

Interview with Michael Baxandall

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A. L. - I would be interested to find out who your first intellectual mentors were and what your experiences were in your early university education. I suppose I'm looking for some early formations of your intellectual interests.

M. B. - Well, I suppose, quite certainly it would be F. R. Leavis.¹ Have you ever heard of F. R. Leavis?

A. L. - Yes.

M. B. - I read English at Cambridge. I'd got into Cambridge on Classics but changed to English, and was taught by Leavis at Downing College. I think still he's the largest influence I'm aware of. But in a curious way it's not really a matter of one's work looking like his. It was the first time I was intellectually excited. There were all sorts of aspects of his work which I still admire, certainly.

A. L. - Was he also a model as an educator?

M. B. - He was a problematic—no, problematic is the wrong word—but he was a difficult man, and many people disliked him. I didn't dislike him. I wasn't personally close to him, but there was a moral urgency about his approach to literature which could take forms in literary criticism which one might not want, but which I still find admirable. I thought about this a couple of years ago when someone writing yet another book about Leavis wrote to me and asked what I felt about the influence of Leavis on people who had worked outside literary criticism, because I was one, and I thought about it quite a lot because, it's interesting, it's very difficult to pin down particulars when you're working in different fields and I've got friends who are also people from Leavis who are now anthropologists or whatever and they are different again but, you know, there's something consistent in all these people. In some ways he was a very, very powerful teacher. Even for people who did not go into literary criticism.

A. L. - And this was less him offering a model for method, but rather this dedication?

¹ Frank Raymond Leavis. See works such as *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study in the Contemporary Situation*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1938; *The Great Tradition*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954; and *Reevaluation: tradition and development in English poetry*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1963.

M. B. - Yes, and his various values. I mean he was a nonconformist, he was an outsider. He was widely considered difficult by the other Dons at Cambridge. He had this strong sense of the importance of relevance, almost a moral sense of relevance. It was not a matter of things being immediately applicable; he taught us very carefully that it was not a matter of a need for social didacticism. And then there was his sense of there being an indication of a total order in every fragment of a thing, you know, that goes right through. That's still important to me. Then he was interested in art—literature, that is to say—which maintains contact with the vernacular, not necessarily the popular but a vernacular life. Then he had a strong sense of the relationship between technique and morality, in almost a nineteenth-century sense. And so on, it's these things that... when I'm writing he's still one of the people peering over my shoulder, trying to keep me honest. You know, I was eighteen. I'd never been intellectually excited in this way before.

A. L. - When you mentioned some aspects of Leavis I'm reminded of Wittgenstein in some ways.

M. B. - I think, yes, you mentioned Wittgenstein in one of your letters. Leavis actually was a friend of Wittgenstein. Or had been. I don't know if they were intellectually influential on each other. I don't know what to say about that because the truth is I've never really sat down and read Wittgenstein. There's a general problem, I think, when one's thinking about influences on one, in that—and Wittgenstein is a case of this—one may never have read a thing, and yet Wittgenstein and other things were very much in the air in some diffused form. In other words a lot of the most powerful influences on one, one doesn't know the name of oneself at the time. The people one cites are people who usually have helped one with some local negotiation. While the big *Zeitgeist* people for example, one is not aware of. I mean I've read odd bits of Wittgenstein, very vaguely. But how can I deny it? I'm sure I've been influenced by Wittgenstein.

A. L. - I get the impression that Cambridge at the time you were there was very much influenced by Wittgenstein, and Russell.

M. B. - Well there was Cambridge and there was Cambridge. I was in the English school and I don't think we knew much. We knew there was this character Wittgenstein but not much beyond that. But there's another aspect here which is complicated and that is there is a sense in which one may know of somebody like Wittgenstein—or another thing that people bring up, Structuralism—not through directly knowing them but by knowing things they came out of to a certain extent. And the combination of knowing things they came out of and what's in the air gets to one in some way. In other words I find it very difficult to... even in cases like Wittgenstein or Structuralism, where I was not aware of these things at the time. I don't think it would be accurate to deny influence.

A. L. - Well, I suppose this brings us specifically to *Giotto and the Orators* because of course at certain points at any rate it certainly looks like it uses a Structuralist method.²

M. B. - Yeah, I was astonished when somebody said this at the time, because I didn't know what Structuralism was, and yet it is clearly Structuralist.

A. L. - There is a point fairly early on in the book where you use the phrase 'Meaning is use'.

M. B. - Ah yes, but that...I don't know, is that Wittgenstein?

A. L. - Well, yes, I believe so.³

M. B. - Though I think other people have used it before. I was getting that out of a certain amount of reading in some kinds of linguistics, not philosophy, that came to me—I mean I was aware of it, I was quoting it—but it came to me from linguistics.

A. L. - Now one of the references that you give somewhere is Jameson's *Prison-house of Language*.⁴ Is that the sort of linguistics that you were reading?

M. B. - I was interested in various kinds of linguistics. *The Prison-house of Language* had a certain resonance with what I thought I was doing. I read linguistics unsystematically, mainly American and English linguistics.

A. L. - The linguistic relativists; had you read Benjamin Lee Whorf?⁵

M. B. - Yes, I had read Whorf and decided that he had gone too far. Even then I was not a linguistic relativist in that sense. For me, as I remember, the distinction was between having a word for a thing facilitating thinking about a thing rather than the Whorfian sense that you had to have a word about a thing to think about a thing. And what interested me more than the Whorf thing, and still does interest me, was the whole idea of enforced discrimination.

A. L. - So that's the 'linguistic enforcement' you mention in *Giotto and the Orators*.

M. B. - Yes, and I recently used it again in a different context in a paper which came out in a *Festschrift* this year which I call 'pictorially enforced discrimination', it's about the difference between pictorial representations of the Annunciation and verbal, theological ones.

A. L. - What was that reference?

M. B. - It's called *Hülle und Fülle. Festschrift für Tilman Buddensieg*.⁶

² Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators. Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition 1350-1450*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscomb, New York: MacMillan, 1953. The notion comes from the first part of the *Investigations* where Wittgenstein writes: 'For a large class of cases—though not all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is in its use in the language.' p. 20.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-house of Language: a critical account of structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1972.

⁵ Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality. Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Mass.: Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956.

A. L. - May I ask you about Boas because wasn't Gombrich interested in him?

M. B. - Yes. I think it was Gombrich who told me to read Boas.⁷

A. L. - And was his relativism more to your liking?

M. B. - I don't think I thought about him in quite those terms. I was more interested in what he had to say about the relationship between medium and form. And that's what particularly interested me in Boas, not his relativism.

A. L. - In reading *Giotto and the Orators* there is much that reminds me of Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*.⁸ Did you know this book, were there some ways in which you were trying to go beyond its limitations?

M. B. - Well, let me say first—because acknowledgement is due here—the first book I read on art which made me think it might be interesting to be an art historian was *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, which I thought was a really neat book.⁹ You know, as opposed to Berenson, it might be interesting to do. I must have read *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* by that stage. I didn't then, and still don't now think of it in relation to the *Orators* because for me the interest of his criticism there, which I think better of than many people do, lay in the attempt to relate artistic forms to conceptual thinking and pushing it really hard. What I like about the book is that he's not cautious, he pushes it... and this is where it takes you. As you know there were two levels of play. One I accepted the other I didn't. I wasn't aware of that playing much of a role in the *Orators*, but I certainly knew the book.

A. L. - Another person in whom you were obviously interested, at least in terms of defining your understanding and defining of Humanism, was Kristeller.¹⁰

M. B. - Yes, Kristeller. Well, Kristeller was Mr. Humanism in those days.

A. L. - Did you have a direct relationship with him?

M. B. - Yes, he at some stage—I can't remember when exactly—came to the Warburg Institute, came and talked. I had found the Facius manuscript. In all honesty I don't think Kristeller played an important part; what were you thinking of?

⁶ Michael Baxandall, 'Pictorially Enforced Signification: St. Antoninus, Fra Angelico and the Annunciation', in *Hülle und Fülle: Festschrift für Tilman Buddensieg*, A. Beyer, V. Lampugnani and G. Schweikhart, eds, Alfter: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1993, 31-39.

⁷ For a brief biography see E. H. Gombrich, 'The History of Ideas. A Personal Tribute to George Boas', in *Tributes. Interpreters of our cultural tradition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, 165-183. With A. O. Lovejoy, George Boas is known as one of the founders of 'the history of ideas'.

⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1967. First published 1951.

⁹ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts. Papers in and on art history*, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955.

¹⁰ P. O. Kristeller is known mostly for his volumes of manuscript lists and his work on the humanist Marsilio Ficino (1433-99). Kristeller's essays have been collected in *Renaissance Thought and the Arts. Collected Essays of P. O. Kristeller*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

A. L. - I suppose, in a sense, that his objectives seemed to be similar to Gombrich's in terms of how humanism's role was to be evaluated in the Renaissance. You had acknowledged Kristeller in the *Orators*.

M. B. - Yes. The acknowledgement to Kristeller is apropos of... Kristeller was a great letter writer, and at every post one got a letter with manuscript numbers! And that was very useful. But I think I disappointed him a bit because, you know, he really wanted me to go and collate manuscripts, make editions, which I wasn't much interested in doing. But he was always very helpful. But I don't think of him, as opposed to some others, as having had very much effect on my notion of what the Renaissance was. There were various people around—I'm thinking of the sixties and seventies—Billanovich,¹¹ Garin,¹² Kristeller.

A. L. - The book is dedicated to Gertrud Bing.¹³ Could you indulge me by talking to me about her?

M. B. - Gertrud Bing was an absolutely marvelous person. Now what shall I say about her? She was director when I first encountered the Warburg Institute. She really brought me in. Gombrich was in America at the time. She had been an assistant to Warburg of some sort. You knew that. She didn't publish much herself. Her doctorate had been on educational theory. She was the ultimate reader, in all respects. For example, I still have manuscripts from that period which I gave her to read and on which she had written. And the good natured shrewdness with which—reading a paper on something which she probably didn't know much about—she saw where things were wrong; she had a sense. But I dedicated the book to her because she died not long before the book came out and, you know, she had been a really good friend. It's difficult to convey the character of somebody who hasn't written much or been a great lecturer. She was immensely tough, a really tough Hamburg intellectual. Totally admirable. And that intellectual tradition can be immensely appealing for somebody coming out of the English school.

A. L. - Doesn't Gombrich mention in the book on Warburg that Gertrud Bing had been working for some time on a manuscript on Warburg, but this she had destroyed and had never published.¹⁴ Do you know anything about that? Did she ever speak to you about it?

M. B. - Not really. The whole business of writing up Warburg was a bit of a problem at the Institute, still is. The notion was that when she retired—while she was director she was really too busy to do it—she would do something. I'm not sure if it was specifically on Warburg's language, but she was going to do something on

¹¹ Giuseppe Billanovich. An Italian scholar at the Catholic University of Milan and a central figure behind the periodical *Italia medioevale e umanistica*. Much of his work has been on Petrarch.

¹² Eugenio Garin. Italian scholar of humanism and Italian intellectual history of the Medieval and Renaissance periods including *Italian Humanism. Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, Peter Munz, trans., Oxford: Blackwell, 1965; *Science and Civic Life in the Italian Renaissance*, Peter Munz, trans., New York: Anchor Books, 1969; *Portraits from the Renaissance*, Victor and Elizabeth Velen, trans., New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

¹³ Director of the Warburg Institute, London. Formerly assistant to Aby Warburg.

¹⁴ E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg. An Intellectual Biography*, London: The Warburg Institute, 1970, 14.

Warburg. But somehow it never came about. Now I'm not at all clear on what exists. I didn't see what she did. And I think it was the preliminary arranging of material rather than actually writing. But when she did write she wrote beautifully.

A. L. The introduction to the collected works of Warburg.¹⁵

M. B. - Yes, it's a nice piece. The dedication to Bing was partially intellectual, partly personal.

A. L. - At what point do you think your interests were going more from the literary and classical to art? Was that at the Victoria and Albert?

M. B. - When I left Cambridge I got a scholarship to go to Italy to study literature and I got interested in the arts when I was there. Now, the reason I came back to this humanist literature was that in the days when I was meant to be doing a PhD thesis (which I never did) the PhD was to be on restraint in the Renaissance—the development of various kinds of restraint not only in art but in other matters too—because I didn't like the way Norbert Elias had done it.¹⁶ I wanted to do it in a different way. I was interested in all sorts of things; manners, and so on. One of the early bodies of material I started working on, which was originally just going to be a step on to something else, was art criticism. It was clear that the use of Classical Latin or near Classical Latin was a strong agent in bringing about this restraint. I was interested in the way people became more restrained in the way they held themselves, and that sort of thing. These texts, when I came to do my thesis, it seemed to me that I should do a preliminary job on them, and that's what the *Orators* was. Unfortunately, it expanded and eventually became the book. I really didn't intend to write that book.

A. L. - Were you aiming at something more like *Painting and Experience* originally?¹⁷

M. B. - No, what I was aiming at I think was... [pause]. This becomes a bit complicated because there's no simple way of explaining what I was aiming at. So perhaps I should mention another intellectual influence, this one of a rather peculiar kind, and that is, that after Italy—while I was in Italy—I decided I had to learn German if I was going to become an art historian, so I needed to earn some money and taught English in Switzerland. Then a year after that I went to the University of Munich where the *Ordinarius*¹⁸ was a man called Hans Sedlmayr—have you heard of Hans Sedlmayr?¹⁹—now there's a problematic character. But I found him fascinating, a hugely clever man, very knowledgeable man, and in a sense I suppose—I'm now returning to the restraint episode—I suppose that what I wanted to do was to do something like Sedlmayr's *Verlust der Mitte* on the Italian

¹⁵ See also Gertrud Bing, 'A. M. Warburg', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 28, 1965, 299-313.

¹⁶ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, E. Jephcott, trans., New York: Urizen Books, 1978.

¹⁷ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-century Italy: a primer in the social history of pictorial style*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972.

¹⁸ A principal professor in a German University department.

¹⁹ Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: the lost center*, B. Battershaw, trans., London: Hollis and Carter, 1957. Originally *Verlust der Mitte: die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit*, Salzburg: O. Müller, 1948.

Renaissance, but honest, and proper, and solid, in a sense. Because, you know, *Verlust der Mitte* just won't do. I don't know if you've read it. It's called *Art in Crisis* in the English edition. Sedlmayr was... there were problems. But the sense that you could address culture and art directly in some funny way had a certain resonance with Leavis. And I wanted to write a book of this sort. In other words I suppose that I was thinking that I wanted to do Leavis on art and Sedlmayr honestly, instead of with what I considered the trickery. So that's what it was. And I suppose the texture. I still have piles of notes from this in London, which occasionally becomes useful for teaching [laughter].

A. L. - One of your early publications was through the Victoria and Albert.²⁰ What was your connection, exactly, with the Victoria and Albert? Were there any people there who interested you intellectually?

M. B. - Yes, I was a Junior Fellow for two years at the Warburg Institute and that was basically a research grant. And at the end of this I needed a job and I had a chance at two jobs, one teaching and one in the museum, so I went to the museum and I was assistant keeper at the sculpture department at the Victoria and Albert for four years.

A. L. - Is that where the interest in German wood sculpture came from?²¹

M. B. - Yes, that is where that came from. Because I thought that I'd be working on that huge Italian sculpture collection but it turned out that John Pope-Hennessy had just finished the big catalogue.²² So it was suggested to me that it would be nice if I turned to the German and French collections—and I took them on with the idea of eventually cataloguing them—which are much smaller collections. I started with the German and that's as far as I got really. That's how I became interested in that sort of thing. Partly out of pure bewilderment. A lot of the German sculpture I didn't like, and was puzzled by it. People like Veit Stoß, and about what this came out of.

A. L. - Does this catalogue element explain the rather unique form of the *Limewood Sculptors* book? A book in the first half, and catalogue with extensive entries in the second half?

M. B. - Yes, I felt I had to do that, or I felt I was justified in doing that, because most English readers and American readers wouldn't really know who these people were and therefore needed somewhere to look them up. I never envisioned anybody reading that through. It's meant to turn to or to turn to and look at the pictures in the back. It took quite a lot of work. Partly one does these things for one's own ease of mind, to make sure one's done the work one's self, and having done that, you know, I thought I might as well throw it in. I remember one review suggesting that it should have been two books instead of one.

²⁰ Michael Baxandall, *German Wood Statuettes 1500-1800*, Victoria and Albert Illustrated booklet #14, London: H.M.S.O., 1967.

²¹ Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

²² John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: Victoria and Albert, 1964.

A. L. - I think it works well.

M. B. – Well, I mean, it's an appendix. As I say I never expected people to read it through. It's not written like that.

A. L. - May I ask—this is probably too vague—how you perceive your relationship with Gombrich either on a personal or intellectual level. Your first article was co-authored with him.

M. B. – Gombrich's been hugely important to me in various ways. For one thing he was my boss for a long time. And he's certainly been a big intellectual influence. I mean, the excitement one felt when *Art and Illusion* came out was huge, and I'm very aware of things, particularly in *Art and Illusion*, which perhaps were basic to me in Gombrich.²³ The whole sense of the way in which the beholder projects, to me is hugely important. It had never occurred to me before reading *Art and Illusion*; actually I had because I'd heard him talk about it, but Gombrich made the thing a revelation to me. So it was very important. I don't know how one assesses degrees of importance, I mean he's been around ever since I've been in the business; he's still very active right now.

A. L. - Do you feel your concept of the Period Eye was in any way an attempt to flesh out or further the concept of the Beholder's Share?

M. B. - No, I don't. Incidentally Gombrich doesn't like that book (*Painting and Experience*). I mean, when that book came out many people didn't like it for various reasons. It seems a bland enough book now but at the time people were really rather angry about it. And for Gombrich as for many there was an element of sort of reintroducing the *Zeitgeist* by the back door, with the notion of the Period Eye. I would deny that, but that is what many people felt. Now with the Period Eye I, again, in a sense am probably not the person to say where the influence comes from. I mean, I'm aware of certain things and so on. I got that from anthropology.

A. L. - The same place you got cognitive style...

M. B. - Yeah, Herskovits...²⁴

A. L. - Yes, I have it here...

M. B. - That certainly... as I say, I spent a lot of time in the evenings with anthropologists in those days. So that is what the Period Eye for me would become; one could think of a sort of a Cultural Eye and this is simply the application of that. And for me it seemed a sort of perfectly obvious thing to do, I mean I wasn't aware of the problems.

A. L. - It seemed to me to very much like the concept of the Carpentered Environment.²⁵

²³ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion. A study in the psychology of pictorial representation*, New York: Pantheon, 1960.

²⁴ See Melville Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology*, New York, 1955; and Melville Herskovits et. al., *A Cross-cultural study of Perception*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.

M. B. - Yes, there it's like Whorf again. If one pushes this too far, just as I stopped before Whorf, I stopped before the Carpentered Environment. But what I do believe in is the power of culturally acquired skills.

A. L. - This is one thing that I was going to ask you, if the Period Eye was the optical equivalent of linguistic relativism, so that Whorfian linguistic relativism was, in its logic, like the Carpentered Environment.

M. B. - It depends what kind of analogy you wanted to make and on what register one was making it, but I think that there are...yes...not exact symmetry.

A. L. - I don't think that you reintroduce the *Zeitgeist*, you keep to particulars.

M. B. - Well, I thought I was sticking to skills.

A. L. - Of specific sub-communities...

M. B. - Not the *Zeitgeist*.

A. L. - There was one thing—this is more for my curiosity—did you ever think that there was a certain affinity, when you were preparing *Giotto and the Orators*, between what you were engaged in and what someone like Lorenzo Valla had been engaged in and did you have a kind of dialogic relationship with Valla?

M. B. - Valla is still one of my heroes. I love Valla. I hadn't thought of it in quite that form but I'd be happy to agree to that, yes. On the whole I didn't take to many of the humanists but Valla... the irritability, the sharpness, and so on, I found very congenial, and still do.

A. L. - As I do as well. You know this article which calls Valla an 'ordinary language' philosopher?²⁶

M. B. - No, I haven't come across it. But it's quite true.

A. L. - I'll send you that and the very acid reply to it by John Monfasani. A very bitter attack.²⁷

M. B. - Yes, I'd be interested. No, I'd be happy to think of myself as an imitator of Valla.

A. L. - One finds out from the prefaces of *Giotto and the Orators* and Michael Podro's *The Manifold in Perception* that the two Michaels were close friends in the late sixties and early seventies.²⁸ And there seems to be some parallels of interest. When I read *The Manifold in Perception* and I look at how Podro looks at Schopenhauer, Herbart's

²⁵ Also called the 'carpentered world hypothesis'. See Marshall H. Segall, D. T. Campbell, and Melville Herskovits, *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, 83-97.

²⁶ Richard Waswo, 'The "Ordinary Language Philosophy" of Lorenzo Valla', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 41, 1979, 255-271.

²⁷ John Monfasani, 'Was Lorenzo Valla an Ordinary Language Philosopher?' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 50.2, April-June, 1989, 309-323. Included following the essay are responses by Waswo and Sarah Stever Gravelle.

²⁸ Michael Podro, *The Manifold in Perception: Theories of Art from Kant to Hildebrand*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972.

concept of mind, and especially Fiedler's ideas, I can see them playing off interestingly with your projects.

M. B. - Well, we were very, very close. I mean we still are in a sense. Just as Leavis is one who reads over my shoulder to keep me honest Michael Podro is another. And I often think of what he would make of this. And we read each others' things. Now he is much more able to deal with philosophical matters than I am. When I was a junior fellow, and also when I was at the museum we might spend several hours a week talking to one another. He was very important to me. I learned an immense amount from him. And, incidentally, again, he is Cambridge English school as well. He was at Cambridge the same time as me. He wasn't at my College but, you know, he read English.

A. L. - Unlike you he finally mentions Wittgenstein in the end.

M. B. - Yes, well, I mean he's read Wittgenstein! I haven't! [laughter]

A. L. - I was actually thinking we could talk more about these things tomorrow. But there was one thing I wanted to talk about today. In the late sixties and early seventies, especially in the Polytechnics in England, there was a Marxist or Leftist movement laying the groundwork for what we now call the New Art History or the Social History of Art, problematic as those terms are. Can you comment on your exposure to this trend, to the individuals who exemplified it; such as one of your colleagues here at Berkeley, Tim Clark? I'm not just interested in these people but also in other socially-minded historians like Peter Burke, whose *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy*²⁹ was published the same year as your *Painting and Experience*; as well as Raymond Williams and others who were impressed by the aims and method of the Annales historians such as Lucien Febvre³⁰ and Marc Bloch.³¹

M.B. - Well, that's quite a complicated one. First of all the Annales group I had read and liked but was not aware of them being immensely relevant to what I wanted to do. Peter Burke I knew and we were both struck at the similarities between the two books.

A. L. - You cover the same ground, but you do very different things.

M.B. - We were doing them independently but again it was the spirit of the times. I might not have been as deeply into the Annales as Peter was but it was in the air. Raymond Williams I never knew and really hadn't read him at that stage. The book of his I still like best is one of his novels. Have you read *Border Country*?³² It's a

²⁹ Peter Burke, *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy 1420-1540*, New York: Scribner's, 1972.

³⁰ Works include Lucien Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1925; Lucien Febvre and H. J. Martin, *The Coming of the Book: the impact of printing 1450-1800*, D. Gerard, trans., London: N.L.B., 1976; *Life in Renaissance France*, Marian Rothstein, ed. and trans., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977; *The Problem of Unbelief in the 16th century. The Religion of Rabelais*, Beatrice Gottleib, trans., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

³¹ Works include Marc Bloch, *The Historians Craft*, Peter Putman, trans., New York: Knopf, 1953; *Feudal Society*, L. A. Manyon, trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964; *French Rural History*, J. Sondheimer, trans., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966; *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, William Beer, trans., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

³² Raymond Williams, *Border Country*, New York: Horizon Books, 1962.

lovely book. It's about his father. He was a Cambridge Marxian generation a good deal before me—the thirties—and I never met him. There was one book, *The Country and the City* is it called?³³ I quite liked that. But his particular sort of Anglicized Marxism I wasn't particularly keen on. Now, you asked when I came... I don't know where to begin really; I grew up Marxian and still am, in a rather general sense. I mean I'm an old-fashion social democrat, still. But what was very important to me in this area was when I went to Italy after Cambridge and discovered Gramsci. Gramsci is still...I still teach all my students Gramsci, you know, because apart from anything else he's a marvelous tool for the historian of Italy and his notion of the organic intellectual is very important.³⁴ In a sense I would think of myself as Gramscian rather than Marxian and owing more to that party—Gramsci—than to French Marxism.

A. L. - And the concept of hegemony?

M. B. - Hegemony doesn't appeal to me. That isn't the thing; well, in a sense, O.K., but I don't get much mileage out of that. What I like is the concept of the intellectual. For me, painters, intellectuals, in a sense... So I hadn't really read widely in Marxism because, simply because, I mean, I read all the obvious things; Marx, Engels, but I didn't like what they offered very much in the way of an apparatus for dealing with art. Leavis, incidentally, was very anti-Marxist.

A. L. - Gombrich as well.

M. B. - Yes.

A. L. - If you look back at some of the literature on the Renaissance looking at society in the renaissance were you interested in Wackernagel's work?³⁵ Antal?³⁶ Or Alfred Doren?³⁷ Alfred von Martin?³⁸

³³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. One of Williams' more important works was *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1960. Originally published 1958.

³⁴ Antonio Gramsci divided intellectuals into two groups: the traditional and the organic. The traditional intellectuals were the artists, writers, and scholars—those whom we usually understand as 'intellectuals'. Organic intellectuals were connected to the base apparatuses of society, and grew out of these structures. A plant manager, for example, with all his ways of understanding, tendencies, and so on, is a product, as surely as the manufactured material goods, of the capitalist/mechanized system which requires and forms him. The manager's intellectual life is related to this work that this most immediate element of his society demands. See John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967. See also the chapter 'Intellectuals and Education' in *An Antonio Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935*, David Forgacs, ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1988, 300-322.

³⁵ Martin Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist. Projects and patrons, workshop and art market*, Alison Luchs, trans., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. Originally published 1938.

³⁶ Frederick Antal, *Florentine Painting and its Social Background. The bourgeois republic before Cosimo de' Medici's advent to power: 14th and early 15th centuries*, London: Kegan Paul, 1948.

³⁷ Alfred Jacob Doren. Several works on Florentine guild systems and Italian economic and labour history, including *Entwicklung und Organisation der florentiner Zünfte in 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1897; *Italienische wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Jena: G. Fischer, 1934; *Studien aus der florentiner Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1969; *Die Chronik des Salimbene von Parma*, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965.

M. B. - Wackernagel I found useful but not resourceful. He was there rather too much. I think I may even have a certain degree of animosity against Wackernagel because in the first edition of *Painting and Experience* I chose to cite—some information I can't remember now—in the form of a thesis written by the student from whom he had taken it. I did put Wackernagel back in the revised edition, because obviously it was perverse, particularly after Alison Luch's edition. So Wackernagel I don't think of as very constructive. Doren was of course a marvelous historian. Yes, I learned a lot from him. Who else? Antal? Antal of course was a big London figure, in a curious way, and I still admire Antal quite a lot. I wasn't one of the people who knew him or followed him. There was a little sort of group of disciples in London, I wasn't one of them. I don't like the Renaissance book, I do like the Hogarth book.³⁹ So in other words I liked and still like Antal but not in his Renaissance book. I couldn't get on with that. And people like Hauser I couldn't get on with at all. I never liked that sort of stuff.⁴⁰

A. L. - Gombrich had stated his opinions of Hauser...

M. B. - Yes, in the review.⁴¹ But that review in a sense would state the grounds for Gombrich's dislike of *Painting and Experience*.

A. L. - Continuing on with this question. You seemed to want to distance yourself from this Marxian strain. You deal with it in the 'Language of Art History' article⁴² and the disagreement between yourself and Tom Crow⁴³ at the 'Art and Society: Must We Choose?' session later published in *Representations*.⁴⁴ I was wondering if you could comment. In retrospect what do you think of this conflict, if indeed there was a conflict? Any fundamental ideological differences? I might mention Kurt Forster as well.⁴⁵

M. B. - This is all going on, what, ten years ago? I suppose I was getting a bit fed up with people insisting this is what art history should be because I always felt that there should be many different kinds of art history and I do tend to get irritated when people are normative about what should be done and what's more I was at that stage a bit irritated at being associated, being seen as part of something which I...I think is fine but I just don't want it being pushed down other people's throats.

³⁸ Alfred von Martin, *Sociology of the Renaissance*, W. L. Luetkens, trans., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1945. Originally published 1932.

³⁹ Frederick Antal, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art*, New York: Basic Books, 1962.

⁴⁰ Works translated into English include: Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, Stanley Godman, trans., New York: Knopf, 1951; *The Philosophy of Art History*, New York: Knopf, 1959; *Mannerism: The crisis of the Renaissance and the origin of modern art*, Eric Mosbacher, trans., London: Routledge and Paul, 1965; *The Sociology of Art*, K. Northcott, trans., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

⁴¹ The review in question was of Hauser's *Social History of Art* and was first published in *Art Bulletin*, 35.1, March, 1951, 79-84. It also appears in Gombrich's collection of essays *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other essays on the theory of art*, London: Phaidon, 1963, 86-94.

⁴² Michael Baxandall, 'The Language of Art History', *New Literary History*, 10.3, Spring, 1979, 453-465.

⁴³ See Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

⁴⁴ Michael Baxandall, 'Art, Society, and the Bouguer Principle', *Representations*, 12, Fall, 1985, 32- 43.

⁴⁵ Whose position on the debates of the time was stated in Kurt Forster, 'Critical History of Art or Transfiguration of Values?' *New Literary History*, 3, 1971-72, 459-470.

So this is still a bit of a problem for me and it's involved in the work I've been doing recently, and I think that my sense of urgency at the moment is not for contextualizing art history in that sense, it is to get back to the visual—not to exclude the contextualizing art history—but simply as a matter of balancing, and I think that at the moment we are weak on the visual side, so that's what that was about. Now, the Crow/Baxandall thing was, to be honest, slightly contrived I think because we each...it was to keep the thing alive [smile]. I mean Crow and I had a good time. On the other hand, the bad temper; there were some personal reasons which we need not go into which accentuated the bad temper of the *New Literary History* article. But I really was fed up with the way these people were saying that the only way you could do art history was so-and-so. So that's why that article starts off in that very bad temper.

A. L. - Another person to bring up, Carlo Ginzburg. He spent some time at the Warburg when you were there. I would like to know what your views on 'Microhistory', maybe not so much Carlo's work in particular but Microhistory in general.

M. B. - I've got a lot of sympathy with it. I like *The Cheese and the Worms* and Carlo's other things.⁴⁶ I don't know what else I can say about that because, you know, I like it, and if I had the materials to do that sort of thing I think I'd do it myself. In a way I tend that way, but not programmatically. But I like it.

A. L. - Your interests seem to lie with higher culture, or intellectuals within a culture, as with the *Orators* or *Painting and Experience*.

M. B. - Yes, I suppose it's high art. I mean it's not that I disapprove of attention to popular art or that sort of thing but I suppose what I do believe is that superior art at any rate—and one of the things that I got from Leavis is the notion that one cannot exclude evaluation from art criticism or art history—that high quality things are richer historical documents. If that is what one is using it for.

A. L. - The words 'pattern' and 'habit' recur throughout *GiOTTO and the Orators* and *Painting and Experience* as they do in many texts using relativist assumptions about the constitutive role of language. Now, by the 1980s you seem very much more aware, or more interested in addressing the problem of the role of the individual within the constitutive sea of language and images, so that the title *Patterns of Intention*, as you mention in your introduction, becomes a kind of multi-layered pun on some of the problems of your own methods and interests.⁴⁷ You say at one point that it has several meanings for you, could you comment on how you saw *Patterns of Intention* as, on the one hand, addressing problems and issues generated by your own methods, and then, was this book, more than any of the others, a book that was

⁴⁶ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller*, John and Anne Tedeschi, trans., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982. Originally published 1976; *The Night Battles: witchcraft and agrarian cults in the 16th and 17th centuries*, John and Anne Tedeschi, trans., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983; *The Enigma of Piero*, M. Ryle and K. Soper, trans., London: Verso, 1985.

⁴⁷ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention. On the historical explanation of pictures*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

a response to people, to what was going on in art history vis-à-vis their responses to you and your previous work?

M. B. - In the first instance I think I was thinking about my own work, but in particular matters, yes, it came up against other people's work. I had to deal with that—Marilyn Lavin's, for example.⁴⁸ But really what I was trying to do was getting my own mind a bit clearer in that book, because I had and have those basic positions, such as that one can't consider a painting without a sense of it having been made by a human being, and so on, this sort of thing. Which, you know, people have told me presented problems because, clearly, as soon as you start trying to do an impossible thing such as think like Chardin, and ask why he did this or that, there are complexities. So I was trying really to see what I wanted to do, where I stood. Now, many of the questions which came up were suggested to me I suppose by lines of that time, you know, *Death of the Author* time and that sort of thing. So in that sense I am addressing other people.

A. L. - Anyone in particular?

M. B. - No. I think probably insofar in that it was particular people...well, one writes to irritate partly, and I've always written to irritate partly, sometimes specific people sometimes not. And, clearly, the use of the bridge was a sort of ploy. I think with the Chardin chapter I wasn't trying to fight with anybody, I was trying to work out something myself. In the Piero chapter at the end there were left these undealt-with problems about validity and rationality, that sort of thing, and then I've always had a distaste for excessive iconography. That book was four lectures here that I gave in 1982, and it still is four lectures really. I never thought I'd write a book on how one does art history, I'll certainly never do it again, but, you know, it happened to fit at the time.

A. L. - One of the reviews of *Patterns of Intention*, by Adrian Rifkin,⁴⁹ was very odd in many ways in the manner in which it singled out your tone and attitude and so on. You had managed to antagonize and irritate someone, obviously, and there seemed to be an attempt to anachronize you, what you were doing, and perhaps anachronize the whole Warburgian tradition, with you being representative, perhaps; or you being someone who was extending its life into a period where Marxism, Feminism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis were the hot things in art history and many graduate students were turning to these methods. I was wondering, in retrospect, what were your thoughts on this? How seriously or not seriously did you take this? What did it represent to you?

M. B. - To me it represented a reaction I had often had from people in England, again, whom I still think of as highly normative people, and it is clearly a very substantial group of people. There's a paper in the new *Art History*, have you seen it? That one on Gombrich and Stokes, and there's a little section on me in the

⁴⁸ Specifically Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's 'Baptism of Christ'*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. Baxandall deals with interpretations of Piero's 'Baptism' in the last chapter of *Patterns of Intention*.

⁴⁹ Adrian D. Rifkin, 'Brief Encounters of the Cultural Kind', review of *Patterns of Intention* by Michael Baxandall, in *Art History*, 9.2, June, 1986, 275-8.

middle. It's written from Western Australia where I am apparently a sexist villain. My prose is taken apart, you'll enjoy it.⁵⁰

A. L. - Where is this again?

M. B. - The new number of *Art History*. What does one do when this happens? In a curious way what one does is play up to it, I mean one begins almost caricaturing oneself, which is a danger, because one doesn't want to accommodate these people, but it's quite strange for me now. I mean, I was writing these things back then not knowing the framework in which they would later fit in historically, and in many ways I don't like the way I've been presented in relationship to the old social art history, and I suppose I've resisted, really, by becoming a caricature of what the Rifkins claim. In a curious way one becomes more like that...

A. L. - You get pushed away.

M. B. - Yes, I mean I don't want to be...I just...I found that even at the time they were a bit of a herd.

A. L. - I think that I wrote down a phrase, something you had written in the 'Language of Art History' article, that you thought art historians had a 'good natural vulgar streak', I was wondering at whom that was directed?

M. B. - No one, but I meant it seriously. The vulgar streak is necessary, again, that element which I did get from Leavis: the desirability of an association between high culture and the vernacular.

A. L. - One of the things that I suppose that this leads to is that your position as professor of the Classical Tradition at the Warburg, probably the article you mentioned points out that you are representative of this intellectual tradition.

M. B. - Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition; there's a delicate...

A. L. - Sorry. Yes, I see that. At any rate, what do you feel is the future of that tradition? If there has been an invasion of these alternative methods that seem to be dominating. Do you have any thoughts about this?

M. B. - Thoughts about the future of the Classical Tradition or the Warburg?

A. L. - The Warburg.

M. L. - Now that I find very difficult to respond to. Because what is one referring to? The Warburg is in the first place a library with a few teachers attached. I find it very difficult to answer this without being unpleasantly sort of commonplace and smug and pious, I think there is a future for what the library represents. The library represents to me a lot of things, particularly interdisciplinary, so to speak, a disposition to expose one's self continually to things which don't fit in well with what one is doing. A whole lot of things like this. But that doesn't really answer your question because you mentioned the Classical Tradition. There, one point to

⁵⁰ Richard Read, 'Art Criticism versus Art History: The Letters and Works of Adrian Stokes and E. H. Gombrich', *Art History*, 16.4, December, 1993, 449-540. Baxandall had not read the article at the time. It's not quite as bad as he'd heard.

keep in mind is that in Hamburg, before it came to England, the Institute was called *Kulturwissenschaftlicher Bibliothek*. Now, when they came to London they thought 'culture' wasn't the word, so it is a slightly artificial contrivance, nevertheless, there is this preoccupation with the Mediterranean lands and what has come out of that, in that sense, it's not very interesting to say that yes, there is a future. But it's a difficult question, really. What is the Warburg?

A. L. - Well, I asked you that question largely for personal reasons because I feel that Warburg's original vision and of the function of the library is again reasserting itself; that it is in fact coming around full circle again—this current popularity of interdisciplinarity. We've gone through a decade and a half of worshipping sexy methodologies but also finding out their limitations in doing so. So I also believe there is a future.

M. B. - Yes, the Warburg, beyond the matters of certain sorts of themes which historically happen to have been pursued there, does stand for certain kinds of curiosity, certain kinds of energy or willingness to do things in what may not be the most immediately economical way. A whole lot of rather elusive things which I would uphold and which, in a curious way, I think anybody who uses that library, gets. It's an extraordinary place and material instrument.

A. L. - I recall Cassirer's account of his first visits.

M. B. - One of the problems now as time goes on is that the library gets bigger and things become maybe less crisp. New generations of people there interested in different things and so on, but the basic notion of four floors, with these different things in some way vertically related to one another is powerful. And, I mean, I'm sure a lot of people who go there aren't aware of this ideological structure they're moving about in. It's just a case of people working in... within physical [tape unclear]. I find it very difficult being here because having been so much at the Warburg, I don't know the names of books, and I know where books are at the Warburg. When students come to me here I can't give them the names. I know it's a green-bound book, and that's it. But, yes, the influence on me of that library is huge.

[End of first interview]

Interview with Michael Baxandall

February 4th, 1994, Berkeley, CA

A. L. - I was wondering, since we were covering a lot of ground the other day...just a chronology for my own sake. Cambridge, Italy, Switzerland, Munich, Warburg, V & A, Warburg, something like that. What years are we looking at?

M. B. - I went to Cambridge in 1951. And I was there until 1954. There was a hiatus when I came down from Cambridge—which is biographically interesting to me but won't be interesting to you—where I'd expected to go into the army for National Service and was turned down. And I bummed around for a year painting houses and reading.

A. L. - So you were a painter.

M. B. - That sort of painter. Then summer 1955 I went to Italy and spent a year there. 1955 to 1957 I spent a year teaching in Switzerland.

A. L. - Where was that?

M. B. - St. Gallen. Interesting time. I have an unpublished novel about that time, which isn't quite finished. I don't know if I'll ever finish it. Next year would be—what, 1958? 1958 to 1959? The two semesters at Munich. And then came another crisis because I had got a job teaching English at the University at Baghdad and there was a revolution in Baghdad. So that job fell through, so I arrived back around Fall in London at loose ends and got a part-time job a day and a half a week at the Warburg Institute at the photo collection, and got by with that and other things—translation—for another year and then by the next summer I had got the junior fellowship at the Warburg for two years. At the end of that I went to the V & A. I think that was in 1960. I was at the V & A for three and a half or four years.

A. L. - Was Pope-Hennessy at all...

M. B. - The keeper... I was lucky; it was an interesting department, at a good time. John Pope-Hennessy was keeper himself. John Beckwith,⁵¹ who was a medievalist, was there and Terence Hodgkins, who is still a close friend, was the third man. He dealt with eighteenth-century English and French art. Good, interesting bunch of people. And they were very good in those days. It's no longer so, but in those days in the national galleries—the big national galleries—you were really kept partly to make yourself a scholar. So they used to send me off for two months intermittently to Germany to travel around and study this and that. I used to spend mornings on chores, letters and labels and that sort of thing—seeing the public—and the afternoon learning about German sculpture. It was a good time. It's no longer like that. Then about 1964 or 1965 Gombrich asked me to go to the Warburg; they were

⁵¹ John Beckwith published several booklets on caskets and sculpture in the Victoria and Albert collection: *Caskets from Cordoba*, 1960; *The Veroli Casket*, 1962; *Ivory Carving of Medieval England 700-1200*, 1974. His books include *Coptic Sculpture 300-1300*, London: A. Tiranti, 1963; *Early Medieval Art*, New York: Praeger, 1964; and *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.

going to start a new course, an M. Phil. course on the Renaissance, and I went with a view to that as a lecturer in Renaissance Studies. And then I was at the Warburg from, it must be, say, 1964 or 1965, something like that, until I came here. And, initially, when I came here in 1986 or so, for the first couple of years I still stayed working at the Warburg. So, I did a semester here, Spring semester here, and the Fall quarter at the Warburg, then there was an early retirement offer in London which I took. Which doesn't give one enough to live on, but which means I needn't work all the time here.

A. L. - How was it that you came here? [Berkeley]

M. B. - I'd been here for a quarter—in those days this place was on the quarter system—in 1978 and I'd liked it. The reason why I came here is simply—not simply... [pause] I suppose I was in my early fifties, I'd been at the Warburg a long time and I wanted new stimulation, [it was] sort of a mid-life crisis, in a sense, of an undramatic sort. After all, I had arrived at the Warburg in 1958, I was a quarter-century around the Warburg.

A. L. - I would be interested to hear you talk about the differences between American and English students. You obviously have had much exposure to both. Is there anything you notice?

M. B. - Yes, quite a lot. First of all, this must go right back into the high schools. American students are much better in seminars. They're more willing to talk, less bashful. They know how to operate in seminars. Secondly, they often don't have some of the, for example, linguistic skills which English students have. Thirdly, the positive side of this is they're willing to learn languages much more, you know, you get students here who need Latin for the Renaissance and go for a year every morning at eight o'clock to a Latin class and at the end of a year they have perfectly usable Latin. Now that is unthinkable in England. The willingness here to throw yourself at something like this at a late stage you don't get in England. So there are two sides to it there aren't some of the skills but there's a readiness and, indeed, the equipment because in an English university you wouldn't have the crash courses in languages you have here. What else?

A. L. - Are the graduate students any younger in England?

M. B. - No, I don't think so, I don't think so. It is so that English students normally go to university when they're, say, eighteen, they do a B.A. which is normally a three-year course, so they are twenty-one when they start their graduate work. On the whole they don't take as long over their graduate degrees as American students, I think, because the English PhDs don't have coursework, or didn't, it's beginning to come in. I mean, you simply write a thesis. Which for some is very hard. It's an isolated life. People slow down. If you've no external markers, you become maybe more and more scrupulous, or over-scrupulous. So there are problems. Other differences, well, obviously European students have a sense of the history of Europe, which American students don't have. Why should they? On the other hand American students, at any rate in California, have more knowledge about Asian and Latin American especially. I think American students are rather more anxious to be

correct. I'm not talking about politically correct. I mean that in some forms but... I notice with our graduate students here in art history they're very anxious to do the right thing. You find the same in England too but my impression is that in England that the students may be in a sense be more self-indulgent. They're less preparing themselves for a vocation. They're indulging themselves. I don't mean this is bad, I rather like this, and the students I like here tend to be rather odd people who don't fit in the professional career art historian mold. Those are the main things. So it's not that one is better than the other but they are different.

A. L. - The other day you mentioned that you came from a family that had interests in the arts. Could you talk about your family?

M. B. - My father was a museum director, art museum director, before the war.

A. L. - Which museum?

M. B. - Well, before the war he was an assistant keeper of the department of art at the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, where I was born. I remember the thirties very well; all sorts of things about the thirties were important to me. I mean this was South Wales, a depressed area, my father was very active—my father was a socialist pacifist—and very active in going to the mines, settlements, educational institutes, and that sort of thing, so that was part of the life. He was much engaged in contemporary art, it was contemporary art which really interested him most. So I grew up with Roger Fry on the shelves, and then when the war came I went away to school, boarding school, so all that ambience disappeared. After the war my father went as director of the Manchester Art Galleries for about six years until my first year at Cambridge. So I went to school at Manchester Grammar School in Manchester for those years, and I'd been at boarding school during the war. And it's at Manchester that I learned my Latin and Greek, insofar as I ever did. I was never very good at that. And then he became director of the National Gallery of Scotland, which he was for years. It was a nice nexus because it was sort of aestheticism, a sort of left-wing aestheticism, a strong Quaker element. My parents weren't Quakers but a lot of our friends were Quakers and these settlements in the mining valleys were run by Quakers. And then the house was a center for a sort of socialist theater group and they used to come and stay. And, you know, this was the ambience. And part of my problem in modern art history is that this is still part of my ambience and taste, I mean I still think of myself as doing Roger Fry, you know, in a different way.

A. L. - Maybe I'll ask you this question that I was going to save until later, but you mentioned the other day that it was difficult today being a social democrat. And I was wondering if you could talk about that.

M. B. - Yes. That's very complex and difficult.

A. L. - Are you equally connected with the political situations in England and America?

M. B. - No. I've never been politically very active.

A. L. - Are you discouraged by what you see in England?

M. B. - England is in a terrible mess. For complex reasons not simply connected with factions. I mean the reasons are so complex. Yes, I am depressed. But I'm sort of a soft academic social democrat of an old-fashioned kind, and not deeply troubled in my own convictions. I don't read much politics.

A. L. - I wanted to get back to the responses you had to *Painting and Experience* because the other day you mentioned that a lot of people had accused you of bringing in the *Zeitgeist* through the back door. Now all the reviews that I read were pretty polite and fairly positive. Could you tell me more about these reactions to *Painting and Experience* and what quarters they were coming from, what forms were they taking?

M. B. - Well, it wasn't so much reviews, just reactions—and to this I had to be sensitive—particularly reactions from émigré scholars of a more elderly kind for whom...

A. L. - Gombrich?

M. B. - Yes, but he wasn't the only one. It had resonances for them, with fascism, of a kind which it couldn't have for me, because it was a whole central European, particularly German universe; people like Lamprecht; I never read Lamprecht, I still haven't read Lamprecht.⁵² The main review representing this was Ulrich Middeldorf in the *Art Bulletin*.⁵³

A. L. - Could you reflect on the German émigré scholars who had emigrated to England and whether you saw any opportunities in the confluence of the German and English intellectual traditions; a confluence which you, indeed, might be seen as representative of?

M. B. - Well I was deeply sympathetic with them and still am. I mean, the alternative was the Courtauld Institute which was not what the Courtauld Institute is now. And I saw myself as moving in with them. Now, this was complicated because I also valued very much the English art critical tradition—Fry, Ruskin, Adrian Stokes, you know, I liked—and that was a tradition that was being destroyed at that time. What was happening was a continental type art history of a professional kind, so to speak, was being formed which really destroyed both the art critical tradition and another tradition which I admire very much and still do and that is the English antiquary tradition. Often many of them were amateurs; this is especially true of medievalists and English Renaissance. I feel a bit elegiac about both these traditions which have not survived the development of art history as an academic thing. Now there was also the point that I was not an art historian. Until I came here I was never employed as an art historian. At the V & A I was an antiquary and at the Warburg I was a cultural historian, and I liked that because it meant that I was a bit outside, which was nice. Now, I think in some ways... when one talks about the continental tradition in art history and the way that it came into both America and England after the war, I mean, there were many continental art

⁵² Karl Lamprecht. German historian and historiographer. Teacher of Aby Warburg.

⁵³ Ulrich Middeldorf, review of *Painting and Experience* by Michael Baxandall, in *Art Bulletin*, 57.2, June, 1975, 284-5.

histories, there wasn't just one, there were many different kinds. There was Gombrich and Wittkower⁵⁴ and so on at the Warburg, but there was also Johannes Wilde who worked on Michelangelo and Venetian painting at the Courtauld. I don't think the transformation that happened to central European *Kunstwissenschaft* in England, I don't know about America—was altogether... well, it was not to my taste, and it still isn't. You know, the people who did this in Germany had a different sort of education from the English, if you'd had been to a German or Austrian Gymnasium you knew your Kant, if you went to an English grammar school you didn't know your Kant or Plato, or didn't know your Plato in that sense. So the hybrid seemed a bit impoverished, it still seems to me a bit impoverished. I think a lot of the virtue of the German tradition was lost and certain aspects of the German tradition were taken over without the cultural framework. Do you see what I mean?

A. L. - And have you felt at any point, or can you see your work in any way trying to correct this, to redirect or refocus...?

M. B. - No, no. Certainly not programmatically. I mean apart from anything else I don't know my Kant, and Michael Podro is one of the few people of my generation I know who does know his Kant. I suppose I come back to the sense of trying to do Leavis and Roger Fry—who are an odd pair in the first instance—with enrichment from central Europe, rather than trying to do central Europe in England. But I still think of what I do and what a lot of the art historians I like do as being art criticism rather than art history.

A. L. - Speaking of other people I thought I would go through a few names, if that's O. K. with you. I don't have so many specific questions but perhaps you could comment on your relationships with them and what you think of their work. Some of these people I know you know and others you may not know personally but I know you know of them. First, because one thing that interests me with Podro is that your work brings out a lot of philosophical issues if one reads it the way I like to. But you don't like to deal with the philosophical issues...

M. B. - I can't. I'm not equipped.

A. L. - What about Richard Wollheim.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rudolf Wittkower and Fritz Saxl, *British Art and the Mediterranean*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1948; Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, London: The Warburg Institute, 1949; Gian Lorenzo Bernini: *the sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, London: Phaidon, 1955; *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958; Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn. The character and conduct of artists*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963; *Idea and Image: studies in the Italian Renaissance*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1978; *Selected Lectures of Rudolf Wittkower*, D. Martin, ed., Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁵⁵ For books pertaining directly to art and aesthetics see Richard Wollheim, *Art and its Objects*, New York: Harper and Row, 1968. A later edition with six supplementary essays was published by Cambridge University Press in 1980. Also the *Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, Richard Wollheim, ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1972; *On Art and the Mind; essays and lectures*, London: Allen Lane, 1973; *Painting as an Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. An important early volume was *Socialism and Culture*, London: Fabian Society, 1961.

M. B. - Richard Wollheim, who as you know is here, I've always admired very much. It's not so much that his sort of preoccupation is necessarily my sort of preoccupation because I don't have a deep investment in Freudianism.⁵⁶ But he seems to me a totally benign figure; a philosopher both competent as a philosopher and yet outside and independent from it because really, in the sixties, the fifties and sixties, English philosophy was a pretty specialized business and Wollheim was really exceptional. It's difficult to realize that now how exceptional he was in maintaining a disposition to operate outside professional borders.

A. L. - Did he know Wittgenstein?

M. B. - I don't know if he knew Wittgenstein. I mean, Richard... I'm sure he must have known him but how closely I don't know.

A. L. - Another Richard, Richard Goldthwaite.

M. B. - Richard Goldthwaite I met for the first time I suppose about fifteen or twenty years ago and liked him very much and the book on the Florentine palace building campaigns is superb.⁵⁷ I suspect he deliberately sets out to try and irritate art historians. There was a symposium soon after I started coming here. It must have been around sixty-seven or sixty-eight, at the Getty, where they got together — half the people I suppose were social historians and half were art historians — to talk about the Renaissance. And there were others like Goldthwaite. And in the end...it is difficult to communicate usefully with them because of their denial of the possibility of aesthetic value as something which can be respectably treated by an historian. So, Goldthwaite: I admire his work very much indeed, but I couldn't do quite what he does because of the pushing away of the possibility of aesthetic value. For a Roger Fry man that is difficult to take!

A. L. - David Chambers and Francis Haskell.

M. B. - David Chambers came to the Institute it must have been about nineteen-seventy and we'd both written similar things without knowing of each other. He's still a good friend. He'd been at St. Andrews and had written this book, this collection of documents, I'm sure you know, which is terribly good and very useful.⁵⁸ But neither of us knew of each others' book. I can't remember the chronology but it must have been pretty close.

⁵⁶ Wollheim has written several books on Freud, including: *Sigmund Freud*, New York: Viking Books, 1971; *Freud: collection of critical essays*, Garden City, New York: Viking Books, 1974; *Philosophers on Freud; new evaluations*, Richard Wollheim, ed., New York: Anchor Books, 1977; *Philosophical Essays on Freud*, Richard Wollheim and James Hopkins, eds, Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982; *Freud*, London: Fontana, 1991.

⁵⁷ Richard Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: an economic and social history*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. See also *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence; a study of four families*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968; and *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

⁵⁸ David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance*, Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1971. See also *Cardinal Bainbridge in the Court of Rome 1509-1514*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965; *The Imperial Age of Venice 1380-1580*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich,

A. L. – Nineteen-seventy-one, wasn't it?

M. B. - Was it? Yes, it was very close. And we later for years taught a course at the Warburg which we both enjoyed doing, he did Venice and I did Nuremberg. On Renaissance society and culture. So, I mean I certainly learned things from David but I suppose it was after that book.

A. L. - And Francis Haskell?⁵⁹

M. B. - Francis Haskell I knew quite early on. He had been working abroad but he was at the Warburg quite a lot. When I was a junior fellow, which would have been late fifties, I knew his work but, again, there, I can't go all the way because of the radical relativism.

A. L. - Because he goes too far?

M. B. – It's just not what I want to do. I mean, I think he's usually right about what he says, it's simply not something I'm particularly interested in pursuing. It's less disagreement than wanting to do something on a different level. Recently I've been reading *Patrons and Painters* quite a bit because Svetlana Alpers and I have just finished our book on Tiepolo and, you know, his work on Tiepolo is superb, marvelous. Much the best thing on patronage in that period.

A. L. - You mentioned Svetlana Alpers. She published her article on Vasari, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes'⁶⁰ a couple of years before your first article in the *JWCI*.⁶¹ Was she studying there at the same time?

M. B. - Svetlana was a pupil of Gombrich's during the year Gombrich was at Harvard which was my first year as a Junior Fellow at the Warburg, and I think her Vasari article came out of her work with Gombrich, I think she says so. Svetlana had sabbaticals every six or seven years and used to quite often spend them in London, so I knew her...and she worked regularly at the Warburg, that's how I knew her. But it wasn't really until the early eighties that we saw much of each other and she was working on seventeenth-century Netherlandish stuff which I know nothing about. First Rubens then *The Art of Describing*.⁶² So in a way the Vasari connection didn't go on in her work.

A. L. - In *The Art of Describing* there seems to be some common interests.

1971; *Splendours of the Gonzaga*, David Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981.

⁵⁹ Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters; a study in the relations between Italian art and society in the age of the Baroque*, New York: Knopf, 1963. Haskell has several works on patronage, art & society, taste, and collecting. See *Taste and the Antique: The lure of Classical sculpture 1500-1900*, Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, eds, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981; and *History and its Images: art and the interpretation of the past*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

⁶⁰ Svetlana Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's "Lives"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23, 1960, 190-215.

⁶¹ Michael Baxandall and E. H. Gombrich, 'Beroaldus on Francia', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 25, 1962, 113-115.

⁶² Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing. Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

M. B. - Yes, I think Svetlana was finishing that book when I came...I came here for a month in eighty-two to give the lectures which were later *Patterns of Intention*, and I read the book in manuscript then, and that was the first time I'd seen it. And I think in her discussions of my work earlier I mean she was fairly critical. There's an article, some article.

A. L. - Well, I think there was a review of *Patterns of Intention*—there was a lot of people who didn't know how to take *Patterns of Intention*, and she published a fairly lengthy review, where was it? It was actually in a more popular type of magazine and not in a scholarly journal and it was trying to explain your objectives.⁶³

M. B. - She reviewed quite a lot at that time. No, there was something in *Critical Inquiry* in the seventies, something fairly critical, I mean it was a general article, 'Is Art History?' or something like that.⁶⁴

A. L. - Thomas Puttfarcken?

M. B. - Thomas Puttfarcken came to the Warburg in the early seventies but it might have even been the late sixties as what they called a Hamburg Fellow. Every year somebody came from the University of Hamburg to the Warburg with the Aby Warburg Fellowship given by the city, he was one of these, and we had many common interests. I like him a lot. He wrote...have you looked at his thesis on *Maßstabsfragen*?⁶⁵

A. L. - No, only his stuff on de Piles.⁶⁶

M. B. - Well, his thesis, it's on scale in pictures. He wrote it with Wolfgang Schöne. I think the library here has got it. And it's really over that I had dealings with him. By the time he wrote the de Piles book he'd already gone to Essex. He taught at the University of Hamburg and then came over to join Michael Podro at Essex, because Michael Podro had built up an interesting team there. A lot of interesting people. So the de Piles work I wasn't closely in touch with, but I did at one stage read a manuscript of the book.

A. L. - I was curious that you had mentioned that you had spent a lot of time with anthropologists at Cambridge...

M. B. - This is more in London. In the late fifties and sixties.

A. L. - These are the people through whom you got to Whorf and Herskovits?

M. B. - Not so much Whorf and Herskovits. Those I read for myself. What I think I got through them was some diffused Structuralism, you know, what we were talking about last night. I mean, I didn't realize I was getting it but I was thinking last night, after our talk, I did after all go to hear a Lévi-Strauss lecture in those

⁶³ Svetlana Alpers, 'The Historian and the Critic', review of *Patterns of Intention* by Michael Baxandall, in *The New Republic*, 195, July 14-21, 1986, 34-38.

⁶⁴ Svetlana Alpers, 'Is Art History?' *Daedalus*, 106, 1977, 1-13.

⁶⁵ Thomas Puttfarcken, *Maßstabsfragen über die unterschiede zwischen großen und klein* (Ph.D diss. University of Hamburg, 1971).

⁶⁶ Thomas Puttfarcken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

years.⁶⁷ I don't think I was acutely aware of what he stood for or how people were lining up in France, but I knew about Lévi-Strauss.

A. L. - Was this just a lecture in London?

M. B. - It was simply a lecture across the road at University College, which my anthropological friends gave me to understand might be worth hearing.

A. L. - Who were these anthropological friends?

M. B. - Well the main one was Peter Ucko, with whom I used to spend a great deal of time in those days. He went to Australia and now he's back in England but we somehow haven't re-established. He was writing a book—a book on paleolithic art with a friend of his Andrée Rosenfeld, so it's by Ucko and Rosenfeld.⁶⁸ And he was finishing a thesis on prehistoric figurines from the eastern Mediterranean on which he was conducting a big, and what has turned out to be a successful campaign against the interpretation of these as mother gods.⁶⁹ And it was through him I got to know other anthropologists. Now this, again; although this didn't happen at Cambridge, it sort of fit in with what I got from Cambridge because many anthropologists had read English at Cambridge before they became anthropologists. Jack Gody for example. An older generation, Jack Gody. I happened to see him last year in Berlin.

[tape ends, new tape]

M. B. - The break makes me think again of this whole business of how one picks ideas up, and I think it's a matter of picking up ideas in an informal way, as it were, rather than knowing one is getting Structuralism or whatever. It's informal but it's happening.

A. L. - In the articles in the *JWCI* in the sixties there was an attempt to de-centre or to refocus Alberti's *de pictura* [*On Painting*], showing what it came out of, what were some contributing factors to it. Could you comment on that project and how closely were you working with Gombrich on these articles? Because there are some affinities with, say, for example, his work on the *cassone* painter Apollonio di Giovanni.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Lévi-Strauss's most influential books had been *Tristes Tropiques*, J. Russell, trans., New York: Atheneum, 1961. Originally published 1955; and *Structural Anthropology*, Claire Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, trans., New York: Basic Books, 1963. Originally published 1958.

⁶⁸ Peter Ucko and Andrée Rosenfeld, *Paleolithic Cave Art*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1967.

⁶⁹ Peter Ucko, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece*, Occasional paper no. 24, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1968.

⁷⁰ Which Baxandall knew well since it appears in a volume of essays which Baxandall, in Gombrich's words, '...undertook the thankless task of seeing...through the press'. E. H. Gombrich, 'Apollonio di Giovanni: A Florentine *cassone* workshop seen through the eyes of a humanist poet', in *Norm and Form. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London and New York: Phaidon, 1966, 11-28.

M. B. - At that time I was doing a PhD and he was my advisor. Most of those articles were written I think—I can't remember the publication dates—but I remember writing them while I was at the Victoria and Albert Museum. But clearly they are very Gombrichian. And another thing is that at that time—again I don't know the dates, sounds stupid—but about that time, certainly the museum period, I was editing a volume of Gombrich's essays called *Norm and Form*. When Gombrich started publishing the books of essays Michael Podro edited the first one, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*,⁷¹ and I did the second one which was the Renaissance papers, excluding some iconography. So in all sorts of ways I was drawing on Gombrich. Gombrich is hugely important. You're interested in the period so let me tell you this. When *Art and Illusion* came out we were so preoccupied by it that there was a regular reading group which met in Michael Podro's apartment, where I think six, seven, eight of us went and worked it through chapter by chapter and discussed it. Gombrich was hugely important and we read him very carefully.

A. L. - One thing, again, this is going back to something you mentioned the other day, I wanted you to perhaps talk about it a little more. You said that you had wanted to do Sedlmayr's *Art in Crisis* 'honestly' without the 'trickery', could you elaborate on that a little bit more?

M. B. - Well, I suppose first of all what I wanted to do... I wanted to do art history in some depth into the relationship between cultural history and, indeed, cultural criticism. Leavis. In other words I didn't want simply to do style history I wanted to do something which connected—it sounds so banal—connected art with social culture. Sedlmayr did that, but it's not quite 'trickery', it is a reliance on big statements which to me seem, not only too big, but to be connecting terms in illegitimate ways partly metaphorical, for example one of the things he talks about is the way people have lost contact with reality, with material reality. This for him is expressed in architecture by nineteen-twenties buildings on stilts.⁷² I mean, this is an extreme case. Perhaps you ought to look at *Art in Crisis* because it was a book which got around in those days. It was very powerful in Germany. Sedlmayr. Gombrich was a student in Vienna when Sedlmayr was von Schlosser's assistant. Sedlmayr was this brilliant man who behaved rather badly in the war. He eventually, in the late thirties, got von Schlosser's chair at Vienna and had been, in so far as he'd been anything, a social democrat, but when the Nazis took over in thirty-eight he switched very quickly, and was so compromised that at the end of the war he lost his job, and he retired for some time and wrote an impressive, again flawed, book called *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*,⁷³ which hasn't been translated. Then he got the chair at Munich and became a great figure. He was a charismatic lecturer. I fell out with him. I went to his seminars, I... I... well, he was anti-English

⁷¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London: Phaidon, 1963.

⁷² Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis. The Lost Centre* [see note 19]. Baxandall is referring to the section entitled 'The Second Revolution Against Architecture: The Denial of the Earth Base' on page 104 of the English edition, where Sedlmayr criticizes the works of architects such as El Lissitzky, Ledoux, Ladowski, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright, among others.

⁷³ Hans Sedlmayr, *Die Entstehung der Kathedrale*, Graz: Akademisch Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1976.

among other things, and made anti-English remarks in his lectures for my benefit [laughter]. In my second semester in Munich I worked more with Heydenreich, who was at the *Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte*.⁷⁴

A. L. - On Renaissance architecture?

M. B. - I learned a lot there; a marvelous seminar for the whole semester on Federigo da Montefeltro, in Urbino. Simply on him. So you would spend one meeting looking at the plan of the castle working out main routes people would have taken. I did a very bad paper on the *studiolo*.

A. L. - I don't remember any citations in Luciano Cheles' book.⁷⁵

B. - [laughter] No, it was a very bad paper. But I worked hard, particularly on the German. Anyway, Sedlmayr was a huge value in Germany on a slightly middle-brow level. And I had a Danish friend in Italy who gave *Verlust der Mitte* to me to read, and which intrigued me, in a sense, that's one main reason why... that's why I... I wanted to look at Sedlmayr. But the trickery is playing with big, impersonal terms and forces and connecting them metaphorically, if you see what I mean.

A. L. - The word 'crisis' makes me think about this whole thing in the seventies about the crisis in art history and the crisis in the discipline, which is linked to the Left and what they were doing. Do you know Donald Preziosi's book *Rethinking Art History*?⁷⁶

M. B. - I really haven't read it through. I've read parts of it.

A. L. - One of the things that he mentions is that this 'crisis' is a great fabrication. Do you have any thoughts about this 'crisis' situation?

M. B. - I think I would agree with him there. I think it was a bit of a fabrication. I mean, what happened in England—and, you know, I'm not well-informed about America—what happened in England wasn't quite like that at all. There was a big expansion of academic art history in England in the sixties in two wings. One was in the art schools after a thing called the Coldstream Report⁷⁷ had to do 15% of the students' time what was called 'general studies', and what was in many cases, initially at any rate, art history; that was one thing. Then, the universities. Many universities set up departments, and there was a huge increase in the amount of art history certainly between the late fifties and the end of the sixties. Now what was done in the universities tended to be old-fashioned—I withdraw that word—tended to be art history as we knew it. Courtauld stuff. What was done in the art schools, and some Polytechnics which also had art school sections was much more varied

⁷⁴ Ludwig Heydenreich, *Leonardo da Vinci*, New York: MacMillan, 1954, among other books on Leonardo. Also Ludwig Heydenreich and Wolfgang Lotz, *Architecture in Italy 1400-1600*, M. Hottinger, trans., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974.

⁷⁵ Luciano Cheles, *The Studiolo of Urbino: an iconographic investigation*, Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1986.

⁷⁶ Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. See especially chapter one: 'A Crisis in, or of, Art History?', 1-20.

⁷⁷ After Sir William Coldstream, painter and head of the Slade School of Art. Was also chairman of the government committee on art schools. See 'New Diploma in Art and Design. Minister approves big changes in advanced courses', *The Times of London*, Wed. Nov. 23rd, 1960, 7a.

because they were much freer. In those years Michael Podro was running the department at Camberwell School,⁷⁸ and I taught there, I taught in other art schools too. I was delighted to. It was much more varied because you didn't have to teach the dates, that sort of thing, and my impression is that what was later presented as a crisis was an after the fact reading in the light of sixty-eight and some ideas that came out... or didn't come out of but became more prominent, current, after sixty-eight. And after the fact, reading back of this. I'm not putting this very well. I was never aware, I must admit, of what I would call a crisis in art history, I mean a chaos in art history, yes, but a crisis in the sense of a debate, I must have been somewhere else when that happened. I mean what is a crisis?

A. L. - I was interested because of Preziosi's comments but also I think it was in sixty-eight that Perry Anderson wrote his essay on the 'Components of the National Culture' in which he talked, speaking as an English Marxist, about English intellectuals typically isolating themselves from the continent.⁷⁹ I mean, nothing really happened in 1968 in London that was close to what happened in Paris.

M. B. - I was there and I saw the only big incident that did happen, and it was absolutely minimal.

A. L. - What do you remember of that time? How did you respond to these French students.

M. B. - I was very badly informed about France at the time. I should have informed myself better than I did. One knew what was going on in Germany. One was much more aware of what was going on in Germany because that took place in the universities in a way that was clearer than in France.

A. L. - Rather than in the streets.

M. B. - Yes, so the whole business of the formation of the *Ulmer Verein*,⁸⁰ which was the union of the radical art history students, that sort of thing, one was much more aware, and this is, you know... it's so easy in looking back to sort of present one's ideas and positions as clearer than they really were. In fact, one learnt things indirectly. One's friends were caught in the middle, so my friends were not on the whole the radicals at that time. At that time I remember my feeling for the people who were desperately trying to keep some sort of sanity going between what one felt was momentary radical enthusiasm and the awful dinosaurs, who, there were then, as there still are, quite a lot of them. And many of that generation were destroyed; the sort of liberals of good will in the middle. It was a classic case of these people being squeezed. So to be honest that was very much at the front of my feelings at that time. The English causes were so, sort of, marginal. 'sixty-eight', as it were, didn't really happen as such in sixty-eight in England; things happened afterwards which came out of this.

⁷⁸ Camberwell School of Arts, London.

⁷⁹ Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, 50, July-August, 1968, 3-57.

⁸⁰ For which see the following collection of documents and articles: *Kunstgeschichte gegen den Strich gebürstet? 10 Jahre Ulmer Verein 1968-1978. Geschichte in Dokumenten*, H. Hammer-Schenk, D. Waskönig, and G. Weiss, eds, Hannover: Ulmer Verein Verband für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaften, 1979.

A. L. - Perhaps to shift the emphasis again. You spoke very longingly about the Warburg library the other day. I'd like to hear about the library's importance to you and to other people who have been connected to it intimately like you. It's a very singular type of institution. Maybe for those who don't have that connection it might seem somewhat mystical or something.

M. B. - Have you ever been there?

A. L. - I've never been there.

M. B. - People when they first go there are a bit intimidated because it seems initially that it's going to be very confusing to find their way around. It's an open access library. Apart from the periodicals in the basement and a reading room in the ground floor—there are four floors. Now, the original theory was that there should be order both horizontally and vertically. This of course is an extension of what the original Warburg library in Hamburg was. But you have the first floor visual; the second floor, broadly speaking, literary; the third floor magic and science; fourth floor, social patterns. And, although it doesn't work actually physically anymore, there are notional correspondences going on. For example, I did a quite lot of work on rhetoric and I taught rhetoric and dialectic at the Warburg. Now it used to irritate me but it was good for me that to find the books for that I had to go to the second floor on literary criticism, another section on the second floor on humanism, historiography section on the fourth floor, where a lot of the standard texts on rhetoric were, and so on. Which means that one is encouraged to move about. I suppose looking at it from an art historical point of view the absolute opposite of the Warburg library is the Princeton art history library. Have you ever seen that? Now that is the snuggest, most perfect, insulated art history library in which it must be immensely economical to do art historical jobs. But the virtue of the Warburg library, apart from being open access—among various other things like having a lot of old German books—lies in this structure in which one keeps on stumbling across things and making connections.

A. L. - It encourages Warburgianism.

M. B. - Yes. I mean, many people do use it in a non-Warburgian way. But I think many people who go there, with a view to do some specific job, are 'Warburgized' or something once they do it. It's not a huge library and it's certainly not a great art history library.

A. L. - You mentioned Princeton, and you had mentioned some admiration for John Shearman.

M. B. - I liked the Mannerism book.⁸¹

A. L. - What do you like about it?

⁸¹ John Shearman, *Mannerism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967. See also *Andrea del Sarto*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965; *The Vatican Stanze: functions and decorations*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972; John Shearman and Marcia Hall, *Science in the Service of Art History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; *Only Connect: art and the spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

M. B. - Well the pride and joy of the Courtauld suddenly breaking loose and going out and being interesting! [laughter] I like Shearman a lot. He is interested in music and knows a lot about music so he used it in the Mannerism book. I also like a lot of his very detailed work, like his work on colour in Leonardo I think is marvelous work. It's astonishing that his PhD thesis has never been published as such, I mean some of it has come out as articles but...

A. L. - A person who has dealt with some things like colour and optics is Samuel Edgerton.⁸²

M. B. - I met Sam Edgerton when he was quite young. I didn't know him well. I run into him every now and again. I like his work, but I suppose his particular enterprise on the relationship of a certain kind of science to painting isn't quite what I want to do, I have always been a bit frightened of the whole perspective discourse and I've never mastered it. I've never mastered perspective, so I'm not in a position to read critically these books.

A. L. - I would be interested to know, because obviously I'm interested here in the intellectual history of art history; if you think that art historians should be interested in this sort of thing. For instance if you could detach yourself from this situation, and a student had come to you and wanted to do a dissertation on a living art historian.

M. B. - I suppose I would've asked what this was a way of doing, in other words what was the project, what was the deep project. I suppose I'd have asked if doing this was a way of thinking about the problems of art history. And if so what these problems were. I tend, when people come and say they want to work on something, to ask what the issue is, I mean this comes from teaching rhetoric and dialectic for years I do think very much in terms of classical theory of issues. So I suppose I would press the person who came to formulate the issues of the thesis. I might then ask them why they are not addressing those issues a bit more directly. Not because I feel all issues should be addressed directly, I mean, often my own work in a sense is addressing issues through cases, which means you never really handle these fully, as a responsibility to a case. I suppose that'd be it. Read Quintilian on issues, I tell all my students to read Quintilian.

A. L. - You are doing more work today on attentiveness and optics?

M. B. - Yeah, I have slipped into that sort of thing.

A. L. - Why do you say 'slipped'?

M. B. - Well it's a matter of...I mean you're interested in art history, I don't see myself quite as an art historian. I see myself as a cultural historian who works with visual things.

⁸² Samuel Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery on Linear Perspective*, New York: Basic Books, 1975. See also *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985; *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: art and society on the eve of the scientific revolution*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. An article on colour is 'Alberti's Colour Theory: A Medieval Bottle Without Renaissance Wine', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32, 1969, 109-134.

A. L. - I don't fit in very well either, apparently.

M. B. - No. So what interests me a lot at the moment... in a sense I see it as circular, and some people attack me for forsaking the contextual circumstance in art history. I don't see this, I see myself as being three-quarters the way around a circle at the end of which I hope I shall be able to say something better about the picture. So what interests me a lot at the moment is this visual perception, again, I'm doing this really through cases. What will come out of the visual attention stuff I don't know, but it's already involved in other things now. Svetlana and I finished our Tiepolo book in December⁸³ and I also finished a book on shadows, on shadows and light, the visual attention comes into that very powerfully, the whole question of how far one tends to shadows and what this is.⁸⁴

A. L. - You mean shadows in paintings or real shadows?

M. B. - All of them. Paintings come into it. It's not specifically about paintings it's about eighteenth-century notions about shadows, modern notions about shadows, how shadows come into art, problems with shadows, that sort of thing.

A. L. - When is this coming out?

M. B. - The Tiepolo is due out in September but it's being rushed. The shadows won't be out until the end of the year. But what I shall do... I've more or less decided not to do a direct big book on visual attention as such, but I want to do three or four long pieces of writing on pictures and I think I shall do the attention thing in that form.

A. L. - O. K. That's all my questions. Thank you.

[End of interview]

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⁸³ Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

⁸⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Shadows and Enlightenment*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.