architect on the MCA. That's a large firm, and you don't think of it necessarily in the same genre as you think of SOM.

Blum: Probably because they are an engineering firm who have architects on their staff and SOM is an architectural firm.

Netsch: Remember, they hired a lot of my good people to work in the production end. But it's an important point. I just think we ought to really accept the fact that the firm type has changed. When I think of a large firm I think of Kohn Pederson Fox the architects who did the quarter-round green building downtown [333 Wacker Drive]. They are one of the new large firms. I. M. Pei has managed to stay a reasonable size by really dividing the work up between the three partners, and they each get credit for it. That was important when Jim Freed left IIT and came back to New York. That was a decision Freed had to make because he couldn't really work here and teach.

Blum: And maintain a practice there.

Netsch: Yes. And the gentleman who had the trouble with the glass in Boston, Pei's other partner—he did a very glassy high-rise in Boston.

Blum: The Hancock? Is it near Copley Square?

Netsch: Yes, right near Copley Square. That's it. And all of them have gone through these kind of things—all of us have gone through trials and tribulations—I was telling you about the mirrored glass at IIT. You get into technology and

sometimes get into trouble.

Blum: To go back to one of your projects, I have read that the Air Force chapel has had constant problems with leaky windows and leaky roofs.

Netsch: That's kind of a wonderful story. The chapel got built, and nothing happened. It was fine, although Ed Merrill, who was the supervisor, had written a lot of letters and complaints about the fact that the contractor was not being as careful as he should because the building was more complicated than he realized. And then what happened is that all of a sudden these leaks started. Ed Petrazio and I and one other person would fly out to Colorado Springs and check in a little, cheap motel and wait for the rains. And it would rain and we would rush up to the chapel—it's a big building—and try to find out where it was leaking inside and where is it coming from. I guess it was Ralph Youngren, he was the third person. I had to write a report, and I was so hurt about these leaks. I called it "A Report on Water Migration on the Air Force Academy Chapel." Needless to say, I received little humorous digs over my euphemism. But what we found out was that actually it was the fact that each of the tetrahedral groups would move in the wind. It's very windy up there, and the building can receive wind from many places. And it's long, and so it could be doing one thing at one end and another thing at the other end. These joints where everything connects is where all of the glass goes through. So it was finally decided that what we should do is develop a big cover of plastic over the glass windows, which eliminated many of the sources of the problem because with each little piece of glass sitting in that window frame, everything begins to—it doesn't take much for water to come through. And so they went and put in these long panels of plastic. It's done a lot to eliminate the major problem. Also, I understand that the sale of the little chapel handbook that you can buy for a dollar and a half—of the design of the Air Force chapel, which of course, doesn't refer to the leaks, but it's been done over several times; there are several different editions—is money that is used for maintenance so it isn't coming out of the taxpayers' pockets. They don't need it all, because they are redoing the steps, twice. They are doing the major steps. They are going back to granite. They have tried precast

and so forth and so forth. So there are many kinds of stories, but since we are talking about the chapel, it's like my story on the overhangs at Northwestern Library, the cantilevers. When you get a major problem, it's that one of your children has hepatitis. If you're serious about it and accept responsibility you don't say, "Well, that's somebody else's fault—that's the engineer's fault or that's somebody else's fault," and then you can walk away from it. But I can't do that.

Blum: I have a sense that you were very connected to each one of your projects, however far back they may go.

Netsch: Yes, and that's going to come up in our memories as we talk. It may take a twenty-four-hour cycle for some things to reassert themselves in my subconscious.

Blum: Speaking of the media attention and the notoriety that SOM and you personally and others in the firm were getting, in 1958 there was an article in *Fortune* magazine, which was titled cleverly "The Architects from Skid's Row."

Netsch: Oh, do you want to know the story behind that? Because I'll bet I'm the only partner who will tell it.

Blum: Yes! What was it?

Netsch: We were very famous at the time, and we were the source of a lot of research. There was one novel that was written in which Gordon played a principal part as a hero, and one young lady in the office was supposed to be the woman in it—neither one actually identified. But our lawyers got a hold of this book, and I remember a partners' meeting with paper clips through every page in which there was some problem that the legal department, that Gross Sampsell, thought besmirched Gordon. And it was handled, I don't know how, either with the publisher or something, but it was taken care of.



Blum: What was the name of the book?

Netsch: I will not tell you. I figure it's past and over with. It wasn't true, so it does no need to—but it made a great story. I'm not saying that there wasn't a relationship of a partner and someone else in the office, or some other office at some other time. I'm not saying that this was a puritanical joint, but this was a case where it had gotten to be a problem. Well, the other was this *Fortune* article. The author talked to everybody, all the partners, and I think in retrospect I probably was more candid than the other partners, being the younger, newer partner, and not protective of the firm. But they could get sources from talking to associates and participants and having a drink with somebody. It got to be a pretty interesting story about how the firm really worked and what a partnership meeting was really about. And boy, did the paper clips appear on that draft! That poor guy who wrote it really had the pressure put on him.

Blum: To clean it up?

Netsch: I wouldn't say "clean it up." It wasn't a question of it being dirty, it was a question of it destroying the kind of image—the image of the firm and the partnership and everything. It did get published anyway, but he told me later he really took a licking from his editor for it.

[Tape 6: Side 2]

Blum: One of the comments I read in the *Fortune* article was that the office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill had gotten so good at Miesian buildings that there was no more invention, no more experimentation, they were just good at what they did. This was 1958. Do you agree with that?

Netsch: I know. That might have been one of things that sent Nat through the ceiling in the article. And I'm certain Gordon objected, because Gordon really thought more of Corbusier, as you know. I see more Corbusier in Gordon's buildings, except in the window wall, maybe, but I think his window walls

became very much his own. But I would say is that the normal kind of public statement that was a typical statement because, wasn't Seagram done about that time?

Blum: Yes.

Netsch: And Seagram was actually a nationwide event. The bustle in the back was a great source of discussion in the architectural profession and permitted a new leeway from the regimen to those who followed Mies and interpreted his work. I could only imagine that again giving the background of that article is one kind of marvelous way Mies could get back at the firm and say, "You're through. You've done it. What are you going to do next for an encore?"

Blum: But that was in 1958. Didn't that become a valid criticism of SOM later on?

Netsch: See, I don't think so, because I think it became a criticism of Chicago.

Blum: A criticism of the Chicago office?

Netsch: Of the Chicago office, but Bruce was very frank about what he was doing. It wasn't a question of wanting to do anything else. And then if you put my input into the Chicago office you realize there was another voice.

Blum: That's why I wondered if, with a comment like this, you gained some support for the direction you were looking for and going in.

Netsch: No, no. That article caused so much trouble, that the statement that you picked out of that article I immediately read between the lines in picking out why it was there.

Blum: You personally have been so widely published. I found articles in Italian, in French, in German, in Japanese, and in Portuguese art and architecture publications. What vehicle did you or the firm use to get such wide coverage of your work?

Netsch: First of all, I've got to surprise you. I wasn't aware. You're the one who told me. No one in Skidmore, Owings & Merrill collected any documentation on me. *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* was a popular architectural magazine that I took, like I took the *Architectural Review*, and when they published "Young Architects of the World" I was just as surprised as anyone else when that accolade occurred. But for all of these other things, I can only assume that with the international reputation of SOM, and then with the importance of the Air Force Academy, Inland Steel and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School I often got included in the pictures.

Blum: Oh, yes.

Netsch: I think when you write in a foreign magazine you go to the library and you find out what's there, and that's what was there. I really was a popular—I mean, I had done some well-known buildings.

Blum: It seemed that many of these publications also followed your work.

Netsch: But they didn't interview me. See, I wasn't interviewed by anybody, and certainly the office did not collect the work. They did not collect the articles, nor did I. They're not in my file.

Blum: I was curious to know how your work got into the American journals so regularly.

Netsch: Well, I've got to say—remember, we talked yesterday about getting on the lecture circuit with Rudolph and Yamasaki and so on. When you got on the lecture circuit and were talking at schools, and even afterwards with Field Theory I was being invited for a very different reason than, say, the Air Force Academy, but then as a teacher. I was a good teacher—that would be a way that my name constantly came up because as the magazines were circulating, and noting who was doing what in the month, they would get that information. Then, I have to say, I can really thank two women, Mildred

Schmertz of *Architectural Record*, and some of her staff members who were also very supportive, and Betty Thompson from *Progressive Architecture*. I did not fare so well with *PA*'s male editor. In fact, he wrote me a marvelous note later on. He said, "I know we have had disagreements over time, but I would like to keep in touch with you off and on."

Blum: Did they call you and say, "Hello Walter, what's new? What have you been doing recently?" Would journals do that?

Netsch: See, what happened is when the postmodernist thing came along, *PA* jumped to support them. Their review of the UIC was so devastating. It separated out in my mind—for example, the presentation on the Miami University Museum of Art in the *Architectural Record* by Mildred Schmertz that also went back into other Field Theory buildings. That was a very handsome presentation in depth and not just simple reportage. Of course, Betty Thompson was the beginning. When I was living out there she would drop by. And when I was in New York I would drop by and see Mildred and show her what I was doing and have a drink and talk about what was going on. The New York office got people from the magazines dropping in all the time, naturally.

Blum: So did magazines really pursue the office for the coverage?

Netsch: They pursued the office, and they pursued certain projects. And they also pursued the photographers like Ezra Stoller, one of the great architectural photographers, to find out what he was photographing so they would know what was current. Most of the modern work of Bruce's and of Gordon's and of mine, and certainly Chuck Bassett's, for SOM, as well as Eero's and his later firm. You just go down the line. Until the new breed occurred about ten years ago, the photographers were as much key resources for material as anything else, because they all wanted those beautiful pictures. I mean, they were beautiful. The book came out on Ezra Stoller, and it shows his affinity for that kind of work. You'll notice that work photographed later is different.

Blum: What do you mean different?

Netsch: I mean the eighties and nineties had a whole different set of photographers and a whole different attitude. They were not quite so classical.

Blum: Who was your preferred photographer?

Netsch: Well, I had three. The photographer Balthazar Korab from Detroit who, when he was doing my College of Surgeons, fell off the wall and broke his ankle. He did a very handsome, honorary thing for me, using the chapel as a photograph. And our local photographer Hedrich-Blessing. The other one was Orlando Cabanban. Orlando would always photograph with people, and I like that. They were my three favorite photographers.

Blum: You say they were your favorite photographers. Were they also generally used by the office?

Netsch: The office primarily used Stoller.

Blum: According to the records of Hedrich-Blessing at the Historical Society—where they're now—SOM was one of their biggest clients.

Netsch: Hedrich-Blessing, that was Bill Hartmann. I'm sorry, that was a fractured piece of mental remembrance. Bruce liked Ezra because Ezra was New York, and Bill liked Hedrich-Blessing because they were Chicago and supported Chicago. They were all good.

Blum: Who was the photographer at Hedrich-Blessing? Was it Bill Hedrich?

Netsch: Yes, that's right. It was Bill Hedrich.

Blum: One of your projects that got so widely covered was the University of Illinois-Circle Campus.

Netsch: Well, that was an instant campus, you know. It was the first time one was programmed. It was literally programmed, and it was programmed by the university, not by me. It really took my system way beyond, into the computer and everything, and it had a very fresh set of goals. There was no department of engineering. They all had different names and titles. The then-president of the university was an educator and a lovely human being that we worked hand-in-glove with searching for solutions to an urban university. They were determined they would not be a carbon copy of Urbana in the classic academic system. We soon found out the faculty was appalled at the idea of stretching into new worlds of an urban university to describe the urban responsibilities, academically, and, therefore, it was a major battle. Did you know I designed four universities for them following the program?

Blum: No, I didn't know that. Walter, before you get into the design of the actual campus, how was the site selected?

Netsch: Well, that's in the beginning. In the beginning there was a major political battle, and I can only reconstruct it. The university, knowing the political problems of the inner city, not so much the social but the political problems, selected a site in the suburbs just west on the Eisenhower Expressway.

Blum: Was that the Miller Meadow site?

Netsch: That's Miller Meadow. Mayor Daley discovered that and he was furious, absolutely furious, that his University of Illinois was going to go to the suburbs. See, the university in Champaign-Urbana and in Springfield are not part of the Chicago circuit, you might say. Everything was a battle between the city and the suburbs. So we were hired to do a study of sites, and four sites were selected: Meigs Field, south of the Loop, Garfield Park, and Miller Meadow. And we had no definitive program at that time, so little blocks were put together to represent a university, you might say. For the SOM staff, after their experience on the Academy, this was a great new try. We thought we would just be given a site if we got a job like this, not have to pick which

place you build the academic building. But we did it again like for the Academy when we designed three different universities. Then I did three different designs, this time four. And we kind of favored Meigs Field.

Blum: So you did a site analysis for each site?

Netsch: We did a site analysis and a model for each site. Of course, the big problem with Meigs Field, as you knew, my heavens, it is out in the middle of nowhere, and you've got this gem. You've got another Air Force Academy. But how are you going to get there by bus? It was a very pretty little scheme, but not very rational. South of the Loop was really the most logical of all the sites, but this was early in the railroads' dissolution. At this time they thought that of each square foot of property south of the Loop was a jewel, and that this land was going to be invaluable. It was going to be as expensive as Randolph and Washington downtown, as a block. And so, there was a lot of lack of interest on the part of the railroads, plus they hadn't yet moved all of the railroads to Union Station. So we were a little early, and we actually helped force that resolution. As you know, the buildings that have been built since have not been the high-tech, expensive buildings. They have been housing and things like that. Garfield Park was fascinating for me, personally. It had the Joseph Lyman Silsbee building. It was way before I was president of the park board, or even knew about that, but I could review where Wright had participated. I went out and saw these places in disrepair and tried to develop a scheme that would bring the park and the university together—you know, we would take advantage of the park.

Blum: So you would put the university in the park?

Netsch: In the park—in the southern portion of the park, not the northern. We also insisted that they would have to buy an equivalent amount of land in the neighborhood to build a new park. Garfield Park was already disintegrating as an area, and from a planning standpoint it interested me not only as an example of a new kind of preservation or reuse of a park that was in a difficult social situation, but also by building a major new park we got into

the neighborhood. And the neighborhood, in a sense, got revitalized—not that a park got reused. In fact, the great objection to it on the part of the analyses of people was that it was taking away something where they had already lost so much, so it really was very highly criticized. For Miller Meadow, of course, we did a scheme, and all the logic of the university just couldn't—in fact, more innuendos: you know, the-professors-want-to-live-in-the-suburbs sort of thing came up, and so, therefore, the mayor gave the university the site that we now have.

Blum: Mayor Daley?

Netsch: Mayor Richard J. Daley—not this mayor, his father. He was going to get out from under some public housing projects and the commitments to build more. See, there was always public housing south of there. It's still there. There were areas on this campus site that had been reserved for future public housing.

Blum: I thought the neighborhood that the University of Illinois is now located in was a very old Italian neighborhood with small houses and local businesses.

Netsch: It was. No apartment buildings, but a lot of businesses. Taylor Street had a lot of businesses. But this end of it towards the expressway had been chewed into by the expressway. Expressways are never very—just look at the edge of an expressway anywhere. It's not the healthiest part of the neighborhood. The neighborhoods usually take a licking.

Blum: But there was a lot of opposition to the university by the local community.

Netsch: Oh, absolutely. Florence Scala. She loves me. She thinks that I was really sincere and did my best under a difficult situation, but she just did not want the university there. But I saved Hull House—not the brick factory building, but I decided that the idea of Jane Addams should go back to the farmhouse she lived in, when that was really the neighborhood. I also saved another building, because that was the building that Frank Lloyd Wright first gave



his famous speech on *The Art and Craft of the Machine* in 1901. So I maintained that piece of history. Those things were little battles. Those were not just, "Oh, Walter, isn't that a wonderful idea?" you know, to do the farmhouse over, and it wasn't.

Blum: Is there any truth to the statement that Daley selected that place for the university because he wanted to halt the northern expansion of the black community?

Netsch: I never heard that.

Blum: Because that's been published.

Netsch: I'm talking about when I was working on it. When I was working on it, it was Florence Scala and the Italian community. Jim De Stefano grew up in that area. His father collected rents in that area, so he tells me stories about it being really an Italian ghetto.

Blum: An Italian ghetto?

Netsch: Yes, like I was telling you of Manchester being a German ghetto for my parents. This was an Italian ghetto. Let's define a ghetto. A ghetto is a homogeneous, urban area in which blue-collar economics is the basis. In other words, although there were areas which people built little houses west of the university, here there was a lot of single-family houses where they built another house on the back of the lot. This was how they brought Mother and Father over.

Blum: That wasn't the thrust of this comment. It was to block the black expansion that was going north.

Netsch: Well, let's say the euphemism I got was that the area had been assigned for new public housing.

Blum: Which means black families would have been part of that.

Netsch: Which would have meant black families, because if you know that the two projects there, the high-rise Brooks Homes and the low-rise Jane Addams Houses, were essentially black, so it's by inference—a good sociologist would realize what the mayor was doing, you're right.

Blum: Do you think that was what he was doing, in your opinion?

Netsch: I'm not going to try to second guess him. I knew he had to come up with a site. I knew he had to have a site next to the Loop. I knew that he couldn't get it south of the Loop. There was no other site where he had access to property. See, the original site went just down to—not Taylor, but it was about two hundred feet north of Taylor. When we built the first phase of the UIC we didn't have the whole property. We had to plan on that area which was the most—it was about from Hull House north. It was partly Greektown. It had already shifted its allegiance, you might say. So that was the only property that the mayor actually had a handle on, and he took the rest of it. Hartmann and my project manager, Fred Kraft, who was a full partner, handled all of those discussions with the university. That's again another story like the Air Force Academy. I was in the design room. My job was—not that I was to be socially irresponsible. I don't mean that, because we did become socially responsible. For example, the gardens had walls around them. There was a tremendous accusation that "Walter put walls around the campus to keep people out," and we put the wall in because we knew that black and white young people would be sitting on the grass together, and we were protecting them from the hostile eyes of the neighborhood. So it depends on whether you are looking in or looking out. We were in, looking out. They were our clients. The kids were our clients, and we were going to make it as civil for them as we could. So the little gardens I planned where food and coffee would be served was a major effort. And the whole idea of the forum was a major effort to focus community, as far as the university was concerned, inside so they could do what they wanted to. Remember, we were in the civil rights movement in my studio. We had black staff members. We were not a

WASPy, prejudiced group.

Blum: But in a larger sense, the idea of renewing a community is what a major institution, such as the university, could do by reaching out with fingers into the community.

Netsch: We did that scheme. I could show you a beautiful drawing. Instead of acquiring all of the land south, I proposed that we put fingers into the university and build very small buildings. It was an extension of one of the three pedagogic schemes that I developed after the site was selected. See, after the site was selected I again did schemes for three different universities.

Blum: For that site?

Netsch: For that site, but that was a pedagogic scheme. On one of them I really got worried about the big university sitting there, so I designed one scheme that had four colleges. In each corner was a college, and some of these could just go out into the neighborhood. It had a central library and auditorium and a few things that were central. I really loved that scheme.

Blum: How was that received by the powers-that-be?

Netsch: Actually, the president thought it was a nice idea. They made a study, but it got defeated on a cost problem. You would have to have a dean in each college. At that time it worked out that the cost for having the four separate universities—I'm not sure it was purely Kosher as an analysis—showed that within ten years the cost of the university would have been eaten up in salaries. I did another one that was an urban trade school kind of scheme. I did another one, the classical buildings, and then the one we did which I call "the drop of water"—you know, knowledge spreading out—and again, we had four areas. We had engineering at one end, we had architecture at the other, we had humanities and social science. We had a three-cornered hat.

Blum: The plan has been described as having a center, as you do—a "drop of water"

with concentric circles.

Netsch: That's the way I described it.

Blum: Yes, with the densest area at the hub?

Netsch: It is in the center, and it all looked in for several reasons: One, I discovered acoustically if I did large buildings at the edge that the sound from the expressway would disappear and the center would be quieter.

Blum: Did you use a computer, your Field Theory? Was that involved in this at all?

Netsch: No. You see, Field Theory came in the second phase. In the first phase I was struggling through "I'm not going to do the Air Force Academy again," and so I really didn't know what these buildings were going to look like. They were rectangular. There was a high-rise, and so forth, but I had no idea what they were going to look like. What really began to put the aesthetics together was the concept of the drop of water, the center, the forum, the exedra. My example was Ephesus and Miletus, the Greek city-states where in the center was the plaza. The people went to school in the plaza, and they went to the library and they went to church. We didn't have a church, but we had a student center. So that was the origin of the scheme, and that's why, of course, I feel so badly about the heart of the original concept being destroyed. And the lecture halls were underneath, you know—the whole thing was all together. That became a study in geometry—how do you put these things together—because it was a nonbuilding. See, I started off with a nonbuilding. That's the easiest way. If you're not a Miesian and you're going to sit down and do a Miesian building, you know your bay spacing is usually twenty-four feet square, and it's going to have exposed structure, and it's going to do this and going to do that. So I started with this concept of the drop of water, and that automatically gave me a nonbuilding in the beginning. Secondly, I decided I wanted to do an urban design, so the first building south was the Science and Engineering Building. It has a big roof, if you notice it. The idea was to build a big roof, then to build a city under it. I talked and talked and

talked about that, this was the beginning, and unfortunately when they did the addition to the south they eliminated the roof and built a building underneath it. But again, it was a search for a contemporary, urban philosophy. How do you build in an urban society? You build a nice big roof, and you do things underneath. You live underneath, out of the weather, and you don't have, really, the sun and the HVAC problems, and so forth. It was really, I thought, a super-radical idea, and it got misinterpreted entirely. The walkways came about through the fact that we were—again, remember I spoke about being designing for 5,000 students at the Air Force Academy—we were to design for 32,000 in the master plan. The real problem was how not to pave the whole area for 32,000 students, so that's where the walkways started.

Blum: The two-tiered walkways.

Netsch: Yes, and then that gave the advantage of having a weatherproof one in the wintertime—or essentially a weatherproof one. Then they also developed this marvelous, simple geometry of—again, with all the experience of technology on the Air Force Academy, we went back to the quarries and discovered we could cut a ten-by-twenty-foot piece of granite, one foot thick, right out of the quarry. The methodology by which we cut it was that we would lift it up, put it on a freight car, and ship it to Chicago. In a sense it was the pyramids without the hundred thousand workers.

Blum: Yes.

Netsch: I mean, it was the machine, and so you took these ten-by-twenty-foot pieces of granite, and they were, therefore, relatively inexpensive. The question was then how to hold them up. What we discovered was that if we put the columns back inside, not at the edge, because the granite itself couldn't hold up—with twenty feet it wouldn't be so easy, so you would put the columns back. Then with Fazlur Khan—it was the one time I worked with Faz—he developed with me this shear head in which the top of the column reached out and grabbed the granite. By making the spans shorter it allowed the slabs

to be stable. Then we put two steel rods connecting each piece of granite, which meant that if a fire truck came along and ran into the wall and it broke, this granite piece was connected to this thing, and therefore it would hang.

Blum: It wouldn't fall?

Netsch: It wouldn't fall on somebody. It was a very carefully engineered thing. This was before the EPA, and so we could design...

Blum: The EPA?

Netsch: The Environmental Protection Agency, so we could design a very handsome, classical railing. We did the bollards with chains that link between. It had three things: one, a young man who worked with me had a father who was an iron worker, and he showed me how to make these chains by bending the chain and simply pinching the end while it was hot. You could then take the next chain and fit it in through the pinch. This little pinch was shaped like that, so in order to take the next one in you had to turn it the other way, and so it was locked in. You couldn't take them apart very easily. So we had a high-tech, low-tech walkway which received international recognition. It was Stanley Tigerman who led the parade of hate against the walkways.

Blum: Stanley was a late arrival. Didn't much of this begin long before him?

Netsch: Oh, no.

Blum: Well, there were articles early on that said the walkways were very cold and windy in the winter.

Netsch: On the top level. You just weren't supposed to walk there in the winter. That's why a street level one was down below.

Blum: Well, they said some things dripped down below.

Netsch: Now that was later. The maintenance at the university was horrendous. Very simple. After having gone through the chapel I wasn't going to go through a problem like that. Every piece of granite had a little cut in it, there was this stainless steel clip put in there, and goop was put in on top of it. There was no reason why reasonable maintenance couldn't have maintained that. I am very defensive about this because it was well thought out, it was designed, and it became a symbol of everything that was CIAM.

Blum: I don't understand that statement. What do you mean?

Netsch: The article in *Progressive Architecture* said, "Why do you follow the principles of CIAM?"—the International Congress of Modern Architecture—and that walkway was the symbol and the idea of selecting a classical idea of the Greek center for intellectual—god, if anything was iconic, it was that.

Blum: The articles that I read, and there were many, said that the students themselves didn't feel a sense of community in any of the places.

Netsch: Climbing all over those exedras in a city? That has to be later.

Blum: They said it was empty—the whole place was empty. It was never used. That's what they said didn't work.

Netsch: I designed very special lighting, and if you went up in the first four years of the university you saw the lighting, and it looked like the brave new world—streaks of lighting coming out. It was beautiful.

Blum: What happened to it?

Netsch: They put up four prison light guards with great big flashing lights that shined down harshly on the granite. Why would you stay there? They did everything they could to destroy an idea. If you ever want to talk about an architecture being absolutely crucified—and they did it on the basis of security.

Blum: This happened four years after it was completed?

Netsch: Relatively soon afterwards.

Blum: Well, crime is an urban problem.

Netsch: The neighborhood fear did start then, but that was not the solution. I wasn't a participant or asked to participate in any of the discussions. I had been isolated from the project.

Blum: After you finished it, you were not consulted on changes?

Netsch: You check the date that Stanley came on board out there. You just check it. You talk to Bob Bruegmann about it. Bob Bruegmann was on the other side of the fence, trying to defend it all along. It was caught in the whole social milieu. Remember, we couldn't get into the Art and Architecture building. There was a riot the day of the dedication. The Fire Department was called. It was said there was a fire there. You've got to remember, this came at a time of a larger upheaval. This project, as well as Yale's architecture school, became the focus of antagonism. I'd be invited to talk over there, and I would walk in the room and people would run up and call me all sorts of names and swear at me and scream at me, and I just had to stand there and take it. The university didn't care. They just let this continue.

[Tape 7: Side 1]

Netsch: Much of what you're reading was about the deliberate social unrest that occurred, and the faculties—I was on the Humanities Board at MIT, and the whole main court at MIT was graffiti from one end to the other.

Blum: Well, there was campus unrest all over, as you are describing.

Netsch: It was all over. So I think you ought to not take the words as straight words,



is what I'm criticizing you for doing. You're saying, "I read that this and this and this." You didn't read behind why it said that.

Blum: That's why I ask for your response.

Netsch: Well, you got it, because this was a whole part of revisionist time, and it's now the gospel out there. This is the gospel word, that this happened. It did happen, but it was not a nice time. It was not a nice time for me, personally.

Blum: To be a campus architect?

Netsch: That's right. Here is something that went from being one of the great experiments and turned out to be filth and shit. That's what Stan Tigerman called it, "shit."

Blum: In your opinion—not Stanley's—was it a success?

Netsch: It could have been. It could have been. It also got caught in the whole dynamics of the program where the faculty came on board and wanted to make it look like Urbana.

Blum: Do you mean more traditional? Is that what you mean by "like Urbana?"

Netsch: Yes, that's right. The philosophy department wanted their philosophy building, and so wanted their thing, and there were major battles on funding between Urbana and Chicago. If you want to do a major study as the great French historians do on this university, you have to review what was happening in terms of academic philosophy, what was happening in terms of lack of spine of faculty members during the student unrest, which was a national problem. You have to understand the role that the Black Panthers and the Weathermen played in Chicago in terms of organizing.

Blum: Were they a problem on campus?

Netsch: Not by name. See, you're being very pragmatic. You're taking a word. I'm talking about ideas.

Blum: What was in the air at the time?

Netsch: That was in the air, and if you're a young student, that's in the air. I mean, I would have perfectly sensible people come over and want to interview me about the campus, and before we got going, in about forty-five minutes, all on tape, I would suddenly discover I was—theoretically they thought they were setting me up for a tape that they could replay back at the university. That was in the School of Architecture. It was a very difficult time, a really difficult time, and, of course, as you know, the proof is in the pudding. Stanley Tigerman built a building six inches from Art and Architecture's expansion plan. When they canceled the building, the double helix didn't work. It was a circulation diagram. For ten years I've explained how they could clear one staircase in there. They could make it out of wood, and you could join the helixes and it would work. But they preferred to live in their own anger.

Blum: Are you're talking about what's happening now?

Netsch: I'm talking about the last twelve years. They preferred to live in their own anger. No, I think now today they really understand a little more, but the damage has been done. Art and Architecture was really a very important building.

Blum: You began the first phase and the Art and Architecture and Behavioral Science buildings followed.

Netsch: That, I built the whole building.

Blum: But there was a phase two.

Netsch: A sequence of buildings.

Blum: And there was a shift. I don't know if this was based on the demands of the staff or whether it was just a change in educational methods, but in the first phase it was pointed out that you grouped buildings by functions—the lecture building, the library.

Netsch: Yes, for the central services.

Blum: Yes, and in the second phase each of these functions was placed in the building devoted to a specific discipline. Why did that happen?

Netsch: It varied. Behavioral Science, which was primarily a lecture subject, had as its focus the lecture rooms and many fewer classrooms. But it did have the faculties in with the school.

Blum: Instead of being separated in their own building.

Netsch: Instead of being separate, yes. The Art and Architecture functioned around the concept of the studio, and the studio functioned around the actual design we set up at 22 West Monroe.

Blum: Your own studio?

Netsch: Our own studio. We set it up as a mock-up for how to do an architectural studio. The fact that there were no windows was a function of working with Coenties Slip and all these people who had all the windows in the world, but they worked at night. My artist friends didn't want the impact of stray shadows and stray-this-and-that.

Blum: So you brought that idea to your design for Art and Architecture?

Netsch: All of these ideas came out of what I was experiencing, and I thought I was bringing these things to the university as fresh ideas. We also had terraces at Art and Architecture, to go out and sketch and work and draw. We had this

amazing thing that the way this double helix grew at the thing. If you were walking down you would walk down one floor onto the tabletops of the next floor, and so forth. It was all designed dimensionally. It was the first building that had brick stripes in with block. It predated the Postmodernists—their pseudo-Romanesque thing—so each of those buildings was very different. The Science and Engineering Building addition on the south was done very simply based on very complex things about high-tech laboratories, and they were the source. We built an atrium there. It was an atrium which, in a sense, kind of went back to MIT, to me, where we had an atrium where we could go out and smoke a cigarette and talk and then you'd go back into your laboratory, into your little world. So the design of each of them had a physical form based on the philosophy or the methodology of the teaching program.

Blum: And that meant moving all the services, all the functions and the staff, into the one area.

Netsch: The high-rise is only Humanities. You've got to remember, the only place we put the faculty separate was in the high-rise. And we thought that architecture professors were humanists who would choose to have a drafting table out in the drafting room. They would not have to have an office with a name on the door.

Blum: Did they agree?

Netsch: Obviously, they didn't. The building was accepted and built, but there was a strong minority against it. I'll agree that Stanley wasn't the first to object, but he certainly maintained the rhythm, and he took over the responsibility for the building and then trashed it. I knew we were in for trouble when I was not allowed to design the furnishings for the building which would express the philosophy. Dolores Miller built those terrible lockers, if they stick around, which were the most hostile addition to any physical environment that you could possibly create. Now we have people who really enjoy the building. I've had professors invite me out and I've had students have me

out, and they love the building. Now it isn't a hundred percent against the building. It's now being rediscovered, but it's late to rediscover it.

Blum: The Art and Architecture Building was finished in the sixties?

Netsch: It was finished at the time of the social revolt because I said they sent the fire department. In the sixties, yes. In fact, wasn't the campus finished in 1964?

Blum: I thought 1967.

Netsch: The first part.

Blum: Well, it seems that the University of Illinois building program went on into the seventies.

Netsch: Oh, yes, but again, we had to get a class in that was out at Navy Pier. We had a timing problem. We had to build enough facilities. That's why Art and Architecture came in the second phase, because we didn't have to do a specialized, professional building, and Behavioral Science, being a lecture thing, could use the lecture rooms.

Blum: Did you use the Field Theory for the second phase because the buildings demanded it or you had a personal need to explore it? How did this work?

Netsch: Well, as I told you, I was looking for how I was going to practice the rest of my life, and the forum and the walkways and the big roof had geometric elements in them. They really synthesized in our discussions of the idea of Art and Architecture. What was justified in my mind by the most amazing scientific discovery of the twentieth century, and our ability to honor it in form, was absolutely denied by the staff and the faculty. I never understood it. That's the double helix. Crick's double helix is the thing that has changed the whole world—medicine, the body of the future. And so, being able to design the building on the basis of the double helix—historians eventually will discover it. If I can make my computer work, it's one thing I want to go

into to have people understand what we were really doing, because the double helix worked as an architectural event. And I was using a twentieth-century form, just as the Gothics used the shape of the cathedral to express the form of religion, or the Romans used in the shape of the basilica, or the Greeks used in the form of the temple. I got to really understand how seminal Art and Architecture is, and that's why I get so mad at Stanley because I know he knew that. It was so Freudian. If you can destroy the father—I was godfather for his first son. Did you know that?

Blum: I didn't know.

Netsch: We used to dress in a tux, and we used to play Ping-pong every New Year's with his first wife. So you've got to understand that there was a tremendous Freudian event that occurred. Remember, when he left me and went over to work for Bruce, it was the beginning of his change from his Yale days. I helped Stanley get into Yale without a degree, and so I would go back and see Stanley. I met Bob Engman, the sculptor of that piece, and I saw Paul Rudolph at his apartment in New Haven, and all that. You have no idea what a personal, destructive event Stanley pursued. I think it's important that this record show at least my knowledge of what happened. I invited him over and when he saw this house. he said, "Goddamn you, Walter."

Blum: What did he mean, how wonderful or how terrible?

Netsch: Well, it was probably "how terribly wonderful." I mean, here is a Field Theory building, here is an exciting house. It's accepted as an exciting house. For the *Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition* exhibition he wrote me a little letter saying, "I need a couple of old fogies to submit a solution," and I submitted a solution which unfortunately for him turned out to be one of the important solutions. I was one of the few people who used the computer while everybody else was draping themselves with American flags and Post-modernism, or symbolism from the last competition. I used the computer and Field Theory, and made a beautiful drawing. I was never asked by Stanley to participate in any seminar on the subject. My drawing is

published in Australia, in Europe, everywhere as part of the exhibit.

Blum: You seem to have been a great friend of his at one time. When did this falling-out with Stanley occur? Was it a slow deterioration?

Netsch: I don't know. I have no idea. He'll have to go back and consult his conscience. I don't know what part his second wife played in it. I don't know what part his relationship with Bruce played in it.

Blum: Was Stanley actually working in your studio?

Netsch: Yes, he did work in my studio for a while.

Blum: And then he stayed with SOM but moved to Bruce's studio?

Netsch: Yes. We used to walk home together. It was the early times.

Blum: I think he was only with SOM for a short while.

Netsch: That's correct. It was very early. I think the projects like United Airlines, or something like that that we had already talked about, were the kind of things that I was working on. No, it's not a friendship I have any desire to try to restore. The damage was so deep and so thorough. I think part of it was because—it may sound egoistic, but I was the one who kept up a steady, even strain—the search, the search, the search. I went through my MIT experience, I went through my Air Force Academy experience. I had my catharsis on the chapel. I built on that catharsis, and I came up with something called Field Theory, which went way back to Wright and everything, and I kept up a steady search. Stanley went from pillar to post. He went from Yale to Mies, to sinking Mies with that nasty little drawing of Crown Hall—I mean, I wasn't the only person he vilified. I'm not that conceited. But I think that it really upset him that there was one person who honestly believed as an architect in a sense of responsibility, because he interpreted it in an entirely different way.

Blum: Well, you certainly were committed to a different direction.

Netsch: Right. But the interesting thing was, it was not an egoistic direction. Anybody could do it. The reason I got so excited about Field Theory is that I was rediscovering the way the Gothicists used geometry or the Greeks used geometry. I discovered a way that was three-dimensional, was Boolean in the sense of Boolean geometry, and had qualities of ambiguity that I thought were a part of modern times rather than the four square—you know, truth is beauty; that is all you know and all you need to know, that kind of thing. I didn't believe that. It didn't fit my art, it didn't fit my architecture, it didn't fit my music—my Shostakovitch or Prokofiev or even the Beethoven sonatas, which are really radical. No, it was a departure—and needless to say, it made Chicago as my home very complicated. One of the reasons I backed out of the AIA and backed out of everything was that, what was the use of getting involved in the hostility, and what was the use of trying to defend myself. It's not easy to create a new idea. It really isn't. Especially in architecture. I'm sure Mr. Gehry has a lot of enemies for what he does. He is doing very different things.

Blum: Yes. I think Don Ohlson, among others, said that you are responsible for new direction in campus planning and design. Do you accept that?

Netsch: Well, I accept that with the caveat that I accept it as the part of the postwar dream of a new society. I would say that today that is being re-looked at, and so it becomes a base from which people worked. I was able to do a working library at the University of Chicago. Look what I did at Northwestern—a very different solution, building out into the lake and allowing for the edges to grow. But I had an existing campus to work with. At MIT I did a very formal linkage very much like the original campus was done, and the one time Professor Anderson ever criticized me, he said, "Walter"—this is before it was really finally decided—"I think you are making a mistake."

Blum: When you were doing the MIT work?



Netsch: The MIT. He said—and this was in his marvelous Scandinavian—“I think you should build a great, big, one-story building out in the back, out of wood, and let people do what they want until they decide what they’re going to do.” Well, I tried that out on the client, and especially Pietro Belluschi thought I had lost my mind, because everyone was building objects. Actually, I understood what Andy was talking about. In fact, we had one scheme like that for UIC. I tried it. There is a beautiful temple in Japan, Ise, which is rebuilt every twenty years. There are two sites, and they build this beautiful building, and then you rebuild the same building. It was my concept that we should build phase one of UIC on what is the big parking lot primarily to the west of the campus, and that we should find out what people want, and then build the permanent campus in phase two. That would also allow us to get close to the community in doing something, but it didn’t work.

Blum: That sounds like an expensive process.

Netsch: It’s an expensive intellectual process. If we would have built temporary buildings you would have built them at twenty dollars a square foot, or ten dollars a square foot. You would have used prefabrication. It was a nonarchitectural solution. It was part of what the radicals were thinking about in designing the East Berlin University campus. I was not unaware of what was going on in the world. I am not saying I created that concept, but it still is a concept. They used to call it the “Kleenex” concept—you know, you use it and throw it away. It was the time after the student revolt, or in my case, my searching for what do you do on a new campus, in a sense going through all of these different sites? We were in the stage of social change before we even got into the job. So these kind of ideas still have validity.

Blum: You were quoted as saying about the University of Illinois, “I hope this is the last nineteenth-century campus we ever design. Next time I hope to approach a campus as a single system, not a group of objects.”

Netsch: That’s correct. In fact, I am right now working on a concept of urban living,

with the computer, of a single system, which is shopping and living, condos and offices and restaurants, in an area adjacent to Michigan Avenue that would have as its image something that I suppose someone would say goes back to the English technique, Tecton or something, of the fifties. But I'm doing it for entirely different reasons. It's an idea of something which is a step towards building your own house in the sky. It's still a goal. I think the suburbs are the prime statement of what I am talking about. I hated to build the last nineteenth-century university. This spread of houses forever, you know, to me is a sad statement of our relationship to nature. As you can see, this university is as personal to me as the Air Force Academy. It is a less happy experience, obviously, culminating in my unsuccessful effort to save the—I finally realized that they were going to tear down the symbol of the campus. I finally accepted that. I did save the auditoriums because they were in a logical location—you know, they were there. The columns for the walkways are beautiful—the butterfly. To save them I offered to design the most glorious trellis that you could then have the most glorious plants up on top of, and it would be a great humanist statement." The *coup de grâce* to me was the fact that, and it convinced me—Stanley's advice to the management was, "Get rid of the whole thing." You know, there is a statement that has been made that they designed and used these machines to chew up the concrete so that it would be destroyed. It's just like the Holocaust. The bodies were burned. The center of my campus was burned, was ground up. I've got pictures of it. I did a show over at 1756 Gallery in which I showed those machines as dinosaurs, destroying the campus. It used to be a beautiful experience. I used to go out and watch the kids play in the excedra when the lighting worked and it was friendly and all the trees were growing, and it was beginning to become green again. It was one of the greener campuses anywhere. But it was radical, and to some it was wrong.

Blum: Someone made the statement that the architect labors over giving birth to the child, but he doesn't have custody.

Netsch: That's true. He doesn't have custody, and you know that, except over time what is considered custody should not be considered the individual who did

the building, but the concept behind. Why is it we don't destroy a Gothic church? Why did we not really place the importance of the double helix in the whole environment of American aesthetics instead of saying, "I'm going to reproduce Vitruvius," you know, in the Postmodern idiom. The loss of Art and Architecture is really the loss of everything out there. When Art and Architecture was destroyed it was easy to destroy the walkways in the center.

Blum: Was that the symbol for you?

Netsch: That was the symbol for somebody, not for me. I mean, it was a symbol for me, yes, but in a very different way. To destroy it was to—I did a scheme. They asked me if I could put windows in the drafting rooms. I said, "Sure, I could put windows in the drafting rooms. Do you really want them?" So I did a sketch of how you put them on center, because we had all of these drafting tables designed to work in the system. They asked the question but never pursued it with management or anything like that.

Blum: Then why do you think they asked?

Netsch: To either tease me or insult me or something. But I didn't realize that. I took it seriously. In fact, it got so complicated at the east wing of the Art Institute for the school. There was a meeting with the student body and the faculty about windows in the building, and we provided the windows. But the hostility at UIC dragged over into that building. That building works fine. It has the very interesting problem that the board didn't want the building.

Blum: Didn't want that building?

Netsch: They didn't want the school there. They said, "Walter, I hope when you design this building it is easily convertible to galleries." It so happened the site was such that I couldn't do anything else. It was either going to be classrooms or studios or galleries, and they all have the same connotation in terms of basic form, so I didn't have to sacrifice any of their goals. I put the

highly technical thing in a separate little rectangle that worked out fine for the students. But the school has grown so that it hardly exists there anymore. It's in four or five other buildings downtown. They have expanded all over, and so that building is only the symbolic part of the school.

Blum: It has been said—and I wonder if you agree with this—that your application of the Field Theory got easier and more improved as you used it as time went on.

Netsch: Oh, absolutely. I think the growth of an idea is very interesting. This is why Professor Wiggins, with the CD-ROM he is making, is doing the Air Force Academy Chapel and Miami University Museum of Art [MUMA], because MUMA is a very sophisticated version of Field Theory. It's just like any inventive invention. In its first terms, if it has any value, its richness is not understood by the creator. It's been a growth process all along. But I don't find that a difficult problem, because I can show you the first Romanesque church, and I can show you the Cistercian Romanesque churches which came two hundred years later, that all ideas, if they have promise, they have growth and enrichment.

Blum: Did you become more comfortable with it, more familiar with it?

Netsch: Well, I was never uncomfortable with it. It was always a search, so "comfort" wasn't the word. It was a discovery. It was always the excitement of a new discovery. See, we used a phrase of Lou Kahn's, and it's about time we introduce this. Lou Kahn and I used to share one of these lecture platforms together, and we got along, because I said, "Lou, aren't you saying 'know why before know how'?" He always remembered me as the "know-why-before-you-know-how guy," and then I always remembered him because he used to say, in his terms, "the existence will of an idea expresses itself." It no longer becomes you or your ego, it becomes the existence will. Our great faith in Field Theory was that it had its own existence will, and I could do it one way and someone else in the design room could do it another way. The existence will—we call it the EW—and so when we were criticizing a design

we were working out, we'd say, "Is that the true EW of it?" Of course, we got certain things about A and A as a symbolic first. It was like the chapel. It was a major, simple, bold statement. Behavioral Science became more complex. MUMA became more elegant. The little dormitories up—you know, Sunburst Homes, is a great little building. That was the case where Will Rueter and I could really concentrate. Will made major contributions to that; in fact, the client asked him to do the next building. I thought that was fine. I was always sorry that Will never had the opportunity to continue in freedom. The one thing that I had by this time, was independence. If you hired Walter you knew you were going to get a Field Theory building, and it was going to be published. It was going to get yeas and nays. Out at Iowa the buildings were really liked. They didn't have the hostility that existed at UIC, so no one tried to fire me out there. And they're good buildings.

[Tape 7: Side 2]

Blum: Walter, by the time you were well into the University of Illinois you were using Field Theory, and you've used it, as far as I know, ever since. What is the Field Theory, in simple language?

Netsch: I'll try to do it. UIC, of course, was the next big project after the Air Force Academy. It allowed me to explore other directions, and with Will Rueter, primarily. We developed Field Theory on the Art and Architecture building and carried it through on Behavioral Science, and Science and Engineering. This theory was also developed in a very large project called Project Y for the University of Illinois. It's a very beautiful project. It spanned the Congress Expressway. It had five different theaters. It had a drama school and the art school. It had an opera house. It was everything, and the money, hopefully, was coming from the famous aluminum magnate who was married to one of America's favorite actresses who was married to the man who wrote *The Front Page*. One of the major projects in Field Theory was a project called Project Y, and this was established as the grand statement that we were going to do to give an equivalent of Lincoln Center to Chicago. There was a vice-president who eventually became the president of the University of South

Carolina and became very controversial, but at this time he had a connection to the MacArthur Foundation in Florida. And he was a vice-president out at Circle Campus, and they thought he would be able to get the money. Obviously, the chancellor down at Champaign-Urbana who had supported me in Field Theory was not unhappy that I had this opportunity. At the same time, in order to do this there was a lot of discussion on the idea of the performance halls being like the violin to the orchestra, or the piano, or any instrument; that the hall was the instrument of performance. There was a big conference up in Montreal on this. I attended this conference and did a lot of research on the different kinds of spaces, and that's why we did these different performance halls. And so, the scheme essentially took this bridge across the expressway, and you had this big loop—we took out Greektown, and you had this big loop. Don't be so romantic. What do you want to do, put Fort Dearborn back downtown?

Blum: No, but Greektown is a functioning ethnic section.

Netsch: It was not. It was a functioning restaurant section. It still is today, and I'm a great participant of Greektown. But at the same time, Greektown could have re-established itself around having performances every night. And the whole idea was to have a drama school, an art school. It was to put a real urban cast on what they now call UIC. It was all in Field Theory. The drawings are beautiful. Each theater, whether it was an opera house which was done after the La Scala idiom, and there was a linear performance theater, there was a black box theater, there was a traditional stage theater, and there was a thrust stage theater. But they were all individual theaters. It was one of the greatest studies we ever made, and it was also a great chance to show off Field Theory.

Blum: Who hired you to do this study?

Netsch: The university, the vice-president of the university in Chicago and the chancellor down in Urbana. He said there was a possibility that funds would be available, so we did this very secret research on Project Y. That's why it's

given a code name—like the atom bomb—Project Y. We had a very fine drama school surrounding an arena stage, and we had parking. It was a really elegant thought. I don't know where else you could have put it in the city of Chicago with an adjacent academic institution to support it. It was the first time—it was all connected by a covered walk; not a two-level walk, a covered walk, and the ceiling of that covered walk was a whole series of neon and incandescent lights that were computer programmed to be the equivalent of Broadway and at the same time at the theater where the main performance was happening that night, or theaters, there would be an extra event. Now, you know the only place that has ever occurred since is the United Airlines terminal out at O'Hare, and it's a wonderful idea, and I did it back in the sixties. It was a major effort. It had a whole history of theater, the whole history of performance. We developed a great presentation for all this. She saw it, and she was interested in it.

Blum: Who? The donor?

Netsch: The potential donor. The potential donor was the foundation. It was to be done in honor of Helen Hayes, who was a part of the family, but she didn't, have any access to the money. It all fell apart—I mean, the money never occurred, and the project died. But the important thing is that it gave us an opportunity to completely shape a large piece of property in Field Theory, and to do the parking lots in circles, which I had done on Westinghouse in Pittsburgh earlier in my life. It was a major, major application of Field Theory. Now, Field Theory is supposed to be, and is, a geometric and mathematical methodology by which you do nonlinear structures. You don't take a bay, which is, say, twenty-four or thirty feet, and just repeat it ad infinitum, horizontally and vertically. By introducing the diagonal you introduce the ability to change direction. We started off with a diagonal at forty-five degrees. It has since become very sophisticated and can be any degree you want to establish.

Blum: Was this all done on a computer?

Netsch: No, this was all done by patient drafting. These drawings are gorgeous. The only person I know who has even had access to them maybe is Bob Bruegmann. Whether they exist or not, I don't know. The university, I think, stored them and probably threw them away. There was a model, of course, and there are all these studies. And I have slides, of course, of all this. I don't think SOM has many, if any, because it was not a project completed, and since it had all of this secrecy it never became a publicity event. We couldn't use it for promotion or anything like that.

Blum: What part has the computer played in your development of the theory?

Netsch: Well, it's really since my retirement, actually, so I think that *Late Entries to the Tribune Tower Competition* was the first time I ever used it on a building completely. We did use it on North African projects occasionally when the Chicago office was willing to allow some computer time to be spent on my projects. See, this was the heyday of the high-rise, and at SOM they were using it left and right. It works very well for orthogonal—that's the square, ninety-degree spaces. It works fine for orthogonal, it works fine for working drawings, but I was interested in it as a design tool. If you can imagine an opera house like La Scala, with changes in scale of octagonal forms, each box an octagon, changing in size from grand boxes or grand tier to the shape of the auditorium, and the stairways instead of being circular were octagonal, and you went up a few stairs and had a landing and a few stairs, and a landing. It was all very romantic. And so, the buildings in Project Y were really quite something. And there were some linear schemes in which we show that you didn't always have to rotate a square, so to speak. The most important part about it was our training. Sometimes a hip-pocket building becomes a great—it moved Field Theory from what we had actually built at UIC into a very rich theory that we could use on other projects in the future.

Blum: Walter, if you were not doing this on a computer, could you draw all of this by hand? I read about lattices, one overlaid on the other.

Netsch: That's right. A lattice is when you rotate a sheet that has these forms and then



you put another sheet over and you draw it all over again. In fact, you draw it a third time. If you lattice something—say I have this drawing, and I want to lattice it, so I want to do it at that angle.

Blum: So you can layer them.

Netsch: I would do that drawing twice, and then do a third drawing and then do it all over again.

Blum: And make a layer cake out of them.

Netsch: For example, the top layer of Behavioral Science is latticed, and that very important latticing allows the shape of the edge of the building, and we did that in lieu of a cornice. We thought that was a contemporary application of a cornice, or the top of a building, finishing off a building. And so, we were using a classical Renaissance effect, but creating it in Field Theory terms. If you go by the building you will notice that the same form has been just slightly shifted, and it is that shift, that latticing, that makes richness in the form. The important thing was how to do it three-dimensionally. The important thing on Field Theory was, as you know from Art and Architecture, it was extruded. The same shapes came up through the first floor to the fifth floor. But on the library at the University of Iowa, working with Maris Peika, we found a way in which we could have the thing grow three-dimensionally. And as it grew three-dimensionally the outside of the building had angles. It was really about one of the first in which we were to explore the three-dimensionality of the forms, and it's important for that reason.

Blum: So many buildings, as I read through the literature, are cited as the first example of the application of your Field Theory. Which one was it, as you remember it?

Netsch: Well, in the evolution of Field Theory, the buildings that started the mathematical search are, of course, the Air Force Chapel, the Northwestern

Library—those two major buildings—and then A and A was the first Field Theory building. You have to understand there were predecessors to anything. There were Romanesque churches that looked more like Roman basilicas than Romanesque churches when they started out.

Blum: Would you cite A and A as your first application of it?

Netsch: As the first complete demonstration of it.

Blum: A journalist that you talked about yesterday, Mildred Schmertz, has said that your Field Theory is as important as Corbusier's modular and Buckminster Fuller's dome. She raised the issue—and I repeat it to you—why hasn't it become more widely accepted and used?

Netsch: Very simple. It's difficult. Why doesn't everyone use the twelve-tone scale in music? It's difficult. It's a theory. Why doesn't everyone use Frank Lloyd Wright's thirty-sixty diagonal? It's difficult. Why doesn't everyone use Corbu's modular? It's difficult. And everyone who wants to sit down and put a series of boxes together in the orthogonal manner and has been trained to do that all their lives, and most of the buildings they walk into have a corridor and a box and a box and a box—why should they explore the aesthetics of the square root of two? Why should they try to understand the Fibonacci proportional series? All of these are adaptable to Field Theory. So all of these geometric forms which followed from the rotated square, which is simply the square root of two—1.414—and its associated percentages—1,1, and the square root of 2, etc. A young person wrote me about six weeks ago, and I sent him a whole bunch of stuff. He said, "I want to do a Field Theory building." I haven't heard from him since. I think he fell down the well. I mean, he saw how much work it was and where one started. Even on my team, Maris Peika understood it, Will Rueter understood it, Bob Peters understood it. Those three people really were able to work with me and produce Field Theory buildings, and I could depend on them. Oh, Wayne Tjaden, of course. Ralph Youngren never was interested in it. He never really pursued it. It was hard work. I have in front of me two drawings: one which

shows a square and a rotated square, which is not on the forty-five degrees. It's on the third points, and it has an inscribed square that's on those third points which is rotated from the other one which is on the outside. Now, this is called a 3-5-7 figure, and that's because the geometry works out that the original square divides itself three by three, or nine squares. The included square is five by five, and the outside square is seven by seven. The numbering system is that the fives and the sevens are equal in size. They are proportionately different than the three. If you'll notice, I have taken that original figure and shrunk it by one-third. I have taken the square and shrunk it and shrunk it and shrunk it. Now, this scheme is called my Katsura house, which is a sequence of little temple spaces which then form bedrooms on this wing and form a master bedroom on that wing and form the dining room and kitchen on that wing, all around this big central space. Now, that was done on the computer. This came after 1980, after I retired, because it was very difficult to start shrinking and expanding proportional systems easily with just plain pencil work. This other is the chrysanthemum. Now, the chrysanthemum was done while I was in the office. It was used primarily on the library for Sophia University in Tokyo. It, however, was not used in the final scheme because my Japanese associate found it too difficult. And it was a question of having so much personal identity with me that it also developed an identity problem for them. You will find that architects who've got projects in Tokyo at that time got them from American clients, essentially, and did them for American clients.

Blum: Walter, as I look at this it looks to me like, although they are different shapes, of course, the chrysanthemum being round and this one being—I don't know what to call it, but with arms.

Netsch: This is radial, and this is orthogonal. But it has a square and a square, and that's a classic geometric form.

Blum: But it looks to me like the density in the round one is in the center, and the density in the other one is at the end of the arms.

Netsch: Well, that's just mathematically the way I have shrunk this.

Blum: Does it mean anything with regard to planning your spaces?

Netsch: It did, absolutely. I chose to shrink these because the smaller ones at the end became dressing rooms and baths, and I didn't need the same size. Conceptually, when you design any building you envision its use as well as its form, and then they become interactive. I don't know whether you noticed that these things overlap. This unit overlaps, and these were going to be pitched roofs, and these pitched roofs were overlapping and passing through each other, and they were forming the lighting above. It's one of the buildings I shall use if I ever get my Field Theory book done in which I will explain the use of a flat form three-dimensionally, and intersecting planes. Now, all of the things have occurred classically in architecture, but I am applying them to this methodology. Field Theory is a methodology, you see. That form is entirely different from this form. Now, this is an interesting proportion, that every other one is equal to half or one-quarter of the larger one, so there is an A series and a B series.

Blum: So there is an inner ring of petals and an outer ring of petals?

Netsch: No. It means the outer ring and the third ring in are mathematically related. The next ring and the fourth ring in are mathematically related. So there you're beginning to develop the richness of dimension, which drives some architects wild. "Walter, I have a four-foot grid," or "I have a five-foot grid. Why do I want to end up with a building—this is 7, and this is going to be 5.13, and this is going to be 3.5, and all my dimensions are going to be"—this is where the computer began to help. See, I could do all that, and then the computer just prints it all out.

Blum: Today many young people come out of grammar school computer literate. I would think that playing around with some ideas like this would be duck soup for them.

Netsch: Don't forget, it's my fault. I haven't written the book yet.

Blum: I would think that anyone interested in computer graphics would...

Netsch: No, no. All right, look. An architect sits down and looks at this and says, "That's the Katsura house. This is Walter Netsch's Katsura house, and it does these certain things." They'd say, "Why the hell bother?"

Blum: What do you mean?

Netsch: Why go to all this trouble? Why isn't everyone filled with Frank Lloyd Wright buildings? They don't want to go to the trouble that Frank Lloyd Wright did in creating his buildings. It takes genius to create a complex aesthetic idea. All I thought I was doing was carrying on the tradition in Chicago. That really kept me going. Here is a little house I designed, and you will see the chrysanthemum...

Blum: Yes, I see.

Netsch: ...and the different layerings of chrysanthemums, but you will also see some linear aspects of this through the center. That has, if you'll notice, a raised second floor, and you will notice that these are rooms, which have height. The interesting parts about this is that this also had an evolution of the same chrysanthemum layered over this. It's a second layer, which was supposed to be for rose vines to grown on, so you had summer shading with roses. I mean, this is a very romantic building I was planning to design in the slum. My wife thought I was absolutely insane. A young student made this. This end is his addition. That form does not come out of these forms. That's the kind of problem when you have a student that's interested in Field Theory and likes it, but then he's got to put in his little thing. I said, "Well, that isn't the EW of it. That's not the existence will. Granted, let's put on something, but let's bring it out of the field. Let's have it come from within."

Blum: Were you working with him on this?

Netsch: He used to come up to Chicago and stay. When I was over at the studio he would stay there, but he came up from Purdue. He was one of my students at Purdue who I still see often who likes my work.

Blum: Is he pursuing the Field Theory for himself?

Netsch: Again, it's too complicated. And you've got clients. Just imagine, if you were working for Joe Jones, architect, and you came in with a Field Theory building. What do you think the boss would say? "That's not my identity." You've got to remember, if you came in with a Gehry design in the office you'd have the same problem. "Who do you think that is? Who do you think I am, Frank Gehry?" I'll be accused of copying. Most architects would rather be anonymous; this is what Stanley goes after, which is correct—all of these architects who do plain vanilla buildings and do varieties on plain vanilla buildings would rather be into the comparison of "my plain vanilla building is better than his plain vanilla building." I'm not sure we need a world all full of genius buildings. It might be too chaotic. Do you realize what Bruce said to my studio after I left?

Blum: No, I don't.

Netsch: "You're working for me now."

Blum: Oh, to your staff, meaning no more Field Theory buildings.

Netsch: That's right. So, you've got to understand, I'm not trying to sound super-fancy, because when I started off to do this I was explaining what I was trying to do, not repeat myself. You see, I didn't want to repeat myself on the Air Force Academy, and if you look at my Field Theory buildings they do not look alike. You put one up against the other...

Blum: No, they are different.

Netsch: They are very different, and so they do show that it is a system. It's not a particular—it's not like Postmodernists taking the column and making it fat, short or wide, and applying it to a facade. It is a very complicated methodology based on geometry, and, as I say, it's three-dimensional. It's very complicated to make it three-dimensional because our world is designed to be essentially a flat land. We're all flat-landers. You even see people go out and build on mountains. They don't try to go up the mountain, they cut a piece off and level it off and build a building. It's easier. Building my house, I hired a young contractor who seemed interested in it. But it did him in, and me, too, almost. Maybe it was just hard for him to understand, why do things happen? There are some mistakes on the building that were not caught by my friend who worked in the office who was superintending the building but he was not a Field Theory expert, you see. He treated them as straight drawings. So you have to understand that I'm not angry. I, in a sense, preceded Gehry in having buildings which were so unique that you didn't copy them, and so unique that I had clients. I mean, people hired Gehry to do another building. Not every client was new. My new clients were not hostile to Field Theory, and God knows when I went to North Africa the Arabs thought I was rediscovering their world, and I was, because in Arabic mathematical order—you look in the history books on design—every mosque is based on geometry. Now, granted, they came from Hagia Sophia, and I'm not going to get into a debate on where things started, but the whole Muslim culture, because it's nonrepresentational, has to use geometry. So I had a very easy time. The only thing, I did a very complex series of studies on their student housing for the university in Blida, and I used the—what do we call it? We don't call them ghettos in North Africa, we call them—the casbah, of course, is the absolute imposition of a complex, three-dimensional world, because they're usually on hillsides, with their interest in geometry and order, and the collision of these forms where they don't always work. It's not Field Theory, it is Arabic architecture. It was wonderful. But I, using Field Theory, developed a casbah of student housing. You've got to remember, Algeria at that time was a forward-looking, socialist state, and they simply said, "Walter, we don't need that." I showed this scheme to the minister of housing and the minister of education, both trained in America, and to the

project man who was a marvelous Communist, uneducated Algerian who just loved his country and had been an intimate part of their revolution. And they said, "Walter, that's not the new Algeria. We are not going to go back to the casbah. That was when all of us were being compressed by all of you, forced to live in an environment." And so, our housing turned out to be quite different, and we did the scheme over. Our housing, we did a nice booklet in French, Arabic and English, describing the Algerian housing. It got some publicity.

Blum: What was the design like that they did accept? Can you just describe the difference between the casbah version and...?

Netsch: That they did accept? Well, first of all, it was designed on the basis that we knew, and we began to think it over, that Algerians lived with a single light bulb in a single room, and eight or ten people slept there. I'm talking about the average guy coming up from a small town who is dedicated to moving ahead. Algerians aren't dumb. They have been, not militarized, but by the fundamentalist religion they have been really activated into a different kind of person than I had been. But they had certain rituals of being together, so we designed clusters of rooms, about seven rooms, around a little tearoom or a little living room. And they probably worked beautifully on the chrysanthemum. I can't remember whether we used the chrysanthemum or not. We devised the male dormitories around these clusters of units and these towers had staircases outside, and everything. For the women we took the geometry, and we made it into a long, curving, like a quadrangle instead of a tight form. Wayne Tjaden worked with me on these two. They were very different. The men's dorm, those were built. They're in Blida. And we even designed Field Theory tiles for the staircases because tile making was really a part of Blida.

Blum: So you were able to adapt the Field Theory part of your work to the local culture?

Netsch: Absolutely.



Blum: Was that always true?

Netsch: I think I have always tried to adapt my architecture to my local client. If you do a history of libraries I designed before Field Theory, they show that the library for Grinnell is the library for Grinnell. The library for Northwestern is for Northwestern, and Regenstein is Regenstein. They are all very different buildings, and this was for very different academic cultures. But when you talk about the differences with using Field Theory, then you have the differences in form and attitude, but you still have a very strong geometrical end. The Northwestern Library has a strong geometrical form. The Regenstein didn't because the client really did not want Field Theory. I had done some Field Theory studies, and he said, "Absolutely no. We don't want it on this campus." It was a Gothic campus. But it did remind me that, why on earth did I really begin to think back on geometry? Again, my father plays a part in this because, we talked about him being a meat packer and a tough guy and all that—a second-generation immigrant and very proud of his role—but he suddenly during the Depression, 1929, in which we were not as damaged as other people fell in love with Oriental rugs. He had people at Armour, the Armours and the Swifts and their friends and all of them. They were not our friends socially, but they took terrible lickings, some of them did, and they had culture behind them, and they had Oriental rugs. I don't know where our rugs came from, but Father started collecting Oriental rugs, so I began to walk on geometry from the time I was eight or nine years old. I'm sure that plays some part in it because they were beautiful rugs. One of them came from a German palace. They would come to America, and then someone was forced to sell them. They have since been walked on very hard by my sister and her children, and they don't treat them with quite the same hallowedness. Some of ours, I have. I have the smaller ones, in the dividing-up of the family things. I have some of the smaller ones, and they're very handsome, and they are nonrepresentational. Dawn and I added to the collection. Primarily, we added kilims because my father didn't consider kilim an authentic Oriental rug. He was after the real McCoy. I just wanted to mention that.

Blum: Do you think this was a subliminal influence that sort of entered your brain without your even knowing it?

Netsch: Oh, I do, I do. It was just like the music and the piano lessons and the Rachmaninov *Prelude in C# Minor* that I couldn't play well in concert. All of these things, they're structural. Music is structural. The floor was structural. The paintings weren't. The paintings were very emotional. Certainly, the *Spirit of the Dead Watching* by Gauguin and the *Girl in the Mirror*, by Picasso, that marvelous complementary color red, green, thing. It's just an amazing painting. I look at that in awe. I guess you could also say I also looked at—the *Spirit of the Dead Watching* is that pretty, nude woman lying on her belly with the spirit of the dead. I mean, Gauguin was a romantic figure. So they each played a part. I was, unfortunately, what they call one of these "sensitive" kids. I wasn't the town bully. And I had my mother who was so introspective. We sat down and did our Bible lesson every morning together. We read it together, and so I got to know the Old Testament and the New Testament, and that's not without its geometry. That's not without its journey. It's not without its confrontation between right and wrong and moral being. I am what I am because of where I came from, and all of that just got turned into architecture. Whether it's right/Wright—I told you of the Barry Byrne apartment house and its impact on me. The Barry Byrne apartment house was as strong as the Oriental rug, and so they all fit together.

Blum: This is purely speculative, but do you think had you not gone to MIT or a school like MIT that your career would have been shaped in quite the same way?

Netsch: I think it is possible if I had ended up at an Ivy League school, but, as you remember, I said I wanted to go where there was no God. I didn't even want to go to Harvard with Gropius, and I knew who Gropius was. Aalto's arriving at MIT was the accident of the war, and his being a friend of Anderson and Beckwith, getting the Scandinavian connection at MIT.

Heaven knows, he's a more geometric architect than any of the others in that sense of having a complex shape of forms, because he worked with wood. If you work with wood you're inclined, like the Japanese, to do very elegant things with different shapes and forms. I could imagine, but I wasn't like Gordon. I wasn't strong in mathematics. I'm strong in geometry, in solid geometry, trigonometry, but not in mathematics.

[Tape 8: Side 1]

Netsch: It's very important that calculus is a basis because it has limits—you know, to infinity—and it takes you through the mathematics of change. But I didn't understand that because I wasn't doing Field Theory at the time, I was doing those straightforward little buildings that we saw of Morgan Yost. It wasn't until I was in fifth year, that I really began to explore buildings that had some sort of personal identity. I think I was just like everybody else. That was my objection to that brochure of the postwar house exhibition. You can't imagine what a break that was from Royal Barry Wills. You just cannot imagine. And for an architect today in a review to say that it doesn't relate because why wasn't he using Wright as the basis, well, Wright was a nasty word. Wright was that strange man who went off with that woman to Europe and did these crazy houses where the roofs leaked, and all of that. He was not a popular professional model. He was not a model at all, as you know. I even had trouble with Mies when I was on the jury of the Boston City Hall competition.

Blum: What do you mean?

Netsch: Belluschi didn't want to give consideration to any solution in phase one on the competition that was Mies-like. I'm not a Mies man, but I really got angered. Anderson was the professional adviser. Belluschi wouldn't be that personally hostile, he would just see a Mies solution coming up—a Miesian solution, as you all call it—and say, "Too much glass. I said, "Pietro, if I hear that once more I am going to demand of our professional adviser that the glass on all 256 entries is measured to make certain that this is not a

deliberate objection to a Miesian solution." One of the seven finalists was Miesian, and I was just determined that we were not going to have that kind of attitude. It was a sort of an Eastern attitude. Bill Wurster was on the jury, and so Ralph Rapson, and I had the second choice as our choice and not the first choice.

Blum: You've described what the Field Theory is, where you think it came from, what shaped it, what the needs were. We're sitting in a room with four of your computers right here. Where is it going from here, in your opinion, for you?

Netsch: I am hoping, and the reason for all of these computer screens, is to have, first of all, some physical peace. This has not been a good year for me physically, and that impacts my capacity to work with other people. I could come down here at two o'clock in the morning, but I can't call someone else up to come down here at two o'clock in the morning. Also, I've got to find someone who is computer literate, and I mean computer literate. Our geometries are not simple, and even if you work with Form Z, which is the software I prefer to use, it's a devil of a lot of work to put all these figures accurately on the screen. I do them, but I do not do them accurately. I do not spend the time to be sure each point is on each point, because I am interested in exploring the theory, not in producing a precise diagram. When we take a break I will open up the machine and I will show you something I am working on. It's not rich enough yet, and I know where it could be much richer from my simple drawings.

Blum: You mean the program is not rich enough?

Netsch: The ideas presented on the machine are not rich enough. I need an engineer, who I do have, that will come visit me. Next week I'll have my friend come over and talk engineering with me, and then I may be a month away from hiring someone. My sculptor friend, who teaches at Columbia, has forgotten he is supposed to be getting me a Macintosh-computer-literate student that I can hire at a reasonable rate. This student has got to start off with no

knowledge of Field Theory, essentially, although my friend uses Field Theory in his classes. He gives people a Field Theory shape and says, "Design a restaurant." He makes them explore the multiplicity. Other architects, other teachers, could give them a couple of boxes and say, "Put a restaurant in there," so he already does that. But that doesn't help me with what I want to do.

Blum: So you want someone to use your computer, work with you, and explore some of your ideas?

Netsch: Yes, and there are four houses I want to use, two of which you just saw this morning, and the one that is published in *Inland Architect*, the Silver Petals, which has been fairly well developed on the computer. Perhaps I can pull that out of this machine for you so you can see what we have there, or some of it anyway. And the fourth house is my 21<sup>st</sup> century house that I have been working on—my greenhouse, I call it—responsive to nature and products and energy.

Blum: Environmentally correct.

Netsch: Environmentally perfect, or as perfect as you can do.

Blum: Do you expect to build any of these houses—actually construct them?

Netsch: Silver Petals was to be built, and it wasn't till Dawn decided to run for comptroller that I realized we couldn't build and have her run for office—we had to make a decision—plus the fact that the Nature Conservancy also fell in love with the same site I fell in love with. I only wanted to buy thirty acres, and they bought ninety-five acres plus the existing buildings on this lake, Lake Lulu, up in Wisconsin. That house was all ready for working drawings. It was a prefabricated house. It was to be landed. It was not to be built on the site, so environmentally you would come in and build this steel frame on twelve-foot module, and then everything else would be dropped in place. It's a little bit like my house here. It was square, except all hell breaks loose on

the inside, plus, because I am not restricted in the site, it protrudes in four different directions in accordance with the environment of the site. And so, it's a very beautiful house.

Blum: It's got a very romantic name, Silver Petals. Where did that come from?

Netsch: Well, that piece of sculpture you see—it's me. Chrysanthemum, Silver Petals, Katsura, they all come out of my life. Some people accuse me of being a very romantic guy, and some people accuse me of being Frank Lloyd Wright-ish. But I'm not a tough pragmatist—no, I am not.

Blum: Walter, you have talked about the Field Theory, and maybe one of the examples closest to your heart is your home, where we're sitting right now. Would you tell the story of how this unusual house came to be, and why?

Netsch: Surely. I would also add that this house would be included in my book—see, I'm trying to write an electronic book on Field Theory by doing these examples. You will see I have kept a diary of what I'm working on over there as a try-out of how voiceover would work with the drawings. But the house occurred because when we were married, we were living at 20 East Cedar, and it was full of art. Dawn loved it. She could leave the laundry downstairs, and someone would pick it up. And the cleaning would arrive, and no one had to clean anything. No one had any grounds to work, and the car was in the garage. Dawn had lived on the second floor at 1350 Lake Shore Drive, had no car, lived in the lowest floor with the cheapest rent, right over the marquee, and she was now living in style. She had run for the constitutional convention and got tremendous support—one of the blue ribbon candidates—and had done a tremendous job on the Constitution, and her world was up. And she was teaching at Northwestern, or about to, and life for her was what she really wanted. We were two professionals, and I was busy with my life. Well, they decided to make 20 East Cedar a condominium, and I said, "Dawn, you like a constituency. I don't. I don't want someone calling me up at two o'clock in the morning and saying, 'The toilet doesn't work. What do I do? The elevator is out. How am I going to get into my

apartment?’ and so forth.” Being an architect in the building I would therefore be knowledgeable about everything, just as her voters think she is knowledgeable about everything. And I said, “Not for me,” so I began looking for a piece of property. I found this property, which was an empty piece of property. It had to be empty. I wasn’t going to tear down anything traditional. Secondly, it had to be affordable, and thirdly, it had to be in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Ward, which was Dawn’s ward, or the 43<sup>rd</sup> Ward, whichever number it was at that time, so it would be politically viable for her. I found two lots. I had a real estate person look for it, and I found this lot, which is forty by seventy-five feet, empty. It actually had a building on it that mirrored the apartment building across the street, which has a turret and looked like the entrance to the community, which it did. The lady, who was afraid of the neighborhood becoming black and was Jewish and was concerned about the attitude certain blacks had towards Jewish people, completely tore her building down so it couldn’t be reused and had the lot for sale and moved to Skokie. The second lot was farther west where all the fancy houses are being built now because it’s not a historic district and you can do anything you want. That was a fifty-foot lot, fifty by one hundred twenty-five feet, and it was only \$20,000. This one was, as I said, forty by seventy-five feet, much smaller, and it was \$32,000. It was west of Sedgwick, so that was the reason the price was so low. This area was considered dangerous. The high school was all black, and people were...

Blum: What year was this?

Netsch: Early seventies. We bought the lot a couple of years before we moved in. But I knew that Dawn wanted to stay as close to Lake Shore Drive as she could, and so going west of the next major street over from Sedgwick, Larabee, was out of the question so I didn’t even think of the two. Also, I watched, as I sat on this site and just parked the car, I watched the police cars come by very often. They were, of course, protecting St. Michael’s, and so St. Michael’s was always under surveillance. You’ve got to remember, Larabee, west of here, had been torn down. Larabee Street had been absolutely torn down, like later on everything was torn down for the Carl Sandburg development. “Urban

removal” some people called it. So Larabee was vacant, and this was a vacant lot, and Ogden had been closed. I was traveling all over the world doing buildings, Saudi and Australia, and when I traveled I would sit and work on airplanes and do designs. And I thought originally of doing a design that would have two units in it—a small unit so that someone would be here in case Dawn wanted help. We weren’t used to neighbors. We had no idea that there was such a thing as real neighbors. In apartment houses you are anonymous. When you are on the eighth floor in a duplex you have only one neighbor across the hall. Earlier Dawn mentioned a movie actress, Patricia Neal, because Dawn remembered that Patricia Neal was one of my loves from the movie screen. Other people liked Lana Turner, I liked Patricia Neal. She once visited us from across the hall. Our neighbor knew that I liked her, so we met her. Big thrill. So anyway I would do these different houses, and gradually I really didn’t like the idea of having two units. I actually finally got the idea for this house—they were all being done with Field Theory, but much more complex. I finally decided on the forty-foot cube. I had an apartment building on one side and streets on the other two, and there was a very old, scrabbly house just north of us, run down. My father would have been appalled if he had known I’d bought this lot. He would have thought that I had lost my mind. But I was sitting in Eero Saarinen’s beautiful airport at Dulles with my squared paper, working away, waiting for a plane to Chicago, and the initial idea came to me of the diagonal through the cube. If you notice, the house is the diagonal through the cube. And that started the evolution of movement, the spiral movement of the diagonal through the cube, because once you start you are moving up, and it came very quickly. All you need is something to create a real spark, and then all sorts of potential ideas occur. I don’t mean the house looks like those first sketches, but it did start off that way. And with the rotated square and the bay window poking out the front and back, and lopping it off on the sides, but it established the pattern for the roof, and the roof pattern reinforced the diagonal, and the reinforced diagonal reinforced the plan, and then the idea of the levels occurred. That came out of my Yost background. If I went down two feet it was very economical, so I went down two feet and then up five—up three and then up; yes, up five gave me the floor-to-floor height



between—I wanted ceilings high enough, even on the lower floors, to put paintings in. And the paintings, of course, were the object. I needed wall space to look at, and the diagonal became a great shape for a room. At 20 East Cedar we could come in our house and never see the living room because you could cut off and go to the bedroom or the kitchen. And so I was determined that this time we would go through the living room because a lot of paintings were going to be in it, and we wanted to see that we were living with art. The first *Living With Art* exhibition at Iowa was done when we were still at 20 East Cedar. That's how the house started, and it just sort of grew. Then I said, "It's going to be a high-tech house." I had this great idea that I would build the house structurally—this is after the chapel and the tetrahedrons—so I was going to use exposed steel trusses—you know, beams—as vertical columns, four feet on center or three feet, four, on center—whatever the square root said at that point. They were to come up and meet the rafter above so you had this gridded cage you were living in. And the paintings would be mounted on the front of these things, and it would be just terrific. The outside was to be a preformed Smith wall, which is aluminum on the outside, aluminum on the inside, and all full of foam core, so it was good insulation. Then the windows do like they did at the corner—the skylight came down and the window came right down to the ground as it does in the southwest corner. It was beautiful. We did whole set of drawings, very incoherent drawings as we were finding our way. They were really complex drawings. We put it out for bid, and it came in at \$125 a square foot.

Blum: What was the going rate for residential?

Netsch: About forty or fifty dollars a square foot. But \$125, and I said, "Why can't I do this house for twenty-five dollars a square foot? I'm using all standard parts out of Sweet's catalog." And the contractor said, "You're absolutely right, and I can do it for twenty-five dollars a square foot if you will build five hundred." I said, "Oh, I get you." He said, "You've got to, therefore, use what everybody else uses—concrete block, brick, patio doors, double-hung windows, and so forth." Well, I wasn't going to use double-hung windows, and I remembered that Lou Kahn had this block which is in squares.

Blum: Concrete block?

Netsch: Well, it's an eight-by-sixteen block, but he has an extra line down the middle which converted eight by sixteen to eight by eight, because Lou liked squares and cubes like I did. When he wanted a concrete block wall he didn't want to have to look at that rectangle. So I could use his block and an air space in the brick on the outside. Then I decided that the patio doors looked about the same as paintings, so I used the patio doors everywhere in the house. They were cheap, inexpensive, and they were the shape of paintings, so the view out was a painting. Whether it was the ginkgo tree or the neighbor's back balcony or the street, it was a scene through a window. The other thing that I developed is the plumbing core—going back to my economy days of houses with Yost, my plumbing is stacked, the bathrooms are back to back with the kitchen and the downstairs bathroom below the upstairs. So the cost for all of those things was very small. And then there is a great cube in this house. It's not just two layers of nine-foot ceilings with a roof. That's forty feet high at the bottom of the staircase downstairs to my study, so there is tremendous volume in there. It came in at thirty-four dollars a square foot, so we built it. As I say, it was difficult for the contractor. I had to fire him, and I had to sue him because I found out he was using my money to build something else. He was a young guy who was always behind, so with one job he was buying stuff for the job ahead—he would be robbing Peter to pay Paul. It's the story of life, sometimes. So we went ahead, and it took longer to build. No one had ever thought of using a crane to put these major beams in. You rent the crane and you put them up in a day. I did some nonstandard things. All my rafters meet all my others on point. They don't rest on anything. My structural engineer had to design metal clips. He did a good job at solving these fairly unique problems, for a house. We got the house finished, but it finished late so we had to move from 20 East Cedar to the Churchill, and we had to disperse our artwork among our friends. Some pieces never came back. Another time we exhibited our collection at the University of Iowa. I had luck at Iowa with my client. I would go visit the museum, and they were glad to have the collection. We gave a major painting—two major paintings to them,

two Smiths, so we're listed as major donors over there.

Blum: This is a very unusual house, with no doors in the house, how does this work for you?

Netsch: How does the house work for us? Oh, it works for us fine.

Blum: You don't miss the doors?

Netsch: Heavens no—in fact, the only problem I was having with the building code is that the bedroom had no walls. The bedroom isn't separate. You walk into the kitchen, or you walk into the extension of the living room, or you peek through into the living room. I said, "Well, I'll build string walls, if you really want them. I'll run a string up to the ceiling and a string over, then there is the shape of a door, three by seven feet. You can walk through that string opening if you want to." I was being haughty. I had a pretty good reputation by then, you see, so no one was going to touch me. City Hall didn't touch me. And there are no handrails on the edges, and there are no handrails on the stairs, except the single handrail. And the diagonal stairs going down, of course, were a preview of what I was going to do at the Art Institute, and the triangular living room was a preview of what I did at Miami of Ohio for the art galleries. Things that I knew or had thought would work and did work for us were then applicable other places.

Blum: Was this an exercise in experimenting with some ideas and seeing how they worked?

Netsch: Of course. I finally got Dawn to sit down and look at the plans, which she couldn't understand. The only thing she said was, "There is no closet in the kitchen." A closet for a broom, light bulbs, or what have you. And so I had to sit down and redo that corner. I redid that and that allowed me to do that dressing table bathroom for her, so it came out positive.

Blum: If you were going to do this house today, would you make any changes?

Netsch: No, that to me is what is known as the ludicrous question everyone asks. "If you were going to do this over, what would you do differently?" Of course, I would do the whole thing over differently because I am a different person today.

Blum: How would you rephrase the question?

Netsch: Let's say, What have I done to the house since we built it? We added the gazebo on the roof of the garage.

Blum: Oh, what else have you done to the house?

Netsch: We took out the bay window in the front as it was a rotated square and added that new chrysanthemum bay window with the little stainless steel trusses. We added the chrysanthemum field in both of those additions to the rotated square. So you see an enrichment of the first idea with the chrysanthemum, which was simply the rotated square with the emphasis on the diagonal.

Blum: Is it because your development in the Field Theory took you into the chrysanthemum form?

Netsch: Right. In fact, the chrysanthemum was such an ideal thing for my Japanese client, only they kept saying, "It's an eight-point chrysanthemum for the emperor." I said, "We'll use a twelve." It gave us more flexibility. We had more choices. There is a lot of difference in choice between one out of eight and one out of twelve. We designed a very beautiful building that was never built. See, some of these things have been recorded on slides and drawings and, in some cases, films, and all of this is able to go onto a compact disc. Now with Glen Wiggins coming here, doing a CD-ROM on Field Theory, I may have a connection that I can use if I can understand what he is doing and I can be supplying material to him. I don't have to be the author of this compact disc, but I can supply the information.

Blum: Explain a little bit about what he is doing.?

Netsch: He is putting the Air Force Chapel, which is an early, pre-Field Theory building, and Miami of Ohio, which was the last building I did as a partner in the firm, which is a sophisticated, horizontally and vertically, Field Theory building, and so he uses the two of them. They are also one-story buildings. They're easy to perceive.

Blum: And the point of the CD-ROM is to demonstrate a Field Theory development?

Netsch: He is doing an educational CD-ROM. He has already done a film on me, using some of my work, and he is very interested in Field Theory as a legitimate aesthetic statement. He is uncluttered by Chicago attitudes, being an Easterner, and he has been very happy to work with me. I saw the library of my friend Lou Kahn on CD-ROM to see how he approaches that, and that will give me some ideas for disciplining myself to the rigors of this computer, which has no discipline. That's really what my program is. I have about a three-year—I'm trying to last till the year 2000. I do want to see the millennia. I have done a lot of research on millennia, which we don't need to go into, in terms of philosophy and social change, and physical attitudes in our Western culture.

Blum: Walter, you said you had an afterthought about a question I asked before and that was, What would you do differently in your house if you were building it today?

Netsch: Well, it really isn't doing it differently, it's getting a different visual image. Remember I told you our last opera was *Così fan Tutti* in London at Covent Garden, and it was with costumes by Armani. I said if we had to come home here, and Dawn had Armani clothes, I'd have to get rid of all of the paintings and paint some white. Well, I painted the walls all white and the floor white, then I began to think this morning, lying in bed, that all I have to do is to put

this big, white fabric on all the walls, just like Armani did on the set, just to please himself. And so, I envisioned a machine up at the top. I'd press a button, and all of these white walls would fold down, all the paintings would close, and the windows, and we'd have just the skylights and this white wall, and it would look very chic and very modern and very different. You could throw colored floodlights on it, just like you do in the theater, you know, and the white walls become all sorts of things. So it is possible with this kind of a house to develop a very theatrical look, if you wanted to. Not that this isn't, but it's a different kind of theatrical look. That's because I've been thinking about some things I am working on. But I thought you would be interested. That's the way I would think about doing it. I'm not talking about doing it over, just how would you give it a different image.

Blum: Is it the influence of the past weekend that brought this to your mind?

Netsch: Probably seeing operas again. The stages were very limited sets, and the settings weren't really important. They worked hard to use them, but they weren't really that important. We talked about social significance. Part of it is, you know, I said I had known a woman at MIT who was very much involved with social conscience, and her ex-husband had been a Communist labor organizer. We were coming out of the Depression, going into the war, and so things were important. Certainly, when Aalto came to MIT he had everybody doing little plywood houses with four-by-eight modules; again, houses that could look more like the things we did for Morgan Yost, and certainly again in the modern idiom. Simple shapes, you know. The four-by-eight plywood was not Mr. Wright. It was the modern movement and was reflected in materials and techniques. But it also related to the poor. The competitions that were done at the time were for postwar housing which were for every man. Ralph Rapson was winning them left and right, and so was Charlie Eames. Oh, I saw Shirley Genter again over the weekend. I hadn't seen her in years. She came up from Santa Fe to go the opera. Skip Genter was an important personage in PACE Associates, and so it was great seeing her again and remembering Skip. It reminded me also of the fact that he was interested in a direct means when he was teaching at IIT.

Blum: He was interested in what?

Netsch: Direct means. I was thinking of the phrase. And we went up and watched the dam being built in New Hampshire, I told you—the social change of the countryside, and we saw Gropius’s house being built, which was modest and direct. Nothing flamboyant or elitist about it at all. It was his interpretation of a New England house. It was great to see those. It could be an interpretation of a New England house as a young architect. So with all of that as background, and then my thesis at the end of the fourth year on how you would redo social housing in South Boston. Then my fifth-year thesis on the house and its response to change in life styles and growth, and using storage as the focus of the change, because the accumulation of items in our society is a reflection, mostly, of America rather than any other society. We are a consumer society. I was prescient on that without being very knowledgeable about it. So all of those things related. And then working at Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge was a social experiment. You can go up and see the Tennessee Valley Authority housing. It’s a social experiment, my first real job outside of Morgan Yost. And so all of these sort of establish, you might say, a vocabulary of the mind. Then the Yost houses themselves, the little houses we did, and then we came across two major things. One, of course, was my concern over public housing and when they were redoing Pruitt-Igoe, and the other one is little St. Matthew’s Methodist Church down here in Cabrini Green, another public housing project and a church. Those were two, and in both cases I had to convince the firm that it was a reasonable thing to do, because it hardly was the scale of a planning project or the size of a little church wasn’t exactly typical of SOM new projects at a Monday morning meeting.

Blum: Well, you know, it must have been quite memorable for Nat Owings when you brought Pruitt-Igoe to his attention because in his book he wrote, “One day Walter called me at Big Sur. He had a job to resolve the repressions of a depressed area in St. Louis to begin an on-site renewal of blacks in the central core. He said with a voice filled with excitement and emotion, ‘But this job

cannot be charged on a commercial rate. How can we do this within SOM?"  
And he goes on to say that it was subsequently taken on as a research project.

Netsch: Well, that's Nat's theory of how it was taken on.

Blum: And yours?

Netsch: Well, actually, I'll tell you what happened. At the Monday morning partnership meeting in Chicago, which at that time was probably Bruce and Bill...

Blum: This was the early seventies.

Netsch: Yes, so it would be Bruce and Bill. Bruce and Bill, I think sometimes, whether it was to keep me out of trouble or to please me on something I wanted to do as compared to something they wanted to do—I explained the program to them. I wanted to use, of course, the black personnel we had. Charlie Duster and my friend Dave Sharpe from IIT, Professor Dave. Both of them were really experienced in the inner city. We talked about it, and then we decided we'd better put a team together. The team I put together consisted of the famous anthropologist at the time, about bubbles and personal space. He was the hot writer. I found some young community researchers from Detroit, right out of the ghetto, working on another project in Detroit or Twin Cities. And then an economist from Baltimore that we had known from the Baltimore project, a socially interested economist. There were about fifteen of us by the time I put the whole team together. We made the written presentation on who we were, and bios and pictures.

Blum: Who did you present this to?

Netsch: It went to the public housing agency in St. Louis.

[Tape 8: Side 2]



Netsch: We had very strong support from the community group, the people from Pruitt-Igoe, that were also involved in evaluating the proposals.

Blum: Let me step back for just one minute. Was this an open competition, or were you invited to make a presentation?

Netsch: No, it was a public announcement. We wouldn't have known about it. And so, we submitted. I don't know how many they got, but it was down to four and then down to two. I don't remember who they were. Oh, we also hired the city planners who worked on Pruitt-Igoe originally because they would give us background that we didn't have, and they were also St. Louisans. We made the presentation to the community group and to the housing agency, and we were selected as finalists. We heard by the grapevine that we sort of won, sixteen to nothing, from the community staff, but we didn't do so well with the CHA people. Well, this team was a pretty radical team. We're talking about going to Pruitt-Igoe. We said we wanted to work there, we wanted to hire people. After you were selected then came the financial arguments. We presented a very low fee. I didn't know it, and I am no bargainer. That is not my specialty. They thought of all sorts of reasons and things, and the price kept coming down and coming down and coming down. Finally, I was really worried. I was determined to get the job, even if we did it for nothing.

Blum: Why? What compelled you?

Netsch: Well, look, here I had David Sharpe and Charlie Duster, who was the grandson of Ida B. Wells, and the whole history of the housing projects in Chicago at my right-hand side. And I had Bob Hutchins who later on after he left Skidmore became a preacher, a minister, so it was a highly socially responsive group. Then we had all these wild, sixties-type people for teams. Actually, I didn't really offer all of this at once. It was a bargaining chip each time. We would do this, we would do that. Finally, one man who was really for me said, "Your bottom-dollar price is \$150,000, and you will hire three people and you will work at the site immediately." I said, "Sure. That's what

we said all along.” So I went in and said it, and we got the job. It was nowhere near covering expenses, because, well, then we flew down and it didn’t cost very much. For the famous movie that we did on Pruitt-Igoe I drove the Porsche down, and we filmed with our cameras the famous planning and the master plan and the model and the blowing-up of the buildings, all from the back of the Porsche or from empty apartments around the site. It was a very exciting time.

Blum: What was your plan? You were going to destroy the tall buildings?

Netsch: We really didn’t know, when we started, but we found out. You’ve got to remember, this was the seventies. The site plan was dreadful. It really was. It was this bar of tall buildings, just one right after the other. They took great pride in the fact that on the longest winter day the shadow would just go up to there on each building. So there was sun in these buildings, but they were grim—long, grim buildings. They had all been shuttered with actual steel plate and welded on the first two floors.

Blum: For safety?

Netsch: Because people were using them for drug houses and houses of ill-repute, the first two lower floors. They finally just sealed them off, so they were eugenically clean. Anything we could do with them we could do with them. But we had the experience—now, let’s think about what my models would have been. Well, my models were point towers and low-rise housing in Finland, the Finnish public housing. The Swedish public housing came out of my past from MIT. It came out of an understanding that these were highly successful, they were beautiful, and they were a combination of high- and low-rise. Fortunately at this same time there had been the competition for Operation Breakthrough, and Operation Breakthrough had developed concepts of low-rise housing which could be built for about \$40,000, or even \$30,000, and one entrant was from Missouri. So what we envisioned was to take Pruitt-Igoe as a great, big three-quarter-mile-by-three-quarter-mile area and make it into seven different little communities—complete little

communities—and that we would convert the high-rise buildings to point towers. The idea was to blast down and cut away half the high-rise, you see. We developed a scheme that then we would have two of these buildings, high-rises, left sitting there. They had a little break in them, occasionally.

Blum: So you would have a slim tower.

Netsch: A slim tower with windows all around. We often left the first two floors at the bottom for townhouses, to be redone with separate entrances. Then surrounding this would be all these new townhouses, and then we would blow up the other buildings that were in that area and make little mountains. Because this was flat land we'd make little hills which divided one community from the other. So you would have this site plan—which is a movie and was, I think, printed; I have the booklets—that we prepared, and all the studies—the social studies. But the wonderful thing that we discovered in working which got us so excited and pleased, we were doing housing which could be done. It would amount to the units in the existing Pruitt-Igoe that could be sold for about \$3,000—a good starter house; a real starter house. The only thing was, the government, which they are now doing but they wouldn't do for me, it was our idea to cancel the indebtedness. If you had to blow up the buildings why don't you cancel the indebtedness, because what are you going to pay the debt off on? Because if they agreed to blow up the buildings, then they agreed to blow up the debt, in essence. Well, they wouldn't do it—they said they wouldn't—and so that, of course, made our \$3,000 number much different.

Blum: More?

Netsch: But it was a really exciting plan. The thing that made it so impressive was that the middle-class blacks had not then left St. Louis, and there was nothing done with style and substance that would simulate Clayton or Kirkwood or Webster Groves—I don't mean in the complete sense of the word, but these would be these little suburban units. Well, now they're all over the country, but they were based on redefining public housing as a form. We did all our

research. We had many funny episodes. The young black community group was really even more naïve than we were—I didn't think it was possible—in the sense that they had an almost Messianic faith coming in, and a good rah-rah community group, and things would start flowing like honey and things would happen. You might say it was similar to Gingrich's "new outlook," or whatever he calls it. It took more than that. Our friend the anthropologist Ned Hall and his wife were disappointing because we were finding new answers, and I was hoping by bringing all of these people on board I would not just get a regurgitation of what they had written.

Blum: Edward T. Hall?

Netsch: Ed Hall. We called him Ned. They were very good, but they would tend to retalk about the bubble. We were really doing something different. We did a shopping center located in the churches, and it was a decent plan. It wouldn't rival the beautiful plans in Finland because we were in a scarred inner city. The real excuse the powers that be said they would not do this, and the reason they blew up all the buildings, was that they had made a promise, a deal with the businessmen downtown, which is just ten blocks away, that if Pruitt-Igoe disappeared they would build the new auditorium center north of a dividing street—let's call it Clayton; I'm not sure what it is now—which is on the Pruitt-Igoe side of town, and they kept that commitment. Rather than make a social commitment to the people they made a commitment to downtown. We were really disheartened, and then, of course, I made that big boo-boo of getting a call from BBC and would I send them a snippet of the blowing-up of the building. Although I was married to Dawn she didn't watch me every step, legally, you know. She said, "Walter, you've got to send something with it." I just sent it off in the mail, and, of course, it just became public property. I had no control over it, and therefore it was used for every possible reason. "The death knell of modern architecture," and everything. The only reason we did it was that we had originally planned to tear it down brick by brick to give jobs. You tear down and rebuild—the idea that you were training people to do both. Then the Nixon office in Washington and their priest in the office, who was also related to the priest in

the Catholic church—the Democratic mayor in St. Louis. The priest was sort of the go-between and no help to us, I can assure you. They just said No, you couldn't do it brick by brick. I had to find another way, and that's when I remembered my experience in the Second World War of these people who blew up things effectively for advances in Europe. Well, I got hold of them, and they were delighted with the project, obviously. We made their life. They became a business. Our little film snips—we even snapped the film. The government didn't even care about recording the event. The second thing they did, when they did approve, we had to blow up a building closest to where the people lived. I picked a site where there were no longer people living which was then going to be made rubble. We had in the budget the rubble, shaping it and covering it with dirt and letting trees grow. Well, they made me blow up the building right next to the people. That's a hostile statement. Then they turned the project down, and they left the rubble, then the rats got into the rubble, then the money they were going to spend for landscaping that rubble—in other words, we were taken down the primrose path. We were what is known as suckers. We were suckers in the sense that here we were doing a very good job and a serious job, and people were getting excited and felt promise, and there was discussion about it in the new magazines and everything, and they hadn't any intention of doing it at all. You see, that's the thing that really hurt. It really hurt. It isn't the first time that a political thing like that has happened.

Blum: So you submitted your plan to this committee, you went through the competition process, you won the commission, and you began it, and then it was abandoned?

Netsch: And we even had the example of the blowing-up, you know. It looked like we were on our way. The low-cost housing was coming out of Missouri and everything. This is another example where the firm never backed me. I mean, Bill Hartmann wasn't down there with me, side by side, fighting it.

Blum: Was he supporting you within the office?

Netsch: Well, if you call letting me do it support, yes.

Blum: And approving of it and all of this.

Netsch: No, no, no. He didn't review it or anything like that, and there was no sense of its importance.

Blum: So what validity is there to this bit that I read that Nat Owings wrote in his book?

Netsch: Well, Nat is different. Absolutely the truth. I called Nat. Nat was my mentor. He was in California. I couldn't call him up every time I needed some help. I couldn't say, "Nat, will you come to Chicago and help me fight Bill Hartmann to get him to respond?" No, this was an example of my carrying water uphill in the firm.

Blum: But you seemed to be fairly independent and you could do what you chose to do in that context.

Netsch: That's fine, but you want to win. You want to win. If it were an office building Bill Hartmann would have Gordon Bunshaft here, or he would have someone here, or he would have someone who knew someone. You see, that's what I am talking about. There wasn't that sense that our little crazy studio was as important, and what we were doing was important as...

Blum: Well, it probably was not going to be the biggest money-maker, if that was a factor.

Netsch: Well, I don't know. Bill Hartmann would have to tell you, if he wanted to think about it again, why I didn't have real support. But anyway, I had what is known as academic support. I showed it at all the schools and everything, and it was an important part of the social change and established my reputation as a planner and a social architect, and there was no ego trip. We

picked townhouses from Breakthrough.

Blum: Did SOM get any mileage out of the project in the sense that they were related to a social cause?

Netsch: I think that would be something a historian would have to check, because I was so involved—it's just like with the recent book on the Air Force Academy. There is a lot of stuff in the book I didn't know was happening. When you're designing, you're designing. Your whole heart is in it. It had some marvelous moments that history should know about. When the lady who was my secretary, not that she would last a week in the Chicago office, but she was from Cabrini Green, she was third-generation from Cabrini, and she said, "You know, we didn't go to church and say, "Polly at the other end of the floor went to church every Sunday and she was pregnant before I was." So it established a kind of marvelous sense of criteria on social—because the fourth generation was going to appear again as a single parent. So you had real reality. She had enough confidence in me to tell me that story. I watched her one day, because I asked her to get me a ticket on an airplane back to Chicago. I watched her dissolve in tears. She didn't know how to do a ticket on the telephone, you see. I had transported myself from my fine, elegant, Chicago secretary to Pruitt-Igoe, and I was furious. I got on the phone and said, "Who are you? You have no right to assault someone on the telephone who may not understand the process." She was also great at helping me understand the community. One day I said to her—there were five high-rises that were left with people living in them—and I said, "This particular high-rise looks worse than the other ones. I wonder why that it?" "Oh," she said, "don't you know, Walter, that's Dodge City." I said, "What is Dodge City?" "Well, Dodge City is that the gangs take over in the fall and they move in for the winter season and they move out in the spring, and they dominate." Now, this is seventies. The government had plenty of time to learn about social organization. Well, all of these convinced us, because one of our main items was to start as we were tearing down this whole area and putting in new utilities and so forth, was to immediately do one of these point towers—immediately—to tear one off, just a point tower, and one low

part, and make that administration. People would move into these units.

Blum: While other construction was going on?

Netsch: While everything else was being built, and be a classroom situation. It will be in home economics. For example, my secretary said, "You know, I have a credit card, too, from the local furniture company, and they only charge me thirty-two percent."

Blum: Thirty-two percent?!

Netsch: So you really began to understand that it was a different world out there. You would also go there in the wintertime, and there would be glass all over everywhere—broken glass from these old buildings that were all boarded up, the upper floors. People had stolen all of the copper pipe out of them, and the gutters. It was really vandalism. I can almost understand it. They were empty, deserted, abandoned by the government, and made useless for housing. Why not? So the kitchen sinks were taken and the refrigerators and so forth. But you would go there on a crisp winter day after light snow had fallen, and there was the sparkle of the glass through the snow, and the kids were sledding on the doors of refrigerators. There were these images, these images of poverty and fun, the images of harsh reality, that is real. You've got to understand what David and Charlie Duster went through. Here were middle-class black people, well trained, so sympathetic, so believing in this wonderful opportunity that SOM was doing, and yet so embarrassed by the poverty and by the ignorance and by the lack of desire to get ahead. David found a young man who he made his draftsman. He even brought him back to Chicago as a draftsman, and he went to IIT. Whether he graduated or not, I do not know. But David and Charlie and I and Bob Hutchins had a terrible time on these towers. The towers were really for big families because some of these small units just didn't have what David and Charles called "decent-sized bedrooms." Then all of a sudden David Sharpe broke down and said, "I come from public housing. Walter, these standards for housing are wrong. We've got room in this to combine two apartments and give decent-sized



rooms, places for kids to play inside their room.” It was impassioned—I was nervous. I was afraid that this would kill the plan because we were obviously going against FHA standards.

Blum: The FHA had size regulations, didn’t they, for rooms?

Netsch: Oh, absolutely, for room size and everything, and they were based on the bottom line, theoretically. But this was re-housing. This was existing housing, and so we finally decided we would take a chance. Another thing we decided we would do for senior citizens, we decided we would do another point tower for senior citizens in which a member of the family could live with a senior citizen. It was designed as a two-bedroom unit, and one of the units had to be occupied by someone who would take care of that person and be responsible for that person—shopping and everything. We had really worked so hard on this. There is nothing wrong with some of this today. This is just as logical today as it was then, because we have more crime in the low-rise units in public housing. The press doesn’t really show it and doesn’t really tell the whole story, because I had architect friends who are remodeling three-story units on the South Side, and parts of them are destroyed within a week of the new people moving in. So it isn’t a question of high- and low-rise, it’s a larger question of social identity and social responsibility.

Blum: It sounds like the Pruitt-Igoe project really disappointed you because of the people you were dealing with in St. Louis, but you must have learned an enormous amount from such a project. How did you use that information?

Netsch: I think it flavored my whole life. It was one of the projects that really flavored my whole life, like Oak Ridge did, too. It convinced me that, if we were willing to do it, that there was a way. It convinced me of all things that it wasn’t people, it was the opportunities for people that we really had to work for. And so, later on, doing St. Matthews Methodist Church the little church in Cabrini, when the pastor came to interview me. I was very honored. He brought a member of his block, and they sat in my office in the Inland Steel

Building with this table and this back bar and they interviewed me on what my attitudes would be and what my interests were, and what was the relationship between kids and the church. And we were hired. Again, I had to go tell the partnership that this was another project that won't make money, but it's important to us in the city. It was a great experience. Charlie Duster got to be the job captain and the superintendent on this one. He brought to the job, again, a sensitivity. But this, of course, was a Field Theory building, and time had changed it. This time our design reflected—I call it jokingly sometimes my Lou Kahn building. It's the masonry building with the spaces that interlock. Lou Kahn gets no blame for it. You know, you have little jokes in the office. When the EW of something happened, the existence will of the scheme, he said, "Oh, Lou might do that." But we were just building a simple masonry building with short spans so that they could afford it, but it had all the traditional needs. It had a crying room for mothers with babies to look through the glass and see the service.

Blum: You said "a crying room?"

Netsch: A crying room so the babies could cry and the church service isn't interrupted. Oh, it's customary in churches in the suburbs all the time.

Blum: I just never heard it referred to as a "crying room."

Netsch: The choir was behind the organ in the back of the space rather than out front, which I wanted to do with the Air Force Chapel. I liked it and I did it again here, which, of course, went contrary to traditional black services in which the choir plays a dominant visual part. But this is a more formal service. The people who came to St. Matthew's came from 9500 South. I mean, they had moved away from the neighborhood. They had lived in those demolished buildings between Cabrini and LaSalle Street, but still came back to their area and they supported the church, although they had been dispersed, you might say, by urban removal. In fact, the socially strong people got dispersed, and the problem people stayed at Cabrini. This was an odd phenomenon. But anyway, it was a very nice experience. We don't tithe, but we give a small

sum every year to this church and to St. Michael's across the way, although we're not a member of either religion. It was an important kind of project to have in our studio. To have these kinds of projects in the studio occasionally was very important because it gave a sense of reality. Martin Luther King marching in Cicero was almost a project in the office because I would allow the studio members to go out and march with Dr. King during the day, and we would, shall we say, put the nighttime hours in the daytime slots so that the attendance record didn't look radical. So it was in a sense a project. They would come back and say what happened. In the civil rights movement I was a marshall in the marches, and I had these books. I have all these books now out in the garage on the sixties: *Manchild in the Promised Land* and all these books on the black movement. I'd get two or three copies that were required reading for the course—and of course, there was no course. In the studio along with selecting the art prints from New York would be the discussions of these books. It was a real camaraderie.

Blum: It sounds like there was a program in your studio for, what, reality check?

Netsch: Well, we didn't think of it as a program. It was just for our own awareness and we wanted to improve it.

Blum: Did that happen in any other group within SOM in the Chicago office?

Netsch: No, in no office. It also instilled in me the desire, for example, to get us out of South Africa, and I got us out of South Africa, eventually, partly because I think Carleton House wasn't the great, roaring success that they wanted, and partly because they were making it difficult. So I won't claim sole responsibility for getting SOM out of South Africa, but we were one of the first to follow the edict, "You stay home and give us a chance to get rid of apartheid." Little Sunburst Homes was another example of a social statement.

Blum: How did that come about?

Netsch: Again, someone appeared in the office. This is the one time an article in a magazine about Pruitt-Igoe or about St. Matthew's or about the paired new towns in Detroit, which we haven't talked about yet, all of these, someone would read something about it, and some church member would have heard about it and said something to another church member. I was not a habitué of church every Sunday, following a job. It might have been somebody's idea of business, but it wasn't mine. I was too busy working. I'd be home designing something. Barbara Rueter said I called Will up all the time and said, "Come on down to the office, I've got an idea," or "Come on over to the house, I've got an idea." She said, "You have no idea how intense you were." I said, "Well, you know, Will and Maris were my two real stars on Field Theory, and they were as excited about it as I." Will said, "That's true." Anything that would get one of us motivated, an idea, the three of us would pursue. This was theoretical. It didn't have to even be a project. You'd be sitting here, doodling like I am, and something would happen. So social responsible mixed with the radical art movement—pop painting was radical at the time, Lichtenstein and then Oldenburg and all these people, so we were out of a mold, you might say. We were the young intellectuals. Our studio had a special character.

Blum: How many people were in your studio?

Netsch: Oh, it really varied, depending on the projects. Big projects like UIC or the Air Force Academy were fairly large. But people would leave. They would come through and they would get the experience. Some of them had come from other towns to work here, and they would go back home, or they would go where they thought their future was or where their wife thought the future was. We were a stepping stone. There was nothing wrong with that. My friend Bush-Brown said that Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and not just my studio—Skidmore, Owings and Merrill was the best postgraduate course in America, and he wasn't the only one to say that. They did get that reputation. For a long time we didn't get overtime. No one got overtime in the industry, and it was just sort of accepted. Then it came in, and then we had to watch it or we had to chalk some things up to research, which is our

time—meaning research was our time or our chance to study to get ahead. Our goal was to do a fine Field Theory building, and we realized that we were in hot water, in a sense. We jumped in the ocean over our head, and then we had to figure out what we were doing and how we would do it well. I'm still doing that. I brought drawings down to Will to show him what I am working on, and we talked about it. He has now a very small practice of his own, which is totally unrelated to the way I think when I am on this machine.

Blum: Is he working with Field Theory?

Netsch: No, he is not. He does modest remodeling work and things like that. I think the other thing that affected our attitude was the fact that we were in education so much.

Blum: Do you mean that your projects were universities and libraries?

Netsch: That our projects were academic—universities and libraries. Everything that we were doing was consistent with the idea of the Emerson attitude. I always say our puppies are the product of the Enlightenment because they were invented about that time. About the 1870s someone started breeding for Bostons then, and I've always had Boston terriers, so the Enlightenment even follows with our little puppy dogs. We had no great desire to do a commercial office building. We would love to have done a high-rise, but we weren't so interested in a commercial office building. We were disappointed at being sort of given not the top structural engineers or the top HVAC people because our projects were considered sort of mundane and not on the cutting edge. We thought we were on the cutting edge, and that anything that reeked of following Mies was not the cutting edge. But they were not tall buildings of immense size, and therefore just a few people like Sam Sachs appreciated what we were doing and gave us a lot of help. And Ken Naslund in structures. These people would give us help, but we had to really fend for ourselves. As I told you, we always ended up in the cheap space outside the SOM office. About the only linkage was through my office on the fifth floor of Inland.

[Tape 9: Side 1]

Blum: Did you agree that your studio should be in another space?

Netsch: Oh, yes. We all accepted the fact that we would rather do our projects, the kind of projects that we wanted to do, than have to help pay the rent on the high-priced space. We also felt a little like wanderers in a strange land. We were together but separate from SOM, and we were carrying a fresh banner, which got to be a rumor around the SOM offices that Netsch's studio was doing these strange buildings. When the publicity on the chapel came out, as I said, that I broke the dam on recognition. So it was a sort of natural thing. We prided ourselves on our hair shirt, in looking back on it.

Blum: Do you think that was a good thing?

Netsch: Yes, absolutely.

Blum: You mentioned Sunburst Homes. That has also been referred to as Winnebago Homes.

Netsch: Yes. It was Winnebago Homes originally, and then everybody got excited about naming things after Indians and things, and the church people up there decided they had better, since it was a—what is it that Newt Gingrich calls them?

Blum: An orphanage? Was that an orphanage? I thought it was for disturbed children.

Netsch: It had disturbed children, but they were off and in a sense discarded. There were various levels of problems. I think it's very important because, first of all, it's a marvelous story. I'll tell it. Probably no one knows it. Will and I worked on the scheme. The idea of, again, circulating up was what we had done on the Architecture and Art building the movement in space. The fact

that the program required nine units instead of eight—actually, Will worked out the geometry, and he said, “Walter, don’t you see something different there? Look hard,” he said, and sure enough, there was one more. Actually, he knew how to break the rule. Braque, the painter, used to say, “I love the rule that breaks the emotion, and the emotion that breaks the rule.” That was another one of the sayings in the studio. We had come a long way from “space is glass,” you see. Sunburst Homes are important to me because not only are they good little buildings, but there are three of them *in situ* so you can see them in one place. Sometimes someone asks, “What do you think are the important buildings you’ve done?” You think of why. One, this broke the rule; two, it has good social purpose; three, it works; and four, you see them in place in the environment and they don’t look strange. In fact, they look so natural sitting there that you think the rest of the world looks just like that. Actually, the client called me up and said, “Could we hire Will to do the addition to the gym?” In other words, Will had the time and made the effort. I was doing many projects. He got to know the client much better than I did. And I said, “Sure.”

Blum: Was this a state-run institution? You called it an orphanage.

Netsch: No, religious with state support.

Blum: And they came to you?

Netsch: They came to us, yes. That, again, some historian would have to research out of the letters because I don’t remember why. Those things are not like the hot presentations for the Air Force Academy or, I’ll never forget, for Amoco, for the high-rise, the hundred-story building here in Chicago. Evidently, SOM had lost out, and then suddenly Bill got the idea that maybe they would try me. So I went over and made another presentation. Of course, we didn’t get it. I was not exactly prepared, either emotionally or—I didn’t really feel like it because I was the second-rate, the substitute thing.

Blum: Is that the feeling you got from Bill’s asking you to try?

Netsch: Yes, to do it, right.

Blum: Had someone else tried?

Netsch: Yes, Bruce had lost.

Blum: Oh, so he thought a different approach, a different design might appeal to them.

Netsch: That a different approach might appeal to them. That's the only time I ever got involved, and it was a disaster. It really didn't work at all. There was no chemistry within us, and there was therefore no chemistry with them.

Blum: But there was with, for instance, the Sunburst Homes.

Netsch: Oh, yes, but those were the kind of small projects that didn't need support, you see. We had the support of the client immediately. Once they saw the scheme they fell in love with it. The idea of these kids around these different levels, they aren't just down a corridor; the fact that it looks into this living area that has this crazy fireplace and this chimney going up the middle. It's an exciting building—it certainly didn't look like Boys' Town—and it was just what they wanted.

Blum: Did you or your group do research for housing children, which was very different than—a library, a university building, things you had done before?

Netsch: I think all the experience we had from everything from Pruitt-Igoe to dormitories, and the client was very clear. We went up there and saw what they were doing and their living. But we didn't do an in-depth research. You've got to remember, Will Rueter's stepfather was a Lutheran minister, and so we didn't come from a hostile environment. Our backgrounds were such that—I think sometimes too much is done today on research because they don't have the inner feeling and objectivity, or sensitivity, so they have



to go out and get it from a book.

Blum: So you built a busy environment for children who had certain problems.

Netsch: Absolutely, we designed the thing with a straight line down the middle, so this is yours and this is yours, but it isn't a symmetrical room. We added our extra dimension of design to their explanation of need, this is what I think we should talk about. They had the parents, so-called, in each building, on the ground floor.

Blum: The instructor or a guardian?

Netsch: No, it was a family. A man and a woman—I don't remember whether they lived there or they stayed five days and then someone else came on the weekend or not. That's a tremendous challenge to ask someone to make in their lives, to be like foster parents. I respect people who can do that. It's an unbelievable, emotional willingness to give. I have just loaned quite a few pictures to Bob Bruegmann that Will Rueter sent me. I thought for a moment I'd send them to Newt Gingrich and say, "Your use of Boys' Town isn't quite as good as another one I could recommend," then I decided I didn't want to suddenly be known as the recommender of what I know would not happen.

Blum: Well, you'd give him another option.

Netsch: No. He would have to change before I think he would understand options, although intellectually he is an interesting character. The Paired New Towns was the other example, and how I got into that I don't quite know. Oh yes, I do know. Academically. Academicians heard about my work on Pruitt-Igoe, etc., and I was put on the team. It was a big, fancy team of social scientists—Wayne State—social scientists and architects and planners, and architects I knew from Detroit, and some new faces that were black that I had never known. The idea was not mine, but it was a great idea. The idea was to have a new town outside of Detroit that connected to Detroit with high-speed transit, and that there would be a defined new town in town, and a new town

out of town. You might go to high school one semester out of town and the other semester in town. Or you could go back and forth. It didn't mean you were restricted forever to those boundaries. I mean, you could go to the movies any damn place you could or would or wanted to. But we tried to offer social and cultural services that would tend to allow what we were thinking of as natural social integration between the two groups. In other words, we didn't pick a black family and move them to new town out of town. Anyone could move into our new town out of town who wanted to. It would be predominantly black in new town in town simply because at that time it was the area and it hadn't been destroyed. Now Detroit is a wasteland. I think that this was the great talking project. We'd go over there twice a month, and for one day would talk two hours in the morning and then eat lunch, and talk two hours in the afternoon and then go back home. It was really an academic effort. The results were not as good as they should have been, partly because of the problem that I think some of us couldn't quite get the imagery. I had sort of in the back of my mind, *Communitas* appeared from my subconscious of the new town out of town, and there were other people who knew of it, although we couldn't use Mr. Goodman, the author, as an example. It was sponsored by some do-good, civic community. I've forgotten who. But it was an experiment. It was a chance to talk about an idea. I don't know if it would ever work or not.

Blum: Was it ever built?

Netsch: No. Well, first of all, whoever was working on high-speed urban transit didn't support it. Oh, that reminds me. I did one other—we haven't talked about technology, but I did a study for Westinghouse's high-speed, urban transit for downtown Pittsburgh.

Blum: Would you please finish the Detroit first? Was it because the towns were too close, is that why high-speed trains didn't make sense?

Netsch: No, no. The committee was so diffuse of social scientists and political scientists and architects that we couldn't really sit down around the drafting

table and develop a physical scheme that it needed, and I feel partially responsible. It needed something to look besides all the talking we were doing. We were talking, talking, talking.

Blum: And you as SOM?

Netsch: No, I was just a consultant to this. It was not an SOM project. It was one of those extra-curricular jobs I did, like teaching or serving on a committee or going to a conference or something like that.

Blum: It seems that one of the biggest needs after the war in the States was housing.

Netsch: Of course.

Blum: And to rebuild the inner cities.

Netsch: No, it really wasn't. It wasn't till the seventies the inner city began to fall apart. It wasn't until all those jobs that were done in the war had finally left and the people were without jobs. And the suburbs had taken over with Levittown. Levittown was the watchword. I went up and studied Levittown and looked at all the Levittowns, and the garden city in Radburn, New Jersey. All of those things were images of what was happening. They were tied because partly they were the first real effort at mass building at the housing level, aside from Lake Meadows. Lake Meadows I think really floundered on the idea that Nat and Am Richardson were determined it would be high-rise sidewalks in the sky. They became enamored of the sidewalks in the sky business. As you know, it had to be forced integration for a long time. It was an unwritten sixty/fifty, and it no longer exists. It's now ninety-five/five or something like that.

Blum: But that was the thinking at the time, put up a skyscraper and you could make a park with all the extra ground land.

Netsch: Oh, yes, right, and your tennis courts and everything. I did the ice rink there

and the pretty little building with Gertrude Kerbis. It was also supposed to have a swimming pool, but New York Life would never put the swimming pool in because blacks and whites would be swimming together and they'd take a photograph of it and they'd lose all their insurance policies in the South. It was kind of marvelous. In *La Belle Hélène*, which is an Offenbach operetta we saw last night, the leading actress, the queen Hélène—Helen of Troy—was black in the opera. I thought, here I am, in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, an area of all the worst transgressions in political thought and relations, and a city that's been decimated, and here, without a quibble is a black opera lead. She was very pretty and she sang beautifully. No one said a thing. It wasn't even mentioned, not even a whisper at intermission.

Blum: This is 1995.

Netsch: Yes, and it's opera. I bet that the same group of people, if they were sitting in their home next to the golf course and someone moved in that wasn't exactly like them, it would be a different set of concerns.

Blum: You did a Newark new town. Was that also something you might say comes under the heading of a social conscience project?

Netsch: No, the Newark new town came out of the Washington office. Nat had the idea that he was going to get me to Washington to set up an office and that Dawn would have to run for the Senate or Congress, and then we could move down there. He didn't understand that she was interested in state government, not federal government. So I would go down there and work with the Washington office, and they got the Newark project. It was their project. I went up there with the staff to try to work. It was worse than Pruitt-Igoe. It was a whole city of despair. We were working on those little projects which came out on the Baltimore project later on, taking a small section, cutting the street off and converting it into pretty little pictures. Most of it never happened. The rate of decline was so much faster than the rate of repair that we were really carrying water uphill, and it was unsuccessful.

There were a lot of those projects that were going on that I would like to think the world would be better off if they had ever gotten done, but most of them floundered on the bureaucracy and also the financial hanky-panky like what you are now hearing about CHA in Chicago. It was normal exposure of many people to funds they had never seen before. I always think of the Irish coming to America and becoming politicians in the community and learning their lesson. And Boss Tweed. It's no different.

Blum: You have mentioned competitions on and off. You entered one in the mid-eighties.

Netsch: Well, we entered one when I was in Oak Ridge.

Blum: What was that?

Netsch: That was the one on the thing down in Kansas somewhere. Was that really in the eighties?

Blum: No, in the eighties I was going to refer to the Hong Kong competition.

Netsch: Oh, the Hong Kong competition, right. That was a competition that I had done after I retired, you see. That was a marvelous one because we had the experience. We set up drafting rooms in the garage, and guys would come by at night and work with me on it.

Blum: Guys from your studio?

Netsch: Who had been in the studio and were now working other places or at SOM. They would come by at night, and we would work on it. It was a marvelous chance to use the geometry because we had done it on the library in Tokyo, and here we could try it again on Hong Kong. It was also an important thing—I can show you the drawing. Feng shui—I don't know how you pronounce it—there is a Chinese word for the priest to tell you the feng shui of your environment. Your table should be in this location, facing this way.

You should move the door, and so forth...

Blum: For proper relationships?

Netsch: ...and so the proper vibes would occur. It's religious. So that was a chance to design little units. I designed little, round units that were—because they were located on the field they would constantly shift direction, so you didn't have to move the bed around. The bed would be here, here, and it would be here, there and there, and so forth. So I thought I had really solved that problem. Zada Hadid, who won the competition, you know, did a dramatic thing that the architects just fell in love with. I did a very dramatic thing, but it also recognized the program.

Blum: When you use the Field Theory and you use it in places all over the world, different cultures, different environments, do you incorporate the regional and the cultural differences in your use of the Field Theory?

Netsch: Absolutely. You ought to see the site plan on Hong Kong. It's shaped like a dragon.

Blum: I have seen a very small one, I think it was published in *Inland Architect*.

Netsch: Right. The original is downstairs here. It's shaped like a dragon, and the central building comes out of the dragon's body. Again, we got so interested in it that I didn't write on the drawing "the dragon head" and "the dragon's body." I didn't communicate as well as I should have. Architects say, "Oh, there goes Netsch's Field Theory. I bet that's a Netsch's building " It's like working on the Boston City Hall, when Belluschi said, "Oh, that's another Mies building, that's another Mies building," and if you didn't like Mies you didn't like the building, and if you didn't like Field Theory you didn't like the solution. But that was a marvelous one. We made a model. It's still here out in the garage. Someday I'm going to resurrect it if I have some time because it lights up at night. I made it in my neighbor's garage. It was a lot of fun. But the important thing was that the main building came right out of the

body of the field and the landscape—the shaping of the ground—so it was the first really nonbuilding we ever did. In other words, the building, the shape just is the shape. It was a one-story building. It had dining rooms and bars.

Blum: This was to be a club wasn't it?

Netsch: It was a club. I really thought of it as a fancy place in Hong Kong for very wealthy men to take their current...

Blum: Lovers?

Netsch: Lovers, yes. That's what that was for. It had all of the exotica of that, and so we tried to create that—the mystical and the separateness, and these little glass towers that you would go to would be like going out to a teahouse. We thought we had a very good chance, but our drawings were so complex. Our solution had eight different levels, and so this dragon appeared eight different times, and pieces out of it, and so forth. I am certain that most of the jurors said, "Oh, my god, I'm just not going to look at that." And our photographs we thought would be enticing. I think the one thing the studio lacked, in retrospect, was, we needed one guru who would say, "Now, Walter, we're going to do that to that, we're going to do that to that."

Blum: You were that guru, were you not?

Netsch: No, I was the guru in the intellect, not in getting the job done.

Blum: Did you go there to present your drawings?

Netsch: Oh, no. You had to send them in. If I were there to present I could present very well, but if you just send drawings in—we kept thinking these Field Theory drawings would entice the jury, but there aren't enough Eero Saarinen in the world to entice.

Blum: To understand them?

Netsch: And also, that Postmodernism was coming in, and they were looking for an *au courant* answer.

Blum: Are there any competitions in your memory that were memorable or important for you?

Netsch: Some of them are memorably awful. There was a modernized Main Street with glass blocks. I could draw it for you today, but I wouldn't want to.

Blum: Was that when you were with Morgan Yost?

Netsch: Yes, but I did it at home.

Blum: Wasn't that published?

Netsch: No. I didn't win. We did things like chairs, and we selected chairs that other people did, and furniture design, so we kept ourselves pretty busy with other than just buildings. But the competition always allowed us to take a chance on something. I'd have to look up and see how many competitions we did enter. There wasn't a tremendous number.

Blum: You have spoken about clients, and it seems to me in many of your projects that you were dealing with committees, not a one-on-one client.

Netsch: The academic world is a world of committees. For example, at UIC if the provost and the president hadn't been interested in what I was doing and how seriously I was trying to help, if at Iowa or Grinnell, the president, hadn't really taken an interest in what I was trying to do, or the original admiral on the Naval Postgraduate School—I have always been very fortunate to have, usually in my better projects, a contact. You might say like a father, or the president at Wells College, the building was named after him. The library was named after him. All of these people really were father-



figures to me. They were someone that I wanted to perform for, just as I would do for my father. They are also good critics. They were sort of surrogate Owingses or a surrogate father. In almost all cases they appeared older, or at least more worldly. I was lost in my little studio and lost in my dreams of the field, and I needed those people. The better jobs have that kind of responsibility. I have done good jobs, like the east wing of the Art Institute, which is a good building.

Blum: You were dealing with a group there, too.

Netsch: Well, no, I was dealing with a board and that was Mary and Leigh Block. They were really the dominant members of that board. They told me, "You've got to design a building that can be a museum, not a school, because a school isn't going to last." There were a lot of people on the board who... You know, the good ones disappeared. They really wanted to stay in the visual arts as a museum. The school had just been so successful that it's run away from them, and they were willing to go off-site.

Blum: In two separate buildings?

Netsch: In two separate buildings, and go through all of that chaos. They still liked the identity of being aligned with the Art Institute, so they were perfectly willing to stay in that little corner of the world.

Blum: You say Leigh Block was the heavy on the committee, was he agreeable when you worked with him? He was the one who wanted you.

Netsch: Oh, yes. No, he was very agreeable, but I am telling you something he told me in confidence. This was not a public statement. I had to be sure that it worked as a school. That's all that really meant. I meant I wasn't going to get any support from Leigh for the school. I really had to work with the school and to keep the cost within reason so that it would work. That's why the shop areas were developed from the original shop and we didn't try to move them, and how we developed those little openings so light got down on that

lower floor on the east side, and how we provided that little garden down below so that the kids could smoke marijuana without people on the street saying anything. There was no private space there at all. I couldn't have them climbing on the roof. So you thought of all those little things. I'm not saying that everybody went out in that garden and smoked marijuana. That isn't what I said. I said it was a chance for privacy from a casual passer-by. But those were the things we were always thinking about. And the gardens at UIC, UIC, the reason the brick walls were around, I told you, was to keep unhappy eyes from looking in rather than trying to, as Stanley said, "establish a wall against the neighborhood." Again, it always depends: is the glass half full or half empty?

Blum: The Art Institute has been called Chicago's cultural cathedral, and you have had a lot of contact with the Art Institute, not only the east wing but...

Netsch: Well, our gifts, our interest in program.

Blum: Were you not involved in the remodeling of the Prints and Drawings Gallery?

Netsch: Oh, yes. Mrs. Regenstein, a dear person, she was my mentor. She hired me to do Prints and Drawings.

Blum: Were these galleries or the study room?

Netsch: The whole gallery. She hired me to do the Eye Clinic at Presbyterian-St. Luke's, she hired me to do the music building at Northwestern. She was really very supportive, and we had a marvelous relationship. I'd go over there for lunch, I would listen to her stories, and I would talk to her about what we were trying to do. The clients also talked to her. For example, I found out she wanted Fortuny fabric in one of the galleries, and so we got some Fortuny fabric, but we put it up backwards, on the back side.

Blum: Deliberately?

Netsch: Deliberately, oh, yes, because the design was so strong it was in conflict with the prints. But she would tell stories out of school on the other people at the Art Institute, too. She was bitter, like most Jewish grand dames, of the injustices she suffered.

Blum: Because she was Jewish?

Netsch: Yes, social injustices. She felt people were after her money. Her son really helped her to manage her affairs. But she was a great lady and a great asset to the city. It was marvelous to have this one continuing client that was not a business or a school but was a human being that had all of these varied interests. The arts and music, they were her loves. When I was doing the study room in Prints and Drawings—and we did a good job on those things. They worked. The only thing I can't help on is growth, if they expanded fast. We tried to give them all of the advantages they had. The client in those cases was very supportive of Mrs. Regenstein, too, and they would do what she wanted. Well, any donor has that kind of privilege.

Blum: Didn't that make that difficult for you, working for a handful people, each one with their own ideas?

Netsch: I think we incorporated enough of everyone's ideas in what we did that it wasn't shocking. The idea of getting that upstairs study area in Prints and Drawings was a great coup for them. I mean, they saw extra space and saw it working with the vault and getting it, and the value of being able to have a quiet space for the special review. Now, Wayne Tjaden worked with me on these projects. Wayne is now my Field Theory helpmate.

Blum: Today?

Netsch: Well, today, even, but at that time in the studio. Will had gone and Maris had gone. Sometimes Wayne was temperamental. He was the temperamental one. Will and Maris, we could just sort of yell it out, but with Wayne you had

to be a little more cautious.

Blum: Walter, you also did the McKinlock Court and the Terrace Galleries at the Art Institute.

Netsch: That was a very modest remodeling we did there. That was more or less helping out.

Blum: But you had several projects there, at least three or four that I am aware of.

Netsch: Oh, yes. The Art Institute was a good client. The whole ring around the McKinlock Court, that's what you are talking about.

Blum: Right, those galleries.

Netsch: The real problem there was to save the trees. That's why the roof slopes down, so that I could get as much air space to the head of the trees as possible. I wasn't trying to be romantic.

Blum: Oh, I always thought it was shadows and light or something more complicated.

Netsch: But it was actually something very pragmatic. What's the use of having a garden if you kill all the trees? A very simple story: We were imposing the physical environment on these living things. Also, we wanted to join the existing building so we could walk through at that level, and at the same time you could see the existing building, the architecture of these buildings, and, as you know, it's very visible. That was one of the first times people had done that at the Art Institute. They usually changed things when they did the additions, and I wanted to show you could do it another way. So McKinlock Court was a nice thing. We had very little do with the exhibit material or the selection of what went where. Sometimes we thought it was nice, and

sometimes we didn't, but the Art Institute liked what they did, so that was it.

Blum: Wasn't there a problem with the Textile Department? There was just too much light for the textiles?

Netsch: Wayne worked on that, and he was as cautious of the light as anyone else. I thought it was worked out between Wayne and the textile curator. I didn't really get involved with that battle. This was toward the end, and I was getting ill, actually, or having health trouble and not knowing it. But Wayne did a good job, and he talked to her and he kept her happy. She was a little difficult.

Blum: She is very careful about her material, her objects. And textiles are very sensitive to light.

Netsch: With this ultraviolet glass, I don't think we have destroyed anything there.

Blum: Perhaps the jewel in the crown at the Art Institute is the trading room.

Netsch: Oh, of course.

Blum: How did that come about, the Sullivan Trading Room?

Netsch: The Sullivan Trading Room came about because as you know, our Chicago archeologist Richard Nickel was doing everything he could to save the building, and he lost his life in that building. We were all involved in one way or another in the battle of saving the Stock Exchange Building. We were trying to figure out what we could do, and it was suggested that we could incorporate the Stock Exchange room at the Art Institute.

[Tape 9: Side 2]

Netsch: I saw the trading room, and we saw pictures of it. It was a gorgeous room.

What could we do? Wouldn't it make a great trustees' room? So we did a scheme in which it was the trustees' room, and we presented it unofficially to the building committee as a thought, and I received a very recriminatory comment from Mary Block saying, "Walter, do you realize there are so many colors in that room, what can I choose to wear?" and the ladies around her sort of agreed. I just couldn't believe it. So I just went home with that kind of bitter determination that architects have. I just redid the scheme. It became the trading room, it became the green room for the school, and the room out in the corridor that they use as a little restaurant was supposed to be the Chicago School of Architecture gallery in honor of Richard Nickel. That was okayed, but no one really thought they were ever going to give it to the school, no one ever thought that they were going to—at least John Maxon had no intention of putting architectural ornaments out in that front space.

Blum: You mean the architectural fragments?

Netsch: Yes. I was trying to coordinate it. None of us really realized what a commercial event we had there, and so everybody lucked in. The Art Institute was happy because they have this money-making spot to rent out and show off, John Vinci's restoration was beautiful, and Mrs. DeCosta was generous. John Vinci and I had a terrible fight once on this. I had drawn a line, a diagonal line across the—we were running out of money on the restoration, and I said, "John, if there is no more money let's do east of this line completely, and west, let them see what it will look like if we don't have enough money." And John said, "No. We've got to go to Mrs. DeCosta and get the money," and he did. It worked out fine, and he said, "See!" I think it really made his experience at getting funds. Then we were left with the arch, and Bob Hutchins was my designer/project manager on that. I designed, I think, a nice little garden, and in that garden you're supposed to go down through the arch and a subway over to the parking garage. It was all planned. It's there, except they never built the subway. I always have these half results. So you have this nice arch to go down through, and that's why it's sited that way. Bob did a great job of research on restoration of the top. We talked with the engineers, and on the back side we had to build a gradual

thickness for support as the weight went down, like a buttress on a Gothic cathedral. If you have something like that you need a buttress. So I did these different layers of circles. And, oh, we got blasted in the newspaper by some critic as being the ugliest rear view he had ever seen, and here we were deliberately trying to be responsive. I still think it looks okay. I really do. And it was modest. You know, these people who want to do an ego trip every time, I think it's wrong. But then, picking out the trees. Our landscape guy was really very good. We have these *Acer platanoides*—the twisted trees that are in the garden—and we had the lindens on the street. We had my friend the sculptor Isamu "Samu" Noguchi doing the sculpture. The first thing that Samu said to me was, "Walter, you didn't leave me much room." I said, "Don't look at me. I didn't widen the street, city hall did. They wanted to be certain that we didn't plan this any farther east to encroach on Columbus Drive than..."—and that had an impact on our sunken garden, the other garden with the arch, and Samu's design. But those lindens that we planted then became the tree for that whole Butler field, and we established a base there. But one marvelous, unfortunate story, again—when we designed the pool down by the arch I found a very handsome saying of Louis Sullivan, and I got Bill Hartmann to give \$4,000 from SOM's exchequer so that this could be written up on the limestone above the fountain. Well! The artistic powers-that-be, not the board, told the board, "You cannot do that."

Blum: At the Art Institute?

Netsch: At the Art Institute. "Look at those names up there on the building—Rubens, and so forth... Why do you want to use Louis Sullivan?" I thought to myself, well, I know they don't like architects, because it's a real job, as you see, to get the trading room in. When it was dedicated my main outside critic assistant was, of course, now curator of the collection. The historian who knows about Sullivan and Wright so carefully, and spoke at the dedication of the trading room and gave me physical credit for doing it—David Hanks. David Hanks gave a dedicatory speech, and the reason he gave it was because he was instrumental in convincing the Art Institute that the trading room should not move to New York.

Blum: Is that where it was slated to go?

Netsch: If we didn't take it, and if you didn't follow Walter's advice and incorporate it into the building, and the arch. All of it was going to go to New York.

Blum: Was it your idea that it could be housed in the museum and you brought it to their attention?

Netsch: Yes, right. We were delighted to incorporate it. There was no problem with us, but it wasn't easy. We wanted it to face east like it did. John Vinci always said, "Well, those other windows faced the alley." I said, "There is no alley, John." I couldn't take an alley out between the school. The site was very tight. You had Goodman Theater, the lecture hall, the east entry, the trading room and a school, all along Columbus Drive. So it happened, and it was really—oh, I'll say one interesting thing happened on that. An architect who was on the AIA reviewing committee for the honor awards some year said, "Walter, will you take me around and show me these buildings that you have done?" I said, "Well, I've just finished the east entry to the Art Institute." He said, "Well, show it to me," and he thought it was better than anything else he had seen. He didn't tell me a word, and the next thing I knew it had been selected. He had gone back to Washington and said, "This is the building that should get the award." It's an interesting building because once again we used limestone, we used the little window, that repetitive window that I suppose I should have said is a part of Wright's idiom in the city. I never even thought of it as that. The students wanted more windows, and so we put those big windows in.

Blum: The vertical ones?

Netsch: Yes, hoping they would not paint things on them or mistreat it. It has worked out fine. And the angles, of course, those little marks into it, representing the field, also give some nice reflections.



Blum: Did you oversee the dismantling of the trading room?

Netsch: No, I didn't personally. Bob Hutchins did most of that with John Vinci. John wants complete authority when he is involved with a restoration. That's why I say we had the arch and he had the trading room. We provided the shell and the casing for it, and of course, were very much aware of its shape and dimension. But we added the extra east end, so you could walk around it instead of going through it, and the ramp that allowed the kitchen to work. That was in case they wanted to use the trading room for an event. We didn't think of it so much as a commercial venture. I don't think anyone did. Well, maybe the business manager did, but he didn't tell me.

Blum: There are events in there frequently.

Netsch: I know, and it's very effective. They've got a carpet down now. That's to help the acoustics. That's one thing they've discovered, that Chicago School major spaces are acoustically terrible, whether you're talking about the trading room or the nice little building in Lincoln Park that I restored when I was president of the park board, Cafe Brauer. Oh, that was a battle. I mean, restoration is always a battle. I insisted we use the right kind of roof tile, and the zoo board and their unofficial representative on the park board—I jokingly say that; the other commissioner who is a socialite, Bill Bartholomay—came to me, I was president, and he said, "Walter, can't you use plain asphalt tile? It will cost so much less, and the zoo can get an income that much sooner." I said, "Bill, no, we can't. This is restoration. We can't do that. We have to use the tiles." And so, he went back to the board and said, "Walter is adamant. He won't change. He'll make an issue out of it if we insist," which I told him. Ed Uhlir sided with me so I knew that if push came to shove I had in-house support. So they backed down, and we got the tile, and then Bill told me later, "Walter, you are absolutely right." The opening night was all very fancy, and the searchlights were on, and the television cameras were there, and everybody was giving speeches about "what a great restoration job this is," and how "it's so great that the zoo is participating," which was great. We almost played a little hanky-panky. It was legal, but we

stretched it to be sure that the zoo participated rather than a commercial contractor.

Blum: Well, you had to fight for it.

Netsch: It was legal, as I said, but they got pretty angry. I insisted on rebidding when the first bids came in on Brauer. Someone else had won, but in reading the fine print there was no assurance they were going to do the proper thing. But we had to read the fine print, so we then reinstated bidding. That, of course, was further reason why we couldn't change the rules. But it's a real battle. John Vinci could tell you lots more stories than I can tell you. The same thing was over at UIC with the Jane Addams house.

Blum: The restoration projects?

Netsch: Yes. That was with the Jane Addams house, and then the brick meeting room where Wright gave his speech "The Art and Craft of the Machine" in 1901. There is an adjacent building. The rest of the buildings I let them tear down. That was at the University of Illinois. Then at the University of Chicago there was the restoration of the main auditorium down there, the concert hall, and Goodspeed Hall. Mandel Hall, Goodspeed Hall, and one other building we restored and remodeled.

Blum: Robie House?

Netsch: Well, the Robie House I helped save. That was a fight I was in to get Mr. John Root, Jr., to move his new building a block, twenty-five feet north.

Blum: What was the story with the Robie House?

Netsch: Well, Mr. Root had decided to build that dormitory, which exists just north of the Robie House, on the Robie House site and to tear the building down. We all—everybody—got very excited. Well, not everybody, but a lot of people. I was a young architect then. I went to see Mr. Root, and I said, "You can't do

that. You just can't do that." Others went to him, and then finally we went to the university, the theological seminary, "You shouldn't do that. How can you tear down probably the most famous Chicago landmark? It was in terrible shape, and, it's all your fault."

Blum: It was all whose fault?

Netsch: It was the university's fault. And we won that battle. The public pressure was really on. It was funny, because then fifteen years later I was doing the Stevenson Building and Oriental Institute combination, catty-corner from there. The students put symbolic graves on the site, and so we had to give up the project. The university was due on the project—one of my really better Field Theory buildings. I did that with Maris, but it never got built. But it's the kind of idea you put in your hip pocket and you think about using it somewhere else. It happens to all architects. It's not unusual. Here I am, socially conscious and socially responsible, and sometimes I'm undone by my own group. That's all I was joking about. That was the purpose of that little sidebar, so to speak.

Blum: You've done a lot of work at the University of Chicago on campus.

Netsch: Yes, right.

Blum: You say you did a lot of restoration projects.

Netsch: And we did one other building, a rather dull building, for science down there. One of the most important things I did was the base of the Henry Moore sculpture *Nuclear Energy*. I designed the base and I did the drawing. It's a Renaissance base. It has an exaggerated perspective. If you look at the jointing on the granite, everything is pointing towards the atom piece, which, of course, is not symmetrical. But you could do this with symmetry. Everybody likes the base very much. It was one of those little extra-curricular things I did.

Blum: Did you site it alongside Regenstein Library?

Netsch: Oh, no. That is on the exact spot of Stagg Field where Fermi created the atomic reaction, so no, we were locating it exactly. The historian at the university would have died if anybody had moved it. He was very nice. He was a very popular historian for a while, and he was the head of the project. The library had nothing to do with it.

Blum: I just thought because the two were so close, physically.

Netsch: Well, that's probably how I got the job but also we would do it for nothing as a little contribution to the university; at least I recall it being for nothing. It's the kind of thing you went home and worked on. We didn't do it in the office. It was a great honor to do that base. So with that and Northwestern and IIT, I have been involved with campuses in three universities here.

Blum: Do you consider yourself a university specialist or a library specialist?

Netsch: I would consider myself a specialist in institutional work rather than commercial, because it could be a library, it could be a museum, it could be a school, but it also could be the Miller campus at Northwestern which is a body of land—which reminds me, I got word the other day that the Lindheimer Astronomical Center at Northwestern is going to be torn down. I was really dumbstruck.

Blum: Why?

Netsch: It's not used anymore. I told them that I have to recognize that a high-tech facility does have built in obsolescence, and that the Hubble—he said, "Well, the Hubble telescope makes the use of this telescope absolutely unusable for highly scientific sightings, absolutely unuseable because by comparison..." Originally it was located at the lakefront because it had the longest stretch of dark night for viewing, but in twenty years that dark night has been impacted by growth along the lake. I think the university is probably right in

saying it, but it's the only high-tech building in the city of Chicago. It's a very special kind of building.

Blum: Do you consider it a building or a structure?

Netsch: It's a structure. We had designed it with all of these pipes holding this thing up, that as the sun moved around, like on this hot day, it kept moving on all of these little pieces all over, that there is a minimum amount of change and movement. We had these solid cores of concrete coming up that were supporting the instruments themselves. It's a very nice kind of instrument, and I'm sorry that it's probably going down. I have talked to somebody who said when the ice comet was going to smash into Jupiter, people could line up at night and go up the stairs and see it. So it does have some kind of use, but the planetarium is really there for that for the public—and it was really built as an educational, scientific tool. I called them back the next day and said, "I hope maybe you're going to give a visual record copy to me and to the Lindheimers," and the gentleman I was talking to said, "We never thought of that."

Blum: What do you mean, "a visual record?"

Netsch: A photographic record. Your child dies and you have pictures.

Blum: Is that the way you feel?

Netsch: Yes. I thought, gee, instead of trying to drum up support on making a landmark out of it and fighting to keep it—we're talking about what happens to architects' creations, and I realize that everything can't be kept as a landmark. It's an important building, I think, and I think the insensitivity of not making certain there is a visual record on the behalf of an academic institution, I find that discouraging. I had to call up and try to put a bee in their bonnet so they would do it. I'll tell you what goes through a designer's mind. We are emotional. There is no question about it. Tomorrow morning I go to the library committee, the Northwestern Library Committee, and we

are working on a birthday party for the Africana collection of Mr. Herskovitz. I was asked, what can I do, and I proposed that we should be doing things with the Field Museum and other places. I got delegated to do this research, so I have my little report here for tomorrow. At the same time these people have nothing to do with the Lindheimer Astronomical Center, but you know, you sort of feel, "Well, I should tell them, okay, I've done this, this is it." They have just selected an architect to do the part of the library that has the card catalog because they don't need them anymore. But they didn't talk to me about it. I've just assumed, here I am, the architect of the building, and they might at least say, "Walter, we're talking about this. Have you any ideas? Would you like to talk it over with us?" I don't expect to be selected as the architect. I am not saying that. So I had that blow about four weeks ago up there, that they had hired a Boston architect to give them ideas. The other day when I was talking about this exhibit I said, "When are you going to get all of the card cases out of the downstairs?" We had designed those. They were specially designed and they're handsome, and they've got nice, granite tops, and they've got these bases and they're cantilevered. They're really handsome. I said, "Gee, you know, after the card catalogs go you could put some of these granite bases on the bottom, and you've got exhibit bases. I don't mean you keep them all, but you could run some the other way, and you've got an idea for an exhibition coffeehouse. You can put plastic over the exhibit so they don't spill coffee on it." She said, "Gee, that's a good idea." I said, "I've got a lot of good ideas." So you get sort of testy, or I get testy. I just thought you ought to know that, when you're asking me these questions, that sometimes the pressures from outside I think are a little thoughtless, you know. It wouldn't have hurt the librarian to have invited me to lunch to talk about that. I think there are things that can be done and that should be looked at. They want my thousand dollars a year on the committee. Dawn says, "Oh, but you've given such good ideas." I said, "Well, the hell with it. They don't need those good ideas if they don't remember to even ask me about something." So, you see, I probably won't do that tomorrow. I'll probably just give my report and sit in on the meeting and have coffee with all of these sweet old things. There is one dynamic woman there. I give them directions on how to step and who to see and who knows what. They don't

know. So, I was sort of confessing that there have been times in my life when I would sort of like to choke the client on the basis of insensitivity to the architect who is providing ideas and concepts. Most of them think of us as another provider, like the man who delivers his crackers and the meat and everything, because we are paid. It's something that I think occurs in America alone. There was a time, of course, when I was a celebrity that that wouldn't occur. But you don't stay a celebrity forever. You get Mr. Warhol's fifteen minutes of fame or so, and now you're thought of as a civic person with obviously some money they try to get out of you, whether it's the museum or whatever it is, and to be put on a committee and do some work. I really don't like committee work. I feel used. I feel used because, especially at Northwestern the staff is sort of bulldozed by this committee. They don't stand up. The committee is ignorant.

Blum: But if you're on the committee you can give it a direction.

Netsch: That's what I am doing, but I don't really want to. When the child grows up it's supposed to develop its own roots. I don't know Mr. Herskovitz. One reason I am interested in it is because my wife thought he was a great teacher. It's been recorded that part of Dawn's social responsibility came from Mr. Melvin Herskovitz. The young men's council, for example, of the Art Institute, that was different. We were all young. We were not the board. We didn't have authority. We were interested in seeing contemporary art come about. When I was a trustee at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) it was a young museum. I told you Mr. Shapiro asked Pussy Paepcke and the then-head of the Graham Foundation John Entenza and I to become minority board members—that marvelous joke of Joe Shapiro's because we were the only Protestants. He was adding Protestants to the board. Pussy was a great human being, and in those days, a long time ago, she had guts and guile and charm, and John Entenza had the same guts, guile and charm. I had guts but no guile and no charm, but I was there and I liked art—modern art. But it was interesting. It takes a kind of personality who is civically responsible, but the best members on committees and boards are people who are really interested and knowledgeable and make the effort to learn, if

they're put on something. When I was on BPI, Business and Professional People in the Public Interest, when we got involved in a project we really did our homework.

Blum: Walter, do you think you feel particularly sensitive to what time has brought about for some of your buildings, some of your structures with which you felt were breaking new ground, and today, years later, they're being changed, they're being remodeled by other people? Do you think you are particularly vulnerable to that because your buildings are particularly vulnerable to that kind of change because they were so new, and you, because you are so sensitive?

Netsch: Well, it's true. I really feel that. When I had an eye problem last week I went up to the Eye Clinic. I said, "Jeepers, I might as well go to the Eye Clinic. I designed it." I walked in the major portion of it, and it looks just like when we first did it. And it's just been restored. But then I asked to see the boss, who remembered me as the young architect who did it, and he said, "I apologize. We had to do this over because we had to get some storage. We had no storage room." I said, "I know storage is now a major concern everywhere." We had two private offices before, well, they put another examining room and a private office in, and now these two people who were in charge in the beginning are now part-time. They're advisors of counsel is what they call lawyers; they really work, but they don't have to work full-time. So they gave me the examination, and it's always interesting to see. But he said, "I'm sorry we had to change this because we needed more storage."

Blum: He was sensitive to you when he said, "I'm sorry."

Netsch: Yes, that's right, but the major part was kept. People often say, "I don't know how you invented this, Walter." I say, "I really didn't. Wayne did that." We were trying to find a way that we could give eye examinations in half the space, so we used a mirror—a terribly simple detail—so what you are looking at is really twice the space. They thought it was ingenious. A lot of our solutions reflect not only Field Theory but ingenuity in thinking out the



problem. And the idea at the Art Institute of the arch to go under the tunnel to force the way so people could get to parking, practically under cover or walking through a pretty garden—I think if you're like me who has been, I think, a sensitive architect as well as a successful one, you are inclined to be hurt more easily because every book you read says, "Well, why do you talk that way? Louis Sullivan didn't get anything. Wright didn't get anything. Harwell Hamilton Harris didn't get anything. Why should you? Times haven't changed." So you say that to yourself. "You're right." But then an incident happens and it starts all over again. All I'm saying is, I'm a human being, and as a human being I am going to respond, even though I know it's useless to do that, and I shouldn't do it.

[Tape 10: Side 1]

Blum: Walter, some time ago you mentioned something about Westinghouse, and we held it so maybe this is the time to discuss it.

Netsch: Westinghouse was an example of, let's call it my Pittsburgh period. It was pre-Field Theory. We got a client, which was Westinghouse, to build an addition to their research center outside of Pittsburgh. It was a little bit like IIT, adding on to somebody else's something or other—I mean, bays of research rooms. Nothing as important as Mies's, but an important project. This was what you would call a good commercial client, Westinghouse. It was a very difficult site. As you know, Pittsburgh is hilly, and I remember it for three things: one, it was the first time that a major participant in Skidmore who eventually became a partner and worked with Bruce, primarily, and is now practicing on his own and actually did the remodeling for Sears Tower, Jim De Stefano. This was early Jim, and it was early Mr. Smith. Adrian Smith was a very young designer assigned to the project. So this is of kind of historic interest, and this is the project that Adrian worked with me on and so did Jim, who then went on with me to the library at Wells before he joined the regulars, you might say, in Skidmore. We've always remained friends, however. It was important because the three of us decided—and I think it was through this project that we got the Westinghouse trolley and to do the

Westinghouse transit system in Pittsburgh. They liked our fresh thinking. Well, there was fresh thinking, we designed circular parking areas where the interior ones were for smaller cars than bigger cars, and by these big, circular parking lots we were able to save the landscape and have it penetrate. It was just a landscaping idea that worked in this particular location. It also gave them an idea that we could think things through in a fresh manner, and that led to our transit responsibility. The other thing that happened is, we tried to do a plastic building. Obviously, Westinghouse was interested in new materials and working on new materials, and so as architects we thought we would try to bring a new material. Our additional wings were to have this—I could almost draw the cross-section now—this big, long plastic opaque element on the facade, and the strip window above, and more and more and more. It failed, but it was the first time Adrian had worked with us. He went back and joined another project. I really didn't have a studio at this time. No one had a studio. I was working in the office like everybody else, as a senior designer.

Blum: Walter, what do you mean, it failed? You mean it was never built or you didn't think it was built successfully?

Netsch: No, I mean it failed as an idea. It couldn't come in economically. There were fire problems. I think this was soon after the Air Force Academy, and I was all filled with the idea that we could bring technology to the world on every project. This was going to be a technological breakthrough for Westinghouse this time instead of for the government, but it didn't work. However it was a linkage to getting the Westinghouse transit program, which was a very fascinating study because, first of all, it was to try to put a raised transit system in an urban area. Secondly, we devised, being Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, you might say, the idea of great, big, long trusses that went from the end of one block to the other. Inside this huge, U-shaped truss at the top we were going to put in power and water and everything so that you didn't have to dig up the streets in to future, except for sewers. We weren't putting in sewers. And all the new electronic power things that were supposed to go in in the future—telephone, and so forth. And then below it we hung the

trolley, so it was suspended over, and you could look down into the urban area and look into the shops, and so forth. It was exciting. I think I had a Porsche at this time. We'd photograph everything backwards because you had to try to—well, you're shooting in the back of the car, and so it was amazing trying to make everything look forward. It was another use of our movies. I don't have any idea where that movie is. It may be in the SOM archives—it probably is, somewhere. But it was a great, fun project, and it had the idea of another essence of high-tech, urban planning. It had some sense of reality because they tried it out, but I think in our search for the panacea for urban society we hooked so much onto it, it got more and more expensive and sort of fell of its own weight. But it was a good study. I don't know what finally happened, but I know the route we picked. The research on the route was something that was, I think, finally made into a bus route because it did hit the proper areas.

Blum: So the two things you designed for Westinghouse, the transit system and the addition neither one was built by you?

Netsch: No, the addition was built and the parking lots were built. It was from our success on that project that we went on to the transit system. Actually, Jim really took over that project.

Blum: You have talked about films that you and your studio developed. Why were films such a good medium for you to study projects?

Netsch: Why is everyone using computers today? It was the hot thing. I said to you if I could have been the Italian film director, Antonioni, instead of Walter Netsch, I would have been Antonioni, and so we used film whenever we could. It was the perfect medium, I felt, to describe architecture to a client as something three-dimensional, in the round, or in looking at a city, how do you see it in context with other elements. And with Pruitt-Igoe, the new plan in contrast to the old. You could show all the terrible conditions at the old buildings, and then exploding the buildings, and then the renewal, the fresh idea. Film is probably the best way to do it because you can do it in a very

short period of time, you can do it effectively, graphically. Before modern graphics the film was the media. The media was the message, you know.

Blum: In your studio did you work with models, as well?

Netsch: Oh, yes, there were models. Almost every project had a model. We did full-scale mock-ups of rooms with plastic board, and in designing furniture we would do that. And light fixtures, anything we were working with, we would end up with a full-scale mock-up, probably, fifty percent of the time, anyway, and some sort of small-scale mock-up all the time. That was part of the training in architecture for all of us coming out of the Second World War.

Blum: I'm not particularly aware of many people using movies, and you say it was the medium of the time.

Netsch: Well, don't forget Charlie Eames was the leader in doing movies. If you felt yourself in that peer group, you were doing movies, too.

Blum: And you must have, obviously.

Netsch: Absolutely. It would be naïve of me to tell you otherwise. In fact, Charlie Eames gave me crits on my movies on UIC and sent me back out to do the slow-motion studies of the students using the classroom, the excedra and the forum. It's a marvelous little movie, somehow missing, or it's in something down here that I haven't found yet. Or again, it may be in the SOM archives.

Blum: These were done on sixteen millimeter?

Netsch: Sixteen millimeter film. See, what happened was that sixteen millimeter film became very popular because Canon came out with a camera called a Scoopic, a very easy, hand-held camera you could do blue movies with, and that was its primary purpose, doing dirty movies. I mean, out in San Francisco and L. A. that's what they were doing with it. We found out that there was this very flexible camera. Then we had a Beaulieu, which is, next to

an Arrix, a really professional camera. Arrix was much too complicated, but the Beaulieu wasn't. So we had three movie cameras. We could make a set-up with the two Scoopics and the Beaulieu, so we were really just like Hollywood, you know. We could shoot from three angles at once and then edit. By using the three cameras we really were in a sense also exploring dimension as young architects. It was an extra tool.

Blum: That was your virtual reality?

Netsch: That's right, it was our virtual reality. When I went to Europe on vacations or for partners' meetings I would just take one camera along. I couldn't be in three places at the same time, because simultaneity is important when you are doing this. We got so we watched movies all the time. We had parties after a project we had done, and we showed movies, and we talked about movies, and we talked about the techniques of filming and how it could improve ours. The little film I did on Felspoint in Baltimore is an example of our doing a mood film, so called, trying to describe an area. And it also intrigued clients. It was part of that high-tech SOM firm—they could do film, they could do something unusual. When it finally came to Dirab Park in Saudi Arabia, as I said earlier, we did a thirty-minute television film, like Disney does today, outlining and announcing their park and simulating what it was going to be doing and cutting into other examples. Earlier we tried to think of the things that make you who you are in terms of a creative person. For me, in college, it was the novels and it was jazz and it was the war, and things like Aalto coming to teach as part of the war. Then after the war it was high hopes and the new world and revving up for it. It took time. And then, of course, in my case, it was the Air Force Academy—well, first it was the Naval Postgraduate School, and then the Air Force Academy and the work in Japan. I had all three, so I had that simultaneity almost like film—three locations, you might say. And then we took thirty-five-millimeter slides. We took slides in the Kabuki theater, we took slides of all the temples in Kyoto. I have just hundreds of slides about these various experiences, and that all fed into practice. Practice could be dull and businesslike—you know, this is Project A, 172-A1A, or it can be something that occurred a moment in time

when other things were occurring. You could almost find, if you did deep research, about any good, serious architect—Eero, for instance—that there was a relationship between everything that was going on his life and what he was creating. We know it about Wright and people like that who have been the subject of so much research, and I think it's true of any good architect that it's not done in a vacuum.

Blum: Did you have an interest in photography as a child, as a younger person?

Netsch: None, and I didn't do it in college.

Blum: So you came on it just as a tool for your work?

Netsch: It came on as an additional pencil in my hand. You know, this was a high-tech pencil, and we fell in love with it. But don't forget, I like paintings, and if you like paintings you think visually. If you like paintings, the daguerreotype, you know that there were early films from France with the earliest movies, and they were an art form. We saw Jean Cocteau's famous movie, we saw the art films, and all of that fit together. If you were just straight on architecture that's not true, but I think we were fairly Renaissance people. We had music, we went to the symphony as kids in college. As a child and as a kid I went on my own, and then we had art, and as I told you. If I thought there was something really important I wanted to hear at the symphony—maybe a new Shostakovich; Koussevitzky was going to do the new Shostakovich or one of his symphonies—I would not go to design class that afternoon. And I'd go to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and I'd spend time, and it was there that I really loved the Japanese prints. They were fine Japanese prints. I would quit the design lab at MIT, cross the river, spend the afternoon in the Museum of Fine Arts, and then meet my friends for supper or dinner, a cheap spaghetti dinner, and then go to the concert in Symphony Hall. They were all in one little locale in Boston. So you get in the habit. Our professors really encouraged culture. If you were interested in culture they didn't mind you missing class. In fact, they were very happy to get students that were broader-based than the strict pragmatists who came to become an

“architect.”

Blum: Do you think that perhaps your studio attracted people who were interested in the arts, rounded in that way, or was it the work that attracted them? Was it the personality or was it the work?

Netsch: It was usually the work, but I tell you, it was my interview with them. They brought stuff to see and talk about, and I would challenge what they were talking about—“Why didn’t you do this and how did it happen? What was going on in your life at that time?” We looked for well-rounded people that would fit into the studio. You had to fit into the team because they were coming from very diverse areas. About the only thing that could hold us together is the common ancestry in culture, shall we say—in American culture.

Blum: Were these people already working for SOM, or were they people who just needed a job and were interested in your studio?

Netsch: Most people came from the outside. I gradually developed people from—well, some are friends from the past, from college, some were—like the Naval Postgraduate School was a good, exciting job, and we needed to hire additional people that I would interview. As I said, the deans of most of the schools were very happy to give me names.

Blum: Did many of these people stay with you and stay with SOM, or did they just come and go as the jobs ended?

Netsch: They stayed quite a while, oh, yes, and people followed me. Some of them went to Baltimore when I went to Baltimore.

Blum: What was the Baltimore job?

Netsch: Well, Baltimore was Nat Owings, really. Nat Owings got interested in planning. I told you about Senator Moynihan from New York, and Nat trying

to get him interested in this national vision of a national infrastructure. Of course, Nat had been interested in planning in Chicago, and so he got this job sort of by default. They were having a hard political argument. The highway planners for the Baltimore I-95 were going to build a bridge right across the inner harbor of Baltimore, from Federal Hill to Felspoint. Nat somehow got word of it, and the papers were all agog, and Nathaniel Owings mounted his white charger, and his spear was long and sharp, and charged into this. He had also discovered, as I found out later, there was a lot of hanky-panky going on with the road.

Blum: Politically?

Netsch: Politically—money and people and collusion, and so forth, and the governor, who eventually did, I think, some time in jail for this. So Nat fussed around and caused a commotion, and they gave him the job. They said, “You take over.” Everybody thought he was nuts to do it because he took into his bosom the key people who were doing the political manipulating—the highway planners. He made a great statement to the other people and said, “Well, I’d rather have them in front of me than behind me.” That sounds like Nat.

Blum: That’s smart.

Netsch: But it gave all of us who had to run to project one hell of a time.

Blum: How did he select the SOM people to work with him?

Netsch: They had already been selected. See, I came on late. Norm Klein was in charge of this and also spurred Nat on to fight the good battle in the spirit of planning and everything. Norm got some very good people, really my kind of people. They would have been very happy in my studio. They were doing a great job, and then Norm got ill and, unfortunately, he eventually died. Then Nat put Johnny Weese in temporarily, and Johnny Weese would take the red-eye special from California all the way to Baltimore to try to help out.



I don't know what John was doing in California for love nor money, but it was a big firm by then and you didn't know what everybody was doing. You lost contact. John was beginning, also, to hit the bottle.

Blum: Was John a partner?

Netsch: I was a partner by then—no, John never made a partner. He was an associate partner. I don't think he even made a full partner. I think his drinking became a problem, because it became an emotional problem. He saw the world as somewhat against him. He was not a first-rate designer, and he thought he was, and so it made him a second-rate administrator, trying to do both. He could have been a first-rate administrator.

Blum: But you say he came cross-country for this Baltimore project.

Netsch: For this, and then Nat decided he needed help, so I got sent down. The only administrative job I ever had in my life was to run this team. We were presenting regular planning documents and environmental reports—everything that I never had done before. We were also fighting the good battle; in fact, one of our battles—this remains a scar on the landscape in Baltimore. They tried to run the highway through a black community, and if you can imagine all of us on our white chargers, trying to prevent this from happening, trying to devise a cut—you know, a depressed highway in which we were going to build all of these schools and everything on top so you would never see the highway, and there would be all of the linkages. Well, the one difficulty about liberals planning is that as we saw the holistic need for a total resolution, the price went up and, of course, the politics went up because the school board didn't want this, or somebody didn't want that, or the mass transit system we were doing on top to give everybody who didn't have a car, with low income, a chance to get to a job—all of that, you know. I understand the road got built just through the black neighborhood and then stopped, and it never went anywhere. It was supposed to then go through a hill in the park and then come out the other way.

Blum: Through a hill?

Netsch: Through a hill. We had a marvelous time designing that tunnel—a good-looking tunnel, because everybody was objecting, “How can you do a good-looking tunnel?” Anyway, it was fraught with problems. Our staff meetings would sometimes be five hours long where I was trying to outwit the polls and the polls were trying to outwit me. That’s where I said that my sidekick and assistant and I by Friday night were ready to go have crab and martinis. We would have five martinis, I think, and eight crabs—not soft-shelled crabs, but the marvelous Maryland crabs you crack open. It was an intense experience. The one thing that you find missing today, except probably, say, in Gehry’s office—and I’m just guessing because I know one man who works there, and from what little conversations I’ve had with him, it sounds like it’s the same—the intensity of belief that all of us had that we were doing the right thing for the right reasons, and we were warriors for good and social good. That was one part of Skidmore, and as I say, the other part was that Nat kept looking for fresh design in everything, because I think the firm fell down because they couldn’t really see it when it happened. I was thinking that to me the only really radical buildings that the firm has ever done actually came with Gordon Bunshaft and Faz Khan—well, except for mine, the chapel and so forth—was the Haj Terminal that Gordon did with Fazlur. Gordon never got to go there, and Gordon never got to see the client. But it was Gordon’s idea.

Blum: The tent-type roof?

Netsch: Yes, and Fazlur came through. Also, that marvelous bank office building Gordon did in Jeddah with the holes in it, you know. I had previously done a building with holes in it for another client over there that didn’t go ahead, and Gordon pooh-poohed me on it and said, “That’s foolish, Walter. That’s foolish,” and then he turned around...

Blum: ...and did the same thing?

Netsch: No, no, he didn't do the same thing, he made it classic. Mine was a Field Theory one. It was a radical mountain, a combination of environment and space, but conceptually it was the same idea. Gordon, who was pretty good about this, would take something home that he would see, and he would turn it over in his own aesthetic system, and he would take the good he saw in that and create something else. It was not the same thing. It was not copying, it was not plagiarism in any sense of the word, because the concept of that green interior has existed in all time, even in the Bible, so it wasn't that either he or I invented it first. But he had that great capacity for doing it, for thinking things over and regurgitating. The tents in the Haj were not the first time anybody had done that kind of architecture, but the combination of the client and these thousands of people coming on their way to Mecca, arriving by the ton loads with these big, new aircraft, dumping these people in, and the Saudis really supporting it as a financial thing—a religious center, actually, and then they would go on up to Mecca. Then having Faz, of course, being Muslim helped tremendously, and so there you've got a symbiosis of client, of personality, and of goal. Now, you see, Gordon was willing to give up things to the client.

Blum: And never seeing the project, though.

Netsch: And never seeing the project. He was willing to do all that for the project, you see. Fazlur, who had to fight with Bruce all the time on everything, found Gordon quite a different person to work with.

Blum: Would you have done what Gordon did?

Netsch: When I worked in Saudi, when I was doing Dirab Park, I needed a consultant on a zoo. I'm no zoologist. I got Dr. Lester Fisher from the Lincoln Park Zoo, and I didn't realize he was half Jewish. It never dawned on me what people are. But I found out he couldn't go to Saudi, and so we had to take along his second in command, who was an Irishman and certainly wasn't Jewish, and that was difficult because then we'd go back and talk to Dr. Fisher. He was hurt, and I was angry. I really pursued it. "If you can bring Kissinger to

Saudi, you certainly can bring Gordon and Dr. Fisher.” The client would step on one foot and then the other, and then go back to supporting Nixon against McGovern, putting me in a corner. I was trying to describe, the sense of—the exploding time really formed Skidmore, with Nat being the nucleus.

Blum: You talked about Nat tackling the politicians in Baltimore to save the Baltimore waterfront, the harbor.

Netsch: That’s right.

Blum: It was my understanding that Nat was not much of an architect. Was he a planner, or did he just have the political savvy to deal with people for jobs?

Netsch: No, he was an environmentalist. He was not a planner either.

Blum: Wasn’t that only after he went to California?

Netsch: No, I think when he did Lake Meadows he was an environmentalist. He certainly was not a Corbusian. He was not aware of *la ville radieuse*, you know. That was not his world. My French may just make you cringe. Nat, he was just a man of his time, when all of this stuff was exploding. Like when they did the Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati and they got all the artists involved with it. They had Miro for the French restaurant, they had Marianne Strengell for fabrics, and they had two American artists—the humorist Saul Steinberg and Alexander Calder did a mobile. It was the fact that we didn’t keep our nose to the grindstone. It’s what made the firm, the fact that it was made up of personalities—others were the project-manager types; the good business people who kept the firm afloat by knowing where the budgets were and the timing and the schedules and the costs. They were important, too. I don’t mean that they were dull sticks, but it wasn’t their all-enveloping passion—I saw *Tosca* with Walt Severinghaus at Covent Garden in one partners’ meeting. He and I decided that we wanted to go to the opera, so we just went and bought some tickets. Walt Severinghaus was a very serious man who handled the business end—he was the Abe Lincoln of the firm. He

was Honest Abe. He also looked like him, too, and spoke slowly. He was primarily a business person, and deeply religious. He got quite a few clients through that arena. He was more than just a businessman, because Covent Garden was one of his goals. In *Cavaradossi*, in that opening scene in the painting—unless I've got my two operas mixed up—I'll never forget the scene and the painter and the guy escaping and putting him in, and so forth.

Blum: Do you think that it's unusual for architects to be interested in the arts?

Netsch: Yes, I do. Most of them are anti-art.

Blum: Anti-art?

Netsch: They don't really collect art.

Blum: Well, they may not be collectors, but they're certainly sensitive to it.

Netsch: I don't think they're even fascinated with it.

Blum: One of the things that struck me in your projects knowing that you are a collector is that, I am not particularly aware that in of many of the projects you actually worked with an artist, say, for an outdoor sculpture or for a wall hanging or something of this sort as Gordon often did.

Netsch: That's not true because...

Blum: Noguchi is the first one I think you mentioned, and I know he was very popular with SOM, especially Gordon.

Netsch: Yes, but I had Richard Hunt out at my Madden Mental Health Clinic, where Loyola is. I commissioned a painting by the artist up here for the Northwestern Library coffee shop; we had the banners for the Wells College forum; I commissioned a piece of music for the Air Force Academy Chapel; we gave paintings to Wells College Library.

Blum: Personally? You and your wife?

Netsch: These were all personal, but that means I'm involved with the artists, and I see them as part of the environment. I thought you said...

Blum: No, I meant in terms of the project. Personally, I know you are a collector.

Netsch: But I spent my money to do this. This was not the firm's money. It was a real conviction on my part of the relationship that art and architecture play together.

Blum: And you couldn't convince the client to...

Netsch: I didn't bother to. It wasn't even a bother. Don't forget, my architecture has a lot of art in it, you know. In fact, Gordon used to say sometimes, "Walter, I think you are just a painter."

Blum: Did you take that as a compliment?

Netsch: No, I didn't. No, I don't think architects usually have that much devotion or know artists or become involved—I mean, like going to Coenties Slip and seeing artists, as we talked about yesterday. As far as I am concerned, Gordon was the only other person I know...

Blum: And he often used works of art in his projects, and almost always with Noguchi.

Netsch: Yes, but he also worked with Dorothy Miller at MoMA, with his clients. He had wealthy clients, and he got them to buy lots of art or to fill a gallery. He had a kind of gallery of his own that could spell that, and so Gordon impacted on me. Let's not kid ourselves. People could say it was a commercial attitude on the part of Skidmore to do these things, but I don't

really think so. I think you could have avoided it if you wanted to, but we didn't want to avoid it.

Blum: Did you meet Noguchi through Gordon?

Netsch: I've forgotten how I met Samu. It was somehow—he and I hit it off somewhere, probably at a conference or a lecture. He asked me to join the team on that project he was doing by the symphony hall in Detroit, so I came over on the eleemosynary way and just joined the team, because he could depend on my logic, really better than Gordon's logic, on a social project. And then when the Art Institute hired Samu...

Blum: For the sculpture.

Netsch: ...as I say, it was just a natural working arrangement.

Blum: Was that at your suggestion?

Netsch: No, they chose him. That was very easy to work with. They might have said, "Have you ever worked with him," or "Do you know him?" and of course, the answer was yes. I remember doing an evening in Samu's honor at the Detroit Institute of Arts with that woman critic—a marvelous lady—Dore Ashton—I think she was the most ugly beautiful lady I ever met. She wasn't pretty in one sense, but she exuded ideas that just transcended her visage. She was a good friend of Samu's, and a great critic. She did a movie on him just recently. She was one of the modern critics of the sixties, seventies and eighties, and a very important one. I did another Richard Hunt sculpture out at UIC. This one I didn't do. This was through the Art Institute's program of something. It's not a nice story, but true.

Blum: Do you want to tell the story?

Netsch: Yes. As you know, the Art Institute picks artists for commissions for works in different places. I can remember a story that for Northwestern, for Stevenson

was going to select this particular sculptor. The university turned it down, and therefore the sculptor will remain unnamed. Then I remember Mary Block telling me, "We've got to pick a Chicago sculptor. We've got to give a Chicago sculptor something," and so they gave UIC to my friend Richard Hunt. They gave Richard a nice location in one of the west entries, and he did "Slabs of the Sunburned West" by Carl Sandburg, and it wasn't stone.

[Tape 10: Side 2]

Netsch: He did a very handsome sculpture, and it was one of the smaller amounts given for a project. It satisfied some people at the Art Institute that a Chicago sculptor was chosen—and I don't want Richard ever to know this, but he probably does because now he gets major gifts. The sculpture for Loyola was part of the one percent for art and therefore had a budget. I'll get back to that one in a minute. He did this piece, I liked it very much, but he had a very hostile title for it. I said, "Richard, I can't go to the client and say what the name of this sculpture is, for a mental health clinic." He said, "Okay, then call it 'Play.'"

Blum: "Play"?

Netsch: "Play." And so I said, "I certainly will." That was the name, and that's the name out there for the sculpture, "Play." History will never know what the other name was.

Blum: What his wish was.

Netsch: Right. And it was the first of his major pieces. It gave him a real start to doing these major pieces, which have become... He started doing them all over the world, you know, and they're fine.

Blum: Was the money used from the Art Institute, from the special fund that was...?

Netsch: It's a special fund. It's the Ferguson Fund. This was a Ferguson Fund



program, and the two instances that I know of were at NU and UIC.

Blum: Walter, throughout the entire decade of the seventies were you working at the University of Iowa?

Netsch: And at Grinnell.

Blum: Was there a link between the two?

Netsch: Oh, yes.

Blum: What was it?

Netsch: Jim Hammond and I—Jim was a young partner, and he went out with me to get the job at Grinnell. We got the job at Grinnell. He was to be the partner in charge. You know, wholesome Jim. He really is a nice human being, and honest as the day is long and about as un-SOM as you can be. He was a great help in getting started. We were asked to do a master plan, and that was often the way architects got started at small colleges, was to come in and try to help them do that.

Blum: This was at Grinnell?

Netsch: At Grinnell. This was the first one. Howard Bowen was my client, and he liked us, and then we went on to do the first project which was the new library. The librarian suggested that we hire the most famous librarian in the world, who was then the librarian at Harvard University, who had written the book on library planning. It was a great experience to work with him. Also, we had on the board of trustees the man who was inventing roof air conditioners, which, of course, have flooded the whole environment. If you want to talk about measles, there is measles but there are also roof air conditioners. He was a very honest man and a very devoted engineer. So he told me I was to use them on the library, and that's when I put them on the side. Then I tried to sculpt the wall so the ducts would go up in there. But we

did the library, and the library was successful, and after that we did the forum. Howard said, "I want you to do a student center where you do not hang your intellectual hat at the door," and we did a sequence of spaces. Bob Peters, who worked with me on many projects—he worked with me on that chair—actually took the beginnings of Field Theory as a geometric organization of octagons, squeezed and perfected, and developed a sequential thing. We did a coffeehouse, we did kind of a rumpus room, we did a late eating place and a regular eating place, and we did a music room. But all of these were sequential, and you could come in through these different doors, and this glass thing would link the—a very pretty building. I'd like to see it again. And then we did a dorm, Norris Dorm, which was our first really dull building, but it worked. It was the time when we were doing grouping. You did a group bathroom and then all of these things were around it. It later became a multi-sex dormitory. How it works I haven't the faintest idea, unless you just wear a bathrobe. And then we did the theater arts building, and then we did the physical education and swimming pool. We did it, again, as an extension of the forum where you had places to have coffee and sit and talk. Howard Bowen was a great president. You can tell by the way I'm explaining that his aims were way beyond what would be normal for a small college, even a good college like Grinnell where eighty percent went on to graduate training. And so, he got moved up to be president of the University of Iowa, and I moved along with him. There I was involved first with the basic science building. Hideo Sasaki was doing the master plan, and they wanted this building built over the highway. They wanted automobile traffic not to go that way, so they gave us the site of the roadway. But we made it a Piranesi pedestrian passageway, up from the bottom of the hill to the top, and also, that's where we did the movie. It's a Field Theory building. Maris Peika worked with me on this one, and we did, really, a very good building and a very radical building. That was one of the few really radical buildings. Howard liked it, and the scientists liked it. It's still a very nice building, and they still talk about it.

Blum: What was so radical about it?

Netsch: Well, first of all, all of the laboratories were based around the concept of a central core, and all the utilities went into that.

Blum: So was it a pie-shaped room?

Netsch: Well, no, they could be octagons or they could do all sorts of... You have to see the movie to understand what was happening.

Blum: But all around a core?

Netsch: All around these things. And then through all of this you were walking through and up levels. All of these had little windows that poked out onto this, what we, now call an atrium. They all had snap-tooth shutters which were there in case of a fire, that automatically if the heat built up would break a connection and the shutter would close off the opening so it would be a fire door. And so you had these purple shutters in this cream-colored space, with the orange. Some of our color schemes were really wild. Very early we were good on wild color. The young people like it. Then we did the library, the science library, and it was there we took Field Theory into three dimensions by making it change shape as it grew. That was with Maris, and then we worked on the hospital. The hospital did not go ahead. We developed a very exotic solution, and that did hit the fan. Now it's common. It was something we had learned, I think, up at Mayo's in Rochester, and it was reapplying. Then we did the computer center, and then we did the addition to the computer center, and that's when I got my heart attack that gave me the open-heart surgery that led to my retirement.

Blum: You had a heart attack there?

Netsch: No, I had the heart attack going from Rochester to a conference in Indianapolis or somewhere. All I know is, I was very uncomfortable, I couldn't lift anything and could hardly breathe, and so forth. I didn't know exactly what it was. But anyway, that was the beginning of a series of things. Mayo's and the University of Iowa were sort of ending my career, physically,

because of the physical disability. And Howard, of course, went out to the Claremont Colleges in California, and Sandy Boyd took over as president at Iowa. So this very last project, the addition to the computer center, was under Sandy.

Blum: The design for each of these buildings, I know they're all different and you were working with the Field Theory, and obviously Howard Bowen appreciated your work very much, but how did he present these designs to his board?

Netsch: Well, I'll have to explain. It's just like all this stuff here. We go through an immense effort in logic. You don't put on your beret and go in a dark room and grab a field and say, "That's going to be the basic sciences." We were here, trying to design changing laboratory shapes to meet the needs of research and teaching. I worked at MIT and I'd see how much money they spent as they'd tear these things out and build them over, and tear them out and build them over, that I decided, gee, there must be some way to lick this. And so, we designed this sort of technological train, and this train would be a system of work stations, and these work stations would then grow out of this core and had the utilities on them, and then this other work station could start off here then could suddenly turn off and go that way if it wanted to. And all these things were unhookable, like a train, and the whole idea was to develop a system of environments. We went through a long study of the different kinds of environments we could create geometrically that would relate to the teaching programs and research programs in basic science at Iowa. Remember, this is a basic science building and not a commercial building. We thought we would pursue this, and they agreed, but this is where things were beginning to fall down in terms of technology. They were looking at a market. They couldn't see a market for it, and so these things became walls and they became lab furniture. The rooms were workable. They were fine. No one objected to them, and they kind of liked the idea of the separate—every professor had his own little world. They had all of these worlds that they were living in.

Blum: Bud Goldberg calls those units “pods”. Maybe that would apply to this.

Netsch: Yes, maybe they were called pods. I can’t remember. But they became very beautiful and our drawings were beautiful. One of the important things is to see a Field Theory show on a project, like Basic Sciences or Behavioral Science. They were really gorgeous abstract drawings. They were paintings, in a way. The colors were glorious, and the techniques were good, and we prided ourselves in doing this. Even on the Air Force Academy, Eero would bring the current partner in that firm to the presentations on the Academy to see my presentations. Kevin Roche was a young architect then, he is about eight or ten years younger than I, and Eero would bring him. He was impressed with them.

Blum: So in trying to understand your position, you were looking at their needs, and you were trying to answer their needs as they understood them at that time.

Netsch: Right, in our terms. And look ahead and then use the fields as this extended geometry over orthogonal geometry. There usually was a social advantage to people not particularly liking a long corridor with laboratories off of it.

Blum: You mean the traditional.

Netsch: The traditional, and you could walk through. Many people consider this one of the best buildings at Iowa today.

Blum: The Basic Sciences Building?

Netsch: Yes. We did that, and so we did all of those buildings, so that was the story of Grinnell and Iowa. That was marvelous. Again, we had studios by that time, and a different cast of characters. Wayne Tjaden was in on the end of the computer center, where Maris was in on the beginning of the Basic Sciences and the science library. I’ve forgotten who was in on the hospital, but there was a transition there of three teams, actually, from the studio.

Blum: Did you feel that one or another of these buildings was more successful?

Netsch: I would say that we have never had any complaints from Iowa.

Blum: But from your point of view?

Netsch: And from my point of view, I think Basic Sciences and the computer center were two very good buildings, very different buildings. The programs were very different, and they were very good buildings. I think the library, again, like Wells, you walk through it, and the idea is that you walk into the book. You walk through it and then go into the library. I have no idea how it works. It probably was harder to expand than any other building we did. I have no idea—that's why I'd like to go out and take a walk around and see what happened, because now the computer has allowed libraries to compress material that can be put in, especially scientific material, a lot of it is on CD-ROMs and other techniques, and scientists like to have it in their lab rather than go to the library.

Blum: You have designed many libraries. How many have there been?

Netsch: About fifteen. All different if you lined up all the libraries.

Blum: And big, major libraries. I mean, two major ones in Chicago.

Netsch: Well, and little, small libraries. Skokie Public Library, for example—Jim Hammond and I did Skokie, and then Jim did the addition to Skokie after he left the firm. That was about Grinnell time for me. I may be wrong, but I think so. So that's a little public library, you know, and then you have a lot of college libraries. I guess most of them are college libraries.

Blum: What was the big challenge with libraries, or did they present a big challenge?

Netsch: Well, I like libraries because they are the intellectual center of every university or college, and that you sort of define the heart of that university or college by the library and its location. The library at Grinnell was—because it's had an addition made to it—a nice, little building, facing an open plain, and a balcony to read on. It was bucolic, and yet it had all the proper relationships between book, reader and research that this consultant taught me. And so, it had a very special flavor. You go to Skokie, which was a public library, and there they wanted to have little public meetings. I arranged an art show for the opening of the Skokie Public Library. It was either from Emmerich or Kootz. I got them to ship twenty-five paintings out here for the opening of the library, so we had a cultural combination of art and literature. We were very much holistic in the system of the arts.

Blum: Well, I know that libraries now have some concerts, they have poetry reading, they have art exhibitions.

Netsch: Coffeeshouses.

Blum: They loan paintings to borrowers for a certain amount of time.

Netsch: At the MIT library, when I was on the Humanities Committee, Mrs. Stratten... We would meet in her living room—President Stratten's wife—and we devised the system for freshmen to come in and select a print they could take to their room for the semester and live with that print, and then they would return it. I remember giving some money for purchases of prints for MIT students to do that, and others did on the committee, and Mrs. Stratten got gifts from outside. I'm going to meet with the architectural librarian from MIT in a week or so. They tell me that they still loan out these prints every year.

Blum: You did a remodeling in the library at MIT.

Netsch: Ah, that was an important building because it's under the main dome. It was also a personal crisis because Anderson and Beckwith had done the

remodeling, and they had done it—let's say, if I can try not to be mean; I don't mean it meanly—they did it disregarding the basic forms of the building. One of them was to hang a suspended ceiling, so you missed the whole dome, and put in fluorescent lights above so everybody got even lighting, and they put lots of readers in there. Well, I wasn't going to do that, and so I moved the readers into the books and took out the false ceiling and—because I remembered when I was a student there used to be this famous thing that told you that the earth was moving, a pendulum, swinging up there down from the dome.

Blum: Did it have a little needle on the bottom, with this long cord?

Netsch: Yes, and it swung in a definite pattern. I remember that as a physics lesson. Well, I commissioned Bob Engman and gave it to MIT—instead of hanging that we hung, and it still hangs, the Engman. Engman did a beautiful piece called a mobius strip. A mobius strip is that continuous strip without beginning and without end, as you know, and that hangs and swings in the middle. Then around it I built these alcoves of periodicals, and they were all self-lit, so I didn't have to worry about light fixtures. And then we had the dome again, we had this piece of sculpture hanging here, and we relit the dome as a work of art. The electrical engineer working on it was a star at MIT and an expert on lighting, and he did all of this lighting. I was there recently, and they haven't changed that at all. It really works. It was a restoration/renovation in which—it's very easy with a circle to add geometry. You don't have any problem there. And they're very beautiful. We used a chair very similar to this chair down here in the living room.

Blum: The Vasarely chair?

Netsch: The Vasarely chair, and it joined well and the whole thing is a very beautiful room. Then we redid the circular stacks. Now, I believe I had already done the circular stacks at Northwestern before I did this. I'd have to check the timing on the chicken and the egg, whether working on this influenced me on the availability and practicality of having radial stacks, or vice versa. But



then the idea of bringing the readers into the stacks was important, and we did this again through lighting. It's a highly successful renovation, and it's one of the beautiful spaces they take visitors to at MIT to see the dome. You know, you get to see—it's the center of what I'm getting at. Every library on every campus has its own need. The Wells College Library is this trek up the hill, and you stop on your way to the library between the dorm and the classrooms or dining room, and vice versa. The library at IIT was restricted to Mies's site plan, and to do that by then I had to put two libraries in one—the standard IIT collection and the Crerar at another level because they needed their identity in terms of their financing and technical/legal recognition. So every library I did had a different reason to be.

Blum: Do you have a favorite among those that you designed?

Netsch: I don't have favorites. They all have favorite meanings, each of them different, because the cast of characters was different. I suppose you could have a choice of Shakespeare's plays, whether you like blood and guts or comedy, but I don't have that kind of diversification in libraries. They all had the same common goal. I think Wells College is one of my favorites because you sort of contrast Wells with MIT. At MIT we did a restoration of a classic dome and evolution of something beautiful with something contemporary in it. And then at Wells College you have this grand space of a continuous space, which is an enormous room of E. E. Cummings sort of personified in a library. Then you have the nice, little, convenient, well-organized Grinnell Library. It's neat and tidy. God knows what it looks like now because they added a third floor. That was done by a local architect. Ben Weese did it. He never consulted me, so I have no idea what he did, and I have never seen it published. But they're just all different. The library down in the southwest at Texas Christian University, there's one where we did a scheme and we thought we'd envelop the existing building within a library. We thought in all our logic that it was the right thing to do. What we failed to recognize was that the trustees wanted a building they could get some money for and put a name on, so you didn't do this amorphous evolution which we thought was a fascinating idea. And so, we redid it and did an addition, and the addition is

very nice. But it was absolutely like going back to square one and saying, “Now, this criteria is entirely different. We are not going to use the theory of envelopment, we are going to use the theory of articulation,” and we did, and it was a highly successful building and it satisfied a need that we had ignored. I remember going down to the dedication. A great librarian, but he died very soon afterwards. It was very sad. I must say, most librarians are good clients. Occasionally, you’ll get a nice old-timer who lives in that world—completely in that old-time world—and he or she is pretty difficult to dislodge. It’s usually someone else who does the dislodging—you know, a professor or a member of the committee. It’s not my role to do it. I’ve got to find someone who believes that what I’ve proposed is correct. So these libraries were always special. It was nice to have the vocabulary. It’s nice to know what was the latest thing going on in microfiche, so you had at your fingertips all the technical vocabulary, and you could talk to any librarian about what’s what. You could discuss with them at their library what their needs were going to be and how they were going to use these new tools, and were they or were they not what the student habits were, and if there were any that were unusual. That was important.

Blum: Were all of your libraries equipped for computer use as it’s used today?

Netsch: No. The first library that we did for the computer was Northwestern because it just hadn’t come about yet. There we had a consultant from the UCLA library who was really the first. It was the first library to really do the research on what computers could do for libraries.

Blum: At UCLA?

Netsch: UCLA. That consultant was really a hot shot. We had the librarian from MIT on our committee, and he was fascinated. That’s John Burchard, and John was fascinated with what was happening there and really kind of surprised he couldn’t get it at the Institute. MIT has so many divided libraries. It’s the prime example of proprietary librarianship, and that leads to very difficult examination of the collection from any other point of view. The only other

place we knew where we had that same problem—I'm going to digress for a minute—is in the library for Sophia University in Tokyo which was a Catholic university. It was a very important one in Tokyo because many Japanese send their kids there because a young priest comes to Tokyo who is interested in education, and he finds he likes the idea of teaching at Sophia. So then they send him to a monastery to learn Japanese. So, Sophia University has all these people, and therefore they had all these little libraries. Here we designed an absolutely beautiful building in which everybody kept their little library, and it sort of exploded into general additions to that collection. All of these backed up into the core storage library, so everybody sort of gave up half their ownership—but it made a marvelous scheme because we had all these little libraries on the outside, actually parts of the composite whole.

Blum: It sounds like it was a way of satisfying everyone.

Netsch: But I brought it up because there was a beautiful way of solving a problem, and it was a library problem. It lent itself, then, to special Field Theory interpretation, and it became a very beautiful, beautiful scheme. We were associated with a firm, a very powerful Japanese firm who had great contacts with the trustees, and they decided it was wild.

Blum: Too wild?

Netsch: Too wild, and it had an adjacent building across the street for faculty offices which was terrific. The young man who worked with me later taught in Texas, and unfortunately was killed tragically in an automobile accident. He was one of the brightest Field Theory practitioners. He was doing Field Theory in major private palaces in Cairo—he had developed this connection while he was teaching down there after he left me. He was one of the few people who continued Field Theory after leaving me and taught it at a school. A great guy. He was a Miami of Ohio student that I met, and he came to work for me. He liked what I was doing on the building, and so forth. But it was really at Northwestern, and then at the University of Chicago that the

librarian really didn't want computers. He didn't really want them, but we hooked up a system to work with his very personal interpretation.

Blum: Well, the U of C is a research library. It's not a browsing library.

Netsch: It was designed that way, you see, and therefore the building looks that way. That was what the University of Chicago really wanted. So it's a proof that each of these buildings have their own... That's why it has all of those stacks that come out in those various jagged angles outside, because as they expand—I didn't know which way they were going to expand. I had no idea, and so I tried to develop an aesthetic that could change without your ever knowing it's changing because it's just another jagged line. Eventually they will probably have to tackle that when the collection gets that big. So each one of these libraries presents a different problem.

Blum: And the Field Theory worked for every project?

Netsch: It even worked for the University of Chicago, but he said, "No Field Theory, period," so I had to work on a linear system.

Blum: And what happened in Japan?

Netsch: So what happened was, the Japanese architects took over. At Sophia after our scheme was turned down I didn't know what to do except to sort of say, well, if the associate wants to do a scheme, we'll be glad to crit it if we can be of any help. So, the Japanese are very bright. They took our scheme and regularized it, and we had to play doctor to their scheme to make those little libraries connect so they begin to work. Then they submitted elevations which were just god-awful. I spent my own time—this was my own time—doing alternative elevations for them, sent them over, and they turned them down. In the meantime, these other architects, Gehry and these people, were coming along. They were all ten years after me and doing all these crazy buildings and everybody accepting them. But up until this time I was numero uno, and I was defeated by the Japanese system of "who's on first,"

like what is going on with the automobiles right now. In fact, at the very first luncheon we had for the clients and the associates who were selected, I mean, I didn't know them and they didn't know me. The president of Nikkensekkei got up, but he didn't know much English, so he read his little speech, and it said, basically—I think the phrase I can almost say word for word—"I do not know why you came because we can do this ourselves, but now that you are here we hope you will enjoy Japan."

Blum: What a greeting!

Netsch: I almost dropped my spoon in my soup.

Blum: How did SOM, and you in particular, become involved in this project?

Netsch: Well, we got hired because of my reputation on libraries.

Blum: Who hired you?

Netsch: The university, but they had to have a Japanese architect. We couldn't possibly do it all. So I sent Don Ohlson, who did this makimona, over to interview these other possible associates, and he made an analysis that said that "these people will be able to produce the drawings that we will need. They have all the skills, and they're a journeyman firm," but—and that's what we really wanted. We didn't think we wanted to fight it out with a prima donna, because most of them don't have really high-tech background firms in Japan. A few of them do. Again, this is a kind of a falling between the stools story on SOM, a communications problem, come to think of it. Some of these things I have had a chance to think about since we've been doing this oral history, and as these things come up my mind is fed. One architect we knew in Japan was, is, Kenzo Tange, and Gordon and Nat knew Kenzo Tange. When we had the partners' meeting over there he took us all up into the mountains for a marvelous fish dinner, and all that sort of thing, but he wasn't interested in working with Walter Netsch on a library in Japan.

Blum: Because he could do it himself without Walter Netsch?

Netsch: Yes, because he could do it himself without Walter Netsch. And the library didn't hire Kenzo Tange because for some reason they didn't want him, you know. So we were strapped in trying...

[Tape 11: Side 1]

Netsch: It turned out to be a very beautiful experience because the librarian was very interested, and there was one leading priest, Father Armbruster, and we have become very good friends. He was the one who could interpret for me the real need of the university and what the goals were.

Blum: Did they give you a program, a written program?

Netsch: Well, if they did I couldn't have read it.

Blum: In English?

Netsch: In English. No, they didn't give us as much. We had to ferret it out from a Japanese program, but it was mostly understanding the societal relationship of the libraries—you know, all these different libraries and their role. All of these separate libraries were to be brought together in a university library, see. But I started to say, they built the building that we doctored, and then they invited Dawn and myself to the dedication. The dedication book has the plans of our solution.

Blum: Was that a mistake?

Netsch: No. It's the marvelous Japanese way. My friend knew that this was the spirit of the real library, so this got published, and then there were some fill-in sheets that show how they got around to the one that was built. It has that marvelous flavor. It was the nicest compliment you could possibly get, but one of the strangest documents I've ever opened up at a dedication service.

Blum: Were you surprised?

Netsch: I was absolutely surprised. It wasn't done as a joke or to be kind to me, it was the spirit, the EW of it, in the Father's terms. I did some watercolors for him once. But his friend, a lady from Austria, lost them in the taxi, so I did a whole new series for him—there are a couple downstairs from that series—and I sent them to him. We get a Christmas card from him every year, and I'm about to send him these two new books. Father Armbruster and I went to the symphony together, we went to Kyoto together. He was also delighted to have Dawn over because he could explain to her the position of women in Japan.

Blum: Very different, I imagine.

Netsch: Very different. And it was even worse back in 1980. So you've asked about libraries. You see, they are all different, but they all have different reasons and they all have different stories because they have different reasons. Every one of them was a serious effort to define what is a library for that university, working in that way. Whether it was the University of Chicago or Sophia or Northwestern, all of them were a separate search. There is no perfect library that satisfies every need. There is no Model T, except maybe at a very small nucleus of a small town, and now you'd even have two versions: you'd have the computer version and you'd have the book version.

Blum: Is there a book version today? I thought every library was on computers, or into computers.

Netsch: Well, for example, at Northwestern we had a core library. It's called the Northwestern Core and Research Library. That came out of working with their program. They felt there were 75,000 books that all the disciplines could agree on as effecting the culture of the American student. That library would be open twenty-four hours a day, and any student working on a problem in research should be able to go to that library to assist him or her in

understanding the issue he was facing. So that is an example where there is still belief in the book. I think to a great extent the Northwestern Library is very good. It's gone through two stages since we did it. We had a central station, then we went to some substations, and now it's a dispersed thing. It's what they have put in the memory, in the programs, that you really can get now that you never could get even when we started. I find that it makes the start of research very easy—well, in a way it does and in a way it doesn't, because it gives you so much information that you don't know whether you know where to start unless you know how to ask the right questions. So in many ways it's the same old story, only one is electronic and the other one is a wall of books, and where do you start?

Blum: Were you involved in the changes that took places at Northwestern Library?

Netsch: I was involved a little bit in the discussion of the changes at lunches with Clarence Ver Steeg, but they have all retired now, and there have been two librarians since. The new librarians come in, they like the library, they're happy with it. I was surprised that the basic card catalog was still there because they were down to really about just two rows that they were using. I had assumed that the rest would gradually have disappeared, but they hadn't. Some people who are old will still go to the card catalog, but it's not updated anymore because it's on the computer. I mean, you're not going to double update. There's no way. That would be an extravagance. I did the science library and another library up there. It was a very different library. It was mostly periodicals because everybody is up to date and published three weeks ago and now on the lab desk someplace. It's quite a different world in technology and in basic science. I think that much of it doesn't hit the papers, you know. Occasionally you will hear something. As you will read on the Sarasota Library, they want to build a new building in the center of town. They want a new central library. It's an image thing. They want a central library and they don't know where they're going. The newspaper story about Sarasota is one of the most antiquated. I read that, and I wonder, what on earth kind of a library are they doing?



Blum: It was my impression that Sarasota had a nice, small community library that satisfied their needs.

Netsch: It did, but now Sarasota is a big White Sox team center. I would say the average income has zoomed. But no one has sat down to say What is a library? They used to drop off their summer reading, which was their summer novels, at the library in the fall on their way north.

Blum: Oh, the snow birds.

Netsch: And much of the collection was summer novels, and that sort of appalled me. But I don't know how it's changed. I mean, if I were down there I would have to go through what has been the collection, the accession rate in what kind of work, and how do you assess it, and do you keep it, or what happens, and what's the relationship to the computer and to the people who have reading—I know someone who is blind who really depends on the audio discs for reading up to date.

Blum: Are these the fundamental questions you ask for any library project?

Netsch: In any library project, you are interested in, one, the readership characteristics, especially in a public library. In an academic library you know that in history you are going to go through a series of Western civilization, and so forth, and you sit down and discuss the depth of the collection in these areas, and you will get a logical answer. But if you've got a dispersed public using a public library for specific reasons, like we discovered early on that people went into the library often to get the financial reports because they were retired and they wanted to think out their investment strategy, and they couldn't afford or didn't have brokers, or Schwab and Company didn't exist, you know. I'm really serious.

Blum: I understand.

Netsch: And so, when I said, "What's this?" he said, "Well, I'm not sure we do that

anymore.” Then you’ll read in one of these stories about the homeless living there, it talks about old people living there, and some people coming there to, I guess, look up their genealogy or something like that. But it sounds a little bit grandmotherly, you know, except it had a good research section because this was a newspaper man writing. He said, “I can call up and I can get my research answers in two hours.” And I began to wonder, So what kind of a collection do they have? because here is a reporter, he’s not writing on international affairs, he’s writing on the Sarasota community. So there must be an interesting collection of local history. So I read it one way, and he talks about it another way. Then he talks about this staircase. “One thing you’ve got to do, if you build a new library you’ve got to move this staircase to the new library because there are so many jokes about this staircase.” This is kind of wonderful after all our discussions on Mies’s staircase at the Arts Club.

Blum: What is the staircase like?

Netsch: Well, it’s like mine down here, the diagonal staircase. It’s like one of the early diagonal staircases that the Art Institute destroyed.

Blum: I don’t remember Art Institute’s staircase being diagonal. I remember it being sort of tapered.

Netsch: That’s right. It was a very conservative version, but this other one is a diagonal staircase. In fact, there is a picture of it you’ll see in the article. It literally goes up at forty-five degrees, and it makes people, they say, “woozy.” But actually, it’s got a marvelous handrail based on the Laurentian Library, sculpted out of granite, but this is bent out of metal. I was describing it to this writer, and I think he got discouraged when I pulled all this stuff on him, I guess. But it was perfectly natural to me. I gather at the library that people try to walk up the staircase this way, so that’s what makes the joke. If you just go—the EW of it is that way.

Blum: So people try to walk across it?

Netsch: I have no idea. It's just the first time I ever knew it was such a *cause célèbre*. But it's evidently a charming joke. It isn't a hostile joke. So he really wants the staircase moved if the library gets moved. But I feel that—well, they've all been wonderful. I mean, there we did separate living rooms because we had this small town feeling around the main room. You had the stacks, and then you had these rooms that looked out onto the water, and then another one that looked out onto the water. And so this was a little living room here, and another little living room here, and then you had carrels along the wall. It worked very well, but he said, "All of the interesting books are upstairs, and no one wants to walk up the stairs, so I get all of the books to myself," he said. So it's kind of a fun article—it was sent to me, and then one of my partners wrote a note, because he has retired there, and said, "You should talk to the original architect. This is a fine building, and it can be reused."

Blum: Did they want to abandon the building and build another?

Netsch: Yes. I have a feeling after reading this literature that—because the latest information is from March 21, and now it is almost July—they voted in a meeting to run a study on what they could do with this building, but they never called me back. So there are a lot of things I told you in political situations—you sit around a table, and, "We'll study it, but you know what our result will be before we study it." Oh, you know that. That's the way city planning has gone in Chicago for years, or highway alignments have gone. You know, "We'll make a study, but we'll come back and say this is the only way we can do it." Friends of the Park and I have fought many issues knowing ahead of time that it was a *fait accompli*, and that if there was any way we could challenge it we'd try. It's interesting. I think sometimes that it would be fun to sit down with someone who really liked architecture and liked Field Theory, and we could do sort of a travelogue about these buildings and a story about them, because I think the interesting part is that the people who use them today were not involved when the building was originally built.

Blum: Do you think they wear well?

Netsch: I don't think a society worrying about jobs and coming into the library to work on their *vitae*—that seems to be one of the major uses for this library now—hardly is going to be in a reflective mode for the use of a library. That's a very urgent, intense, introspective need, like an emergency room. It really is. It's an emergency room where the library is performing an emergency service. It is not the research end of the library, or even the fun, social end of reading, and things. So just what they would do in a new library, God knows what that program would be about. I remember the program for the Evanston Library was such because it was in an academic community. It was a good program—a program written for the competition. I didn't join it. I'm just commenting that the program was very good, but it insisted that a part of the original building be kept, and once the architect was selected they dumped the main reason and everybody was forced to work on the design, which is very insane. Somehow the winning solution did it in the manner in which it could be dissolved, you know. It would melt. And very bright. Although I find the building very heavy and cumbersome, visually, it seems to be very successful as a library. It works, and it works in an academic environment. I mean, this is a bunch of smart people. If you're doing "what is a Sarasotan versus what is an Evanstonian," you get a ying and yang answer.

Blum: You mentioned that you think perhaps the new Sarasota Public Library is going to be like an emergency room. You've done health care facilities.

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: Is there a connection, from a design point of view?

Netsch: Well, if I were designing, let's say, a library in which one of the major components was to provide a kind of Kinko-like service on how to improve one's *vitae* to get a job, you would need the equivalent of a doctor in the emergency room to evaluate your report, you would need another one there to be able to solve graphically what's happening so that you could go back to the computer and either change the font or change the system or change the

spacing or change the paper. So you need these two experts. Well, that sounds like an emergency room to me, only in a library context. It has nothing to do with the collection, it has nothing to do with the computer, to speak of, if that were a major need. And I would consider it a transitory, major need, so I would be thinking of this as kind of a service center you would be providing in the library, which would be an additional need.

Blum: Is that what the Baldwin Building at Mayo's was?

Netsch: No, the Baldwin Building at Mayo's is tertiary health care because the community up there was getting their nose out of joint because everybody was coming from all over the world, getting this great care—I was a patient there once, in 1941 or 1942, and I know there are experts and they do this analysis—so the community needed something. And so, Baldwin is a community organizing tertiary health care. It has parking garage so you can park and go in. It isn't primary health care at all. If you needed it then you would be fed into the system, but otherwise it was Mayo's answer to respond to a community need.

Blum: It was highly praised, and your solution must have been very appealing and satisfying.

Netsch: Well, it did three things. For one, it kept the ability to handle a great number of patients easily with minimum personnel, and it had a room that the doctors really liked—we designed it together with the doctors—an examining room they really liked, and I tell you, it was really an experience designing that room.

Blum: Why?

Netsch: Because the doctors at Mayo really become part of the Mayo system, and the kinds of needs of recording information have to be organized in such a manner that you could go from one discipline to another and read a report and have it makes sense. You don't have to restudy the patient all over again,

otherwise it would be a lousy, fancy center. Because it's so big it needs organization, so these doctors are well trained in doing certain things in certain ways.

Blum: Who explained the system to you?

Netsch: The doctors. I sat down with several doctors, and we'd try a room, and we'd say, "No, that's not going to work. You've got the patient too close to the accompanying visitor so that I can't really tell who I am examining—the patient or the mother or the brother or whoever it is." Little things like that. We wanted to have two environments in the room—the environment of the oral examination and gaining the confidence of the patient, plus the exam part of the room. It was very carefully explained to us, and we wanted to do it efficiently and well. We wanted to design the corridors so that the nurses' station could monitor as many of those corridors as possible so there would be immediate visual control. We did all that, and it's a nice building. On top of that we did the garage with a tumbling landscape, so we think we hid the garage in a grotto, so to speak. If you look at Baldwin you'd see Baldwin in the entrance, and you'd see all this tumbling landscape, but if you drove in and landed on one of these parking levels and then walked in, you would be coming in—but you'd end up at the same place.

Blum: How did SOM get that job? How did you get it?

Netsch: First of all, Bruce had done some hospitals. He had done Presbyterian-St. Luke's with varied success with the client. I had good success with the Air Force Academy Hospital. When it comes to hospitals I am a very good listener. I think when it comes to working with clients I am a good listener. So I had a reputation for success in what I had done in hospitals. I've really forgotten how we got the job. See, most architects say, "I saw someone at a party," or, "I knew there was going to be a job and I wrote a friend who wrote a friend to tell a friend to do something." I'm absolutely naïve on that end of the field. It probably came to us through some doctor who knew of my work. My mind is beginning to unfold. There was some actor in this, and I

think Harry Weese played a part. I think Harry Weese was working up there and had done something.

Blum: Well, just off to top of my head, Baldwin is Kitty's family name. I don't know if this pavilion was named for the family.

Netsch: I have no idea. It would be an absolute surprise to me. But I think somehow Harry was designing something, an office building, and I think somehow he recommended me. He certainly wouldn't recommend anybody else in Skidmore, I can assure you. He absolutely had a great antagonism to Hartmann, to Graham, to everybody, so if it did come through Harry it would have been a direct recommendation. I never met Mr. Baldwin. I worked with the Israeli artist who has a sculpture downtown with all the colors.

Blum: Agam?

Netsch: Agam. It was a piece for them—helping him locate it and working with him on it. That was a good project. Don Ohlson worked on that. I can't remember the studio head. I think it was Maris, but I'm not certain. But it was a good building and came within the budget, and we never got another job from Mayo, but *c'est la vie*. Sometimes you get known for being a specialist—shall we say, the "unique building" specialist.

Blum: Well, that's why I asked, because that seems like a very important job among health care facilities, and yet you were a campus and library specialist.

Netsch: Actually, it was a community building. It had nothing to do with their major hospital. They were using Ellerby and Company for the major buildings. This was a separate problem, a unique problem, a local problem, a community problem. It was not a Mayo Health Center problem in that sense of the word. It so happened when I was working on the hospital in Algeria, I tried to get Mayo's—you know, the doctors I knew up there—interested in associating because, God knows, the Algerians needed help.

Blum: This was at the University of Blida?

Netsch: Yes, it was the teaching hospital at the University of Blida. It was adjacent to it. I've forgotten the name of it. It was a major teaching hospital. Midwives are a major part of the Muslim culture because they are women attending women, not wanting a male doctor present. It was an amazing cultural problem. Again, we had some nice clients who could help us through this very stratified sexual organization. Well, if you have male nurses in male rooms, and you have female nurses in female rooms and—I don't remember how he did it, but how does the doctor who has twenty-five patients in surgery, how do you handle him? Does he go to twenty-five different places or do we work out—I've forgotten which system we used. I'd have to go and study those drawings because it was a very complex solution. It was a very complex problem. But there the social mores played such a heavy part.

Blum: So it was more than just learning how to arrange a hospital or how to design a hospital. You had to learn all about their customs and their culture.

Netsch: That's right, and it came out to be a very different kind of hospital. I think Mayo's probably had sense enough to realize they didn't want to associate and stumble into that because they would have said, "We can't afford to do that." Algeria probably couldn't either, being a socialist country.

Blum: Did you think it would bring up the quality of medicine in Algeria to have this association with Mayo? Was that your purpose?

Netsch: Yes, it really was, because we were finding the university a problem. They wanted us. We didn't understand them, and they deliberately made it vague. Somehow they thought we would get all the latest textbooks to them in all the disciplines so they could turn about and copy them and not face any of the copyright laws or anything. This happens in Third World countries. It took the longest time for our lawyer and their lawyers to understand why we couldn't do that, because you'd go in the bookstore in Algeria and you would



find loose-leaf spiral bound books like this. They were not regular hardbound because they cheated. They went and converted a classic book into something that they could give, because they gave all the books to the students. My life has been a cultural parade, in a sense, of meeting all these different cultures—Japan, Algeria, Saudi, Iran. They were all different. Even down under was different because little traces of English royalty had seeped in.

Blum: You mean Australia?

Netsch: Australia, yes.

Blum: Walter, one of the projects you've mentioned off and on throughout these sessions has been Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and it got very good press, I sense from you that you were very pleased with it—that was the art museum. What was the story with that?

Netsch: It's kind of a marvelous story. The reason I talk about it a lot, it was the last major building I did, it was the most sophisticated use of Field Theory, and young Craig Hartman, who now is a partner in the San Francisco office, worked with me on it. He really made a major contribution. I think he is one of the people who would say that the studio had an impact on his life even though he is not practicing Field Theory today. Someday we'll talk about just that kind of problem—or not problem, but what happens. Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, announced they were going to build an art museum. They tried to get I. M. Pei, who was not interested, Philip Johnson, also not interested, etc., so there was this second group of invitees in which I was included. I heard all this later from one of the faculty participants. We made a good showing. The site was spectacular. First of all, there are all of these pseudo-Georgian buildings which make up the campus of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, but this site is across the road into what is known as the Western College campus, which has been absorbed by the university and is made of sturdy Americana stone buildings. It included the big heating plant for everybody, and a gorgeous wooded area with very low density. This site

is on the brow of a hill, looking down on a pond, overlooking the chapel tower of Western College, which was formerly a women's college. It was just unbelievable. To our surprise, at the interview, we discovered the art museum had to be a modern building.

Blum: Why?

Netsch: Because the gift required that it be built in the modern style, which couldn't relieve us more because at the interview, looking at this strange bifurcation between Western College and Miami, we wondered where we would be sitting. But we were selected, and they had a building committee—a very fine building committee—consisting of people from the Department of Art, the Department of Architecture, and the museum staff. The museum was in a temporary building that had been used by the Navy ROTC in the Second World War—this being one of the privileged colleges for ROTC Navy. They also are the resource of the famous grammar school books, the McGuffey Readers, and so that was the second library. They had the McGuffey Reader Library. They were going to have this new modern art museum, and they were going to then upgrade the McGuffey Reader Library—some of the collection that was in it they would move. That also was a relief, because a special collection—the McGuffey Reader Library has a very different clientele than normal art museums. So we went and we got the job. We did programming. It was a rather vague program, consisting of temporary exhibition space, a classroom auditorium, storage, a small amount of conservation, receiving and administration. The administration, for example, was two offices and a front desk. It really was the beginnings, and they didn't need more. We developed, as usual, two schemes. The scheme that we selected, Craig Hartman did the most in establishing its basic form. My house, however, had established the triangular exhibition spaces.

Blum: Is it true that your house was the maquette for this project?

Netsch: Yes, for this project, but it was Craig Hartman who put the triangle of this room into the figure. We used a diminishing scale of 1.414 to establish

smaller, medium and large galleries. So, you see, we were beginning to work three-dimensionally with the field, and then we also worked vertically. The smaller gallery started from its vertical dimension, and the large gallery started from its vertical dimension, although the form of each shape was the same.

Blum: Was the size of the room dictated by the pieces in the collection? What was their collection like?

Netsch: There wasn't much of a collection. Dawn and I have since given them twenty-five pieces, which makes up a major part of the collection. Walter Farmer gave a major part of the ancient part of the collection. He was a local graduate and devotee of art, and he claims that he was the one who insisted that I be hired. We have had our off and on relationship because both of us are very interested in the museum, and both of us have ego problems for different reasons regarding our gifts. His are primarily in ancient ceramics and figurines and sculpture.

Blum: Walter, when you submitted for this job, did you submit a design? What did they have to go on to pick you?

Netsch: Well, I submitted what Skidmore, Owings and Merrill usually submits.

Blum: What is that?

Netsch: We submit a very handsome brochure of our past work, in colored photographs, and by this time, you know, I had Grinnell, the Air Force Academy, MIT, etc., etc., etc. I had all the right blue-point names. And there wasn't, I don't think, any great disagreement. I do not know who my final opponents were. They were probably Ohio architects because that was a problem, that there was the state of Ohio money in there as well as private money. There was great concern. But anyway, we proceeded with the building. The president of the college was sort of fascinated with this strange beast, but the art community was excited about the solution. It was a piece of

sculpture.

Blum: It's been called an architectural sculpture.

Netsch: Yes, the building is a piece of sculpture in the environment. In fact, because of the proportional system and the order in which we put it, there is a place when you walk down from the pond up to the building where all of the exhibit spaces turn out to be the same size.

[Tape 11: Side 2]

Netsch: I must confess, that some of these visual images were really not as apparent to us while we were working on it. You would look at the model and you would see things, but the idea of walking in space and suddenly having everything sort of line up and collapse was very beautiful. Charlie Duster was the job captain and the superintendent on the building, and they loved him. He also represented a kind of additional flavor in their report on the use of minorities at the campus. That was not planned on our part. Charlie was one of my trusted cohorts from Pruitt-Igoe from the 1972 time. This was 1987. That was a long time.

Blum: Had Charlie Duster stayed with you and your studio since Pruitt-Igoe?

Netsch: Well, I think sometimes he was taken off and moved onto some other thing, but he was really our guy. Being a technician, he could work anywhere, and it would depend, especially if there was some inner city thing that Bill wanted done that was important to have Charles on.

Blum: Because he was black?

Netsch: Not only because he was black, but he is a professional who comes from a fine family. In the partnership we've had more than one socialite—Bill Drake, etc. Every once in a while the partnership decided that your blood wouldn't hurt, aside from all of us who were more pedestrian in our ancestry. That

was a strange phenomenon of Nat's. He would do that occasionally.

Blum: Was that true with other firms, as well?

Netsch: Oh, sure. There is no reason why, if you've got a silver spoon in your mouth and you walk in the room and you want a job and the spoon shows, why not? You hope that talent does the same thing for you. You may not have the spoon, but you have the talent.

Blum: I interrupted you with Charlie Duster.

Netsch: Well, anyway, the prices came in well. They were out of a small town. We started off, and Charlie did a good job. We had an opening and had a Field Theory show, which I prepared for the opening. Much of that material now resides in the Chicago Historical Society. The panels survive there. They were four-by-four panels that matched, so you would do, say, the Basic Sciences Building would then form a pattern and the way the geometry fit into the squares. It might be sixteen feet long and twelve feet high. It was our usual sense—*my* usual sense—of scale. We had that exhibit and, of course, we gave some paintings. The Zolla-Lieberman Gallery loaned some works of art, and together we had a good opening show—all fresh material as far as the university was concerned. I was invited to give the commencement address at mid year and was given an honorary Ph.D. I managed to get an honorary Ph.D. in each decade—one in each decade—so I'm through till after the year 2000, if I make it that far and if there is some reason for doing it. The building really was a success.

Blum: Do I understand that there was to be an addition to the existing building?

Netsch: Yes, there is to be an addition, and I saw to it that I would provide advice free of charge on behalf of the museum—for the record I shall say only here, and it's not very important, the president of the university offered to name the museum after me. I said I thought I was already named by being the architect, and I thought that it was something he should offer to somebody

who would give them half a million dollars, so I politely declined. And that's really true. I mean, I didn't need—I hope my name is stamped on the building when you've got this Field Theory building.

Blum: Didn't Gordon say, "I hope my buildings speak for myself. I don't have to"?

Netsch: That's right, exactly. I think we all feel that way. When the addition came along Hartman was in San Francisco. Wayne had been with me and had gone into private practice. I asked Wayne if he would join me, and I asked the university if they would pay him, professionally, so he was paid. Then they had another director—this is always a problem with changing horses—and we did a scheme that amplified the desires of this director. Well, he left, and the new director came on, and I don't blame her. You want to put your own stamp on it. And we went through a crisis. Someone, in order to facilitate her power struggle, told lies about the building—the windows didn't have UV, and so forth, and so she got all excited and we had a major meeting about it. And I was furious. So we started a *contretemps*, and then she got all these experts in there because she was very good at getting funds to do things. She got all these experts in, and we had to spend half our time confounding the thing, and we had to design a system to lower the light levels in the building. And we did. They had recommended boarding up the windows. Of course, now light in the galleries is "in" again, but you've got to remember, this was started about, oh, eight years ago when light was "out." And so, we had these sliding panels of plastic where we could tune the intensity of light that comes in so if you want five foot-candles for prints and drawings you put these dark panels out. It was a very good system. I'm very proud of it because it allowed you to take an existing building, make a series of simple changes—they seemed simple to us. You have to open the book and read the notes, and, say, if you want this percentage you do this. It seemed hard for the curatorial staff to understand that. It seems a strange phenomenon. They didn't quite finish the project because we also hung some white panel sheets in each room that would then even out the reflectivity on each wall. So we really had a chance to take a look at our own building, which was a good building, and modify it to meet some very exactly criteria, as if we had the

*Mona Lisa* hanging in each room, which was fine. But that, of course, delayed the idea for the expansion and allowed a new program to be written—a very extensive program. I said I had to object. I didn't think that the rate of acquisition occurring in the museum was equal to the reports she had received. But we settled down—all right, it's her program, it's her responsibility, and we will design to that responsibility. We did two buildings—the two wings, I should say, to the building. One was a new staff, conservation and storage facility—a very elegant addition, but very pragmatic. We did all the things that all the people wanted, you know. It has temperature and humidity control standards for each room. It is very specific. It also had a room like the one that Wayne and I had developed in Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute. You know with the balcony—so we did a research reading room where you could take a painting out of storage or even out of a show, and a visiting curator could sit and look at it all day. But it would be sort of a viewing thing. Because of Walter Farmer we put some of his small stuff—some of the exquisite ancient objects in cases that could be displayed. And so you had a kind of display within the storage and conservation area. The new administration wing looked over the valley, the other valley. We were looking over the pond valley, and now we're looking over the other valley. The two wings allowed us to develop a driveway which entered a courtyard now, and in the middle of the courtyard were some absolutely spectacular, 250-foot pines and cedars that framed the circle. Oh, it's a beautiful little plan. The other wing was additional exhibition spaces. It was my hope that the directress, Bonnie Kelm, Ph.D.—that Dr. Kelm would take an interest in the idea of developing the old galleries as a visiting gallery for student work, for the smallest one, to work with the art school. Then there would be a prints and drawings gallery, then there would be two galleries for the permanent collection, which would be a revolving gallery, then the two new galleries would be for traveling exhibits. We all recognized the fact that traveling exhibits were now going to be probably six months in length—a long time—so we devised a major gallery which had an interrelated scheme. You could either go in the center area and see one exhibit, or you could go around the edge and see another. It was kind of an exciting thing. I think Bonnie is used to more conservative exhibition

attitudes, and it sort of shocked her. But anyway, she had hoped that the man who provided the plastic for the remodeling and for the light control panels would be the donor of \$4 million for the wing. We got along fine with him, but all of a sudden something happened. And I've got to confess this is a problem when your architect is not only involved with your museum, but up until the time you've taken over he's been a major part in the advisory committee and has been a major donor to the collection. They have our Hoffmann *Blue Spell*, they have the Indiana *Selma*—the famous civil rights thing—they have a whole series of Nolan numbers, and a lot of work. This does sort of inhibit any director.

Blum: Do you think it's a wise idea for the architect to have all those roles? Is there a conflict of interest there?

Netsch: I didn't consider it a conflict of interest. I thought since I have these skills and an interest in art, I was a major contributor. It wasn't Bill Hartmann that helped with the Art Institute.

Blum: But didn't that put you in an awkward position?

Netsch: It put her in an awkward position because I also represented the past. I think that was the most difficult thing. I think anybody that comes in kind of likes a fresh slate. Now, for example, the man who has done the educational CD-ROM on Lou Kahn's library at Exeter, the prep school, has asked with his publisher to do his second educational CD-ROM on the Air Force Academy Chapel and this museum at Miami University. Now, the reason being, one, the chapel was designed at the beginning of Field Theory, and the other, the museum, is sort of the tail end of it. You know, Alpha and Omega. And it's a good idea. Dr. Kelm seems interested. She has approved, but she has set up all sorts of problems on whether this could be done because I am doing this on such a date and that on such a date. I'm staying out of it. We just recently last year gave them the Lichtenstein tea set by Rosenthal—a beautiful tea set. I don't like to talk about money, but we paid \$10,000 for it, and we were so afraid we'd break a cup that we hardly used it. Then when it was given as a



gift it was valued at \$30,000, so I don't know how they're going to handle it. But they can have it. So they received five nice things from us last year.

Blum: Why have you selected that museum, a little museum out in the country, to give some very important works of art?

Netsch: Because it's a damn good architectural museum, and I like to imagine my things being there.

Blum: But does the college draw enough audience for it to be really seen by the public?

Netsch: Well, the quality of the space should have quality art, so when the public does come—and I hope that maybe it will be someday like the Louisiana Museum in Denmark where we went up to see it. Louisiana has grown to be a very famous museum now, and it has wings and everything. I just hope they get the funding so they can—for example, we have a fountain and a sculpture at the entrance to the museum, and in this one wing we enclose it and it becomes the garden room for serving coffee and things like that. So I'm also proud of being able to show that it can be expanded—it's my Louvre.

Blum: Did it expand well, in your opinion?

Netsch: Oh, yes. This scheme is very fine. It's just elaborate, that's my only concern about it. It does some very interesting things with Field Theory, and it's an extension of the idea. Wayne and I still talk about it because there are some lighting effects we want to try, if it goes ahead.

Blum: Words caught my interest in articles about the museum. The new area was described as "marvelously quirkier, looser, than the first part."

Netsch: It is quirkier, yes. Well, I call it richer. We used the fields in more elaborate ways. This is an example where we no longer used a camera. We don't have the Scoopic, and we've given away the Beaulieu. I've given them away to

some school. Now we use the computer, and so we have a computer movie that we did for an alumni event—not exactly an alumni event, but you might say of the art museum alumni; the donors. So we’ve moved to the other media. Of course, this will be available for use on the CD-ROM, plus all the material we have on the computer.

Blum: Walter, you talked about the CD. Can you just talk about that for a minute? You talked about the CD as showing the development or the changes that took place in the Field Theory as you used it, from the Air Force Academy Chapel to the art museum at Miami University.

Netsch: That’s what we hope Glen Wiggins, the author, will do. That’s what he has told me he will do.

Blum: Yes. What do you see as major changes that occurred between the two projects?

Netsch: Well, in the beginning it’s like the first Romanesque church. It was just an extension of the basilica. We didn’t know what we were doing. It was a handsome, geometric building, but it had studies in scale and change in number, and it’s my “you can’t go home again” building. Once I had done that I had to figure out what I was doing. It took me all the way to the forum at Chicago Circle, and then the phase two building there to really start practicing it as a theory. And at MUMA—we just started off with the theory, and we didn’t have any other thing, and then we enriched it—we scored—and then the addition enriched that. We built on, and oh, we made so many studies. That’s the real problem.

Blum: Are you saying that it became easier for you to use, and visually it became more complex?

Netsch: Yes. I think it became more—well, I call it “prettier.”

Blum: Was it ever too complex to work?

Netsch: I think perhaps Behavioral Science at UIC, because people claim they need to put out a thread to find out where they are and to get back to where they were going. It was perhaps too complex. But it was the first real enrichment where we took classrooms and study rooms and offices and lecture rooms and put them all together in one building. Just the change in scale was a feat. But this one is clear and precise, and dramatic. I mean, we are, shall we say, conscious of what we're creating, three-dimensionally. But with the others, it was often a discovery. Until we made the model we didn't realize what we had accomplished. On paper we said, "Gee, I think that's going to look good."

Blum: You were working this out on the computer?

Netsch: No, we were working it out on yellow tracing paper. Don't forget, we've been working on Field Theory since 1954, so the computer didn't start, really, with us until the eighties, after I retired. So we were still on tracing paper and models and study models and slides. You see, this macro media movie was done for the addition, which hasn't been built, so it's a very late technical addition to our toys.

Blum: Walter, do you think that this progression, this development, this change, in your work with the Field Theory—would you say it's gone from simple geometric form to very complex?

Netsch: Yes.

Blum: What do you think about someone becoming interested in Field Theory now, starting where you ended—where would they go?

Netsch: I have a feeling that if you look at the work of about three architects in California, a couple of architects in New York, three or four architects in Europe, I think you will find that at some time in their lives they have looked at the work. But they have, because of Deconstructionism, adapted their

attitude towards geometry to the thesis of breaking it up. I am a reconstructionist, not a deconstructionist. I take the geometry and reconstruct within it, and I don't suddenly take a diagonal and slash it through and fragment it. I think that's probably why my work seems almost conservative in the eyes of a good architect who is looking around and seeing what's happening in the world. You're either doing beautifully precise things, like this new inverted pyramid in the Louvre that you will see this fall, which is high-tech to the nth degree in which all the little wires are so small you can't see them, and you don't know how that glass pyramid is staying there, upside down. You know, you have that terrific phenomenon. Then, of course, there are the purists in geometry who are still working in a linear mode. For example, our local architect who did the State of Illinois Center...

Blum: Helmut Jahn.

Netsch: Helmut Jahn is doing some very elaborate work in Germany. He has a new, three-dimensional support system for a single dimension, a wall, but it does some interesting things, like it sags three feet in the middle in a windstorm, and it doesn't collapse. It sounds absolutely marvelous. It's at the Munich Airport, if you ever go there. I didn't know it was there, or I would have seen it. But he hasn't played around with three-dimensional geometry. He has played around with forms, but not with geometries. I think the chamfering at the top of the State of Illinois Center top is hardly an elaborate, three-dimensional excursion. So there are those people who on their own will rediscover it. I think that the main reason things will happen is, someone who was really interested in it will develop the software, because no one wants to draw as much as I draw. No one wants to. Even Craig Hartman—who was very good at drawing very complex things; now he is a partner out there in Skidmore—he wouldn't even have the time to do it. The other thing is that people like Gehry, who used the computer from Douglas Aircraft, they were very cooperative, I guess, with him—I know this from one of his men who was a student of mine at the University of Tennessee—they used this software because the wings and shapes and bodies that they develop on aircraft are three-dimensional. They are not holistic like my geometries. They

are a wing or a body or a tail or in a cell, or something like that. They're bits and pieces, and if you notice, Gehry's shapes are bits and pieces that are then sort of collaged, in architectonic terms, like where they have to be coordinated into an aircraft. But that's a step. I mean, here is an architect using it in a way of an elaborate piece of software. Probably he can't do it any better than I could, as a human being, but he's got someone on his staff who is young and, shall we say ambidextrous. It isn't so much talent, it's this kind of capacity that it's in your blood. Like in the old days before the automobile, being a good horseman was in your blood. You just automatically could ride a horse.

Blum: You don't think that was a learned skill?

Netsch: Oh, there is always a learning experience, but you saw it all the time. It wasn't a question of, How do you get on a horse? Why is it the left side? Who helps you up? It was all there. That's what I mean by "being in your blood." Then you developed skills. I think of the computer, when you are a child you are just playing with it, and then it gets in your blood. So a very complex system comes along, Intergraph, which is a two-screen system that is a step beyond me, and it is common for many young engineers and architects today. I have a feeling that as I look at that Harry Bertoia chair, that wire-frame chair in the living room, and say, "Now, how can that be done on a computer?" and I say, "Oh, gee, I know. I could do this on Form Z. I could do this and then deform a standard item into that shape." Harry had to do that himself, but he did it probably by taking a simple screen, mesh, and shaping it and bending it, and then said to someone else, "Look what I've done. Now how do I do it in a mass production system?" So this is what the computer does for you.

Blum: What does the computer do? What would it do for someone designing such a chair?

Netsch: Well, see, Harry did just two or three chairs in this mode. Now you can sit out in the design room and do fifty chairs, and tables. Anything you want to

do. Or screens. It just gives you such a wide choice because once you establish the vocabulary, the variations on the vocabulary are the variations in the objects. If you had to sit and draw each one of those, and then you had to make a model. Oh, it does speed up the system, and it also speeds up the opportunities for choice. It also can be degrading by the same method, you pick out the worst method, maybe, because it's easiest to build, or something. But that's true in any discipline. That's what really makes it so exciting, and I think as we go into lighter materials, less concrete block and less brick, that we'll begin to live in buildings which have odd shapes—not the Bruce Goff way, but Bruce didn't have any tools to do it any other way than he did. I think it's for the year 2010 where some people are already living on the moon, or someplace, and they automatically—it's their world.

Blum: It sounds like science fiction to me.

Netsch: It is, but so is my house to a person living in an earth house. Just imagine, 1839, you lived in an earth house in Chicago, and that wasn't so long ago but the technology has changed so rapidly. And it will change again. These new materials and the computer are going to change things. There's no two ways about it. It's a marvelous time if you have a fresh mind and are willing to create things that seem, shall we say, unbuildable at the moment. We need a sort of Bucky Fuller around again to dream.

Blum: Would you like to be a young architect, just beginning your career now, with all the possibilities?

Netsch: Well, I'd be satisfied just to be twenty years younger so I could make a contribution with gusto. At this moment in time I don't want to have to start all the way from the beginning. I'd rather start with some sum of knowledge.

Blum: I was thinking of all the possibilities with these computers and ideas.

Netsch: I don't know what I would be today if I were doing it. I might not be an architect. But if I could just be twenty years younger as an architect, with my

experience now, I'd settle for that—my Faustian trade.

Blum: Off and on you have mentioned projects out of the country, and you began to speak a little of your project in Australia. What was that about?

Netsch: Oh, yes, Australia. The Brisbane Project is a planning project. We were hired to associate with architects in Brisbane who had seen publications of our work, which is one of the great advantages of being published. I was hot copy for a while because I had a fresh approach. Anyway, we were hired. Wayne Tjaden, Don Ohlson and I were the heads of the team that went to Australia. I can remember flying from Lima, Peru, to Brisbane for a meeting. I arrived so exhausted that I wasn't very good at the meeting. Can you imagine flying straight through?

Blum: How many hours is that?

Netsch: It was about thirty-six hours. You'd sit in an airport for three hours and try not to fall asleep, and miss the next plane. I kept wondering why I went that way. It seemed like it was so much shorter to go the other way, but the way the flights went—I had to take Air France to the Caribbean, and the Caribbean to some place and go around that way, so it was a long way around. It was something. But it was an amazing project. When we got there our associates were very nice people. The mother of one was a lady—you know, Lady So-and-So—and they were also traditionally sort of Australian-British. They went to the horse races, and Lady What's-Her-Name was a very gracious person. So it was kind of nice getting down there. We lived in a motel—typical—but the project turned out to be to design new additions to the government center, adjacent to the river and park and adjacent to existing classic buildings.

Blum: In the English mode?

Netsch: Yes, in the English mode. I mean, colonnaded entrances—temples, you might say; temples for offices. That was fine. That wasn't a problem. The problem

was they had just built a two-lane expressway along the edge of this beautiful river—you know, something like San Francisco eventually tore down—and the question was, how could you work within these traditional buildings, these ancient small blocks of the city, and a highway, this expressway, and the river? So the first thing we did was to shoot film. We shot film—well, the first thing we did was walk around. There were a couple of old buildings that were small. Traditionally, the buildings before the pompous ones are really elegant and small, and they were right for the climate. They all had shaded arcades and balconies, and the other buildings did not. They were stone buildings. We went out and saw some of the rainforest that was outside the city, enamored of the heat and humidity as a design motif, in some manner. So, we filmed along the waterfront, we filmed from the waterfront. And this was a hill, so there was a change in elevation. We tried to get used to it, and we worked on it. Of course, we knew in the background that we were going to use Field Theory—how, we didn't know—so you come to certain conclusions that have nothing to do with Field Theory. One, we wanted to develop an entrance from this big, pretty botanical park, so you had a feeling that this was one arrival point, that then you would look through and you would see the river and all this spaghetti of the expressway, but you could see water and hopefully you could see little boats that would take you on a trip lined up at docks along the edge of this. So you tried to bring humanity through this massive structure. That was one given. Secondly, then, you did the traditional thing of layering the needs, like garages are at the bottom, and different kinds of public needs—you know, getting licenses, and things like that, are at another layer, and our information things are at another layer, and offices are at another layer, so you could develop that as a linear kind of sandwich. Then, of course, we had all these streets to cross, and everything. We began to realize that we were not going to close all the streets, so we devised our subterranean layers to live within the blocks so we didn't disrupt the infrastructure of the streets. Then as we gradually grew out of the ground at different locales—it was different because of the hillside—we had these vistas that we were trying to project through. Then we wanted to change the column spacing as we went up so we didn't have all the little columns that you need for an inexpensive parking garage. We also said, "Gee, this is



great," so we also envisioned different ways to walk around. Brisbane has a nice climate. This is not Chicago. It doesn't have a winter, but it has humidity and rain and sunlight. So we did different sections—things lapping outward on different levels. This one had a balcony here, the next one has a balcony over here, and the next one has a balcony over here, so they all cast shadows. Then we'd do it the other way. If we were on the shade side, this is the balcony and then this is the balcony and then this is the balcony, so we had sort of an inverted pyramid series of shapes that we could deal with. We then looked at that these things could cross the street, and suddenly we had our rainforest. The trees overlapped the highway and give you the shade, so we thought of the buildings as overlapping the roads and giving us the shade, and they're also doing these things. So then we began to look for nodes that architects talk about all the time—points of reference. Those had to work to elevators and stairs, and then we had these holes. The holes were, therefore, over the land and not over the street. It was a very exciting thing, and so we did a movie which showed this. Looking back on it, the thing that we didn't have was, we didn't have the SOM backing to go spend the extra \$400,000 as if we were going to get a project in Chicago. First of all, you're the primary architect in Chicago so you spend the extra \$400,000 to really convince the client that this is right. You build the model, and you do things beyond the planning stage that are architectonic to entice the client to understand what we're talking about when we talk about the building as a rainforest. It's probably a difficult concept for people to imagine, architectonically. They can imagine the rainforest, but they're not monkeys living in trees, you know, so it's not easy. We did this, and it got a good review, but our associates really weren't Field Theory trained. I mean, they just thought it was a nice idea, and they hired us to come down. And so, we did this movie. It was a silent movie, so you had to say with your little arrow, and duh, duh, duh, duh, duh, view. It's a very simple movie, very clear, and it shows this change in the transition of structure and these forms, but it doesn't have that final, entrancing imagery.

[Tape 12: Side 1]

Netsch: You finally see an image of this wonderland, this Disney World, in the Dirab Park movie, and here it's still an abstraction because we haven't thought out everything because we just didn't have the time and the money, and our associate didn't have the time or money. I think the dream was a pretty expansive dream. I kind of liken it to what Wright did along the lakefront in Madison, and what they're doing today is so cut-back, I don't see the dream that Wright envisioned. It will be a different thing. And so, whatever happened was done piecemeal.

Blum: What was built?

Netsch: I don't know. I have never seen it. You can't go back and—it's not around the corner so you can't just dash off to Brisbane.

Blum: After you submitted the plan were you in touch with the local architects at all?

Netsch: We were for a while, but don't forget, this was late, and I retired, and contact was lost with people.

Blum: This was before you retired?

Netsch: Oh, yes, but it takes time. It may take ten years for a planning thing to even be approved. With those things you deal in decades. You don't deal in years. But it's an important little movie, and so it points back to what we were just talking about. It's Field Theory. I do have these products of process which, because when you look at a finished scheme or you look at the final presentation drawings, you have no idea how it evolved. But we have several of these projects which show the evolution, the decision-making, the ordering between the pragmatic needs of programming, the aesthetic needs of urban planning, and the three-dimensional response to the weather or climate, in this particular case in Brisbane, the fields. So you've got all of these four things coming together, and it's in this little film. If someone is interested in how to tackle the problem, it's a good process film.

Blum: How much emphasis, was there in your academic training on urban planning? That seems to be a current concern.

Netsch: Well, don't forget, my first job was at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which was a planned community and we did a revised master plan to upgrade it to a permanent community. So my first project after Morgan Yost was urban planning. Then the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School was a planning process—you know, preserving the garden—and then the Air Force Academy was 20,000 acres. I walked every road. It was a planning program as well as a series of architectural problems—the academic area, the housing area, the central services area.

Blum: Did you have any of this in your academic training at MIT?

Netsch: We had some at MIT. Usually, each semester in the fourth year there would be one planning problem for which there was an architectonic result, but—Anderson and Beckwith had designed one of the earliest shopping centers down in Beverly, and, therefore, they were interested in planning. So they would give us problems—not shopping centers, but they would give us an urban planning problem.

Blum: Wasn't that unusual in schools at that time?

Netsch: Well, they were unusual professors. They were wedded to the modern movement. Anderson, especially, was well trained in what had developed in Sweden and in Finland. They knew these planned new towns, and we were taught to plan new towns. You know, we would see it, and so it became part of our ethos because it was part of their ethos. Then when Aalto came it was reality. Even though the man had dollar bills stuffed in his pocket, I guess, so he knew what those were—anyway, different than fives. He wasn't giving fives away, he'd be giving dollars away for a cup of coffee or something. And it was his coming to America. It was just coming into its own, and the housing projects were just coming along. I just didn't want someone to think

that we're all duckings under the table or something. But there also was a planning degree at MIT.

Blum: Oh, there was?

Netsch: I didn't take it—a graduate planning degree. People like Anatole Kopp, when he came over from France to take his graduate degree, did a major planning problem. But don't forget, he had been looking at Corbu's Moscow entry, you know, and he was aware, like most foreigners, of what was happening on the broad scale. Do you know what we had? We had Eliel Saarinen's Smithsonian Institution entry. That was one of our examples. There was Broadacre City of Wright's which, because we were from the Midwest, we would see. And then I had *Communitas*. And then what was going on in southern California.

Blum: Yes. It was beginning.

Netsch: It was piecemeal all around, and if you had a professor who didn't go home every night just to tend to kids, you were a part of it. Boston was a very sophisticated city. Don't forget, when I went to school in Boston Mary Martin made her try-out—all the plays and musicals were being tried out in Boston. I saw Miriam Hopkins do a play that was a disaster. My father asked me what I wanted to do with my roommates, and I said, "We'd like to see this play." This was a play, *Orpheus Descending*, which was a rewrite by the man who wrote *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. It was an early Tennessee Williams play, and it was try-out. I can remember, she was in tears in part of it. The lines were being rewritten so fast she didn't even know her lines. It wasn't a very good play, and there couldn't have been more than fifty people in this audience. But Boston was a real try-out town. And you had the Boston Symphony, which was one of *the* fine symphonies. Koussevitzky was, I would say, *the* conductor in America at the time—and again, so European, and the war, you just were so lucky to be there. Since MIT was considered this heathenish community, the fact that we all took an interest in this, as mathematicians and scientists often do in the arts, it was just a super

environment to live in. I'm not sure with the pace of scientific growth and the esotericness of physics today that it has the same sort of excitement. My roommates, for example, were drop and bubble experts. This was in relation to oil and had something to do with what really worked in terms of aircraft engines. Their theses related to the Second World War. I mean, they were really a part of it, but at a very working level in their lab. I call them drop and bubble experts. They were much more sophisticated than that.

Blum: I'm sure they had a more dignified title.

Netsch: I just didn't understand what they were doing. But don't forget, these were my roommates. We lived off of the beautiful Beacon Hill oval, Louisburg Square, where all the best houses were. We lived off of it where the subway went into the hill, and we paid eighty-five dollars a month for three of us, so that was twenty-eight-fifty a month. We had this marvelous basement apartment with this obvious two-story living room in order to get down into the basement. But don't forget, one of my roommates was also going to the local music school. He had a class at the conservatory as well as doing all his stuff at MIT. I mean, they were all brains. The other roommate also played the piano, but he didn't go to the conservatory. So we had a piano in our digs. That's not exactly par for students, but there were a lot of people from MIT who didn't share our enthusiasm. They were more interested in a mattress on the floor. Living there and walking to school, you either walked over the Longfellow Bridge to MIT every day, until later on when I lived in a graduate house which was just across the street, or you walked from there downtown to the theater or to the symphony hall, or you could walk to some marvelous places that were famous to eat cheaply. There is something the Middle Western city just doesn't have with its endless space.

Blum: You're describing the environment as being so enriched and you also got training in urban planning at MIT.

Netsch: In all of this, but don't forget, we're talking about Pei, we're talking about Hartmann, we're talking about Harry Weese, we're talking about Ralph

Rapson. You just list all of the products of that time, of which I am just one, and we all had this tremendous advantage. I lucked in, finding where I was going to school. Others may have made a more coherent decision to end up in Boston. I haven't even listed the Harvard people that graduated from that time.

Blum: Do you think the people at other eastern architecture schools outside of Boston also had urban planning in their curriculum?

Netsch: Princeton did, Princeton and Yale, but they didn't have quite the same feeling for the city as Harvard and MIT did because we were in it, and they had to go to it. There is a difference between going to it and being in it, especially as a young person where you don't have all the funds in the world, and walking is reasonable in terms of transportation. So Brisbane is a very small example of doing a downtown capital redevelopment program, but the advantage to it is that we did record the process, and I think we did this because in Field Theory you have to bring the client along. You don't suddenly make this immense leap and say—well, as Stern can do.

Blum: Robert Stern?

Netsch: Robert Stern can make the amazing leap and fold back the paper, and there is this conservative piece of the past rendered in the present that establishes all sorts of image to the client so that they just ooh and aah and go back to the country club, which also looks like it. We didn't have that ease of transition.

Blum: How did you educate your client?

Netsch: Well, the films were one way. Beautiful drawings are the second. Our Field Theory drawings are really beautiful, especially the University of Iowa ones for Basic Sciences. The UIC ones on Architecture and Art, Behavioral Science and the Science and Engineering Building, they are on slides and they are very coherent, elegant, in the same mode as the art of the time—the art of the sixties. Again, it was compatible. One reason why we liked the art and the art

liked us was because we were both doing it, but we were doing it for a different reason. So we really depended on that.

Blum: Were you usually successful in bringing the client along?

Netsch: Yes, and the people said that I had the capacity to convince. With the help of the drawings. I think part of it was my enthusiasm for my work. I'm not talking about an ego trip, I'm just talking about "look what this does!"— sort of a "let's share the surprise of how wonderful this is." And I had marvelous clients, or associates. It was the associate in Brisbane that we dealt with mostly. It was Howard Bowen, the president of the University of Iowa, or Sandy Boyd, our friend out here at the Field Museum, or it was the president and the provost at the University of Illinois at Urbana. Our best buildings were really built when we had support on high.

Blum: Do you have a favorite client, or is that a silly question?

Netsch: A favorite client? Well, for all sorts of different reasons, no, I don't. You made me think of one, the famous scientist who was the science adviser to Kennedy who was my client on the building at MIT, and he talked the dream, you know. I did a marvelous, wild building for him, and he looked askance at the idea of actually building it at MIT. So I learned very quickly that people like to dream, but they also are careful...

Blum: Does the dream self destruct when you make it a reality?

Netsch: The reality at MIT. Belluschi was the same way. They were both overwhelmed by the Institute, and we developed these linear buildings that continued the pattern. Probably the building I consider best is the Material Science Building at MIT, which fits just behind the dome and was an early building.

Blum: Why do you say that was your best? What makes it your best?

Netsch: It's just the best looking, it's the most high-tech, it had the clearest program, and it had a great position in the facade. Then, of course, there was the restoration of the dome, which is, again, a beautiful project. The next building of interest at MIT for me was the building which—it's the one building on Massachusetts Avenue which has been taken over and used by someone else, so the program was not very clear. But the biggest problem was a linkage building between two of the classic buildings, Building Seven and something else. As a linkage building it also had a passageway underneath for cars. It also looked up Massachusetts Avenue towards Harvard, and I had a terrible time with Belluschi. Pete Belluschi and I were not getting along, and he was really the approving client at this time. This was way before the Air Force Academy. No, I was in this long line of SOM people that were now at MIT, and he expected me to behave in the more traditional mode. He is the one who didn't like Mies, you know. But I did a beautiful, structurally expressive design for this linkage—the idea of the bridge, the structure, and so forth. But he thought it was absolutely the most insane suggestion an architect could make for Boston, and so I did about five more schemes. The final scheme I did was a little, what I called an oversized house with a tower. The tower looks across the bridge towards Boston, and it looks up towards Harvard. I put conference rooms in it. I did an architecturally contextual solution. I said, "Well, if I can't build a bridge I'll try a contextual"—but I was determined not to do a classic joining of these two buildings, which Belluschi really wanted me to do—give in and just do, as we would call it today, "do a Stern," although Stern didn't do MIT-type architecture or facades. And so, it's there. The rest of the buildings I did were linear buildings that have a facade that relates back to the existing building, but they're not anywhere near as handsome as the Material Science Building. The Electrical Engineering Building is also a good building. It was the last building, and then Jim De Stefano took over. It has a great knuckle where one building joins another, and a marvelous staircase—just pretty and bright yellow. But the rest of the buildings were pragmatic buildings. Oh, that's right, we did another entry building which was the computer center, and that computer center had to be done so that if all the computer stuff overheated and had to have water in it, and everything. Of course, all of that has disappeared. When



we think of what's happening at Northwestern, as we talked about earlier, I've got to realize that my buildings at MIT had to undergo those changes so the facades don't really reflect any kind of programmatic need, except Material Science.

Blum: Have you accepted the fact that your buildings, on various campuses especially, have undergone these sometimes drastic changes?

Netsch: I accept it unless the architect does a thoughtless change, or if they are to me a thoughtless change. But I have to accept that. There are a lot of anonymous buildings in this world—a "decorated duck," or whatever Venturi called them. There are a lot of buildings that are sort of warehouses, in a sense. I think it's going to change over time. I think these big buildings are disappearing as a response to need. As these scientific things get smaller and micro—microsystems and microcommunication—the need to herd us all together begins to disappear.

Blum: Working on the MIT campus, did that have special meaning for you because you were a graduate of the school?

Netsch: Well, Gordon did the very handsome addition, and it was nice being there where Gordon had been. My Material Science Building faces his, and it's a good building. There is an Anderson-Beckwith building there, which is plain vanilla. It was an honor to go back to my school. It was an honor to serve, really even more, as a human being. I served on a humanities board for a while in the midst of the times of upheaval where I sort of represented an understanding of what the upheaval was about. Some of the older professors we had to deal with in the humanities program did not understand, and the younger ones were even more radical than I. The ground floor of MIT was full of graffiti. It was an involved institution. It really was. Even though very elaborate scientific things were going on, I must say engineers are schizophrenic, or scientists are. They believe but they don't believe, you know. It's a real question. So that was a great place. I was there during President Stratten's term, and he and his wife, Kay, were just great personal

friends. I could indulge in art with prints and drawings student loans, as we have already discussed, as well as the academic programming, and practicing my professor. So it has that role. I would like it to have been better, yet I have three good buildings there. I shouldn't really complain. I. M. Pei has that earth sciences building which is a problem and a half for them —I mean, the wind blows through the bottom, and people were sliding on the ice and breaking their arms all the time. They were building all sorts of entranceways to try to solve it. I lost out to I. M. on the interview on the museum. I hope he gives them his art collection, because he has a lot of art he could give them.

Blum: All of your overseas projects seem to have come in the late seventies. Was that because the commissions in the States dried up because our economy was bad? We had an oil crisis, and so on. Why?

Netsch: No, it was really because my publicity was strong all over the world. Actually, Dirab Park happened with one of the people on the Paired New Towns project, in Detroit who was intrigued with my thinking and capability. He knew I had never done a zoo, but he knew someone in the Saudi Arabian hierarchy and recommended me. So all of a sudden I got called to Paris to meet this man, and it worked out. Of course, I had been to zoos, but I had to get used to a very strange culture. First of all, it was a culture that you could meet in Paris and set a date, but if it was in Arabia you had to wait your turn to be called. You arrived, and then you were expected to wait in all these little rooms to be called before the king or the prince, as if you were in the royal palace in ancient days,. As you waited your turn you sort of moved up a room. Well, in this case the rooms were global, in a sense, so they would say, "Come September 10th," and you would come September 10th, but you knew you were just moved to a room and you would have to wait. You might be there three weeks or four weeks before you ever had the meeting.

Blum: How did you learn that? By doing it? Or you were told ahead of time?

Netsch: I had to learn it through experience. Also, you would make a reservation for three private rooms and find out that all three of you were all in the same room. I am certain, on their half, they said, "Well, we know we can't get you in overnight, so we'll get you there when we can as soon as possible." That's what's going on in their mind, in their Arabic mind, because princes are not used to waiting for anybody else.

Blum: And you were to see a prince?

Netsch: Oh, yes. The mayor of Riyadh, who was doing the zoo, was married to a daughter of the king, and as you know in Saudi Arabia there are many sons and daughters of the kings through the various wives, so there are various hierarchies. He was one of the top ones. Once in a while I also met one of the lower princes while I was waiting around. I met one young prince when he was arriving on the airplane and bringing all this stuff for the presentation. I talked to him on the airplane. You flew, usually, to Beirut, and then you made a transfer from Beirut to Riyadh, or to Jeddah and then Riyadh. And so, this young prince invited me to tea, and he knew what I was doing and therefore wanted to see me. I don't know what was supposed to have happened—you know what I mean—but he sat and showed me cartoons that he had copied in the hotel room in Switzerland, so you had these very bad television copies of Bugs Bunny, and what have you. I could see why he wasn't an important member of the family.

Blum: Do you think he just wanted to communicate with you through something he knew would be familiar to you?

Netsch: No, it was just that he wanted to be in touch with me because I might be able to do something for him with someone higher up on the hierarchy. But his way of entertaining me certainly turned me off, and entertaining is very carefully considered there. We had orange juice. There is no drinking, officially, in Saudi Arabia. In other places I've been to parties where I have asked for orange juice, and they said, "I know, Walter, that you drink, and

therefore what do you want?" They'd bring me a full tumbler of gin, so they wanted to watch you get drunk.

Blum: It wasn't their hospitality?

Netsch: You should take this seriously. Don't laugh. They just wanted to know who we were. We were from another planet. We were from the U.S.A., and we didn't have the experience of the desert. We don't wear those marvelous clothes for hot weather, we don't have four wives, we don't have a harem, and we don't have a man's world and a woman's world. I mean, who are we? You go to visit their house, and there is this so-called family room, which really is for the men to entertain, and there is a bathroom with a urinal. It's really designed for men. There were usually different floors so each wife had a separate floor with her children. One time I got to see the living room in a house where the room was a rectangular room, probably ten feet by twenty feet, and it had a huge television set in the middle. Everyone sat on cushions all the way around, and it was hierarchical. It was just like the mafia. The boss sat here, and the number one son sat here, and number two son, and number one aide sat here, and number two—it was all the way around. You've got to understand that we come from the U.S.A. with democracy in a free-flowing, interactive society. How can it work? The prince had a degree from the Sorbonne or a technical school—I've forgotten which—in economics. Another prince had a degree from the economics school in London. But I am certain these princes when they went to these schools in London lived in a minipalace and went to the school, and so forth. So they didn't really even see the English. I never saw any of the peccadillos of the Arabians. The Iranians—I would meet an Irani in Paris on a project, and he was there with his French mistress and his blue Silver Cloud Rolls-Royce that he kept there. He lived a double life, and it was accepted. He had three wives in Iran. No, it was a perfectly normal situation. I suppose Mrs. Kennedy, when she became Mrs. Onassis, suddenly faced the fact that here was a man who lived a much more Oriental life, publicly, and that it was just part of an Eastern culture. So they were trying to get used to us, and we were trying to

get used to them. We'd come seriously prepared for a meeting with stuff, and they were not really—especially a zoo—you know, why a zoo?

Blum: Why a zoo?

Netsch: The lions woke up the ladies of the royalty, roaring in the morning, and it destroyed their beauty sleep, so they wanted to move the zoo.

Blum: You mean the lions were on the grounds of the house?

Netsch: No, no. Riyadh is a desert town. At night there are no cars on this road, and if twelve lions want to roar, you heard it within a mile radius like you would hear in Africa. But the other thing is, the zoo really was the property of the king, and the mayor who was related to the king. The idea was that we saw what the zoo was, so we made a visit to the zoo. The zoo animals were gifts to the king. There was a marvelous old orangutan who had been there all of his celibate life for twenty years; he had the most marvelous face. Oh, he was something. Of course, we have movies of all this. There were two Dalmatians in a cage nearby, which struck us as strange, but they were gifts from somebody. Dogs are not a household pet. They are eaten, and if they roam across the desert they are food for shooting. That's Muslim. That was true in Egypt, also. We knew that. So these beautiful black and white Dalmatians were in a cage, and so you would see all of these different animals—a zebra, a something or other. Often the zebras had been unshod, so their hoofs had grown and curled up because they were in a cage. For the zoo man from the Lincoln Park Zoo, it was an amazing experience. But we got to know the man who ran the zoo, and I came back and designed what I think is the most marvelous zoo—and I'm sorry since Disney is announcing a zoo that he didn't ask me to do a zoo. I took a chunk of the city, because these buildings are far apart, and I built hills and mountains all around this. I built a micro-environment. Then they had little valleys and plateaus, but the thing is, you walked inside this mountain, in air-conditioned splendor—I thought this would really appeal—and so you could walk inside this, and the animals couldn't smell you.

Blum: And could you see the animals?

Netsch: You could see the animals right up close with this mirrored glass.

Blum: Were they in cages, or was this a natural habitat?

Netsch: They were in natural habitat. You could do what most of the Arab men wanted to do, to see them fornicate, and this was a perfect place. It was like an exhibition of monkeys and everything, and they all had these habitats. I didn't explain the fornication bit. I also read a lot of Arabian novels before I came over, and the idea was to get away with something so you didn't get your hand or your arm chopped off. You did climb the wall and make love to the princess.

Blum: Was this the underlying thrust in the literature you read?

Netsch: In the literature were all these fantasies of male derring-do against the Muslim tradition of penalty. It was fascinating. So I took all this in, and I designed this terrific zoo.

Blum: How was it received?

Netsch: It was like my casbah that I did in North Africa for the housing. It was negatively received. I still think someone should do it.

Blum: What happened? As you presented it they said, "No, it's not quite right," or what did they say?

Netsch: No, they just didn't know. "No, we've got to go out of town." The noise of these lions was the dominant thing, and I thought I had sheltered sonically the noise. So they gave me a site about twenty-five kilometers out of town. They said, "Go look at this site," so we all got in Jeeps and went out and looked at this site. Saudi Arabia was the bottom of the sea at one time. It's a

huge, flat land with ridges and mountains that form the edge. Also, there are rivers in the sea, as we know from what we read in science articles in the *New York Times*, these marvelous rivers at the bottom of the sea which go down two or three thousand feet. Well, suddenly we came to what was a dry sea. This thing was about a thousand feet deep, and it had these tributaries coming into it, and there was sort of a node where it went on out. Of course, it had been dry for centuries. It was this absolutely fantastic physical event. So, what are we going to do? That was the site—that *is* the site. You don't debate things with a prince. That's the site. I thought, how are we going to do it? Well, we got some World War II aerial maps from the U. S. Army in twenty-five-foot contours—not five-foot contours—but twenty-five-foot contours. We took that twenty-five-foot contour map, and we made a mold.

[Tape 12: Side 2]

Netsch: Just like Cleopatra being rolled up in an Oriental rug and presented to Julius Caesar, I envisioned taking this marvelous map—it was really a three-dimensional model; it was something; it was about five feet square—and unrolling it in front of the prince. And here was his site, all in these sand colors, and I wowed him. This really wowed them, but I needed to show them, “This is what you've given me.” See? It's huge. It had at least 30,000 acres—bigger than the Air Force Academy.

Blum: You couldn't just move your original concept and stick it there?

Netsch: Oh, no. You suddenly realized there was something larger in this program that you hadn't realized at first. What they would never confess to is that anything that had given them an idea. Of course, they had all been to Disney World, and they had all been to...

Blum: You need a Magic Kingdom idea.

Netsch: That was right. They had been to Tampa to the Budweiser animal thing, and they had been to San Diego to the safari amusement park, but they didn't tell

me that, you see. I was trying to solve a problem based on this strange little zoo with two Dalmatians. Just enlarging the collection was going to be a problem. And so, I brought this, and then we took the movie cameras. It's a wonder. I probably got started collecting stuff in my arteries climbing up and down all over this thing, photographing this hole. We've got a lot of out-takes on film of this which would bore anyone to tears because we would do it over and over and over. Because we had these twenty-five-foot contours—this rubber map was no good to us. How were we really going to plan something? We usually designed on one-foot contours. So we had a photograph, and we had to see where outcroppings were, and things where we could then add to our contour model so we could make a more literal event and make more decisions. In the meantime, things would grow. We had the zoo, we'd go to a meeting, and he would say, "Where is the aquarium?" "The aquarium? Well, Prince Sultan," or whoever it was, "this takes about 600,000 gallons of water per day." Water was more expensive than gasoline. Water was three dollars a gallon in Riyadh. It's precious. There is no rain except in a deluge a couple of times a year. I had forgotten that princes could get 600,000 gallons of water if they wanted to, and I said, "Besides, it has to be tempered, it has to be salt—saline in some cases, crystal-clear in others," and so on. "No problem."

Blum: They spoke English?

Netsch: Oh, of course, perfect English. "No problem," and we would add this. So gradually the program got bigger. We had an astronomical observatory, we had a dressage for horses, we had a place for hunting with hawks, which was their native sport. They would say, "Where is the monorail, Walter?" I said, "We had these Jeep trails. We thought that would be kind of fun in the Jeep." "We want a monorail." Then, "Where is the lake? We have these huge 20,000 acres, and we could do it." A lake?

Blum: Did they give you a program saying, "We need an aquarium, we need a lake, we need a monorail"?



Netsch: No, this is an accumulation of dreams.

Blum: This sounds like Disneyland taking shape.

Netsch: It really was. So as it got bigger and bigger and bigger, they said, "Would you take us to Disneyland? We want to visit our cousins in Florida."

Blum: Who were their cousins?

Netsch: Jews.

Blum: Jews?

Netsch: Miami was Jewish. It was Jewish heaven.

Blum: But Disney World is in Orlando.

Netsch: That didn't make any difference. It was Florida. You've got to have this global view, and you have to understand the curiosity that the Arabs had towards the wealthy Jews who lived in Miami Beach in all these condos and everything. As I say, the Arabs came from tents. They made very certain that I went to see the town they originally came from, which was a gorgeous, basically earth-mounded little town next to a stream that really worked when the rains came. But it was the desert, and they had their camels, and they said, "You must realize that we have come from the desert to Riyadh." You've got to remember, they were making millions, billions, of dollars on their oil. I tried to project to everybody, when I would come back to the office, what was going on. Bob Hutchins and I would work on it. I don't know whether Maris ever made a trip. But I had learned from Brisbane that I was going to try to make this really work. It would be great to have a project like this really happen. But how to build a building down in this hole in the middle of Arabia when I knew that they were doing all these things along the coastline for oil, and everything high-tech, and workers' housing and all that? I was really competing with something very pragmatically necessary. So we

devised the idea. We said we'd pull a Bucky Fuller—a combination of Bucky Fuller and Frank Lloyd Wright and Field Theory. We would sort of pull these stones and rocks out of the ground. Remember I told you their homes came from the rock-mud village. So we would sort of build these forms up from, say, ten, twelve feet. They would also keep the heat out, and they would be thick, and they would look like the surrounding landscape. In other words, it was from my idea for the one in town, sort of brought out there. Then we'd build these space frames for roofs. You could then ship by air all these rods and these joints, and you could train unskilled people to put this in here and that in there and suddenly it's built. So we thought we had resolved the technology. We really built the huge roofs. Infinity was our scale. We didn't have to worry about it. This preceded Khan and Bunshaft's tents. His tents were to be non air-conditioned also, you see, so you had these great exhibit spaces and flow-through spaces, as well as enclosed spaces for the aquarium and for the horse shows. And then, "Where is the hotel? Where are the..."—what do they call their houses? Egyptians call them the same. It's a nice name. It isn't quite the word "palace," but it signifies an elitist domicile. "Where are the sites for these? Where are our guest houses?" So this project grew and grew and grew. We'd come back, and I kept thinking—we were small potatoes, as far as expenditures. I didn't really put it in the kind of perspective that my client did. I was seeing a billion dollars down the road, and he was having the time of his life—all of them were. It wasn't just him—they would have these parties for us, and they were having a great time. We'd bring these great drawings, and then we shot these movies. We had built a big, \$25,000 model of this thing and shipped it all over to Saudi, and we had this thirty-minute movie, *Dirab Park*. We did it in English. I had finally found a bank teller in Cleveland, Ohio, who spoke Arabic good enough that he could be used for the voice-over because I would blow the whole presentation if the pronunciation was wrong. So we did that. We brought an Arabic version of the twenty-seven-minute film. I explained that this was hopefully for the king to do a minute and a half of introduction, and he would do the close, or the prince would do the close, or vice versa, of what this meant for the future. Of course, it had this great kind of democratic feeling to it because the zoo was for people.

Blum: It was no longer the royal domain?

Netsch: Oh, no, it was very much the royal domain. It was their play toy, but the excuse was that it was for mankind, just like the Haj. But I'm saying this now out of my learning experience. I was just inundated with an addition on an addition on an addition on an addition. So we brought over the movie and this model. We came and we set up the model, then we didn't hear from anybody for five days.

Blum: Were you still there waiting?

Netsch: We were back in our motel again, waiting to be called, but we were told to set up the model in this room, which meant that everybody could look at it.

Blum: And study it, yes.

Netsch: I think we even gave them copies of the movies, and we gave them a booklet, *Dirab Park*—I've got a copy somewhere around here—which also included the price tag. I finally decided that I would say it, and they would say, "No problem!" This was the end, anyway. This was our last trip. We hadn't been paid for some things. We were not being paid by the cost of the project, we were being paid to do a master plan. We were being paid, and the movie was about \$30,000 extra, and we were paid the \$30,000. We were slow in getting paid for some of the other things through their system of handwritten bills, and so forth. Then I had a nice meeting with the prince. He thought the movie was terrific, the project was terrific, but "too much money." Thank you very much. Perfectly nice. Had a party and thanked us for all our effort and wonderful...

Blum: They didn't ask you to scale it down?

Netsch: No, no. You're being practical now. This was a dream. This was a dream, and we had shown them this dream, this chinchilla coat, and then you didn't

really want to buy the chinchilla coat after you found out what it cost. I found out that about ten years later a zoo expert from Africa, an Englishman, also got invited to Riyadh, and he succeeded in doing a zoo, which I have not seen. But he did a zoo. It was nothing more than a zoo. It was not all of these other things. So we had this marvelous confection. I mean, it wasn't a bad experience. Wright did these confections—that famous project down in the desert, all the little houses and hotels; the resort that he was conned into doing by that gentleman who had these dreams. The only thing I felt is that it was sort of a rude assumption that we could be bought.

Blum: I don't understand why you felt that way, because you got paid for your time.

Netsch: No, no we got bought, and our time and effort, to play with their dream.

Blum: Do you think perhaps they didn't realize that it was just that when this began?

Netsch: No, no, they're not unintelligent. This man graduated from the School of Economics in London. I think that they are very wealthy people who had a play toy. It was a little bit like living in the court of Louis the Fourteenth. And Louis had something he wanted to play with, so he built Fontainebleau. I just think it's an interesting social cultural experience. I think it was a learning experience for them, a learning experience, certainly, for us. As architects you would like to build something, and so after you have gone through all of this—I could just see, how it was building the pyramid. I could see people doing these pyramidal space frames. We did weather studies on temperature gradients and what would happen with these structures on lowering the temperature. These people probably didn't take a bath more than once every four or five months. For example, women are not allowed to drive car in Riyadh. They may now, but at that time a woman couldn't drive a car. So if you belonged to an American or European ministry, and you lived in a compound, and you wanted to go into town to the souk to buy something, or go somewhere to have tea, or be invited by one of the princes or princesses,

maybe to discuss social work—there is a lot of education going on there—you'd have to have your chauffeur take you. The car would be an enclosed car, air conditioned, and some of the ladies just couldn't stand the body odor of the chauffeur. I mean, it permeated the vehicle. We rode mostly in open Jeeps, but that's again a cultural thing you have to understand. Everybody lived outside, or you had these immense rooms so you didn't have close contact with human beings. Of course, the princes and those people didn't have that problem, and neither did most of the people they were dealing with. But you'd see someone come into the prince's office, which was maybe forty feet square with a desk at the end of it, the aides would be near him, not next to him, but they would call someone in the room, and that person would come in and bow, and he'd be thirty feet away. So he could be a menial, and it wouldn't be a noticeable problem.

Blum: You seem to have learned a lot about that culture. Was there anything that you learned that you were able to apply to another job?

Netsch: Well, not really. Not really, because we designed the air force academy for Iran—I was doing both at the same time. I had a request to go over to Iran to meet with another prince and the Saudi prince said, "Why do you want to go to Iran? Why do you want to speak to those infidels, all those dirty people?" I said, "I've got a client." He said, "Well, I'll let you go this time." But, you see, I had to pick up my passport before I could leave. You give up your passport when you enter this country. So I went to Iran, and I got the same thing in return, "Why do you want to go back to Saudi?" So I had to drink tea at the ministry in Tehran for about ten days in order for them to let me out to come back. You just have to understand. We see the movie *The King and I* and it's all done very charmingly, but if you project all those charming little conflicts that Anna had into the real world of commerce, then you can imagine what's going on. I had two projects in Iran. I had designed the building for the extension of the Far Eastern Institute for the Shah of Iran and had an interesting time bringing that model over and showing it. At the presentation they designed the location of the model because the Shah was shorter than I—I was then six-four—so that I would be placed on a lower plane, and he

was on some steps with the model so that he would be higher than I was. That's the time when I learned about moving from room to room to room till we finally got our calling for the presentation. That project fell through—absolutely fell through. I don't know why it fell through. We got called, and we waited there, too. I got everything up to the palace, and it started to snow—it really started to snow—and the vice-president of the University of Chicago, Charles Daly, who is now head of the Kennedy Library in Cambridge, had come over with me. He is a marvelous Irishman, and he wasn't going to struggle like I did to get the model set up hours beforehand. That was the architect's responsibility. So he and his aides stayed in their room, and they looked out and suddenly found snow everywhere. The palace was up the hill. I had gotten there before the snow had started falling, so I was there. I could walk across the palace grounds in the snow—that didn't bother me—and I got things all set up. I waited and waited, then I got put into a room to move up for the presentation. I knew where the presentation was going to be because I had set the model up there. I waited and waited for the vice-president, and he didn't come. So finally the Shah—he was the boss—he called us. It was our turn, so I marched down this big hall of Oriental rugs with these other rooms with people waiting to see the Shah, and went in and got on my lower level and made the presentation. It's a beautiful building. I'm certain the model became a dollhouse for the children. He wasn't going to say anything anyway. It was presented to him, and that was it. So that project disappeared. We have beautiful drawings of it, and slides.

Blum: Were you paid for your time and your work and all expenses?

Netsch: Yes, right, but you'd be surprised how many architects have what are called "hip pocket projects." They are listed in the books and architectural magazines as—sometimes they say "not built."

Blum: Unrealized?

Netsch: Unrealized, that's exactly it. So it became an unrealized project, but then I got hired back to do the air force academy for the Shah. The Shah's favorite general was a pilot, and he decided he wanted to give him an air force academy. Also, he wanted to get an air force to fight I don't know who—maybe the Arabs, because they all spoke so badly of each other. And they all fought over either the Arabian Sea or the Persian Gulf. It depended on which country you were in what you called it. It was to be in Isfahan, and Isfahan is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and one of the great, major cultural and religious centers of Iran. So we had a journey down to Isfahan from Tehran, and again we had a marvelous site. The presentations were made before certain people, and my associate was a prince, who I described also. We would meet in Paris sometimes. And the project grew. I had the program for the U.S. Air Force Academy, which was a very tough program—you know, the housing—but here this was to be the academy of academies. I caught the idea from working on these two simultaneously, so these were gorgeous drawings, and they were maybe six feet wide and ten feet long—amazing drawings. We had the history of Persian prints behind us, so being interested in art I could make a beautiful presentation related to their culture. Finally, we made the final presentation. In the meantime, Iran is falling apart. I could describe some dinner parties and things where you could see—I felt like I was in White Russia. I would come back and say, "I'm in the last stages of White Russia"—you know, the time of the czar. This is the time of the Shah. We made this amazing presentation to a roomful of Iranian generals, and a roomful of American colonels, and one American general who was an aide to the Shah, who sat way up. He had a little, separate desk, but he was, oh, thirty feet away from the Shah. The Shah had a beautiful inlaid table and a special chair, and I made the presentation. I was eating cotton by the time I went through these twelve beautiful drawings on the wall. There was a break about the seventh drawing. The Shah ordered tea for himself, so we adjourned while he had some tea, then we finished the presentation. Then about two weeks later we heard word that the Shah's favorite general was killed in a hang-glider accident. Of course, he had been shot. This was the beginning of the revolution, so we were there in the beginning of the revolution. It was as if we were in the last stages of Pompeii. We would go to

beautiful parties. If I was a more traditional architect and let other people do everything and go to all the parties, I could have gone to a party every night. Well, the china matched for fifty people. The shrimp was piled high on table. The wine was excellent. The ambassador from America was charming and spoke French. Everything was done in French.

Blum: What was your presentation done in?

Netsch: Oh, in English, but that was a military meeting. I'm talking about a social evening now. The women all wore French evening gowns. They were not dressed in native dress. It was unbelievable—very elegant. And there were three nights a week that these things would go on. The other three nights the young people had their things. They would borrow movies off of the airplanes that landed. They would be on the turnaround flight, so they would take the movie off. You would all get a ride in a Mercedes convertible at about 80 mph, the wrong way on a one-way street, as you were going to some little *pied-à-terre*, smelling sweetly of the smoke of marijuana, and liquor. All these young people were having a great time—you know, I wasn't so old then—and it was at a party. I was older than they, but I wasn't ancient. They would quit at four o'clock in the morning, and then you would go back to the hotel. Well, I couldn't do that and work—either party or work—so I begged off the parties. I later heard that my associate, Farmin Farmian—he was part of the royalty but he wasn't called "Prince"; Farmin Farmian, he is an architect, millionaire—I think somehow he got through the debacle, and he is still there.

Blum: Was your Air Force academy ever built?

Netsch: Oh, of course not. I mean, there was a revolution. The Shah fled the country. God, why would these people build it? These were fundamentalists. I never met the fundamentalists. Once one of Farmian's associates said, "Walter, I think I'd like to show you a real town—a real Iranian town." I said, "Great," so we took a day off and left early in the morning, with a driver, of course—you never drove. Everybody had a driver. We sat in the back seat, and we



had to go through Gom. Gom is a religious center, and I had to hide on the floor of the car while they drove through Gom.

Blum: Why is that?

Netsch: I was an infidel and if I was caught there could be dire consequences. I mean, Gom was sixty miles from Tehran, and to get me out would be a horrendous problem for the ministry. And besides, it was a fundamentalist community, and life was already complicated. But we had to go through there to get to the town I wanted to see. We got to this town that makes Oriental rugs and has a market, and I have some great slides of going through it—the way the city was built. Kashan was a city of domes and flats and domes, and everything connected by walkways. But then we got up on the roof, and we walked on the roof of the city. It was like being on the moon, with these domed shapes, and then these bright colored yarns drying in the sun, an occasional bed for sleeping. I've got a couple of really great slides.

Blum: Well, you paint beautiful pictures with your words.

Netsch: Well, they are beautiful pictures, and it was a great trip. So, even though the project didn't get built there were bonuses in cultural expansion.

Blum: It sounds like it was an adventure for you on several of these projects. Unfortunately, they were not built. But the North African projects were.

Netsch: The Middle Eastern projects were adventures that were not built. But in Algeria that was the Socialist/Communist effort, and they're still building. I mean, it's not completely built yet.

Blum: You had three jobs in Algeria—three sites.

Netsch: Right, the men's housing is complete, I understand. It is now about eighteen years later. The women's housing, I understand, is complete and a portion of the university has been started.

Blum: The University of...?

Netsch: Blida. The portion of the Agricultural School of the University of Blida has been started, the hospital has not been started, and Tizi-Ouzou has not been started except maybe for some housing. I say maybe because I think they moved the site. And Khroub was never started. I think my history of projects in Third World countries is about on a par. In fact, Kenzo Tange had done a high-tech solution for Algeria; I did a low-tech solution for Algeria. I designed a solar block to shield the sun, and all that, and made a great effort, and they liked me. Kenzo Tange had designed this high-tech thing. Suddenly the minister descended on me, and he said, "Will you take over Kenzo Tange's project?" I said, "No, I can't do that, professionally. That's improper. Even if Kenzo Tange agreed—he would have to approve." I wrote him a note saying that I had been asked to do this, and I had refused, but in the meantime the Algerians had told another story to Kenzo Tange.

Blum: Such as?

Netsch: That I tried to take over the project. Of course, he was very angry at me for that, and it wasn't true. First of all, it was like yang and yin. You had a high-tech with seventy-foot spans—it was one of his, when he was involved with the mega-cities ideas in Tokyo. I understand his project is now getting built, because in their heart of hearts, you see, they really wanted a high-tech thing.

Blum: Did you misread them?

Netsch: I may have misread the younger people, but not the good Socialists/Communists who had made the Algerian experiment, I did exactly what they needed. They needed jobs. They needed products. They needed a school of intimate scale so that the people coming from the desert would not be just awed by it, and the cadre would be built immediately. They finally used some cranes to build my three-story buildings.

Blum: Well, how were they building high-tech?

Netsch: They could raise concrete blocks up that way, as well, you know. They found a way. I was trying to hire unemployed people for the jobs. It was a little bit like Pruitt-Igoe—you know, blow up the buildings instead of tearing them down. It's a battle. Now with labor the way it is, and the transition of the computers, I would do a high-tech, low-tech building. It would be more like what I did for the zoo—something out of the ground, coming up, and something elaborate coming down so that the society would participate in both. In fact, this is what I am working on right now for Chicago, only I am doing a high-tech environment in which you could build a little old Royal Barry Wills house, if you wanted to. So that's the story of the foreign projects.

Blum: What significance do they hold for you in the span of your career?

Netsch: Well, first of all, as you can tell from our talking, they made me a better human being by cultural exposure. They made me more convinced of our social/liberal goals in America. They certainly gave me opportunities to explore Field Theory in compatible environments where I didn't have to go through the process so much to try to explain to the client what was going on. And they gave opportunities, because they were different cultures, to explore different physical environments that we would not necessarily do in the Western world. And then a couple of them were extravagances, that if I hadn't been so dedicated and sincere I probably would have handled bet-

[Tape 13: Side 1]

Blum: Walter, most architects belong to organizations such as the American Institute of Architects. Did you say that you resigned from the AIA? Why did that happen?

Netsch: I probably misstated. The only thing I remember withdrawing from is the club on top of Symphony Hall, the Cliff Dwellers, over the issue of women not being members. I don't remember saying that I resigned from the AIA

because, frankly, if you're made a fellow and you resign you would be stripped of your fellowship so it would hardly behoove me to do that.

Blum: Do you think the AIA serves any important function for the profession?

Netsch: Well, in the beginning when I belonged to the AIA as a young man, and before I was a fellow, in the fifties and sixties the AIA in Chicago was a pretty active young group. I remember serving on the AIA design committee here and taking a year to have a group of us, about eight of us, decide what is the critical criteria for modern architecture. And so, we prepared that, and I still have my little three-by-five cards of our synthesis of the study. So we had those kinds of discussions. Later on I guess the only thing you could compare it to was when they formed the Chicago Architectural Club, during the Postmodernist period, which was outside the AIA. That was, I guess, in opposition to the AIA. When it was originally organized as the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club it was within the framework of the American Institute of Architects.

Blum: Did you do work for the AIA?

Netsch: I served on juries in Washington for the AIA. I never really took an interest in wanting an administrative role in the AIA. It was not my cup of tea. Therefore, as I became more and more involved with my own design responsibilities at Skidmore I became less and less involved with the AIA. As I became more and more identified with my special little corner of the design world, I was called on called less and less to be on a jury, but that was natural. So gradually my participation in the AIA lessened. I'm still a member of the AIA, I still pay my special sum to the fellowship and the special thing to scholarships, but I couldn't honestly give an evaluation for what it would mean to a young person today to be a member of the AIA. Everyone is so conscious of dollars, I just wonder if the AIA is able to attract young people to be consistent, participating members. I was not a member of the AIA in college. There was not that collegiate club, probably because we were away at school and most of us came from different cities.

Blum: Could you join the AIA as a student?

Netsch: They had student chapters of the AIA, and the chapters used to have student meetings in Washington. I remember going to one of them and heading up a design session in one of them. Also, Jimmy Scheeler, who became an administrator at the AIA in Washington, was in my studio at one time. I think he worked on the Air Force Academy, or projects prior to Field Theory. He was a young man who decided on a career outside of Chicago, in Washington. An administrative role was what he wanted. He sort of headed-up design programs for the AIA. I've gotten to know some people outside of SOM in the AIA, but we've never been very close. I'm more likely to have made friends and acquaintances through serving on the Fine Arts Commission—you know, appointed by President Carter and serving under President Reagan.

Blum: Why did you join the AIA when you did?

Netsch: I think I did because it was the thing to do. I mean, you were a young man in Skidmore. I was not a radical in those terms at that time. SOM had senior partners who were active, administratively, in the AIA, especially in New York, and Nat encouraged it. Remember, Nat got the gold medal.

Blum: Oh, that was years later, though.

Netsch: That was years later, but you don't get it because you have been an iconoclast against the Institute. And the AIA supported us during the Air Force Chapel fracas.

Blum: What did they do?

Netsch: They made a statement—a general statement saying that architecture shouldn't be treated that way. It's a serious thing. It didn't come out enthusiastically for the chapel, but it did support it as a process rather than as

a particular design, and the right of the architect to perform. So the AIA was just what I would call a normal part of architecture of Middle West Chicago. There was no other professional organization to join.

Blum: Well, there were organizations that were not as high up on the hierarchy of prestige, there was the Western Society of Architects. There are several.

Netsch: They were not active in Chicago, to speak of, at all. The only thing was the AIA, really. The Illinois Society of Architects didn't occur until much later, and it was a group that was concerned with licensing. I was on NCARB, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. I was appointed by Governor Stratton to chair the licensing examinations in the state of Illinois, and you obviously wouldn't get a role like that if you hadn't been a member of the AIA because a governor would ask the appropriate professional group for recommendations of names. So, you see, I took part in those traditional administrative bodies, but as a designer.

Blum: And you joined because it was just sort of expected and the usual thing to do?

Netsch: It was expected, and it was the professional group. I had no reason to rebel against it. It wasn't really until the Postmodernists decided to make issues about everything from CIAM to the AIA that it really became an issue. The other time it became an issue was when the recession started and the cost of being a member, especially on behalf of firms because they depended on the firm taking out a member for every staff member—not a membership, but paying a fee—and this caused consternation among some offices.

Blum: Well, somewhat before you say the AIA supported you in your chapel controversy, another architect, Paul Schweikher, had some problems with the railroad exhibition on the lakefront and the AIA offered him no support whatsoever.

Netsch: The *Tribune* decided. It was called "George Tagge's contribution to Chicago

society.” He was a reporter for the *Tribune* and really a lobbyist for the *Tribune*. As you know, the reason that Mies’s—well, it wasn’t Mies’s originally—the original scheme for the exposition building was sited on the lakefront was because the *Tribune* didn’t want to pay the price for rehabilitation after the railroad fair. So the railroad fair was a piece of power politics.

Blum: Well, Paul had some problem with whatever it was that happened at the railroad fair, and he expected the AIA to stand behind him, and it didn’t. He withdrew, he joined again later, and then he withdrew again. He had a love-hate relationship with the AIA.

Netsch: I can understand that, but I’m just explaining the power of the *Tribune*. Probably he tried to get support for a professional thing that he had done for the railroad fair, and in the meantime all the liberals and everybody were all uptight, and Mr. Tagge’s memorial on the lakefront was a bitter pill. But it was a power pill, and therefore Schweikher probably had to take it. I don’t remember the details of that, but I can understand that the AIA would run scared of the *Tribune*—really run scared of the *Tribune*.

Blum: It was the local AIA that he criticized.

Netsch: That’s right. Well, I don’t remember the local AIA ever taking a position on the Air Force Academy.

Blum: It was the national that supported you?

Netsch: It was the national in Washington, and it was because of Nat, he went to them and said, “This is a professional problem before Congress. What are you going to do about it?”

Blum: Do you think over the years that they have been forthright in issuing statements?

Netsch: No, they are not particularly courageous. I think when my UIC building was being blasted there was nothing from the AIA, that I recall. It was Bob Bruegmann and other people who made personal statements about it. I think the diversification of the practice, the change in the role of architecture and business, the conflict between the developer/architect, the developer who controls the architecture, all of those things impacted on the traditional role that the AIA played. It grew out of the original concept of the guild as the society of master craftsman's shop that occurred in the Middle Ages for the craftsmen. In other words, I think of its original concept as a guild rather than all the things that it tries to do now.

Blum: Would you join it today if you were an architect starting out?

Netsch: I don't know, because I have no idea what they offer a young architect. I have no idea. I haven't looked into that.

Blum: To become a fellow you have to be sponsored. Who were your sponsors?

Netsch: I can't remember.

Blum: Was a project involved?

Netsch: Well, I just recently, for example, was the sponsor for Nick Weingarten so that he could become a fellow in the AIA, which means that I took the administrative responsibility, with the help of his secretarial staff, in writing people for support and in reviewing his documentation to make certain that the visual effort was, I thought, as effective as possible. Since he primarily is involved with the computer, see, he does not have a list of buildings he has done. This year I was asked to support about four other people, and two were selected of the four. It's a very interesting problem, recommending people. First of all, now if they recommend someone for fellowship, now you have to compare it with every other person that you know is a candidate. I have become an expert at what is known as the "lukewarm recommendation" versus the "very positive recommendation" because I have



to make a choice. I have several times told someone, "I don't think I know your work well enough to provide a recommendation." So those are the three characteristics: you endorse enthusiastically, you endorse lukewarmly—I don't mean negatively—or you don't do it at all. The people I recommend lukewarmly are usually because they are in administration, and I can't really define the result. One recommendation I gave in administration was for Bob Wesley, who was up for the fellowship. He helped Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in the minorities program very heavily. I started it, and he has continued it. I spoke for him both as a superintendent for my house, and what he did, but he did not get it. So there was an enthusiastic endorsement that didn't make it.

Blum: Will you just say a word about what the minorities program at SOM is?

Netsch: I call it a program, but it was a personal program.

Blum: Oh, was it an affirmative action program, like hiring minorities?

Netsch: After Martin Luther King's death and the fire on the West Side, there was real consternation in Chicago. We were living at 20 East Cedar, and I could look out the windows and see the fires burning in Chicago. I realized that—I, who had made a major effort to support minorities in architectural education and to hire minorities in the firm, I felt that we should, at that moment right then and there, quit work and have a series of symposia for the black staff members to talk to us. Now, no other office did this. We did it because we, of course, had the visual imagery.

Blum: What do you mean no other office did this?

Netsch: In the New York or San Francisco office. It was a very effective personal kind of talk. It seemed that these people who had suffered, you might say, the problem of discrimination, albeit unintended, were able to voice that in the office; therefore, it reinforced my position in the firm to speak up for those things. Apartheid is what got me to support getting out of South Africa.

That's what got me to hire and use a black designer on the Air Force Academy, and to have Charlie Duster as one of my regular chief draftsmen or superintendent.

Blum: Do you think there would have been opposition to that within the firm had you not had this education program?

Netsch: It's education by example—obviously, obviously. Bill Hartmann wasn't a devotee of affirmative action. Certainly, Bruce Graham wasn't. They more or less took the position then that it should be by qualification—you're selected on the basis of ability, not on the basis of color or gender. That, of course, is the hot position again today.

Blum: Exactly.

Netsch: Knowing the number of blacks that even got into architectural schools, or the cultural problem, that I felt so strongly about, that we're such an exclusive embodiment of Western culture which, except for Picasso picking up the form of African art, there was none of it in American architecture. It was very different, as we learned from our little symposium after the Dr. King event, for a young black architect to suddenly take a kind of historic, philosophical lesson out of classical European architecture, especially when everybody fled from them in the city. There were classical Christian Science churches and synagogues just abandoned. And so the African-Americans moved into those buildings, but if you see how they move in those buildings, the culture of their service and the culture of the service that they originally had is quite different. And so, you can imagine an architect trying to create for the world which he knows, and to go to college and have to sit through three years of Western history and get it imbued in his own feeling. I was just looking at a Renaissance photograph this morning and suddenly realized where Lou Kahn got his flat arch peering into a big facade, and that's from those paintings of the main St. Peter's in Rome. Why could I go to the Art Institute and find that my favorite painters in the Art Institute were quattrocento painters and Japanese prints? I mean, I could make a decision, one, on

quattrocento as an evolution of my own society, and I have the confidence enough in my own cultural background that I could accept and look at the Japanese print. Of course, you've got to remember that the Japanese print had looked at Western painting, and Western painting had looked at the Japanese print, so there was a connective aesthetic tissue which if you were black would be kind of hard to suddenly discover. And so I, needless to say, feel that affirmative action played a big part, and certainly the AIA played a big part in that.

Blum: In making people more aware?

Netsch: No, in appointing young black architects to roles in the Washington scene—appointing them on committees. They were maybe not the strongest design representative you could have, following Bruce's criteria, but an important communications criteria among all of us on a jury, discussing why we like something or not. By then we were all more senior and it would help an architect who was successful in a black community but didn't have the strongest clients and certainly would be hard put to select a more or less classical solution, even in the modern movement. I mean, what is black about Corbusier? What is black about Mies? What is black about any of these people? So the AIA did help in that manner.

Blum: Did black architects tend to build in the black community and white built for white clients, or was there some crossover?

Netsch: Well, there was only crossover through affirmative action, really, where a federal project which mandated black participation would have a major white firm as an associate. Usually the white firm did the designing. There is a lot of discussion about fake participation by putting minority people in. When I was president of the park board I had three women commissioners and two men, Bill Bartholomay and myself, and we had Dr. Burroughs, the lady who started the DuSable Museum. Margaret Burroughs, and then Rebecca Sive, who was a political activist and public relations organizer—in other words, she would get luncheons and things organized for groups,

always Democratic and primarily political. And the last one is, as I say, my favorite Communist, Miriam Gusevich, and she has gone back to Puerto Rico. We were all appointed by Harold Washington, and the mode of the moment was fairness. That was our doctrine, and so fairness was paramount in the policies that the park district established under our regime in contract hiring. We demanded a twenty-five percent minority participation in a contract and, I think, five percent for women in the field. Rebecca Sive Tomoshefsky—that's her husband's name, and he's an important young lawyer in the community—was really outspoken, so many of our meetings were based on the whole problem of minority participation.

Blum: Were there any of these percentages applied to you and your jobs, for instance, on the Air Force Academy or any government job?

Netsch: Oh, no. That was prior to affirmative action. I only know that, for example, on Miami of Ohio they inquired if I had any black participants or minority participants on my staff—minority or women.

Blum: Did you?

Netsch: I did. Charlie Duster. So I would say occasionally there was a request for a gender and race answer, but there were no percentages.

Blum: Do you think you helped SOM become more aware at a time when it was critical?

Netsch: Oh, I know I did because I fought for them. I fought for the staff. It got to a point in the affirmative action where each partner had to submit to a committee for review the qualifications of each person for a raise.

Blum: Was this throughout the SOM organization?

Netsch: Yes, this was because of federal law because if any staff member felt he was unjustly denied a raise or given an improper raise, they could go before the

courts and sue. So we had to develop a very complex system of judging. I suppose even architects today have to do that until the affirmative action program is changed. Now, that may strike you as being an unnecessary and complicated administrative process. I know many of my administrative partners thought it was a damned mess...

Blum: What was your feeling about it?

Netsch: ...and that we should have the right to decide what we wanted to do, giving a raise or not giving a raise. Actually, I can remember not giving a raise to somebody as one sort of message that they had better go look for a job somewhere else without firing them. It was kind of a polite brush-off, you might say, not unheard of in the annals of American business. So this was a real effort to try to systematize it. I didn't object to it. It got to an awful point where differences—you know, the very good people were easy to identify, but the great middle band, how do you differentiate between twenty-five dollars and thirty dollars a week? That got to be kind of a problem. I never got into any kind of court action about it. The firm got in several real battles in court, and they lost, I think, every one of them.

Blum: Do you think that was just the climate of the time, or was it legitimate gripes?

Netsch: No, I think it was somewhat the pomposity of Nathaniel. There were a couple of participants that got sort of unceremoniously fired. They never got hired back but their compensation as participants was given them.

Blum: And that's what was in question when the court action took place?

Netsch: Well, as I say, it was done quickly and without cause. They had a recourse, you see, that they would not ordinarily have had. So the law did help in stabilizing those things. It did help minorities and women. I remember I was even hesitant to hire women on a staff. First of all, I didn't know how the kind of work we were doing all over the world was going to work out.

Blum: For a woman?

Netsch: For a woman, but I soon found out that in hiring a couple of good women that it didn't make any difference at all. There is also the problem of marriage—a married couple.

Blum: Within the firm?

Netsch: Within the firm, and that went through a series of yes/no, yes/no, okay/not okay. These things were minor administrative problems.

Blum: Was the feeling that it's better not to have a marriage within the firm? Was it easier?

Netsch: Yes, certainly because of conflicts in ego, really, and also if someone didn't like somebody and there was talk around in the firm, and someone was married, the husband or wife would hear that and then some vindictiveness would occur on either side. So that's one of the reasons that it was frowned upon.

Blum: You mentioned the Fine Arts Commission a while ago. That was based in Washington. I know Gordon had been on the Fine Arts Commission. How were you appointed to the Fine Arts Commission?

Netsch: I was a President Carter appointee, and therefore probably from the liberal side. Bruce didn't think I should serve.

Blum: Why not?

Netsch: I have no idea, but he talked to Gordon about it, and Gordon said that was none of his business and none of Bruce's business; that "he was appointed by the president and he should serve."

Blum: Could that have been interpreted as a conflict of interest?

Netsch: Yes. It was not a national problem for Gordon to serve, but Bruce made it a national problem if I served.

Blum: Was that just the difference in your personalities or him sort of...?

Netsch: That was part of the conflict. Nothing happened. I did serve, and it was memorable. I thoroughly enjoyed it because I served during the Vietnam War Memorial period. I served during developing the underground galleries at the Smithsonian and got to meet a friend of mine who heads up the New York classical firm. It was a case where I was relied upon in the group to, one, maintain, as you might say, an aesthetic stance on what should happen in Washington; two, to be sort of liberal in my context, like the Vietnam War Memorial; and, three, to provide a stiff spine against the secretary of the interior. Now, granted, the chairman of our group, the head of the National Gallery, also had a stiff spine, but he had a political problem so I could speak out at a meeting and relieve him.

Blum: Was that J. Carter Brown?

Netsch: Yes, and I could relieve Carter from getting in trouble with the local people. I also, of course, caused him some problems by sending some people back to the drawing boards when I felt it was necessary. I had heard stories like that from Gordon, too. Gordon sent people back to the drawing boards.

Blum: Gordon told a long story about Harry Weese and his design for the transit system in Washington and how it went through the review process, when he was on the committee.

Netsch: How actually Gordon really developed those arches inside. Harry has never admitted that—and, of course, he can't do it even today—but that was an example. I had sort of the same role, but my problem was not to change the Vietnam War Memorial but to be certain that the flag didn't get placed in an inopportune location. I fought that sculpture for a long time. I felt it was an

unnecessary piece of visual symbolism that has been proven true today, because you see pictures of people looking at the names on the wall. You don't see them praying in front of the sculpture of those three awful figures. In fact, I dislike them so much that I first said, "Carter, in order for you to accept something in the National Gallery it has to be approved by a committee on its aesthetics, and it has to be exhibited. I'd like you to exhibit that maquette in the National Gallery." I said this to him at an executive committee meeting. He, of course, didn't want to do it, and I knew that. I said, "Well, then, why do we have to accept it on the Mall?" I was so adamant against the sculpture that when I was replaced. Guess who replaced me? The sculptor! The Reagan administration. So I got my comeuppance, you might say, from the Reagan administration by that. But I served, and I served well. The press reports of the meetings in Washington record my service. My departure was considered a loss.

Blum: How long were you on the commission?

Netsch: I have forgotten. My departure was considered a loss by the critics in the *Washington Post*. I was relied upon to serve, and also with my broad experience I could discuss with the landscape architects or I could discuss with planners or I could discuss with designers. It was an effective combination with Carter. We had women and blacks on the commission. We had a diversified board and all politically appointed—some of them subsequently were more politically appointed than qualified. I won't comment any more than that. But this was an active board, we took it seriously, and we did a good job. Getting that Vietnam War Memorial through was really a project. You have no idea. There were motions in Congress to scrap the site, all by the secretary of the interior. We really had to bolster the project. We had the big public hearings. Maya Lin couldn't decide whether she liked us or not. Well, she was young, she was aggressive, and she said, "I want it just the way I have done it. I don't want the sculpture, and I don't want the flag." The walk became too narrow, and people were trampling all over the grass, so we put down the little granite squares that we had designed for the Air Force Academy and never used, and then let the



grass grow between them so people could put in their little flags and things. It was difficult for her because she was fighting for survival. Nothing was acceptable except what she had submitted. We understood that completely, so we had to accept occasional darts from her, too. I don't think she ever really understood what we did.

Blum: I understand that Harry Weese was very helpful to her.

Netsch: Well, I have no idea because it was never discussed. Harry's role was never discussed. He never talked to me about a role. He probably assumed that we would do the right thing, you know. We had to select the architect that she had to work with. I think of all the Washington architects we selected, we selected a reasonable choice. He was not a designer. He was a manipulator, and she needed that, but it wasn't someone she could communicate with. I think she thought that was a hostile act, and yet the last thing in the world is that you want another designer suddenly coming along and saying, "Well, let's make the marble white instead of black. Let's do this or that or the other thing." The Vietnam War Memorial Committee was very grateful for what we did—Scruggs and company—in keeping it, and then, as you know, they have saved every item that has been left there. They're having to rent warehouses to put everything in, and each week's gifts, let me say, are then properly kept and stored. It's a wailing wall. It was a very successful design, but it was a great time to serve because it was a chance to preserve something that was important architecturally. It was also a chance to participate in the public debate, and it was great to fight for something good that wasn't yours.

Blum: Walter, how do you think you came to be selected by President Carter? Do you think your wife being active in Democratic politics had anything to do with it?

Netsch: I don't know. I really don't know. There would have to be someone who was in the Carter administration—I'm certain that they looked at my résumé. They certainly didn't pick me because I was a Republican, because I wasn't. They could have picked me because I was a well-known architect who did

the Air Force Academy, and a Democrat, and a Middle Westerner. This is about the farthest away they ever picked on the board.

Blum: You mean it was all controlled by Easterners?

Netsch: Eastern, yes. One of the women on the board was an important political figure in Syracuse.

[Tape 14: Side 1]

Netsch: The decisions certainly were political. For example, I have no idea whether Carter Brown, who must have known of all of the suggestions, whether he called Gordon and said, "Would Walter do...?"

Blum: Had Gordon just left the commission at that point?

Netsch: No, he had been off for several years, but he was known as being not only strong but really almost boisterous. He made headlines every day, and some really well-known architects took great umbrage with his redesign of their things. I mean, I think Gordon's solution on the transit system was beautiful, and I know he went home and thought about it. I could just see him going home and worrying about it. I didn't have any project—the project we had that was mammoth was the Vietnam War Memorial, and therefore a design contribution at that level I never had to face. I played a minor one, especially on the Smithsonian. It was the one time I remember I got into classical discussions with the architect, who was from the major classical Boston firm, Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott—it's a name that's been famous for a hundred years—we would sit down and talk about classical Renaissance architecture, and do you do a door that way, or don't you do a door that way, and having discussions at that level. It was sort of the thing that Eero taught me—you know, "I want SOM to do the best job they can. I'm not going to tell them what to do." I had the same position this time as Eero did then. I had to tell someone what I thought—I'd give them a critique but not design it.

Blum: But wasn't that the function of the commission, to act as a review body and make suggestions?

Netsch: Yes, but it all depended on how political the commission is and how controlled it is from the White House.

Blum: How controlled was your group?

Netsch: Well, you see, we were the opposite. We were fighting the White House, actually, because the secretary of the interior was the one who was trying to get rid of the memorial. Remember, he is that West Coast man, James Watts. He was controversial himself. Oh, my. And we were a Democratic board, you see. We had all been appointed. What happened was, Nixon waited to the very last two weeks to appoint the members, and the members don't have a definite term. You can get unappointed and you don't even know you're unappointed. I didn't know when I was unappointed—let's call it "fired." There was either some break in the congressional sessions, or something, and so you could be replaced. But Nixon replaced a whole group, and so we all came on board at once, except for Carter and one man who is the son of Edward Durell Stone, who did the Indian Embassy. Ed Stone, Jr. who was a landscape architect and a hold-over, as Carter was a hold-over, and the rest of us were new.

Blum: In the context of SOM, were you and Gordon the only two from SOM ever on the commission?

Netsch: Yes. There have been no subsequent appointments.

Blum: Didn't that add a lot of prestige to SOM?

Netsch: I should hope so.

Blum: Isn't it quite an honor to serve on this commission?

Netsch: Oh, listen, if you look at those leather envelopes that each of us had our minutes in, and see who preceded you, I was so pleased to see the names that preceded me. There were some famous people who I'm not going to mention now, and I can't mention them all. It is one of the great honors you can receive, I think, in the profession.

Blum: Is it an effective committee?

Netsch: It depends on the politics of the time. Don't forget, Gordon had a very political situation—the transit system. He had a *confrère* in Harry Weese, albeit they were competitors. It was a major, major project for Washington. I mean, it's a great thing to have. For example, it ended up at Takoma Park. Takoma Park is a little community college I designed in Washington.

Blum: Is that in Washington or Maryland?

Netsch: Maryland, just over the line at Silver Spring. You know, the line is so thin. I just can't imagine, really, a higher honor in our profession—maybe the Pritzker Prize. Those prizes are very honoring. But aside from that, a role-playing honor is serving on the Fine Arts Commission now. Today Washington is built. So much has been built in Washington in the last twenty years. And with the triangle now coming to completion, which, Harry Weese, for example, made a scheme for which was not followed. It went back to the classical system. Nat's battle on Pennsylvania Avenue, which he did under Lyndon Johnson and caused great consternation with Gordon—the FBI Building is not a complete success; let's put it that way.

Blum: But that was done by Murphy.

Netsch: Yes, but Nat got Pennsylvania Avenue done. How C. F. Murphy got that building is beyond me, but he got it. It was not favorably received by many people. Of course, I think Nat felt great umbrage because he was getting Pennsylvania Avenue done, and he was not going to be picayune about the pluses and minuses as long as it got restored. Saving the post office was an

important part of Nat's effort. When I was a GI in the service at Fort Belvoir the buses back to Fort Belvoir lined up around that post office, so I have kind of a memory of being hot and tired and sticky and getting on those buses, going back to camp.

Blum: Wasn't there some politics involved in the Hirschhorn Museum that Gordon did?

Netsch: I don't know.

Blum: There were things that got torn down that perhaps shouldn't have, or things were saved that...

Netsch: You see, I never got involved. I never did a building in Washington, so I wasn't involved. Gordon has had problems like that. I don't know whether he was serving on the board at the same time he was doing the museum. I can't remember. But it wasn't unusual for Nat to be working on Lake Meadows when he closed Cottage Grove and got him in hot water.

Blum: Would you personally consider that a conflict of interest?

Netsch: Sure, that was a conflict of interest, but Nat thought it was absolutely right to get a parcel that went all the way to the lake.

Blum: For Lake Meadows?

Netsch: With Lake Meadows, and Cottage Grove, which wasn't going anywhere. It was a diagonal street. We've closed many of them since. Ogden, Blue Island has been closed in spots. The UIC site closed Blue Island. I'm just saying that I know Nat had a conflict of interest.

Blum: A little while ago you said the only club you withdrew from was the Cliff Dwellers. What was the situation there?

Netsch: I didn't belong to many clubs. Let me describe the club business in SOM. Partners in SOM had their club fees paid for by the firm, and legitimate lunches were paid for by the firm. The Chicago Club and the Tavern Club and a golf club were considered acceptable partner club memberships. I didn't play golf, I was not going to get any jobs in academia out on the golf course, nor was I going to get any at the Chicago Club. As Bill said, "We've already got so many members in the Tavern Club, you don't want to be a member there." The only other legitimate one was the Arts Club, and I became a member of the Arts Club on my own. Occasionally, if we had a large party there with some academicians, I believe Skidmore paid the bill. But most of it I paid. The membership in the Cliff Dwellers was really at a request of some people—"Walter, we need your help. Please join the Cliff Dwellers." I joined very late, and then to my horror discovered they didn't allow women, and that some of the Cliff Dwellers who I knew from politics were the guys that went up there every noon for lunch and sat at the big members' table and drank the wine and ran the club. I would occasionally get up there—and I mean occasionally; seldom, really—and sit down at a table and listen to all of this. I thought, my God, what is this? Then all of a sudden someone started the rebellion. I didn't start it, but I quickly joined and became one of the members that made a public statement about withdrawing.

Blum: Because women were not permitted?

Netsch: Because women were not permitted. Then that was rescinded, and then they said, "Would you please join back?" and I joined back.

Blum: Well, wasn't the big flap about Adlai Stevenson, who was running for public office, belonging to that club? Wasn't that the publicity that made the club's policy public?

Netsch: I wouldn't be surprised. Maybe that was it. I don't recall. I never considered that a political problem of major degree. Nat made me a member of the Wayfarers Club. I am still a member of the Wayfarers. Now, the Wayfarers is

a club of leading members of Chicago's power group.

Blum: Political?

Netsch: No, it was not political at all.

Blum: What kind of power? Rich?

Netsch: I mean presidents of banks, the president of Marshall Field's, presidents of universities. Socially and economically powerful. As architects they had Harry Weese, Nat Owings, Bill Hartmann, John Moutoussamy, I think John Fugard, and a couple others. Well, Fugard was important in the AIA. Nat, when he left Chicago, said I should be a Wayfarer, so he evidently gave my name to the secret committee. I still to this day don't know who is currently in the secret committee. I did get a question from one of—I'm now ex-officio retired—you know what I mean—and I didn't attend much last year. I had to give a presentation. I gave a presentation, I don't know on what. It was a preliminary to being a member. It was nice going. They are nice members. They always had oyster stew and steak or lamb chops, for years, and now we don't have oyster stew. Now we have vegetables and fish or chicken, so it's become edibly acceptable. The members of the group are still important members, but they said to me the other day, "We ought to get some new blood in the architects," so I gave them some names of who I thought could be acceptable. If I had known a radical young architect I would have named him, but I didn't. But it wouldn't have passed the secret committee because they would have asked "who is he?" you know. I was always disappointed in the way—John Moutoussamy was made a member later on, and you can imagine why. Also, with his relationship to Arthur Ashe—he was the father-in-law of Arthur Ashe.

Blum: John Moutoussamy?

Netsch: John Moutoussamy's daughter is Arthur Ashe's widow. They are a nice family. We had known them a little bit socially prior to this. That club

occasionally has interesting lectures.

Blum: Walter, with the clubs you belonged to—the few that you’ve mentioned—did you ever get jobs from the contacts you made in the clubs?

Netsch: Not to my knowledge. The Arts Club, no. I mean, why would I get a job? If I had gotten a house I think it would have been through the Arts Club, but I never did. Certainly, the Cliff Dwellers was as competitive a group of people as I have ever met in my life.

Blum: And so many of them architects.

Netsch: And so many of them architects that they would hardly—it’s kind of nice to go up there and have a drink and see Frank Lloyd Wright’s name or Louis Sullivan’s name on the little table. But clubs were never an important part of my professional life. Through membership in the Cliff Dwellers I became an associate member of the Cosmos Club in Washington.

Blum: Now there is a club that has had women-member problems, isn’t it?

Netsch: I only used it when I had women at the meetings because they were a part of the project, so if it happened it happened before me. But on Takoma Park when we had meetings we always had them at the Cosmos Club, or I stayed there prior to going to a meeting at Takoma Park. I usually stayed at the Hotel Washington for Fine Arts Commission meetings. It was less expensive, I was paying for it myself, or the firm was, and I didn’t want to burden costs. It didn’t make any difference as long as it was a clean place to sleep. Oh, that reminds me of a funny story about Washington. We were always on a tight budget on the Air Force Academy, and I guess I felt it more than most people because most of my jobs were what we call low commission jobs. The percentage on the commission was low. So when we were down there doing the programming on the Air Force Academy we found a hotel, a little hotel, which now is quite acceptable. But then this one was on its way to acceptability, which meant that there were cockroaches and so forth and so



on. But we endured a lot on my jobs in terms of where we stayed or where we ate, depending on our food allowance or our living allowance. It just sort of reminds me that that was part of the camaraderie, I guess.

Blum: Was that allowance for room and board set by SOM, or was that your decision?

Netsch: No, I was a design partner, and I had to make the decision, and I was trying to make it modest. We were not going to live high on the hog in a socialist country like Algeria. It was partly my political and professional position. I am sure that when I got interviewed they sensed that I was not going to come down and demand things. I hired a couple from the Peace Corps who had been in Tunisia. They spoke French and understood Muslim ways. I have had several key people—in fact, some of my most sensitive people were Peace Corps graduates. I think they played a very important part, not only in my life but in America's life, and professionally.

Blum: You served on a local committee, the board of directors of the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council of Chicago. How did you get appointed to it?

Netsch: Okay, now that is an example of a council that was active politically in supporting Chicago best and Chicago first. Dorothy Rubel was the directress of it. You could join. You didn't go through any kind of review. If you joined and became an active participant—this was my real active political club assignment. I mean, this was better than the AIA. First of all, it wasn't just architects. There were architects, there were economists, there were developers. Ferd Kramer was a young man then and an active leader in this program. It was really a good group. When we moved we gave our furniture in our conference room from 100 West Monroe to them, and they still use that table—big clunker of a table—in their own program.

Blum: You say this was sort of your choice?

Netsch: Oh, absolute choice.

Blum: It was in sympathy with your own politics and ideas?

Netsch: Everything. It was on social housing, on the whole problem, and I really was an active member.

Blum: Was there an effort within SOM to sort of spread out into many of these organizations on the right, on the left?

Netsch: Nat Owings felt that very strongly. It was either social or to the left because the city was Democratic. He was very pragmatic.

Blum: What did the council do? What was the purpose of it?

Netsch: The purpose of the council was, we were the watchdogs against political programs for the city of Chicago and the federal government.

Blum: Meaning?

Netsch: Meaning under Dorothy Rubel, for example, in 1948 we established a new charter, and the Metropolitan Housing Council changed its name to the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council. The historic fight over the closing of Cottage Grove for Lake Meadows...

Blum: You weren't on the council then.

Netsch: No. I'm just giving you—you said, "What did the council do?" That was in 1949. No, I think I started in 1954. We produced the high school textbook on tomorrow's Chicago. We fought an inappropriate lakefront development committee for a new housing code. We lobbied, which led to the creation of the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, and we developed a center for neighborhood renewal, which is now still going strong. But the most important thing—the annual meeting thing, crisis of the sixties, housing, and names that were important: Howard Green, John Baird, Tom Nicholson,

Calvin Sawyier. All these people were important to it. The most important thing I got involved with was the strategies for the committee on a model cities program. Let me see, what date was it? In 1965 the Committee on Urban Progress report recommended the metropolitan government rent supplement proposals to be incorporated into federal law, and the Housing Act of 1965 on rent supplements. This was an important issue, we took an issue, and we invited the then-secretary of HUD, who was one of the first African-American members in federal government, to Wingspread for this conference. It was great to be sitting in Wingspread, working on this kind of a problem.

Blum: So was it sort of like zoning and regulations and things of this sort?

Netsch: Well, mostly major issues like Lake Meadows and closing Cottage Grove, like building on the lakefront, and the Crosstown Expressway. There was a whole series of major issues that came up. I ceased to be a member when they became more interested in suburban events, I guess you would say. When Lois Wille wrote *Forever Open, Clear and Free* she gave me a copy of her book in which she dedicated my contribution to Metropolitan Housing and Planning. It was a do-good organization, but it was a politically strong organization, not because of the political connections but because of the variety of members in development and real estate.

Blum: Did the mayor and the city council of Chicago have any connection with this group?

Netsch: Only if Dorothy Rubel and a group of people met with the mayor. That's the way it happens today, I'm certain, with the housing council. Friends of the Park has to have a meeting with the mayor. See, everything has now been diversified. You have Friends of the Park today, of which I have been a member. We have a Lake Michigan group, we have a waterways group. It's all been separated out by individual likes and interests, which I think weakens the whole business. If they were all in one common group and there were people espousing the Friends of the Park or people espousing the

lakefront or people espousing the Chicago River in that same group, you have to get them together—or the Metropolitan Housing and Planning. I think when the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission—NIPC, you know—came into being, I think that was what I consider to be the last real major contribution. When I was president of the Chicago Park Board I served as our representative to NIPC as a nonvoting member. I liked it. It was an interesting series of sessions. They were mostly involved with suburban affairs, but it was there I learned—and I fought and I couldn't get anyone to support me—that Lake Shore Drive is really a highway in federal terms. I was trying to get it made back into a landmark boulevard rather than a highway. But I think NIPC was the last real major contribution of the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Commission. They had a big dinner this last spring, and they invited a man to come to speak on the relationship of the border towns related to the main cities. I went to the meeting a year ago, or two years ago, when there was a big discussion on what's going to happen to urban cities, and the statistics on the minority and economic poverty levels that were determining the character of Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, etc. So now they give speeches. They are not active in relation to—see, you've got the Landmarks Commission now. Everything is really fragmented.

Blum: Was there any benefit, direct or indirect, for SOM, for you being such an active member of this council?

Netsch: I think it was only in the kind of jobs I got later. Obviously, my attitude on housing reflected my desire to do Pruitt-Igoe, you see. So it's kind of what I call a training perception contribution that it made to my career, and then that affected SOM's reputation.

Blum: Throughout your career you have taught courses at universities.

Netsch: Oh, yes. I really like teaching.

Blum: And the list as I have it is pretty extensive. It goes from the University of

Michigan, Rhode Island School of Design [RISD], MIT, Lawrence University, Miami University, and the University of Illinois.

Netsch: Lawrence Institute of Technology. It's not a university. Lawrence University is up in Wisconsin. I have an honorary Ph.D. from there. I don't have a teaching assignment there.

Blum: What stands out in your mind about teaching?

Netsch: "How did you get the job?" so to speak—well, first of all, the Air Force Academy got me on a lecture circuit.

Blum: About the Air Force Academy?

Netsch: Yes.

Netsch: UIC got me on the lecture circuit, then I became a Hill Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois, I became a visiting professor at Minnesota. Those were honors that came to me from the staff, appointing me to those roles, and the dean—Ralph Rapson knew; it came through Ralph Rapson in Minnesota, I'm certain—and at Urbana through staff members down there that I had lectured before, or had done short teaching stints. There are several kinds of teaching stints you can do. You can give a lecture and stay for a week. That's one kind of teaching.

Blum: One lecture, one day?

Netsch: No, you may give two or three, but stay for a week, then you work in the studio, and then you sit around and drink beer at night.

Blum: And did you do critiques of students' work?

Netsch: Yes, during that week you are in the studio. If you are in the studio you are giving a critique, and then you would sit around and talk at night.

Everybody let their hair down, and you'd have a beer, and so forth. Then you would get these longer assignments like Hill Visiting Professor, and I've forgotten the name of the one at Minnesota, or I've gotten them transposed. That was an assignment for a semester, and that involved going down there every week for a period of time. Or at the Rhode Island School of Design, RISD, is where the president, Albert Bush-Brown, and I had actually served on seminars and lectures and had become personal friends, and he asked me to teach. Bush was made president. He was a history professor at MIT. Mrs. Moholy-Nagy and I became friends doing a week's seminar at MIT. I guess it got to be a pretty vocal discussion, and so Bush remembered to ask me to teach at RISD when he became president. It was a very tough time for him down there. But I enjoyed it.

Blum: You were teaching architecture?

Netsch: Oh, yes, design, just design.

Blum: Were you teaching Field Theory?

Netsch: It would depend. Sibyl and I sort of hit it off contentiously at MIT, but I gradually learned, really, to respect her, and I really liked her. When she would come to Chicago I would send her a dozen roses.

Blum: Did you know Moholy-Nagy?

Netsch: I only knew him as sitting in the audience at those lectures at what is now a night spot, Excalibur, but when it was the Institute of Design. It really was great at the Institute of Design. That was a hotbed of reality, in my mind. But, of course, it was the hotbed of "irreality," I guess, in everybody else's mind, except us young people. But Sibyl was great. I enjoyed teaching—I really did. I've got to explain, when I was on the commission for the examination of architects I took over the design responsibility, and I invented a system. This was before all this computer jazz. I would devise a program for a small building, and I would define it. It had to be designed in a specific way and

then any alternate way they wanted. This was because I believed that in modern architecture, structure, as it does in any great period in architecture, defined the character of the building. So one year I'd pick a little library and say that it has to be done in bearing wall and in another way, so they had to sit down and do two solutions on two pieces of paper. Of course, everybody thought I was nuts because then I had twice as many exams to grade. I said, "No, that's not true because one of the most important things is, if a young architect can't tell the difference between the bearing wall and post and lintel or arch, I don't think he should be an architect." So if you couldn't make two solutions you only got fifty percent. If you got one right and you got a fifty, fifty didn't pass. So I felt I was developing a design resolution in which you failed yourself. I didn't flunk you. I didn't possess an aesthetic hat that said "I like your work" or "I don't like your work." You had to produce, and everybody knew that. The people who were taking the exam knew it. It never got criticized except for a few times when there was some political pressure for me to pass somebody. They would get out the exams and want me to give a long, written explanation of why that person didn't pass. I never had anything revoked or changed, but I did feel very definitely that I had devised a system where you tripped yourself.

Blum: Well, you were encouraging flexibility, too.

Netsch: Yes, I was encouraging also the evaluation of talent, because often I would get two terrific solutions.

Blum: From the same student?

Netsch: From the same examinee. Those people really liked the exam, and they should. They could get a hundred or a ninety-five very easily.

Blum: When you were teaching in these universities, what did you think was your underlying message you communicated to the students?

Netsch: I really followed Professor Anderson's technique. It was very Socratic. He

didn't say, "This is wrong," or "This is right." He didn't say, "Do it differently." He would say, "Why did you do that? Tell me why." It was through that dialogue of the why that I began to have my own precept—know why before know how—and that was my precept in teaching. And so, I would try to develop a dialogue. I would try to explain why I was doing something in Field Theory. For example, at that time I was working on the library at Wells College. I would explain that you have a sloping site, an irregular site, and to try to put down a symmetrical pattern on that site was irrational. You were just forcing something. And so, I would explain that I developed this combination of three rotated squares, not four but three, so I automatically had an eccentricity that I could move about on this sloping site. So, know why before know how. That would be an example I could give without asking people to do Field Theory. It was very hard. I didn't encourage people to do Field Theory because I would want them to spend their life doing this, and I didn't feel that it was my role to proselytize for that short period of time. I would do it through a lecture, showing what I was doing, but I would not do it through grading or demanding. Most of the design problems, of course, were a part of the design curriculum, so you would land in a fourth year that's doing this.

Blum: So you have to work within that.

Netsch: You would have to do that. The only time I really set everything was when I was teaching at Purdue. This was the landscape architecture group, teaching architectural design. Since I didn't feel I was a perfect expert in landscape, although I had had all this experience with Kiley and everybody, I decided that I would use that same technique that I learned. First of all, it was very funny. It was the first time—it was just the last eight years—I faced a class of all white towheads. I just looked out at that student class, and I thought I had landed on Mars or somewhere. I didn't have, I would say, a typical urban meld of students.

[Tape 14: Side 2]



Netsch: The design end of landscape, in that I think they were going to be that combination of a designer that we hired at Skidmore who did the planting in front of a high-rise building—a very restricted set of criteria, not a Dan Kiley. So I decided, I said, “Well, first, let’s get to know each other. I think landscape should have some images, so let’s pick a scene from an opera, and let’s design a garden about that opera. Or if you don’t really like a particular opera, think of Wagner as a”—and I suddenly realized, all these eyes looking at me as if, What the hell is he talking about? So I brought some music down which was Wagnerian, and then I said, “Let’s pick something which is like a poet, like Shelley, so you could read a poem of Shelley’s, and then, “Let’s do two gardens.” I can’t remember exactly what they were. I wanted to get them to forget everything they had learned about landscape except to create a three-dimensional world that evoked something. Then we would try to design one for children later that needed help, disabled children. What was the difference between doing a park for disabled children, or for the elderly? What would be the way of doing a park in which water—not a great, big fountain, but water dominated, like the Japanese do? And so, I would try to do that. For the inner city—and I was way ahead of my time on this one—let’s suppose there are compact discs, and you’ve got all the information on every basketball player, every baseball player, every football player that ever played, so you can have all the arguments in the world, but you could go to this CD and push a button, and you could get the truth.

Blum: Ah, the right answer.

Netsch: The right answer, and so, let’s call this park the right answer, but the right answer was how well you played basketball, too—you know, making a basket. Or it could have been for rugby or soccer, if it was an ethnic group. So I would try to get a very real sense of everything, but I was trying to get the student to think of landscape, really, in a cultural way and to create that way. I’ve got this sweatshirt they gave me at the end, and it’s called “A Semester in Hell.”

Blum: I was going to ask, did you think it was successful?

Netsch: I think with some, with the good students. They would still consider it one of the bright spots of their academic career.

Blum: Was it successful in your terms?

Netsch: Well, I guess I didn't know what to expect. With the good students it was fine, and with the poor students it was not so good. They all picked a subject for themselves to do, and then I had to crit each program and get them to say what they really were talking about. I think one of them was a seasonal park. I said, "I want you to design an autumn park, and I want to see what color everything is. I want you to design a spring park, and I want to see how many beautiful greens, different colors of green, you can get in." It was a great experience for me. They liked me, I liked them. I got an honorary degree there, come spring, and I teach there occasionally. The professor that teaches this course, I help him do programs, like Meigs Field last year, and I serve on juries for him now. I'm restricted in driving right now, so I can't go dashing down there any time I want to. I gave them a series of books that I thought were terribly important for them to understand. A Yale professor has written three books about three stages of American life: what the character of the land was and is, what determined it; and what urbanization did to it. I would hope that they still use it for a freshman class. I'm looking again, always, for cultural connections. This fragmentation of history and culture and design makes me very nervous.

Blum: Walter, what is your opinion of where young architectural students learn more, by studying problems in class, or apprenticing in an actual situation? What is the benefit of over the other?

Netsch: Well, I'll tell you, there are some teachers who teach in class of doing a student à la Corbusier or à la Mies or à la FLW, and that forces them to go back to the history board and try to learn what the vocabulary of these great designers is. I have no objection to that. If a student selects that as a project, and if I was teaching, I would be very willing to go along with that. But I

would also be very demanding that he draw the antecedents he is talking about—that he physically draw them so he would understand what the Villa Savoye really is, and that it could take horses during the Occupation was totally irrelevant to what its real role was. That was sort of just a happening. I am a great believer that a young architect should get experience in a drafting room to see how the world works. Now, of course, it would be CAD, computer aided drafting. Like this young man who is going to come and work for me, he's certified for CAD. Well, I don't really care if he is certified for CAD because I am not interested in CAD. Computer-aided drafting is the software that allows him to do working drawings. To become skilled on CAD means that you can produce these drawings, or you know how to use resources from the files the way this office does staircases. You pull it out and reuse it if that's what they want to do instead of looking at it another way. So I think that is very important, and also to be exposed to the character of the office. Most young architects can't design the way their bosses did, just the way I had trouble with L. Morgan Yost. People would have trouble with me, or people would have trouble with whomsoever they were working for, because they are trying to define themselves, and unless they really, like most Miesians, wanted to define themselves as pure Mies, there was antagonism rather than a complete search for obeisance. If you really want to go study under somebody, you should do that. I had people come and work for me because they wanted to study under Field Theory. They wanted to know what we were doing and how we were doing it. Some became very good at it, some didn't, but they knew when they came here that's what the discipline was going to be. They couldn't sit down in the corner and do something else and have me objectively evaluate it.

Blum: If you were hiring a student out of school without much practical experience, what would you look for?

Netsch: When I used to hire people I always demanded that they bring a brochure of their work because I would want to see visual images. Now they're getting very elaborate in their work. It has now become a very sophisticated system. Because of the great number of people looking for work today, you've got to

attract attention. You've got some really expensive, dramatic things. But then as I flipped the pages I would ask the why question, and that would determine whether I would hire them or not. If they responded to the why question, "That's the way Le Corbusier did it," then we would discuss, Did Le Corbusier do it that way or was it somebody else?

Blum: So you really want them to begin to think for themselves, to find themselves.

Netsch: That's right. See, Field Theory does not design a building. It's a system. It's an aesthetic system of proportion. That's all it is. It's an aesthetic system of proportion, and it's a rigid system unless you know how to break it—you know, my famous dictum. I felt in teaching, however, that was not my responsibility. See, working in the studio, you were there because you were working for me. There are a lot of architects who don't have that drive or that specific aesthetic, and they hire young people for ideas they can use.

Blum: Did you learn anything from your teaching experience from the students?

Netsch: Oh, yes. If you've got a very sensitive student it was a pleasure to have that dialogue. It was really a pleasure, and you learned that some people can be extremely sensitive but are inarticulate—I mean, visually inarticulate—and the question is, how do you get that resolved? You've got some really good people who can't draw, and that's a problem, to try to get people to draw. Then you've got people who know how to draw *à la cliché*, and the question was how to get them beyond this great facility of drawing things very quickly in a cliché mode. I'd get them to draw a Japanese tree instead of this shorthand that they did which would be unacceptable in a landscape architect's office if you were designing someone's backyard garden. I was trying to get them beyond that, or if it's architecture to get them beyond the building they could do so easily in that way.

Blum: And in learning these differences about students and young architects, did they help you in your studio?

Netsch: I think the most interesting fun was being on juries because then you have the egos popping out between all of us who are peers and jurors, and defending—if you thought a student had done something very well, but it was not standard, and you'd hit some other professor who was looking for the status quo and thought this was bizarre, so you'd have to defend it. That was also a learning experience. It wasn't a personality conflict, it wasn't anything like that, it was just the way you are as a designer and as a professor. A lot of professors were swayed by pretty drawings because they see them as "that guy or girl is going to get ahead. She is going to be able to be useful right away." I'm thinking of the landscape, my last teaching assignment.

Blum: Did that experience make you more savvy about the differences in outlook and approaches in your own situation at SOM, and perhaps more understanding?

Netsch: No, because it was pretty intramural. I would bring all these stories back to the studio, and we'd discuss it in the studio. Sometimes I'd bring a drawing back, and sometimes people would disagree with me in the studio as to what I thought was good or bad. And so, we heightened our critical appraisal capability, that's what we did.

Blum: Was this brought back to your studio or to the larger office?

Netsch: Not to the office as a whole, no. I've given lectures in front of other offices.

Blum: Of SOM or other architectural offices?

Netsch: No, other offices. Afterwards we sit around and talk. Some people are good critics and want to know more, other people just don't see it as a useful part of their education.

Blum: Walter, off and on you have mentioned degrees that you have received—honorary doctorates from various universities. Why did they give those to

you?

Netsch: Well, the first one was quite a surprise. It was from Lawrence University up in Wisconsin.

Blum: Lawrence University or Lawrence Institute of Technology?

Netsch: No, I taught at Lawrence Institute of Technology. I received my first honorary Ph.D. from Lawrence University along with the then director of the Yale Drama School who has gone on to be quite famous. It occurred at the time of a Kennedy assassination. I've forgotten which Kennedy at the moment. Therefore, it was a very sad occasion, out in the stadium. About six of us got an honorary Ph.D. I remember afterwards saying, "Gee, this is great. I never got one of these before," and they said, "Well, I hope not. We only give them to someone who has never had one."

Blum: Why did they choose you?

Netsch: I'd have to look on the degree. We have them here somewhere. And I have the cape. I had done the Academy.

Blum: What had been your connection with Lawrence University prior to the doctorate?

Netsch: Nothing, none of us. Their idea was to select bright people of the future. As I say, this young man was really hot stuff at the Yale Drama School, and you would know his name if I could remember it. So everybody on that list, and I'm sure they hope eventually that when I die that there will be an appropriate remembrance of this first opportunity. And I'm quite sure my will has something in it for that. The second one I think was—what was it?

Blum: Northwestern?

Netsch: Is it Northwestern, the next date?

Blum: I don't really have dates on these, so I'm not sure.

Netsch: I'm trying to get to four. There was Lawrence—it was then Lawrence College, but now it's called Lawrence University, I think—Northwestern, Miami of Ohio, and then Purdue, in that order. With Northwestern it was, obviously, that I had done Miller Campus, and I had done a considerable number of buildings there. Then came Miami of Ohio, which followed the art museum, and there I had to give the commencement address. Then came Purdue, where I had been teaching in landscape, and I got that one in landscape architecture.

Blum: Were they all based on the same premise that Lawrence University's was?

Netsch: No, because I had already gotten the Lawrence one. It was based on contributions to that particular institution. It was not out of the blue.

Blum: You have said before you have one for every decade.

Netsch: Yes, that's right.

Blum: So you have four.

Netsch: The four. I mean, we're now in the nineties, so nineties, eighties, seventies, sixties.

Blum: It's nice to collect these honors, but which one really means something to you?

Netsch: Well, I hadn't thought of making one more important than the other, because I also gave a commencement address at Kent State as I was assisting them after the debacle of the assassination. These are honors you never know are going to happen. No one tells you ahead of time. You get a nice letter from the president, and you read the letter—it's in fine arts, it's in landscape, it's in

arts and letters.

Blum: You mean these degrees are in various disciplines?

Netsch: The degrees are in various disciplines. The capes, of course, relate to the individual schools. I kiddingly tell Dawn once a year I should put on all four and walk around the house. They're very pretty, in an honorific way, not in a humorous way at all. No, it's quite an honor to get them, and as I say, they have all come unexpectedly. The only one, at Miami I had to sing for my supper by giving the address, which was something I would never agree to do again. I mean, it's a very hard thing to write a commencement address, because you know no one is going to listen to it, it should be short, mainly it should amuse the trustees, and it should have a few salient ideas on the future.

Blum: Where did you learn these rules?

Netsch: I must tell you, I really worried about what to say. We had a partners' meeting beforehand, and one of the New York partners, who was from Texas, was telling this joke. He said there was an examination being given, and he was a proctor for the examination—this is all apocryphal—and he came upon this student taking the exam, tossing a coin, heads or tails. He watched him, and the student would mark yes or no by tossing the coin. He thought that was strange, but it was his decision. You can do it that way. But then ten minutes passed, and he came by, and the student was flipping through his things. He said, "What are you doing now?" He was still flipping the coin. "Checking my answers." And that was a really funny joke. It's the only joke I remember, and I used it at the commencement address, and it was a roaring success. I hope that none of the students took that advice.

Blum: Well, it was too late. They were finished. They had graduated.

Netsch: That's right. See, I've forgotten how I did it, but I did relate it some way. So when in doubt I tell this just as a story. But it really saved the day for that



address.

Blum: It sounds like an amusing kind of story for students at a commencement address. I think a commencement address is really a big responsibility.

Netsch: Yes, it was. It was terribly important. It is because you just don't want to be flippant, and you don't want to be foolish, and you don't want to be so, so frightening to them and their future about what's up for them. You don't feel morally responsible. You shouldn't really try to do that—at least that's not my cup of tea. Both of those addresses are somewhere in the file. Either the Chicago Historical Society now has them, or they're somewhere downstairs floating about. I have many notes from lectures. They are not organized, but they're there, and they will eventually get somewhere. They do reflect what I was thinking about at the time, and so if they are dated or if in the subject of lecture a building comes up then they can be dated and you can trace my thoughts at the time. I am a notorious note-writer. I would go to a lecture, and I would sit and take notes. I'd keep them all.

Blum: You're an archivist's dream.

Netsch: It's just that I was trained to do that. I told you about the three-by-five cards from high school, and so it was part of my training. If I go to a lecture, you'll find me writing on the back of the evening's announcement, or if we go to a fund-raiser that's important to a university.

Blum: You have been, as I have said before, widely published. Do you think on the whole that the press has treated you and your work in a favorable light?

Netsch: Oh, yes, especially when it was all new. It wasn't until the Postmodernists came that there were any really snide remarks. As the saying goes, I was "good copy." There were different buildings, they had reason behind them, they were well photographed, and they were products of SOM. They were published often without my knowledge. They would just suddenly appear. The one, of course, I knew about was the Japanese one when they did SOM. I

got good coverage in that. I had no idea that I was going to be one of the young architects of the world in that article in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* in 1957. So, often I didn't know. I really didn't know. Some editor looks down and says, "What's interesting that's going on right now in architecture?" Just like now, you pick up a foreign magazine and you will find Frank Gehry in it, or you will find someone in it, and it's of interest to the—it's also of interest sometimes the way they describe it. It's a little different. I think that system hasn't changed. I know there are some people who pay people to get things published, but we never did that. We always assisted people. If they called up and they wanted photographs, we would send photographs, or we would send bios, or we would send the building description. We had in our file a building description of plans, sections, occasionally elevations, and then photographs of the finished product. If anybody needed it, we would forward it. So to that extent I am certain that editors knew that there would be adequate material for coverage. I think that started with Gordon's buildings on the Heinz Company in Pittsburgh—that famous red door photograph in *Architectural Forum*. And then his Connecticut General in Bloomfield, Connecticut, and things like that. Those buildings of his were well covered, they were east of the Hudson, except for Heinz, and therefore they had adequate access to editors who were all in New York.

Blum: Except *Inland Architect*.

Netsch: Well, *Inland Architect* didn't cover them at first. They were always covered later. The only time *Inland Architect* did anything early was when they did that one on me in the issue on avant-garde architecture with Peter Eisenman, the architect for the Wexner Center.

Blum: So are you, on the whole, pretty satisfied with the way your work has been treated?

Netsch: I certainly am. You may quibble about someone's description of something sometime, or some misinformation, but I especially liked it because I could get beautiful copies of the field—you know, they would get reprinted and the

plans looked pretty. Another reason, I think I got good display work because I think the layout artists—they weren't standard buildings. They were something to play around with, so to speak, graphically. That's all right.

Blum: Well, your buildings were unusual, and perhaps controversial.

Netsch: Oh, sure.

Blum: And you were with SOM, which was very hot copy for many years.

Netsch: Yes, that didn't hurt.

Blum: Throughout these sessions you have talked about one client, another client, they were good, they were easy to work with, not so easy to work with. Has there ever been a client that you refused the take?

Netsch: That's a very interesting question. I was trying to think—has there ever been such a client? Well, I know there are jobs I never went after. You would hear about work, and you could write a letter and say if you were interviewing for the project we would like to be considered or included. I didn't do this very often, but when work was slow you would do something. But I never deliberately went after anything in museums. I didn't compete with my partners, so I never entered the office building field. I actually had enough work, almost all the time, in academic and institutional that I don't believe I ever turned down a job. I was just trying to think. It would be more likely it would come in the more commercial arena that you would have this kind of problem come up. As I say, I got us out of South Africa, so naturally I was trying to discourage work in those areas. I was concerned about doing the air force academy in Iran because of the politics of Iran—the Shah being a controversial character and the fact that we already had a lack of success with the addition to the Stevenson Institute, and next to the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. It was to be a combination of Oriental Institute faculty and Stevenson faculty. Of course, that whole thing disappeared. I tried for some jobs that I never got. I was interviewed, we prepared our

dossier, and I would like very much to have done them, but I was not successful. I would get that nice letter, “We have appreciated your interview. It was fascinating,” or it was something or other, “but we have decided to select,” and then you would find out who they selected. At MIT I was usually competing with I. M. Pei. As I told you about at Miami in Ohio it was kind of a default situation where Pei and others had turned it down. I never kept tabs—Don Ohlson would have to be interviewed—on who our competitors were because he really handled that and worried about it if we didn’t win.

Blum: Does some other firm or another architect—designer—stand out in your mind as perhaps your competitor?

Netsch: I was trying to think. Since I was in such a rarified world of museums and such, it could have been HOK [Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum] sometime, earlier, before they had gone into the sports arena business. It could have been Saarinen’s successor firm, not Johnny Dinkeloo because he was gone too, but Kevin Roche. It could have been Kevin Roche. As I say, Don Ohlson would have to go back through our decline letters. But there were surprisingly few—surprisingly few. I can’t, really, ever remember being out of work. I can remember looking maybe six or eight weeks down the line and saying, “Gee, things are going to get pretty slim,” and then something would happen. We’d get a letter, “We have seen your work recently published in such-and-such. We are planning to do thus and so. Would you like to be considered?”

Blum: Was this through the office pipeline?

Netsch: Through the office pipeline I did not get any work. The office pipeline was mainly the business pipeline and the commercial pipeline, and that was because of Bill Hartmann’s relationship with businessmen in Chicago. That work went directly to Bruce. They formed a team on that. I was left to get my own work. As I say, that’s why the publicity was very important to me, to have adequate, nice pictures and presentations, and also clients who were willing to recommend me. That’s also very helpful.

Blum: It seems also that some of your jobs extended over a period of ten, fifteen, sometimes twenty years.

Netsch: A decade—yes, that’s right. The University of Illinois was ten years, the Air Force Academy was ten years, MIT was eight years. When you have a forty-year career, even then it adds up pretty quickly. And the first ten years, they’re not yours. You are working for someone else, really—at Oak Ridge or in Okinawa. I have been reading everything about Okinawa celebrating the fiftieth anniversary, and the Okinawans want to get the Americans off the island. So I have been looking for names of the places that I remember, and it appears that they have all been changed. So I keep looking for Sukiran or Kadena or Machinato, and I can’t find—I heard only one, Naha. I was really surprised that that still exists because that has to be some sort of political decision. Evidently, from reading the newspapers, there has been a very town-and-gown situation—in the not nice meaning—the military have not been very well liked on Okinawa, and they have had an actual firing range where they blew up a mountain which was a sacred mountain, and we did some of our things which are “ugly American”-ish. But, of course, that’s all subsequent. We were there because the Japanese had agreed that this would be America’s largest floating base, and it wasn’t Japanese, it was Okinawans. Of course, the Okinawans hated that, so they hate the Japanese as much for our being there as anything.

Blum: But you were there after the war.

Netsch: Yes, but right after the war everybody was very docile. That was a tremendous war, and Okinawa was badly bruised. More people were killed, more ships were sunk, in the battle for Okinawa than anything, and it was really the cost of that battle of taking that last island before Japan that I am sure convinced Truman to drop the bomb on a city because there were less people killed in Hiroshima than on Okinawa. It’s just they weren’t Japanese, and the Japanese didn’t get a lesson. It’s been interesting, reading the papers today, to sort of feed back onto why we were there and why it was done so

relatively easily, because it was a Japanese-conquered island that the Japanese gave us to use, and therefore all our work originally was done in Tokyo. We weren't there. It wasn't until the construction started that we actually gravitated down to Okinawa. I spent almost a year on Okinawa, and the firm spent about three years, two years after I left. Different teams would come in. Nat would suddenly decide that he wanted me home, and so I would get home. It was enough time. They had others. I was getting more senior, and so I would get replaced.

Blum: When you talk about place names today being unfamiliar to you, I suppose that's just another instance of change that has taken place in the past fifty years, just like your university.

Netsch: It's amazing how accelerated change has been. Look at the Pepsi-Cola building in New York. They hired another architect who was reasonably careful, and even Gordon seemed to agree that he was reasonably careful. They were always worried about what was going to happen to the main tower.

Blum: And Lever House?

Netsch: Lever House, it being such an early building, and the detailing, the window wall, was not as elegant, so they were always wondering what was going to happen to that building. I still think it gets suspect every once in a while.

Blum: Do you mean you think it is endangered?

Netsch: Bruce has had to go through Sears, and if Sears weren't so big I am certain it would have been torn down by now. It has been a major crisis for a building that size to be half-built and have been caught in a total change of habit from the desire for great big square-footage demands downtown, with loads of secretaries and typewriters, to a few people with computers.

Blum: What has caused all this to happen, other than just the passage of time?

Netsch: It's the technology. I mean, we have never had such a rapid turnover. I was just looking that my newest computer, my 8100, is now considered old hat. "The Power Macintosh 9500 is now Apple's most powerful computer, outrunning even the Power Mac 8100-110." So, I have hardly used it, and it's behind time. Now, should I rush out and get a 9500? I have to read the article to find out how long they think that's going to last.

Blum: Can you adapt them? You can with buildings.

Netsch: You can with some. That's the one interesting thing: small items of technology are designed to be obsolete. They put enough into them that they become obsolete.

[Tape 15: Side 1]

Blum: Is future change built into your concept? Do you try to provide for that possibility?

Netsch: It depends on the project and location, usually in the environment. If it's a college or university building—a library, for example—it's thought that it will be a library forever; that it will serve somehow as a library. At the School of the Art Institute I was deliberately told to consider the fact that it might eventually be exhibition space, and so the main levels of the drafting areas and the art areas are convertible to galleries. The whole scheme, as it lines up and is connected through, makes it available. You could approach it from Sullivan's trading room, very easily. Some of the technical facilities would be obsolete, but they are very small. I think the buildings at MIT were done in an anonymous fashion on the inside layouts so they could be converted to any other engineering discipline. However, they would spend huge sums of money, either putting in additional power or additional air, so you have really a flexible shell, but the technology often changed so rapidly that those elements became obsolete.

Blum: Well, I was thinking that because your buildings were state-of-the-art at the time, you perhaps thought ahead.

Netsch: I did some buildings very special, and they were to be very special. But, Basic Sciences at Iowa is a flexible building. You could move one discipline into another. The computer center really isn't. It's a fine computer center. Oh, you could make an administration building out of it, but anybody can make an office building out of anything. The hospitals were always so special that they would always risk becoming obsolete. If there are specialized operating rooms and things, they would automatically—it's our culture to design certain things. Look at what happened to the main Ford River Rouge Plant in Detroit that was used in the Second World War. Everybody thought it would last forever because it was a great big shell, and you built all that equipment. It was designed by Albert Kahn and was well done. I remember Professor Anderson used to give that as an example of a fine institutional building in the sense of it being industrial institutional. I think he assumed it would last forever, but it was torn down just a few years ago because we have gone into automated production. We don't need that big an area now. We need to provide cells within cells now in industry because you need absolute cleanliness, one hundred percent. If you're painting a car today, it's in a very clean environment. If you are doing certain things in science it requires a so-called clean environment, so you build a shell within a shell, and that shell can be destroyed. So it's very difficult for an architect. It hurts because traditionally architecture was thought to be the indestructible symbol of mankind's aspiration, but then we forget, does anyone remember the buggy whip factory? No. Does anybody remember where the carriage factory was? Steel mills are destroyed all the time now for mini-mills. And so, I think it's had a major effect on architectural aesthetics. It tends to say to some architects, "Well, what the hell, it's just a business. I'm not going to create anything that's going to last more than twenty, thirty years. Let's give them what they want, and let's not worry too much about what happens."

Blum: What was your thinking as you graduated, about the role of an architect?



Netsch: Oh, it was a brave new world. We were going to rehouse and we were going to provide new cultural facilities for fifty million Americans that had been waiting for the war to end and the Depression to end. Don't forget, we had about fifty million out of 150 million to provide for.

Blum: And related to the concept you just spoke about, how were your things going to last and make a difference?

Netsch: Remember, my thesis was storage and its application to change, but, you see, it was changing within the frame of reference of where it was. It could shrink as well as expand. But I forgot the neighborhood might change, you see, which it did. Lots of neighborhoods changed. If you go out west in Chicago you will find wastelands where perfectly decent apartment houses lasted for thirty years, and then they were empty hulls and then burned down. No, it's been a shock. I mean, look at Wright houses. It's an effort to save them. They're very beautiful, often. Wright, I think, thought they would last forever, although sometimes he didn't detail them to last forever because his budget limitations were very tight. He tried to give an awful lot for the money. As I live in my house, which is a sturdily built house, I am amazed that now it's been up for twenty-some-odd years. We have put a new roof on, we added insulation before we put the roof on, and we went from a standard roofing material to raised-seam copper so that we would have a more lasting material and so that in any future sale of the building someone would automatically say, "Well, that's one thing I don't have to worry about." I just think it has really effected—I think Sweet's catalog, and the window wall, all those things which are mass-produced and built in—for example, in a factory there is the usual wash-up shower rooms. Now if you pick up a magazine today, everybody has Bradley as a manufacturer, and they have redesigned the factory washroom so there is a single arrival point and everybody washes around it, or there is a single arrival point and everybody showers around it, so the maintenance and upkeep of basic piping has been eliminated. Much of the change is done through what they would call improvement, but it was also making less expensive maintenance. Now, of course, there is often no need for the factory. I think the greatest harm is in the idea in housing, in the

suburbs, of trying to create the mini-palace; that you've got a mini-palace, and that palace is going to last forever. People go there because they are a single family, isolated. They have three acres. There is no neighbor to intrude on them, and they just hope an airport doesn't land nearby which would impinge on them, not by sight but by sound. But there is that desire on the part of individual, still, to create the palace for himself—I mean, to buy the palace for himself. Architecture hasn't lost that symbol for many. You can just look in the real estate sections in the Sunday paper, and you will see pictures of houses that look imposing and grand, in the current sense of grandeur. So, you see, the concept hasn't disappeared, the reality has. Now the virtual reality is coming into play, which is the ability to sit at home and... The last issue of *Metropolis*, or the one before, had an interesting idea that a person living in a housing project could sit down at their computer and look at the same screen that a person living out in the suburbs could look at, and both of them fantasize the same dream. And that's true. What they see is a beautiful island with something, and all of a sudden they're there and they're involved. That is becoming, more and more, less a story for the week, but you can turn this on or you can go to Shangri-La or Tibet. There are all sorts of things that are going to be happening, so this is going to cause another consternation—"My house is no longer my dream house. My house is no longer my castle. I can have a new castle every week, or I can create them." That's the next stage. We can all sit around, and we can manipulate the image on the screen. It's hard to say what forty or fifty years from now will be like.

Blum: Do you think this ability to change walls and things of this sort will bring out a lot of do-it-yourself architects?

Netsch: No, but I am playing around with the idea of trying to create some artificial environments so that you could recreate your house—not you yourself, but you could get someone to do it—if you have been playing around with your computer, and you would like to do a house of a special kind of glass, or a special shape. What does that mean? It means that the exterior surfaces and the roof are not subject to weather. It means that you probably have sun

protection, so it means you have created for yourself your own canopy enclosure. Maybe it's on the seventy-fifth floor in space, swimming out there somewhere, and you build this thing, and you look out on it. I say it that way because, if you notice, the rides at the entertainment parks are getting wilder and wilder. People are searching for their own space module to play with. You go to these entertainment parks, and you get carried through these different environments, and you bring these ideas home and you live them. You don't live in your bedroom. You live in what you just saw at Disney World or Universal Studios, or whatever it is. We are creating for the elite, and America is elite—all of us, in that sense—compared to an African who is scrambling and picking up seeds to feed his children. We are not hunter-gatherers. There are civilizations that are still hunter-gatherers, so you have this dichotomy within the world, and you realize that ours is moving so much more rapidly than theirs. They are not, unfortunately, catching up to us as rapidly as we anticipated when I graduated from college. When I graduated from college, by now I assumed the world would all be sensibly fed and sheltered, and that we would be worrying about other things. But we're still worrying about minimal shelter as well as these virtual reality shelters, which I never thought we would be worrying about, because I didn't even think about them. We were thinking more of social responsibility than creating palaces.

Blum: Do you think that is a factor today in architecture?

Netsch: I only think it would become a factor if politically it became feasible and socially acceptable. Right now, doing something for the poor is not—housing for the poor, obviously, we're talking about tearing them down. We're not talking about what we are going to build. It's very strange. It's a different world. I keep thinking that the year 2000 can sort of act like the Second World War for us, which was our hope for freedom and society; that, plus the modern movement having occurred as a part of that revolution. I keep hoping that something will happen that will create for the year 2000 the same sort of thing. I am more concerned that we are going to have a cataclysm—you know, an earthquake or something really destructive, or a political

earthquake which could be reactionary as well as—rather than facing the year 2000 with hope. No one talks about the year 2000. We are talking about balancing the budget by 2002 or 2005. We're trying to skip over that millenia, and I don't know why we are doing that. We ought to symbolically make it, I think, important, but it's not happening.

Blum: Walter, throughout your career you have had all sort of support services from SOM regarding your projects. You have spoken a little bit about Dan Kiley as a landscape designer, and you spoke about some works of art that you used in some buildings. You didn't speak about photographers, and they were essential to a building after it was built. Who was your photographer of choice?

Netsch: Well, I had several. There is Balthazar Korab in Detroit.

Blum: And in Chicago?

Netsch: Here in Chicago is Orlando Cabanban. Either he or the major firm here, Hedrich-Blessing. Of course, there was Ezra Stoller, who was Gordon's favorite. They were the sort of leaders in the field. Occasionally, I would get a photograph. Someone was going to photograph my building and would send me one. That happened at Northwestern, and I have a photograph of one of my buildings that I really like. He never was able to do any more because he did it with a red filter, and it was such a separate kind of thing that it didn't say as much about the building as it said about photography. So you had to be careful that people wouldn't try to entice you. I met a lot of photographers, and they would try, but we really would just rather fall back on people we knew. Ezra was especially good on models. You could work with Ezra Stoller. He would say, "Make some clouds for me," or "Do a backdrop." We would do it, and we would shift it around, and he could make it look real. And yet, I think the Hedrich-Blessing photographs of the Academy are beautiful. They have a less sculptural interpretation than Ezra took, but I think they are very good. There is a young lady named Elizabeth Gill Lui who has photographed the Academy very well recently, especially

the chapel, and so we have used her. And we used her in Robert's book about the Air Force Academy. It was through her sending me some pictures of the chapel that I became aware of her. She did the same to the Academy proper, and they became aware of her work. She is local out there, and she does a very good, sensitive job.

Blum: Was there a special quality that you looked for in a photographer's work for your work, which is distinctive?

Netsch: The way I would look at the project and the way they would look at the project would be two different things. I have forgotten who was the photographer for Miami of Ohio. But that person, for example, caught the building very well, and the environment. It was really the building and the environment, along with Hedrich-Blessing and the Air Force Academy. Ezra Stoller caught the model. Korab was such a personal, idiosyncratic photographer that sometimes I could respond to what he did and sometimes I couldn't. He has a very beautiful picture of the spires of the chapel just floating among the trees. Now, that's fine, and it's a beautiful picture, but it hardly explains anything about the chapel. So you've got two kinds of pictures that photographers do for you: one is to tell the story of what it is, and the other one is to tell the evanescence of the story of what it is. That really depended on the poet in the photographer, and not on you. I think you really had to rely on the poet. For example, Hedrich-Blessing's shots are not poetic. They are clear, and the two photographers they had I think were well trained in the abstract, constructivist school of art. They made our architecture examples of that aesthetic mode which we had sprung from. But it's very impersonal. You don't sense a Korab there. Cabanban loved to use people, and I liked him for that because I did like people in the architecture. Gordon didn't. When I was on trips with my wife—we'd take a vacation and go to a ruin somewhere—I didn't want anybody in my photographs. I wanted to bring the ruin home, but I didn't want to bring the moment home. So that's a difference of whether you want to record the moment or whether you want to record the image.

Blum: And what do you prefer for your buildings?

Netsch: Well, it varied, you see. Sometimes, if it was well done—for example, the exedra, the central campus at UIC before it was destroyed, its great advantage was with people sitting all over it in the sunlight and using it. It was a used space. Or I designed these stairs that are part stairs and part seating, so I would want people sitting all over, and Cabanban would do them with people sitting all over. There were two choices: the moment or the image. It also depended on the publication. Photographers knew what publication they were aiming for—not you. They would photograph, in a sense, to their client. I might be paying for the photographs, but they knew what the magazines wanted.

Blum: Knowing the differences between the photographers and understanding them so clearly, did you call the photographer that suited your needs at the time, knowing pretty much what you would get from him?

Netsch: Well, for example, I photographed all of my projects heavily myself. I have maybe over 5,000 photographs, slides, and some of them movies, so I was trying to capture either one—the image or the instant. I have slides that do both. I have more slides of this house that I look back on, and I say, “Why was I doing that?” and I realize that I was trying to capture the variation in the light from the sky. I did try to capture the seasons by where the light was slashing through, but I never was that methodical about it. I would never claim that my photographs were as good as a professional photographer’s, because if you are a professional photographer you set up the lighting, you read the light meter, and you do this, you bracket your pictures, and you do all of those things. If you are photographing the art in this house, you don’t do it until it’s dark. You don’t want any natural light. Then you put your own light on it so when a photographer comes here to do art, it’s quite different than an architectural photographer coming to do it. Living in both worlds I have both worlds. I enjoy looking at the professional results, and then I have my own attempts.

Blum: What about interiors? Did many of your projects include interiors that you did, or you hired out? Who were those auxiliary people?

Netsch: My biggest help in interiors is and was—Skidmore. They really developed their own interiors group, and then within that group I developed for my studio a special affinity for Powell and Kleinschmidt. They developed with me designs of individual pieces of furniture. With them we discovered the 40/4 chair for the University of Illinois. We brought out to Chicago the creator of that chair. Then we developed all sorts of variations on that chair. It's a metal stacking chair. But we made it into a tablet armchair, we made it into a lecture chair—lots of different roles. They were very good at both selecting modern—not contemporary, but modern furniture. We liked the same things—the Aalto, the Saarinen, the Eames—and we did our own, with Don Powell or Bob Kleinschmidt. You would have one or the other in Skidmore. It wasn't until they left that they became a duo, so you would have to say, "That was Bob Kleinschmidt's job," or "That was Don Powell's job." But then they also worked side by side, no matter whose job it was. If we were getting out work, Don Powell would be helping me, making the interiors drawings, as well. If Bob Kleinschmidt was doing the job, we'd do the other. So they were important. Now, Bruce had Jane Johnson (Graham), of course, and he had Dolores Miller. I had Dolores Miller once in a while with rather unsuccessful results. Then, of course, the disaster was when she left the firm and did Architecture and Art at the UIC. She didn't do Architecture and Art in the firm, she did Architecture and Art as an independent person, not selected by me. On the Air Force Academy we didn't select the interiors person. We worked with them—a very famous industrial designer—and we enjoyed working with them. They developed some very good, anonymous pieces to go in an Air Force academy. We tried not to date our things. We wouldn't fill it full of Aalto bentwood lounge chairs with tiger skin coverings. That was Aalto's choice, that sort of tiger skin covering. We found Charlie Eames's furniture very compatible with us, and so it wasn't just Kleinschmidt or Powell. Bob Peters, who was a designer in the studio, would, often in the evolution of his design, work on something special that he wanted. For example, down at Springfield, the American Bar

Association, he and I did the building, but Bob did most of that building. It has a little atrium in the middle with some stairs going up. It was so designed that the client couldn't do much to it.

Blum: You mean he couldn't ruin it?

Netsch: Bob had the idea that this was very elegant, almost elitist—and we did our doors at the corners. We established a spatial frame. No mullion. You looked into the corner of the building. You saw it on the diagonal perspective. That was a deliberate attempt in which the aesthetics of the interior were directly a part of the architecture. It was a very small, executive office building where there would be seminars, and publications would be distributed. It had a very specialized purpose, and we gave it a very specialized result. I never went in when I was down there. I should have, but I never went in. You know, you can't go home again. I don't really want to get hurt. That's really why I don't. I know those doors open that way, but what do they open onto? Someone brought a desk—an absolute monstrosity, to you, but to him or her holds the whole history of their life and the evolution of their job. They have brought this desk with them from place to place, and now it's sitting on the diagonal axis in the office. Or they don't even catch that idea, and the chair and the desk have absolutely no relation to the space. So you hesitate, where you've worked very hard in developing an elegant interior. For example, when I did this house I deliberately did not do axes and things. We have tried all sorts of things, and we'll change things around, so it makes it sort of sloppy. About the only axis we have is going up those stairs to a chair, but we've put a different chair there every time. We don't use the same one. Or we've had a piece of sculpture there.

Blum: Did the original concept of your buildings include interior furnishings?

Netsch: Oh, yes, they always did. Sometimes it was, shall we say, programmatic, and other times it was really very, very deliberate. At Grinnell on the forum to try to explain flexibility, we had a whole lot of little square stools in pretty colors—red and gray and black—and they were arranged to come out from



each corner. We designed it so that at night when they closed up they would put it that way. In fact, Skidmore got kidded a lot for designing things so that at night the help had to put everything back the way it was on the drawing, and so when you came in in the morning it looked like what Skidmore wanted, but then you brought your vase of flowers, and you brought this and that. There were some clients that would literally tell their secretaries, "You cannot put anything on this desk. It has been designed, it has been located by SOM, and it's to remain that way. It's an image." The interiors became a very strong part, especially in the office building sector. You couldn't tell a professor very easily not to put his papers, because my wife has absolutely the messiest offices. She collects this enormous amount of stuff, and she wants what she is working on right there at her fingertips.

Blum: Well, considering that reality, does the SOM design idea, that it should be clean and without any other distraction, does that seem valid today?

Netsch: Well, you see, I didn't do many of those buildings. I didn't have that. If we did a dorm we tried to show the fact that each person had his own territory. They could throw their clothes all over—we accepted that—and they could change it. If they didn't want that sense of territory they could meld it. They could put both beds together if they wanted to. We were not the image end of the firm. We were the experimental. Our images were the new spaces.

Blum: Did you mostly stay within the firm, or with groups such as Powell and Kleinschmidt who were with the firm but left and formed their own firm...

Netsch: They left after I did, you see.

Blum: But did you mostly stay within that range for interior people?

Netsch: I did. I stayed in my studio as much as I could. It was part of the whole thing. And Bob Peters, who worked on the Vasarely chair, also was as much interiors as a designer. There was no reason why he shouldn't have an opportunity to explore those potentials. Don Powell and Bob Kleinschmidt

worked on the spaces, too. They helped design the spaces. They were architects. They weren't just fabric selectors, as we would say. No, we were quite different, and we were not working for Stow-Davis. The firm actually did make arrangements to work with manufacturers to do lines of furniture. But that's mainly where there is a large market, and the market was in the office buildings. It wasn't in academic. We tried but we failed trying to design some equipment for laboratories. We did that little movie and everything. But the laboratory people had been doing these things for sixty years, and they weren't going to change. And so, you had to live with that. Even Lou Kahn had to do that out at Salk Institute.

Blum: Walter, you were with SOM for more than thirty years. What were some of the important changes that you witnessed during that period of time?

Netsch: There were, I think, three major changes. One was the maturation of the senior partners, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—those human beings. They established the reputation of the firm, SOM, and chose to build a top design firm once they got the opportunity, so the second echelon, the Bunshafts the Netsches, the Bassetts, and Grahams had this huge opportunity of this force that had been created and could take advantage of it. Then it was up to us to do what we did with that. Actually, Craig Hartman is coming out of my studio. He is a design partner in San Francisco. Jim De Stefano became a partner here, and then he went on his own. So the effort was then, I thought, to provide the next generation the opportunity, but what happened was the impact of the huge explosion of building type that tended to standardize attitudes. You know, Connecticut General is a marvelous building, and Bruce did an interesting one over in Kalamazoo.

Blum: The Upjohn Building?

Netsch: Upjohn, but you don't know what's happened to those buildings. They have been changed. But for a while that design leadership held the fort, and that allowed me to be able to work on my own because I selected a different field. I selected institutional and academic, and I did that consciously—not by what

I selected but by the fact that Gordon only did office buildings in New York because that's all they did, essentially. If he did a little computer building it looked like a little office building. Or banks. They were commercial, but they were...

Blum: Well, now, he did do the Beinecke Library at Yale.

Netsch: Yes, and that probably is the least important of his work. He really tried extra hard there to do an image building, and it probably was less successful. So the third thing was that I had the chance to explore a new field. I had a chance to explore my own aesthetic sensibilities because Nat had established this freedom for me. And since I was noncompetitive, if I was successful I was allowed to be, and SOM allowed me to be. It didn't always help me, but they allowed me to be. And then, of course, I had all of those resources—the engineering—that were very important to the success of a building and how you finally get it made and built. I think what really happened was that systems—I'm talking about managerial systems—began to take over the pattern of the firm as the kind of work was dominated more and more by office buildings.

[Tape 15: Side 2]

Netsch: The client says, "I don't want any cross bracing on my building." You know, after Hancock, Sears couldn't have any cross bracing, so they had to do something else. I didn't have that problem. I had one where I had this infinite game I had invented called Field Theory, and so each problem got to be a unique experience. No one was really worried that their building was going to look like another thing repeated, so I didn't have that problem. The only problem I had in the firm was the fact that I couldn't produce my work as inexpensively as others because I had that lengthy search. Automatically we were spending more time in design.

Blum: Are Field Theory buildings much more expensive than buildings without a lot of angles on the exterior?

Netsch: No, that is not true. I built UIC on budgets and Northwestern on budgets of thirty-four dollars per square foot. They were not expensive buildings. You could always build cheaper, but there was a standard that SOM started with. No, it was just harder for us to produce it. Our costs were higher. Doing working drawings, if you were used to doing an orthogonal building you kind of resisted putting in a sixty-degree angle, and it took you a little longer to draw it. So that's what I meant. Our productivity was lower.

Blum: So are you saying that buildings in the SOM office became rather standardized, where you had the technique, with your Field Theory, to individualize?

Netsch: That's what happened for a long time. Bruce would set the glass back four feet, and the frame would be exposed, and that became a sort of pattern with him. He would probably argue that, but it appeared that way. In fact, it was during the eighties they began decorating these buildings. Then the problems really set in because they didn't have a Myron Goldsmith to do an elegant structural frame. Myron would do an elegant structural frame that identified the building. Most outsiders—I mean outside of architecture—don't really recognize some of those subtleties because they are esoteric. I am talking about Brunswick downtown versus the building at the corner of Monroe and the river. The Brunswick has a very elegant little transition to the flat slab. Very different buildings, and Myron struggled to do very different structural concepts. That's quite different than just doing the glass setback. I think that the firm was no more to blame than anybody else. So much square feet was produced—it was an unbelievable amount of square footage. I can't claim to be the square footage champion at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill because our buildings were, in the aggregate, a much smaller proportion of the total. I think of the foreign work we did quite a lot, but much of it just didn't get built.

Blum: Would you say that that was the major change; that design sort of became set in a pattern?

Netsch: Well, as long as I was there you always had that fresh idea, if you want to approach it that way, in the firm. So as long as I was in the firm and our studios were producing work, there was something else to look at. In fact, I understand that the slides of my buildings would go along to a presentation in case someone was interested in the humanist angle, but it didn't mean the job would come to me. It meant that they knew how to interpret their client, or their would-be client.

Blum: Did you also give a client another option of SOM work?

Netsch: I did not use the regular SOM work in my presentations because, one, I didn't produce it, and therefore I couldn't say, "I'll give you this as a product." So I didn't do that. What you saw is what you got, in a sense.

Blum: Nat Owings has said that "success has dominated Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and today we are order-takers, not creators." Is that what you are saying?

Netsch: That was really, essentially, what happened. It happened for the whole industry. I think you can look at the buildings being done in Asia—the high-rises—and you see it is still going on. The high-rise building as a building type has lost its real meaning. It isn't Rockefeller Center anymore. You don't find anything as elegant as the Rockefeller Center ensemble. That was really one of the high points. Or Mies's Seagram building and Gordon's building, facing each other.

Blum: So in some ways SOM was a victim of its own success?

Netsch: I think all the firms were. SOM was no different than any other. I don't want to say they were a victim of success, except they were, because they also wanted to make money. Some of the partners became very covetous of—they heard about other architects. I remember that. Their competitors were making large sums of money, personally. They felt that our firm ought to be

able to do that for them, and that didn't help. But I do think the eighties were a backlash from 1968, you know, a reactionary backlash.

Blum: Did you say among other things just now that some people at SOM got greedy?

Netsch: Oh, yes. But that's a human problem. I don't want a young person at SOM today who hears this or reads this to say, "Oh, the partnership got greedy." Perhaps it did occasionally, but then all of a sudden a project would come up of such interest that it would dominate. You've got to remember, the other thing that happened, as I have been trying to imply, the choices of building types collapsed. Now, maybe the firm made that decision to lessen the choice to developers of office buildings, and for that they should be criticized. But that doesn't mean that if they got a chance to do another type of building type that they couldn't or shouldn't have been able to create something interesting. For example, in the airport in the Haj, Gordon, with Fazlur, really did create a new building type which you now see at Denver, but much less successful—interesting but much less successful—so you know that the firm was capable of that. As I said, the third thing that really happened was, there was no Nat Owings there to be the moral and yet the economic leader. In other words, he was hard-boiled and yet he was a dreamer. We didn't have anybody else of that kind who could sit with those two hats. You know, he wore both hats at the same time. He could fight hard for a job and fight with a client, but then he would fight for your design. He wanted a design to be different. He wanted it to reflect the needs of the client, and he wanted SOM to keep on going. That didn't happen, except with the Field Theory, because we had an open-ended situation. That's another reason why I think we did Field Theory. We had an open-ended situation. I think the one thing that's happening right now in architecture, with the Postmodernism being over and people looking at new concepts of Modernism again because of the changes in technology, that there is a chance to do new work and that they just wouldn't only do office buildings. You notice Frank Gehry doesn't do office buildings, or he does damn few. He does a variety of building types. Frank Lloyd Wright did the same, and Pei the same, although Pei less than some

others. He has some similar problems that SOM has. I think that is an important distinction, to do different things and not to suddenly get caught in a mold. It's an attitudinal mold. If I had done nothing but libraries all my life it would have been terrible.

Blum: As all of this was happening over the years, and there were more and more developers coming to SOM who wanted to build more office buildings, there were partners' meetings, there were discussions among people at SOM. Did anyone say, "Let's keep our fingers in other pots"? or "Let's not do so many buildings on one type"?

Netsch: I don't think you make the decision that way.

Blum: Did it ever come up at partners' meetings? Did people discuss it?

Netsch: As long as I was a partner there was diversification, so you have to be talking about the time after I left, and, of course, I can't speak for times after I left. But I think it really was a function of the people they knew. Certainly Bruce and Bill Hartmann knew the developers, and they knew the businessmen in town, and they knew office buildings were *the* thing they were interested in, either in town or in the suburbs. And so, they honed that skill, and once they honed that skill they got the work. As I said, the biggest complaint I have is that after Nat was gone I had no advocate. That meant that our diversification had no advocate, so that's what we are really talking about. What the firm decided to do, they decided clear-eyed that that was the wave of the future, and they were going to be a part of it. Granted, a lot of work had cut down in universities, and things like that, but they put all of their eggs in one basket, and they suffered for it for a long time. Now the same basket is being filled again, only in other countries. There are people naysaying it. "Why are you doing this? Why are American architects going over to Asia and building all of these specialized building types?" I think they are probably the most ego-flattering objects that a building committee can have.

Blum: What?

Netsch: An office building. You know, they are going to get their office, they are going to get this entered so they are going to get these elevator caps, and they are going to get this and they are going to do that. And I am certain they are going through the same thing over in Asia. There are clients sitting around, chomping their cigars and thinking, "Well, those guys did this for me. They're not going to do it for someone else," and they aren't. They are going to do something a little different.

Blum: Do you think that Nat Owings's choice of words "order-takers" is apt?

Netsch: Well, we used to say towards the end of the seventies that in our high-rise buildings all we were responsible for was a fresh lobby and a fresh elevator; that the window walls, the number of elevators and the essential shape of the building were all being determined by economics. It wasn't so much success as Nat saw it. It was, rather, you might say the economics of success that lorded over the decision-making, and it made it harder and harder. I can remember trying to do one office building in Field Theory for the partnership. I showed it to Bill, and he showed it to a developer, and they both said, "Walter, you can't do that. You've got too many corners, too many edges," and I said, "But I've got everybody having a sense of their own office. Everybody has their ideal environment." Sure enough, six years later that design was it, but without my discipline of the Field Theory. So the ego trip study did take over, and the developer did find a way to get a little extra edge. In fact, you'll see some buildings advertised as "every corner is an office, every office is a corner," so the whole mood changed. Economics dominated. In other words, it became building committee oriented, so you had to give more people bright corners. That wasn't why I was doing it. I thought it was an exciting new way of doing an office building.

Blum: Skidmore, Owings and Merrill has a reputation that is sort of legendary about having the most vicious politics in the field of architecture. Someone said, "By the time a guy works himself up to the top, he has been lobotomized." How did you survive for thirty-two years?



Netsch: Well, I don't know. Today I told you before we started this that I did another interview, and it was on Air Force Academy. One of the consultants I have talked about as being more mercenary than others, I have discovered this morning to my amazement that he literally talked with one of the undersecretaries of the Air Force on what he should do at the next meeting of the consultants. This undersecretary said, "I want to see five or six schemes." I was amazed to hear this story now, after all these years, because actually this person was responsible for my having to do all of those elevations of the cadet quarters that I talked about, and that is why Eero came back and said, "This is never going to happen again. We are critics. We are not the designers. It's up to SOM to do the best they can. We've got to make a choice." But to hear that one of our consultants—I'm not really surprised, but I never thought of it at the time—would literally go to the clients and say, "What do you want next?" So whether we're the most mercenary or not is a debatable point. We were aggressive—the firm was aggressive—but in getting the Air Force Academy I went through everything I could to present the right, beautiful pictures, the chart. I suggested we get the cadets in on time, and then I showed how we could do it. I didn't know if Gordon was talking to the head of one of the insurance companies to say, "Would you recommend to the secretary that you really enjoyed working with us?" Now, I don't consider that as vicious as people would say. I mean, it's a recommendation. But I never did that, so I never had that problem. I am sure we were aggressive, but I am certain others were just as aggressive to get the job, and even after the job. I mean, here is this consultant who was very aggressive to get the job. He tried to see everybody. I would say, for a matter of fact, that we did less—no, Eero did the least.

Blum: Did the least of what?

Netsch: In trying to use pressure to get the job. Probably Wright did the most, and then the standard architects who were used to working with the government pulled every string they could with every general they knew, so I don't think we were the most aggressive in that particular job. Now, I don't think it was

because I was there. It may have been because I had done the U. S. Naval Postgraduate School. I had designed a school for them. You could look at it. You could like it or not. But it was there. We had the North African air bases that we had done. You could like it or not. They were there. We had Okinawa. It was there. We had proof that we had done things. Now, we aggressively told people that we had done those things. I don't think that's bad. I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if later on in the office-building developer business that the developers encouraged competition between the architects, and that occasionally Bruce and Bill would spend more money than the rest of us were aware of in order to get a job. But that is to me less evil, because it was our money, then trying to pay someone dollars and cents to give us the job.

Blum: You mean to bribe someone?

Netsch: To bribe someone, yes.

Blum: Does that happen?

Netsch: Oh, I'm sure it did. Not for Skidmore, but for others.

Blum: Well, you know, Nat Owings has a reputation of being absolutely ruthless in going after and using whatever was necessary to get what he wanted.

Netsch: I don't think that's true. You would have to define what you meant by that. I really wonder. He would go after clients who were friends of his to give a good word to a possible future client. He would, I think, sometimes promise the most outlandish results to a client. I can remember an early head of United Airlines, there was a hangar out at Midway that he couldn't use because his plane was now bigger than the hangar. They were going to the DC-3—things were moving very fast. Nat promised, "I could make that hangar bigger, and it would cost you less," and he came back and he told Jack Train, "You make that hangar bigger and cost less than doing a new hangar, because I said we could." If that's what you mean, he was, but he

had to have some intuitive sense that he had some talent behind him that could do that. Jack Train did an elegant job of raising the roof, so to speak, by putting a new truss in and making it work because we were inventive. Nat promised that we could—he did this. I didn't. I correct myself from a few minutes ago. Nat is the one who promised that we would get the cadets in, and he said, "Walter, you've got to find a way to do it." So if he was ruthless that way, he was as ruthless with us as he was with anybody else. But he was also confident in applying the kind of pressure that we would respond to.

Blum: You have described him in many ways, not directly but indirectly. How do you remember him?

Netsch: Well, I remember him—let's say the way I don't remember him first. I don't remember him as taking our shoes off, putting them up with a fishing pole, and watching the bobber bob in the water. He was always so high-keyed. He would always be coming at something or for something. When he had those lunches with us at the Tavern Club I spoke about, there he was trying to entice us into doing our best. At these lunches he would try to get us to talk about architecture. He would also pick up ideas about what he would say when he was going to talk, and we were fully aware of that. But we were also trying to convince him that what we wanted to do was good architecture. Harry Weese got very angry because on the University of Maryland job Nat made him put a pitched roof on, or something, and Harry walked off. I would have done the same thing, but he didn't dare. He learned his lesson, I think, by losing Harry, that designers had scruples, and you just couldn't do that.

Blum: Is that the reason Harry left SOM?

Netsch: Oh, yes.

Blum: Well, Jim Hammond was apparently with Harry on that assignment at the University of Maryland and he jokingly called it "Moon Mullins architecture," so apparently he wasn't as insulted by it as Harry was.

Netsch: Jim wasn't faced with having to put the pencil on the paper, as Harry was. Harry would forever look at that drawing and say, "My God, I did it." Jim was a very different person.

Blum: I interrupted you about Nat.

Netsch: That's all right. But the other thing I think about with Nat was coming in with wild ideas, like a national infrastructure, and pushing that idea when he was interested in planning. Or when he was doing Lake Meadows with Am Richardson, he was trying to push a new image of a high-rise building, and Am called them "sidewalks in the sky." There were schemes that were much more exciting that never got built. I mean, the sidewalks were more literally sidewalks, with spaces to stop and talk and things like that. So out of these a lot of good ideas were tried. He encouraged that but he was also willing, when the chips were down, to kind of agree with the client that they had to cut it back. But I remember Nat, we never talked about art. He would joke and say, "Walter, did you buy another crazy painting?" or something like that, and he meant it humorously. Like the Air Force Academy, we haven't mentioned that much. He was at most of those meetings, but he had sense enough to let Gordon and me talk because he knew Saarinen, Becket and Belluschi didn't like him. But we would talk afterwards, the three of us, Gordon, Nat and I, and try to recap what happened at the meeting. Fortunately, things were progressing, and we didn't have very many upsets. See, I knew Nat on the Maryland job, on the highway. As I told you, he put his enemies in front of him. That meant we had to live with them. So here you have a man that recognizes difficulties but still wants the job and has the great confidence that we can overcome the difficulties. We had this enormous, enormous confidence, and that confidence would get all of us in trouble sometimes because sometimes we couldn't produce to the rate that he wanted. He would get angry. I have never been one of those people that got fired. He fired Chuck Wiley. He fired a couple of the participating associates in design.

Blum: Were these lasting firings, or was it just in the heat of the moment?

Netsch: No, they were lasting. When he did it, he did it. He would get so angry that he would just explode and that was it. It was that on both sides. There was just no way of coming back or finding a compromise. And then Nat would tell me that he “had to do it.” I said, “Why did you fire Chuck Wiley? Look at all he has done for the firm.” “What do you mean ‘he has done for the firm’? You don’t know what happened out in San Francisco.” I’d say, “Well, of course, I don’t know what happened out in San Francisco. I am here. I was back here. But I do know Chuck. I know he was difficult, I knew you got along with him before when he was difficult.” By being difficult I mean determined to do what he thought was right. I also knew that he would have a tendency to go off skiing when he wanted to, and that antagonized Nat no end. But I don’t know, really, why he was fired, to this day. And Nat wouldn’t back down, and I thought he should back down with Chuck. So I remember him as—you see, I don’t like to discuss partners’ meetings because, first of all, they were confidential. Secondly, we never voted on anything. Everything was done through kind of consensus, so you could have the most horrible, yelling, screaming thing, mostly about economics. We would have these design show-and-tells towards the end. We didn’t have them in the beginning. I brought things in. I told you of when I showed Gordon the Naval Postgraduate School, probably because that is what I was supposed to do. But the show-and-tells were a disaster. I mean, you couldn’t have a logical discussion of a design when each office was given twenty minutes to show what they were doing right now.

Blum: Was there a competitiveness that this process set up?

Netsch: No, there wasn’t a competitiveness. It was embarrassing. If you didn’t like something, you didn’t really—how could you in two minutes say you didn’t like it and why you didn’t like it and what you would suggest that they do instead? What approach, not what solution. And also, we had project managers there as well as partners and designers, so you had people coming at it from different viewpoints. I liked to see them all occasionally, but I

would much rather talk to Chuck Bassett privately than go to a partners' meeting. I'd rather go out in the drafting room and see what he was doing, or go to New York and see what was going on in the drafting room, and talk to one of the designers, or Gordon, about what was going on. That was a more one-to-one, logical. So I think when we decided to institutionalize these things, I think it was happening because I think Nat was getting nervous about this business of things beginning to look alike, and things like that, and he hoped to sort of expose it by having these things. But you're a family, and you just don't cut each other up publicly. If you do, you will end in the alley. I am not kidding you. It would be like a mafia because people would think they were doing it personally—that I was going after someone personally. I wouldn't say there wasn't much talk behind people's backs, but that's natural everywhere. But I don't think the show-and-tell design things worked well at all. What would happen at a partners' meeting is that the designers—in New York there was Gordon and Roy Allen, there was Bruce and myself in Chicago, and Chuck Bassett in California. But usually at dinner it would end up with Gordon and Chuck and I, perhaps, having dinner together, talking about design. That was much more effective.

Blum: Was there more of an exchange in that circumstance?

Netsch: I think there was more of a friendly recognition of the talent. Roy Allen didn't discuss design the same way. In other words, the three of us had a vocabulary that was close enough, meaning an attitude, that we could talk. And those show-and-tells of forty people were just too many. My relationship with Nat was so special—one, he trusted me. I got advance copies of the books he was writing, and I was asked to read them and criticize them. He listened to my criticism, and I would take that responsibility very seriously. Now, I don't know anybody else he would give that book to, *The Spaces in between*; in fact, I named it.

Blum: You did?

Netsch: I said when I saw the draft, "Nat, you're talking about the spaces in

between." He said, "Great title," just like that. I would sometimes say, "Nat, you're too frank about this subject. It's probably more complex than you have made it," and Nat would say, "I don't care. This is the way I feel about it." I would say, "Well, Nat, it's your book." So I had that personal relationship with him. When we would go to partners' meetings in foreign countries he was so jovial and he was so outgoing and he was so representative of SOM. He was the O in SOM, and the O was much bigger than the S and the M. Really. I mean, he's a personality. He was out front as a personality, so I remember him as being a personality then, and I remember him socially being a personality. And I remember him as just giving me every chance. And so, I trusted him, and he trusted me, but that didn't make me privy to his thoughts. My one responsibility in the partnership was to make David Childs a partner. That had so antagonized some of the partners that David Childs would never be a partner. I had worked with David, and I had had problems with David, but in honesty with Nat I agreed to do that. Now, what does that mean? Since we never voted, the discussion of who could be new partners would come up as a general discussion, and since I had worked with him in Washington I was able to show the good points of David Childs. Some of the less flattering points that have occurred since were part of his getting the responsibility and running with it in a manner which I think would turn Nat over in his grave.

Blum: You mean abusing it?

Netsch: Abusing it. But the first time I did that I explained things, and then Nat got up and said, "But goddamn it, he should be a partner right now," and another partner said, "Now, Nat, there is no 'right now.' We all have to think about it, and when it is right then it is 'now,'" or something to that effect. It was essentially the speech. I remember after the meeting Nat said, "I blew it, didn't I, Walter?" and I said, "Yes, you did, Nat." He was not made a partner at that meeting. It was at the subsequent meeting that he was made a partner.

Blum: And were you his advocate?

Netsch: I was still his advocate. I think he became less an advocate of me after he became a partner because he was the part of the success argument that Nat projected, but he didn't see that quality in him.

Blum: Did Nat live to see what you are describing happened later?

Netsch: No, Nat did not live to see it, and Nat would have told him off if he had seen it happening.

Blum: Did you know Louis Skidmore?

Netsch: Senior?

Blum: Yes. I knew Louis Skidmore. Remember, I told you the story of going to Annapolis, to the Naval Postgraduate School, as the first time I met him. He was always an enigma to me because, one, he was so comfortable in the Oak Bar in the Plaza in New York where I was not comfortable, so it was a different lifestyle. Secondly, he knew business people, and that was his way of getting business—you know, talking to business people.

[Tape 16: Side 1]

Netsch: Skid was a very dapper fellow. Skid got Belluschi to design his house in Winter Haven [Florida]. He didn't feel he had the talent to do it, but he picked the right guy to do a very elegant house. You could see him in Paris after the war with that little mustache and a cane, and being very, very dapper. His marriage to Nat's sister always struck me as a yang-ying relationship. She's a down-to-earth Middle Westerner. But it was a very successful marriage because she sort of held the world together, and he fantasized in the world of power and was responsible as much as anyone in seeing to it that industry knew who Skidmore, Owings and Merrill was. And when I said he was in the Oak Bar, he would have lunch with people there. Raymond Concrete Pile was a major friend of his, and then, of course, they were major contributors during the war for getting stuff built all over the



world. And so, our lives didn't cross.

Blum: Wasn't he instrumental in the history of the firm for opening an office in New York?

Netsch: He was always a New Yorker, and he was responsible for the New York fair.

Blum: That was in 1939.

Netsch: Gordon, of course, did a major job there. Gordon once told me that they originally planned to do the whole thing on water, and everything was to go by boat from place to place, so you can see, Gordon also dreamt as a young man. He had outrageous ideas. He was told by Robert Moses, who did the fair and all the expressways and everything, "Absolutely not." So Skidmore was the sort of dapper New York businessman type who probably also belonged to the other clubs—the real clubs; the Metropolitan Club, and so forth—that allowed people like Gordon to design. In other words, Skid did for New York what Nat did for Chicago.

Blum: And where did Merrill fit in?

Netsch: John Merrill was hired, not long before I was hired, when Nat decided we should get interested in public housing. So he hired someone out of the public housing field, an engineer, and John was as unlike the other two as possible. John had had a very unhappy marriage. His first wife spent most of her time in an asylum—John, Jr.'s mother. John and Vi couldn't get married because she was Catholic and John's first wife was still alive, and there could be no divorce. So John was a very patient man. He was a good, solid man to put with government projects. He could exist with all of those pompous colonels and generals. It's surprising what a power emblem on your shoulder can do to a person.

Blum: Was Oak Ridge the first effort of Skidmore and Owings to go into housing on that scale?

Netsch: Well, during the war, you see, they did prefabricated housing. They got the job through the Bemis Foundation, Walt Severinghaus and the New York office, and they did it out of New York. It was that job that really got them started in doing big plans quickly, being able to organize and get things done.

Blum: And that's when John Merrill became part of the firm?

Netsch: No, no. He didn't come till later. He was involved with public housing. See, the prefabricated, single-family houses in Oak Ridge had nothing to do with public housing. They came out of the Bemis Foundation and one of these "brave new world" schemes.

Blum: So what was the job—I'm just trying to place...

Netsch: I don't know what the job was, but Nat just decided we should be in public housing, so he hired someone. Nat decided we needed some blue blood, so we hired Jim Hammond, or what's-his-name—we just called him "Gucci shoes."

Blum: Bill Drake?

Netsch: Bill Drake. I always called him "Gucci shoes." He always wore Gucci shoes, you know—loafers.

Blum: Well, how did John Merrill become a partner and get his name on the letterhead so quickly?

Netsch: They made him a partner. Skid and Nat made John a partner. He was never a senior partner, but it always was his name of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. Nat wanted an engineer in that title. Nat wanted a project manager at the top; someone who could run jobs. He sent poor John to Japan after Nat got the job over there. He said, "John you are to live there for two years." He would

never live there for two years, although John and Vi lived in the Imperial Hotel with all those marvelous things. But Nat sent John to Oak Ridge. I'm sorry, not Oak Ridge. I mean Colorado Springs. He did work in Oak Ridge, but when I was interviewed by him for a job he was in Chicago, and then he was sent down to Oak Ridge to project-manage there. But that's postwar, not prewar. So it was the question of Nat recognizing an organizational need, and doing it, and really lucked out in getting this kindly, honest man who could be brow-beaten into doing anything and going anywhere. By "brow-beaten" I mean, "Well, John and Vi, you will love Tokyo." "John and Vi, you will love Oak Ridge," or "John and Vi, you will love Colorado Springs." You know, that sort of thing. And they did. Vi loved making friends. She was good, socially, for John. I was a good friend of the Merrills'. In Japan the three of us would go and stay in a Japanese inn. I have a marvelous picture of Vi in her kimono, sitting in an inn. They were just nice people, and I was a nice person. I would just take my "father and mother" along with me, so to speak, on a trip. I could do things that they couldn't do. I was not seventy-five years old then.

Blum: Was John Merrill about the same age as Louis Skidmore and Nat Owings?

Netsch: Oh, yes.

Blum: So they all pretty much left the firm about the same time?

Netsch: I think so. I can't remember exactly. I think John left first, because as soon as he could get off the Air Force job out in Colorado Springs, he did, and retired there. He became sick and died, and then Vi lived on there and then she died without my knowledge. I didn't know she died. I think Skid died suddenly, too, when he died, and Nat, of course, died suddenly.

Blum: But they had set the firm up in a way where it continued beyond their lifetimes.

Netsch: Oh, yes, the partnership, and they changed it to SOM. That was a conscious

decision, during the Air Force Academy days, to call it SOM and not Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Blum: I think the two are used interchangeably today.

Netsch: Well, they are used interchangeably today, but they don't have to worry about it. There is no Skidmore, there is no Owings, and there is no Merrill, so they can use the full name, but Nat was the one who pushed the "SOM."

Blum: I didn't realize that. We began to talk about SOM's reputation for having vicious politics, and you explained how you thought they did what everyone else in the industry did.

Netsch: Yes. The vicious politics was like what I described earlier, that Gross Sampsell was our lawyer, and he made the firm as much as anything by his ability to write partnership papers and review contracts and keep Nathaniel in tow. Nat had great respect for him. Sister Sampsell was Gross's wife. She was just called "Sister" Sampsell. She was a mousy little lady with, evidently, Chicago blue blood all over her. They lived at 900 Lake Shore Drive, at the turn of the drive. And so, Gross really made it work. When Gross read that article in *Fortune*, it got rewritten.

Blum: Oh, "Skid's Row"?

Netsch: Yes. It got rewritten. It was really Gross who decided that it was not in the best interest of SOM to have it printed just like that. In fact, it was the first one that began to give a lot of cognition to Gordon and to others, and they were still on their anonymity kick. Some of the bitterest battles Gordon had was having to face that anonymity kick. He didn't do controversial buildings, so he couldn't break the dam. I could break the dam by accident, of course. So I really feel that we had a protector in Gross Sampsell—like a Hollywood censor for the movies; someone who read everything that came out and saw to it that it was cleaned up. We all knew that Nat fought hard for jobs, but, to my knowledge, he ever did anything really underhanded. He may not have

liked somebody, but other people would talk about Nat and about our work very critically, so I wouldn't be surprised if Nat learned to fight back—you know, in presentations. I know that all of these people used the Chicago Club—that's a euphemism for power—for lunches and dinners. Every architect in Chicago who was anything did the same thing—or at the Tavern Club.

Blum: Do you think SOM, or Nat, was just more successful at doing what everyone else did?

Netsch: Yes, I do, plus I think that—I was trying to think of the name of the other firm in town that was our chief competitor when I was a young man. It was Perkins & Will. They did the building that was just torn over here, the U.S. Gypsum Building. Larry Perkins, in later years, always told me how jealous he was of Nat.

Blum: Many people have spoken about that.

Netsch: And how he would want to get a job that Nat wanted, and he would want to do better than Nat. And so, I think that part of this discussion of enmity or Nat doing underhanded things was really jealousy on the part of a lot of these other people who just could not understand how Nat could pull off these things—they never had as bright a design team. They never let their design team have their heads. Because remember, Perkins & Will, they thought they were the designers and the businessmen.

Blum: Could you have spent thirty-two years in a firm that imposed certain design guidelines on you?

Netsch: Probably not more than six months. No, that was my reason for saying that I think it got me into Field Theory—my wife would say, “Well, Walter, you know you can't go anywhere else, and you know you don't want to do half the things you would have to do if you were on your own.” And so I would lick my chops and go back to work.

Blum: But there was an ongoing difficulty that has been publicized, and that was your difficulty with Bruce, and Bruce's difficulty with you. What is that all about?

Netsch: Well, it was certainly competition. When I left Japan, Bruce was put in charge then over there.

Blum: In Japan?

Netsch: Yes, for the projects over there. Ralph and I came back to America, and so Bruce made whatever happened later, which is the tail end, his responsibility. He gained a reputation for being successful at doing whatever he did, and then he came back to Chicago. I was the chief of design in Chicago and was working on things, and Bruce was starting off in the design room. He never worked under me. He had made a rapprochement with Bill Hartmann very early on, and the luck of the dice was the Air Force Academy, for him as well as for me, because I got the Academy and he got Inland.

Blum: He finished Inland.

Netsch: He got Inland, and then he became chief of design in the Chicago office while I became partner in charge of design of the Air Force Academy. I had no responsibilities for the Chicago office. I spent ten years on the Academy.

Blum: Where were you actually based? Were you in Colorado, or were you here?

Netsch: We were here, but in a separate office. We had a different space. Remember, the cheaper space for the big crowd? I had my design office in Inland, but it wasn't until towards the end of the Academy that UIC began to appear, or Grinnell, or something like that, that I began to pick up my specialty, which was academic and institutional work. So, once again we were noncompetitive, but then we became co-chiefs of design. Then they hired Myron. I'm not exactly certain why, but they did. Was it was for a special

project, or because they knew of him at IIT?

Blum: And he had been in the San Francisco office?

Netsch: Myron? Well, that would have to be through Jack Rodgers then, but I never knew he was in the San Francisco office. You see how separated I was from what was going on. So when he was brought back to Chicago, Bill Hartmann told me there would be a troika. He used those exact words, "There will be a troika"—you know, the three of us. That's how it happened, but then I was the only one who was interested in educational and institutional work. And the jobs sort of got themselves—you know, through the publicity.

Blum: So why was there this problem with Bruce if the three of you were co-equal and working on separate projects?

Netsch: Well, there is no such thing as co-equal.

Blum: All right, you were a troika: you, Myron and Bruce.

Netsch: We were a troika. Bruce just manhandled Myron and made him work on design things that he wanted, bawled him out for taking so much time, and all that, but needed him—really needed him. Occasionally, Myron would get a really good job, like the telescope out in Kitt Peak, Arizona, and then he would do a fine job and make a special job into something coherent. The problem didn't exist in the drafting room, but it existed in the meetings. You know, "Walter, why can't you get a better profit ratio?" "Walter, why must you play around with theories?" I used to come the partners' meetings—I used to get up an extra hour and a half early to get myself fully awoken and to try to read the minutes of the last week to try to guess what Bruce was going to do. Bill Hartmann would sit at the end of the table, and Bruce would often sit at the other end, and no one knew what Bruce was going to say. He would come crashing in at 120 decibels, screaming and hollering about something.

Blum: If Bill was sort of in charge of the Chicago office, was it up to Bruce to conduct the meetings?

Netsch: Well, Bill never really took charge of the office. He was very happy with the troika. He was very happy that I was able to take care of myself and develop my own studio out there. If Nat called he would say, "Walter is fine. He is working at Grinnell," or he is doing something or other. Then he and Nat would talk about an office building somewhere, and clients that they both knew.

Blum: Did Nat know this was going on between you and Bruce?

Netsch: Oh, yes. As long as we were able to function, we endured the—what's it called, the "slings of fate," or something, that Shakespeare talked about—because we were happy and we were successful, and to hell with them. There was a lot of emotional turmoil going on on the other side of the fence, so to speak, at that time between Bill and his wife, and Bruce and so forth, and they had enough to keep themselves busy.

Blum: But it made life for you more complicated.

Netsch: It didn't make life very pleasant. It made life very unpleasant, but I just endured it because I couldn't figure out any other solution. I was asked, "What were the other solutions?" I was asked several times to consider being dean of a school of architecture. That was my way out, but they were always outside of Chicago. My wife wanted to be governor of Illinois, and she was not going to leave Chicago. We had a conflict there, you know, in terms of—I mean, I could work in Australia or Saudi or somewhere, and go crashing off to all of those places, but I always came home to Chicago. Nat tried to get me to take over the Washington office as a way of making things calmer. That was before we put David Childs in charge. I explained to Nat, "Dawn doesn't want to be senator." "Let's make her senator. Let's make her congresswoman. Send her to Washington. She will be happy. You will be happy." I'm not sure I really wanted to take over. There were rumors that started that I was going



to go to New York, and Gordon didn't want that. He knew what was going on in Chicago. Roy Allen was a docile associate, and I didn't want it either. I didn't want New York. Chicago was my town. I had no desire to go to New York. Gordon knew I wasn't interested in his job. But there were these efforts to try to placate. I'm sure Bruce stormed around with Bill Hartmann. What did he say about it when you interviewed him?

Blum: Bill did not speak about any difficulty, as I recall.

Netsch: See, he looked the other way in the office, too. As I have told you, one night it got so bad that Dawn said, "You've got to go talk to Bill." We called Bill, and we went over and sat at his kitchen with Benta, and I was in tears. I was really breaking up. I was really about to have a nervous breakdown over this conflict. Bill made all sorts of promises about making things better, but it never happened. It was never even discussed, my being there. Whether he ever talked to Bruce about it or not, I do not know.

Blum: Did you ever talk to Bruce about it?

Netsch: No. It was impossible. You can't talk to Bruce. Everybody else is wrong. When Hancock started falling, it was the engineers' fault. It was everybody else's fault. When the marble did something on another job, it was somebody else's fault. He didn't run out in the middle of the night and try to find out if the chapel leaked, you know. That was just a difference of personality. Bruce is talented. There is no question about his talent. He did some good buildings. But eventually he got into a rhythm, you might say, especially dealing with the developers. That is where he fell into a pattern. I never had that problem. He did. But he succumbed to it where other people did not, and that's when SOM slipped and other firms slipped in, if I may use that phrase, with the same developers because they would doll it up a little differently. He got caught with his Miesian pants down, so to speak.

Blum: After Mies was no longer fashionable?

Netsch: That's right. Nat didn't like Bruce. Actually, Gordon didn't like Bruce. Everybody was afraid of him, though. I mean, you do get to be afraid of a tyrant. He also did his homework. He did his homework primarily in finance. He knew whether every job was doing well or badly, and he used the dollar sign as the leverage in any discussion.

Blum: Well, that was important to the firm.

Netsch: Like Will Rueter, when I encouraged Will to take the job in England to go work on new towns over there when he had a chance to do that, I thought that was great. Then Will came back and wanted his job back. He had been a participant. He had made a participant in the studio. He got interviewed by Bruce, and the next thing I knew, Will came over to see me and said, "Did you know that Bruce told me I could never have a job at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill; that I had deserted Skidmore and continued on to Great Britain. I realize if I came to work with you I would still never have a chance to get ahead."

Blum: To be a partner?

Netsch: Yes. Bruce was brutal. With Bob Hutchins, when I was having open-heart surgery, well, I felt like I was dying and I realized I had to leave the firm because of all these pressures, and the open-heart surgery. I realized I wasn't going to go back into that cauldron again. That was lucky because the academic work was beginning to dry up, and Postmodernism was around the corner, and so fortunately I told the partnership I was going to get out, and I recommended Bob Hutchins to take over my studio. Evidently, after I left Bruce just dissolved the studio. I had recommended Bob Hutchins for partnership, and Bob Hutchins did not make partner. Two years later Bob Hutchins made partner on Bruce's terms and was made into a project manager. Again, like Jim Hammond and the others, he was not a designer. He was a project-manager type, and Bruce wanted him to run the Duchissous job out at Arlington Racetrack. Bob Hutchins headed the Arlington job—not the design—and then Bruce blamed him for all the money losses. He said,

“You knuckled under to Duchissous on everything.” I gather he did because he was a gentleman, and Duchissous was a little bit like Bruce. They are both domineering. If you can be hostile and win, that’s the easiest thing to do. Yet the people loved Bruce. They loved that.

Blum: Well, Nat, obviously, identified the difference between the way the two of you worked, and in his book he wrote, “Graham has a formula; a very pragmatic approach. Netsch’s work was the soul and the spirit of people.” You explore new approaches, and Bruce refines them—not your approaches, but refines approaches.

Netsch: That’s absolutely true. Now you see how right Nat really was. Nat was aware of everything. He couldn’t solve everything. He couldn’t do much—especially he couldn’t interfere in Chicago with Bill Hartmann in charge, because Bill could run to New York and claim to Walt Severinghaus that, you know that Nat was also becoming an alcoholic, so we had the problem of Nat sort of falling apart. I think the pressures really got to Nat, too.

Blum: I can certainly see where with the various personalities and responsibilities, being equal partners, would perhaps encourage alliances and little cliques for the power.

Netsch: Yes, that’s right, but also the intensity. Everyone had the Holy Grail in their terms. Certainly, Nat had his vision of the Holy Grail. I had my vision of the Holy Grail. Bruce had his vision. Gordon had his vision. You can’t name anybody that didn’t have it, except perhaps Chuck Bassett. Chuck was sort of laid-back. He liked to do nice buildings, but he was perfectly willing to retire and sit in a hot tub. Did you interview him?

Blum: Yes.

Netsch: Didn’t he find he has been able to—and he goes down and talks to the firm once in a while.

Blum: Well, if I recall correctly, he said when the developers took over it was time for him to leave. That's when he retired.

Netsch: You see, he hadn't fought a separate battle. And so he left. He wasn't going to go into that one.

Blum: Now, you retired in 1979?

Netsch: Yes, 1979-80.

Blum: Was this precipitated by a heart attack?

Netsch: Open-heart surgery. I was a very early recipient of having the heart on the side of the table while they put an artery in and then put it all back together.

Blum: That was in 1979.

Netsch: Yes, and then I had it again in another four years. I had another open-heart surgery, so I was damn glad I did retire. I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't. Then I had the arterial aneurysm, and then I had the pulmonary embolism. And I have arthritis and osteoporosis. Actually, as I started retiring all of these things started catching up to me. I really was physically falling apart. It wasn't having worked thirty years. I probably worked sixty years, you see. Do you know what I mean?

Blum: Eighty hours a week, yes.

Netsch: And thinking and working and trying to hold the team together, and getting the jobs, and fighting for their salaries, and fighting for their recognition at the participant or associate level, and fighting Bruce's and Bill's hatred of gays. We had one gay partner from New York. They got him retired. He took medical retirement. That's a euphemism for running him out. He wanted to take over the Paris office because his boyfriend lived there. A perfectly nice guy. He went to Algeria with me—a very sensitive, perfectly nice human

being. But Bruce and Bill were—well, part of that happened was because Leigh and Mary Block loved him and they suddenly discovered that he was gay. He was our interior designer here, the head of the design office. He was shipped to New York, and Gordon was delighted to have him. Gordon is a human being.

Blum: Who was he?

Netsch: Davis Allen. In fact, his mother went to school with my mother to be Christian Science practitioners, but we don't remember each other from our youth, seeing each other occasionally. Neither one of us made an impression on the other. Our mothers did, and so our mothers were delighted that we were both in the same firm, and all that sort of posh-tosh, as my mother would say; "posh-tosh." But Davis went on to do fine work in the New York office. I guess Leigh and Mary put the fear of God in Bruce and Bill on bashing.

Blum: There was an article about the state of the firm at this point. It was a recent article. It said that your retirement was forced.

Netsch: Forced? No. That was an error. It was forced by my health.

Blum: Well, they said it was forced by the politics in the office. They also mentioned your health, but not as the major cause.

Netsch: Well, let's say it honestly. I had an early open-heart surgery. I was one of the early ones. They took longer to heal and were more excruciating than they are today. I had a lot of blood transfusions, and later on we all wondered whether I was going to get AIDS because of the blood. A lot of the staff gave blood, from my studio, and some of them were gay. Some of them have died, but none of those who gave me blood have died.

Blum: Weren't they testing the blood then?

Netsch: They weren't testing the blood then. The question wasn't even asked.

Blum: Oh, that's pretty scary.

Netsch: So the second time I had open-heart surgery they gave me some sort of artificial blood or frozen blood, and that caused a terrible problem with the lining of my heart. So I am a survivor when it comes to the physical environment. But I was tired. I was physically and emotionally tired, so no one had to run me out of the firm. I had just told Dawn I just wasn't going back. I had put my proper years in. I could take early retirement legally without asking anything. I thought Bob Hutchins could take over the studio, although the designers in the studio were very unhappy because I told them I had recommended this. Well, Bob is not me, and they envisioned just what happened. The studio was dissolved as soon as the work was finished. In fact, I think if you look at Fort Wayne it says—the Fort Wayne Art Museum—it says "MSKTD and Associates, the Fort Wayne firm, and design consultant, Walter Netsch." That originally wasn't so. Originally it was SOM and their firm. Then when I retired, you see, what would they do? Chicago didn't give a damn about that building, so I became a consultant.

Blum: Did you stay on as consultant after you retired?

Netsch: No, I was just Walter Netsch, Consultant. I wasn't with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill at all. I was just a consultant to the project. In other words, I helped on finishing the working drawings and in the interiors, and lent my, we'll call it "authority," to the meetings. I enjoyed the relationship with the people down there.

Blum: Walter, it looks like you had come full circle. The Air Force Academy was the work of SOM, but the chapel was Walter Netsch's work and at the other end Fort Wayne was the work of Walter Netsch and not SOM so you've come full circle, in a way.

Netsch: I hadn't thought of it that way. It was difficult but I never really regretted

that decision, to be perfectly honest.

Blum: To retire or to stay as long as you did?

Netsch: No, to retire. I often had regrets on staying, but if it weren't for our studio and what we were doing—our own Holy Grail was more important than my being beaten up. Besides, I'm a tough guy. I can come back. I fought.

Blum: You seemed to.

Netsch: No one would say I didn't fight. Therefore, the firm really wrote me off. I never was included so I was surprised to be invited to the fiftieth birthday. For example, I put together the book on SOM's fortieth birthday. Have you ever seen it?

Blum: I don't think I have.

Netsch: Gordon put together the little cube that says "40." It was a big birthday party, and Nat got Gordon and me to do it. It was just before Nat retired. It's really an important book. You might ask Skidmore, Owings and Merrill if they've got an extra copy of the fortieth birthday book. It would be good for the AIC library, it really would. I went through records, and it had all of those early things—I'm part historian, as you gather, and so I put together the history of the firm and the people and the partners' trips. It was from a partner's point of view. It's a good document.

Blum: Walter, often in oral histories I ask, What impact did your career have on your family? I think because in your situation you and your wife have each had an active career, I will ask the question in the reverse, What effect did Dawn's career have on you?

Netsch: Well, it was both of us. Dawn did not have a laughing, jovial, golf-playing, drinking husband that could go out with some of the politicians. She had a famous husband who had his own work, so I was not really the great support

for her that I could have been. Nor was she for me. She was not out there fighting and scratching like some wives in the partnership did, and some wives were very successful at fighting and scratching for their husbands.

[Tape 16: Side 2]

Netsch: Dawn liked Nat, in a way, but she was really afraid of his “off the top of the head” way of coming to decisions, which was less off the top of the head than most people would believe. He had to sit down and write that. No one ghost-wrote his books. Dawn really didn’t like SOM. It was not her cup of tea, although she knew I had to be there. She knows me as being a hypochondriac. She also knows me as taking great vacations and going on excavations to Angkor Wat and all those wonderful places. I represented an exposure to the world that she at her economic level could never have achieved, so her dreams of being an archeologist—we had two trips down the Nile because she wanted to go again, and another trip there, but not down the Nile. So I supplied that. Then, of course, during this last election when it was so difficult to raise money, especially for a woman candidate, that I was perfectly willing to sell or give away much of the art collection. I was very fortunate having sold the Lichtenstein, which we could use. But a lot of people say, “I don’t know a husband that would give his wife \$1.5 million dollars.” I disagree. That’s a very easy thing to do, if you believe in your wife and you know she is being mistreated. I could do this. I did not do anything in the campaign. I sat in on several important crisis meetings. It was usually when Emily’s List wanted me to give them some more money. Dawn was very embarrassed by all that, and to this day I think she really kind of objects to the fact that we had to do it.

Blum: That you had to finance her campaign yourself?

Netsch: That we had to finance it. That’s not the way she wanted to do it. But I couldn’t see her go down the drain. As it is, towards the end of the campaign we couldn’t afford anywhere near the television time that Dawn’s opponent had. In fact, for the last \$120,000 I insisted we do one TV ad which shows



Dawn and Penny together, the first time two women had run for office. I had asked for that in the beginning, and everyone said, "That doesn't make any difference. They will never get a vote." I finally said, "Well, you're going to do it now, or I'm going to get someone else to do it," because, again, from a historical standpoint it's very important that they were the first, and I wanted it documented. I wanted it on the record, and the media is the record. Then they rewrote it twice because the gal who ran for vice-president came. David Axelrod redid the ad to include the great lunch they had, the women's rally they had, and so it was important that it got done. It was too late to make any difference for the vote. We knew that. We knew the Republican women in the collar counties had deserted us where they had not left Carol Moseley Braun. But it was partly because of Carol Moseley that they left us. You know as well as I know what happened.

Blum: Shall I admit my ignorance? No, I don't.

Netsch: Well, Carol Moseley Braun's personal life upset Republican women in the collar counties and was easy to use as an example.

Blum: Was this because of the finances about her mother's house?

Netsch: No. It was her campaign manager who spent the money, and they went trotting off to South Africa.

Blum: Oh, I didn't know about that.

Netsch: He was trained by Jesse Jackson and is a South African. Then they announced their engagement, of course, which has since been dissolved. So all of that—the Republican women deserted, but the younger people, the pro-choice people, didn't get excited. Dawn was kind of left all alone looking like the oddest human out there—the straight arrow—and she needed all the support I could give her. She still has a lot of loyal—the loyalty to her, and from strangers now, is just immense. I am so glad that happened. I don't know what kind of a governor's husband I would have made. I haven't the faintest

idea. But we don't have to face it. I often explain when they say, "What would you do if Dawn were governor?" I say, "Well, there are several things I would do. One, I would see that the beautiful Wright house in Springfield would be used for public occasions."

Blum: The Dana-Thomas House?

Netsch: Yes, for public occasions. I would see that the modern art that is created in Illinois would be exhibited in the governor's mansion, knowing you can't put big canvases in the Dana-Thomas House. Wright didn't design for big canvases. And I would be interested in the history of Illinois.

Blum: You would be like a cultural minister.

Netsch: Yes, that's right.

Blum: What did you do after you retired in 1979, after your recuperation?

Netsch: First of all, I was working on that history of ornament— I mean my own ornament thing. That gave me something to hang my hat on.

Blum: The history of ornament, is that what you are calling the history of Field Theory?

Netsch: I don't know. Anyway, it never got a name, it never happened. So I have always had something to sort of really get interested in. Then I probably joined a competition. Oh, I was working on our house in Wisconsin. I started looking for a summer house so that Dawn and I would have a place to go to. Everybody went somewhere in the summertime, why shouldn't we? So I started looking for that, and that got me interested in a certain approach towards fields. I had never realized my wife never wanted to go to Wisconsin. She has the marvelous habit of just, like Bill Hartmann, letting things sort of die of their own weight. When the conservation group bought the whole lake and all of the land, it solved our problem. So I had

competition in one thing I did.

Blum: Well, I know you were painting, I know you were sculpting, and had exhibitions of your work at the Zolla-Lieberman Gallery.

Netsch: Yes, right, so I kept busy.

Blum: But you also made headlines with another job you had as the president of the Chicago Park District Board.

Netsch: Oh, yes. That's right. That occurred then. I honestly thought I was appointed because of my professional skills, and what I ran into was my lack of political skills.

Blum: Wasn't that to be a five-year term?

Netsch: Yes, but you see, it took me two-and-a-half years to get appointed. And then Harold died.

Blum: Harold Washington appointed you?

Netsch: I was Harold's boy and delighted to be Harold's boy. I was not Sawyer's boy, and so politics descended on me pretty quickly. A lot of things came undone when Harold died.

Blum: Walter, while you were there I personally remember you making people aware of the archives. It wasn't an archive then, just stored boxes, years and years of stored records and drawings, in the basement of the Park District building.

Netsch: Yes, right. See, I started doing what I said I would do as the governor's husband, I would start making Chicago aware of its heritage. Then I started working on the playgrounds and making those playlots safe. I was having a great time. I also really antagonized the whole rest of the board.

Blum: Is that why you were not re-elected?

Netsch: I didn't stand for re-election again. I told Harold I was not going to. I just became a commissioner on the sideline.

Blum: You were the president.

Netsch: I was the president. I was there when I threw out Ed Kelly. I had the former alderman of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward, who is a marvelous guy, acting as my counsel and telling me what to say. I had a script. I had a bank of television cameras in front of me. I was in the strangest position. If I hadn't had to fight for the job with Channel 11 filming me out in these West Side parks, showing off the terrible state they were in—I took that celebrity job just to do something for the parks, I mean that aspect of it. But after Harold died things really just disassembled itself. Sawyer tried to fire us all. Compromise was made to change from five commissioners to seven, which allowed him to put more of his people on, and they were really obstreperous. They certainly didn't like my platonic system. They didn't like meetings that went five hours long. One was a divorce lawyer and the other was something else, and they wanted to get back to court and make money.

Blum: You were also unearthing a lot of things not only that time and disinterest had buried but also had been deliberately mistreated, not maintained, and you were coming up with ideas that looked like they were going to rock the boat.

Netsch: That's right. I wrote a book—I have a copy of it—on the whole idea of reorganizing the Chicago Park District, which we did. It has since been disassembled again by the current regime, because they don't want—I mean, this was really a Democratic revolution.

Blum: Under you?

Netsch: Under me, and Margaret Burroughs was a big help. Bill Bartholomay sort of stayed on the side and when pushed voted yes. And, of course, Rebecca Sive Tomochefsky and the other member really went along with me until it got to be an ego problem. I wrote this book, *President's Report Park District Reorganization*, and it said, "Walter Netsch." They said, "Well, we didn't approve it." The women did. I didn't realize it was an ego trip, and so I had to release the book on my own at a press conference. No commission meeting. I tried to get it accepted, but it was never really formally accepted as an official document. Some colleges used it for a while as an example of what happens with a big park system.

Blum: Well, Walter, even though your position was not confirmed what...

Netsch: Well, I quit, you see. I quit.

Blum: Even though you left you had opened the door for something very constructive—maybe not of the dimension you may have had in mind, but the Park District now has an archivist, records are available, and they are being cataloged. This is very important.

Netsch: And the playlots have all been redone, and we've got some bold schemes, and we're changing Lake Shore Drive like I said to do. All of these things are happening. And we have planting in the middle of Lake Shore Drive. I have accomplished a lot of things. I am not arguing that. I'm just thinking about all of the things we could have done. I want a "could have done" world. You see, I don't look for coming back here again and getting another chance. If someone were writing about me I think the title should be *There Are More Things to Do*. There are always more things to do. I felt that very strongly at the park board. It was a very tempestuous time. I threatened to resign privately a couple of times and worked out speeches and had PR people read them, and, oh, went through all sorts of discussions about it. It's one of those things you do regret. I really regret that I couldn't achieve it there, and again I have to admit it, that's my personality. I was so driven by the opportunity that I could see there, and it was not an ego trip. Nothing is named after me.

That isn't it. I just couldn't believe important people, including the mayor, could have such a menial kind of attitude.

Blum: Are you naïve about these things?

Netsch: Yes, I think I really am. When I saw Daley letting me swing in the wind, I knew he didn't want me as the president. That's why I quit. Then I screamed and hollered at Dawn, and Dawn is a friend of Daley's, and nothing has ever been said. It's really like politics. We gave books and some things to the library in Mozart Park, one of the little buildings we did which is an important little building, and Rich Daley went to the dedication and said, "Isn't it nice that we have people like the Netsches who do such and such?" Politics is politics. Dawn can accept all this. See, I can't accept all this. I will probably excise this when the tape comes out, but I have not been pleased with—the person who stood behind me the most was Harold.

Blum: Was it under Daley's administration when you were not confirmed by the City Council?

Netsch: No, it was under Harold. Those were the Council wars when they wouldn't approve anything of Harold's. I finally made it after two-and-a-half years, and so by five years it was already—I was willing to serve five years, but I never got the chance because then Eugene Sawyer had a short term because he finished out Harold's term, and then he lost the election. No, I have been hurt by the fact that the mayor has never wanted to talk to me about public housing. I have always felt, and this is the one thing about Dawn's role that has hurt my role, is that there is always a political gale out there that doesn't allow me to operate. And it's true. I mean, I could do Pruitt-Igoe, but that was in St. Louis. I don't know how to solve that problem. You could name any couple, and the same problem exists.

Blum: Especially when you have such very different careers.

Netsch: I don't mean to end this history this way, because I really want to thank you

for doing this. I had no idea what it was going to be like. Again I was naïve. I have probably treated it a little differently than most anybody else who has done this because I am who I am, and my work is what it is, and my friends who are a part of that work had to be a part of this story. I now welcome the opportunity. I don't know if the current members of Skidmore will either understand or accept these things I have said. I hope and pray that the young people at Skidmore will realize that they have all of those toys in the closet which are even more exotic than mine, and will make use of them for a larger purpose than just the toys, which I think I did. It's very important that this be done, and I am glad to add this to all the words I have said to Bob Bruegmann over the years, all the speeches I have given, and the records, as you know, that exist. But I have never had a chance to really get old enough and quiet enough, I guess, to take this opportunity.

Blum: Walter, that is a beautiful way to end these many hours. Thank you very much.

Netsch: Thank you.

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## WALTER NETSCH

Born: 23 February 1920, Chicago, Illinois

Education: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, B. Arch. 1943

Work Experience: L. Morgan Yost, 1946-47  
Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, San Francisco, 1947-51  
Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Chicago, 1951-79  
Design Consultant, 1979-81  
Private Practice, 1981-current

Government Service: United States Corps of Engineers, 1943-46

Honors and Awards: Fellow, American Institute of Architects, 1967  
R. S. Reynolds Award, American Institute of Architects, 1964  
National Society of Interior Design Award, 1966  
American Library Association Award, 1978  
Bartlett Award and Honor Award, American Institute of Architects, 1978  
Library Building Award, American Institute of Architects, 1978  
Inland Steel, American Institute of Architects 25 Year Award, 1982  
United States Air Force Academy Chapel, American Institute of Architects 25 Year Award, 1996  
Honorary Doctorate in the Fine Arts, Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin, 1968  
Honorary Doctorate in the Fine Arts, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, 1979  
Honorary Doctorate in Humanities, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1980  
Honorary Doctorate in Landscape Architecture, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, 1991

Service: Advisory Committee of the Ford Facilities Foundation  
Advisory Council, Film Center, Art Institute of Chicago  
Board of Directors, Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council of Chicago  
Chairman, Architectural Registration Board, State of Illinois  
Chairman, Planning Committee, American Institute of Architects, Chicago Chapter  
Chairperson, Committee of the Lakefront, Chicago  
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Jury on Institute Honors, American Institute of Architects  
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President, Chicago Park Board  
Trustee, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago  
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Exhibitions of  
Netsch's Work: Colorado Springs Art Museum, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1954  
Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio, 1979  
*Transformations in American Architecture*, Museum of Modern Art,  
New York, 1979  
University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa, 1971  
*Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition of 1922*,  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1980  
Zolla-Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, 1981

Exhibition of the  
Walter and Dawn  
Clark Netsch Art  
Collection: *Living With Art*, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City,  
Iowa, 1971  
*Living With Art Two*, Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio,  
1983  
*Living With Art Three*, Miami University Art Museum, Oxford,  
Ohio, 1991

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