

ORAL HISTORY OF STUART EARL COHEN

Interviewed by Betty J. Blum

Compiled under the auspices of the  
Chicago Architects Oral History Project  
The Ernest R. Graham Study Center for Architectural Drawings  
Department of Architecture  
The Art Institute of Chicago  
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## PREFACE

May 1976—the war of architectural ideas erupts in Chicago! The battle was launched in a pair of exhibitions, each presenting its own view of Chicago's architectural history. In one, *100 Years of Architecture in Chicago*, Mies and his followers were presented as the legitimate and sole heir of the renowned first Chicago School, a popularly held view that had the support and validation of respected historians such as Sigfried Giedion and Nicholas Pevsner. The other more catholic exhibition, *Chicago Architects*, sought to explode the exclusive view of the first exhibition to include many architects who had long been forgotten or deliberately excluded. This revisionist point of view was organized and presented by several disparate architects, soon to become known as the Chicago Seven, and documented in the exhibition's catalog written by Stuart Cohen.

How and why this unprecedented, startling confrontation took shape, the strategy of the Chicago Seven that followed and its effect on the architectural community in Chicago is the story that Stuart Cohen tells. He was in the advance guard of the Chicago Seven and was known as the resident academic. The events spearheaded by the Chicago Seven are set in the framework of Cohen's tripartite career: that of writer, educator and practitioner. Cohen remembers his engagement in the activities of the Chicago Seven as one of the important challenges in his career.

To record Stuart's story of people and events, we met in his office in Evanston on three consecutive sessions, May 27, 28 and 29, 1998, where we tape-recorded ten and one-half hours of his recollections on 7 ninety-minute cassettes. The transcription has been minimally edited to maintain the spirit, tone and flow of Stuart's original narrative and has been reviewed for accuracy and clarity by both Stuart and me. The selected references are in three categories: those of general interest about the Chicago Seven, articles written by Cohen on various topics, and articles written by others about Cohen's work. Cohen's oral history is available for study in the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at The Art Institute of Chicago as well as on The Art Institute of Chicago's web page.

I am grateful to Stuart for his cooperation in scheduling our recording sessions and his candid and thorough narrative of the events and people of this pivotal time in his career

and in the history of Chicago architecture. Special thanks go to the Graham Foundation for Advanced Study in the Fine Arts for funding this group project. My appreciation goes to my colleague, Annemarie van Roessel, for her thoughtful judgement in transcribing the tapes, her skillful shaping of the final form of this document, and for her general cooperation throughout this project.

Betty J. Blum

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Stuart Earl Cohen

Blum: Today is May 27, 1998, and I'm with Stuart E. Cohen in his studio in Evanston. Stuart was born in Chicago and received his architectural education at Cornell and early on embarked on a triple-headed career: you write, you teach, and you build. You were the youngest member of the Chicago Seven, a group of Chicago architects who came together in the 1970s to challenge the mainstream of modernist architecture. Stuart is the author of the important and influential catalogue, *Chicago Architects*, that accompanied an exhibition of the same name in 1976. Since then he has been recognized as a vocal intellectual influence. Among those of the Chicago Seven, you were thought of as the resident academic. All of this occurred at a time of unprecedented disenchantment and ferment, a time when the status quo was under fire from almost all sectors of American life. May we begin with your earliest recollections of what led you to architecture and then work our way through your experiences to the time of the Chicago Seven? You were born in Chicago in 1942?

Cohen: Yes, in Chicago.

Blum: I've seen the E. in print so many times but never your full name. What does it stand for?

Cohen: Earl.

Blum: Was your father connected to architecture or construction in any way?

Cohen: No, my dad was kind of a minor mathematical genius. He was trained as an accountant but he actually never really worked as a certified public accountant. He worked for my grandfather who owned some hotels and



other kinds of property, so my dad was involved in hotel and property management. One early memory of him is that he—we grew up in Winnetka and we moved there when I was five from the North Side of Chicago—he rode the train, the North Western, every single day. He rode from downtown and back and at the end of the day, he would give my mother ten dollars and he would give me a dollar or two, these were his gin rummy winnings. I asked my father as a little kid, "How come you always win and how come the people you're always taking money from want to play cards with you every afternoon?" He said, "Well they're sort of a captive audience and we have a regular game because there's nothing else to do for forty-five minutes on the train." Then I asked him how he always won at gin. He said, "Well, I remember every card that's picked up and discarded and I calculate the odds of drawing what I need to complete my hand." So my dad was one of those guys who could do three, four, five-digit long division in his head. I don't know that I inherited any of that, in fact I can't add two and two to get four. It's probably because my memories of my dad when I wanted his attention were that he was always going through ledger books. He used to bring them home with him at the end of the day. My mother always wanted to be an artist. She went to Northwestern University. She wanted to go to art school but my grandfather, who was a sort of an old Viennese gentleman, told her that she could not and that no one in the family would be an artist.

Blum: Why was that?

Cohen: For the same reason that he told my uncle that he was going to go to law school and made him go. He was very patriarchal. There were proper things that girls did and teaching was one of those things, so my mother actually went through, but never completed a degree in education at Northwestern. She wanted to be an art teacher.

Blum: Well, she sort of blended her wish with his. Was being an artist too bohemian in your family's opinion?

Cohen: Absolutely. Gypsies were artists, as far as my grandfather was concerned. I think that my mother was always sad that she had never done anything professionally or even at a personal level. My memories as a little kid were that I was always drawing things. My mother and I would sit down together at the table and make drawings of things. At a certain point, what I was drawing as a little boy was machinery. I actually continued doing that through high school.

Blum: What kind of machinery?

Cohen: Airplanes mostly. Also rockets. I took lots of science at New Trier High School. I actually wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. When I applied to colleges, initially I thought that maybe I would want to go to someplace like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). But I actually wasn't entirely sure. I had done all the kind of pre-engineering math and science stuff, but I was also always taking drawing courses.

Blum: Did you ever know an architect or what an architect did?

Cohen: I did, actually. That's sort of part of the story. My parents had a big old house on Scott Street. At a certain point, they sold the house and for a couple of years moved into some modern townhouses at the corner of Westmore and Green Bay Road designed by an architect named Herman Lackner. Herman, at that point, must have been in his mid-forties. He lived in one unit and we rented the other unit and the unit next to us was where his mother and her spinster sister lived. I was actually incredibly taken with this townhouse that we lived in. I think it was probably the first time that I had ever thought about architecture as something that somebody had planned out and thought about. It had things that were enormously clever in the planning.

Blum: So you met Herman then?

Cohen: Absolutely, he was our next-door neighbor. He is such a wonderful, wonderful guy. I think he is a very talented architect. Anyway, the house

had just wonderful, very imaginative features. It was a three-bedroom house. My bedroom had a door out on to a roof deck on top of the garage. So as a teenage kid, I had a suite with a roof terrace, which I just loved. On the second floor, there was no circulation, there was a straight-run stair that came up to a tiny vestibule with a very large skylight that sat over almost the entire area, so that as you walked up the stairs you looked up and out through the ceiling, which I thought was fabulous. There were other very clever things that he had done that I was just aware of as part of the planning of this house. I had decided by the time I was a teenager that I wanted to study mechanical engineering. Probably the best advice that I ever had, because I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do, was from a friend of my dad's. He had been dean of some small school of engineering somewhere, and my dad had wanted me to talk to him. What this guy said that made so much sense was, "Look, if you're not one hundred percent sure that you want to do engineering, instead of going to someplace like MIT or Cal Tech, you should go to a really good university that has a really fine school of engineering. That way if you want to transfer out of the school of engineering, you don't have to change universities." It made perfect sense to me. I applied to a whole bunch of places, including Harvard and MIT, just to see if I'd get in, and I didn't. Then I applied to Cornell and Michigan and Berkeley and got in to those places. Michigan was too close to home and Berkeley was way too far away, and I thought that Cornell was Ivy League and that was something that I wanted to do, so I went to Cornell. Actually I did a year of mechanical engineering and decided that it was so dull I couldn't stand it and that I had probably made the wrong decision because Cornell had an enormous emphasis in the engineering department on preparing people for managerial positions as opposed to research or applied engineering. The other thing that I figured out was that to do what I wanted to do required math that was clearly beyond me. And all the people in engineering were so boring, it was tragic. These were the days when people wore K and E slide rules in leather holsters on their belts. They were these really big slide rules, twelve inches long, and everybody had them, because the bigger the slide rule the more calibrations you could get and the better your answers were. They were bulky to carry around and you could buy the equivalent of belt holsters.

It looked like you were carrying a Colt .45, because it was twelve inches long and it hung down from your belt and everybody wore them on the side. I thought, Oh my god, between the holstered slide rules and the pencil protectors, I just had to get out of there. There was no one I met in engineering that had any interests outside of engineering. It was just not for me. I did very well in my courses and then applied to the school of architecture at Cornell. I was in engineering for one year. Cornell had a five-year architecture program and I knew nothing about it except that a guy from my high school had gone there. So I used to start going over there. It looked fabulous to me, it looked like play. They did art projects, and I said, Oh my god, this is what I want to do.

Blum: How did your family react to that decision?

Cohen: Everybody was fine with it. One of my early memories is asking my mother if I could be an artist and my mother saying, No, it's almost impossible to make a living being an artist, why don't you be an architect because they're sort of like artists. I don't think I ever really thought about that again until I was thinking about what I might do after I got out of engineering at Cornell. It was the fact that what the architects did looked so enticing. The freshman class was in the basement of Sibley Hall—I think they stopped them from doing this in later years because of the fire regulations—and they used to create a kind of Kurt Schwitters-like environment out of this basement space by collaging, pasting, and building on every single surface. It was like going into this amazing cave.

Blum: Was that an architectural *merzbau*?

Cohen: Yes. Here was this studio that had been altered in this way and I just thought, god, this is fabulous, I could do this all day long, what fun. I applied and I was actually very nervous because they only took one or two transfer students and the year I was applying they had had something like thirty applications for transfer for what turned out to be three positions. I was just very lucky that I got in. The fluke of it is that I didn't know what I

was getting into. I had no idea who the people teaching there were or what the education was like or how extraordinary the education would be. As it turns out, two of my teachers, Colin Rowe and Werner Seligmann, have now received the Topaz Medallion, which is the AIA/ACSA's highest award for achievement in education. The group of people who were teaching there were people who have subsequently come to be known as the Texas Rangers. They were extraordinary. Certainly, I would say that Rowe is a genius, and Lee Hodgden, who had a huge impact on my undergraduate education, is a genius. Then I think that Werner Seligmann and John Shaw are among some of the smartest people that I've had the privilege of meeting. They were all incredibly focused, clear, analytical teachers who could actually say, "Look, here's something to think about and here's why," or, "That doesn't work and might not produce something that would look good and here's why I think that," or, "Here's the set of ideas that I'm using as criteria for making this judgment." It was such an amazing education. At a certain point I knew people who were in schools of architecture elsewhere and we would compare notes. I understood that I was getting a different kind of education as a result of the way these people thought about and analyzed and talked about and considered architecture, that architecture was not based just on things and how you made them, but based on ideas that had an historical continuity to them. That was a very, very strong message.

Blum: Did the education, as it unfolded through these instructors, confirm your impression of what you would ultimately do as an architect? You went in thinking that you were going to draw and do fun stuff. Did something else happen?

Cohen: I was absolutely passionate about architecture as an art. The curriculum was extraordinary; not only did we have these people who were so intellectually high-powered, but we were required to take two full years of drawing and painting and sculpture.

Blum: Just as a fine arts student would.

Cohen: Yes. We had one required course in fine arts each semester for two years. Then I took photography and printmaking and one more painting course, so I took three more semesters. Tom Beeby once said that the extraordinary thing was that we all left Cornell willing to die or at least starve for our art, that we all thought that what we were doing was making art and that we felt about it and the sacrifices it would require of us in the same way that the kids in fine arts felt.

Blum: Did you ever think about transferring out to fine arts?

Cohen: No, I wanted to be an architect. I would have been a horrible artist, but if I'd really had talent in that direction, I might have.

Blum: Did you see your role as an artist-architect?

Cohen: I didn't think that there was any other kind. Well, maybe I shouldn't say that. I thought that architecture was about what you saw and experienced, what the quality of the thing was and the way it affected you perceptually. In fact, Lee Hodgden, who was there, had all of us reading Gestalt and perceptual psychology. There were a handful of us who took all of the 100- and 200-level psych courses because there were one or two people who eventually went to Columbia who were teaching at Cornell who were really famous, like James Gibson, who had written one of the classic texts on how we perceive things and the senses as perceptual systems and cognitive intelligence [*The Perception of the Visual World*, 1950]. We all wanted to take courses with these guys, who were only teaching 300- and 400-level courses, so we suffered through all the basic psych courses so we would be able to take these seminars. There was this idea that architecture was about what you saw and what you experienced and the making of a three-dimensional environment that affected people psychologically. Then, on the other hand, it was the history of ideas that were embedded within art and the larger society and culture, and that those ideas over time had related to them in formal systems and compositional systems.

Blum: That sounds very theoretical.

Cohen: It is until you sit down and start to make something of it.

Blum: But what happens in putting the pieces together? Do they fit, do they hold up in translation?

Cohen: You want to know what happened? I think that most of the people I went to school with either survived or were destroyed. What do I mean by that? Well, we were given analytic skills that were probably so superior to what anybody else was getting that we actually—and we all understood this—we were being invited to measure what we could do not against our fellow students but against Frank Lloyd Wright, Aalto, Mies, Le Corbusier, even Michelangelo. One of the things that I think was extraordinary about Colin Rowe as an educator is that he never actually taught you things, he would point you at things and facilitate your learning them. For years after I left Cornell, I would think about things that Colin said to me that I didn't understand. Someone had once sort of jokingly asked Colin who he thought the greatest architects of all time were and he said, "Of course, Michelangelo, Borromini, and Le Corbusier." We asked about his choice of Borromini. He said, "Well, between Michelangelo and Le Corbusier, Borromini was the architect who best understood the intentions of Michelangelo." That suddenly put everything in perspective, that Michelangelo was this giant and that everything that happened subsequently was somehow related in his mind back to Michelangelo. It took me years to actually figure out what that actually meant, what the relationship between the mannerist and plastic qualities of Borromini's work and Le Corbusier's work were, the compositional idiosyncrasies that made the work unique, but that in his mind he related them and, in turn, related them back to Michelangelo. So here we all were primed but without the ability to make things that were particularly good or brilliant. I know that for me to survive that education, I needed to personally come to grips with the fact that I wasn't a genius and that I wasn't going to do work of the stature, quality, or impact of Le Corbusier, for instance. He was the twentieth-century architect whose work was used

constantly as a teaching example with respect to ideas about creating space and the way in which form could continue in the absence of decoration, as linguistic systems of form and continue to carry meaning. We just needed to deal with that. Some people did, and some people didn't. An extraordinarily high number of people who came out of Cornell went on to teach, although I've never done a comparison with Harvard or Yale, which probably also have high numbers of people teaching. One of the things that we all learned to do was to think about architecture in a way that allowed us to communicate ideas about architecture. I think essentially all you have to do is figure out the interpersonal skills part of it, to know when students are learning and when they're not, and then you can teach. There was also one teacher there, Werner Seligmann, who had a practice, and he did maybe a building a year, not very much. Werner would show his work in lectures and talk about it in exactly the same terms as he would talk about work by Schinkel and Le Corbusier and whoever. Werner was talking about compositional ideas related to facades and vertical planes. He would talk about centering and compositional ideas that involved multiple symmetries, he would talk about layers, he would talk about cubist painting and the relationship of the structure of the shallow cubist space to the facade of a building. Then he would show the science building he did at Cortland State University or at Syracuse and talk about the way in which he had designed the facade of the building and the proportional and compositional systems. They were the same ideas being described. It occurred to me that here was this person, by limiting his practice and being selective about it, who had managed to make architecture that met these criteria. We all understood that all great architecture was somehow supposed to meet these criteria, that it had ideas and you could talk about them in those terms, that you could internally generate the criteria for evaluating the work based on what the ideas in the building were. I think in many ways, Werner, who has just received the Topaz Medallion, is a kind of model. I left and I thought I could practice architecture the way I wanted to and make things that were as good as I could make them, but I needed some way to support myself, because, clearly, nobody pays you to do this. So, I thought, what would I like to do for my second job: bag groceries at Dominick's or wash dishes? Why don't I



try to get a job teaching? So eventually, I did. I actually stayed at Cornell to do a master's degree with Colin Rowe. Cornell was a five-year education and the Vietnam War was sort of winding down and it occurred to me that I hadn't been drafted yet and I could probably miss it if I went to graduate school. Rowe had started a fairly new program in urban design which looked very interesting. Well, the opportunity to spend six or seven hours a day with this guy was just very intriguing. He was just the most extraordinary person I'd ever met.

Blum: Before you move on, you spoke about your training at Cornell in how to think and understand the ideas behind architecture. There was a study that I read about that you and Martha Pollack conducted. Would you explain?

Cohen: Well, we started to do it and we actually reached a sort of impasse and we had a falling out that involved in a major way what the study was about.

Blum: I thought that the focus was to determine the relationship between Cornell's education and the fact that so many of the graduates went on to teach.

Cohen: That's what I thought it was too.

Blum: What was the connection?

Cohen: We never actually got that far. We had difficulties working together, I think is the best way to put it. We had interviewed a whole bunch of people and we had sent out a questionnaire, which we had argued about the questions on. She had involved her then-husband, Marco Dinini, who did statistical stuff and taught at Northwestern. He ended up doing both the analysis and most of the questionnaire. I was really very unhappy with the questionnaire. Then she simply unilaterally went ahead and did the mailing. We had differed about who this would get mailed to and I don't even remember anymore, but the demographics of the mailing were very different than what I had wanted. I had wanted it to go to people who were the educators and it was to find out why they had gone into education. But she had done a

general mailing to try and figure out of a general sampling what percentage had gone into teaching.

Blum: But you understood from the beginning that a high percentage had gone into education?

Cohen: Yeah, that was the premise.

Blum: You wanted to know why?

Cohen: Yes, and she wanted to know the percentage. But that was nonsense because we had an alumni catalog and you could go through and read each entry and everyone who was teaching had entered that fact there. Our study just sort of fell apart. So we each took the documentary material. At that point I was teaching and I had a practice and I said, Well, was I really ever going to do anything with this? What I did with it was to give it to Alex Caragonne. I gave him the entire package and he read through all of it. Pieces of some of the interviews are quoted in Alex's book, *The Texas Rangers*, and in the postscript on their impact on the next generation, the students who had become prominent as educators. So it actually did something. It wasn't all lost.

Blum: When you were in school there was no residual of the Beaux-Arts method. Had the computer made its mark in your classes yet?

Cohen: No, there were no personal computers. They were all mainframes that were programmed by punching holes in cards. One of my roommates was an engineer and he would carry around stacks of punch cards and they would go crazy because the whole thing failed if the entire sequence didn't run. So if you had one wrong key stroke or had something out of sequence... I have nightmares about going to give a lecture and handing a slide carousel to someone and having them drop it and all the slides fall out and the lecture doesn't exist anymore. Here were these guys with two hundred punch cards

and if somehow they tripped and the box spills, their work is lost. Although I'm sure the cards were numbered somehow.

Blum: You talked about drawings, but what about models? Were they part of your experience?

Cohen: You can see by looking around the office here that we do models at every single scale, including interior models at half-inch. I still think that it's the best way to look at a complex three-dimensional thing, whether it's an object or a space. I had a really good friend at Cornell who would make these sketches and everyone would think that he was far behind and then in the last few days before the project was due he would come in with this plan drawing and this amazing model. I once asked him about it and he said, "I sort of figured out this process because I could never get anywhere designing just on paper and the minute I had the floor plan figured out, I would draw it on cardboard, cut it out, and then decide the height of the first floor and start cutting out strips of stuff that were walls, and then I'd cut the windows in, knowing that the windows could be continuous openings or just holes, then I would look at the window opening in relation to the space behind it, because I could see both simultaneously, and I would figure out where the vertical continuities would be, and then I'd build outward from those main pieces and work back and forth between the plan and the model."

Blum: So he was thinking in three-dimensions.

Cohen: Yes, and the models were amazing. They looked like someone had cut them apart and rebuilt them five hundred times. And that was in fact his process. He would make a sketch of the elevation of a building and then he would cut it out and then he'd put it on the model. Then he'd look at it from the outside in and then from the inside out. Then he'd start changing it by cutting new openings and pasting things on it and eventually when it got so trashed it wasn't useful anymore, then he'd make a new one. So I tried this method and my ability and my grades took this enormous leap and I suddenly found that what I wasn't ready to visualize in my mind yet I could construct a piece at a

time in three dimensions and make much better decisions about it than if I'd only worked in two dimensions. This is something that Stanley Tigerman once said, that the two people practicing in the city of Chicago who saw in three-dimensions and made extraordinary spaces were myself and Ken Schroeder. Helmut wasn't about making space. Tom Beeby's work wasn't about making amazing, complex spaces. In fact, years ago, I took Tom through the Carrigan townhouse, which was this kind of miniature thing and really complex spatially. It was my and my ex-partner's homage to the Sir John Soane Museum in London. Tom looked around and said, "Sort of like Soane." Then he got visibly more and more uncomfortable in it because I think it was too idiosyncratic because it was too miniaturized and too complex. I think he was starting to look claustrophobic in there and I took him out.

Blum: Did it have that effect on you?

Cohen: No, not at all. Making miniaturized, complex things didn't seem to bother Frank Lloyd Wright at all, he just did it. It reflects the extent to which our work is autobiographical, I'm little and neurotic and complicated. It's there in my work. Maybe that's the way in which we are all artists. I think really and truly that the ability to visualize and to make things that are complex spatially came out of the fact that rather than trying to develop those skills in drawing, at a very early point I developed those cognitive skills in models. That had an effect on the way I taught. Many years later when Tom was head of the department at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), I was asked to do a first-year graduate course. For me it was like, how do you take people who are at a standstill and move them to flying speed? The problem is that they would only have three years. There was no two-mile long runway; we're talking a battleship with a flight deck of two hundred feet. You know you have to catapult them. What I did was to construct a course in which they had to design things, we did these three-dimensional exercises which they were forced to do in model and then they made these drawings of them in plan, elevation and section to document them.

Blum: So you were working backwards in a way.

Cohen: Right, because the drawing is very complex and hard to visualize something that exists in space. Everybody always teaches people to do drawings first. You can ask a student to go out and make a drawing of an existing building and they go out and make you a beautiful drawing. But ask them to make a drawing of something they're designing and they make a perfectly crummy drawing. I just thought I could teach these skills and develop them cognitively by just reversing the process. I know it works because I believe it was why I learned to do what I could do. So I did models in school and the model making has carried through everything that I've done professionally. Clients love them and we really use them.

Blum: It was my impression that Mies taught architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) through model making and that drawing was not nearly so important. Were you aware of Mies during the time that you were in school?

Cohen: Actually, I would say not really. I think my awareness of IIT as a teaching method and a specific curriculum really was the result of being friendly with Tom during the years that he was teaching at IIT and we just talked about our curriculum and IIT's curriculum. The joke was that at the end of it Tom would just say, "Yeah, well it's better to send them out knowing something than to send them out knowing nothing."

Blum: But this was at a much later date.

Cohen: Sure, this was in the 1970s.

Blum: If you weren't aware of what was happening at IIT while you were at Cornell, were you at least aware of Mies and his work?

Cohen: Well, let me put this differently. I was certainly aware of Mies and of what Chicago was about. I was very aware of what was going on across the country in the profession. When I say I wasn't aware of Mies, I mean I wasn't

aware of what the curriculum and the teaching methods behind that were. I understood that people came out of IIT and they made buildings that looked like Mies's work, but I didn't understand why that was, because none of them were emulating Mies. The teaching curriculum was much more intelligent than that, which we can talk about a little later when we talk about education in Chicago. But my awareness of Mies was probably one of the reasons that I didn't choose to come back to Chicago when I finally graduated from Colin's urban design program. I knew that I wasn't interested in doing really large buildings and corporate architecture. The kind of culture of architecture that seemed to exist in Chicago revolved around specific kinds of work and specific kinds of commissions. The serious architects in Chicago were Mies and C. F. Murphy and SOM in the 1950s and 1960s.

[Tape 1: Side 2]

Cohen: I didn't see where my interests would fit in. I had sort of an apprenticeship where I would go to learn to do or be involved in the kinds of things that interested me and that I wanted to do. Cornell, because it's closer to New York and Boston and Philadelphia than it is to the Midwest or the West Coast, really had a preponderance of people from the East Coast there as lecturers and visiting critics. It seemed to me that there were lots of small firms in New York doing interesting work and this was based on people who came through to lecture and based on reading architectural magazines each month. I thought about it and decided that I wanted to go to New York. It was really funny because at that point, Cornell didn't have a study abroad program. They were in the process of gearing up to do one in Rome, which they did after I graduated. So for a short time, they actually had an optional semester that you could take in New York City. I did that and the architecture part of it wasn't so interesting, but I had an art course with a guy called Allan Atwell that was phenomenal. It was where I learned to draw. We did all the drawing exercises out of the Nicolaides book, *A Natural Way to Draw*, which was the basis for the book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. We did all those exercises and it was a phenomenal experience. Suddenly here we all were, independent of how well we could draw, halfway

through the course and we were making genius drawings, extraordinary line drawings that looked like Picasso drawings. Then we did a seminar with Alan Solomon who had been the director of the Jewish Museum and who was at the peak of his career because he had just organized the American section of the Venice Biennale where Rauschenberg had taken the first prize. Rauschenberg came into the seminar to talk to us and Jim Dine came in to talk to us. We went to Andy Warhol's factory, the loft in the East 50s where he had the whole space covered in tin foil and we saw Paul Morrissey's porno movies that Warhol had produced. It was an extraordinary experience. I thought that New York was twenty-four hour non-stop cultural and visual stimulation. I said to myself, There are small architectural firms here doing the scale work that I'm interested in and so I'll move to New York. And I did.

Blum: In the architecture courses that you took, what texts did you use?

Cohen: There weren't texts per se.

Blum: Had you read Venturi's book that came out in 1966?

Cohen: Venturi's book came out when I was in graduate school. I remember reading the thing and thinking that this is really very interesting because this guy looks at history the same way that Rowe and Hodgden and Seligmann do. They were constantly using historical examples to illustrate things that they thought were of contemporary relevance, like how you'd solve this problem or how you'd manipulate something in plan. They were reintroducing the idea of precedent, that when you went to solve something, you weren't simply ever starting from scratch, that there were always things that you brought to the solving of that problem or the designing of that thing that had to do with prior knowledge. The idea was that once you accepted that, then you could be selective about prior knowledge and you could search for that prior knowledge. Venturi was saying the same thing and that was pretty interesting to me. At that point, I discovered that there were other enclaves of people who were getting the same kind of message, like Vincent Scully's students at Yale. Well, I was talking about why I went to New York and I

think it was in part my perception of the opportunities in New York, but it was also I had met a series of people in New York through Cornell, including Rowe's best-known student, Peter Eisenman, who was around Cornell quite a bit. Just before I was to graduate, we were at Colin's house and Peter was there and he was talking about the fact that he had just gotten approval from the regents of the state of New York for a school that he was trying to put together, which was going to be called the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. Initially, what he conceived it as was a group of people doing research in architectural and urban projects at a theoretical level. It was to be a kind of cultural center that would do exhibits and lectures and symposia and a school where they would actually take students from other schools, both graduate and undergraduate programs, almost like a semester abroad. They would do problems and projects that were related to New York and to the idea of cities. Peter actually offered me a job, bless his heart, teaching. Of course, as I was graduating, Peter called me and said, "Well, there are some problems. We don't have the funding in place and we don't have any students. The institute will open in the fall, but we'll have four people and there won't be any students. We won't have a teaching faculty." I moved to New York anyway. I was later mildly pissed at Peter because when he finally did have students in place, he didn't come back to me and offer me a job. But anyway, I was planning to move to New York to teach urban design, and when it didn't materialize, I went anyway. I went to Italy for the summer with my wife first, I got married the last semester of my graduate thesis. It was the classic thing where we packed everything up and put it in storage in Ithaca and I didn't have an address. I arrived in New York City without any place to live and without a job. One of the first people I visited was Alan Chimacoff, who I knew from Cornell, (and who was to be dean for a short time at Princeton). At that time, Alan had been working for Ulrich Franzen for two years and had just been made an associate. I went to see Alan thinking that Franzen was a really interesting medium-sized office with what I thought was reasonably good work. They did nice institutional commissions. Alan talked to me and said that they weren't hiring but that there was this interesting guy with a teeny office who was looking for people and who wanted Cornell graduates because of what they could do. What we



could do was basically draw all the floor plans of Le Corbusier's buildings between 1910 and 1929, in the first volume of the oeuvre complete. So I went to 52nd or 53rd Street, to the second floor of this little brownstone, and sure enough, Richard Meier was looking to hire somebody. He had four employees and I think I was his fifth employee. One of his employees was a guy who had been in the graduate program at Cornell with me, named Richard Bader. Then he hired a Princeton graduate named Todd Williams, so Todd and I started on the same day. I joked that I stayed for six months and Todd stayed for six years, just as a way of saying something about our personalities. Richard was hard to work for. He was incredibly demanding. My favorite Richard Meier anecdote is that Todd was working on this thing called the Salzman house and there was a really problematical intersection where he had to bring the railing on a circular stair against the corner of the building which was a curtain wall in this big house. I said, "Well, do you know Le Corbusier's Maison Planex, where the divisions in the window wall turn and become the divisions in the handrail of the stair?" Todd said, "No." So Richard had some books in the office and we took down the Le Corbusier book and we were all standing around looking at it and Richard returned and had a pissy fit, that's the best way to describe it, because we weren't sitting and drawing, we weren't working. The next day, all the books were gone. I thought, Oh, my god, I'm in real trouble in this office, which looks from the outside like the most intellectual work being done, but Richard really wants us to draft, as opposed to engage in any kind of discussion. That may be an unfair assessment, but I was a pretty unhappy camper while I was there. Richard sat next to me and he used to lean over with a 1/8" rule and actually measure the wall thicknesses on my drawings and say, "Well, you know, that's a 2 5/8" steel stud with 5/8" drywall on either side and you've drawn it six inches wide." I didn't know squat, but I did know that you're not supposed to scale working drawings. There was a level of compulsion there that made me very uncomfortable. So Richard and I have subsequently become friends, but he ultimately fired me because, as he put it, he wanted my desk and I wasn't dedicated enough, which meant that because I had a wife and new baby I left at 5:30 or 6:00 instead of staying until 7:00 or 8:00 at night. It was one of those work environments where everybody looks at

you when you're the first person to get up and leave. I think that's all common knowledge, but I have a tremendous amount of respect for his work. So that was my first mildly traumatic work experience and my first disappointment with the profession of architecture. One of the things that occurred uniformly when I interviewed people with Martha Pollack and I asked them why they had decided to teach was that they all said, "Well, I graduated and I decided that I would go out and work for a while and get my license and I couldn't stand working in offices. It was deadening and anti-intellectual and all of this stuff." I thought to myself, I'm in real trouble here, I've chosen to go to New York, because I thought I'd be able to find something that didn't exist in Chicago, which was an intellectual dialogue. It turned out that the places where you would expect that to be, it wasn't happening.

Blum: Was it because in Richard Meier's office he wanted his money's worth from your drafting skills? Or because he was doing the thinking and that was not what he expected from you?

Cohen: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure. But you know what? Every office is that way.

Blum: You mean if you go in as a draftsman you're expected to do drafting?

Cohen: Yeah. All offices, except for very large ones with institutional hierarchies with middle-management, basically have one or two people who do the show, basically. I think that as a result of my experience working for people, I decided that if I ever had an office, I wanted it to be different than that. Clearly, I wanted an office so that I could be the guy making the final design decisions. But I clearly wanted an office where discussion and dialogue were possible. It turns out that the bottom line is that unless you run your office as a business and make enough money to pay people and the bills and your personal bills, you don't stay in business. The game is to stay in business and build buildings. Where could you have gone to work for somebody like that? Maybe Lou Kahn? Kahn died three or five hundred thousand dollars in debt, which was like owing a million dollars today. How could that office have existed?

Blum: When you were in school was there any instruction or guidance in terms of management skills or running an office?

Cohen: No, no, no. We don't even do a really good job of that at UIC now. If you think about it, all the things that you have to teach students in architecture school, is that really the best place to teach them the business of running an office? The thing you want to teach them is not the skills but that ultimately those skills might end up being more valuable to them than the skills you're teaching them. They might at least leave knowing that. The people in the architecture school aren't qualified to teach economics and management and all of that. There are a few schools that have joint programs with business schools. I didn't even exit school with a realistic idea of what the profession was and how it functioned. I'm not sure that most people do. Maybe we're doing a better job of that now.

Blum: As you speak of the strength of your Cornell education, I noticed a few omissions. What about the social issues that were happening on the streets of every city at that time? What part did they play in your education?

Cohen: They were about to happen. The democratic convention was in 1968. I was in New York in 1968, I wasn't at Cornell.

Blum: But the cities had deteriorated and even after the war, the idea of people fleeing the city to go to the suburbs was a big issue.

Cohen: Civil rights was just beginning. In all fairness, it wasn't incorporated as a major issue into architectural education or even most architectural education at that point. The way it was dealt with was in the idea and the importance of the architectural program, that there was a client and genuine needs. While we all understood that functionalism as a design method or as a theory was largely discredited—you couldn't make a building by simply solving functional relationships—we were all brought up to believe that making a building that wasn't simply form making but one that addressed and solved

all of the issues of site, connection, access, and program, was simply something that you did. The equivalent of it in Chicago would be—I always felt that it was a unique thing about Chicago that there is a kind of assumption that you will build well, that it's a kind of moral imperative here, that you're not a part of shoddy construction and that you detail things well, that you make things that are going to last and not leak, or at least that was the air that people were breathing when I arrived here in the early 1970s.

Blum: Did it matter whether the house was on the Gold Coast or in Cabrini Green?

Cohen: No. They were just different kinds of problems to be solved. The Cabrini Green one obviously had budgetary issues and issues of space planning. Culturally, it would be the equivalent of saying that instead of the living room or the master bathroom being the most important space in the house, the collective space is really the kitchen or dining areas and that that could also be the living areas. So you looked at the sociological information as program and you said, Okay, after I understand what the relationships are, I then need to make the most efficient floor plan and build it in the simplest, most rational way so that this could work economically. I did low-cost housing in New York and I won a *Progressive Architecture* award for it. It was fun because it was problem solving with lots of restrictions and that was very challenging.

Blum: Did this kind of problem solving extend to the greater area of a city, issues that Jane Jacobs raised?

Cohen: We were all aware of it, because we did urban design with Colin. We took planning courses as electives along with the urban design studio and we all sort of understood that. Colin Rowe was somebody who was constantly making connections between social and cultural ideas and the resultant architecture as an historian. We understood this relationship between a time, a place, a culture, and what came out the other end as architecture. It wasn't clear how that all worked as method, except that we understood that one of the things we did as an architect was to solve the program of the building. If

the program involved social issues, then you somehow incorporated what those social issues were. All of it was focused back on what the architect did as opposed to what the sociologist did. That was to make decisions that would result in a building form. I had a fabulous experience with Gruzen and Partners when they took a commission with Christopher Alexander—it was Alexander with Sara Ishikawa—they had been commissioned to do a little community center in the Bronx somewhere. They arrived with all of this social theory and stuff and they kept making these horrendously naive diagrams for this buildings and they kept saying, Well, people are coming from over here and over here and so we'll make this big diagonal path through the building. I looked at that and thought that it was actually laughable. These people don't have any clue how you get from the body of information that they had prioritized, which were social issues, to making a building that somehow responds to them. It was clear that there isn't a direct path, you have to invent something that's an intermediate step. There was no language to do that. It's really interesting to see that what Christopher Alexander has tried to do in all these subsequent years is try to develop a language of vernacular parts and ideas about how things have been built that would correlate to those very issues. It's just simple things like understanding that courtyard spaces are centralized spaces depending on what's around them collectively. These people may have had their hearts in the right place and may be dealing with all of the issues that everybody thinks are really relevant, but they sure don't have a clue about how you make architecture out of all of that. The only way we dealt with all of that was to understand that it was part of a larger area of stuff that we considered program, the stuff that you made the building out of and ultimately satisfied. There's a quote from Le Corbusier that sticks in my mind where he says that to design simply requires talent but to program requires genius. If you think about it, what he really means is that here's this building and here's this program and if you just make a building that is simply the program, you may not have a very interesting building but if you decide that your corporate client's lunchroom ought to be an atrium at the center of the building and you can skylight it and make it a two-story space and open the circulation system to the edges of it, then you have taken a program element and used it as an idea that makes the

building into architecture. I think that's what he means by program, to look at the needs that are being expressed and to invent a way of seeing them and new things to add to them that weren't obvious to the client in his statement. That ultimately allows you to make extraordinary architecture.

Blum: Did Corbusier's writings and thinking play a big part in your writing and thinking?

Cohen: They did in my education, they don't any longer in my thinking, except that they are probably there residually in the same way that things that happen to us throughout our lives shape us. At a certain point, I was so interested in Le Corbusier because every time you looked at him and compared him to anybody else, he was a Michelangelesque figure. These other guys were just enormously talented but he was the almost overwhelming genius, at least in our opinion. It was like every criteria every time you looked, you found something else built into the work. At a certain point, I realized that you couldn't understand the writing without reference to the work. If you just read the writing, you got either inexplicable statements or things that didn't really connect. But if you took the writings and the work together, as if they were seamless productions, suddenly you found out a tremendous amount. What all that culminated in was Steve Hurtt and myself writing the piece on Ronchamp. The reason we wrote that piece was that Colin would never talk about Ronchamp because he thought it was an irrational building and he hated it. In the same way that I said that Tom Beeby didn't feel comfortable in the house that I had done, I think that Colin had been to see Ronchamp and probably ran away screaming.

Blum: Was it too sculptural?

Cohen: It was too sculptural and there were too many things that were seemingly indeterminate and you couldn't begin to talk about the building and get very far discussing it as a series of rational decisions or things that were related to other things in Le Corbusier's work. I think that what bothered Colin is that he had actually done a series of articles early on about Le Corbusier's work

and talked about the development of building types and metaphorical ideas and that all of that seemed like it was related until you got to Ronchamp and then it was something else. Steve Hurtt and I thought that we'd try to figure out Ronchamp. We started reading. Jim Stirling, who we knew because he was sort of around Cornell at the time, had done a piece on Ronchamp where he said that, "after the emotions subside there was nothing left to stimulate the intellect." We're sitting there and saying to each other, Wait a minute, did Stirling just have a lapse? Is this just a lark? Was he playing with mud pies for a year in his office? So we sat down to systematically figure out what the building was about and how it related to the body of work. What we found was that there was in fact, along with the frame, the Maison Domino and the Citrohan house within Le Corbusier's work, there were a whole series of projects and very early sketches of tents and structures and vaulted spaces. So we said, "It's very simple to see that Le Corbusier has these ideas about how you make architecture: it's a frame, it's a building made up of walls and it's a roof form which is also a primary structural system." What he was interested in was defining primary structural systems that were also primary makers of space. So there's the floor system that's held up by columns, and there's the wall system that makes linear space, and then there's the shaped roof. The minute you say that simple thing then Rowe and Scully are not right—Scully writes about the megaron structures (walls) in his modern architecture book and about Domino (frame)—but there's another thing. You suddenly start looking and there're all these funny projects with vaulted roofs, there's the Villa Sarabhai and all these things in Corbu's stuff that don't quite fit. And then there're all these exhibition pavilions. The Nestlé Pavilion, the Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau, and they're really sort of complex tents. They're structured almost like airplane wings because they've got ribbing. There's the Philips Pavilion at the Brussels exposition. You look at the models for the roof of Ronchamp and it's the same thing. Then you start to read *Towards a New Architecture* and you read about the Acropolis. This was something that Colin had set us onto: the idea that the high city was a model for Le Corbusier and that he reformulated it in the Mundaneum and the city center at St-Dié. Suddenly, if you say that Ronchamp is a reformulation of the Acropolis, you can begin to understand this building. It

isn't an anomaly, it's simply that it's so complex that to decipher it you have to take literally everything that this guy ever did and imagine it as one very special sacred building. Then you understand Ronchamp. Hurtt and I worked on this article for years and years and years and then Kenneth Frampton edited it for *Oppositions*, for the special issue on Le Corbusier. Ken drove us crazy because I think at heart he didn't agree with our interpretation and at a certain point he said, "I can't edit this any more." Our dilemma was how to take so much information and put it in some sort of intelligent, argued, rational order that would present this thing that we believed. Finally, Peter Eisenman finished editing the article and wrote a really funny disclaimer as the introduction, which was probably the beginning of Peter as a deconstructionist, because what it does is to say that, Yes, but it could also be this, this, and this, and the real value of the building is that anybody can see it as anything or you can see it as all of these different things, depending on what angle you look at it from, which is the notion of tropes and the whole idea of deconstructing text. Anyway, I worked on that while I was in New York and then I actually worked on it when I got back to Chicago. It was years of mailing manuscripts back and forth. This is a very long aside and I'm trying to think what it was an aside to, which I guess was the influence of Le Corbusier on my work. I think that the impact, ultimately, on my work is simply the idea of the free plan and of modern space. That's what's left. We make architecture out of traditional pieces and modern space. In the houses and the things that we do, we made a kind of functional assignment, which is that the continuous space of the free plan equates with a kind of informality and that the contained or *pochéé* or configured spaces of traditional architecture, like the postmodern oval rooms that people were making in the 1980s, are actually centralized, contained, enclosed, formal spaces. What we'll do is to take the program elements and either subdivide them by degree of privacy or degree of formality. Then we'll make some spaces continuous and open or not defined in plan but defined by their vertical extension, so that you'll have a room within a larger space, and then we'll make rooms completely enclosed as more formal spaces. I think that we owe this to Le Corbusier and to Soane. I think the whole idea of traditional trim as something systemic we really owe to Frank Lloyd Wright, even though



our work looks nothing like his. If you look at the way in which spaces are defined in Frank Lloyd Wright buildings, either as continuous spaces or as subspaces within larger spaces this is all done with cabinetry, which is built-in furniture, and then with bands of flat boards. All the banding, crown moldings, wainscoting, base, you can actually see very complex conditions where the crown may complete the reading of a room as contained, but instead of casing an opening, the base molding and the chair rail actually turn into the next room, so you've got one element of definition and another element of continuity between the two spaces. I think that that is something that we've taken up and developed in our work as an idea. I'm talking about our ongoing work today with Julie and the other people in our office. In that sense, clearly, those pieces of what I've learned have carried on. The other part, obviously, which is my little historical contribution at a larger scale to all of this, is the first piece that I did for Eisenman's *Oppositions* on contextualism.

Blum: What does that word mean to you?

Cohen: It doesn't mean making a building out of red brick because the building next door is red brick. It means a design method that, along with program, begins with the site. The site could be literally the site, the terrain, the trees, the siting a building so that it faces the trees or the view. But the minute you're in an urban setting, which is what we dealt with at Cornell, it really means looking at the condition of the city around your site.

Blum: How far does that extend?

Cohen: Probably as far as the pattern that your building is a part of extends. In other words, if you're building an infill townhouse on a street where all the townhouses are built up to a common face, and they define a street wall, then I would argue that that's one of the starting points of making form decisions about the building. Even if the zoning allows you, you don't stick it forward or back and you don't try to rotate it on the site so that what you're sticking out between two townhouses is perceived as the corner of a building. These

are all things that try to make the building commission absolutely unique by making it freestanding and different from the things around it. What contextualism says is that it is a conscious decision, it's not an unconscious decision that simply comes with methodology or with theory. It's a choice. We had all been reading Gestalt psychology because of Hodgden and there was an understanding that things take on their meaning—this is Eisenman with linguistics as well, because you have syntax and the semantic—the syntax or the structure or context in which something is embedded has a lot to do with what its meaning is. So that the building that chooses to be very different from the context it's embedded in is making a statement of difference. So you ask, What are the valid statements of difference in a city? Well, if for some reason I was building a row of townhouses and I had a building at the end of them that I wanted to be a community center, then the last thing I would do is to make it visually continuous with the townhouses because it's the wrong piece of communication. But what if it was a townhouse? What are my obligations to the cognitive quality of the street and the meaning of the city at that point? What we all did, what the contextualism article did, and what Tom Schumacher's articles did was to—at the point at which modern architecture was being taken apart, because functionalism was gone and minimalism was going and Venturi had written that "less is a bore"—what we were arguing was for site, that the site, the context was an important part of design method. We felt that site was one of the things that should be used to make initial design decisions and that it was probably because if you're good at manipulating the pieces of program and the areas or elements of the building, that maybe you could actually start with the massing of the building or how it sat on the site or how it abutted an adjacent building and solve that aspect of it from the outside in. But only where those choices made sense, where they communicated things that made sense about the building and its place in the city and its relationship to other buildings. The *Oppositions* article was actually interesting—this really happened because of Peter Eisenman's editing of the article—we started talking about conditions that weren't simply physical. What I cooked up was the idea of a cultural context—that you could say that the character of each place doesn't just come from what's standing around it, each place comes

with a history and a sense of its past and a historical awareness. I thought that you could choose to respond to that sense of place or that historical awareness. I think that probably the contextualism stuff is me and Tom and Steve Hurtt, but the importance of the *Oppositions* article is what it did to take on a situation where Venturi and Charlie Moore had been introducing historical motifs that were theoretically problematical because they were like, "Oh, you want a pediment? Take a pediment and stick it on this building. Let's take some columns, but what kind of columns do we want? Well, we can't really deal with full-fledged columns, so let's use Doric or Tuscan because they don't have leaves on them and they'd look out of place anyway."

[Tape 2: Side 1]

Cohen: While it was visually interesting, and liberating in a sense, because it said to architects, "Well, you can do other kinds of things," there wasn't any kind of connectedness to the decision-making process. In the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which was an educational system where every single piece of the building and every design decision required a precedent, you had to argue and explain the precedent and why this one was better than that one. I think if it didn't make sense, then you weren't allowed to do it. It seemed to me that making an argument about the appropriateness of place as how you start to make design decisions and the awareness of the history of the place was a way to begin to discipline the choices, which were like Pandora's box. You suddenly thought you could do anything. People like Moore were making these cartoons of classical buildings. Then suddenly there were guys like Allan Greenberg and Bob Stern who were saying, "Well, that looks funny, that looks like a cartoon. I don't want to do a cartoon, I want to do a serious building." They trotted the stuff out full-blown.

Blum: With this contextualism, did you and Steve Hurtt coined a new word that could be applied to architecture, or was it a whole new concept?

Cohen: No, it was an old concept. It was what really good architects did before modernism. It was what even the good modern architects did because Le Corbusier and Wright were very aware of site. Aalto was hypersensitive to site in the sense that the sites actually formed the buildings.

Blum: So you just gave the practice a name?

Cohen: We reinstituted it. We put it back into architectural theory and design method as an important thing. It was like modernism had thrown the baby out with the bath water and that was stupid. After the *Oppositions* article was published, what they did was to have a symposium to go with each issue's publication and they had asked Charlie Moore to do a critique of my article. I, of course, attended, and what Charlie Moore said was, "Well, this isn't really the emperor's new clothes, but what it is is actually giving a new name to what good architects have done all along." It's saying, How have we gotten to a point where we have forgotten that these things should be an important part of architecture? The interesting thing is that the term was really coined to describe the strategy of urban design that was being worked out by Colin and the students in the urban design studio. Originally, I had wanted to call it "contextualism," which is context and texture, with texture referring to the idea of urban fabric. Colin kept saying no, no, no, you can't do that, it's not a real word, you must call it "contextualism." That was a word that was starting to appear in literary criticism. Colin hated the word; he never used the word in writing or anywhere, except to say offhand that what we were doing in the studio was referred to by Hertz and Cohen and Schumacher as contextualism. What we liked about it was that it named a strategy, a way of thinking about something as a starting point. What Colin hated about it was that it institutionalized it. It defined it and therefore, for him, it ended it. Colin couldn't stand anything that wasn't open-ended, that didn't always have thousands of possibilities or directions that it could go in. He was a really interesting guy in that way.

Blum: What kind of a man was he? How did you see him?

Cohen: Oh, that's another hour and a half of tape, easily. Well, probably the most telling thing I can say about him is to talk about... He was an old-fashioned genius. He had a photographic memory. He knew more about history and could quote more poetry than anybody that I'd ever taken a history or literature course with. I think he just flat out was interested in everything and had a photographic memory. Here's Colin, who is in a way a kind of nineteenth-century character because the kind of intelligence that he had was the kind of thing that people used to treasure in certain societies and certainly at court.

Blum: That sounds elegant.

Cohen: Well, he wasn't elegant, but he was so brilliant and so witty and so perceptive. He was one of those people who just made connections between everything. Listening to the guy lecture was just... I didn't do drugs, but it seemed like those people who took acid and claimed that they looked at something and saw something entirely new... He had the ability to put two slides up, which is pretty standard in art history, and talk about them and actually make you understand things in a way in which you had never understood them before. He would put Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin house next to a Guarini or a Juvarro baroque plan and suddenly you would understand what baroque was because Wright was baroque in the kind of pieces and the reiteration of the pieces and the elaborate, almost voluptuous, pattern made by weaving together piece upon piece upon piece. He taught in a weird way. When I met him he was no longer teaching undergraduates. The way he taught us he could not have taught undergraduates. He made a point of never teaching us anything. Colin never told you anything. The best example of how he taught was a critique that he gave me on an urban design thing that we were trying to do. I was working on a portion of the plan that involved a street and Colin came by and looked at it and sort of stared at it for a long time. Then he said, "You should make it more like the Strata Nova in Genoa." Then he got up and he left. He just walked away. That was the critique. So here I am and it's suddenly incumbent on me to figure out what my critique was. What is he saying and why does he think it should be more

like the Strata Nova? What does that mean? So you go and you get books on the Strata Nova and if you're unlucky you get the Peter Paul Rubens one which is just the facades of the buildings that he drew, which are beautiful engravings, or if you're lucky you get one that has a plan. Then you look at the plan and you say, My god, this is actually amazing because what he's telling me is that I can make a street that has spatial definition without having to make the buildings continuous along the street. Here's the Strata Nova, which is made out of these huge palazzos which are so big in scale and in breadth that they define the street without needing to be connected to the next one. In fact, the fact that they're not connected does something very interesting because you begin to get a variation within the street that's made by having these big buildings facing off with one another, where you get a cross-axial relationship between the entrances and the entrance stairs that begins to make a spatial stop in the street and begins to modulate the street in a way in which a corridor street defined by continuous buildings walls does not. Of course, what I was drawing was a street in which all the sides were continuous. What he was telling me was that I needed to investigate a street where the street was defined by buildings that were discontinuous and that had some sort of a dialogue with one another across that space. We all had things dangled in front of us. Some of the stuff you got and some you didn't. You never knew what the hell he was talking about. But because you had to work for it, you accessed that information and you understood it and it became part of you in a very different way than if someone had said to you, "Well, have you ever thought about making a street out of discontinuous buildings where the street does this and this?"

Blum: After reading what you've written, it seems that he made an incredible impression on you. So many of your articles begin with a quote from him or somewhere along the line you refer back to him.

Cohen: It's really interesting, because the point at which I started to understand what my education had been about was when the Architectural League of New York did a series on architectural education. The way they structured it was that they invited people to come in and talk about their education and show

some of the projects that they were doing. It was kind of a young architects thing. I was paired with Michael Schwarting and we both talked about Colin and then showed our work. It was almost as if Colin was an entirely different person for him than he was for me. That may be an overstatement, but we each left Cornell with different things, focused on and interested in different pieces of this huge pie. For many, many years, the things that I was interested in, thought about, did research on, worked out in my writing were somehow based on that education and that exposure as a kind of starting point. So if the starting point was urban design, then my contribution was to say, Well, here's a strategy that actually can work for an individual building as well. My article on additions is a development of that whole set of ideas, because they're particularly applicable to adding to something that already exists. When we build in a city, and when we attach something to a building, we're adding to something that already exists. The same sets of conceptual choices about how you connect to the building and how you relate the forms, materials, and vocabulary of a piece you're going to add to have the same issues of relationship and relational meaning that adding to a city does. When I first started practicing, we were getting these little house additions to do. What that led to for me was a whole theory of additions.

Blum: You say you got something very different than what your friend did from Colin Rowe.

Cohen: I think that everybody got something a little different. It wasn't like I thought I was eating Italian food and Michael thought he was eating Chinese. It's like any kind of a meal when you're served up this platter and you each take something different from it. The really interesting thing about Colin as an educator is that for the people who went off to teach and to write, we each went off and did something a little bit different or looked at things in a different way that was filtered through what we are and what we had heard as opposed to what he had said. Colin was always ambiguous; he was more interested in what you would think or what you would make and seeing where it would go. He would constantly say things that were ambiguous or

open to interpretation as critiques or as comments just to see where it would go. He was like a little kid who did things just to see what would happen.

Blum: Did you and other students ever get beyond the student-professor relationship with him?

Cohen: Are you kidding? I arrived on the first day and called him Professor Rowe. He called me Mr. Cohen. When I persisted in calling him Professor Rowe, he started calling me Sir, which made me even more uncomfortable than being called Mr. Cohen. So I asked him to call me Stuart, which was what all my professors had called me. He said, "Well, what are you going to call me?" I said to him, "Well, I don't know if I feel quite comfortable calling you Colin yet." He said, "Well, that's quite all right Sir, I quite understand that. You should call me Colin when you feel comfortable calling me Colin." So I would say Cornell is like riding a train: you can buy a coach ticket or you can buy a first-class ticket. Out of every class, there were a handful of people who, for unknown reasons, Colin was just intrigued by. We ended up sort of living with this guy. He would say, "What are you doing tonight? Come on over, I'm barbecuing." He just wanted to be surrounded by people. He wanted to use people as sounding boards to bounce ideas off of. We heard countless anecdotes and histories of things. Colin had an enormous library and it was extraordinary to go over there, because he'd be talking about something and he'd sort of reach behind himself or walk into the next room or go away for a few minutes and be rummaging around and then he'd come up and put a book down on the table and say "Look at this, isn't that just fabulous!" Fred Koetter tells this story that Colin used to do that with pictures of furniture and Fred said that there'd be four chairs on the page and Colin would say, "Isn't that just fabulous! Look at that!" But everybody thought that he was talking about a different chair for different reasons. He once said about a certain Borromini interior, "That gives me orgasms!" It was an education in everything visual, because Colin loved furniture and he loved showing us stuff. Sometimes he'd talk about the composition of a painting and then he'd give you this extraordinary anecdotal history of some obscure French countess and her family who owned the painting. It was sort of mind-



boggling. It would go on all night. Colin drank Jack Daniels and he'd just keep pouring Jack Daniels for you. The first time I went over there, I didn't show up at studio until eleven o'clock the next day. Colin just looked at me and asked, "Had a bad night?" It was like, If you're going to come to my house, you'd better learn how to drink. He cultivated not only the faculty as colleagues but the students. He had no family and we were available to him non-stop as intellectual stimulation.

Blum: It sounds like it was a two-way street. You got a lot from him and he got a lot from you as well.

Cohen: Well, Tom Schumacher was a collaborator and Tom was originally going to write *Collage City* with Colin but Tom's wife just had a fit. I'm not sure exactly what happened but I think she thought that Tom was married to Colin instead of her. She did everything she could to pry Tom loose of Ithaca. Fred Koetter was the next choice. I think that what Colin liked about Fred were all the built-in contradictions. He had this amazingly precise mind and this sort of laid-back kind of Montana drawl. Fred looked like the original Marlboro Man. He's 6' 1" and rustically good-looking and you just would never expect this guy to be so smart. I think that Colin loved that.

Blum: Was Colin gay?

Cohen: I don't think so. I know that ultimately he ended up having a long-term affair with one of his female students. We knew he was interested in women, but the problem was that by eleven or twelve o'clock at night he had had so much to drink that he just wasn't interested in sex.

Blum: You did a lot of writing, right from the beginning. What role did this writing have in your career?

Cohen: Actually, the first piece of writing was the contextualism article for *Oppositions*. Well, that's not entirely true, because I had written a couple of things in school but nothing that was published and they were for Colin's

courses. But they were interesting. The contextualism piece was written because it was very clear that the demonstration of these ideas were not initially going to be buildings or city design. Those opportunities didn't exist for the people who were promoting the ideas. We all had a kind of high level of frustration about the fact that at that point in time Colin had written maybe a dozen articles, total. His production was really telling people things by teaching not writing and he felt the need to deal with an idea that way, for ten years, before he wrote the article that finally codified the idea. By the time he finally wrote the article, he often wasn't so interested in the idea anymore. So we were all frustrated and would have preferred that Colin had written some of this stuff, up to the point where we realized that there were things we were interested in that Colin wasn't.

Blum: Were you the pencil in Colin's hand?

Cohen: No, I wouldn't say that. Colin's take on all this stuff was really fairly different. The contextualism article that I did was really trying to take a design strategy that Colin was interested in on a large scale and ask if it had a universal application to what most architects do, which is to do buildings or parts of buildings.

Blum: I had the sense from what you said that writing some of these articles helped you work things out and better understand the concepts behind them.

Cohen: Yes, absolutely. One of my favorite stories... I didn't room with architects in college; two of my roommates were pre-med. One of my roommates, Richard Greenman, who was a genius, was this big fun-loving party kind of guy who loved to go out and play touch football and sit up at night and drink beer. He didn't like to work very hard. Probably he didn't have to. Our other pre-med roommate, Roger, wasn't a grind, but he wasn't as smart as Rick. Roger put in a lot of time. I remember there were courses that they took together, like an organic chemistry course that met at eight in the morning. So here's this organic chemistry class and Rick has slept through ninety percent of it. Roger taught him the goddamn course. Rick used Roger's notes and Roger

went through the notes with him on every single lecture and taught him the course. I asked Roger, "Doesn't it gall you that you study with this guy for the exam, teaching him the material, and you go in and you both get As, or you get a B and he gets an A?" He said, "No it doesn't, because I know that if I can teach this to him, then I really understand it." I think that I have never thought of myself as a writer or as a theoretician. Writing something is making something just like a building is making something. For me, they're not interchangeable endeavors, but there are some things that are generalized that can't be demonstrated or shown or explained clearly by making a building. Those are the things that you write about. What happened was that what I was thinking about, what I was looking at, what I was trying to design, I was working stuff out and then at the point at which I thought I had it sort of figured out, I would go and write something about it. One of the things that has happened is that as I have more and more architectural work to do in my practice, my interest and my desire to write has declined. I haven't written anything for years now because of the practice. I suppose you could argue that I haven't had a new thought in ten years, or that I've gone through everything I left Cornell with. In reality, the stuff that I'm investigating and thinking about and working out is really all being satisfied with the architectural projects that we're getting to do. That may be a way to say that maybe I'm not posing any new problems, but it also has to do with limited energy as well. You make choices about what you do and where you focus your energy. The practice is more than I can handle and is making me extraordinarily happy, although it's the booming economy, I know. Also, a little bit of it is the reputation we've built for the things that we have done over the years. So that's keeping me very busy. School is keeping me very busy, and Julie and I now have a three-year old who takes late naps and is up until ten o'clock. If I'm working on something at home, I'm working on it from ten to one or two in the morning. Frankly, I'm almost too old to do that. Being tired all the time isn't so much fun. I'm cutting the pie differently today. I'm not writing stuff because there's nothing I want to write about and I don't feel the need to write. I go to see things all the time and if I wanted to function as a critic, I could write about them.

Blum: But at one time, you did do a lot of writing.

Cohen: Yeah, because I didn't have architecture to do.

Blum: You mean building?

Cohen: Yeah. It sort of kept me busy; it was a kind of mental exercise. It was a contribution because I guess I was an advocate critic in the sense that the things that I wrote about were all focused by a set of ideas that I felt I was promoting. I don't know if that's good criticism or not, ultimately to write that way, but I did. I don't have any interest in writing about other people's buildings at this point. I have pieces of academic coursework and lectures that I keep thinking, Well, if I have absolutely nothing else to do, I should make them an article or a book or something. Who knows if I'll ever get to it. Some of the stuff, if I got to it now, I doubt that I'd ever find a publisher because it's not current.

Blum: You began to speak earlier about Gruzen and Partners, after you graduated and went to New York.

Cohen: Here's what I thought about my apprenticeship: I'm not getting paid very much money, so it must be part of my education and goddamnit, I'm going to make sure that it's part of my education. When I go someplace, I want to know what I'm going to be doing and what I'm going to be learning. I'm going to stay there long enough to learn what that place has to teach. Gruzen was really interesting because they were a design-oriented firm. They were a large firm, which meant that there were one hundred or more people, and they had a kind of structure and method of operating that was very different from smaller offices. A friend of mine from school, Alden Taylor Mann IV, had been working at Gruzen for a year and a half. They loved him and he was working with one of the junior partners, Peter Sampton. I talked to Tad and he was showing me these drawings and saying, "Well, I was the major designer of the new police headquarters building." The thing that made me know it was true was that he talked about the siting of the building and

talked about the thing in terms of formal issues that I know couldn't have come from any place else but Cornell. I looked at him and I said, "This is quite amazing, how did they let you do this?" He said, "Well, you know they were sort of interested in what I could do and I had these good ideas and I was sort of clever about how I presented them and suddenly I was collaborating and doing this design." I said, "Well, sounds good to me!" So I walked in and they hired me.

Blum: As a designer?

Cohen: Yes. They put me to work, along with Tad, doing public housing. They had always done middle-income and luxury apartment buildings. The firm had a reputation for doing housing. They were probably the New York equivalent of someone like Ezra Gordon or John Macsai here in Chicago. Their practice was apartment buildings, hospitals, and they were starting to do prisons. This was highrise housing and also townhouses. They did a pretty nice job of it. I thought that this was something that I should learn. What was interesting was that they had just gotten the contract to supervise all of the model cities work with model cities money. Every city in the country took that money and did community organization with it. New York took it and gave it to the New York Public Housing Authority and they decided to build buildings with it. It was an interesting interpretation of what the money was for. We had the job to coordinate all of this and we also took a project. Of course, nobody else wanted to do it. The housing authority was reputed to be impossible to deal with. They gave you this book of hundred of pages of boilerplate and specifications and requirements. It was worse than learning to play chess. Tad said to Peter Sampton, "Why don't you give this project to me and Stuart to do? It'll be Peter's project and we'll work on it." I was like a year out of school at that point and Tad was a couple of years out of school and suddenly we had this major project to do that nobody cared about. Nobody gave a fig about it in the context of this office. So we just designed it and it was actually a pretty interesting project. The upshot of it was that that year, along with one of the administrative secretaries, Peter Sampton just asked me to gather all the binders of projects that were under

design to send off to *Progressive Architecture*. I said to him, "Would you mind if I included New Amsterdam housing?" The project was on 157th Street and New Amsterdam Street. So I included this project. I thought, Well, Venturi's on the jury, and Jim Stirling is on the jury. We did these kind of naive drawings; they were no style as opposed to high style. I knew Venturi would love them. I knew that he would understand what the project was about and how we had approached the site planning of this thing. We had actually made a Renaissance plan. Because of the mix of high and lowrise and because of the street pattern, we did a central square with a square in each of the four quadrants. The central square was defined on three sides by highrises, a lowrise, and then another highrise behind it. An existing road was a diagonal and lopped off one corner and made one of the segments incomplete, but it was an ideal Renaissance plan. We had done the highrise and the lowrise in a way that suggested that the courtyard spaces would actually be populated. We forced everybody to go into those spaces to enter the buildings. And we won! We got a citation from *Progressive Architecture*.

Blum: The comment from one person on the jury was that it was "background architecture." Why did that deserve an award?

Cohen: Background architecture was a jargon word at that point in time. It was sort of a Yale-Princeton axis jargon word. I think that Venturi had coined the idea of dumb and ordinary and Charlie Moore had written about background architecture and how cities needed a certain amount of background architecture. Foreground architecture is the Boston City Hall or something that aggressively announces, "Hey, look at me!" Background architecture is the stuff you make cities out of, where you're more aware of the streets or the space than you are of the buildings that shape it. Background architecture was a positive thing to call a building. They were saying that we chose to do the right thing by not making a—Tom Schumacher had a name for it—we'd be driving around and we'd see an exposed concrete building like the high-rise at UIC and he'd say, "Oh, there's another building by Mort Strongform!" The idea was that these were sort of "look-at-me" muscle-flexing buildings. We actually had made our buildings really simple. They were simple brick

buildings with fairly intricate compositional façade games that we played. We knew it was low-income housing and we said, Okay, we've got two double-hung aluminum windows, a big one and a little one, and what we'll do is put three of them together every time we have a living room, and two of them every time we have dining room off the kitchen, and one for the bedroom, and then the bathroom got the one small one. We did things because of the planning of these things that the New York Housing Authority hadn't done for a long time, like bathrooms that had windows in them. There was this idea that these buildings would be so simple that they'd be affordable. Then we had to make them just work by proportion and composition.

Blum: Were you touching on any ideas that used prefabricated materials?

Cohen: No. When you went through the manuals from the housing authority, they told you how you had to build these things. It was actually tragic because they were spending all the money making these things out of concrete block and brick, basically built like minimum-security prisons. Their idea was that the people who live in them were going to try to destroy them from the inside out, so how could they be made as indestructible as possible? Believe it or not, that made them as expensive as building middle-income housing or even some luxury housing. So we just figured that we needed a strategy that was going to make sure that these things were on budget and what the architecture was made out of. I think that was part of the idea that they be background buildings.

Blum: With an award to your credit, why did you leave?

Cohen: Tad had left by then, he just disappeared. He had had it with New York so he went to Morocco. The next time I saw him, he had hennaed hair and was a total flower child. That was nine months later. Tad just didn't want to work in a corporate environment any more. I was very intrigued by it, except for the fact that what they understood was that I was smart and I could do certain things that other people couldn't do and that I would speak my mind.

But what they didn't understand was that I would tell anybody what I thought, in part because that's my personality, and because this was just a job. I knew that if Jordan Gruzen came up and said... Jordan once asked me to do three alternate schemes for a project, and I said, "No, I can't."

[Tape 2: Side 2]

Cohen: I said to him, "If you do this other one, it will work, but it will really make an ugly building that I wouldn't want to be associated with, so that really just leaves one scheme." Jordan actually said to me, "You know, I want you to do five drawings. I want to be able to show the client five drawings." I said, "You know, I can't do that. You'd better do it yourself." Now, this is not something that you say to your boss. I figured that I could say that because the worst thing that could happen was that he fires me. And a week later I'll get a job doing the same thing with another firm. What I was doing was building a reputation for myself for being difficult, which I had probably managed to do already.

Blum: You were with them in 1967 and 1968.

Cohen: Right, a year and a half or maybe two years. The next step up the ladder, if they're grooming you to be associate or a partner, is that they make you an administrator. I'm not an administrator.

Blum: So did you leave or were you fired?

Cohen: I left. At a certain point, I felt that the next thing I wanted to do was get a job with a smaller firm and trade on the fact that I had just won this award and that they had actually acknowledged that Tad Mann and I had designed the project. It was one of those strange things because Jordan Gruzen said to me, "How do you want to be listed in the credits?" I said to him, "I want to be listed as the project designer." And he said, "Well, but we'll list you as the job captain, because you're acting as the job captain in the working drawing phase under the project architect." And I said, "No, I'd rather have the other



one." He said, "Well, I don't understand why. Job captains are paid more than project designers. If you ever go and look for another job, it will get you a higher salary." I said, "But Jordan, it's a design award and I designed the building. I'd like to be called the project designer." And so he said, "Fine with me." Tad was in Morocco at that point, so I insisted that we both be credited as the designers. No one else had really had any input to the project. I think the other thing that had happened was that they were getting urban design and planning projects to do. They had a partner called Julian Whittlesley, who also had a degree in planning. Then they hired a guy called Paul Willen. Julian was sort of not around, but Paul Willen was. I liked Paul a whole lot, but I think that we just had entirely different ideas about how to go about designing big areas of cities. Because I had this urban design degree, I got put on these projects with Paul and I argued and I did alternate schemes and tried to convince him and educate him, and of course, the projects were things that I just didn't like. They weren't bad by the standards of the day, but they weren't as good as they should have been—well, now that's unfair—they weren't what I wanted to do. So I said, It's time I move on. So I did and I worked for a very small firm for maybe less than a year. It was one of the firms that had actually done work on model cities. I had met the principals of the firm, whom I liked a lot, and it seemed like they cared about design. I went in and I said if they paid me a lot of money, I'd be their head designer.

Blum: What was the name of the firm?

Cohen: Castro-Blanco, Piscioneri and Feder. One partner was a Colombian, who didn't tell people he wasn't Puerto Rican because they were getting lots of city work; an Italian, so they did lots of Archdiocese work; and a Jew. How can you do better than that in New York? That's like Fiorello La Guardia, who spoke fluent Yiddish. They had the political scene covered coming and going. Les Feder, who was just a lovely guy, and Bob Piscioneri actually cared about the quality of what they were doing. I thought that maybe I could work there and do something. It was fun and interesting. But the problem was that I discovered that I, this kid who was out of school for only two years,

was being paid slightly more than their senior associate who had been there more than six years.

Blum: Was that because they wanted you so badly?

Cohen: No, it was because I had walked in and said, "Here's what I can do, and here's the salary I want." And I had this award and they were impressed with me and they said Okay, we'll take a chance. The problem was that they wouldn't let me work on anything. I only did design studies because they were paying me so much that when they ran out of design work, the thought of paying me that much to sit out there and work on a set of working drawings didn't sit right with them. Eventually, work slowed up and they let me go. So I went job-hunting and Bob Siegel, Charlie Gwathmey's partner, and who was then a senior associate with Edward Larrabee Barnes, offered me a job. But the job was on one of the buildings that was on the New York State University campus at Stony Brook. The job was starting and they were gearing up to do working drawings. Bob Siegel liked me and thought the work I had done was good and he offered me this job that was going to start in a month. I thought, Oh, god, psychologically, can I be unemployed for a month? Can I afford to be? I also got a call from David Ellwell, who was a friend of mine and who had been with Johnson and Burgee for a number of years at that point where he was an associate. I knew David through Steve Hurtt, because they had gone to Princeton together, and David had been a student of Colin Rowe's at Cambridge. He had gone and done two years of architecture at Cambridge. David called and said they were looking for people, so why don't I come and interview. It was a really strange interview. John Burgee interviewed me; I never met Philip at the interview. He took my portfolio and just flipped through it and said it looked pretty good. Then he said, "You worked for Richard Meier? We can use you." It's true to this day that if you've worked someplace where the work is careful and rigorous, and well-thought out and well detailed, then you can usually get hired at another good firm. So I worked for Johnson and Burgee for about a year and I worked on the IDS Center in Minneapolis. I worked on the interior details. The office tower was under construction and the working drawings for the hotel had

gone out and we were doing the interiors for the hotel. I worked on the lobby and the second-floor restaurant and then I worked on a really funny little thing like a stand-up bar on the concourse level that Philip wanted to do entirely in Astroturf, it was called the Turf Bar. The walls and the ceilings and the floors were all Astroturf. We kept making jokes like, "Is Minneapolis really ready for purple vinyl?" And then I was convinced that there would be things growing in all the Astroturf of this little bar and restaurant. It involved crazy things like there was this door into the service kitchen and Philip wanted the door to go away. So it had Soss hinges on it, which are hinges that are completely hidden and that fold like knuckles, and then it had a really incredibly thin metal edging. The Astroturf was going to be glued on the front of that. Then it swung in, which was probably lunacy, but it was the only way that all of the hardware would be concealed. I never saw that thing; it was there and gone by the time I visited IDS. But I thought the work was all very interesting.

Blum: So you were a designer in their office?

Cohen: Well, I did design development and working drawings on pieces of the interior. I don't know what they thought of me. I guess John was aware that I was from Chicago, and I was aware that he had been a partner in Holabird and Root. David Ellwell sort of tried to take care of me there. I remember two funny stories from Philip Johnson's office. The spec writer had a really bad toupée but was incredibly intelligent and he would come around and say, "Ha, ha, ha, Johnson wants to put marble in the bathrooms, but doesn't he know that it's the most porous material in the world and that in five years it'll smell of pee?" I learned a lot from the spec writer about what specifications are and what they're not. I used to talk to him just because he was so interesting. He used to say to me, "Well, I don't have to put in a manufacturer's name, I can write the spec so that only one person can bid on it by asking that the sections of a curtain wall or a metal panel are break-formed at a certain size, because I know that only one guy out in Des Moines has the size press to do it." It was wonderful because I was learning that and I was learning how to make very expensive things beautifully with expensive

materials. There was a set of working drawings for the Seagram building and the interiors of the Four Seasons restaurant in the office. It was one of those things where all of us, either arriving or leaving, got copies of the bronze curtain wall details from the Seagram building and you got all the interior paneling and door details from the Four Seasons restaurant. It was a wonderful experience to be there in the Seagram building. Johnson had an office on two floors and at lunchtime, when the weather wasn't nice, I would just go up to the main floor. Johnson would bring art in from his home in New Caanan and hang it in the office and a month or six months later, it would be in the new acquisitions room at MoMA, which was down the block. So Johnson had these fabulous things that were hanging in the office, and then he had a really wonderful library there, with a little conference table that was right outside of John Burgee's office—if there was nobody up there at lunch hour, you could just sit there. Instead of eating lunch, I would just browse through Philip's library. Eventually, what happened is that we were working on the interiors for the IDS tower and apparently Johnson was arguing with IDS. The story that I heard was that Philip had wanted to do the wall of the main conference in the IDS corporate office in travertine and they had said, "Do we have to have travertine?" And Johnson had said, "Well, yes you do." One of the people on the board asked if they could just use wallpaper that looked like travertine. Philip at that point said, it's very clear to me that you don't need the services of an architect, what you need is an interior decorator and he got up and walked out, leaving John Burgee sitting there. So everyone turned to John and said, What just happened? John got up and he said, I think that we've resigned the commission, thank you very much. And he got up and walked out after Philip. So I actually got laid off. At that point my friend David Ellwell had gotten a job working for Norval White in Brooklyn, which was a match that I had made because Norval had been a partner at Gruzen and Partners who I'd worked with when he'd been the partner-in-charge of the New Amsterdam housing. Norval was setting up an office and he needed people and David had been talking about leaving Philip for a long time. Norval called me and asked if I knew anyone and I said, yeah, I know this fabulous guy. So David went there and a friend of mine, Peter Brown, who had been an undergraduate at Cornell, and who had

worked at Gruzen and Partners and left to work for Norval. Then Norval got a project that he hired me as a consultant for. So I worked with them in Brooklyn Heights. Norval's claim is to have written, along with Elliot Willensky, the *AIA Guide to New York City*. Norval was also a teacher, I think, at City College of New York. He may have been head of the department there at one point. At this point I was thinking to myself, what do I do now? Maybe it's time to go back to Chicago and put something together there? There honestly wasn't anyone in New York that I wanted to work for. I had worked for little firms and big firms. I went and took my licensing exam while I was at Norval's office and I passed it on the first try.

Blum: Was that just for the state of New York?

Cohen: Yes, but I knew I was going back to Chicago, so the minute I got the notice I'd passed, I filled out all the forms for the National Council Architectural Registration Boards [NCARB]. They arrange reciprocal licensing for you because they're the people who standardize the exams. So I knew that if I had an NCARB certificate, I could get an Illinois license on moderately short-term notice.

Blum: That was about 1968 or 1970? To set your story in context: the civil rights struggle was in progress, Vietnam was still a concern, the Kennedys and Martin Luther King had been assassinated and the 1968 Democratic Convention had turned everything upside down.

Cohen: The 1968 convention was in Chicago and I had watched it on television.

Blum: By this time, of course, the older architectural leaders, Mies, Corbu, and Gropius, had all died. Were you in any way affected by what was happening in the broader context of American political or social life?

Cohen: Not architecturally.

Blum: What about your decision to return to Chicago. Was that somehow connected?

Cohen: You know, I've never been particularly interested in politics. I was one of many people my age who thought that Vietnam was a huge mistake and that we ought to get out of there. I remember Nixon's election. My father had voted for Nixon because he decided that the Republicans were better for the economy than the Democrats. I could never forgive my father for voting for Nixon. I remember I was still in New York at that point, and the stuff in Chicago was kind of a funny thing. I mean, here's Mayor Daley and it was sort of like, well, everyone knows what's going on there. But relative to all these other places, it was a city that was actually being managed and run, even if it was for the profit of some people, it was the city that works. I guess my thought was that it was a sort of moderately benign dictatorship. But for some reason, it was one that valued architecture.

Blum: What was an example of that?

Cohen: Civic architecture in Chicago. Who cares if Daley went to parochial school with Charlie Murphy, we still got great buildings. The developers here—can you imagine a New York developer like Sam Lefrac using Mies to do Lefrac City? Give me a break. I was always aware of the fact that Chicago was where my family was from and where I had grown up and also a city that had an architectural heritage that interested me. Colin was interested in Corbu and hated Wright—he thought Wright was redundant, moronic, and saccharine. He would say, "But of course I prefer Mozart to Chopin!" Now Chopin ain't bad, but to pass Wright off as decorative and to pass Chopin off as decorative is a pretty unusual level of discernment. While Rowe would present things like that in a trivial way, I don't think that he came to these ideas trivially. In fact, his article on the Chicago frame talks about the opposition between Oak Park and the Loop, he had the idea that Wright had no interest in the frame as a maker of space but was interested in the idea of continuous space. He argued that the architects of the Chicago office buildings had no interest in the idea of modern space in the way that Wright

contributed to its invention and development. That was a brilliant *apperçu* at that point in time. So Chicago was just waiting there as an architectural place and somehow or other, despite the architects and the politics of all of the Chicago Loop buildings and of things like the second McCormick Place, they worked for the right reasons and it seemed to me that that couldn't have happened any place else. Chicago was really unique in that way. So I came back to Chicago because my parents really wanted me back here. And my father really created some opportunities for me. I don't know whether it's a story worth telling, but there were a couple of real estate developers that he played golf with. One of them was a guy who shall remain nameless who was developing townhouses in the western suburbs. I later discovered that the townhouses were kind of schlocky. The developer only wanted to meet with me at like seven o'clock in the morning at Jewish delicatessens. He wore pink cardigan golf sweaters and wore a pinkie ring that you could choke on. Our final falling out was after I had gone through the design of these townhouses. I had designed wood frame houses with a garden wall that projected forward a short distance from the entry to separate the front yards of each house, and this guy wanted to put some brick on the townhouses. I kept asking him why he wanted to do that, because putting it on in a token way doesn't make any sense. He wanted to put brick panels under the windows. I told him, "Listen, here's where you ought to put the brick. You know that garden wall that comes out and is the side of the sheltered entryway? If you make that out of brick, then everyone will assume that it's continuous to the inside and it's the brick wall separating the houses and they'll perceive it as value. They'll think that they're getting masonry separating the houses, instead of two-by-four studs. It'll introduce the brick that you want." He said, "No, I want it under the windows." I said, "You know, Bernie, I can't do that. I just can't do that." He said, "OK, why don't you call me tomorrow morning and let me know if you want to work for me." I said to him, because we had butted heads on some other design issues, "I'll call you tomorrow morning." I called him back the next morning and I said, "You know Bernie, this has been difficult and it's the only work that I have, but I think I can't do the work that you want me to do for you and I don't think we'll be happy together." He said, "That's what I had decided as well."

Half an hour later, my dad called, screaming at me, "I've counter-signed on a loan for you to set up your office and this guy's a golfing friend of mine. How dare you do this? What's the problem anyway? Why can't you just do what he wants, you don't have to tell anybody you did it? Just finish the job and collect the fee and be done with it." I said to him, "You know, after you've done a couple of those, there isn't ever going to be anything else. I can't do it. It's not this high moral thing for me. I get physically ill thinking about how ugly these things could be and I can't bring myself to do it." My father just hung up on me and we didn't talk for a couple of weeks. At that point, he just stayed completely out of my hair. It was like, OK, you've got some idea about what you want to be doing, but I don't get it. If you're happy, fine. If you can pay your bills, fine. If you can't pay your bills, I won't let you starve, but I don't want you to come crying to me either. Go do it. My dad also played golf with another architect who did nursing homes. He would say to my father from time to time, "I saw your son's name in the newspaper and this thing that he designed and he's getting quite a reputation for himself." I sort of suspected that even though my dad had no idea where I was trying to go that he respected me and was proud of me.

Blum: So how did you survive?

Cohen: I taught school, of course! Actually, I did everything that I could. I was in the Fisher building, which was owned by a friend of my mother's named Julius Lopin. Julius gave me space in the building to do planning and I became the building architect. I could do it, because it had no aesthetic implications. I would do the best plan I could for the office, and it looked good on paper. I didn't care what it looked like in three-dimensions because I wasn't involved in that. And I would do lighting layouts and electrical plans. Julius introduced me to a bunch of his cronies who owned nursing homes. So I was doing building department violation corrections. The building department inspects all public buildings. If, for example, the handrail in the public stairs is too high or too low, then you're cited with a violation. You then have to submit an architect's drawing or a contractor's work order indicating that you're going to put in a new handrail that meets the code. So typically, these



were old houses in Rogers Park that had been converted into nursing homes. The exiting often didn't meet code and the stairway needed a one-hour fire-rated door at the bottom, or an extra layer of drywall. I was doing these little drawings and I did inspections of buildings. It turns out that every building in the city of Chicago that has exterior metal structures, like a fire escape, has to be inspected every few years by an architect or engineer. So, again through all of these building owners, I was filling out reports. I remember once, in sub-zero weather, climbing out on a fire escape on a twelve-story building in the Loop to look at the bolted connections at each landing and realizing that the landing that I was on was being held up by only one bolt and by the stair coming from above and below, because everything else had rusted through. I said, "Oh! That's interesting." And I walked down another level and made a little drawing of where the connections and the bolts had all rusted through. But the thing that I was doing that really starts all of this stuff was that somebody said I ought to meet Elaine Valkanis at the Museum of Contemporary Art. She was their program director and someone thought that maybe I could do something with her. So I went and had lunch with Elaine and I said, "Can I do something for you?" And she said, "Well, what can you do?" I said, "Well, I'm a designer." I didn't say I was an architectural designer, just that I was a designer. And she said, "Well, you know, we just fired our graphic designer and we need somebody to do the invitations for our next show." I said, "Oh, I can do that." She said, "Why don't you do a mock-up for us and we'll see if we like it." It was just this craziest fluke. I wasn't a graphic designer and I had no graphic design training. I knew nothing about typesetting or specifying type, which I subsequently learned. I ended up doing about two years' worth of invitations and a couple of catalogs for them. Steve Prokopoff was the director and Elaine was the program director, and as a result of this work, I knew all these people. Somebody had given my name to John Cartland who was a partner at Arthur Anderson. He was interested in getting involved with the museum and he was starting an organization called the Men's Council. There were two members: John Cartland and John Venator. John Cartland took a guy called Larry Costin and me to lunch and we were the third and fourth members of the Men's Council. So suddenly I was on the

junior board at the MCA. We talked endlessly about whether we should have women. The structure of this was mostly young executives in large corporations whose corporations were paying for their time to go do stuff for the museum as community service. These guys were all interested in contemporary art and thought it would be fun to do, so they were on the Men's Council. I had actually taken a lot of art history courses and I had been in New York and immersed myself in the gallery scene there in the 1960s and very early 1970s. The Men's Council was asked to name a representative to the exhibitions committee. Here I was asking, how did this happen? I've been back in the city for two years and I'm on the exhibitions committee at the Museum of Contemporary Art? I thought this was actually looking pretty interesting. One of the things that happened on the exhibitions committee is that I got a call one day from Walter Netsch and he said "We have a proposal for an architecture show on Chicago that was done in Munich and the guy who assembled it wants to reassemble it, along with one of your co-faculty out at UIC, a guy called Peter Pran. The show is called, "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago." I know the committee is not going to go for it, I know they're going to kill it, because architecture shows are thought of as bad box-office. Can you be sure that you come to the meeting on Wednesday? It's really important that we're both there to support the museum doing this architecture show."

Blum: So that was Pandora's box?

Cohen: Yes. Walter and I went to the meeting and we both argued for the show, that even if it didn't make a cent it was still important to do it. Then I walked out of there and called Stanley Tigerman immediately. He wasn't in, but he called me back later in the afternoon and said, "I hear the MCA is doing a Mies show and we have to do something about it." I said, "Stanley, that's exactly right."

Blum: Wasn't that why you called him in the first place?

Cohen: Yes. I thought that we should make another statement, a counter show. Now there are pieces of the story that should be filled in, about my teaching at the university and about Peter Pran being there, and the relationship between me and Stanley and Peter Pran and Franz Schulze. Peter and Franz were asked to curate the show in Chicago for this German guy, Oswald Grube. Grube had gone to IIT with Peter Pran and they were friends. Grube had done this show in Munich in 1973. When he got the MCA's approval to reconstitute this show, it would be working with Peter Pran here. Except for the opening, I don't think that Grube actually came here for the show. I think then Peter approached Franz about doing a brand-new catalog that they would collaborate on. I think I need to say a few things about why suddenly the "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" show seemed so important to me and to some of the other people in the city at that time, and also why doing another show seemed so important. To talk about that, I'd really like to backtrack. This will be rather personal from my point of view. One of the things that I had loved about New York was that there was stuff going on constantly. There were lectures on architecture and there were museum exhibits on architecture. You could, literally, go to something once or twice a week to be involved in architecture and the architectural community. At that point in time, Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies was beginning to be pretty active in terms of their lecture programs. The Architectural League, which had been taken over by younger people, was having lectures and symposiums. It was actually a pretty interesting time and there was a real sense of community. MoMA was constantly doing stuff on architecture and design. Emilio Ambasz was the director of the architecture and design department there. I had met Emilio through David Ellwell, who had gone to Princeton with him. New York was an incredibly stimulating environment that you could just immerse yourself in. I went to a lot of stuff and I probably made myself obnoxious by being one of the people after the lecture who raised a hand and asked difficult questions about an inconsistency in what someone said and what they showed. I made a hobby of being an intellectual bad-boy. I think that the upshot of it was that I was meeting people and getting to know people, some of whom I had known from Cornell. When I came to Chicago, my sense was that there wasn't an

architectural community, that there was a kind of vacuum. In this city, which was supposed to be the foremost city of architecture in the world, if the architects were genuinely interested in architecture, you couldn't prove it by any other activity than their built buildings. There was no discussion, there was no dialogue, there were no lectures, or really infrequent lectures. At that point, the Graham Foundation did not have a lecture program. There was an occasional lecture at the Art Institute. The AIA did not have a lecture program. IIT and UIC barely had lecture programs. It was a shock. I kept thinking, if you're passionate about architecture, don't you want to sit around and discuss ideas? Here was this kind of black, Miesian silence. The idea was "Build, don't talk."

Blum: Wasn't that consistent with the image of Chicago?

Cohen: Well, it was totally unacceptable and it was inexplicable. Frank Lloyd Wright wasn't that way. Burnham and Root weren't that way. They were garrulous. The original Chicago Architectural Sketch Club sponsored lectures and the draftsman got together constantly. I had read enough Chicago history to know that the Chicago School in the 1890s and 1900s was a flourishing architectural culture. All you have to do is read the old *Inland Architect*, which had minutes of each meeting of the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club, to see that so-and-so spoke about this or that.

[Tape 3: Side 1]

Cohen: When I returned to Chicago, the Chicago that I wanted as a community was the cultural community of Burnham and Root, and Sullivan, and Wright.

Blum: But weren't you out of touch with Chicago of that day?

Cohen: Yes, it didn't exist any more. It was unacceptable to me. I felt that something needed to be done about it.

Blum: Was that because you needed it?

Cohen: Yes, I needed it.

Blum: Did you want to bring New York to Chicago?

Cohen: No, I don't think it was about bringing New York to Chicago, it was actually about creating a climate in which there's discussion of ideas and forums for multiple opinions—a kind of opening up of things. I never thought of it as bringing New York to Chicago, unless by that you mean bringing aspects of what I had valued of my experience there.

Blum: I mean the exchange, the openness you say you found in New York.

Cohen: Yes, seeing that happen here. I used to joke that when I was in New York, the only thing I really missed were Frango mints and Due's pizza. It was really clear to me, when I came here, what it was I missed about New York. It was the stimulation related to architecture and the forums and the things happening related to architecture and things that you could be exposed to.

Blum: So how did you propose to encourage that in Chicago?

Cohen: I didn't know and I guess I sort of went looking for it. What I should say is that when I decided to leave New York, I had lunch with a bunch of people to say good-bye, including Peter Eisenman. Peter said, "Oh, you're going to Chicago. You have to look up my friend Stanley Tigerman." I had only the vaguest idea of who Stanley was. I sort of remembered *Instant City*, which Stanley used to joke would be his downfall because it would be the one thing that he would be remembered for. He'd go into the history books with a picture of the *Instant City* model.

Blum: Were these his huge pyramid mega-structures?

Cohen: Yes, his huge truss pyramid things. Anyway, Peter said, "Go talk to Stanley. Stanley knows everybody in Chicago and everything that's going on in

Chicago. He'll sort of point you at stuff." I remember thinking, Oh, I know Stanley Tigerman, because he had been doing these renderings that were sort of Paul Rudolph-like for Zonolite brick ads that appeared in *Progressive Architecture* and *Architectural Record*. They had commissioned things from different architects who did renderings about how to use their products. So one of the first things I did was to go and look up Stanley. I called him and explained that—first of all he said, "We don't have any jobs." I explained to him that Peter had said to call you and look you up. Then he said, "Oh, oh, Peter Eisenman! What are you doing now? Come on over and talk to me!" Peter's name was the magic word. So I went over there and I took my portfolio of work I had done at school and the *Progressive Architecture* design award. And Stanley showed me his work and the things that were going on in his office.

Blum: Was he with Norman Koglin at the time?

Cohen: No, he was Stanley Tigerman and Associates. He had been out of that partnership for four or five years by the time I met him. He had space in one of the Illinois Center buildings at that time. It was a white office—everything was white plastic laminate and the floor was white vinyl tile. But apparently I had missed what Larry Booth has described as the first phase of the white office which was when Stanley had everyone wearing white smocks. Imagine Larry Booth and Jim Nagle in white bus-boy smocks! That really made it like an atelier. But anyway, here was Stanley showing me his work, which was pretty interesting. I made some comments about it and asked questions that impressed him that I was perceptive and intelligent. Then we sort of switched and I showed him my stuff that he thought was pretty good. He said to me "You're talented. You'll do well. How can I help you?" I said, "Well, that's not why I came over here. I just wanted to meet you. I have no idea how you can help me." He said, "Well, if there's anything I can do for you, let me know. You're a talented young man and it's nice to have you in the city." Then he said something totally weird, which to this day I will never forget—one of those things that are seared in your brain—it was something to the effect of "But if you ever get in my way, I'll cut your balls off." It was out

of the blue. It was like, Here's who I am and here's what I do and be warned. I ignored it, because it was such a non sequitur. Here was this incredibly generous man who was taking an interest in me, even though I wasn't anybody at all, although he did know who Colin Rowe was and he knew I knew Peter Eisenman and all that. Stanley was for a long time my little dose of architectural culture. About once a month I'd call him up and go over and look at the work he was doing. He wanted to talk about work and he was open about it. He'd show me things and solicit opinions.

Blum: Did you feel that you were getting at the heart of what was happening in Chicago through Stanley?

Cohen: Maybe he was the only thing happening in Chicago from my point of view. He was entirely different from what Chicago was seemingly about. He had a small office. He did little buildings that were obviously something that he cared about from a design point of view and an intellectual point of view. Probably his most important quality is that Stanley has the ability to make people feel incredibly important and valued. He focuses on them, he listens to them, he compliments them. He has the ability to make people feel very special. I was just completely taken because I was made to feel very special. And I really hadn't been made to feel very special since Cornell. Colin made me feel very special. There were also magic moments like meeting Alan Colquhoun and Jim Stirling at a cocktail party in New York and saying to Alan, "I know who you are, I've read your articles," and Alan saying back to me, "Oh yes, I know who you are. Colin's told me about you." I got the same reaction from James Stirling, "Oh yes, you're one of Colin's prize students." So I really asked Stanley to have lunch frequently and it was an opportunity to talk to somebody about architecture. Some of it was gossip and some of it was real discussion about what we thought about Stirling's newest building or so-and-so's latest project. It was wonderful. It was sort of like throwing water to a dying man. There was nothing else out there like that.

Blum: This was during the early 1970s?

Cohen: I came here in 1971 and it was shortly after that.

Blum: Were the Miesians still popular?

Cohen: I don't think there was anything else but Mies. Stanley had just the beginnings of a local reputation and a personality that he created for himself. I hadn't yet at that point met either Larry or Jim. I had not met Ben or Cindy Weese. Stanley was the person that I talked to. He seemed like he knew everybody and knew what was going on and knew everything. That was very appealing. It was like getting the daily newspaper.

Blum: He didn't resent you picking his brain?

Cohen: I don't think it was like picking his brain. Just like Colin needed people around him who provided a certain kind of stimulation and foil, Stanley needed that too. He needs to be surrounded with people.

Blum: So it was a mutually beneficial connection?

Cohen: Yes, although I think we were at very different points in our careers.

Blum: When you learned about the "One Hundred Years" exhibition that was coming to the MCA, you called him. Why did you not call Walter Netsch?

Cohen: Because there was no one else around who had the interest in doing the work and who had the connections to make it happen in the way that Stanley did. I'll explain that in a little bit, but what I need to do is to explain the third track of all of this, which is that obviously inspecting fire escapes and doing MCA invitations wasn't keeping me. I went over to UIC to interview for a job. Initially I was not hired and I remember Tom Yeager was the acting director and I went in and talked to him. Tom felt the need to tell me what the institution was about and also to tell me that he thought that the most important thing that we could teach students was how much—and I quote—"shit goes down a three-inch pipe." I said to Tom, "Well, gee that's



interesting because I always thought that a university education was about teaching people to think." He actually said, "Well, that's true, but ultimately we're doing them more of a service by teaching them how to make something." It was almost vocational. I said to myself, Oops, I guess the university isn't going to be my source of intellectual stimulation. This is not where people are sitting around and talking about architectural theory and what's happening today. I was subsequently hired by Dick Whitaker—he'd been at the national AIA and then had been head of the department at Milwaukee—and I took the position at UIC. That was interesting because I was aware that Dick was Charlie Moore's partner and I was a big fan of the early MLTW work. I went and talked to Dick and he hired me to teach a design studio. But it still was pretty lonely at UIC because everyone was teaching very pragmatic courses. Even the design stuff wasn't engaged in ideas in quite the same way that I thought design studios should engage architectural ideas. From my point of view, Stanley was really it. So when the thing at the MCA happened—Stanley had been aware of it and at this point he would probably claim credit for the show—I honestly don't know if we had the idea to do something simultaneously or if it was my idea. But what we did is right after this meeting we talked about doing a show, the two of us. I had always been interested in Chicago architecture, in part because of Colin's interest in it and also his lack of interest in it, and his interest in Wright. The more I read the more none of it made any sense at all. It was just garbage. Giedion was just garbage. Pevsner was only vaguely better. I kept thinking to myself that this was just preposterous. There had to be something better. Nobody talked about John Wellborn Root and he was probably the best architect in town—certainly better than Sullivan, I thought. When you look at Sullivan, he is completely schizophrenic. The Auditorium building is good Richardsonian Romanesque, the Carson Pirie Scott building has an interesting corner, but it's basically Chicago frame loft building stuff with some Romanesque ornament on the bottom, which makes perfect sense. Sullivan was basically working in the Romanesque Revival, when his buildings were civic buildings except when he didn't have the budget to afford it. Here was Pevsner going on with all this absurd stuff. So Carson Pirie Scott was in one Pevsner chapter that deals with the development of the skyscraper and the

frame. And the first floor went in another chapter that talked about Art Nouveau. I said, you know it's obvious to any idiot: why would Sullivan be connected to Art Nouveau? This is Romanesque ornament, just look at Romanesque architecture and look at Richardson and Sullivan and then look at the cast iron stuff that Sullivan was doing. It was original, he invented it, but clearly it comes out of the Romanesque. I couldn't stand it. So Stanley and I had slightly different motives in wanting to do the show.

Blum: Had Stanley come to some of the same conclusions?

Cohen: No. I don't even think I talked to Stanley about this. So the show had two motives and two objectives. Stanley's objective, and in part my objective, was to make some space, to say that there were other people here who had some legitimacy—this was not just about Mies, SOM, C. F. Murphy, and the people that they trained and their disciples. Even if it was, why should they get to usurp and misinterpret what was happening in Chicago at the turn of the century?

Blum: Do you mean in the way they connected themselves to it?

Cohen: Yeah. By claiming parentage. It was like they were saying, "I'm Anastasia, or the lost prince, I have good blood, I'm the legitimate heir to these people and therefore I should be the one doing these buildings." We said, fine, this was not entirely the only way to see the history of early Chicago, why don't we deal with that and why don't we deal simply with the fact that there's all this other stuff that's happening at the same time that nobody pays attention to because there's been a conscious effort to suppress it. So our motives were to rewrite history and to undermine a position of power that existed for Murphy and SOM and IIT. Maybe it was not as much to undermine it as to say, "Look, it's not what it's claiming to be and it's not the only game in town." We wanted to make space for other people in other firms.

Blum: Including people in smaller offices, like you and Stanley?

Cohen: Yeah, like those that existed in other cities but didn't exist here. Mind you, there were small offices doing stuff here but for the most part they were out in the suburbs and weren't seen as serious architects.

Blum: What do you mean by serious?

Cohen: Well, think of George Fred Keck. That was a small office, he never had more than three or four or five people. There had always been small offices doing work, other than the large corporate commission, but they hadn't been paid attention to. They had been suppressed in terms of the histories that had been written and in terms of the contemporary descriptions of what was significant in Chicago. Our argument was that this was the same as not existing.

Blum: You pointed to Keck specifically in the catalog.

Cohen: He was one of the people for whom a historical consciousness emerged from the show. Keck wasn't really a find, because most architects in Chicago knew about him, but in a sense we sort of reinvented his career and created a historical position for him. We did that in the process of retelling not just the history of Chicago architecture but how the history had been written by Giedion and Pevsner and later by Oswald Grube to be one thing to the exclusion of another thing.

Blum: As you did your preparation for this catalog, and with Keck specifically in mind, did you discover any new information that would help explain why historians like Giedion simply ignored Keck, other than that Keck didn't fit into their theories?

Cohen: Well, that was exactly it. Let me digress just one moment to say that given the agenda we had and that Stanley and I were able to be quite articulate about, we divided the work up. Stanley was going to do the culling of the visual stuff for the catalog and inviting contemporary architects to be represented in the show. I was going to do historical research and write the

catalog essay. Stanley would do an introduction. At that point, we decided that this was probably a huge amount of work and we wanted to ask some other people if they would be involved and be a part of it. Larry Booth was on the Illinois Arts Council at that point and we asked Larry to be one of the curators of the show. What Larry did, basically, was to facilitate our getting a grant from the Illinois Arts Council.

Blum: Was that why he was attractive to you, because you thought he was a pipeline to some funding?

Cohen: Well, what Stanley said was that we should really have Larry and Ben involved and each would do different things.

Blum: What did Ben do?

Cohen: I think he was responsible for making contacts and circulating the show, although I could be remembering things not quite correctly. Obviously, Stanley was a genius at public relations and a lot of the arrangements for where the show would go were made by Stanley just calling people. So we sort of divided the work up between the two of us; we were responsible for the content and its mounting. Ben and Larry would take care of the other administrative things and be part of the show. Just as the Grube show was showing contemporary work by SOM and by Murphy and Arthur Takeuchi and by Pao-Chi Chang and by Al Swenson and all the students of Mies, this show would also make a historical counter-argument to the Pevsner-Giedion thesis about Chicago's place in architecture. Then we wanted to show the continuation of those strains in contemporary work. Stanley was organizing that part. Stanley had in his office two rows of desks that we just laid photographs out on. What we did with Larry and Ben was make a list of people in Chicago who we thought were doing good work. With some prodding to look for good work but not be so incredibly exclusive that we were turning down ninety percent of the people out there.

Blum: Because their work might be background architecture?

Cohen: No, remember that doing background architecture is actually okay. Stanley has just done a very good building on North Michigan Avenue at Ohio Street that's background architecture. If you look at it, it's actually sort of amazing in terms of the proportions in which there's a modulated system of window divisions that doubles on each tier, and the way the columns change. It's just a simple clad-frame building. But it's an elegant building. It's just amazing to me that Stanley can do that and also be the author of some of the other buildings that he's done and is doing. I don't know where it comes from. But there's a background building that I think is absolutely a superb piece of architecture. Now, who knows if it will still be standing there years from now when somebody hears this tape. In any case, we put together this list and began soliciting photographs of projects from people. We were both probably kind of ruthless. We would say, "No, send us something else." Or specifically, with people who were doing big buildings and wanted to send us stuff about that, we said, "No, you did this little house ten years ago which is really fabulous", or, "you did this little medical building. We want that." Stanley loved the fact that we had found photographs at the Chicago Historical Society of two projects that Bud Goldberg did. I think Stanley knew to look for them. They were projects that Bud had done in the 1930s: the gas station and the North Pole ice cream shop. They were so fabulous as constructivist architecture. Of course, here's Bud Goldberg: Mr. Round Hospitals, Mr. Marina City. We said, "Nope, that's not what we want. We want your best work." Here we were, these arbiters of taste, saying that those things are not the best work that Bud Goldberg did, but these little things from the 1930s are really extraordinary buildings. Of course, what we did was to suggest that aside from Mies there had been this alternate strain of really very interesting modernism that had existed here. I started doing focused research, looking for things, and I had remembered from a year or two earlier, like a little tiny article in the *Journal of Architectural Historians* on Keck's Crystal House that was poorly illustrated but talked about it. I started looking for old publications on the Crystal House and I found some. Then I went directly to Keck and asked him what he had. At that point, Fred was in the process of retiring and a lot of his stuff had gone up to

Watertown. But Fred said, "Well, you know, my wife has the office archives and there are a lot of slides." I actually went and looked through every slide and selected about one hundred of them that we duped for the UIC slide collection. But there was no Crystal House stuff there, although there were really early color transparencies of the B. J. Cahn house. These were color slides from the 1930s, which was when the technology was first available. Fred had a Leica and had taken all these photographs

Blum: And Bill was a photographer.

Cohen: Yes, so Bill said, "I think I've got something." And he led me down into the basement and we actually found a package of construction negatives of the Crystal House, which we ended up not using in the show. We used the Hedrich-Blessing photographs because of the limited space. But subsequently, they were published in one of the Chicago Architectural Club journals. They were a really important find. You look at those images and you think this house was built in Switzerland in 1979. It was phenomenal. I just kept reading and talking to people and asking questions. I found out that Keck had been asked by Moholy-Nagy to be the first architecture professor at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, that he knew Sigfried Giedion. And suddenly, it starts to look like a conspiracy. Why isn't this guy in anything? Why has the stuff he was doing in the 1930s been completely suppressed? Why is the Crystal House completely suppressed? It has an exoskeleton and it has trusses with the roof hung from it, like Crown Hall. When you compare it to all of the metal and glass exhibition buildings before it, it's like it's out of place and time. You look at this building and you say to yourself that this building could not have been done before 1950. Suddenly you realize why it got dumped: it didn't fit. If the most important things were all happening in Europe up until 1938 when Mies comes to Chicago and Gropius goes to London and then to Harvard, Keck couldn't have built that building in 1933! There's no way! Where did it come from? What was it connected to? Where did the idea to do that come from? Where did he get the idea to do the columns and the exterior roof structure out of metal trusses? It's just so out of place, so far from fitting into anything, that the

histories being written could not absorb it. They couldn't deal with it. But worse than that, it had no impact. It just happened.

Blum: Do you think that because they were temporary buildings and they were demolished after the fair, they didn't have any lasting impact?

Cohen: But they were up for a couple of years. They were published nationally.

Blum: But they weren't designed to be permanent and they did disappear rather quickly.

Cohen: But so did the Barcelona Pavilion. I'm not sure, but I don't think it was up as long as Keck's Crystal House. I think it was up for under a year and Keck's house was up for the two years of the fair.

Blum: Did Keck have the kind of stature that Mies had?

Cohen: When?

Blum: When he did the Crystal House.

Cohen: Mies didn't have that kind of stature when he did the Barcelona Pavilion. Here's the really interesting thing: Keck's Crystal House was probably better published than the Barcelona Pavilion, because if you go back, there's this guy called Juan Bonta who used to be at Ball State who did the research and discovered that the when the Barcelona Pavilion was initially built, the Barcelona Pavilion wasn't even discussed in the reviews of the fair, or when it was discussed, it got only a few lines that talked about the sumptuousness of all the marble. And there were no pictures. After Mies became Mies, after he became head of the Bauhaus in Germany and then moved here, then suddenly it became an important building that historians were looking at and suddenly everyone was saying the same thing about it, which was that it had to do with De Stijl and the continuity of space and horizontal and vertical planes and undulating space. That wasn't the original assessment. So if Mies had

died right after the Barcelona Pavilion, it would not have been canonized as one of the great buildings of the twentieth century. So what can we conclude: Mies had powerful friends who wrote histories? Even though people say he didn't talk very much he did a better job of public relations for himself than Fred Keck did. I just barely met Fred at the end of his life, but he was supposed to have been obstreperous and refused to join the AIA. He wasn't particularly liked by his colleagues.

Blum: He does have a reputation for having been difficult.

Cohen: Yes, and he did this building that was extraordinary and completely out of time and place. It just disappeared, it vanished. We found it again. It became the pivot point for saying, Well, if this was here, then how in the hell can American architecture and Chicago architecture be dismissed by somebody saying that "nothing happened in Chicago between the disastrous effects of the 1893 World's Colombian Exposition and Mies's arrival on the shores of America in 1938?" I think that's part of a quote from Giedion, although my memory ain't what it used to be. That's outrageous and demonstrably outrageous! Stanley's agenda and participation was different, but I set out to illustrate that that premise was outrageous but that the subsequent histories that had been written accepted it. Even the first version of Carl Condit's book on the Chicago School is straight Giedion. It's not until the later volumes that the point of view is amended. Nothing happened here? Suddenly we've got some extraordinary things happening here, and the most extraordinary is Keck's house.

Blum: When did you discover this counter premise about Chicago architecture? Was it in doing the research for the catalog? Or did you know about it going in?

Cohen: Well, I had been working on it for a while. I was passionately interested in Richardson and I still think that he's one of the great American architects. Because of my interests in Richardson, I probably looked at Sullivan differently. And because I had read the descriptions of Sullivan, which were



more what Wright said about him than what you could support, based on looking at his buildings. When I read Pevsner, Giedion, or even Condit, I just started saying, "Wait a minute. What's wrong with this picture? It doesn't really make sense."

Blum: So was that your message in the catalog?

Cohen: Yes. I was saying, heritage? What heritage? This is not from the Chicago School. This is really from Mies.

Blum: With your organization—you, Stanley, Ben, and Larry—at what point did Tom and the two Jims, Freed and Nagle, join you?

Cohen: Well, there's a little bit more story before we get to that. The story is really all Stanley's, because he is probably the most brilliant architect at public relations that I have every met. He has a sixth sense of it. If there's press present and there're five people standing around and the press asks a question, everybody responds, but Stanley is there with the sound bite that gets recorded. It's phenomenal. The other component in all this was Nory Miller. You might want to go and interview her about all this.

Blum: I understand that she doesn't write about architecture any more.

Cohen: She's a lawyer now. Both her parents are lawyers. She's a big-time corporate practicing lawyer. She married Jonathan Barnett, who's in New York. That's her only connection to architecture now. She wrote for the *AIA Journal* and then for *Progressive Architecture*. She and Suzanne Stephens were doing all the writing for *PA*, and then they decided that it was hopeless, basically. Nory was disillusioned because there wasn't any place to go. There are three jobs in the whole country. There were three nationally circulated magazines at that point in time, one of them is owned by the AIA. Nory had done an article for *Architectural Record* and she had written something about a metal-panel building and the fact that there was oil-canning, you know, shimmering, where the surface isn't that flat. And *Record* took out the sentence because

the people who made the panels were an advertiser. She said, "Screw this." She went to Columbia Law School and just sort of dumped architecture.

Blum: So what was the story with Nory related to your show?

Cohen: She was at the *Daily News* at that point in time. She was also editing *Inland Architect* under Bill Newman, who was also at the *Daily News*. Before the show hit, she did a whole issue of *Inland Architect* on it. We had ongoing coverage in the *Daily News*. Stanley made it, with some help from Nory, into a media event. The way it was made into a media event was something that I would never have dreamed of. Stanley billed it as the Battle of the Titans. Where I would have done a quiet counter show, Stanley had everyone believing that this was a battle to the death between guys who painted their buildings black and guys who painted their buildings something else. The media, including the national architectural magazines, just bought it. So the two shows opened and everyone's sort of running to tie into the shows. The MCA is flabbergasted because it's the best-attended show they'd ever had up to that point. They were keeping a head count in the lobby of the Time-Life building, which was a silly place to put our show, except that Stanley was absolutely right to say that it was around the corner so people could see one and then just walk over and see the other one.

Blum: And it helped that Ben had some connections to get the space.

Cohen: Sure, being one of the architects of the building. It was like attending a party, at least from my point of view. The MCA did stuff, the AIA did stuff. There were symposiums, there were panels. People were giving lectures; we were invited to lecture. I remember that Philip Johnson came and said something about all of this. Allan Temko came from California. Nory Miller once listened to him for half an hour at a symposium and looked at me and said, "My god, that man's a zircon in the rough!" Polish him up and you still have something that's basically worthless. I shouldn't say things like that on tape.

Blum: It was published that at the MCA symposium, "Past, Present, and Future," he publicly mugged you, along with Bruce Graham.

[Tape 3: Side 2]

Cohen: Well, he basically said, "Well, who the hell are you?"

Blum: Didn't the New York Five exist before the book? Weren't they banded together in some way?

Cohen: Apparently Peter had organized some stuff at MoMA, but I don't think they were close. Charlie doesn't talk to Peter. Peter and Richard Meier are first cousins, which floors me. You know they sort of all talked to one another at the institute. I don't know whether they had a structure, in the sense that we had for about two years. The Chicago Seven had dinner once a month at the Como Inn with a slide projector and everybody brought slides of stuff they were working on. I don't know, and I'm probably the wrong person to ask, about whether the New York Five existed prior to cooking up that publication.

Blum: I thought they existed loosely before and that *Five Architects* was as a result of their activities.

Cohen: If they did, I didn't know about them.

Blum: An accusation was made at the time about the counter Chicago architecture show that it was self-serving.

Cohen: Well, it was.

Blum: They said that none of the Chicago Seven built in the Miesian style, you didn't build big buildings, you built little things, you did remodelings, you did additions, that you were trying to creating a legitimate place for yourselves.

Cohen: Absolutely. It was self-serving in many ways. It was asking people to look at history differently, which wasn't particularly self-serving unless you can argue that what we were doing was as legitimate as the next guy in Chicago, not just anywhere, but in Chicago. We were making the argument and it was obviously self-promotional, because there was a lot of visibility attached to it. I have no problem with that, at all. Wasn't "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" self-serving in the same way? When you look at the number of projects by Mies and then you look at the number of projects by SOM, who Peter Pran worked for many, many years, and then you look at the number of projects by C. F. Murphy, who was being served? Yes, clearly one of the motives was to change things. Were there bigger motives? Did we consciously want to change the climate of the architectural culture in Chicago to make it something different? Absolutely! I've never talked to Stanley about this, but I suspect he would say the same thing.

Blum: So, in addition to rewriting history, and creating a dialogue in the architectural community, you were also making a place for your own work?

Cohen: Yes. And we were trying to create a recognition and an awareness and a community in which small buildings, whether residential or commercial or institutional, could be looked at as being as worthy of note as the big stuff that SOM and C. F. Murphy were doing. That was actually a very focused, very intentional thing that we wanted as an outcome of this show. In creating the Chicago Seven, we had the name before we had seven people. It was a name that everyone identified with political rebels and dissidents of 1968. We were, of course, the architectural dissidents. Why not use that name, because it would actually carry that meaning with it.

Blum: So you needed three more people to make seven. How were they selected?

Cohen: They were friends and people whose work Stanley and I respected and whom we thought were good.

Blum: Why Jim Freed? It seems ironic that the head of Mies's school was a member of the opposition camp.

Cohen: Well, I think, in large part, that was Stanley's doing. I think that Stanley felt that it was very important for Jim to succeed at IIT. Success may have meant something different for Stanley than it meant for Jim, but basically, it was making the school a viable school. At that point at IIT, I think almost all the students were Asian and it was in financial trouble. It wasn't a place that people were going to anymore. It wasn't part of a dialogue in the city. It seemed like a missed opportunity. For a long time, Stanley, Tom, and I talked about going to either Northwestern or the University of Chicago and proposing to start a third school of architecture, because IIT seemed hopeless and UIC seemed equally hopeless. Tom was teaching at IIT and I was teaching at UIC and we thought that those places weren't ever going to produce anything. We really had a couple of serious lunches where we talked about how we would constitute the proposal and who we would have to approach in the structure of each university and how it could be funded. It was a serious discussion. Then two things happened—I don't remember the chronology of it, maybe Freed being selected as dean at IIT was first, and then we were looking for a new head at UIC and I was on the committee that selected Tom as the new head. At that point, we began to think that maybe we could do something within the existing framework.

Blum: Do you mean, if they would just do their work of reorganizing the schools, then things would change?

Cohen: Yeah. I think that Ingo was invited to join the Chicago Seven as a friend of Stanley's and because of his position and because, clearly, he wasn't a Miesian architect, even though he had studied there. In fact, his work at that point in time was more influenced by Louis Kahn and the Philadelphia school than it was by things that you would stylistically identify with Chicago.

Blum: But in "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago," he was represented by his building at 88 Pine Street, in New York, which was clearly identified as

Miesian. Freed has said it was one of his last Miesian buildings. There he was with a foot in both camps—part of the opposition and also part of the Chicago Seven.

Cohen: Yes, all the better. Jim's gone through the twelve-step program and finally seen the light. You know, again, it's sort of Stanley's brilliant notion of how you do things and one of those things is that you co-opt the opposition.

Blum: Why was Jim Nagle selected?

Cohen: Jim had a small firm and he was doing good work and Jim and Larry were Stanley's first employees. So they were family. If you have a party, how do you not invite family?

Blum: So the Chicago Seven had a name and finally had seven people. Where did your architectural practice, the work that you were doing, fit into the scheme of things at the time of the show in 1976?

Cohen: I was mostly teaching school and doing an occasional little house addition.

Blum: I thought you had done an actual house by that time?

Cohen: Nah, but not much.

Blum: Did you have any ambition to do big civic commissions?

Cohen: Yeah, I did. Actually, that portrait of me that will be used as the frontispiece to this oral history really speaks to that. At about the time, a student of mine, who is now in New York, a guy called Gary Paul, had been working for Gene Sisco and Bob Lubotsky, which was a little three- or four-man firm. Gary liked Gene a lot and thought that Gene had some talent. They were interested in interviewing for larger commissions and Gary suggested to Gene that we collaborate on some stuff. We did some proposals, which we didn't get, but we actually liked working together. Subsequently, they got a little

project that they asked me to work on and I got a little house to do that I asked them to help me produce. At a certain point—I don't remember the date in relation to the Chicago Seven, but it might be just before or just after the "Chicago Architects" show—I actually gave up the space that I had had in the Fisher building and moved in with them because we were doing so much stuff collaboratively. They were in their first office, in a building that doesn't exist anymore, 200 East Ontario. They kept growing and they had been doing work for the city of Evanston, doing housing rehab work that was federally funded. The city of Evanston really like Bob Lubotsky and they came to us and said that they were interviewing for the Evanston Public Works building, which was a seven million dollar building. They said that if we went out and got someone to do the building with us that had a track record doing public works buildings, that we would be the design architects... Anyway, the city of Evanston said that if we were interested we should do X, Y, and Z and that they would seriously consider us as architects of the project. In fact, they got the project and I was the principal designer on it. This was the beginning of Andy Metter's career as a designer of public works buildings. Andy was basically the project architect and did the design development and the construction drawings for it. In fact, for a short time before we split up, we were doing shopping center work. We did the one municipal building. There were some sizable projects that we were doing.

Blum: The Evanston Public Works building received an award.

Cohen: It received a *Progressive Architecture* award. That was sort of the beginning of the end, because I wasn't credited properly. We never formed a partnership for some complex reasons that really had to do with money—they wanted me to take my teaching salary and put it into the partnership and then draw out on a yearly basis less than what I was getting paid by the university. And they wanted me to buy into their firm and to assume about \$100,000 worth of debt that I would pay off. I said to myself, Wait a minute, what's wrong with this picture? This doesn't sound reasonable. First of all, there's no overhead on my teaching salary. Rather than part company at that point, we agreed we'd keep doing this as an association, job by job. They had

Andy Metter when I started and I immediately hired Anders Nereim, who had been a student of mine, even though he had gone back to school to do five years of architecture after getting a degree at the University of Chicago. He wasn't that much younger than I was, but I had had him as a student and been enormously impressed with him. He was a really bright, talented, gifted man. So they hired Anders and they hired Kathy Quinn, who had been another one of my very favorite students and who is a wonderful person and a wonderful designer. We also hired Jim Law, who sort of walked in off the street as a Cornell grad since someone had told him to look up Stuart Cohen as the Cornell person in Chicago. It was a fabulous group of people in this office. But then the *PA* thing happened and it was credited as Sisco Lubotsky and Consoer Morgan, the engineering firm that collaborated on it with us. At the very bottom of the credits it said "Associated Architect: Stuart Cohen." I was just incredibly pissed that I had been treated that way when, in fact, it was my design project.

Blum: Did that squelch your desire to do large projects?

Cohen: No, but it squelched my desire to continue working with them. The point at which I really knew it was time to leave was when one of my former students who was working at JMB, the developers, and they interviewed us for some shopping center work. I had gone to the initial interview with this guy who I liked a lot as a student and who wanted to hire us. Then Gene did the subsequent negotiation and I was basically cut out of the project completely. It wasn't like, "Well, you helped bring this project in and we want you to design it." Instead it was like, "No, we got this, we're doing this." That just continued to happen and even though we were operating like a partnership, I just said, "It's not even an association anymore and it's time to go." The minute this happened Cathy, who really hated Gene, didn't want to work for him. The minute I announced I was going, she got another job and she was out of there. So there was Andy Metter and Anders. I sort of thought about it and asked Anders if he would be a partner with me. I basically didn't have any work—well, I had one job that was coming up but I had no idea what I



could pay him. So I told him I was going to rent a space and take a flyer on this, did he want to do it with me? He said, "Yeah!"

Blum: May we backtrack a little bit? Yesterday when we spoke, we didn't have copies of the catalogs *Chicago Architects* and *One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago*. Someone had pointed out how they're quite similar in many ways. I credit you with the catalog—not only the content but maybe even the format. What I see as similar in both is the full-page spread of the city and the prairie and the small head shots of each architect in the back of the book. Was this deliberate?

Cohen: No. In fact, we had no idea what their catalog was going to look like. I really did the essay and the historical research. Then, probably in a rather arrogant way, sat with Stanley and looked at the work that was being submitted and said, No, that's not very good, we don't want that, send it back and get something else. We were editing the submissions ideologically. I think I had mentioned before that we had the problem of not including what Bertrand Goldberg will always be remembered for, which is Marina City. We wanted to make a different kind of point. In some cases we actually put in work that wasn't typical of what the person was doing. Either it fit our visual agenda or our ideological agenda. I think that one of the reasons that Stanley and I enjoyed doing these things together was that we had a similar sense of irony. In fact, there was an irony in doing that to Bud Goldberg.

Blum: To Bud Goldberg or to the audience to whom you were addressing the message of this project?

Cohen: In a way, what we were doing was presenting an argument, but we were also presenting the work of a series of architects. So that's how they're seen in a way, their reputation or lack thereof, is part of the work that's standing out there on the street. It's also part of the critical commentary and attention that the work received. We know that, that's the whole issue of Keck, that he had been lost or buried intentionally. So that part of what we did was kind of playfully ironic. I felt, and I'm sure that Stanley always feels in doing these

things, that we were being sort of bad boys. That catalog, in a serious way, was presenting a kind of irreverent picture. I think we used Walter Netsch's house in the catalog. Walter had sent a whole bunch of stuff to us and we said, "Hey, forget it. We don't want any of these buildings. We don't think these buildings are very good or very interesting." Stanley said to me, "Well, what do you think is the best thing that Walter has ever done?" I said, "Well, I think the best thing he's ever done is his house." You know, it's a good building for all the wrong reasons. It's complex field theory geometry, but because it lacks subdivisions, you actually perceive the geometry. You perceive the space and there isn't a problem of getting lost in it and all the other things that are problematical about the buildings he designed at UIC. I said, "It's really a pretty good building. Why don't we use his house?" In a sense, we both saw that as "doing something" to Walter. You know what I mean?

Blum: Did you have a desire to "do something" to Walter? Was he a friend or a foe?

Cohen: He actually wasn't either one. At that point, I knew Walter because I had been on a number of boards with him, including, early on, the Landmarks Preservation Council when a guy named Richard Miller was running it. I thought Walter was a bright and very interesting guy who didn't pay attention and didn't listen to people. It was just that I was teaching at UIC and to look back now, in retrospect, to think that I have spent twenty-five years of my life in a building that he designed that has no windows, that has concrete-block walls and all the charm of an unfinished basement recreation room, is really tragic. It's absolutely tragic. It's not that I was suffering from light deprivation—when you get depressed if the sun doesn't shine—it's that I actually began to realize lots of interesting things about windows in buildings that has nothing to do with bringing in light. It disturbed me greatly, for instance, that I lost track of time. The people that design casinos in Las Vegas understand that completely. But to go in a building when it was day and to come out when it was pitch dark was a very strange sensation that I've never gotten used to. The other thing that I realized was that knowing

what is an exterior wall is one of the major ways that you orient yourself within a building. There was no way to cognitively orient yourself in these buildings because there were so few windows that when you were in a space you never knew where the outside was. Therefore you couldn't spatially position yourself in terms of imagining the organization of the building. To this day I can't draw the plan of that building. I could draw the plan of probably every other building I've ever been in, but I can't draw a plan of that building. In a way, I guess I was mad at Walter all that time for having designed these buildings that I thought were just silly. To insist upon a theory and dogmatically carry it out and then to realize that the result you got when you generated a building didn't allow you to put any windows into it because the system didn't permit you to make openings in the surfaces, that was too dense... That's a big aside.

Blum: Consistent with what you're saying—I don't know if this is apocryphal or not—I've heard that Walter was addressing a group of students in a room at UIC that had no windows and it was a warm summer day and as he was beginning, one of the kids called out, "Hey, open the windows, it's hot in here!" So the students were feeling the same as you were.

Cohen: Well, we're probably going to flip-flop all over the place, but when the graduate program was being started at UIC, there were a few people being considered for that position and Ed Deam had actually been given the job of putting this all in place. I guess they wanted to hire somebody to do this program. Ed asked me if I would go to lunch and discuss it with him and he said, "Well, what do you think, should we hire Walter Netsch or Stanley Tigerman?" I said to Ed, "Come on, you're not actually serious about this. For starters, could you imagine Walter, who is incredibly defensive about the Arts and Architecture building anyway, teaching and having to deal with all of that?" I explained to him why Stanley was actually the better choice for the position. And Stanley was hired, so I don't know if I was the person who was responsible for doing that or not. I probably was just a part of it. In any case, to go back to the *Chicago Architects* catalog, we were actually making selections that we genuinely believed, in our opinion, to be each person's best

work. In some cases, we were also looking for things that indicated that the person did more things than just what they were known for. In fact, there are a lot of people in the "One Hundred Years" show that we included in our show. It's like one show had somebody dressed in their business suit and the other was somebody dressed in their khaki shorts or their blue jeans and ripped T-shirt. We were the shorts, blue jeans and ripped shirts guys, of course. I'm not really sure where the format of the catalog came from. I think that Stanley probably had more to do with the visual decisions and the format than I did, although we both went through the photographs to make the selections. We did have designers who were doing the book. The idea of opening the book with the panoramas of the city and the prairie was Stanley's. The idea of presenting Chicago as both prairie and suburb and city begins to say that we were going to talk about this place with a much larger vision than the other guys. It also said that we were going to look at buildings that were not necessarily built in a dense, urban, environment. This wasn't just an ordinary panorama; it has a vernacular farm building in it. You have to remember that at this point in time Charles Moore was making new buildings that looked like this. There was a message in all of this.

Blum: What about the small photographs of heads in the back of the book. Some of them are identical to those that were published in the other catalog.

Cohen: Well, some people gave us the same photographs. Isn't that a hoot? I have no memory of the other catalog. I don't know that we ever saw it or knew that they were doing this grid of heads. I do know that doing the grid of heads was Stanley's idea and if he knew about the other catalog, then clearly... I think it's fabulous that they're actually parallel. I think it's a shame that the books are slightly different sizes. Wouldn't you want to put them on the shelf side-by-side? Let them continue a kind of dialogue forever.

Blum: I also noticed that every one of the Chicago Seven, except you, is included in "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" exhibition.

Cohen: I don't think that at that time I had built anything within the city of Chicago. That's very possible. I certainly hadn't built anything that would in any way, shape or form, fit into their argument that the show was making. First of all, I was just starting out, I was a kid. Second, I think that ideologically, at this point, I had done house additions and maybe I was finishing my first house. It's very strange that the project that represented me in our catalog was a commercial building. That was actually Stanley's doing. Stanley said, "Submit some work. Do you want to be known as someone who does house additions? Here's this really interesting commercial building." It was actually a Holiday Inn that never got built for a few reasons, not the least of which was that it didn't look like a Holiday Inn.

Blum: But the sign did.

Cohen: Yes, it was hiding the architecture.

Blum: I thought it was a curious coincidence that there were so many parallels between the catalogs.

Cohen: You have to remember that I was really a kid, in terms of age and building, when this was all happening.

Blum: Well, the essay that was so important in it fell to you to write.

Cohen: At that point, I don't think that Stanley had any aspirations to write things. I had already published an article in *Oppositions* that had received some critical attention. I think that Stanley thought—not in Chicago, but maybe even better in New York, where the tally was being kept—that I would be the better person to do the essay and that it might count for slightly more. Whatever... I did the essay. Let me tell you something really interesting—if I think back, it clearly has to be the start of whatever kind of animosity that Stanley feels for me today. When the show opened in New York—we opened it out of town first because of scheduling, which I had nothing to do with, it was Stanley thumbing his nose at Chicago—it opened at Cooper Union,

which was arranged by John Hejduk. We all went there for the opening. Stanley again, in a very masterful way, made sure that catalogs got out there before the show opened and before we got there. He arranged a lunch with John Hejduk and Ada Louise Huxtable and both of us in the tower room of the Cooper Union building, where the works for the big clock are. We walked Ada Louise through the show and she seemed very interested and graciously accepted a catalog and then she was off. She did not attend the opening, which meant that the review of the show was written from her ten-minute walk-through and the catalog. All of the visual images from the show were in the catalog... Stanley was smart about that because the catalog remains after the show is taken down and it is ultimately the lasting reason for doing the show. It was really weird the way we found out about her review. I think that Stanley was at that point already teaching at UIC and had gotten Peter Eisenman to come as a visiting critic. My memory is that Peter was lecturing and I was there and Stanley was there and just before the lecture we had gone up to talk to him. I think it was a Friday afternoon and he said to us, "Have you seen the Sunday *New York Times*?" That was ridiculous because it wouldn't have gotten to Chicago until Sunday. I don't know how he had seen it, but he had read Ada Louise Huxtable's review of the show. I don't remember exactly what he said, but he turned to me and basically said, "You won. Ada Louise mentioned you five times." So when I finally saw the review—we were listed alphabetically in the front of the book—Ada Louise wrote, "the show by Lawrence Booth, Stuart Cohen, Stanley Tigerman, and Benjamin Weese..." and then went on to write about "Cohen's catalog" or "Cohen's essay", which she lauded. She wrote that you could hear the sound of knives sharpening, that it was brilliant revisionist history...

Blum: She referred to it as "the fight."

Cohen: Yeah, she said all the right things. But the problem was that what she really wrote about was the catalog essay. I think that that must have hurt Stanley.

Blum: I'm a little surprised to hear you say that. Weren't you both be glad for such attention?

Cohen: Well, we were. But somehow or other what I think Stanley perceived and what had happened was that while we were both genuinely equally responsible for making this thing—maybe in some ways Stanley was more so than I—there was clearly no way that I could have pulled it off myself. He made the thing happen. But somehow or other the reward was in fact the review in the *New York Times*, which, of course, everybody read. It was laudatory of my essay. I think that that was a little bit of a problem for Stanley. The place that it showed up was when we went to do the “Late Entries to the Tribune Tower Competition” show. Stanley was very clear that he had done the introduction to the *Chicago Architects* catalog and I had done the essay, so for the *Late Entries* catalog I was going to do the introduction and he was going to do the essay. That was also a very, very interesting story, that's another piece in all of this.

Blum: You have spoken about how the Chicago Seven was formed and about how you wanted to keep the momentum up and to keep yourselves in front of the public and the community in Chicago through exhibitions.

Cohen: I think it was actually a bit more complicated than that. What we understood was that there were at least two communities of people out there who were involved in commissioning buildings: real estate developers and everybody else. We said, for the most part, everybody else doesn't care about architecture.

[Tape 4: Side 1]

Cohen: What we defined as a potential audience for the message as well as for the architecture that we were promoting was the art community, all of the people who collect and patronize art and support museums, who go to gallery exhibits. The premise was very simple, everybody knows that architecture is an art form. So why don't we try to convince all of the people who are already part of the art community that a certain kind of architecture is, in fact, an art form that may be more related to the way they think about art

than Mies's Federal Center, for instance. The idea was to do a show in a gallery. We were early, but clearly not the first. By then Max Protech had done a couple of drawings shows in New York.

Blum: And you said they were beginning to sell.

Cohen: Yes, there was beginning to be an interest in all of this stuff. So we had the idea that we would do this show. Stanley had just finished remodeling Richard Gray's gallery on Michigan Avenue. Stanley said, "I'm going to call Richard. He'll love the idea. It's an ideal place to exhibit, it's probably the most prestigious gallery in Chicago." Stanley had said to me, "If my work is there, all my artist friends will never speak to me again." Richard had a reputation for being, not snobbish, but being less interested in the work of Chicago artists than the work of artists with national reputations.

Blum: I think that's a widely held perception.

Cohen: Stanley loved the idea that we could, as architects, do a show in this gallery where most of the local artists were bypassed. In fact, Richard liked the idea. Stanley said—I don't remember if it was his or my idea—that it shouldn't just be "Oh, here's a building that I'm building," like you're just walking into a drafting room and picking up a few interesting sketches to frame and put up on the wall. So the idea was that we would each do a project and they would have an overall theme. Everybody would do their special thing. I said, "Well, here's an idea. Protech is selling drawings and, obviously, Richard will want to sell the drawings and models, if we make models. Why don't we sell the design as well? If we all were to do houses, we could sell the drawings of the house and the model, but we could also sell the right to build the house."

Blum: Do you mean like a copyright?

Cohen: Yeah. If you did a design and they wanted to buy it, then they could commission you to build that house.



- Blum: So would you continue to hold the copyright and be able to sell it to more than one person?
- Cohen: No. Well, I don't think we had worked it out. I mean, the AIA contract language about ownership of drawings... I didn't worry about that. It was just if someone wanted to buy the project, they then could have the exclusive right to hire the designer to build it. But if they bought the project, then you couldn't do that same house for someone else.
- Blum: What if what they wanted was just the drawings and nothing more?
- Cohen: That was fine. In fact, that's what sold out of the show. The show did not sell that well, but there were a few that did. I think that almost everybody sold one or two drawings that were in the show. I think one or two of the models that were there also sold.
- Blum: The theme of the Richard Gray exhibition was single family houses and titled simply "Seven Chicago Architects."
- Cohen: We each did a house. The thesis behind that was—I don't know where the quote comes from—but the idea is that the difference between twentieth-century architecture and seventeenth-, eighteenth-, or nineteenth-century architecture is that previously architecture had been exclusively the domain of public and religious buildings and that everything else were just houses. There were, of course, exceptions to that. But in the twentieth century, the dwelling became the primary building type that was focused on, the exception being public buildings in Columbus, Indiana where Cummins Engine paid the architect's fee. We read the histories of early modernism and that's the perception. In fact, if you look at the icons of early twentieth-century modernism, what are they? They are the Villa Savoye, Fallingwater—most of them are houses. They are not public buildings, civic buildings, or institutional buildings. Whereas, if you go back in the other direction, it's harder. I mean, you've got the Villa Rotunda, but you have to be an

architectural historian to be able to name many more residences. Or, if you name residence, they aren't really residences. Is Blenheim Palace really a residence? They're country houses, or country seats, for royalty, which is somehow different from a house. Anyway, the whole idea was that we were also arguing, contrary to the position of the "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" show, that there's also another kind of building, which was the house and which was incredibly significant in terms of the development of twentieth-century architecture. So we were all going to do houses.

Blum: The catalog essay for this exhibition was written by Dennis Adrian. He had been associated with artists more than with architects. One of the points he made in the essay, considering where he was coming from, was that the work in your exhibition was done by architect-artists. So he was putting architects in an artist category.

Cohen: Right. We wanted someone to do the essay who was known to the art community and to the gallery-going community. Stanley knew Dennis. I may have suggested Don Baum. I knew Don well from the MCA and from the exhibitions committee there.

Blum: Don was an artist himself.

Cohen: He is an artist and an art historian. Dennis teaches art history. I'm not quite sure how we came to Dennis; it was probably Stanley's idea. We knew that we wanted an artist to write it, since it was in an art gallery. There was an argument that we were trying to make, by positioning the work and suggesting how to view the work, that didn't exist before. Part of my thing was to say, My god, here are all of these people who are corporate lawyers and big-time accountants and heads of companies and when they want a house, what do they do? They go out and buy an expensive tract house or they hire a builder and put up something of absolutely no distinction and no merit. How is it conceivable that there is so little sophistication when it comes to this other kind of building? It didn't work to say, Oh, yes, the

reason there are all these clients on the East Coast is that they all went to Yale and they all took Vince Scully's course and he educated a whole generation of architectural clients. There's got to be some truth in that, but it doesn't work globally for me. It was just that no one had ever, anywhere, suggested that people who wanted to commission a house for themselves, or a store, or small office building, could actually think of purchasing it as a work of art that was being done specifically for them.

Blum: How did people accept that idea?

Cohen: I don't know. But what happened was exactly what we wanted, people argued about it. There were lots of architects who were incensed, absolutely incensed. They thought that it was trivializing architecture, to present it in this light. One of the things I remember was said in a lecture that Philip Johnson gave at Harvard years ago. He said that he, "would sooner spend the night in the nave of Chartres Cathedral with the nearest toilet a block away then spend one night in Gropius's Harvard dormitories, with their back-to-back plumbing." The AIA, literally, printed a disclaimer for this. Here they had been, working so hard as professionals to present to the business community the idea that architects are responsible professionals who spoke their language and who paid attention to their needs, and took care of their investments. And here Philip got up and said something outrageous like that. What we felt we had done within the context of Chicago was to say something outrageous. There was discussion about it. The show was reviewed a lot. In that sense, it did exactly what we wanted. There was this fabulous continuing dialogue. People got up and were able to say, "This is garbage. These guys are doing doghouses. What does this matter when we've got great architecture like Mies's Federal Center or Brownson's Civic Center? These are the great works of architecture. This other is ephemera." It was great. It was fabulous.

Blum: In a review of the show, each submission was referred to as a position paper. Your submission had a title that came straight out of Louis Sullivan. It was called *Kindergarten Chats*. Why?

Cohen: If you've you read *Kindergarten Chats*, you know it's about a mentor taking a young architect around and saying that this building is architecture and this one isn't. Here's what's important and here's what's not. Richardson's work is great and these are the things that you should think about when you think about architecture. The title related to the didactic position of the house. The house is a statement about architecture as communication. What it's saying is that the whole idea of the house as an icon is reducible to the child's drawing of a house. It recognizes that something is a house when it's got a peaked roof, a chimney, a door, and a window. So if you were to typify children's drawings of houses—not the kinds that they would make intuitively, but the kinds that they are culturally taught to make, where the teacher says, "Why don't you draw some flowers beside that?" or, "Don't you want to put a chimney on that?" My idea was to take this thing and make a little modern building that had integrated that drawing into it, visually applied it, a kind of billboard of a house. That was really interesting to me. At a conceptual level, it actually related to two other projects. One was work that John Hejduk had done that he called, "wall houses." These were planes with volumetric, cubist-like enclosures behind them, so that you penetrated through the wall and then you were in this glass or semi-solid house or structure behind it, which was made out of Léger/Braque/Le Corbusier-like shapes. There was the idea that, at one level, it was both a cubist tabletop tilted up, as in a cubist painting, and that it was also a primary statement about the public and private domain and the separation of the landscape by this wall, into front and back, public and private space. Simultaneously, I was thinking of the Venturi project for the National Football Hall of Fame competition. It was an enormous billboard that had the great plays of championship games on it. Behind it was the oddest little kind of shed. The idea was that the billboard, or the facade, was one kind of element that was articulated vertically. The piece behind it wasn't an element that had any importance in plan, but was in fact something that was sectional, as a way to detach it from the wall surface. So I was interested in those two buildings as ideas about how to make a building. I was clearly interested in Venturi's Football Hall of Fame competition design, with the big

football scoreboard that announced that this was about football. The idea was to do this with a facade that somehow announced that it was about the most primary, childlike, everyman's icon of a house. And then to do this modernist, one-room space behind it, all of the functional stuff, the kitchen and the bathroom and the vertical circulation all sandwiched into one little solid zone with the glass room behind it, is archetypally modern architecture. It's the Farnsworth house, right? If you look at the plan, it's amazing because it's child-like in that it's simple and it's as small as you can get. The bathroom is compartmentalized in a way that uses the open mezzanine, so that when you actually go into the toilet, you swing that door open and it blocks the view to the toilet area, and the shower is completely separated. It was this modernist idea of planning. It became a marvel to see how you get something in the smallest amount of space and have it still function. The idea of playing these things off one another, as if the front was public and the statement of what a house is, and then the back was something very different and was the modernist idea of what a house is. Again, it was the child's drawing that sponsored the title, *Kindergarten Chats*. It's clearly a proposition that has very little to do with anything you'd actually build or live in, but has a lot to do with a set of theoretical ideas that were current floating around at the time. It seemed that one could make this object as a statement of those things.

Blum: You said that these projects were all for sale. Did yours sell?

Cohen: There was a model, which I think you saw in my conference room. It didn't sell. There was a drawing, which I had colored the facade of, which Ken Schroeder bought. Then I actually made a cutout, like a paper doll, of the house, from cardboard, with the flaps that you glue together. It actually had numbered flaps and if you had little fingers and patience, it took about half an hour to assemble. You could make them. I printed them and they were actually giveaways at the Richard Gray Gallery show. I printed five hundred of them on shiny stock.

Blum: Did each architect do that?

Cohen: No, I just did that on my own. I assembled six or seven of them and with the front I took Zipatone color, just that flat color, and did a spectrum. It was like a street, I had a whole line of these little houses in different colors. I think that Kitty Weese bought them, because Ben later told me that they were on a shelf in Harry's bathroom in their home.

Blum: Was your design buildable?

Cohen: Sure it was. Why couldn't you build it? Part of it was aluminum shop-front or curtain wall stuff. Part of it was stucco. It probably was just frame construction, like any other house. Do you think I should buy a piece of property and go build it somewhere? You know, this house showed up all over the place. Hans Tupker loved it and published it in Holland. It showed up in Japan. It was published not just as part of a review of the show, but separately.

Blum: So you drew on Venturi, and Hejduk, and Sullivan...

Cohen: Well, Sullivan was just the title. You know, the catalog statement was written to be really a little bit opaque. It's like, "Well, what do you think this is about?"

Blum: Was the exhibition successful?

Cohen: The whole exhibition was wildly successful.

Blum: Did you have a clue as to what the Miesians were thinking about all this at the time?

Cohen: They probably thought it was a lot of crap, that it was nonsense, that it had nothing to do with what they were doing, which was sitting in their offices making buildings. What did this exhibition have to do with buildings? We were sitting there and saying, Hah, hah, what does that building have to do

with ideas or with architecture? So there was, in fact, this kind of... It wasn't really a confrontation. It wasn't like I was attacking Dirk Lohan in public, or that Dirk walked up to me and said, "I hate what you do." Everybody was very cordial. But every time there was a public forum, these issues came up and they were discussed. So in that sense, the show was great. We decided to do it again, as an annual thing. At that point, Nory Miller... I was friendly with her and so was Stanley. She was a friend, as well as the person who was writing architectural criticism and reviews in the city. Nory said, "You know, one of the things that really pisses people off about what you guys are doing is that you're seen as an exclusive little club. You're elitist. In a sense, it's as if you're saying, "Well, we know better. We are better." What you want to do is to have the argument be just about issues. You ought to get rid of that exclusive label, even though it's not one that will break your bones; you should actually undermine that label. What you really ought to do is expand the group."

Blum: You mean expand the seven?

Cohen: Yeah, expand the number of people exhibiting, expand the seven. She said, "If you exhibit again, invite more people to exhibit with you. You know, what you're doing is giving the biggest architecture party that anybody's ever given in Chicago and you're refusing to invite guests. You've got to do this." We said, "Okay, let's get lucky. We had seven, now let's have eleven at the next show."

Blum: But before you got to eleven, you had another show with eight of you. In "The Exquisite Corpse" show Helmut was included.

Cohen: Okay, then I'm getting ahead of myself. Maybe I don't remember the chronology exactly.

Blum: Was it when Jim Freed was phasing out and getting ready to return to New York?

Cohen: No, I think it was about a year before.

Blum: Well, Helmut was included in "The Exquisite Corpse" show, so there were eight of you by then.

Cohen: Nory had been making this argument, so when we did the next show, we decided that the person who we all thought was important, who had been left out of the group before, who was a kind of maverick in the sense that he was between both of what we had characterized as the two camps, was Helmut Jahn. We decided that since we had done a non-sited building with our first houses at the Richard Gray Gallery—that we would do an urban project on a typical twenty-five-foot wide city lot. I think it was my idea to do an urban project. Stanley's reaction to that was to say, "That's fabulous, what we'll do is the game of the exquisite corpse."

Blum: Did that just come from out of his head?

Cohen: Of course, it's against everything that contextualism is about. But the idea was that we would each draw lots, literally, for the sequence of lots on a hypothetical city block. Then we would establish an envelope that we could not build beyond, which was side-to-side, front-to-back, and the height. This was, in fact, the site. Then nobody would know what anyone else was doing until the collage was assembled and we saw the streetscape, this varied streetscape. In the invitation to the show, because the designs were secret we used a drawing, the old Dada Surrealist paper game, where you folded a piece of paper and then each person draws part of a body, folds it, and then passes it on. So we made that drawing and then we all proceeded to do our townhouses. I think that the reason we had approached Walter Kelly and his gallery about doing the show was that Walter really just showed sculpture. With the Richard Gray show, it had been whatever we wanted to put in it. With the Kelly show, each of us was going to contribute a single object, a model. We didn't even exhibit the plans of the buildings.

Blum: How large were the models?



Cohen: Well, they weren't just little models. They were half-inch equals one foot. The models were about a foot wide by a couple of feet high by about four or five feet long. They were big objects, with lots of detailing in them. I think the results of it were interesting. My favorite, I think, was Tom Beeby's. It was not well represented by his drawing, but was a thing of enormous spatial richness and complexity. Helmut's was a kind of glass house. Well, I don't know that it's worth commenting on each of them. The show was very well received. The thing that happened, actually, was that Jim Freed and I, both unknown to each other, hired a guy called Ken Schiano. He had been a Hejduk pupil at Cooper Union whom Freed had brought out to Chicago to teach design. I think Ken was also one of the guys, I think, who was involved in opening the IIT model shop. Ken was a consummate craftsman. I knew that I didn't have the time or the office staff to build what I wanted, which was a solid wood model that was fairly elaborate. So I hired Ken. And Jim hired Ken. And Ken couldn't handle it. The night of the opening, my model was there but it wasn't finished. And Jim's model was not there at all; none of it had been assembled. We were both ready to put a contract out on this guy. He subsequently finished the models, but did not do a wonderful job on mine. Freed's was actually assembled of Plexiglas and spray painted and was a lot simpler than what Ken did for me. Mine was part solid wood and part veneers. Later on some of the veneers started delaminating and I ended up in a dispute with him because I didn't finish paying him for all of it. Anyway, the house that I designed looked at the idea of the townhouse in part typologically. But it also takes as a starting point two townhouses that were of particular interest to me. One of them was a mannerist townhouse that Palladio did, that was supposedly his own house in Vicenza, which had a central blank panel. Rowe writes about it in relation to one of Le Corbusier's early houses in La Chaux-de-Fonds called the Maison Turque [also known as Villa Schwob], which also has a large central blank panel that dominates the facade. So the idea of making the center a blank panel and then beginning to cut away underneath to create the entrance and to actually do a kind of modern glazing that turned into a modern skylight piece that lit the circulation zone, comes out of both Palladio and Le Corbusier. It's an

homage to the Maison Guiette, built in 1926, and the Citrohan house by Le Corbusier, which has a sequence of spaces and then a double-story space and then stairs that go up the side. The difference between Le Corbusier's side stair and my side stair was that by canting the wall, I made a version of the Scala Regia out of it with a false perspective. Then I turned the sequence at the back, so that all of the main rooms were off of the stair and the balcony and mezzanine were formed by the spaces of the stair. Then, of course, the whole thing was top-lit by running the skylight piece all the way back. I don't think, it was not the same caliber or kind of idea as *Kindergarten Chats*.

Blum: But in both creations, you were inspired by multiple historical references.

Cohen: Yes. I think that probably, the townhouse does that. It deals with making historical references. But I think that in terms of the actual work that I've gone on to do, the most important thing that the two houses did—perhaps the townhouse in a more literal way, because the *Kindergarten Chats* project is so minimalist and iconic—is to begin to look at the implications of integrating ideas about modern space and modernist form into a vocabulary of traditional architecture and traditional elements.

Blum: Were you working this out in your actual building projects at the same time as you were working this out in these experimental exhibitions?

Cohen: Yeah, a little bit. But I think that my building projects were still basically house additions and tinkering with things that already existed.

Blum: Were you able to use any of these ideas?

Cohen: Well, at that time, no. I really don't think so. One of the things that I feel like I did by altering and adding on to, and tinkering with, and remodeling a whole variety of old houses was that I came to an understanding of how these things were built, how they were crafted, what you could do and what you couldn't do. Then I learned that all of that stuff was like a kit of parts.

When you walk in, and you say, Okay, this is a wonderful Victorian house, but how am I going to make a new kitchen or whatever and how do I make something that is simultaneously new and that functions in a modern way, that has modern appliances and does everything that people want when they remodel a house, but that also has a continuity with the stuff that's already there. The starting point was that we were going to take elements from the existing house and use them thematically. So that it would be like saying, if you've got leaded glass windows, why not make a kitchen cabinet that has, if not the pattern of the leaded glass windows, something that is thematically related to the design of the house. That way you have these elements of continuity. One of the ways generally was to take the trim, whether it was the base trim or door casing or door jambs or crown moldings or chair rails, and to run that stuff through the new, remodeled space. That was a preposterous idea because the kitchens in old houses were where servants went. The kitchens never had fancy finishes or moldings at all. So it's all this kind of fiction. But what I learned in doing this was how to discern the proportion and shape and the vocabulary of the pieces that go into making traditional architecture. But what I was doing with these pieces was to make things that would not, at least in my opinion, have ever existed before a certain point in time, certainly not before the 1930s. What I was incorporating in terms of planning and spatial ideas was everything that I had taken from modern architecture.

Blum: You wrote an article, "On Adding On." Was writing another venue for you to talk about these ideas?

Cohen: Yeah. The article was written at the point when my practice was changing from doing mostly additions to doing some houses. It was like looking back and saying, well, here are some ideas that I know I was working with. How do I extrapolate these ideas from things? Can you make a general theory or can you make a theoretical statement about how you think about approaching an addition?" Of course, it was an extension of the idea of context. The ultimate context in a situation where you come face to face with the issue of the relationship of the new thing to what already exists is when

they're connected. That's when you're forced to be part of another, and that's when you have to decide if you're going to set the new construction in contrast, or maintain a dialogue, or create an extension of what exists. In terms like that, it seemed to me that I could describe not just what I usually do, but all the possibilities for how to alter or add on to a building. Then you think of what the implications are. The implications ultimately are that part of the meaning of what you do, no matter what you think the meaning is, or what the forms are intended to communicate, is that it's connected to something else. It's always perceived as a part of something. So when does that get reversed? Well, when the part that you've added on is bigger than the thing it was added to. Then, obviously, you have another set of relationships when the thing that you've added on completely engulfs or is wrapped around the old building as a nucleus, which is the case with something like Santa Maria Maggiore or Frank Gehry's house. So I began looking at historical examples of additions and add on strategies. It just felt like it was a good point in my practice to summarize this stuff. It was like saying, what have I learned? What can I share with people, as an educator, from my experience of screwing around with people's back porches?

Blum: To get back to "The Exquisite Corpse" exhibition, I had the sense that because the Miesians did things in such a logical, predictable way, that maybe this exhibition was another way to thumb your nose at them because you were being so unpredictable and fun. Was it?

Cohen: Of course, all of it was. But I don't think it was an argument against rationality. I have always thought of my work as highly rational. It isn't arbitrary. It establishes a set of goals, it has a system, it incorporates identifiable ideas and it proceeds logically. I think that most of the people who were part of the Chicago Seven, independent of what their stuff came out looking like, really worked that way. I think that even those who were making things that were kind of whimsical or strange on purpose still could tell you where it came from, how it came about, and why they were doing it. So there was a kind of intellectual component to the making of these things, which we felt was absent in the Miesian stuff—or we felt at least that some

of their stuff was a little bit by rote. If you take Mies, and he's this kind of amazing...

[Tape 4: Side 2]

Cohen: So Mies is this really amazing guy. You read all of Werner Blaser's books about Mies and the description of the building starts with, "it has a twenty-five by twenty-seven foot regular bay," as if that were the most important thing that you could say about this building that was probably as perfect and as exquisite and as conceptual as the Parthenon. Actually, Nory Miller did an issue on Mies for *Inland Architect*. This was more thumbing your nose at people because it was a sort of a non-Miesian view of what was important about Mies. Tom Beeby, who had one leg in each camp because he had worked for C.F. Murphy and he had had a kind of Miesian practice with Jim Hammond, wrote about one aspect of Mies's work. Then there was this fabulous... I think it happened through Tom, because Tom was very friendly with Steve Peterson in New York—Peterson had been really interested in Mies and the existential aspects of Mies and the books that Mies read and the philosophers that Mies was said to have had an interest in. So Peterson started reading all of this stuff and it was like a light bulb had gone off—I mean here was this other way to think about Mies—so he wrote this fabulous article about Mies in *Inland Architect*. So that was just another aspect. And I think that Nory loved it that people were suddenly not just walking by architecture, but paying attention to it. And she felt that she could, along with all the other things that people were doing, just take all the architects out there by the shoulders and say, "Come on! Wake up! You've been looking at this thing for years and there's more there than you think! To say this about Mies doesn't diminish Mies, it actually indicates the stature of the genius of this man's work!" Shake 'em up, shake 'em up! Make 'em think about these things!

Blum: So you saw yourselves as gadflies about these things?

Cohen: I guess, sure. It was so much fun.

Blum: Did you know that an actual competition was held in which architects submitted designs for the Logan Square townhouse competition, sponsored by the Logan Square community?

Cohen: Oh, yes? We had nothing to do with that one.

Blum: They probably took your townhouse competition as a model for theirs.

Cohen: The upshot of this, with Nory's continual prodding, was that we actually talked to the Graham Foundation and did the following: we decided that what we needed was an entire street of townhouses so we went from seven to eleven people. We added Ken Schroeder, Cindy Weese, who else?

Blum: Gerald Horn and Helmut.

Cohen: What we then did was to set up a competition—the Graham Foundation put up a little money and offered us their exhibition space—the competition was open to all the architects in the city of Chicago. That was exactly what Nory wanted. It was a townhouse competition and the rules were the same as the previous Chicago Seven exhibit. All they had to do was to fill an envelope of space. Obviously, because the Chicago Seven were the jury, it had to make some sort of a conceptual statement about architecture—no small matter, right? It was a two-stage competition. The reward you got was that you exhibited your work, along with the Chicago Seven-now-Eleven at the Graham Foundation. So it was open to everyone and we printed up a little flyer that we mailed out to all the Chicago architecture offices and there was a blurb in the AIA newsletter and we got the word out. So all you won was being exhibited. We had gotten a little money from the Graham Foundation and we gave each of the people who won the first phase of the two-stage competition a thousand bucks—at least I think it was that much—so that we could help defray some of the cost of building these models. What they had to do in the second phase was to build a model.

- Blum: What did they submit in the first round, drawings?
- Cohen: Yes. They submitted a design, and then we picked those people and then those people went ahead and prepared a model for the exhibit. I don't know how many entries we got—maybe a few hundred. Maybe I'm exaggerating, but it was really a lot. Really a lot, when you consider that they weren't winning a commission, they weren't winning any money. They were spending money to make a design. What we had all supposed was true: there were a lot of people working in firms who were somewhat frustrated, who didn't engage architecture at quite the level and in quite the way they wanted, who suddenly were invited to design a townhouse and be given some recognition for their design ability, which they weren't getting in their firms. It was like people came out of the woodwork for this. There were so many entries and so many of them were so good, amazingly good.
- Blum: That's what was said in the catalog.
- Cohen: We made a selection of them: Anders Nereim, who I don't think was my partner yet at that point, was one of the people selected; Peter Pran, who was a teaching colleague, entered this competition.
- Blum: Peter Pran? It sounds like you won over your opposition, because he had organized the "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" exhibition.
- Cohen: What opposition? Oh, come on. Peter is a really ambitious, aggressive, funny guy who—it's like, "if this is Tuesday, it must be Belgium." Everything that people have said about Stanley, who reinvents himself every few years in terms of what he thinks and what his architecture is about, that is what my impression of Peter Pran was at the time. Yes, Peter desperately wanted to be part of the gang, part of the in-group.
- Blum: Were you the in-group then?

Cohen: Well, I can't say that, I don't know that but it was starting to look like we were.

Blum: Had you won the fight? Was the fight about over?

Cohen: I think the fight was just about over. Of course, we can talk about what we won... What we probably won were all the really dreadful buildings from the late 1980s that are going to be in Chicago for years and that everybody wants to take down.

Blum: What do you mean, "we won those"? Is that what you think resulted from all your activity?

Cohen: Yes, that's what emerged. The floodgates were open and instead of getting banal architecture that was made out of steel and painted black, we got really horrific architecture that was painted pink and blue that had pediments or classical columns all over it. Frankly, I can pretend that black steel buildings are background architecture more easily than the aggressiveness of the pink and blue ones.

Blum: I understand the idea of opening up the townhouse competition was obviously Nory Miller's suggestion, but where did the idea for the townhouse theme come from? Why wasn't it just detached houses?

Cohen: Originally, with the Kelly Gallery show, we were going to do the opposite of what we had done for the Richard Gray Gallery—I think I said all this earlier—so instead of doing a building that was prototypically suburban, we were going to do one that was urban; instead of doing just drawings, we were going to do models to be shown in a sculpture gallery. I simply said, "Well, we should do houses again. We should do townhouses. We should do a row of townhouses." And Stanley said, "We will redo the "Exquisite Corpse."

Blum: Well, that was for the "Exquisite Corpse" exhibition. What about the townhouse competition and exhibition at the Graham Foundation?



Cohen: Well, it was the exact same exhibition. What we did was we took the Kelly Gallery show, the eight models, and we added to those and then with the competition we did the other side of the street, done by as Stanley liked to say, "the kids." I don't know—if I was a kid, then these people were probably kids, too. Fritz Reed was from Notre Dame; Peter Pran wasn't a kid; Anders was working for me at Sisco Lubotsky at that point; Jim Goettsch worked for Helmut; Bob Fugman and Debbie Doyle worked for Stanley. We did not know—I mean I had no idea that Anders was doing the competition—and I don't think that any of us recognized the work as his. But, of course, there was grumbling because the winners were employees of some of us. We all just responded, "Well, isn't that amazing. We've got wonderful practices and we are employing some of the most talented people in the city."

Blum: Well, that's fine to say. But did anyone actually accuse the jury of having a bias?

Cohen: You know what, Carter Manny was on the jury. Who else was on the jury? I think there were other people on the jury, but I do not remember any longer.

Blum: I thought it was just the seven of you.

Cohen: Maybe it was. But stuff like that actually didn't bother us. It was exactly what we wanted, you know?

Blum: Here's the list of the jury: the Chicago Seven, now composed of Tom Beeby, Larry Booth, Stuart Cohen, Jim Freed, Gerald Horn, Helmut Jahn, Jim Nagle, Ken Schroeder, Stanley Tigerman, and Cindy and Ben Weese. So that was eleven. As this competition took shape, did anyone of the eleven know that the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club held a competition in 1885 for a townhouse on a twenty-five foot city lot? Was your exhibition patterned after that earlier one?

Cohen: No, it wasn't. But the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club constantly held competitions that were reported in the *Inland Architect*. I'm not sure when I did it, whether it was research for the "Chicago Architects" show or if I just read through all the old *Inland Architect* issues for fun. I mean, you're talking to somebody who, when I was teaching at Columbia for a semester, on studio days would ask my employer for the whole day off and each morning I sat in Avery Library and systematically pulled journals off the shelf. I sat in the basement of Avery and went through the full run of *L'architecture vivante* and the full run of *Wendingen*, page by page. These were things that were the most significant publications of their times. I think it must have been for the "Chicago Architects" show that I went through all the microfilm of *Inland Architect*. They published the minutes of every meeting of the Sketch Club. Now, I don't think that I read the minutes of every single meeting, but I was very clearly aware of who they were and what they did. The townhouse competition was part of the ongoing plan, the program, although it wasn't set in place; I think each step just emerged. I think that at a certain point after we had done this, we all understood that Nory Miller was right, and that in fact, we were engaging more and more people and that more and more people were getting on the wagon, so to speak. Anyway, the show went to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, which was Stanley's doing because he was friendly with Mildred Friedman. You know how as you go up through the spatial sequence of galleries at the Walker Art Center there's a space just before you go out on the terrace or walk up to the penthouse restaurant? It's the space where they generally show sculpture and sometimes graphics. We were shown in that gallery. It was the townhouses, we had done them as rows, but my memory is that she didn't show them that way; she arranged them around on pedestals like sculpture. But it was fine. One of the things that I think I was starting to realize, and Stanley too was that it was fabulous that this exhibition was in the Walker Art Center and if the curators wanted to do their own installation with it, that was their prerogative.

Blum: Several of your shows traveled. The first show, "Chicago Architects" traveled. It traveled before it opened in Chicago and it traveled after it left Chicago.

Cohen: Yeah. We called everyone. Universities mounted it and little museums mounted it. I think that Ben did some of that, but mostly it was Stanley just calling people and arranging it. Some of it was done after the show had opened in New York, so that we had press clippings. We just said, "Hey, let's get our money's worth. Let's just run this horse until it dies." I think we did, it went to lots and lots of places. Anyway, so "Town Houses" was at the Walker Art Center and it received lots of notoriety and it did exactly what we wanted it to—even the aspect of who had won the competition, that pissed off some people because clearly we were choosing one kind of design over another. But all that made for a kind of dialogue and I think that a lot of people went to see it, even if they hated it, they still went to see what it was that made people mad.

Blum: Did anyone raise the issue that even though you went from seven to eleven you were simply increasing the exclusivity?

Cohen: What we were aware of was that such criticisms came with the territory. But we wanted to try, in reality and in people's minds, to have a dialogue about issues and things, rather than about personality or notoriety or who's in and who's out. I think that by asking Helmut and Gerry Horn, we were asking people who were very good designers, but who came at their work from a different direction. Gerry was at a point where he was starting to do some of his metal panel buildings—he had done Miesian stuff, but he was starting to do some of the panel wall things and stone panel buildings; it was pushing the envelope. Helmut was clearly beginning to push the envelope of what C. F. Murphy was about. We thought that that was just fine. That was our equivalent of inviting more people to the party and inviting people who didn't necessarily share the same point of view, or who maybe shared the same point of view but who came from a different perspective and from a different starting point, one that was, in fact, IIT and Mies.

Blum: Would you comment on the role of the Graham Foundation in all of the Chicago Seven activity? It seems as though they were incredibly supportive.

Cohen: The Graham Foundation was incredibly supportive. I'm not sure why, except that I think that Carter Manny was really why. I think that he was actually excited that suddenly, after sending so much money out of Chicago for publications and exhibits, that there were people in Chicago who wanted to do and say things that were related to Chicago. I think that while Carter is a very reserved guy, who never said any of this, he must have been very pleased. Carter is a kind of funny guy—you would never know that he is an intellectual, but he actually is. This guy is incredibly well read. He took the position at the Graham Foundation very seriously. I think that every time he gave a grant or invited somebody to come and speak, he knew everything about who that person was and what they did and what they were about. I often think, thank god for him, he was wonderful in that position.

Blum: I know that the "Town Houses" competition was at the Graham, as were your symposia and your conferences.

Cohen: Yeah. Carter was really a very willing audience. If you had an idea and wanted to do something and he saw it as worthwhile, he funded it for us. I think that part of this had to do initially with Stanley's connection with John Entenza, who was the first director of the Graham. Entenza was sort of a father figure to Stanley. Actually, Stanley claims that John shepherded and advised him on his career. Stanley claims that John called him "boy", as opposed to "son."

Blum: But John Entenza was not there when the Chicago Seven was working with the Graham.

Cohen: Yes. Carter succeeded John as director. I think that part of Stanley's connection to Carter, his access was that Carter was willing to take Stanley's ability to deliver something of quality and of importance that was worth funding through the Graham Foundation on faith, probably had to do with Entenza's regard for Stanley.

- Blum: The Graham Foundation was a good friend to the Chicago Seven.
- Cohen: Yes. I had a very funny lunch with John Entenza. He invited me to lunch at the Arts Club. Apparently John Entenza is one of those people who once you say no to him, never bothers with you again. But John had a plot that involved me. He was appalled at the—I think this was prior to or just at the beginning of Nory Miller's writing for *Inland Architect*—or maybe she had been writing for a year or so for the *Daily News*—what John said to me, which just took me back was, "Well, you're much too smart to be an architect." He repeated himself, "You're much too smart to be an architect. I've read some of the things that you've written and I think that you should do architectural criticism. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you wrote for one of the Chicago newspapers?" He was doing exactly for me what he had done for Stanley. He thought I was somebody special and he was counseling me about where my career should go. He said, "You will be a significant critic. You should do this." I said to him, "John, I want to be an architect. I actually hate writing things; it's work for me and I don't enjoy it. It's not what makes me happy." It was like, "Oh, okay." He was cordial to me, but there was never that extension or any connection after that.
- Blum: Because you had said no to him?
- Cohen: Yeah. He wanted a first-rate critic for the Chicago newspapers and he thought that I might be it. Obviously, he thought that I could become important as a critic far sooner, and maybe to a greater extent, than I could become important as an architect. In fact, he had no idea what I did as an architect. I think this happened about the time of the "Chicago Architects" show, so he must have known something of what I did. But I think that the initial connection must have had something to do with Carter calling John up and saying, "Well, what about these guys?" and Entenza saying, "Well, you should give them some money. They'll do well with it." But, you know this is all supposition on my part.

Blum: Earlier we talked about the writing you did, and now you bring it up again when you talk about John Entenza's suggestion. You were the Chicago correspondent for *Progressive Architecture* for six years, from 1975 to 1981. You were also the book review editor for the *Journal of Architectural Education* for a few years in the 1970s, and you wrote many essays that were published in various publications. Did that grow out of John Entenza's conversation with you?

Cohen: No, no. It really grew out of two things. I mean, the *PA* thing is—I had done an article on Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer for them for which they actually paid me the most they had ever paid for an article. You know, while they gave me a modest honorarium for it, I actually insisted that they fly me around to see all of these buildings that I wanted to write about, and they did. I had worked with David Morton on that and I think that John Dixon had really liked the article a lot. In fact, they took the article and placed it halfway through a whole issue on Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer. In a funny way they sort of took the categories that I had established in my article and mast-headed them throughout the issue as if they weren't original observations in my article. It was a little bit strange, but it was fine. No one was writing about Chicago; no one was sending news from Chicago on a regular basis, so they asked me if I would do this. I, of course, said, "Well, what does this involve? How much work is this?" They said, "Oh, you know, it's only a hundred words or one hundred and fifty words. You know, if there's something going on in Chicago that you think ought to be covered, please do it, because Chicago's underrepresented." I said, "Okay, this is important to do, I should do this." So it became reporting on events. But I wrote a scathing article about the plan to make a mall out of State Street; it was called "Mauling Chicago." It said, well, it's the right idea but it's the wrong place.

Blum: I had the sense that you were drawing on Jane Jacobs in that article.

Cohen: Yeah, it did. But you know, I just said, hey, it's twice as wide as Nicollet Mall and it's three times, four times, as wide as the walking streets in Europe. It's not the right thing to do here. I also was implying that the impetus to do

it wasn't architectural or urban, but that it was really an attempt to change the racial complexion of the street. At that point, even though many of the flagship retailers still were on State Street, State Street was really difficult after five o'clock. I had an office in the Loop and I walked to the subway everyday and I was the only white face on the street, or one of very, very few. You know, it was a public place, with lots of people and lots of activity, so it wasn't like I felt out of place or strange or nervous. But I really think that somehow people thought that they could return State Street to what it had once been, which is where all the matrons from the suburbs came to shop. I thought that that was, for me, suspect as a reason for making such a dramatic change in the urbanity of the place. Could you imagine State Street without all that traffic? It would be dead. I think I wrote that it would be dead, and it was. Even though they did a perfectly nice job of all of it, it never had the sense of life and commotion and urbanity and density that having traffic jams and sidewalk jams had. They said, "Oh, let's widen the sidewalks so that when there are ten thousand people there it will feel empty." It was this enormous misjudgment. It was like the square in front of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg—I mean, what an inhuman space! It's just too vast to imagine being peopled, unless, of course, you've got the whole Red Army parading in it, which is what it was designed for. I got interviewed early on about plazas by Paul Gapp. I just said, "Oh, you know, everybody's wrong. The Civic Center Plaza (now Daley Center) is really quite wonderful, but it's just not the same thing as the First National Bank building plaza, it's ceremonial. This isn't a bank building, this isn't bread-and-circuses for people, or a place for people to go eat their lunches, it's civic space." It really looked good when they were entertaining the astronauts. That's what they did with it then, they had these big public ceremonies where they gave people keys to the city. I said, "You know, the only thing that's missing is a little second-floor balcony for [Richard J.] Daley to walk out on." My mother read that and she called me and said, "How can you say that in public? You'll never get any work from the city of Chicago!" Not only did I not want any work from the city of Chicago, but... So writing about Chicago and Chicago issues for *PA* was an opportunity to say things like that in a national forum, as well as to make sure that we, as a city, were being represented and visible.

Blum: Was there any connection between you being the *PA* correspondent and Stanley being the architecture correspondent for *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*?

Cohen: No. None, I don't think.

Blum: He did that prior to the 1970s.

Cohen: For me, the connection was just entirely through John Dixon and David Morton at *PA* and my awareness that Chicago was being dramatically underrepresented in national publications. At that point, Bill Marlin had trashed *Architectural Forum* and it went belly-up. So there were really only three magazines: *PA*, *Architectural Record*, and the *AIA Journal* [now *Architecture*], which then was still called the *AIA Journal*. *Record* was a little stodgy, I think, at that time. *PA* was clearly the people who were willing to take a chance, who would publish something that wasn't conservative, for instance. The other reason that I did stuff like that—and the editorship of the *Journal of Architectural Education* book review thing—had to do with a couple of things. For one, I was an academic and I was aware of the fact I wasn't really building very much at that point in time and promotion and tenure was really dependent on publication. Architects and artists have made a pretty good argument that their work is not writing, but making paintings or sculpture or building buildings, that creative work is equivalent to scholarly research when it is recognized as such. But I knew very well that if I wanted to continue teaching and be promoted that I had to be doing academic things. So why the book review editor at the *Journal of Architectural Education*? Years and years ago, when I had first started writing and nobody knew who the hell I was, what I did was to write letters to editors of architectural magazines. It was really amazing, the architectural content of the magazine seemed controlled, but they would publish two-hundred-word letters from people going on and on and on about some theoretical issue or some social issue. So I actually wrote a few long letters that they published. I mean, if what you wrote made sense they published it because they got so many letters that didn't make sense. I noticed that *Forum* was also the only



magazine that did book reviews on a kind of regular basis. I sent off a note—I don't remember if Peter Blake or if Bill Marlin was the editor at that time—saying, "Will you take unsolicited book reviews?" They said, "Well, the problem is that nobody wants to write book reviews for us." I said, "Well, can I review a book for you?" They said, "Write a review. If we like it, we'll publish it. If not, we'll send it back to you." Again, what interested me about the book reviews is that you could say anything you wanted to in the book review. It was almost as if they weren't paying attention. I'm serious, none of the magazines published architectural theory. It was almost a decade later when Nory was at *PA*, along with Suzanne Stephens that they could write things that dealt with theoretical issues or they would invite people to write. *PA* actually published things by Mario Gandelsonas and Jorge Silvetti. It was pretty interesting but in 1971 or 1972, there was no such thing. It was all journalism: "here's the building, it's made out of bricks, the bricks were made here, the inside is this, the curtain wall is such-and-such, the building is used for this, and the client says they love it because they can sit at the window and look out at the ocean."

Blum: So did you bring another dimension to book reviews.

Cohen: What I did was I wrote reviews that allowed me to say something I was interested in saying in the process of reviewing the book. In fact, the reviews I wrote were a lot of the starting points for the historical stuff in "One Hundred Years," I mean "Chicago Architects." Why do I keep calling it "One Hundred Years?" That's a real Freudian slip. We should have called our exhibition "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" and they should have called theirs "Chicago Architects." Right? The titles are mismatched. Anyway, I wrote a review... I was passionately interested in John Wellborn Root because it seemed to me that, with the exception of Frank Lloyd Wright, he was the best architect of the bunch. I firmly believe that he was better than Sullivan. I mean, he died at forty-one and he had built very few buildings at that point. I really think that he was the genius of all of those guys. Donald Hoffmann had written what I thought was a very thoughtful and intelligent book about Root, which almost says that he was the best guy.

I wrote a review of Hoffmann's book and basically laid out why I thought that Root was better than Sullivan. Also I had been doing research on the Monadnock building because I wanted to write a long article—you know the little piece on the Monadnock in the "On Adding On" article that discusses the relationship between an addition and existing building?—that was the article that I was doing. But in doing it as a bona fide article, I really wanted to know some historical things. I wanted to know why Burnham and Root hadn't gotten the commission for the Monadnock addition, even though they were busy with the 1893 fair. I wanted to know what transpired. I knew that there were all of these letters written by Owen F. Aldis to the Brooks family in Boston. I knew that they were archived and that they were in the possession of the successor firm to Owen F. Aldis—I've forgotten the name of that firm now. So I called them and asked if I could come by to look at the stuff, and they said, "Sure, of course you can." So they got it from a vault and trotted out some bound volumes of books. I started going through the books and discovered that the books had an 1889 letter from Owen F. Aldis to so-and-so listing all of Root's letters. And I said to them, "Well, where are these letters?!" They said, "Oh, we don't have the letters anymore." I said, "What?!" The letters are referred to, not in the Hoffmann book I was reviewing, but in another one that he had written, which was a collection of essays by Root that he had edited—it was called *The Meaning of Architecture: Buildings and Writings*—and there was an introductory essay in it Hoffmann had written. So this was how I knew about the letters. But they weren't there. So I asked, "Where did they go?" They said, "Oh, well, we moved the office five years ago and we had all of these papers, which we thought would be of historical interest to the real estate community. We offered them to the business school at the University of Chicago and they didn't want them and then we offered them to the economics department at Northwestern and they didn't want them. So we just burned them, we threw them out." I said, "Oh my god!" So I wrote this review and I included this sad bit of information. The day after the review hit, I got a call and then a note from Donald Hoffmann, saying, "Thank you for the nice review. I never said that Root was the best, but that's what I meant, that's what I've always believed. You're kidding me that the letters were destroyed." Hoffmann had seen those letters

because he had used them when he wrote the introductory essay for a book of the collection of Root's writings.

[Tape 5: Side 1]

Cohen: So doing those reviews and then subsequently functioning as book review editor was, well, it gave me an opportunity to publish things that dealt with some of my interests, which were history and the development of theory and its relation to then-contemporary theory and its implications for design methodology. You know, in a way, that's kind of a shoddy admission, because when you're doing a book review, you're supposed to be reviewing the writer's book, rather than using it as a way to discuss your own ideas. But, in fact, that was sort of why I was doing book reviews. So it actually sort of fit into its point in time because it allowed me to do things like go to New York and walk into *Architectural Forum* and introduce myself to Bill Marlin and talk about doing stuff in the future for the magazine, although I never did because the magazine folded shortly after that. So, just to sum that up before we move on, my real interest, I think, in architectural criticism has been to write architectural criticism when it became a focusing lens for architectural theory. I think, to this day, one of my favorite pieces of writing is the article I wrote on Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer.

Blum: When I read that article I felt that you had a lot of admiration for their methodology. Did you incorporate any of the methods that you observed in their technique into your own?

Cohen: Well, I think that what I loved about it was that, in my mind, they were doing Venturi one better. Venturi was an elitist masquerading as a populist, while these guys really were pop culture. They were just like the best contemporary music, which was actually mining rhythm and blues, mining soul music, mining jazz, inventing new things that seemed appropriate to the time. What I saw in their work was an interest in modernism, and an interest in industrial building. They were not interested in a cheap way to build or an expedient way to build, but were interested in what it looked like and the images it

created. They were somehow making a kind of collage that was suggestive of something, in a communicative sense, beyond just what was there: the whole idea of farm buildings and storage sheds and grain silos and high-tension wires and all of these things that were uniquely American. What you have to remember is that in the early 1970s Postmodernism didn't really exist. What existed was contextualism from one end with Colin Rowe and sort of a set of ideas about what the physical environment meant, and on the other end Venturi and Charlie Moore. It seemed like the argument was against the kind of legacy of European modernism and its sterility in the architecture of the 1950s in America. What Venturi and Moore were doing—Venturi in a really serious way and Moore in a kind of pop way—was simply substituting another set of "privileged" images, to use the current jargon word. Venturi was drawing on Italian mannerism and Nicholas Hawksmoor and John Vanbrugh and John Soane and he was making a kind of soup out of all of this stuff. Buried in there somewhere was an argument against European modernism because it had nothing to do with America. So what was really interesting to me and to people like Bob Stern was Venturi's interest in American residential architecture, the shingled stuff, and in Richardson and all of the stuff that was uniquely American that had impacted primarily on England and a little bit on France at the turn of the century. Again, it's sort of this counter proposition, because whereas the history books chronicle the invention of the frame and the skyscraper as the American thing that transformed architecture, there's all of this other stuff that's actually uniquely American, like Shaker buildings—just drive around the countryside and look at farm buildings—all of the stuff that since has come to be referred to as vernacular American architecture. Where people like Venturi and Bob Stern were making revival shingle-style houses—Stern probably far more so than Venturi at that point in time—here was Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer and it was as if they'd swallowed the whole thing. They just looked at everything that was, in my mind, uniquely descriptive of the physical fabric of America, not just the cities but everything. There was a methodology there that interested me that was neither the pastiche that Charles Moore has been accused of nor was it the kind of intellectual literary reference-making that Venturi was involved in. I just wanted very badly to do the article not because I loved

them or thought their work was great, I really liked Hugh [Hardy] and I really liked Malcolm [Holzman] and I really thought that their work was amazing but because it was totally original. Nobody had seen anything quite like it before—I had never seen anything quite like it—and, better than that, I knew what it was and I knew where it came from. It wasn't like just suddenly here was somebody called Frank Gehry—you know, for the "Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition," Gehry did a big bird and then Frank was in town right after the opening. I had asked him to autograph my copy of the catalog and he wrote, "I've switched to fish." He did that sort of big, Formica fish lamp. I mean, what is Bilbao? He's still doing fish, right?

Blum: I thought that was like his signature.

Cohen: Yeah, pretty much. I mean, how the hell do you know where those forms come from. They come from the mind of Frank Gehry, or maybe his stomach. They sure are interesting and they're exciting visually, but for me they're unconnected. In the lit-crit game, anybody can connect them to anything. They're plated with titanium and Bilbao has a history of shipbuilding, so the museum must be a ship. Do I think that Gehry set out to make something that was ship-like? I seriously doubt it.

Blum: It certainly seems like it fits its situation.

Cohen: Okay, but that's the wonderful thing about criticism, right? You can see what you want to see. But the formal vocabulary existed before he got to Bilbao. But here was this stuff that Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer did that so clearly had to do with making a new architecture that was uniquely about its place in a very generalized way which said "America" in the way that *American Graffiti* did. Although that wasn't what my work was about, and it wasn't what I ever went on to do or was interested in, I thought it was actually brilliant. I thought that it was an opportunity to make a statement about what was going on in terms of how I saw American architecture changing and where I thought it was going and what I thought some of the theoretical issues driving it were. John Hejduk said to me about that article, "How could you write

that shit?" This was after he told me that my *Oppositions* article was great. Oh, no, I take that back. I wrote an article about Venturi's Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio, and that was the thing that Hejduk thought was so terrible. In retrospect, I'm not quite sure why I did that article; although I thought that building was interesting because of what it set out to do, I didn't like the building. Or maybe I'm just all confused, it's been too long ago, what can I say?

Blum: All this writing was really done, as you have just said, because you were an academic and it helped you to get a promotion. You needed to establish a track record on paper.

Cohen: Yes, but I also didn't really have anything else to do. If I didn't have commissions, where I was I going to explore architectural ideas? I was going to talk about them, write about them, teach them, build them.

Blum: We haven't spoken about your teaching. It began, as you said, at Columbia, before you came back to Chicago.

Cohen: Yeah, Columbia was actually a wonderful story. Columbia was sort of under siege at that point in time because it was when all that rioting was going on.

Blum: Was this in 1968?

Cohen: Yeah. Romaldo Giurgola, whom I had had as a design critic for a semester at Cornell, had just been appointed head of the school and he didn't know what the hell to do with the school. I mean, I think he hid from the students in his office. I was working for Gruzen and Partners and there was this young, really extraordinary kid—well, he wasn't that much younger than I was, maybe a couple of years—who had been a student of Giurgola's at Penn and who had taken a year off from school to work and to get things together. He was Frank Israel. We were at Gruzen and Partners and I think that Tod Mann had just left and Frank was probably why I remained there for another year and remained sane. He was just so bright and he wanted to talk to me

about architecture. At one point, he sort of engaged me in this thing like, "Well, I've got to go back and finish my degree. Where should I go?" I said, "I don't know. What do you do?" He brought in this portfolio of work and I looked at it and I said, "I don't know where to tell you to go. Who are you going to learn anything from? This is extraordinary work!" It was very clearly Lou Kahn, Philadelphia-influenced work, but it was so rich and so wonderful. I said, "Oh my god. What can I tell you? I finished a degree at Cornell with Colin Rowe, who's a genius, and you would be very interested in this guy and you could learn from him." Frank just looked at me and said, "I can't leave New York. I can't leave my psychiatrist." I said, "Then why are you asking me where to go to school? It's Columbia or Cooper Union." So Frank was at Columbia and he had stopped working at Gruzen—first he was working part-time and then he stopped working there. I had also introduced him to Tom Schumacher, who had come to New York thinking that he'd work at the institute because he'd also been offered a job that didn't materialize. Tom took a job at I. M. Pei and Partners and I had introduced Frank to Tom because Tom is a very bright, very interesting man whom I knew Frank would enjoy. I was away over the Christmas holidays and I got back and I don't know whether Frank called me first or Tom called me first, but Tom said, "Oh, by the way, you and I are jointly teaching a design studio at Columbia University." I said, "Oh, how is that?" He said, "Well, how do you think? Frank went in and told Aldo [Giurgola] to hire us." I said, "Well, wait a minute. Is Frank Israel running the school now?" I don't think that Frank ever really thought he was running the school, but I think that Giurgola needed adjunct people and Frank said to him, "Hire these guys." Of course, what he did was to get us hired and then to sign up for our course. So I had Frank Israel as a student! We did an urban problem where they did a design for a six-block area. We had programmed into that area some choices about institutional buildings and in the second half of the semester they selected from within that urban design a site for which they then produced a building design that had to respond to the urban design they had done for the whole area. Basically, Frank figured, Well, okay, I've got two of Colin Rowe's students—Tom had even started out writing a book with Colin—if I'm not going to get it from the horse's mouth, I might as well figure out what it's

about from these guys. So Frank and I remained good friends. I remember having lunch with Frank—he had worked for Jaquelin Robertson and for Richard Weinstein—Weinstein had gone to UCLA and invited Frank to go out there to teach. Frank said to me, "Well, what do you think about going to L. A.?" I looked at him and said, "There's nothing there. Why the hell would you want to go to L. A.?" Clearly, I was wrong about that. I think that Frank's death is a tragic loss because Frank was unbelievably talented and an incredibly interesting designer who synthesized in his work lots and lots of things, as well as making really extraordinarily beautiful spaces and beautiful objects. Frank took me around to see some of the things that he had done in California about three years before he died. Anyway, that's a kind of an aside, but that was the beginning of my teaching career.

Blum: How long were you at Columbia?

Cohen: Just a semester. We taught one course.

Blum: Then you relocated to Chicago?

Cohen: Yes. I think I was in New York for maybe a year after Columbia and then I relocated to Chicago. I thought that maybe it would be okay to teach. I think I wanted to teach because I was interested in teaching, and because I understood that even climbing up and down fire escapes on really cold days and doing everything that I could that I didn't feel was too promising, wasn't going to support me.

Blum: So teaching was your meal ticket?

Cohen: Yeah, it was a paycheck that kept coming for doing something that I figured I enjoyed anyway, which was telling people about things or sharing ideas or discussing ideas or getting people's ideas in exchange.

Blum: Was it a dialogue that you wanted to open up with students? Or was it that you got something from them at the same time?



Cohen: Yeah, I took a little bit in return, that is to say that over the years I've had a few extraordinary students, with whom it was really fun working in studio.

Blum: Do you think that it was only from these extraordinary students?

Cohen: I think that most of the students at UIC are state university students, which means that most of them probably shouldn't be doing university-level work anyway. I mean, UIC has a rolling admissions policy. All you have to do is be in the top half of the graduating class. I don't know if they do now, I never bothered to find out, but I don't even think they required a minimum SAT/ACT score. They probably do now, but they did not then. We were the urban university and we were going to educate the masses, that was the charge.

Blum: When was your first year at UIC?

Cohen: In 1973. The undergraduate students were pretty dismal. They weren't smart and they weren't interested in working hard. They wanted to get a degree because somehow or other they thought it would ensure them a job. If they had a profession, they'd always have a job, hah, hah, hah.

Blum: Wasn't that IIT's approach as well?

Cohen: No, no, no, no, please! Who goes to IIT? Our students don't go to IIT and they couldn't if they wanted to. What's the tuition at IIT? It's a private school. It's beyond most of our students's means. In 1973, I think that tuition at UIC was \$400 a semester. Tuition at IIT was \$6800 a semester. It's a big difference. If you're a poor kid and you want to become an architect and you have to live at home or you need to work and you want to go to school, where do you choose to go?

Blum: So why did you go to UIC when you were looking for a job?

Cohen: Where was I going to go? IIT, at that point in time, with the single exception of Tom Beeby, had never hired someone to teach there who hadn't graduated from there. Tom was hired because he had been a design star at C. F. Murphy and because he had formed a partnership with Jim Hammond. Jim had been a partner at SOM and had been in partnership with Peter Roche, who was one of Mies's star students.

Blum: Jim went to IIT as well.

Cohen: Oh, I didn't know that. But sure, I could have applied for a job at IIT but I wouldn't have been hired because, basically, they only hired graduates from IIT. It was their view that to teach the curriculum you had to have taken it. Driving to Milwaukee or Notre Dame every day wasn't something that I even considered, although I subsequently taught at both places. UIC was the only game in town. It also didn't have an ideological position; it was just a school of architecture.

Blum: Did you have an idea that maybe you would help mold a position for yourself at UIC?

Cohen: I had the idea that, basically, probably, after a year or two I would just be given a class to teach and I could do whatever I wanted with the class. That's still true of studios.

Blum: Did that happen the way you thought?

Cohen: Yeah, but it took three years, not two, before I was finally put in charge of a studio. But I got good work from the students, I was hard-working, I was articulate, I was intelligent. I think that some of the senior faculty must have been at least moderately impressed with me. Dick Whitaker had just taken over as the head of the department and I had certainly known Charles Moore and I had met the other MLTW people. I think that he understood that I was not a typical Chicago architect, which meant an IIT graduate, I guess. You know, I've had a love-hate relationship with teaching at that place, some of it

has been wonderful. Initially, I worked out a lot of theoretical stuff in the studios. I did lots of addition problems, like suburban house problems, roadside building problems that dealt with imagery and an exurban or suburban context, and then I did lots of urban problems that were taught exactly like that course at Columbia. It was my contribution. I taught people that when you built in the city, you could start the process by looking around.

Blum: I must admit that don't understand all of what Peter Eisenman has written, but I read something that I thought was really very understandable and intelligently written. He said, in reference to his teaching, "I use my students as foghorns to correct my course." In other words, I understood him to mean that he took a lot from his students.

Cohen: What he's doing is that he's actually using his students to investigate things that interest him. Because they're outside of him, different people, they will do things that, even though they have Peter's direction as a teacher, wouldn't be what he would do. That's always interesting because you can think about it and what people would do. As a teacher, I did the exact opposite of that. What I enjoyed most were situations when students were doing something so different from the way I would have solved the problem, but still valid and workable, that it actually allowed me to say, Okay, for a moment I'm going to establish a whole new set of ground rules that will allow me to think about this differently. I would make criticism based on a different set of premises or help the students make forms that are in a foreign vocabulary that had nothing to do with my work but allowed me, in a sense, to be somewhere else and to do something else. So the dialogue between working and teaching is always interesting for me because it's like people who, instead of eating lunch, will go and exercise for an hour and take a quick shower and go back to work. I absolutely understand what it means to exercise a different set of muscles; you sit at a desk all day long and then you just go do something physical. After a certain point, the point at which I had worked out certain things for myself, my teaching really became that opportunity, the opportunity to get away from the office and think about architecture differently. By the time you really have a practice, you're not dealing with

things that are theoretical or designing things, except in a teeny fraction of your time, but you're talking to contractors, you're writing letters, you're talking to clients, you're trying to keep people happy, you're answering employees questions about where to put the flashing or whether something's going to settle differentially and crack the slab between the existing house and the addition. Even if you want to have a practice that's idea-based or intellectual, the reality is that making buildings mitigates that aspect. There just isn't time in the day. So teaching really was a way for me to go some place else and exercise a different set of muscles. What happened in the teaching was really interesting; it probably had three phases. One was when I really had a set of issues that I was thinking about because they were really relevant to my work, I worked these out by designing problems that asked students to think about them, like Eisenman asked students to be Peter Eisenman for a day or to work on a problem that he's thinking about. Then, there were the problems that actually went someplace else. They allowed me to formulate different kinds of ways to respond to issues or problems that I had already made a formulation about. Then, at a later point in time, something else happened, which was that we had started a new three-year graduate program when Tom Beeby was the director. Tom sat down and said to me, "How do we teach architecture in three years? What kind of requirements does that place on either core courses or the first courses in architecture?" He said to me, "Would you teach the first architecture course?" Suddenly, it wasn't going to be about what I was interested in and it wasn't going to be students with some level of sophistication investigating theoretical or formal ideas that were part of my interests. It was going to be about where you start. What do you tell people about what is architecture, what are its component parts, how do they fit together, what mixture of things makes architecture, how do we arrive at a methodology for making decisions or making form? What I did was—and I was very excited about it—to formulate the basics of architecture: where do we start, what are the things that you need to tell somebody, how do you help them understand that architecture or design, is not sitting and waiting for inspiration, but is a real process where there are logical points to put in information and points where you're required to make somewhat arbitrary decisions. That there is a

method for building on and developing those decisions. It isn't in fact what you had for breakfast or how you feel that day or reproducing some neat form that you saw in a magazine. Actually, I put together a first-year course and taught it over a period of time. I've had people, and it's now a generation ago, come up to me and say, "You know, I hated your guts, I never worked as hard as I worked in your first-year class and, you know, I still think about some of the things that we did or that you said, or the lectures that you gave. It was the best course I ever took. I learned more in that course than anything else I did at school." It was a killer course.

Blum: Was it designed to eliminate some students?

Cohen: It wasn't intentionally designed to eliminate some students, but it was in part designed to... You know when people said to me, "I've been working on this drawing for thirty hours and I'm not finished yet," or, "I've been working on this model for thirty hours and it's not finished yet. And I'm not enjoying this." I would say to them, "Well, maybe you shouldn't become an architect. What do you think architecture is about? You should be so lucky to get to do this in architecture." The course was very focused and very rigorous and it was demanding. It also investigated another thesis that I had about architectural education—at least primary architectural education—which was that there's a difference between medical school and a residency or an internship. In medical school you take lecture courses and you learn chemistry, biology, anatomy, medical pathology, whereas in an internship you learn something entirely different. Somebody's standing there and saying, "Well, I would hold that scalpel at thirty degrees instead of twenty-seven degrees because if you move another inch you'll nick such-and-such a nerve and this guy won't have any feeling in his left arm ever again." Studio is about that—learning by doing—it's about doing something in which each student learns something different because what they're learning is predicated on their experience and their ability to interact with whomever's teaching the studio. Which means that one person could be learning one thing while another person doing the same design problem could be learning an entirely different thing. So, as a studio critic, you're dealing with one student and you

understand that you're helping or teaching or telling one thing over here and another thing to another student over there. If you think about it, that's a pretty inefficient and foolish way to educate people, particularly at the beginning of their education when it might be useful to have them all hear and understand pretty much the same thing, assuming that you believe that there's actually a starting point for understanding the discipline. What I did was that I didn't teach a studio but they had homework. I assigned a problem, either a drawing or a three-dimensional model to design, that they had to bring in a day and a half or two days later. It was very focused formal exercises in composition with the elements limited. That turned out to be a killer for most of them because it was open-ended. If you don't have an idea, you sit there forever and ever and ever, you could spend ten hours doing it or you could spend a hundred hours doing it. I suspect that most of them spent a hundred hours doing their projects. They came in with these projects. If they were three-dimensional exercises they went on a table; if they were drawings, they went on a wall. Then we would critique them. Initially, I would just talk about them. Then I figured out something about teaching: half the people weren't listening. I could talk about them for five hours and the people who were listening at the beginning of the five hours were sound asleep at the end. I actually realized that what had to happen was that I had to engage the students in the process of critiquing using a set of ground rules: you've made these objects, here's how we're going to evaluate them by looking for these properties: we don't care if they're pretty, they're not objects of aesthetic contemplation, they're intended to communicate something. So what is the something that they're intended to communicate? We have to understand what the compositional idea is and then how it is developed and then what is the meaning of each of the developmental moves. What I did was establish a vocabulary for talking about these in the first couple of sessions and then in the third session we just had everybody pick one that they wanted to talk about, but you couldn't talk about your own. We just went around the table, whether it was a drawing or a model the students were required to critique these things, and guess what? They didn't fall asleep anymore because they were engaged. They picked one and put it on the table. Then what I did was to say, "Well, let's talk about this one."

Which meant that a person might be called upon to make a critique. Then I would say, "Well, look at the way this one starts with the same idea but does something different. Who's going to tell us about this one?" Then somebody else would talk. So it wasn't like we would go in a row and the guy who came last was already asleep. An aside—one of the things that's always been important to me, although I've never been the best listener or the most patient person because I have a nanosecond attention span. It's just short of attention-deficit disorder, I think. That's why I've always liked doing three or four things at once. I think what I learned about teaching is that I actually figured out that it's not just getting there and delivering information or saying something brilliant because if the students aren't hearing it there's no communication taking place. If they're not getting it, then there's no education taking place. Somehow, you have to figure out when it's not taking place and then put plan B in place for how to get students engaged. That was actually exciting for me and I was doing that for a while. Then the ideas about what beginning education should be changed and the course sort of went away. But there is a decade-worth of people out there in the city of Chicago who took this course and either loved it or hated it.

Blum: Did the course stop because you didn't want to teach it anymore?

Cohen: Stanley, who was director at that time, was incredibly supportive of it and I'm not sure quite what happened to it. I think that one of the difficulties with the course is that students always arrive with a set of expectations about what going to architecture school is. I think that Gropius once said, "Our job is to put people in touch with their inner genius." That's not a description of an educational process that anyone I know has figured out or understands, right? It just means just let them be and help them and they'll discover. The student's expectation is that, Hey, I'm going to have all this fun! But here is this person saying, "Okay, I don't care what you think. This is going to be good for you. You're going to do this because it's going to teach you this and then after you leave you can do whatever you want with that information. If it's useful or you see a connection to something that someone else is saying, fine. If not, it's just something more that you know how to do

and it's something that you know and understand." The course typically had a tremendous resistance to it. The students just didn't want to do it.

Blum: So it was eliminated by popular demand?

Cohen: I'm not sure. I think it just sort of got phased out. I was asked to teach other things. While there were other faculty who had taught the course with me. I think that it was Stanley's judgment that really no one else should be teaching the course and if I was doing something else then somebody else could teach whatever they thought the first-year design course should be.

Blum: You've been at UIC for twenty-five years.

Cohen: Oh, god. Don't remind me. When I think about it, I really wonder what the hell I've been doing there for so many years. And why I've been wasting my time.

Blum: What do you mean?

Cohen: Well, listen, during this period of time—up until the time that my daughters were in college and I needed money to pay two tuitions, I was—Stanley used to call it sleeping around—I was teaching at other institutions as a visiting critic. What I did while the girls were in college was I actually helped to organize and then I taught the first year graduate program in urban design at Notre Dame. Bob Amico, who was dean, thought I was terrific and paid me lavishly. I mean, I went down there one day a week and I gave a seminar in the morning and a studio in the afternoon and I think I was being paid fourteen or fifteen thousand dollars for a semester.

Blum: That doesn't sound like a teaching salary.

Cohen: No, it doesn't. If you divide the hours into it, it's more like consulting. It was just fabulous. I started turning away stuff and then, for one reason or another I was receiving fewer invitations to teach. I think that the work I was



doing was slowly going out of fashion—you know Postmodernism was sort of coming to an end, although I was never a postmodernist anyway. But there was a kind of modernist revival or reinterest in, if not the ideology of modernism, then the forms of modernism. I didn't have the same currency that I had seven or eight years ago. But I taught at a lot of places; I taught at Harvard, in fact Harry Cobb had Stanley and many, but not all, of the Chicago Seven out because he thought that Harvard was too heavily East Coast, although it may have been Stanley's idea for Harry to ask us. Larry [Booth] taught there, I taught there, Stanley taught there, Jerry Horn taught there, Ron Krueck taught there, but I don't think that Jim [Freed] did. Maybe that's all. Teaching at Harvard was a phenomenal experience. The students were great. They were uniformly bright. It really put teaching at UIC in perspective.

[Tape 5: Side 2]

Blum: At the other universities where you taught, what were the students like?

Cohen: Well, at Harvard they were bright, Penn wasn't bad either. Teaching at Harvard was an amazing experience. I actually gave a C to one person in my studio who lacked the facility to make good formal judgments, but he was so smart. Here he was doing this thing and it had interesting ideas in it—at UIC he would have been a straight-A student. So it was the experience of teaching at Harvard... I got off the plane and got there and the administrative secretary says to me, "Well, you have a budget of \$1500 for your studio." Like some sort of an idiot I said to her, "Well, what am I supposed to do with \$1500?" She said, "Well, you could buy beer and chips for all the students, but generally, what people do is they pay honorariums if you want somebody to come and lecture to your students. Or, if you want to get someone from outside the Boston area to come to your mid-term reviews or your final reviews, you can pay for their tickets and give them an honorarium." I was floored. One of the reasons I was floored is that not very many years before I had been on the lectures committee at UIC. Our budget

for the year was \$1500! Under Whitaker we had a lecture and exhibition committee. When Stanley took over, he did the lectures unilaterally.

Blum: What do you mean unilaterally?

Cohen: Well, he called up people he knew like Frank Gehry and said, "Hey, Frank, will you come here and give a lecture?" Stanley understood that the lecture posters go everywhere and that it attracts graduate students if, in fact, there are important practitioners. He just took that over. But prior to Stanley's coming there had been a lectures and exhibitions committee which I had chaired for a couple of years and ran on a budget barely more than what I was given to operate my studio at Harvard. Suddenly you just realize that UIC could be a great school if we just had some money. We had budget decrements. We couldn't make long-distance calls from the main office or they would buy push-pins and you would get one box per year. So when we put up students' reviews, we were supposed to collect the pins when we took the drawings down because we weren't going to get any more. I'm thinking, "Oh, my god." You know, here's this pretty nice building that Harvard's got and there's this little cafe on the ground floor that serves food. Every Wednesday at four o'clock they just suspend classes and they give away free coffee, tea, and cookies. What a brilliant thing to do. Suddenly the whole school isn't going to school any more, they're chatting and wandering into other studios and talking to other people and talking to professors that they don't know but who they might have the next year. I thought, "Gee, all you need to do is have a lot of money." Here we are and we're Urbana's poor country cousins. We don't have rich alumni. And we have Walter's building. Walter keeps claiming that the reason the building doesn't work is that it was never finished, but the upshot of it never getting finished is that we've never had faculty offices, we've never had meeting rooms, we've never had a hundred things that you'd want in a building to actually function and teach and have a place to go and talk to students. The architectural library isn't even in the building. I tell students to go and look up a building and I'll come back two days later when the studio meets and I'll ask them if they found it

and they say, "No." I say, "Well, did you look for it?" They'll say, "Well, no. I didn't have a chance to get to the library."

Blum: Considering all of what you've just said about the disparities between UIC and Harvard and Notre Dame and all the other places you've taught, why did you stay at UIC for twenty-five years?

Cohen: I'm just a complainer. I am a stubborn, tenacious, bulldog of a person. I'm not malicious, but I'm one of those people who just doesn't give up. I just haven't given up on the place. And, as you know, I get a regular paycheck.

Blum: If you didn't need the paycheck, would you continue to teach there?

Cohen: You know, I'm getting to a point where even when I divide my hours into the paycheck, it's still pretty good money. My practice is doing so well—I mean everybody's doing well. It's the seven years of feast, which implies that we will eventually have seven years of famine. This is 1998 and I've never seen as much work in my whole life.

Blum: So you don't really need to teach?

Cohen: No, I don't. I'm getting to the point where I'm not sure I want to teach any more. Here we are, we're going through a dean search. Judith Kirschner and this guy called Tom Reese are the final candidates. I like Judith Kirschner and I've known her for years. She'd make a great dean for the school. Thomas Reese is the former assistant director of the Getty and is a phenomenal person. So I'm thinking to myself... And then there's a dean search for Liberal Arts and Sciences. Apparently, Stanley Fish is one of the finalists. Stanley Fish wrote a seminal book that architects who are interested in linguistics and deconstruction and interpretation and meaning read. It's called *Is There a Text in This Class?* He teaches literary criticism. The piece that I have my undergraduate students read is about the two back-to-back classes Fish teaches where he leaves the reading list on the blackboard from the previous class and draws a box around it and then tells the next class

that it's a fourteenth-century religious poem. He asks them to interpret it. And they do! They do!

Blum: Well, you're still there...

Cohen: The reason I'm saying all of this is that I said to one of my colleagues, "My god, it might be interesting..."—this shouldn't be for publication because I think that Judith will probably be the dean and probably be a wonderful dean—but I said, "My god, if people like Tom Reese and Stanley Fish are the deans of architecture and liberal arts studies, I might just stick around and see what happens to this place!" I guess I'm an incurable romantic.

Blum: I'd like to backtrack just a moment to cover something that was happening at about the same time that the Chicago Seven was engaging in all their exhibition activities. There was a renewed interest in drawing. There were several exhibitions in New York—a very big one at MoMA in 1974—and I know that at least one of the shows organized in New York traveled to Chicago, it was "Two Hundred Years of American Architectural Drawing." Although that show was handled differently here than in New York, I think it reflected the renewed interest in drawing. Did the Chicago Seven have an interest in this revival related to their own practices? How do you think all this happened at that point in time?

Cohen: That's actually a little bit harder to address. It's not a simple question. The Chicago Seven didn't have a direct involvement with those New York shows. But I think that all of it was part of something that was taking place. There was a change in the way architects thought about architecture and the theoretical positions that had both readability and sustained interest. It seemed to be impacting on people's practices, what architecture looked like and what it was going to look like. I think that Drexler's show at MoMA was incredibly important in a number of ways. First of all, aside from exhibiting these incredibly beautiful enormous Beaux-Arts watercolor drawings, it was the first show that MoMA had done that you could consider to be an historical show. Somehow or other, for them to look at early modernism,

something that was still part of the continuity of what architecture is about, and what was happening, didn't seem as dramatic a step as showing nineteenth-century Beaux-Arts eclectic work. After all, the Museum of Modern Art was about modernism and this century and in fact it was one of the institutions that had been an impetus in establishing the ubiquity of modernism in design and in architecture in the United States. Also, it connected to the ideas of progressiveness and the avant-garde.

Blum: Were they pragmatically reflecting what was happening in architectural offices at that time?

Cohen: At that point in time, showing nineteenth-century eclecticism and suggesting that it had some contemporary relevance was, in fact, an avant-garde thing to do. I think that the Drexler show, for the people who hadn't seen drawings like these before, certainly must have been a revelation. But in fact it wasn't the beginning of something, it was the codification or the polarization of something that was going on. So people would point to it and say, "Well, look, this is what this other educational system was all about. Here was a way that people thought about architecture and let's look at it in all of its splendor and variety and richness and intellectual implications." People like Venturi had been arguing about the paucity of the modern architecture of the 1950s and 1960s and where modernism had gone. The idea of the exquisite drawing as a way of representing an idea I think was something that was being seen again. Architects were spending time and effort making very elaborate drawings whereas, I think, somehow or other, modernism in its need to produce the idealized free-standing plastic object always seemed best represented in a three-dimensional model. So if you were to characterize modernism and its representation in models... God knows Wright made the most exquisite drawings, and so did Marion Mahony, and Le Corbusier's drawings have this wonderful kind of funky quality to them, and Mies's collage drawings were certainly real masterpieces of representation. But for the most part, the making of drawings wasn't associated with modern architecture. So suddenly, this rekindling of an

interest in drawing seemed to go along with the other kinds of new ideas, or new old ideas, that were being introduced at that point.

Blum: This was in the 1970s. Were computers being used in the offices and the schools yet?

Cohen: No, no, no.

Blum: But models were prevalent?

Cohen: Yes, in offices and schools. People made renderings and axonometrics as well as models.

Blum: I know that linen was used up until the middle of this century. Had the materials changed? Was Mylar more commonly used later on?

Cohen: Mylar was used in offices. I don't think that Mylar was really being used in schools until sometime in the 1980s. The advantage was just that you could make an ink drawing on Mylar and if you made a mistake you could essentially wipe it off, whereas if you were using Strathmore board or drawing paper, you actually had to scrape it off with a razor blade. However, the old fashioned tracing linen—I don't even know if it was still in production in the 1950s—was almost as good as Mylar. You could get an ink line and erase it and there was just the faintest residue of it that was absorbed into the fibers—it was pretty amazing stuff to draw on. But I don't think that the media had that kind of an impact. I think what was happening—I'm not sure of the dates now—was that there was probably a recession going on in the building industry and all of the young people that were setting up practices, really had very little work to do. The opportunities weren't there. My generation really missed out by not starting their practices during a building boom in the way the previous generation had. So the whole question of doing elaborate drawings or projects became very important, whether it was a theoretical project or a project that was mounted as a sort of critique. For instance, the project that I did for the show at the Cooper-

Hewitt that Paul Gapp later published in the *Tribune* was a critique of the State Street Mall. The opportunity to make a project as a way of making a critique of something that had been done or was in the process of being done became very important for us as a generation. Because it wasn't a real commissioned project the only thing that really existed and would continue to exist was the representation. Suddenly, the representation, either the drawing or the model, becomes incredibly important. It becomes the end product. There were an awful lot of drawing projects where the drawing was the end product because there never was a commission and there would never be a built building that would come of it. Probably the most significant thing of that sort that I've done was more recent. It was the project that Anders Nereim and I did for the Chicago world's fair that was planned for 1992, a project which was also very well published.

Blum: But the fair never took place.

Cohen: That's right. For someone who's listening to this tape a long time from now, it never happened. Our project was really mounted as a critique of the very first SOM plan for the fair. There were so many objections to that plan that finally Bruce Graham recanted and then regrouped and brought in big-name stars from all over the world to be involved.

Blum: Was that a pattern in the process that the Chicago Seven also followed? To connect with the Whites and the Grays and the New York group and the California group?

Cohen: Other than the fact that these people were friends and acquaintances, I don't think that there was any real connection between our activities.

Blum: There was a symposium at the Graham Foundation that was related to one of the drawings shows, "American Architectural Drawings: A Contemporary View." What was that rehash about?

Cohen: I'm trying to remember... I did a symposium there. I did one that came after the "Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition." I actually don't recall the one that you're asking about. But, there were many. People were interested and people attended these things because everybody wanted to find out what was going on and was there something that they should know about. I guess it's like computers now, where everybody knows that something is going on and they want to find out what it is and how it affects them and how they should be utilizing computing as part of what they do.

Blum: In 1977 there was a conference at the Graham Foundation entitled *The State of the Art of Architecture*. The Whites, the Silvers, and the Grays, everyone came to discuss unbuilt work. What was reported about that event was that the skyscraper was absolutely lambasted.

Cohen: The conference was something that Stanley put together. I guess he just thought it would be—"amusing" is the word that I would use, but I don't know what word he would use—interesting to get all these people together. I think that the idea of asking people to discuss unbuilt projects wasn't to emphasize unbuilt projects in the sense that we've been talking about them related to the rekindled interest in drawing and representation. Instead, I think that the idea had something to do with the kinds of interaction that the Chicago Seven had been having as a result of our getting together once a month. That wasn't happening in a larger sense.

Blum: What was that?

Cohen: We wanted to have an ongoing dialogue. What we did was we had dinner once a month at the Como Inn. We had a little private room and we had slide projectors and everybody was instructed that they couldn't show up without slides. They could do one of two things: they could bring something that was either just completed that nobody else had seen, or, better yet, they could bring something that was in progress that they were still working on. The idea then was that we all looked at what Helmut was doing or what I



was doing or what Tom was doing and we talked about it, we critiqued these things as if we were—god help me—student reviews.

Blum: Were these exchanges limited to the Chicago Seven, later expanded to eleven?

Cohen: I think that it segued. I think that the dinners went from seven to being the larger group, because I remember Helmut and Jerry Horn and Cindy Weese coming to these dinners. I think that they went on for a couple of years and they were fun. They were really fun! In our own kind of arrogant way we all thought that those sitting in the room were, if not the best architects in town, certainly the most interesting ones. It was an opportunity to see what people were doing and to talk about it, to hear why they were doing that and what they thought it was about, and what dealing with the circumstances of the commission had been. Then we just talked. It was fabulous interaction. I think that Stanley thought, "Well, why don't we do this at a larger scale and invite some people to come listen?" Stanley is, or was, almost as much a labeler of things as Charles Jencks.

Blum: What do you mean labeler?

Cohen: I think that when you think about labeling or categorization, it actually has a usefulness in that it can be a kind of shorthand; if you're categorizing things and you know that something belongs to a certain category, you know certain things are true about it. In biology, if you know something's a mammal, even if it looks like a fish, you still know that it's warm-blooded and bears live young or else it's not a mammal. I think that Stanley actually—and maybe Charles Jencks—liked to categorize things because then they were tidy and in a place. Then they didn't have to spend a lot of effort thinking about them again once you'd catalogued them. That's not a nice thing to say about either Stanley or Charles Jencks but it's true—it's a method of dealing with lots of information but not a particularly in-depth one. So, anyway, this conference that you're asking about was where we just sort of invited groups of people who had identified themselves sort of regionally. We asked everybody to come and show an unbuilt project and then we all just sort of talked about

them. I think that Helmut got beat up badly, as I remember. Peter Eisenman or somebody got up...

Blum: It was Peter.

Cohen: He attacked Helmut's work as being commercial and totalitarian. He said that he thought that Jim Nagle's work was so banal and lacking in ideas that he could not understand why Jim had been invited to this thing. He was really... I mean, Peter's just obnoxious.

Blum: Was that about Jim? One of the articles reported that Peter beat up on Helmut. It alluded to Nazis and all this stuff which, you know...

Cohen: Yeah, yeah. Helmut got beat up on, and Nagle got beat up on too. With Peter it was like the world was ending. Anybody that's followed his career probably knows more about his psychological states and his neuroses than they would ever want to.

Blum: In addition to the severe criticism that took place among participants, why was the skyscraper—I realize that most of you were not building skyscrapers—so maligned, so hated?

Cohen: I think because what had happened was that we were looking at something that had degenerated into a symbol of corporate power and had degenerated as a design problem into something that was largely formulaic. People were willing to believe that the skyscraper, because of its economics and because of its structural demands and planning requirements—that is the dimension of usable, leasable space from the hallway and the elevator core—was something that had simply been solved. As a building type, as a carrier of meaning, and from whatever other point of view that you wanted to bring to bear, there was nothing particularly new or interesting about skyscrapers. In fact, they were rather banal buildings or at least they seemed to be at that point in time. The focus of architectural attention had gone elsewhere. Now, part of this position had to do with bashing modernism. Of course, the

skyscraper and the frame were the icons of the early modernists. Even for people who never built a real skyscraper it was the American city and the city of towers that was the image of the twentieth-century utopia. The fact that the skyscraper as an icon had a special place in the history of early twentieth-century modernism and the fact that what almost all of these people were about was something else, made it an easy target. Ultimately this could be a very nice segue into the "Late Entries to the Tribune Tower Competition."

Blum: That's exactly where we're going.

Cohen: I can tell you the history of the competition, which is also in writing, but it's interesting anecdotally. Then I can tell you what my interest in it was: my interest in it was exactly the same as the "Chicago Architects" show. It was to take the last piece of modernism and what everyone believed from Giedion and Pevsner and people like that to be true and to say, "Well, yes. What about the skyscraper? Maybe we should look at it a little bit more carefully. Maybe there are other things going on here. Maybe there are things that have been looked at only very selectively and there are more things here that are worth our study." The source of this, for me was when I was doing urban design at Cornell. One might expect that the key text would have been someone like Camillo Sitte and his descriptions of how to define squares and public spaces and all those little black and white diagrams that emphasize the space, which was the way we all drew plans at Cornell. We even drew figure-ground reversals where it was the space that was colored in black and the built stuff left white to be able to see the shape of the space, rather than to think of the space as the result of having built the buildings. Actually the key text was a book called *The American Vitruvius: an architects' handbook of civic art* by Hegemann and Peets. It was a compendium of the great urban spaces of the world. What interested me, in addition to the great urban spaces of the world, were actually two amazing things. One, as a student I had never heard of Howard Van Doren Shaw, and his Market Square in Lake Forest, and it was included in Hegemann and Peets. It was near Chicago. Second, there was a chapter on American architecture and the skyscraper. In

this book from 1922, Hegemann and Peets wrote that perhaps the greatest contribution of American architecture to civic art was the skyscraper. I thought, "Now wait a minute! This is not the same skyscraper that Giedion and Pevsner are talking about! Or even that Carl Condit is talking about!" The frontispiece to the book was the Municipal building in New York City. I had been in New York City and had spent time down there. I thought about the Municipal building and I decided that it actually was an amazing piece of urban design because of the way—and I've written about this—it dealt with the buildings and the urban space around it. I said, "You know, hey, there's something here."

Blum: So how did that realization impact your thinking when it came to "Late Entries?"

Cohen: So, to go back to the chronology of the Chicago Seven, we had completed the townhouse show and the competition and increased our members to eleven. This gave us enough for two sides of a street—well, I guess it was just one side of the street, because the townhouse competition winners were along the other side of the street when the show traveled to the Walker Art Center. So we were trying to figure out what we would do and where we would do it for the next show. I think that we had decided when to have the show and we were going to do it at Rhona Hoffman's gallery. Rhona was somebody that I knew through the MCA because she was incredibly active there. She was a close friend of Stanley's and she was genuinely interested in exhibiting architectural drawings. In fact she did a number of shows of architectural drawings. I think we were all having a dinner—it might have been one of our monthly dinners, although I don't remember everyone being there. So maybe it wasn't. It may have been a dinner to get Rhona to do the show. My memory is that she was there, I was there, Stanley and Tom were there. I think that Larry and Ben were there too.

Blum: That's almost every one of the original seven. By this time, Jim had left Chicago.

Cohen: Yes, Ingo Freed had left. So, we were sort of throwing around ideas. The first thought was that we had done a show that was objects so we should go back to a show that was drawings. Then I think that Stanley may have said, "Oh, you know, I'm so busy that this is almost too much work. Why don't we limit it to one large drawing? Why doesn't everyone just make one large drawing?" Of course, we said, "Well, we'd all have to be drawing the same thing"—a townhouse or a country house. It would be the same theme so that you could look at them side-by-side and make comparisons. It was Ben Weese who said, "You know, why don't we redo the Tribune tower competition?" In fact, the publication of the competition, the catalog that the Tribune Company had produced in 1922, had all of the entries—not the plans, elevations or section, but a single large rendering of the building as seen from the Michigan Avenue bridge. That had been prescribed in the competition requirements. We all thought that that was a fabulous idea. I said, "Yes, and we should actually contact Claes Oldenburg and get his drawing of the hooded funerary figure by Lorado Taft at Graceland Cemetery that he had blown up and stood next to the Hancock building." We probably could have gotten it. Somewhere in here we should actually talk about the MCA and the project of the Mouse Museum that I had done with Claes, because it was actually a fabulous experience for me. Claes is amazing. He's very, very interested in architecture and he's thought a lot about it as an adopted Chicagoan. At lunch once when he was in town to install the *Bat Column* I met him and told him that what I liked about it was that it looked like the Hancock building upside down. He went fishing in his bag and actually pulled out a drawing that he had made of the Hancock building upside down. I was basically asking him why, since all of the drawings had sheathing on the bat, had he left it off. He said that he had just loved the look of the structure that had to be engineered to make the thing stiff, but in fact, he said that it had also reminded him of Chicago skyscrapers and the Hancock building. So there was this idea of Claes's drawing and that we would call the competition what he had called the drawing, which was "Late Entries to the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition." Then we talked a little more and we were going to have eleven of these drawings. I don't know who it was who said, "Well, you know, the original catalog had something like two

hundred and forty entries." We talked about it some more. I said, "Well, you know, the really interesting thing about the competition, the reason it was so important, was that it happened at a period in time that was actually transitional." There were entries like the Gropius and the Bruno Taut entries that were modernist. You also got all of the eclectic entries that were Gothic because of the commonly understood idea that Gothic was the purest expression of verticality and height and therefore the appropriate architectural style for the skyscraper. That was the argument that Montgomery Schuyler had made about the Woolworth building, which was heralded as the most extraordinary skyscraper of its day. It was the idea that somehow or other this book was a compendium of what was in the air in 1922. That you could look at it and begin to sense, in retrospect, what people were thinking, what was going on, what the dialogue must have been between the people doing the Gothic and the people doing all these other weird things like pyramids, classical buildings, buildings that piled buildings on top of buildings to make tall buildings. It just became clear that the value of doing the show as a kind of polemical piece would be that it was happening in 1980, a point in time when it seemed like we were at a transition point in the way that people thought about and made architecture. We all just said, "Well, if we can get enough drawings, it will be just that." If we were broad enough about whom we invited we would get that. We decided that rather than it just being a Chicago Seven-Eleven show—yes, we were open all night in those days and you could get anything you wanted at any hour of the day or night!—it would be really interesting to invite one hundred people from all over, to invite one hundred architects to submit one hundred drawings.

Blum: The initial competition in 1922 was open to anyone, it was not by invitation. Why was yours by invitation?

Cohen: The word got out and people were just sending us stuff. I think that we wanted to maintain some control over what we got and to make sure that it did what we wanted.

Blum: That it did what you wanted? That it verified the conclusions that you already had in your heads?

Cohen: Yeah, essentially. The conclusion was that there was a plurality of things going on.

Blum: I thought that it was even more specific than that.

Cohen: Well, that things were changing.

Blum: What about Postmodernism and the idea that historical reference was really mainstream at that point?

Cohen: I don't know if it was so much historical references as that buildings weren't abstract and that they were in fact were carriers of meaning.

Blum: Is that what you meant when you wrote that "architecture had come full circle"?

Cohen: Probably, because I don't think that any of us were espousing full-blown eclecticism as much as we were espousing the simple idea that when you approach the making or the solving of anything that you want to be able to engage everything you know and bring all of your prior knowledge and experience to bear on making those decisions. What modernism had done was to argue the opposite and to put in place a design methodology that excluded the use of prior knowledge or prior experience. Everything was *sui generis*, everything was a *tabula rasa* situation, you start from scratch.

[Tape 6: Side 1]

Cohen: You know in modernism you have the initial decision of whether it's a concrete building or a steel building and then the building just somehow grows out of the performance specifications and out of its requirements and out of its function, right? And you know we all thought that this was

demonstrable nonsense and that, in fact, when you do anything you always say, "Well, what do I know that's of help to me here?" What we were really arguing for here is that we could learn not from the history of architecture but from architecture itself. That in a way, for me at least, is because I didn't study architecture in the 1920s or 1930s, I didn't grow up with the sort of fervor of early modernism—Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright were as remote from my architectural world as was Palladio—so that what I would have argued and have always argued for is a kind of objectivity that allows you to look at everything and to learn from literally everything. That's really what Venturi was saying, right? That it's all out there and it's all architecture and it all has some relevance to how we make things and how we experience things and how we think about things. Even though the culture or economic conditions or political conditions that made these things changed, the reason that some of these buildings have survived as canonical objects is that they had qualities that clearly went beyond the time and the place that they were a product of and they speak to us across the centuries. Now clearly what they say to us wasn't what they said to people fifty years ago—the Villa Rotonda probably meant something much different to someone in the nineteenth century than it did to someone in the early twentieth century and than it does to somebody today. The amazing thing about history is that it's always filtered through a contemporary lens that selects certain things out for certain reasons. It foregrounds certain things and backgrounds others or it makes them seem somehow less relevant or less important to what's current or vital. Clearly the argument was: "Let's reclaim this vital part of human nature. Let's have a past. Let's have a history."

Blum: Does the "Late Entries" competition imply that the Chicago Seven didn't think quite so badly of the skyscraper as they once did?

Cohen: I don't think that we ever thought that it was evil. I think we thought that it had become a symbol for something. It was the something that we wanted to take apart. Then the next step is to take that symbol and show that it's not what the people said it was who were using it as their banner. We wanted to show that it was also many more things. I think that that's part of what the



show was all about. Mainly, that was what it was about for me. The show itself was about showing a cross-section of stuff at a point in time that indicated, if you will, that we had won the battle! Hah, hah, hah... That's what you wanted to hear, right?

Blum: Only if that's what you thought. Now there was a review...

Cohen: John Vinci wrote a kind of pissy review of it afterwards.

Blum: That was not the one I had in mind. I came across a review that raised the issue of how anyone—you or anyone else—could claim that it was a cross-section of what was happening at that time when prominent architects like Bud Goldberg or Myron Goldsmith or I. M. Pei or Robert Venturi or Johnson or Eisenman weren't invited or didn't submit entries in the show. So many names that you would expect to appear in a cross-section were not represented.

Cohen: I think that there was another agenda there. It wasn't mine—I think that it may have been Stanley's—but it was something that we consciously discussed in putting together a list of who to ask to submit.

Blum: Why were architects of such prominence excluded?

Cohen: I think that the show was about discovering or showcasing the next generation, in large part. There are exceptions to that: clearly, Walter Netsch was asked, and we had an entry from the Smithsons, so it got a little schizophrenic there. I think that we tried to make it a show—just as we had been, as a group, of the new kids on the block or the radicals of our day—we wanted a show that was mostly the new kids who were doing really interesting things.

Blum: I don't remember anything like that in the catalog.

Cohen: I don't think that it was. But that's the only explanation that I can give you for how the selection evolved. I know that we did things like... We made a lot of calls—Stanley made calls and I made calls—to people like Philip and like Peter Eisenman and Frank Gehry to ask, "Who should we have in the show? Who are the really interesting people?" I think that the reason that Johnson and some of the other people weren't invited is that we invited people who weren't building skyscrapers, who didn't do this professionally. I don't know why Peter wasn't invited or why the only SOM partner who was invited was Walter.

Blum: But Peter Eisenman certainly didn't do them.

Cohen: I know, and that's why I said I don't understand why he wasn't invited. Actually, Peter may have been invited and declined. A lot of people declined. You know why people declined? Oh, I know why Peter...! Yes... Dear Peter, what a piece of work this man is... When Peter was called and invited, he asked who else was in the show. Stanley sent him a list and Peter answered, "It doesn't do anything for me to be in the show with these people. Who the hell are these people? Why should I put my effort there to be exhibited with a bunch of people who nobody's ever heard of?" We did a decent job of picking. A lot of those people have been heard from a lot since then. But a lot of people declined. Peter was probably the only person who actually refused so harshly.

Blum: It was also reported that Rob Krier said that he wouldn't participate because he thought the skyscraper was evil.

Cohen: Evil, yes, absolutely evil.

Blum: Were there other people who declined for the same reason?

Cohen: Because skyscrapers were evil? No, I don't think so. The Kriers were sort of...

Blum: You wrote an article about the tall building...

Cohen: I wrote three articles, actually.

Blum: Well, one particularly, "The Tall Building Urbanistically Reconsidered"—the title is right out of Sullivan—can you explain your conclusion?

Cohen: Again, as we started collecting all of these drawings and looking at what they did—most of them were really one-liners. By asking somebody to make a rendering of a building... What do I know? I assume that to make a rendering of a building you need to design the damn building. But apparently that was not the case, because a lot of them were in fact one-liners or pastiches. But some of them were actually pretty interesting in terms of what they took on thematically with respect to the skyscraper. I had been actually thinking about the skyscraper in the same way that I had been thinking about all the rest of the historical Chicago stuff and the Chicago School stuff, particularly about the Tribune tower. One of the things that had always stuck in my mind—I had read it as a student and then I had gone back and reread it when we were doing "Late Entries"—was the Louis Sullivan article written in 1924. The article was really famous—it's the source of the statement that the 1893 exposition would set the course of architecture back fifty years—but in fact it's really about a couple of things. It's very much down on the winning entry and it lauded the Saarinen entry as a work of genius. Sullivan was, through Wright and other historians, the guy who was credited as having solved the formal problem of the skyscraper. So if you look at the development of the skyscraper after Otis figures out how to make an elevator that won't kill you if the cable snaps, then you start to get seven-, eight-, and nine-story buildings. What architects are doing is first taking two- or three-story buildings and stacking them on top of each other. Then they slowly begin to make buildings that are metaphorically adaptations of other buildings; the Renaissance palazzo was a favorite because you would get the base and the attic and then the *piano nobile* would get stretched from one very tall floor to six or seven floors. Ernest Flagg's buildings in New York had French Gothic mansard roofs that suddenly were ten stories, with everyone

peeking out through porthole dormers. You got this fabulous attempt to deal with it. Sullivan just came by and said, "This is very simple: it's a column. You have a base, shaft, and capitol." Apparently, he hadn't figured the whole thing out because when he saw the Saarinen entry, he clearly wet his pants. What he wet his pants about was that by setting the thing back and at each pier articulating the verticals without any kind of capping or cornice device, Saarinen had made a building that suggested verticality as an endless expression, something that just kept going—"soaring" I think is the word that Sullivan used. But if you really looked carefully that's what all the Gothic entries did. They're all fluted vertically, they all have some kind of setback at the top—the winning entry was kind of klutzy but it does all of those things. So here I am, with my usual "let's look for anomalies" mindset, reading the article. And I thought, Wait a minute! If you just closed your eyes and switched the illustrations you could read Sullivan's description of the Saarinen design and substitute the illustration of the winning entry. The only thing that you'd have to delete from the whole article is the reference that it's an eclectic building. At that point a lot of things just clicked into place. I actually went and started looking at skyscrapers in terms of everything that they weren't. One clearly knew about them as utopian objects, as part of the city of tomorrow, as a kind of futurist statement about the new world, right? Clearly, all of that had a kind of history to it. There's this wonderful article that we got from Norris Kelly Smith for the *Late Entries* catalog that really makes those connections and that relates the image of the Gothic tower to all the medieval images of the new Jerusalem or the promised land of the Book of Revelations. So those connections were there. Then I started looking at all of the Hugh Ferriss things in *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*. It seemed very clear that there were sort of two themes there: the setback skyscraper as a force of nature—there are the drawings where the skyscraper blends into the craggy mountains in the distance and you understand in the Edmund Burke sense, that this is an expression of the sublime, the overwhelming force of nature being artificially reproduced by man. The minute you think, Of course the skyscraper is a mountain!, then all of the skyscrapers that look like pyramids or ziggurats make complete sense because they are a form of a mountain. Then when you factor in the kinds of mythological meanings of mountains,

where they are the dwelling places of gods or the place where the earth and the heavens are connected, or where man ascended to the heavens, then there is a whole other level of interpretive meaning that you could read into these things. Then, of course, there were all of the 1920s skyscrapers and the Hugh Ferriss drawings that had these little Greek temples on top of them, so you think, Of course they're mountains and these little temples are the Acropolis and it's a high city. There's suddenly a kind of Rosetta stone and a way to understand all of these things. You begin to understand them as more than what everyone else dismissed them as, which was simply eclectic pastiche.

Blum: One of the great objections to the skyscraper was that it destroyed the fabric of the city. That's considering it in a broader context than as just an object.

Cohen: Sure. The ideal modern building is freestanding. If you read Le Corbusier, it's up on columns, on pilotis, and the green space is continuous through it. But as Summerson says, "The park is no longer in the city: the city is in the park." So the ideal site is now seen as being a continuous green space, an Arcadian or Elysian image that has individual temples or buildings set in it. The individual buildings set in this garden, if it's at the density of the twentieth-century city, become the skyscraper. So Le Corbusier comes and loves New York but says that the buildings are not tall enough and that they're too close together. So the modern building is ideally freestanding. But you can't simultaneously have urban spaces that are what creates a sense of place and urbanity. You make a field with skyscrapers and then something else, and you end up with a suburban office park or you have a low-income housing project—you don't have a city. That's not to say that the something else is wrong or bad, it's just not what human history and human experience identify as an urban and civic city. I started looking at that aspect of the skyscraper as well, because ultimately that's why the Krier brothers thought that the skyscraper was an evil thing because it had destroyed the city. I went back to Hegemann and Peets and thought that they understood something clearly because the skyscrapers of the twenties weren't modern buildings even though they were considered modern building types. My article argues that if you look at the skyscrapers then you see that there's

something else going on. There are two things going on. One of the things that made me aware of this was on the first trip I ever made to New York. At that time, I think that the Hancock building was under construction in Chicago. I was a student and I was in New York for a long weekend. One of the things I wanted to do was to go to the top of the Empire State building, but I couldn't find it because I didn't know the address of the building! How preposterous! I knew it was somewhere around 42nd Street and I kept walking back and forth looking for it and I couldn't find it. You know, there was no doorway that said "Empire State Building" over it. It occurred to me that that was very strange: the biggest building in the world was invisible from the street. I just kept looking and there were just these streetwalls and canyons that created the space of the street and the Empire State building was just not there. I realized that at the simplest level so many of the 1920s skyscrapers actually were urban in the sense that traditional buildings were urban. They define the street, they had shops and arcades and things that were not at the scale of the hundreds of stories at which they were built but at the scale of the street and human activity. The fact that the damn building was one hundred stories high was just a fact of life as opposed to a destructive force with respect to the urbanity of the street. I realized that this was actually a pretty simple proposition. While it made for less efficient planning at the lower levels and probably slightly more elevator cores there was no reason why the bottom of a building couldn't fill out its site or shape its site or make a space. It was the beginning of postmodern skyscrapers and the people who were making these things that I thought were kind of silly: the bottom went in or out or the whole form of the skyscraper was distorted to make it prettier, different, which was a big leasing issue. It didn't seem to be in service of anything beyond itself. Certainly it was easy to imagine doing that. And here in the "Late Entries" were all of these examples that did that. Again, one of the starting points of making that argument was Colin Rowe's argument in *Collage City* where you see the Piazza Navona and Sant'Agnese. The church is simultaneously perceivable as an important object in the space because of its vertical development and the domes and the flanking little domes and then it defines the edge of the space because the front of it is engaged in the walls of the piazza. It seemed to me that urbanistically the

skyscraper was about the same thing and that Rowe had never bothered looking at skyscrapers and that the Krier brothers had rejected them out of hand and that the historians of modern architecture had canonized them as icons of modernism. There was this whole other set of ways to think about them as parts of a very dense traditional city.

Blum: There were writers at the time, like Wolf von Eckardt, for instance, who damned the skyscraper because it replaced many older, smaller, urban buildings that had been on these locations.

Cohen: But everybody figured that out. Even SOM came back and has tried to fix the Sears tower and the Hancock to address the street.

Blum: Do you mean to make it more welcoming to street traffic?

Cohen: Yeah. Do you remember Sears tower when it went up? The statistic is that it replaced fifty-five small shops with two unbroken pink granite walls. Think about walking along a street in the city. The sort of vitality of the street has to do with what's there at street level. It has nothing to do with what's above. It's the stuff that's at your level and at your scale. Suddenly where there had been delis and cigar stores and magazine shops and clothing shops on that block, there was a big, long unbroken pink granite wall. And worst of all, it sloped in this really weird way. The plaza, which potentially could have been nice, was sloped as well, which meant that there was no place to go and sit or even feel like there was a place to be. It's like the Guggenheim Museum where you feel like you're not supposed to stop and look at the art, you're supposed to keep rolling down the ramp, or at least when you stop to look at the art you begin to feel like you're doing something that is slightly unnatural. Here was Sears tower and it was a kind of urban disaster. I thought it was a perfectly handsome building and an interesting idea from a certain point up, but at street level there were no ideas about what made a city. And here were all these 1920s buildings that could have been one- or two- or three-story buildings in terms of the way they worked as part of the spatial definition of the street and the city and as part of the urban life of the

city. That just seemed like something that nobody had really talked about. Suddenly, as a result of thinking about the Tribune tower competition, I had all these pieces of an argument, which I thought would eventually be one long article but just ended up being two short articles and one tidbit that I didn't want to lose, but I didn't know where it fit, so I called it, "Loos Speculation." It's about Adolf Loos's column, which was probably the best known entry to the Tribune tower competition. After that it's the Saarinen building and then after that probably no one knows what the Tribune tower looks like outside of Chicago. My favorite has always been Bertram Goodhue's entry, although I really understand the importance and significance of the Saarinen building—it spawned all the deco and moderne skyscrapers of the 1930s and early 1940s. So anyway, we're working on this exhibition and assembling all these drawings and we're coming up with this really weird stuff. By weird stuff I mean that some people we wanted in the show refused us and some people who said that they would send us stuff didn't. Most of the "kids" did send in stuff. Then we got some unsolicited entries from people who just made exquisite drawings and sent them to us because they knew this exhibition was going on and they knew that the original competition had been an open one. They had an inkling that if they made something that we thought was really terrific that we'd use it. We did. There were maybe half a dozen things that were put into the show, unsolicited, that were really wonderful.

Blum: So do you think it was really a serious attempt to present a cross-section of what was current?

Cohen: Well, what can I say—it was as serious as anything else we had done. It was done for the same reason. It had a serious aspect to it, and it had a playful aspect to it, and it had a self-promotional aspect to it. In this case Stanley and I said that if we were curating a show like this it was really not okay to put our own work in it. So we didn't.

Blum: But Tom's work was in it...



Cohen: Tom wasn't curating it. Stanley and I did the show and the Chicago Seven felt just fine about that. It went from being a Chicago Seven production initially to the point where we said that we should get one hundred people. Rhona said, "Well, I can't fit that many people in my gallery. And I don't think that I should." I think that she offered to talk to the MCA because she was a heavy hitter there in the early days as a board member. I talked to people there and Stanley talked to people there because we all had connections with the MCA early on. They liked the idea because they understood that *we* were the reason that their "One Hundred Years of Architecture in Chicago" show drew so well and got so much press. They said—although I never actually heard it—"Well, let's see if they can do it again."

Blum: There were several essays in the catalog besides yours and Stanley's. How were the authors chosen?

Cohen: We invited them.

Blum: How did you and Stanley come to select George Baird?

Cohen: Well, that's a good question. I knew George from a couple of different encounters and I thought that he was absolutely a brilliant guy and incredibly insightful. I also knew that George was one of these people who was really ambivalent about Postmodernism but who had been a really important person early on in writing *Meaning in Architecture* with Charles Jencks. I think it was really because of knowing George a little bit and his *Meaning in Architecture* book and also the Aalto book that he had written, which I thought was brilliant. Norris Kelly Smith we wanted—he was also my idea because to this day I think that his book on Frank Lloyd Wright is as good as architectural writing gets. If I had to make a list of the best books on architecture ever written, his book *Frank Lloyd Wright: a Study in Architectural Content*, would be among them. It had the kind of interpretation that dealt with the architect and his work in the history of the time and the culture, and the architect's interest. It wove a meaning for Wright's work in relation to

American themes and Thoreau and Walt Whitman. I was just in awe of this book.

Blum: Did you know him?

Cohen: No, I met him briefly—I think we got him here for one of the symposia or activities afterwards. I think that having him was my idea. And Juan Bonta wrote something for us. Again, Bonta had written a monograph on the Barcelona Pavilion and the idea of historical blindness. I thought it was one of the most brilliant things I had ever read. I had met Juan and thought that he was just extraordinary.

Blum: So you really wanted this catalog to have quality essays and significant writing.

Cohen: Oh, you bet. Yes. We wanted Vince Scully because he was Vince Scully and because he was a person who early on had been one of the people saying, "Architecture says things!" You know the thing with Vince and his lectures at Yale where he was always asking, "Well, how does the building greet you?" This whole idea that architecture is a social, cultural and communicative art and that you could examine buildings in that way was his great contribution to the way that architects were starting in the 1960s to look again at architecture. We really thought that we needed Vince to write this essay. But he was very skeptical about it, very skeptical. I think in his essay he wrote that he thought this would all come to naught but then when he started getting reduced eight-by-ten-inch copies of the drawings—we were sending each of the essayists stuff as we got it so they could begin thinking about their essays—he said he realized that there was some interesting work and that the show actually was about something. Ultimately, that probably was very flattering, although I don't know that it made a great contribution in terms of understanding what was in the show. The other thing is that I had a copy of the original Tribune tower competition book. I had found it as a graduate student and paid thirty-five dollars for it. Stanley had a rag-tag copy that he claimed he paid nine dollars for in a bookshop on Clark Street.

I think that the actual plates for our volume were shot from Will Hasbrouck's copy and to this day I think he is pissed that the binding on his copy got wrecked. I think that the original 1920s book is now going for something like \$2000, with the buckram and hopsack binding. It was a rare book. I said that one of the things that we really should do is not just a catalog of the show but to do entries from 1922 and 1982. Everybody has seen the 1922 Gropius and the Saarinen entries because they're in the history books, and some of the history books in the 1960s had reproduced a few more. Everybody knew the Adolf Loos entry—but nobody knew the other ones, not even the Goodhue entry; they just weren't part of what was out there, what was part of people's databank of images. When the show is over, one of the lasting aspects is the catalog and I felt that we needed to reprint the original catalog as well. So we went to Carter Manny and convinced Carter that this was really important. Rizzoli, which Stanley had gotten on board, couldn't have cared less—they had no interest in doing it and they typically cut deals where after you sold out the edition then you got your productions costs back: "Sure, we'll print your book if you pay for it. We'll sell it." I think that Rhona, Stanley, and I split three or four royalty checks for something like one hundred and sixty bucks apiece over a three-year period. Then Rizzoli reprinted the book in a different format that had some color plates and we never saw any royalties for that. But we received a grant from the Graham Foundation to cover the costs of reprinting the first catalog. I was so pleased that we could do that and I think it's one of the contributions that I made to that whole process.

Blum: Was it in the vertical format?

Cohen: Oh, that was the second edition. The first edition was in two volumes: they were horizontal, unlike the original Tribune tower book. They had a rough, brown cover that was just card stock, but it was the same color brown as the original Tribune tower book had been. Then there was a little printed inset that said *Tribune Tower Competition* in the style taken from the original book, and the second one said *Late Entries* and it was also typeset to look like the original thing. Then on the spine of both volumes it said Volume One and

Volume Two. It was a very different format than the second edition. I don't think that Rizzoli made money until they reprinted it in the big, long format with color plates.

Blum: Was "Late Entries" a successful show?

Cohen: It was, but I'd like to say a little bit more about the catalog essays. The essays were a bit problematic and I think that they began to be a growing source of animosity between Stanley and me. We never really collaborated on anything after this. I think that I had mentioned that after the "Chicago Architects" show Stanley had made it very clear that the next time out he was going to do the essay and that the catalog was going to be by Stanley Tigerman. I think that one of the problems with the *Chicago Architects* book was that when it was catalogued it was done under my name with an introduction by Stanley Tigerman. Stanley wanted a book credit as well.

Blum: Did the desire to have a book credit grow out of the fact that you were both academics and wanted to publish?

Cohen: I wasn't aware of it until Stanley made an issue of it. Obviously, as an academic I had a growing awareness of it. But I think that for Stanley it was simply a need to be credited and recognized as the moving force behind these things. Somehow or other, if that credit went elsewhere or seemed to be diluted, while he never said anything, it made him unhappy.

Blum: You have said that some of your writings not only gave you an opportunity to work out problems but gave you an opportunity to express your own views about things. Was that also an issue?

Cohen: Yeah, I'm sure that was part of it, but I really think it was more about recognition and authorship. What happened subsequently is that *Progressive Architecture* asked for an article about the show and they ended up reprinting my catalog introduction, which I think must have made certain people unhappy. We had all these essays and then Stanley set out to write about

the show itself. Stanley had gotten a mid-career fellowship at the American Academy in Rome and he was trying to finish up his essay so that he could go off to Rome. So he finished his essay and got on the airplane and left a copy with me.

[Tape 6: Side 2]

Cohen: Brenda Shapiro had written for *Chicago* magazine—I think that she did a piece on Helmut. She was interested and was an incredibly energetic and bright person. She was friendly with Rhona. Maybe I was the one who had asked her if she would read and help copyedit the stuff. One of the things that we hadn't done with the *Chicago Architects* book was to get a copy editor and so the thing had gone to press with typos and misspellings and things that we just hadn't caught. It was so embarrassing. The first thing that Bob Stern said to me when I got to New York for the opening—Bob is a genuine intellectual and academic, as well as a kind of media-mogul and public relations genius—he just said, "This catalog is a joke! Didn't you have anybody copyedit it? There's one sentence with two misspelled words and a comma where there shouldn't be a comma." I was like, "Oh?"

Blum: You were unaware of these problems?

Cohen: I had just taken the manuscript and given it to Stanley and he had given it to the graphic designers and the designers had typeset it. Stanley read it...

Blum: Who was Swallow Press? How did you make the connection with them?

Cohen: Beats me. I can't even remember the guy's name. Maybe he was somebody that Stanley knew or somebody the graphic designer knew. It was basically a catalog that we were publishing and we needed somebody to distribute it. I think that it may have been a marriage that the graphic designers arranged for us. Anyway, Brenda Shapiro was going to copyedit our *Late Entries* catalog and I got a copy of the draft to her. I sat down with a copy and I heard from Brenda literally that very afternoon and she said, "I can't edit this." I said,

"Well, what do you mean?" She said, "Well, I actually can't understand what Stanley means in some of these sentences and therefore I don't know how to make them grammatically correct, which they need to be, and still maintain the meaning of what he's trying to say." I read the thing and because I knew Stanley I sort of knew what some of it was about. I said to her, "You're right. I understand what you're saying." I called Stanley at the American Academy in Rome and I said, "Stanley, is there any way that you can come back and sit down with Brenda or whomever is going to copyedit this?" At that point, after having Bob Stern say, "Come on, you're better than this," how could I let this happen again? I actually got the name of a copyeditor at *Chicago* magazine from Brenda. Then Nory Miller sat with me and taught me how to write by basically beating me up and saying, "You may know what this means, but I have no idea what you're saying. Tell me what this means!" Well, I'd say to her, "This means this and that means that." Then she'd say, "Well, now that's perfectly clear. Why don't you write that instead of this?" She literally beat into me how you write something if you want somebody to understand it. So we went through Stanley's manuscript and I talked to him for forty minutes from Chicago to Rome. I read him pieces and said, Well, Brenda thinks this could mean this or that and she doesn't know what to do. Stanley said, "I can't come back, it's impossible. I read it to everybody in the office before I left and they all thought it was fabulous." I said, "Stanley, come on! They're your employees, what did you expect they would say?!" He was just silent. Then he said, "Give it to Rhona, she's literate. Maybe she can be of help." So I gave it to Rhona. Rhona went through the ceiling. Stanley's text was divided into two parts. One part was a kind of introductory essay that looked at the idea of the drawings and had named categories that he had put the drawings into: this drawing was about the structural frame, this drawing was a duck, which was the building deformed or transformed. In the other part he had written a paragraph about each of the entries. Rhona's problem was with the paragraph portion. She said, "If you publish this, I will not be a part of all of this. I'm a gallery owner and if I invite someone to exhibit in my gallery I cannot, in public, basically say that I think that something on the wall is shit. Some of the things that Stanley has said about the drawings are so uncomplimentary that it would be better to

not say anything at all." I don't know if I was the one who delivered the message or if Rhona was, but suddenly Stanley's effort was cut in half. I think he just said, "Do whatever you have to do." In other words, "You've got my essay, do whatever you need to do with it to make it publishable." That was very un-Stanley, but I think that he felt very trapped by being halfway across the world.

Blum: Couldn't he have worked on it in Rome, where he was?

Cohen: Beats me! Listen, I had a professor, Lee Hodgden, who had what he called the "genius theory." The long and short of this theory was that geniuses don't automatically produce works of genius, they actually have to work hard at doing it just like everybody else. In fact, you can be a genius and produce something of mediocre quality because you don't do the necessary work.

Blum: Are you saying that Stanley's a genius but that his essay was not his best work?

Cohen: No, I'm not saying that Stanley's a genius. I'm maybe suggesting that for whatever reason, Stanley was not willing to work on it or to do the work required.

Blum: So who cleaned it up?

Cohen: Rhona. She cleaned up the language, the writing, and I think that a lot of it she just tried to punctuate and left alone.

Blum: Did she leave in Stanley's value judgments?

Cohen: No, those were gone. I know that Stanley was really angry about this and I suspect that it was something that he was angry with me about, not with Rhona. I was the one who called him and said, "Stanley, you have to come back here and do this!"

Blum: Well, you were the first one to notice it.

Cohen: No, it was Brenda Shapiro. She was the one who said she just couldn't do anything with it. Anyway, the whole thing went ahead and the show obviously was a success. It got interesting and mixed reviews as it should have because a lot of the stuff in it was not so good. Some of the stuff was very interesting. Some of the stuff was provocative in the way that we had hoped these things would be.

Blum: Well, it certainly got local, national and international coverage. I have two articles from French magazines right here. This is a pretty sizable spread in this article.

Cohen: Yes. Well, part of that is just that we geared up and sent stuff everywhere. Rhona was doing a lot of this. We did a press release and we had binders of color slides and we just made a list for Rhona of where to send these things. She actually handled sending them out and she was the one who was responsible for placing the show in other locations.

Blum: Were the drawings for sale?

Cohen: No, they were not.

Blum: So she really had no stake in it other than an interest?

Cohen: Well, it never even went in her gallery. I think that her interest in all of this was that she wanted to do architectural shows and I know that she subsequently invited some of the people who had been in the show to exhibit at her gallery—I think that she had Todd Williams and Taft Architects from Texas and I don't remember who else... She was doing this for all of us as a friend—or maybe mostly for Stanley. But I think that she was also intrigued by the show because it was a drawing show and she was interested in architectural production and in drawing. There was interest in architectural drawing because it was a new thing and people were beginning to think of it



as art in the context of galleries. I think the show subsequently went to the Walker Art Center. I had started teaching and lecturing at various places and Stanley was really making a career of it—he was almost teaching full-time. Although he never had a university appointment he would spend weeks or a semester as a visiting critic. I said to Stanley, "I think that we should just send a joint letter to all the accredited schools of architecture in the United States." I composed a form letter and I ran it under Stanley's nose. We basically said, "We're writing as the curators of this show. The show has been exhibited here, here, and here." I think that we also photocopied some of the press clippings and said that either Stanley Tigerman or Stuart Cohen would be delighted to come and give a lecture about the show at your school. This letter was addressed either to deans or the heads of the exhibitions and lectures committees. I sent out ninety of these things and we had an enormous response. God knows how many lectures Stanley gave, but I must have made twenty-five lectures.

Blum: You both really took advantage of the opportunity then.

Cohen: Well, one of the things that I sort of had figured out from watching Stanley, Peter Eisenman, and Bob Stern was that not only do you make the opportunities, if you don't take advantage of them, you're missing the boat. I sort of thought that it would be fun to do, but it was a killer. There was a period of time when I was getting on an airplane to go somewhere twice a week to give lectures, plus teaching at the University of Illinois. I don't even know what was happening with my practice at that time.

Blum: Was this something you did because your practice wasn't busy?

Cohen: It was something that I wanted to do. It was like proselytizing. I was going out and getting the word out about architecture and Chicago as a place where stuff was happening.

Blum: Were you also lecturing about the work of Stuart Cohen, architect?

Cohen:           Secondarily, sure. But I don't think that I made a lecture where I didn't come across as a Chicago booster telling all the students in the audience to think about coming to Chicago as a place to work. Since a huge number of the places I lectured at were in the Midwest, Northeast, Southwest, as opposed to the East and West Coast, if someone wanted to go work in a city, instead of New York or Los Angeles then Chicago made perfect sense. I saw myself doing this as a kind of boosterism for Chicago. Stanley and I were jointly invited to lecture at the Walker Art Center.

Blum:            On different days or to share the podium?

Cohen:           It was tandem, back-to-back. I sat down with Stanley and I said, "Well, how do you want to divide this up? You've been going around to schools and I've been going around to schools and we each have canned lectures." Stanley said, "Why don't you do the historical stuff and I'll do the entries to the show." I said, "Well, that's fine, but I have this whole kind of argument that I've made. Can we sit down and think about what you're going to say and what I'm going to say and how we can fit together?" Stanley just wouldn't do it. I must have asked him four or five times and he just wouldn't do it. He just said, "I want to talk about the new stuff. I don't care what you say, you can say whatever you want." I was a little bit annoyed about that. In part I was annoyed because it seemed liked when Stanley lectured he just threw some slides in the carousel and got up and ad libbed. He was so bright and so clever that it was always interesting and always engaging. I had actually had a lecture that was in three of my subsequent articles. They were those things that came out of and got worked out making these lectures at all of these different places. When I looked at my lecture, it wasn't an historical lecture, it dealt with thematic ideas of the development of the skyscraper and then how they can be seen in the Tribune tower stuff and where they occurred again in the "Late Entries" show, I actually talked about maybe half a dozen or so of the new projects. I talked about the skyscraper as a maker of urban shape and I showed my partner Anders's project, which makes an urban plaza because the front part of the tower has a low arcaded piece that forms one edge of a plaza. Then the top part is rotated because it parallels the

shift in Michigan Avenue. It seemed to me that what I wanted to say didn't make any sense unless I could tie it back into the "Late Entries." So I did my lecture first and Stanley got up. It was a funny lecture for Stanley because it was missing the energy and enthusiasm he has when he normally lectures. Afterwards, all he said to me was "How dare you?! I thought we had agreed that I would do the new stuff and you would do the history. You showed those things and you left me nothing." So anyway, the upshot of this was that—with their lecture series they typically asked each of the lecturers to write something for *Design Quarterly*, basically to turn their lecture into an article for the journal—I was asked to do an article. I don't know that Stanley cared, but it must have been upsetting to him. There was too much material to do just one skyscraper article. So I separated it and did the iconography and the meaning stuff in relation to the formal development of skyscrapers for the Walker Art Center article.

Blum: So all of that came out of the lectures that you had developed?

Cohen: Yes. Then the second piece was "The Tall Building Urbanistically Reconsidered." It was published in *Threshold*, the UIC journal that Stanley founded. At that point, Stanley was head of the department at the University of Illinois. We were talking again and on reasonably good terms but there was a period of time where Stanley actually didn't talk to me. When Tom Beeby was at UIC he used to get very upset about that. Stanley would walk by me as if to say, "You are not there."

Blum: So you, Stanley, and Tom were all at the university at the same time?

Cohen: Oh, yes. Tom was the director, Stanley was head of the one-year graduate program, and I was there as a teacher, teaching the first year of the three-year graduate program.

Blum: So there were two different graduate programs?

- Cohen: Yes. We had a one-year master's program for people with five-year bachelor of architecture degrees, which was common at that time. Then we had a three-year master of architecture degree for people without a previous architecture degree. That is actually where architectural education has gone now. Almost all the first professional degrees are now master's degrees. We were all there at the same time and it was a pretty interesting time.
- Blum: Did you capitalize on your prior connection having been part of the Chicago Seven? Did that help you work better together, or was it more competitive?
- Cohen: There was a period of time when we all worked together and then there was a period of time when Stanley decided that he just didn't want to speak to me.
- Blum: Was Stanley speaking to Tom?
- Cohen: Of course Stanley was speaking to Tom. Tom was running the show so Stanley was at his side constantly, so to speak. You know, this was after "Late Entries" and it was after the beginning of the Chicago Architectural Club. So all of this was something that had been building up, I think. If we go back to the Tribune tower show, we realized, as a group that we had effectively killed the Chicago Seven or the Chicago Eleven. While we were continuing to gather at the Como Inn somehow or other it just wasn't going to be possible, after having done this large-scale thing at the MCA that had circulated nationally, to just go back and have little gallery shows again.
- Blum: But how had the "Late Entries" that began as an effort of the Chicago Seven, somehow or other, become Stanley's and your show?
- Cohen: I think that it became Stanley's and my show because I don't think that anybody else in that group had the interest, energy, or desire to make an exhibition or to do what we did. They all had practices, they weren't academics...

Blum: Did that mean that the Chicago Seven was becoming very diluted or diffused, almost falling apart?

Cohen: I don't think so, no. Well, was the Chicago Seven falling apart? It existed in the first place because we all thought it was fun to get together and talk to one another. Whether it would have ever existed except for myself and Stanley saying, Why don't we get people together and talk?, I don't know. Clearly, the people who wanted to participate enjoyed participating because we had made something special that they wanted to be a part of. You'd have to go person by person and ask them that question, because I wouldn't begin to speculate about it. What was happening was what Nory Miller had urged: we were just inviting more and more people to the party. My take on all of this was, well, yeah, why wouldn't you do this? Pretty soon the whole city and the whole architectural community will be the party and isn't that what I wanted for Chicago and for myself?

Blum: With that thinking in mind, wasn't that what brought about the revival of the Chicago Architectural Club?

Cohen: Yeah, sure. The question was "What do we do next?" What we did next didn't seem like it could just be an exhibit. It seemed like it needed to continue the idea of taking this group of eleven and including even more people, even more diversity. I don't know whether reconstituting the club was my idea or Tom's idea, but again it came out of one of these "let's have dinner" conversations. I had been very aware that Chicago in its first heyday—maybe future historians will think someday that what we're talking about now was another one of the heydays—that Chicago had had this structured organization called the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club. The descriptions of what they did sounded fabulous!

Blum: How did you come across that information?

- Cohen: Well, I think that I talked about doing that as I did research for the “Chicago Architects” show. I had gone through every issue, page-by-page, of the original *Inland Architect*—it was a short run, maybe six or seven years.
- Blum: Did *Inland Architect* record the early activities of the Chicago Architectural Sketch Club?
- Cohen: Yes, there were literally minutes of each meeting. It was fabulous because it was basically a bunch of kids and they invited people to come speak to them. Dankmar Adler talked about foundation engineering and Root read a translation of Gottfried Semper that he had prepared. And then they had these discussions.
- Blum: Is that what you had in mind for the revived club?
- Cohen: Yes, absolutely, that it would be just like that. I think also that Tom Beeby thought that it was a fabulous idea. The issue was that the Chicago Seven would get together at the Como Inn and show our work and talk. Anywhere from five to ten people would be at each of those dinners. You can do that in a small group. But we had a keen awareness that if we were going to have a club with a lot of people then that probably wasn't quite going to work anymore. Initially we talked about how many people we were going to invite. I'm not sure why, but in the first year we ended up sending out forty invitations.
- Blum: To invite them to become members?
- Cohen: Yes. We decided that the membership would be people who were architectural designers, but not people who just were involved in running offices or the business of architecture as we defined it. We also wanted architectural historians and architectural critics, so Franz Schulze was invited and I don't know whether Paul Gapp was—may he rest in peace—I guess we did and he joined but he never came, or something like that. We invited Kevin Harrington and Sally Chappell and David Van Zanten—we made a

list of historians—and Bill Westfall, when he was in Chicago, was either an original member or he was invited the second year. So each year we expanded this thing. But the initial year was forty people. It was funny because we would all sit there and propose people and someone would say, "Well, what about Dirk Lohan?" or "What about Bruce Graham? They're actually serious designers." Stanley would say, "I'll quit first."

Blum: Was that a matter of personality?

Cohen: Oh, no. It was just what Stanley thought of their design work, frankly. He thought the club should be about something and that we should have a minimum standard. Of course, that was nonsense, because these people were eventually invited and they joined.

Blum: What were the guidelines for membership?

Cohen: I don't know if there were guidelines. The first were that we invited forty people. They were people whom we thought were doing significant work in their field and contributing to the culture of architecture in Chicago as well as to the built environment.

Blum: Young and old alike?

Cohen: Young and old. Bud Goldberg was invited and joined. Walter Netsch was invited and joined. The club was conceived of as a group of people. Subsequently we had a board of directors. The original board of directors was the Chicago Seven. Then we decided that we would take turns and that each year somebody would go off and a new member would come on the board. So it would be us as a group, having founded this thing, slowly turning control of it over to new people. So the criteria then were that if somebody wanted to be a member they had to be nominated by somebody who was already a member and they had to have a couple of letters of recommendation and submit a portfolio. Basically, whomever was sitting on the board voted yes or no on the applications.

Blum: Did that make the process pretty elitist? Were there very many people who were rejected?

Cohen: I never belonged to very many clubs, but my memory of joining the Arts Club years ago was that I needed Jim Hammond to sponsor me and I needed references or letters of recommendation. I don't even remember who wrote the two letters for me. Was that exclusive? Did they ever turn people down? No, I don't think so.

Blum: But that was a commercial club.

Cohen: Yes. Well, the other thing that we did that was very interesting, which I think initially ended up excluding some of the kids, is that we set the membership dues at \$250 a year, which was a lot of money then.

Blum: That sounds like the level of AIA membership fees.

Cohen: You don't even want to know what the AIA membership costs now. You pay firm dues, which means that there is a poll tax on each of your employees. We pay thousands and the big firms must pay zillions. Anyway, we set the club dues high because we wanted an operating budget and we knew—again, it's the idea that if you don't have a catalog, the exhibit might as well have never existed—we wanted a yearbook. The Chicago Architectural Sketch Club started doing exhibits and they published stuff. The Architectural League of New York functioned the same way and they did exhibits and published yearbooks of members' work. What we decided was that we wanted to have a yearly members' exhibit and we wanted to have it juried. That way we could let everybody in but we knew that the show would be of high-quality work. Our thinking was to get distinguished people from outside of Chicago to come and serve on the jury because we didn't, as the Chicago Seven or Eleven, want to be perceived by somebody as the reason that their work wasn't in the show.



- Blum: Like what had happened before?
- Cohen: Yes. We figured the way to do it was to have an invited jury. Then there was the question of what we would do each month when we met. We decided that asking members to show their work and critique the work wasn't one of the things that we wanted to do meeting after meeting after meeting. The idea of charging the \$250 from forty people, which brings in a decent amount of money, was that we would ask guest lecturers to come and we'd pay their way and put them up and they would give lectures for us.
- Blum: Just like the Graham Foundation?
- Cohen: Yes. Each month somebody different would come and be our invited guest and present a lecture. It could be practicing architects who would present position papers or theory, or historians who would present their research. Then we would have this stimulating potpourri of stuff. We hoped that the group would still be small enough that after each lecture people could meet the person and have both a formal question-and-answer time and an informal dialogue that would revolve around this stuff. What we would ask of these people was something that would turn into a publishable paper and that they would give it to us first or exclusively for publication so that we could publish an original work.
- Blum: These lectures-turned-into-articles were all going to go into *the Chicago Architectural Club Journal*, which was published once a year?
- Cohen: Yes. So the journal was going to be a scholarly publication with theoretical work by architects and historical work by historians or critics. We had a category that was "educators" so that one of the lectures that we had the first year was about architectural education.
- Blum: The first journal was published in 1981, which was a year or two after the club came into being.

Cohen: Yes. We needed some time to collect all the information, to put it together, to format it and to edit and produce it. Rizzoli again acted as the publisher but as before they literally said, "We'll print it, but you have to pay for and deliver camera-ready art." They were going to sell the book for fifteen dollars and then they would give us back a few dollars from each book. Essentially they would buy the run from us for a certain amount per book, although I don't think we ever got the money from them until after they sold all the books. It was an incredibly bad deal but it was something that we all agreed to because we knew that Rizzoli had the best distribution of anybody publishing architecture books at that point. I mean, I walked into bookshops in London and Rome and saw our journal on the shelves—that actually blew me away—the places that they placed the book were worth paying for.

Blum: So Rizzoli was connected to your activities strictly as a business deal?

Cohen: As far as I know... I guess that Stanley had spent time cultivating Bill Dworkin and Gianfranco Monacelli. Basically it was Dworkin—I think that Stanley had spent enough time taking him out to lunch in New York that he could just pick up the phone and call him. Ultimately, if you think of it as vanity press for us and vanity press for Chicago then it was probably worth the price because of the visibility and the distribution we had. One of the things that we hadn't anticipated was how much the damn thing would cost and how much time and energy it would take to do it. Initially I think it was done by Anders and Debbie Doyle—I would have to check that—and there were a few other people who worked very hard to make that book. Ultimately, that's why, a number of years later, we had to stop doing the book because we couldn't find anyone who was willing to spend that much unpaid time doing it. I guess that Michael Lustig did it for about three years running and he had it all worked out and systematized and I think that we gave him an honorarium. He eventually declined doing it anymore. The first book actually didn't sell well and Rizzoli returned a lot of copies to us, I think that we published an edition of about three thousand. What happened with that was that the board sat down—I don't remember exactly who was on the board but I remember that David Van Zanten was part of the

conversation—and the question was, Well, why didn't we do well? Part of the reason we thought we didn't do well was that we had second-rate papers from first-class people because we had asked for the exclusive right to publish. Everybody is careful about where they put things because if you put it in the wrong place it's almost as good as having it not exist. So we had that dilemma. We knew the papers really weren't first-class. Then we also understood that as a publication we were also in competition with Yale's *Perspecta*, the *Harvard Architecture Review*, Penn's *Via*, and *Oppositions*, which was also being published by Rizzoli. It just seemed like every year there was another new scholarly publication.

[Tape 7: Side 1]

Cohen: So we said, we're not going to get the kinds of significant articles that would make us able to compete in this arena. David Van Zanten was there and he said, "Well, not only will you not get these things, but is that really what we should be doing? You know, from my point of view as an historian, the most valuable thing you can do is to publish a yearbook that shows the work of each member of the club so that twenty or fifty years from now someone can go to the library and pull these things down sequentially, year after year, and see what each one of the practicing architects in the club was doing. You know, the same thing is true if we can get the historians of the club to do short papers in their special areas of interest as a record of who was working on what at various points in time." I think it was the following year after we had done one of these books that we had the idea that since it was a Chicago yearbook that we would do historical pieces on some of the architects that we had brought to prominence in the "Chicago Architects" show. People who hadn't been dealt with biographically, where there was no existing monograph. So we did a piece on Andrew Rebori and there was a piece on Benjamin Marshall, there was a piece on Solon Beman. Again, what we were looking at was how to make the book a Chicago book and how to make it valuable in the sense that it contained things that weren't anywhere else. So we had a kind of hyper-sense of wanting to do that, to fulfill that purpose. At that point, the roster of the club was continuing to expand and new

people were coming onto the board. We were beginning to do a combination of guests who were invited to come and speak and members' evenings. We tried to do members' evenings that were topical. If, for instance, we were looking at retail stores, we would have three different people present stores—we did it by building type so it wasn't just someone getting up and saying, "Well, here's my work." We were looking at a type of work where there were issues that we would deal with and we could discuss them as architecture in relation to some set of structured ideas. At some point, Stanley got the idea that this should happen as pairs.

Blum: What do you mean by "pairs"?

Cohen: Well, Stanley structured this thing, I think that the first one was the "Battle of the Titans." It was Bruce Graham versus Helmut Jahn. They had similar practices, but different ideologies. Each one of them was supposed to present their work and the ideas behind their work and then the membership was supposed to vote. This was the third year. The first year, some of the members' presentations weren't so exciting—one of the people we asked to speak literally talked for an hour and a half and covered his whole life's work in architecture. Everybody was going, 'Well, we know he did a couple of nice buildings, but what about this one or that one.... When is this guy going to shut up?'—we knew that this was going to go downhill fast and so making a debate out of it was Stanley's idea of how to make it sexier.

Blum: To make it a war or a fight?

Cohen: Yes, yes, yes. People show up to see who will draw blood first, right? There were little certificates that I think John Syvertsen designed that were given to the winners.

Blum: How did you respond to that idea, personally?

Cohen: I thought it was both trivializing and fabulous. Because, in fact, the idea that each one of the members would be invited to talk about their work for an

hour and a half was more than I thought I was up for, as a member who tried to attend all the meetings.

Blum: Well, as a member of the Chicago Seven, you had all come out of the fight as victors, so it was a proven technique.

Cohen: It was more like “My ball, my bat, my rules. You want to play?”

Blum: Do you mean Stanley made the rules?

Cohen: Well, that’s giving Stanley a little bit too much credit here, but yeah. Some of them were actually interesting. The one between Bruce and Helmut was *so* boring because they were both *so* incredibly polite to one another. Stanley had imagined that they would each actually critique each other’s work and say, “Why in the world would you do that?” or “Isn’t that an idea that has been defunct for years?” or “Why would you stick the pediment on that thing, isn’t it trivial? What is it doing, anyway? Aren’t there better ways to camouflage the mechanical equipment on top of a building?” Somehow we imagined that these things would be sexy and fun and really keep people awake. Some of them were, but a lot of them really weren’t.

Blum: So how long did that format last?

Cohen: Maybe a year or a year and a half. You know, at that point, the club was chugging along. There was a core of people who came—if we had one hundred members then we had twenty-five or thirty who showed up at every meeting.

Blum: The club still exists. Are you still active?

Cohen: No, no. Ben Weese and I were probably the last of the Chicago Seven to really be active. My feeling was that as the club got bigger and bigger and as the work got more and more diverse, certain people stopped coming just because they weren’t interested in seeing it. Other people probably stopped

coming for some combination of reasons including the fact that their practices were growing and they just got busier and busier. Helmut used to come and then there was a point at which Helmut just didn't come. Stanley came for the first few years and then one had the sense that he was disinterested and that it wasn't his club anymore and he didn't come. I paid dues for years and would go to a few meetings per year. You know, the argument there, which Stanley made and which I agreed with, was that we had done it for the city, we had done it for the kids—basically the people who have the interest and the time and the energy to go to these things and make them happen. They are the people who don't have practices that inhale them. What we needed to do was have it not be our club, the Chicago Seven's club, anymore but to pass the baton. The problem was that where we had had the interest and motivation and intensity and passion to make something like this happen, there really weren't more than a couple of people who were willing to work that hard and to do that because they wanted to make it happen. John Syvertsen was one of the people who sort of kept the club going at a high level, and Deborah Doyle, and Ed Keegan, who's still very active in the club, and Doug Garafolo. I've gotten to the point where I try to go to a couple of meetings. I've been invited occasionally to come and speak or be part of a program and I certainly do that. But, you know, at the end of the day I'm either totally fried and can barely go home to play with my son or I've got client meetings in the evenings because a lot of our residential clients will not meet with us during the day because of their work commitments. Having moved to Evanston after Julie and I had Gabriel, it's been maybe a year and a half since I've been to a club meeting.

Blum: So the Chicago Seven effectively organized the Chicago Architectural Club and somehow dissolved in the process.

Cohen: We just sort of dissolved, yeah. I don't know if Ben still goes. I used to go when my office was still downtown but I go less and less now. Julie and I were both members and I think I am still a member, but we stopped paying dues for Julie because we decided that if she really wanted to go I would just bring her as a guest. I know that it's probably been years since the rest of the

Chicago Seven—except probably Ben—have been members. Ben is just that sort of guy, he wants to know what's going on and what people are doing and he just has a genuine interest. Ben does what he does, but independent of that, I think he's just always been very interested to see what is happening. So anyway, that's sort of the story of the club.

Blum: In the same year as the "Late Entries" show was being organized, the Venice Biennale selected three Chicago Seven members to participate: Stanley, you, and Tom. In the catalog each participant made a statement. You said, "everything I make is made out of those things that I already know." What did you mean? Does that fairly represent your work at that time?

Cohen: I think that it represented an idea about how we make things in general, which was the idea that Colin and other writers took from Claude Levi-Strauss. It's the idea of the *bricoleur* and the way in which invention takes place by the recombination of things at hand. There's a special kind of intellect that begins with junk, with all the stuff that's left over from the last thing you did, and then you use it and look for ways to use it to solve the next problem or to make the next piece of art. I think that the statement was made in that sense.

Blum: Well, the theme of the show was the postmodern.

Cohen: Well, it was history. Wasn't there a title to the architecture section?

Blum: Yes, it was called "The Presence of the Past."

Cohen: Yes, that was it. Thank you. I think that what I felt I was being asked to comment on was the way in which the past related to the work that I did. We used traditional forms but I didn't think of myself and I don't think that my work at that time could be considered eclectic architecture.

Blum: Did you consider yourself a postmodernist?

Cohen: Sure. But I think that everybody after a certain point in time was postmodern. The only time I really got nervous about making a lecture—and this is a digression—was when I was asked to lecture on Postmodernism at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. I got nervous because certain people were in the audience.

Blum: Such as?

Cohen: Colin Rowe. Peter Eisenman. Bob Stern. The people who really are smart enough and knowledgeable enough to know whether you're making sense or not. So the few times I was asked to lecture at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, those times just threw me into a tizzy. The only time I lectured at Cornell threw me into a tizzy because in situations like that you always feel like you're being judged. I guess it was just the people who were judging me. A guy called Andrew MacNair, who was then running the lecture series at the institute, structured very early on, a series of lectures and symposia in which the people speaking were asked to define Postmodernism. I gave one of those lectures. I really knew that Postmodernism wasn't a style. I didn't want to talk about it as a style or even as a methodology for using historical forms or precedents. I wanted to talk about what had changed: what modernism believed to be true about architecture and design method and how you made architecture. Then to talk about what characterized contemporary work that didn't believe in and consciously rejected modernism. Which was why it was called "post"-modern as opposed to something else. I really tried to list those things out: the new architecture was anti-utopian, it didn't believe in functionalism, it didn't believe in technology as a form giver.

Blum: So you were defining it by what it wasn't. Does that mean that everything that isn't in your list is what Postmodernism was?

Cohen: No, because I think that I went on to talk about the development of work being done by certain people. At that point I had done, or was working on, my Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer article for *Progressive Architecture*. I talked about



Venturi and Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer and I talked about Bob Stern and I may have talked about a few other people who were doing work at that time. I think I even talked about Peter Eisenman's work as postmodern because it was a formalist rejection of everything that modernism had been about, with the exception of abstraction. Although, in large part, I characterized Postmodernism as being representational instead of abstract.

Blum: Do you know how you, Tom, and Stanley came to be selected for the Venice Biennale?

Cohen: Oh, sure. Well, who was doing the selection?

Blum: Who was making the selection?

Cohen: Philip Johnson, Bob Stern, and Charles Jencks. I think that Paul Portoghesi was also involved in it. I don't remember everyone. But my sense was that it was all of these people who knew my work and who knew what I was doing and who understood that it was serious work. We were engaging issues that they wanted the Biennale to put in the forefront. Whether the Biennale did this or not, I don't know. But I think that they were all fairly serious about this—although who knows about Philip, right? Philip certainly knew me and he had come to Chicago at our request to say something after the opening of the "Late Entries." I had seen him on a couple of occasions. I think that he may have known who I was when I was working in his office, which I never really believed then. I used to arrive anywhere between nine-fifteen and nine-thirty in the morning and once I had gotten in the elevator in the Seagram building to go up to the forty-seventh floor and who should step in next to me but Philip. And he turns and looks at me and he says, "Cohen, you're late. Funny thing, I live right around the corner on 57th Street [originally built as the Rockefeller Guest House] and I can't seem to get here on time either."

Blum: Do you think that you guys were selected because you had friends in the right places?

Cohen: Anyway, when I went up for tenure—I have no idea if this was a reasonable strategy or not—but I asked Bob Stern and Philip Johnson to write letters for me. They probably wrote one paragraph but there is a remote possibility that the university tenure committee understood who these people were that were writing letters for me. So I think that in different ways and at different levels, Stanley, Tom, and I were the Chicago people who had national visibility that counted. Larry Booth's and Jim Nagle's houses were constantly being published—I think they were in *Record* houses of the year every year. But basically they were about modernist space and manipulating abstract geometry and then Postmodernism just changed the geometry. Larry started doing things that had vaults or circular windows in them and I don't think that that was what Bob Stern and Charles Jencks were looking to exhibit in Venice. I had met Jencks through George Baird. I had done a review of the book that Jencks wrote, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*. Some of the things that he said interested me because they sounded like the arguments that we were making for contextualism. Then some of the other stuff interested me because it was suggesting that popular culture and a multitude of images that weren't part of architecture could be or ought to be. I had written a review of that book and I think he was aware of the review. At that point, I had then met him on a number of occasions. I had spent time with him and had shown him around when he came to Chicago. So, you know... We were the people that they were aware of and interested in from an external point of view.

Blum: Were you surprised that you were included? It was very exclusive.

Cohen: A little. I had built so much less than either Stanley or Tom. But obviously I was very please to be included.

Blum: There was another show the following year in which you were also included. It was also in Italy. It was called "New Chicago Architecture."

Cohen: Was that the Peter Pran show in Verona?

Blum: Yes. And then it also came to Chicago.

Cohen: Yes. Peter, to his credit, has always wanted to be a player. I don't know at what level he actually engaged the theory involved with all this stuff... He always impressed me as someone who, even if he didn't quite get it, always had a sixth sense about what was in and what wasn't. Although he's not a fashion-plate celebrity-type, he desperately wanted to be part of what was in. He's managed to go to and work at a series of large firms where he, as director of design, was allowed to hire whomever he wanted, and he's hired some extraordinary talent to do cutting-edge designs, which he then put his name on as co-designer.

Blum: Well, it seems that he's also had aspirations to go the exhibition route too.

Cohen: Well, he understood that in the absence of building commissions, which he did not have at that time—he was an employee of SOM who was let go because he was one of Myron's pets and Myron had no political clout. Peter didn't make associate at SOM, which I think was a big blow to him and he was teaching on the faculty at UIC. He really didn't write, he was never someone who produced theory and I don't think that he thought about these things, but I think that he saw what we all had done and he saw that we were mere mortals. He knew that anybody who was willing to work hard enough and who knew a few of the right people could do the same thing. He had some interesting European connections, including Christian Norberg-Schulz, who was a friend of his. So they set up the show in Verona. How strange! How strange!

Blum: Verona? What was Verona's interest in Chicago architecture?

Cohen: None. I think it was something that Peter could arrange through someone that he knew.

Blum: But it came to the Art Institute of Chicago. The architecture department had been recently formed and this was the first exhibition that they had done on contemporary architecture.

Cohen: Yeah. I think that it had to do with Peter actually understanding that if he included the people in Chicago who were prominent and who he perceived as having power, then it was to their advantage to arrange to help him get the show here. Nobody is saying that he wasn't a clever guy about doing stuff like that. I'm just not sure what his motives in doing it were.

Blum: Well, having it at the Art Institute, which is considered to be the stronghold of the art establishment in Chicago, was that the official stamp of approval?

Cohen: For whom?

Blum: For the exhibitors. For the architecture that was being exhibited and the personalities involved.

Cohen: No...

Blum: Would Rhona Hoffman's gallery have had the same prestige?

Cohen: Or the MCA or the Museum of Science and Industry.

Blum: Didn't an exhibition at the Art Institute mean something more established?

Cohen: At the time I don't remember thinking of it in that way, that this is as established as you could get. I don't know why I didn't. Maybe it was because I thought that we were already there as a group or as individuals and a group representing a set of ideas and a way of doing architecture. For the Art Institute to exhibit us was just for them to acknowledge something that had already happened and that the rest of the profession had already acknowledged.

Blum: When did the “outs” of the Chicago Seven become the “ins”? When did you consider yourselves a fact?

Cohen: Probably sometime around the “Late Entries” exhibition and the beginning of the Chicago Architectural Club.

Blum: So it was in the very early 1980s?

Cohen: Yeah. What people were doing was beginning to change. I mean, my god, even Dirk Lohan split his partnership with Joe Fujikawa and Bruno Conterato. He started doing these corporate office buildings—they weren’t postmodern but they certainly weren’t Miesian. Dirk decided that he needed to create an identity for himself as someone other than Mies’s grandson and that probably the way to do it was not to make postmodern architecture and certainly not to do Miesian architecture. So eventually, they were making what I would describe as postmodern architecture. It was like the battle was over. It wasn’t a battle to denigrate or to devalue Mies or to devalue the really fine work that either SOM or Murphy had done in the 1950s and the 1960s, it was simply a battle to make space for the other people who wanted to do other things and for those to be seen as significant or worthy of consideration. Yeah... It was really interesting. You can ask, Well, why did you all stop going to the Chicago Architectural Club meetings? Early on, I was active in the preservation movement in Chicago. I had mentioned just briefly being on the board of the Landmarks Preservation Council and Walter Netsch was on it and so was Jared Shlaes, the real estate developer, and Richard Miller, of course, and Martin Tangora. We all were sort of plotting how to raise public awareness of the demolition of historic buildings in Chicago as an issue. At a certain point I disengaged from that because while it seemed to me that there was still a lot of work to be done, the battle for historic preservation had actually been won. In my opinion the battle had been won the minute somebody didn’t buy an old building to take down but they bought an old building and said, Well, what can I do with this old property? Restoration was one option and adaptive reuse was another and tearing it down and rebuilding was a third choice and they looked at all those

options. I think that was connected to tax legislation. I really said, Okay, I don't need to do this anymore. It's been won. Someone else can do the rest of it. I think that John Vinci was on that board, but I'm not positive.

Blum: In 1982 there was a tax reform act that gave tax breaks for the reuse of old buildings. You did an adaptive reuse of a loft at 175 North Franklin.

Cohen: It was a loft building with a cast-iron front.

Blum: It was recognized as a project that was very well done. Was that consistent with where your own practice was going at the time?

Cohen: The practice wasn't going anywhere at the time.

Blum: Well, there was a recession at the time, that's true.

Cohen: The building had been bought by Ron Grais, who I have known since high school and he actually had gone to Cornell while I was there. I had kept in touch with him. He was a lawyer who was interested in doing real estate development but he had a partner in the law firm who did a variety of other kinds of law. He basically bought the building so that he could make office space for himself on the top floor. I think Ron's biggest motivation was to have off-street parking spaces for him and his partners. So we had put in a lot of steel to hold up part of the building and we took part of the ground floor for parking.

Blum: Was this the building for which you did, as someone put it, some creative lighting behind the windows?

Cohen: We actually did a scheme that was never built. It's shown in an interesting rendering that Dan Wheeler, who was working at SOM at the time, did for us. Dan had come to Chicago and looked me up because he had been a student and had worked in Boston for Silveti and Machado. They had said that he should look me up when he got to Chicago. So Dan came in and he

had been offered a job—he wasn't looking for a job from me—and he showed me this fabulous portfolio of work and these wonderful drawings that he had done. He said that he was about to accept a job with Helmut. I told him the story about Helmut locking two guys in a truck to finish a model of a skyscraper as the truck was being driven to Houston with an eight-inch to one-foot scale model—do you know how big that skyscraper would be? It's maybe a five-foot model and it wasn't finished. I don't know whether the story's apocryphal or not, but it sort of typified what I had heard about Helmut as this sort of Prussian slavedriver. I said to Dan, "if you want to work on buildings like that, why don't you go to SOM?" He sort of turned his nose up. I said, "No, there are some young people at SOM who have made partner who are really good. You should talk to Adrian Smith and you should talk to Joe Gonzales. Adrian is doing really good design work." I actually picked up the telephone—I can pick up the phone now and call Adrian and he calls me back in a day or two and it's always from his car or an airplane, so now we know what has happened to his life since then—but those were the good old days when you could call someone like that on the telephone. He was a junior partner and a studio head. I said to him, "I have a young man sitting in my office who is sensationally talented and whom you should meet and hire."

Blum: And did he?

Cohen: The story is that Dan was the youngest studio head at SOM ever. But Dan also made some spare money doing renderings and drawings. And he made the interior perspectives of the Franklin Street loft building for us. They were beautiful pen-and-ink drawings in the style of Thomas Hope, who made these unrendered pen-and-ink line drawings with amazing furniture. They were the drawings that Leon Krier and Stirling had picked up on. Krier had made all of these early Stirling drawings that were modernist interiors with pieces of regency furniture that Jim was collecting. There was one rendering of the Olivetti building that had never been built and in the rendering Jim is sitting at this regency desk and holding a telephone and the drawing of Jim is completely recognizable because Jim is this big, rotund guy. So we had Dan

do a drawing of an office with Stirling's Regency desk in it as a reference to the style of Jim's drawings. The drawing was a cross-section—we had an area of the office space which because the building was L-shaped and doglegged around a corner had no windows. There was no way to light it because we had no windows.

Blum: You're talking about the loft at 175 N. Franklin?

Cohen: Yes. What we did with the typical floor was to propose doing a hallway with a glass block wall at one side and to put lighting behind the glass block wall and to drop the ceiling in the hallway down to eight or eight-and-a-half feet and to put transom windows in the interior space—the doors were glass doors—and then there was a row of high transom glass windows that looked back to a painted brick wall pretending to be outside so that you had a sense of light which was really artificial light coming from this space, lighting both the hallway and the interior office. They never did the glass block wall, but they did do the transom windows and the light up there. It sort of worked, but you saw a little too much of the ceiling to really feel that you were looking at an outside, but it was really interesting. So Dan made this fabulous ink drawing that was a cross-section of all of this, with the same Regency desk from Leon Krier's Olivetti building drawing for Stirling. But instead of Stirling sitting at the desk, we took the famous photograph of Mies sitting on a Brno chair at a table smoking a cigar, and we transformed it so that we had Mies sitting on a Brno chair with a telephone to his ear in this office.

Blum: In the same years—so many things were going on—the Chicago Architectural Club did another exhibition that was exhibited at the Art Institute: the "Tops" competition. Was this something that grew out of the "Late Entries" exhibition?

Cohen: What happened was that the first member's show that was juried—I know that Tom Schumacher was on the jury, but was Bob Stern? Anyway, we figured that this would be fine. But people were outraged—they were paying \$250 a year, they were full members and they were excluded from the show.



It wasn't the Chicago Seven saying derogatory things about their work, it was people the Chicago Seven had invited. So it became very clear that if we were going to do a members' show then it had to be a members' show open to everyone. We took David Van Zanten's idea about doing the yearbook of work by all the members.

[Tape 7: Side 2]

Cohen: The only provision we had made is that an entry in the journal had to be work that hadn't been published before other than by us—a work that hadn't been seen before. Rizzoli was still trying to sell the book and if it was just projects that had already been seen somewhere else we figured that it wouldn't be any good. So that was the only condition. Then the shows were just of members' work. But we also realized that having just members' work wasn't so interesting. I don't know whose idea the "Tops" competition was...

Blum: "Tops" seems like a variation on a theme.

Cohen: Yes, it goes back to the "Late Entries" and it was a Chicago theme: everybody picks out a Chicago skyscraper that they think needs a top or needs a different top. Yes, it was in the idea of doing themed shows.

Blum: Had the skyscraper found its way back into favor?

Cohen: I'm not willing to believe that the skyscraper ever really went out of favor. People lost interest in it and I think that to do the "Late Entries" show and the "Tops" show was tweaking the situation to get people to think about or look at a certain kind of building differently. We had to be "bad boys" again. You know, putting a pyramid top on a Mies building, there's something kind of intrinsically naughty about it.

Blum: So it was intended to be amusing, fun, and playful from the beginning?

Cohen: Oh, yes. And controversial. Was it serious? I guess it was a kind of commentary that was speaking to what we thought was problematical about modern architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. But it was really thought of as being something that would look irreverently at Chicago and perhaps even some of Chicago's icons and be fun and engaging and be something that people would want to come to see. One of the things that you figure out early on as a teacher or lecturer is that it's not enough to be brilliant and stimulating, you have to be entertaining to engage people for whatever reason. Communication depends on getting somebody interested enough to listen and then holding their attention.

Blum: Did you think the "Tops" show was in that vein?

Cohen: Yeah. I mean, as a lecturer I've never told jokes, but I certainly tell anecdotes. One of the things that made Colin's lectures so fabulous was that there were always anecdotes—he never showed a building without telling you something funny or naughty or bizarre about the architect or the people that commissioned it or something that happened in the building. I think that Colin's stories were like memory devices—perhaps he thought that if we remembered that somebody had shot somebody over an argument about a silver dollar on the top floor of the building that we'd remember the building and something about it. There was always this rich anecdotal level about his lectures. When you go to enough lectures you figure out that there are some people who are deadly boring and there are some people who are actually exciting to listen to. You know, the first time I heard Vincent Scully was at a symposium that Charles Moore had organized on vernacular architecture. I think that I presented a paper about hot dog and hamburger stands and the architecture of the Chicago suburbs and how much they owed to dear old Frank Lloyd Wright—it was called something like "The Ranchburger: Over One Million Sold." Another speaker was Vince Scully and I'd never met him or heard him speak before. I actually sat through the lecture with Charles Moore and I was just awestruck, I was absolutely awestruck! Talk about kissing the Blarney stone, this guy was so articulate and so fabulous, he was so passionate, he was so energetic. I turned to Charlie and said, "My god,

this guy is like a guided missile! Is it a problem that he changes course every few years?" Charlie just smiled and said, "Yes, sometimes he hits the target and a lot of times he doesn't." I just had this realization that if you want people to listen, there's really more to it than just the message, there's the medium as well. So yes, these shows were all cute ideas but they were things that had some substance to them as well as being fun. Otherwise, people won't go places where they don't have fun. You know, there are probably a few of us out there who are passionate about architecture and who would go and hear anybody talk about anything, but most people aren't this way.

Blum: But wasn't this show intended to attract the public? It was at a public museum.

Cohen: Absolutely, yeah. At that point I think that stuff was starting to happen at the Art Institute and the curators John Zukowsky and Pauline Saliga were both members of the club and I think that Pauline actually had something in that exhibit or one of the exhibits—I'm not sure... I know that John contributed written stuff and I think that Pauline had contributed a collage or something for one of the books. So you know there was a connection there and John was interested in supporting this stuff.

Blum: He wrote essays for several of the issues of the *Chicago Architectural Club Journal*.

Cohen: The way we felt about it was that where we had been doing public relations for the seven of us we were now doing it for a large segment of the architectural community.

Blum: And the Art Institute was helping you?

Cohen: Of course. But the Art Institute was a different kind of place to exhibit than Richard Gray's gallery because it drew architects but it drew other people as well. What it was doing was continuing to present architecture to an audience that wasn't just architects, it was a public that we wanted to have

understand architecture in a somewhat different way. I don't think... You know, you asked me about the Art Institute and I don't think I ever thought of it in those terms. Although, clearly, we were all, at one level or another, aware of the fact that we had gone from being...

Blum: From being the "outs" to the "ins"?

Cohen: Or at least from being the people who weren't what Chicago had been about to being the establishment, to being what Chicago and the rest of the world now perceived that the city was now about. That was indeed a kind of an interesting thing to ponder. It's sort of like the problem that Lenin had. There's no such thing as a revolution that goes on forever and at some point you win and you become the new establishment but you wonder if you're really any better than the guys you've displaced. Certainly if we're judged by the buildings, we weren't. The buildings that were built in Chicago with pink and blue facades, pediments, and the silly frou-frou on them—I just don't think that they hold up well. But then for some of us that wasn't what Postmodernism was supposed to be about anyway. So it was kind of sad because we had become the establishment, but what had actually been done? What had been won? People who had no idea what this was supposed to be about as a set of ideas were now making buildings with funny historical pieces glued on them and the buildings weren't very good.

Blum: A couple of years later in Frankfurt, another exhibition was organized by Heinrich Klotz called "The Revision of the Modern: Postmodern Architecture, 1960-1980." These had been the Chicago Seven's heydays and they were represented in that exhibition by their complete townhouse competition entries. It seems to me that this was the first exhibition in which the Chicago Seven's work was looked to as somewhat historical. It strikes me that treating it that way verified or legitimized all of the work that the Chicago Seven had done up until that point. Did you see the Frankfurt show? How did you consider it?

Cohen: No, I never saw it. I never even saw the catalog. But I knew that the show was going on.

Blum: A chapter in the Klotz catalog was titled “The Chicago Seven” and it showed the complete townhouse competition. Somehow it struck me that this exhibition of the work of the Chicago Seven was different from all the other Chicago Seven exhibitions.

Cohen: Well, it was retrospective.

Blum: It was. It quoted the Chicago Seven townhouse competition as if it was something that had been historical, like Sullivan or Root.

Cohen: In fact, something had happened in Chicago and there had been a period of change. I mean, that’s why you’re sitting here with me now. Historically, this had been part of a time that is now something to look back at and understand and quantify and describe—that’s what history is. It was in fact, history.

Blum: You didn’t see the Frankfurt show, you didn’t see the catalog, how did you know that the townhouses were in the show?

Cohen: Oh yeah, because we packaged up the houses and sent them. Anders and I at that point had formed a firm and we looked for office space and ended up in the penthouse of the same building that Gene Sisco and Bob Lubotsky were in. By the way, just as Larry Booth and Jim Nagle had been Stanley’s first employees, Gene and Bob were the first employees of Larry Booth and Jim Nagle when they had left Stanley’s and opened their own office. Then Gene and Bob had left to open their own office. So anyway, Anders and I took the penthouse space. It was really a fabulous office—it was a twenty-foot cube of space with a ten-foot ceiling. It was the elevator penthouse of a building that was at the corner of Ontario and St. Clair, which has since been torn down. We backed up to the elevator machinery but we were in the bay over the entry and we had floor-to-ceiling French doors and little wrought iron

balconies that looked out and then on one side they opened on to the roof. So we had that space and then we took space on the floor below for an entry vestibule and a conference room and we had this stair that went up to the drafting room. We built the desks in as a sort of continuous band around the edge of the room so that everyone sat looking out. It was really a fabulous space. As you came up we had built a solid rail against the side of the stair and we had built a sort of countertop that had a place for a receptionist—but of course we never had a receptionist. The entry vestibule had a glass corner and a curving wall and then cut in right where the wall became tangent to the stair was the door to the conference room. We also had the *Kindergarten Chats* model sitting right at the center of the curving wall. Then you went up the stair and sitting on the desktop along side the stair was my townhouse model and Anders's townhouse model. I remember packing them both up and sending them off to Frankfurt. It's interesting that Gene Sisco became a contractor who went to work for Bulley and Andrews Construction here and then he went back to Boston where he had gone to school. Bob Lubotsky formed a partnership with Andy Metter and Jim Law and another guy who I never met, they went bankrupt and Bob then went in to the family electrical business. He is now a project manager, I think, for de Giulio Kitchens. So Sisco Lubotsky didn't need me, they could do fine without me.

Blum: In the catalog, *The Revision of the Modern*, the comment about your townhouse was that you "play with traditions of architecture." Do you find that consistent with what you've already said?

Cohen: "Play with traditions of architecture?" Well, to the extent to which the things that we do are formalist, then I'm playing with traditional forms as a language and as a vocabulary. So I suppose I'm playing with traditions of architecture. I think that the buildings at another level are also about selected primary ideas about making architecture and making space that come from different places. I think that to say that in an unqualified way is simply to describe a portion of what I think the buildings that we do are about. But the simplest description that one could give.... You know, clients invariably ask,

"What style is that house?" and there's no way to respond to that because the house isn't done in any particular style. It's done using traditional residential forms and elements and the idea is basically that we're making modern houses out of traditional house parts. Is that playing with traditions?

Blum: Well, it could be understood in that way.

Cohen: There's actually a nice article that I make my students read and it's called "Toward a Theory of Precedent" by a guy called John Hancock. He makes a really nice definition, for me at least, about the difference between history and tradition. He says that tradition is an oral culture and that you can't choose to work within a tradition, you really grow up within that tradition and its ways of doing things are handed down from generation to generation. If you are really part of a tradition it's impossible to ask what kind of a house to build because there's really only one kind of house to build. To ask the question what kind of a house should I build, you have to have an historical awareness and to be aware that there are other cultures, other places, and other choices. So there's no one working today who's a traditional architect. We're all making conscious or self-conscious choices about the forms that we make and the forms that we use and where they come from and why we think that they're appropriate or why we want to use them even if it's just that they make your heart go pitter-pat and you like them personally. They're coming from somewhere but they're not part of a received tradition. In that sense, you can talk about the houses as being made using traditional residential architectural forms but I don't think that you can talk about the houses as being in any way traditional. In terms of the compositional stuff and the three-dimensional stuff they reflect a personal interest in American picturesque houses, Queen Anne and shingle-style houses of a certain vintage, and they reflect a certain specialized interest in Frank Lloyd Wright and in modernism. We do strip windows and corner windows and those kinds of things that work volumetrically and interlock like many of the early modernist things. Maybe it's because my name is Stuart Earl, I'm an Anglophile—or maybe it was because Colin hated English

architecture and only wanted to talk about Italian architecture. We all had to go find out who John Soane and who John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor were entirely on our own—as far as Colin was concerned they didn't hold a candle to Michelangelo and Borromini. So there are bits of English architecture that make my heart go pitter-patter, quite frankly. Those things I think obviously have some impact on the work that we do—English Arts and Crafts has a special place...

Blum: Do you think that the experience that you had with the Chicago Seven shaped your own personal direction?

Cohen: Oh, absolutely not. Absolutely not. Tom Beeby once said to me years ago—initially I was insulted by it but I realized that it was meant as a compliment—“Ten years later, you're the only person that's still doing the same work.” It was his way of saying that the ideas and things that I was looking at when we all started I was still doing and now they were all doing it. At least that's what I think he meant. Initially I took it as, well, you know, you've gone to sleep for ten years. You haven't been doing anything new. But I think that it was actually meant the other way around.

Blum: So do you think that your work has been shaped by any of the Chicago Seven activity and the thinking and reading and writing and teaching you've engaged in?

Cohen: Oh, yeah, of course it was. It became all part of me. But was I impacted by either the Chicago Seven stuff or the work that my other colleagues were doing? No. The one way that I was impacted by the Chicago Seven stuff is that the research on Chicago that I had done for the “Chicago Architects” show was work that I had begun as a student. Did that have an impact on my work? I don't think so. The skyscraper was stuff that intellectually I had been thinking about, urbanist stuff and the way in which skyscrapers actually had a series of thematic meanings that they exploited. Has that found its way into my work? Well maybe... Look at the number of my houses that have little towers on them, my god...



Blum: What about the articles that you wrote—say on the work of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer?

Cohen: I don't know if it did or not. Certainly the American stuff interested me. Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer and a couple of the little houses that they had done at that point were in fact picturesque shingled houses. I actually was sort of in awe of and amused by the playfulness and the way that they were responding to stuff. But it was an appreciation that was very different from what I was interested in when I went to do architecture. Maybe it's one of my virtues as a teacher that I can look at and critique things that are one hundred and eighty degrees from what I do or what I think about or even what I believe is the right way to do something and I can say, Well what are the virtues of this and what are the problems? Here's the premise, now let's look at how this has been developed and what has come from these basic assumptions. I'm willing to accept the assumptions. So there are lots and lots of things that I like, that I admire, that I really love, that would never occur to me to do myself because they're not me, they're not my personality. Years and years ago I called Dirk to get into the Farnsworth house because there was somebody from Europe who wanted to see it. This was back when I was running lecture programs at UIC—a lot of the people who were coming were people who I knew and they understood that by coming here I would go and give a lecture at their place in return. So I was constantly doing tours of Oak Park or of my favorite Loop buildings or my favorite Near North buildings or the buildings in the "Chicago Architects" show. I don't remember who it was but there was a visitor who only wanted to see the Farnsworth house. You know, I have never seen the Ise shrine or Katsura palace but I could imagine that probably my emotional reaction to them would be similar to what I saw and felt at Mies's creation. That is not to say that Farnsworth is Japanese, but to say that it is transcendental, that my sense of the Farnsworth house was that it represented a kind of balance and perfection that was palpable, that was part of what I experienced of the place. You know, there's Le Corbusier's quote, "You make architecture and you touch my soul." What the Farnsworth house was like to be in was an

amazing experience. The sense that everything was just perfect and figured out and calm and serene. It was amazing! But would I ever want to make a Farnsworth house or do something like the Farnsworth house? Has the Farnsworth house had any impact on my work? I would say probably close to zero. The idea of a house or a space with a core is as close as I'll get to acknowledging the Farnsworth house as an architectural idea and using it in making something that seems to float in a larger space. Boy, if I had to name a handful of buildings that I've walked into that for me were an emotional experience, where I felt that I was in the presence of something truly great as a work of art, the Farnsworth house would be on that list, more so than any other Mies building that I've been in. Probably it's because of the scale and the way in which you can engage the house on a personal level. You know, his other buildings are so grand or civic or whatever, even Crown Hall. But here's this perfect jewel. Even the idea of the landscape... I've always wanted to write about the difference between Philip's glass house and Mies's Farnsworth house, because they're always compared. I have been to Philip's house because he gave a yearly office party there. I think that it's probably the best thing that he's ever done, it's an amazing house. But then I went to the Farnsworth house and felt that they were so different. There's that funny book [*Philip Johnson: The Glass House*] that Jeff Kipnis wrote about Philip's house in which he says that Philip's house isn't modern but Mies's is. But it's exactly the opposite! Exactly the opposite. Mies's house is absolutely classical. Here's Philip's house and it's quintessential modernist space. The fact that it's on the ground and you feel a continuity of the ground plane from inside to outside, that the ceiling marks out and defines a piece of that space and then the cores subdivide the space and makes the space flow around them, that is quintessentially modern. Mies's house has none of that—it's static, where Philip's house is dynamic. Mies's house is serene and stable. Then there is the continuity from inside to outside space that is supposed to characterize his architecture. But in Mies's house, lifting it up eliminates the foreground and makes a vista or panorama almost like the Miesian collages out of the view. That puts you in a very different relationship to the outside than the one in which the ground plane you're on is continuous from inside the house; it is more like what one imagines the platform spaces of the

Katsura palace are like as they open to the gardens. I love the Farnsworth house and I think I understand why it's so good, but it doesn't really have anything to do with my work.

Blum: Are there ways in which your work references the work of others you admire?

Cohen: No, no. Even to the making of space that goes from inside to outside, we do houses that have almost continuous glass walls. One of the things that I understand is that by making them out of muntined windows that instead of making a space that feels continuous with the outside, we're actually making a space that has physical definition and a sense of containment because of all those lines on the surface. You can see outside but you understand that you're in a space that's contained by a transparent surface that has lines drawn on it. Do I always use traditional muntined windows because I want to do traditional houses? Do I use them because they give the house a traditional look or scale? Absolutely not. I use them because when you make a big area that's just a sheet of glass, the spatial experience of it is so different.

Blum: Throughout the hours that we have spoken, occasionally something has surfaced that reminded me of the New York Five or other groups elsewhere. One of the things that I found as almost a companion piece to a conference that the New York architects had in Charlottesville, Virginia, was a similar conference here in Chicago.

Cohen: Oh, that was the thing that Stanley did. You have to ask Stanley about that because he organized that. I think it was during a period of time that Stanley was pissed at me, because I wasn't invited to that.

Blum: Stanley, Tom, and Bruce Graham were the Chicago people at that conference. But the *Chicago Tapes* that were published as a book—by Rizzoli again—seemed to be a companion piece to the Charlottesville conference and *Charlottesville Tapes*. But you say that you were not involved in that.

Cohen: No. You know, there's the Mies dictum that it's better to be good than to be original. Stanley has never had any bones about being original. If there's a good idea and it works, then hey, why not use it? Don't you always go to other cities and say, "My god, if they only had a Due's pizza or if they had a Crate and Barrel, you could make a fortune?" It's like something that you see at home that you know could travel well and that you could put someplace else and you know it would be a smash hit. I'm sure that the idea to do the *Chicago Tapes* came from that other conference, but so what? Why not?

Blum: In the following year, 1987, there was a conference in Chicago at the Art Institute called "Seven + Eleven."

Cohen: We had nothing to do with that.

Blum: Were you there?

Cohen: Yeah, but Ed Keegan organized it. It wasn't our idea to do it. Was it a fifteen- or twenty-year anniversary?

Blum: It was ten years after the battle was won and it traced the history of the Chicago Seven.

Cohen: I think there were two things. Ed Keegan—he used to write for *Architectural Record* but I don't know who he writes for now—understood that this was something that would be fun to do and would be worthwhile for him to do in terms of his career and would attract wide interest. At least half of the people in the Chicago Seven are funny and articulate and enjoy getting together to talk and respond—this was good entertainment.

Blum: You were there?

Cohen: I don't know if it was good history. I was there and we were all there.

- Blum: You were quoted as saying, "In part it was a public relations stunt. The initial part was to convince those who thought that Chicago architectural history was one big X that there was something else, something legitimate. We did it to make a place for ourselves."
- Cohen: Sounds like all the stuff I've been saying for the past few days.
- Blum: That's exactly what you've said. However, when this was reported, they said that when the Chicago Seven was asked, "Well, what's next?" the Chicago Seven people said, "It's not up to us anymore; it's up to the new crop." Were you ready to pass the baton?
- Cohen: Yes. I think it was because of the times and it was because of where we all were in our respective careers.
- Blum: This was 1987, so it was only ten years ago.
- Cohen: Well, ten years ago I actually had an architectural practice, whereas in 1977 I didn't. Then I had the kind of practice that most people do at night on their kitchen tables. I'm serious! People work for big firms so that they can afford to live and they do a house addition or two a year. The reality is that by the time you have done three or four of those you can actually, if you don't care about having money, more than just live. I had a practice in the 1970s that was what most people would consider moonlighting.
- Blum: You were represented in the Art Institute conference by your *Kindergarten Chats* project and the Carrigan townhouse remodeling, which was then one of your current projects. Would you comment on the change, the contrast, between those two projects? Where had you gone in those ten intervening years.
- Cohen: I'm trying to remember. We were each asked to show an old project that had been part of the Chicago Seven stuff and then a current project. I don't

remember whether I suggested that there was some sort of a connection between them.

Blum: Did you see a progression or development in your work?

Cohen: Clearly, *Kindergarten Chats* is a theoretical statement that involves ideas about how architecture communicates and what the elements of architecture are, how one combines things that are representational or at some iconic level involved with the traditional images of the house and modernist space. The Carrigan house is about many of those same things. It's a very spatially complex house in which the physical dimensions of the house—the fact that the whole house is in miniature, since it's only thirteen hundred square feet and only eighteen feet wide—was somehow opened up using what I think of as design devices that come out of modernism. You always were in the whole dimension of the house at one time, the rooms were each spaces within a larger space and this was all done by providing spatial continuity both in plan and in vertical section. We opened up the whole center of the house—we had taken a house that had sort of been trashed and turned it back into a Victorian or Edwardian mansion by trimming everything out with really large-scale robust moldings that were like what had been found in fragments in the original house. But the way in which everything was trimmed out was much more like the way in which Frank Lloyd Wright uses trim. So the comparison that I make to the Carrigan living room is really to an old photograph of the dining room of Wright's Ward Willits house, which has the light fixture in the ceiling that is recessed and makes a square, then set directly under it is a perfectly square table of the same size with chairs around it so that you perceive the table as a volume of space within the larger space.

[Tape 8: Side 1]

Cohen: The bay at the end of the dining room of the Ward Willits house is triangular and it comes to a point, but the ceiling trim is actually read as a complete diamond form. The end of the bench or the platform—I don't remember

exactly which—does something that again reinforces the feeling that this is a subspace within a larger space. That's exactly the way that the dining room at the Carrigan house works. It isn't really an oval: one end of it is flat and the oval is completed in the ceiling by the shape of the bay above that's part of that vertical slot that goes through the house. The back wall, of course, curves and then there's the oval trim that's put on the ceiling and then the double chandeliers mark the foci of the oval to complete the reading of it as an oval. But in plan it isn't an oval. So it is also a space that is continuous with the other space because even when you close the doors that fold back against those two piers, the slots on the sides stay open and the wainscoting runs continuously past those piers.

Blum: Is this something that you considered in *Kindergarten Chats*?

Cohen: No. *Kindergarten Chats* is a cartoon, it's a baby book, right? The façade is a cartoon of a child's drawing of a house and the back is the quintessential modern, glass volume of space, which ultimately is kind of boring. But if you're doing something that's reductivist, that's supposed to communicate at that level, then that is what I did... The Carrigan house is very, very complex, but it's about genuine modernist space that is continuous space and a series of devices for creating it that are made with traditional trim. The trim, for us in all of our work, is systemic. Beside all the things that trim does—giving scale and covering construction joints—it defines space. If you look at this space that we're sitting in, there's a little tiny piece of trim and those corners, which happen because those bookcases came from our old office and we boxed them in. The idea that we're in a room where the side walls slide up and that wall, the ceiling and that other wall make a canopy is reinforced by wallpapering all of it and by that little tiny detail where the crown molding runs around the whole thing. So what's the trim doing in our work? Well, for most people, it's making it look like a wonderful old house and something that they feel comfortable with, but conceptually, it's actually allowing us to make and shape your perception of the spaces in a very specific way. In that sense, it is part of a system of making spatial definition and it's always doing something. It's never just there, at least for us. I think that if I put

these two things, *Kindergarten Chats* and the Carrigan house, next to one another, I must have said something like that by way of explanation of what the ideas were and what the continuity of the ideas was between the two projects. In a way, the Carrigan house, which was done with Anders, is incredibly important. It was the first commission where all the pieces are in place, even the glass cabinet in the dining room that has glass doors on both sides. We just finished a house with a kitchen that is a space within a more complex space where all the upper cabinets are two-sided glass so that you see through to another space that is a butler's pantry and you see through to a stair that is sky-lit and at another point you see through to a family room space. You can see in the Ward Willits house—I would never do it this way and I don't even think it's that well done—there is a glass display cabinet with a glass back that abuts the double-hung windows. Along the east wall there's a built-in buffet and then on either side of it, symmetrically, in the center bay, there are two display cabinets with solid doors below and then the top is like a glass vitrine that butts up against the window behind it.

Blum: These are ideas that you have worked out over the years.

Cohen: Over the years, yeah. And I'm still working on them. When I think about how long it's taken for us to figure this stuff out and to get to the point where we can make something and have everything perfect—perfect in the sense that Mies's houses were perfect for me, where there are no missteps and no loose ends or awkward moves—I think that takes commitment to a singular way of doing things. Maybe part of it is just a kind of heightened sense of morality where you could ask, Would I really experiment on a client, would I really risk making something ugly? I know that people come to me for things that they want to be beautiful.

Blum: Would you make something that might not be beautiful to explore an idea?

Cohen: No. I'd sooner die.



Blum: So this is what has happened to you over the past ten or twenty years? What has happened to architecture? We're no longer building Miesian high-rises.

Cohen: And we're no longer building silly postmodernist buildings either, or even eclectic buildings. There's very little interest, I feel, in my work. I hardly ever see Bob Stern's work published. I suppose the only person who really gets published, even at long intervals—I'm talking about architectural magazines, not the shelter magazines—is probably Allan Greenberg. Alan is kind of the radical end of it and he's doing very literal classical revival buildings. There's some interest there. What we've really seen is a kind of pendulum-swing in which modernism kind of dried out and got where it was really quite banal and not very interesting. Then Postmodernism fell off a cliff in the other direction and was really rather trivial in the use of historical motifs and the elaboration of cheap decorative elements. There was a lot of paste-on ornament. One of the things that really amazed me was that years ago, Tom Schumacher and I went to go see the house that Bob Venturi built for his mother. Frank Israel was in Philadelphia at that point and Frank called his mentor and teacher, Bob Venturi, to ask him to call his mom and let us go by and see it. So Frank took us to see this thing. It was fascinating. Vanna Venturi, Bob's mother, showed us Bob's bronze baby shoes. I actually had this kind of violent reaction to the house. This was early on and before Vincent Scully had gone on and on about it. But it had been published and I knew it was supposed to be an important house. But I hated it. I hated it because it was something that was calculated in a way that made anybody educated as an architect unable to like it. It violated every single rule. The ornament was literally made to look as though it were made out of cardboard. It was insubstantial. Everything that was ornamental, the moldings were hung there as if they had been attached with glue; they didn't start or stop at logical points, they were just applied. The Venturi house was just a real "rub your nose in it" kind of house. Serious architects didn't make houses with pitched roofs and this house had the highest pitched roof in the world because it was gabled the wrong direction.

- Blum: Was your reaction all negative or did you find some redeeming features?
- Cohen: This was my feeling. Maybe it had something to do with McKim, Mead and White's Low house but maybe it also had something to do with making a traditional gable roof so big that you couldn't miss it. It was the form of the whole house. It was just this incredible polemical statement. But experientially it wasn't a particularly wonderful house. It was certainly an interesting house. Even the spaces and the fireplace with the stair crashing into it were interesting. I guess I just had this funny reaction to it.
- Blum: When the history of the 1960s through the 1980s in Chicago is written, how do you think the contributions of the Chicago Seven will be assessed?
- Cohen: I think that we will probably be given some credit for having changed the culture of architecture in the city of Chicago, having created a conscious architectural community where there had previously just been one by association. You were Miesian and that was it. Somehow it's just beyond me to imagine Al Swenson and Pao-Chi Chang calling up Art Takeuchi and saying, "You know, we've been thinking about the way you make a corner when you're doing it out of such-and-such. Mies did it one way in brick and another way in steel, but we've got this idea and why don't you come over and we'll have a drink and talk about it." I just don't think that those guys ever had a community in that sense or even in the sense that it had existed at the turn of the century. You can't even say that we revived it because it wasn't there to revive. We created it, we made it. We made it because we wanted it and because we wanted to be a part of it, to have it there so that it was something that we could be part of.
- Blum: Now that twenty years have passed, do you think it still exists?
- Cohen: I think that it does because architecture in Chicago has changed. For instance, when I first arrived here I decided not to go back to Chicago because there was nobody to come back to Chicago to go to work for. Stanley may have just formed Tigerman and Koglin at that point.

Blum: You weren't interested in a firm like Holabird and Root?

Cohen: Or in SOM. Or C. F. Murphy.

Blum: But SOM was quite different from Holabird and Root, they did modern architecture.

Cohen: But the culture of large offices is corporate. What you're expected to do in large offices is to sit there and produce things. You're not being paid or asked to think about things or engage in a dialogue. I think that all of those firms did good work and they certainly cared about the design quality of their work, but I think that if you cornered all of the senior partners and asked them what was going on, they would have acknowledged that it was important to sustain the quality of the work because of the way they marketed their firms and their desire to continue getting certain kinds of commissions that weren't just garbage, as opposed to trying to make extraordinary buildings or great architecture or to explore architectural ideas in their buildings. Those are things that can't happen in large firms, by definition they can't happen. Even when you take the large firms and divide them up into ateliers, there is still somebody minding the store. Julie and I are here and we're minding the store. But it's our store and we can take a set of working drawings and call our clients and say, "Well, we've been doing this thing, but actually, we've been thinking about it and we've made another sketch and we'd like to make these changes and so we'll just do it." Sometimes if they are smaller-scale changes, we'll just go ahead and do it, we'll throw something out and just redo it because we've figured out a better way. So, if it's a percentage fee, we'll show it to a client and say, "Well, this is a better way to do it." They'll say, "Okay, whatever." But we can do that because we can choose to throw our money away on making something better, or we can choose to not make money, or choose to lose money, or choose to prioritize the things that are important to us, which, if you've got hundreds of employees that you feel any responsibility toward—by which I mean that you want to continue to pay them—then you can't do that. The

minute that you're not profitable you can't sustain the operation. If you look at Chicago, there are hundred of little firms of guys who practice by themselves and who have one employee. In fact, the culture of small firms doing a variety of commissions—there are little firms that don't do houses and that do only stores or commercial interiors or office space—the fact that they exist now where they didn't exist before is because, I believe, of what we did. We made it possible for that to happen, for people to be able to say, "Well, you know, I'm getting really sick of working for that big firm and last year I did two house additions and I got ten grand apiece for them. If I could only get twelve grand apiece and do three of them a year, I could support myself. I don't even have to rent a space because I can clear out the third bedroom and put a drafting table in there." Suddenly, there were people doing this where before I don't think that it had ever occurred to them that that was an option. I think that we made that happen. Chicago is different today because of that. I just say it's different—I don't say that it's better—just different.

Blum: Do you think that this could have happened without the prodding of the Chicago Seven?

Cohen: It's really hard to answer that. Would the economy have allowed that to happen? When the big commercial work started to go away, would a lot of the people who were being let off have tried to get one more porch remodeling to support themselves and then say to their firms, "To hell with you, I don't need to replace this job." I don't know. I imagine that there are other circumstances that might have produced the same result, but we'll never know. There were a few people pushing very hard to make something else happen.

Blum: According to the *Chicago Tribune* last year, when they listed the most notable contributors to one hundred and fifty years of the arts in Chicago, the Chicago Seven were cited as follows: This group of rebels opened the way for a more inclusive version of Chicago's architectural history, including

tradition-minded architects and unorthodox modernists left out of the standard modernist canon.

Cohen: Should I have that put on my tombstone as an epitaph? I was very, very pleased when I saw that. You know, I guess I had known that there was this impact, but I had never thought of it in terms of the scale. I guess that Blair Kamin was the person who wrote it, but to have it recognized and acknowledged in that way was really wonderful. I guess it was very gratifying because it was a lot of hard work—I won't say that it was unpaid hard work, because it certainly paid off. It was a tremendous amount of work that was dedicated to doing things and making things and promoting the Chicago Seven, myself, and Chicago as a place to come and work and as an environment. What we did was to create a rumor. If you can get enough people to believe something, then everybody assumes it's true. Depending on what it is that you've gotten them to believe, then it becomes self-fulfilling. I think that there are probably Hollywood celebrities who have slept with one another simply because they were so sick and tired of reading that they were already doing it that they figured that maybe somebody knew something that they didn't and they ought to find out what the story was all about. Some of it was that. There was a kind of dynamic that was created. I was very taken, very touched, with the *Tribune* piece.

Blum: Today your architectural practice seems to be mostly residential work.

Cohen: Well, we just finished an interesting commercial project for a client, Portion-Pac, for whom we had done corporate office space twelve years ago as a Sisco Lubotsky/Stuart Cohen project. We subsequently did some residential work for them and then they expanded their office space into the adjacent building. It was a very interesting project. Our client wanted to do glass-block walls—we had tried to do glass-block at 175 N. Franklin but it didn't make it into the budget—so in this new project, we have curving glass-block walls and there is an eleven-by-sixty-foot space between the two buildings that we turned into a covered atrium. There's a window-walled conference room that looks into that space and the owner's private conference room is

the back of the space with a vertical wall of glass. The guy is an art collector and has lots of pieces that will go into the space—we've just finished it. It's one of those things that because it's modernist people would look at it and initially not believe that we did it.

Blum: Why do you think that?

Cohen: Well, because it's like the argument that Betty Edwards makes about why people can't draw: people can't draw because they just don't look at things hard enough. They look at things long enough to identify them, to see what someone's wearing or what the shape of their face is, but do people really look at things? No. They look at them for the useful aspect of the visual information, to identify and to categorize, but people don't really look. So here's our space and it looks a little bit like Richard Meier, except that it's got curving walls that have nothing to do with Richard Meier. The factory actually had a bow-string roof and what I did was to take the whole idea of the bow-string roof and flop the curve down as a kind of datum that ran through the space. The window-wall work probably looks a little bit like Richard Meier. But the whole idea of making spaces within spaces and of manipulating the vertical dimension as well as the horizontal dimension, of making rooms that borrow light or look into the next room or are physically part of the next room because of a glass wall or a spatial opening, for me it's the same set of spatial and thematic ideas as our residential work, but with a different vocabulary.

Blum: Do you mean the different vocabulary is between residential and commercial projects?

Cohen: Not just residential. Somebody could walk in the next day and ask if we could make an office space for them. We'd say, "Well, you have a law firm, what do you want your law firm to communicate?" Then we might end up doing something that was wood-paneled and looked like English Georgian. The space that we did for Portion-Pac years ago was somewhat Aaltoesque, because it had an undulating ceiling, and it was somewhere between modern

and postmodern. The new space is very contemporary; it's actually what they wanted as part of how the space will work for them. They make cleaning chemicals and sell them to large corporate and institutional users. They're on the Near West Side of Chicago and you walk into this factory building and there's this designed space with the volume turned way up. Early on they understood that this was part of their marketing and that they were actually spending money to create part of their image. The two partners are fabulous clients. They wanted space that they could use in a certain way and then they wanted something that when people walked into the building as potential clients, the space would make them go "Wow!" It's interesting to ask if it's somewhat schizophrenic to do something like this. Maybe it is just a little bit because clearly my interests are closer to the forms that I use in residential work, but I have no problem in doing it because ultimately I'm one of those strange people who thinks that architecture is made out of ideas as well as the manipulation of forms. For me, doing Portion-Pac was just a continuation of what we do.

Blum: In 1991, you were recognized as one of one hundred architectural firms in *Architectural Digest* that were the best in the world. The citation on your firm was illustrated with interior shots of the Carrigan house.

Cohen: We still have reprints of that article that we give out to clients. It's so outrageous. The cover says that it's a guide to the world's most exclusive architects. It is actually a guide to the people who had been published in *Architectural Digest* in previous issues. But listen, I wasn't complaining about it. It was very nice and we promptly ordered a thousand reprints, which will probably take me the rest of my life to give away.

Blum: Isn't *Architectural Digest* more interested in residential projects anyway?

Cohen: Yeah. Well, it's really interesting because we took Suzanne Stephens and Elizabeth McMillian, the former architectural editor, through a couple of projects that we had done, including the Grund house, which I think is a really interesting house as a kind of modern traditional house. In terms of the

interiors and the trim systems, everything is really pared down, so it's much more minimalist. They were interested but nothing came of it. What I realized was that *Architectural Digest* is primarily about doing houses for the stars or publishing the work of a select group of architects whom they've already decided are architects whose work interests them.

Blum: So you broke into a very exclusive club it seems.

Cohen: Well... Needless to say, we haven't been published in *Digest* since.

Blum: Well, that was 1991.

Cohen: I have no idea if there's any one magazine that sort of typifies what our work is about, in terms of who publishes it and who doesn't. Years ago, I remember Stanley introduced me to Elizabeth Sverbeyeff Byron, who's now at *Elle Décor*. She said to me, "Well, Stanley says you're very good. What do you do? Can you take me to see some of your stuff?" I took her around to show her some of the things that we had built or were building. At the end of the day she said to me, "You know, the things that you've shown me are really very good and very nice. I would love to publish them, but the thing that you have to remember is that we're an interiors magazine and your clients' furnishings just aren't up to what we would publish." You know, for the most part, we do the houses and the people either move in with all their old furniture or they hire an interior designer. For some reason, there's a real paucity of great interior designers in Chicago. I don't know where they are.

Blum: Do you do interiors?

Cohen: Well, we did the interiors of the Carrigan house and we do interior architecture. We tell our clients that we do everything that's attached to the house, so we will do finishes and tiles and hardware and light fixtures and the plumbing fixtures. We don't do the moveable furnishings, and it's a whole other thing where you really have to know what's out there. It interests me. If I could clone myself or find somebody that we love working with and



who wanted to be part of the firm, then it might be another story. But I don't know if we could sustain that. I don't know if the people who come to us for residential work would also simultaneously hire us to do interiors. I love furniture, and this all comes from Colin, because they are designed objects of culture and they're miniature buildings, ultimately. They're kind of microcosms of the issues involved in buildings, including modern architecture and functionalism. Modern architecture isn't actually all Mies chairs; it's all the stuff that Giedion published in *Mechanization Takes Command*. It's all of the furniture that moves and transforms itself from a table into a bed to a chair or a wardrobe. That's the kind of modernist functional, multi-use, minimize-the-space kind of furniture. Maybe fifteen or twenty percent of my library here is books on furniture and interiors. But just doing architecture takes so long and so much effort that I somehow can't imagine the time or energy it takes to shop with clients and do the interiors. When people shop for a piece of furniture that they're going keep for a long time, I think that it's more difficult, actually. Maybe that's why most interior designers make more money than architects do.

Blum: Do you think that architecture is a well-paid profession?

Cohen: No. Clearly not. I don't think so. I think that the people who do well at it, do well. But if you take any of the Chicago Seven—I don't know what any of them makes—but if you look at the kind of visibility that we have locally and nationally and then imagine a cardiac surgeon or a corporate lawyer of comparable prominence and proven ability—I'm not billing my time at \$450 an hour, I don't make ten thousand dollars a day. We're a profession that takes a tremendous amount of education and we make people apprentice for three years, even though after three years you really don't know a whole lot about how to build a building. In terms of what it takes to do it well, I think that it's comparable to any of the other professions. But the way in which what we do is valued is very different. I think that part of that has to do with the way in which architects have presented themselves and the things that we have given away. Do I want to be a general contractor? No, but at a certain point in time the only way that you could get a building built, short of

physically building it yourself, was to go to an architect because the architect let the contracts to all of the trades and handed the clients the key at the end of the process. It seems to me that that's a way of being crucial to the process in the same way that nobody in their right mind would enter into a business agreement worth more than a few thousand dollars without calling their lawyer and asking him to review it before it's signed. How did lawyers get to be that essential to people's business lives and architects get to be as unessential as we are?

Blum: Are you a member of the American Institute of Architects [AIA]?

Cohen: I'm a fellow.

Blum: When did you become a fellow?

Cohen: Oh, I think I was all of forty years old. I think it was maybe in 1984, but I don't really remember. It was like, "Oh, the AIA wants to f\*\*\* me." It was like, "I'm too young."

Blum: You have complained about how you think that architects have given away their services. Has the AIA played a role in helping set standards?

Cohen: Of course! Absolutely. There was a white paper on employees' salaries and fees that was done by the AIA and the Chicago chapter of the AIA was sued by the government for violation of anti-trust laws. I think this was ten or twelve years ago. Presumably, by publishing a white paper, the AIA was telling its members what they should charge for their services or what they should pay employees and that was seen as price-fixing. We know what it was intended to do, but the reality of it is that there isn't much the AIA can do. The reason is that there's always somebody out there who's going to do it for less money. I would say that half of the work that we're interviewed for, when we tell people the fee that we charge, either there's complete silence or the interview finishes up nicely but we never hear from them again. We know that it's because they don't want to spend that money on architectural

fees. They think that that's the difference between granite counter tops and marble tiles in the bathroom and ceramic tile. Generally, the case for the value of an architect's service isn't made. We really make an intelligent argument for why we charge our fee. We just say to people that all of the horror stories they hear about building a house that was supposed to cost six hundred thousand dollars and when they finished it was more than a million because when they hire a contractor, the contract for construction is the architect's documents and whatever is in those drawings you get, but whatever is not in those drawings you pay extra for. I just say, "Look at our drawings, they are as complete and as detailed as we can humanly make them. There is nothing in these drawings that we haven't tried to draw out and describe. The extras on your job are really going to be changes that you make during construction, not things that the contractor finds that he can charge you for because they're not in the drawings." You know, it doesn't make any difference. We're still perceived as being very expensive by most people...

Blum: Do you think that the AIA should do more public relations for the profession?

Cohen: But they do!

Blum: Why did you join the AIA?

Cohen: Well, considering that you can buy their contract forms without being a member... I have a very simple and wrong answer.

[Tape 8: Side 2]

Cohen: All the years that I was in New York working as an apprentice for other people, once a week, when I spoke to my parents, my dad would say to me, "And how much longer do you have to work before you can take the AIA exam?" Every week I would say, "Dad, it's the state architectural licensing exam that I'm going to take. The AIA is a professional society." And the

next week or the next month he would ask, "And how much longer before you take the AIA exam?" I realized that for a lot of people being a professional and having an architectural license are synonymous with being a member of the AIA. The minute I got my license, I just decided to join.

Blum: And you've been a member ever since?

Cohen: I'm not particularly active in the AIA, although I think that the things they're doing, for the most part, are valuable and useful to the profession. They lobby and make sure that no one is passing legislation that allows just anybody to build a building, which is good old-fashioned protectionism and that's what they're supposed to be doing. I think that the AIA will have a very interesting and changing role in the future because almost all the states are going to a situation where they require continuing education to maintain licensing. When it happens in the profession, universities are not set up to accommodate this. Even though the Illinois chapter doesn't require it, the national AIA has just started to require it, so to remain a member you need a certain number of advanced learning credits. You know, I could probably claim talking to you for twelve hours as learning credits. You can do self-study, it's really loose. Then the AIA will be in the continuing education business big-time.

Blum: That sounds like it would be very useful to the profession.

Cohen: Yes. John Syvertsen and I have talked a little bit about it and learned enough to know that the people at the AIA already know this, without my having to say, "Hey, do you know what's coming?" I think that the AIA's role will change, but I think that its continuing role has always been as an advocate. Ultimately, they can't tell the guy next door that he can't quote a lower fee than the one I'm quoting and steal the work from me. That's why we're so underpaid, because some architects will work for so little. We've created a niche practice when ninety percent of the people who walk through the door know our work and want what we do.

Blum: Do you think your clients have pre-selected you?

Cohen: When we interview we show them the work that we do and we show them the process. We show them the drawings we make and the models we build. We explain to them why we build models. We show them the perspective drawings we do. Then we show them the working drawings we do, which are sets of drawings that just go on and on and on. Then we sort of explain to them that not only is this what we think is the right way to do it, but you couldn't get the kind of controlled, near-perfect product that they've achieved—which is why they've come to us—without going through this process. I've learned a tremendous amount from people who build our buildings—from the carpenters especially—about how you build things. But there is not one moment that I would want a carpenter working on one of my jobs to make an aesthetic decision. The people who continue building our things are the ones who know when it's time to stop pounding in nails and to pick up the telephone and ask a question. Then we make those decisions. We try to have everything clear and on paper but it's time-consuming and expensive for us to do all that. We've been at it long enough and I'm old enough that I ought to get paid decently for it. Unfortunately we don't get paid like doctors and lawyers but we're finally, after all these years, getting paid decently.

Blum: Am I correct to assume that you're Jewish?

Cohen: Yep.

Blum: Have you ever found that being Jewish got in the way of your architectural practice?

Cohen: No, although when I was in school, I was made acutely aware of the fact that architecture and engineering really weren't professions that you went into if you were Jewish. It wasn't like studying law or becoming a doctor, where, based on population, there is probably an over-population of people who are Jewish. In architecture it was the other way around. But I think that that has

changed over the years. When I went to architecture school, there were three women in my class. Two of them ended up graduating at the end of five years, even though our class had gone from fifty-five down to about thirty-some people. But right now, our graduate enrollments are probably running about fifty percent women. Of course, there's no reason why women shouldn't become architects. I mean my partner is a woman and our office is staffed over fifty percent by women. First of all, there's the myth that boys are more active and that they have better spatial and mathematical skills, which is crap. Or, maybe it's an initial reason when they're young, but why should it still be true when they're twenty? The other thing is that women were told, "Hey, be an interior designer. You don't really want to go out and have to talk to big, mean guys who pour concrete." Women believed it. That doesn't exist anymore. I've never come into a situation where I was made aware of my Jewishness as an architect. The possible exception is Harry Weese, who kept referring to me as "that guy from New York." I knew exactly what he meant: he meant that I talked a lot and that I was Jewish. Ben Weese once said about Harry—I shouldn't put this on tape, but I will, because I'd kill to have the career with the impact that Harry's has, even though he's bitter that he's been passed over and he didn't have the career that he wanted to, I mean, give me a break—Ben just shook his head and said, "I just don't get it. We both grew up in the same place and I don't know why Harry's anti-Semitic." I said, "Maybe it's because everybody kept calling him 'Mr. Weiss.'" Ben just laughed and nodded. You know, I have no real evidence that Harry's anti-Semitic, maybe he disliked me for other reasons... Our clients are, I would say, maybe two-thirds Jewish and the rest not.

Blum: Do you think that your religion works for you in some sense?

Cohen: I don't know if it does. We've done work for everybody out there.

Blum: Have you ever had a client whom you did not accept for any reason?

Cohen: No. Our commissions never had moral implications. However, there are lots of jobs that we may turn away either because we go to somebody's house and they want to add on to it but their level of taste or sophistication is such that we just know that we couldn't do something good for them or satisfy them. We do the same thing if the budget is so out of whack with their expectations and we know we'd get in trouble and not satisfy them. We turn jobs away, not all the time, but probably a quarter of the inquiries we turn away for one reason or another.

Blum: So not only are you pre-selected but you also reserve the right to pre-select.

Cohen: I don't think that any of our clients ever think, "Oh, I'm Jewish so I want to use a Jewish architect." I once was complaining to Ken Schroeder about a stone mason who was working on one of our houses that had a boulder stone wall. Ken said, "Oh, tell me who the mason is so I can be sure not to use him." I don't remember the guy's name now, but he was Irish and dealing with this guy was not a fun experience because I literally had to go sit on the site and tell him which stone to put where. I told Ken the guy's name and Ken just started laughing hysterically. He said, "You know, of course, he's not Italian. All the stone masons are Italian." Well, of course, they're not, but there's a tradition of stone masons in the same way that there's a tradition of Jewish doctors and there's an expectation of that. I don't think that that exists for architects. If you want some sort of cultural correlation, what do you make out of Peter Eisenman, Bob Stern, Frank Gehry, Stanley Tigerman? They're all Jewish. Colin used to accuse me of being Talmudic, by which he meant that I always wanted to sit there and argue the fine points of things or at least discuss them. I'm sure it must have something to do with things that are culturally Jewish, rather than religiously Jewish. Being aggressive and noisy—those are all the things that Harry Weese thinks I am.

Blum: Stuart, given another ten years to think about all this, how do you think that you'll remember your involvement with the Chicago Seven, in the course of your own career?

Cohen: It's history. I think that the only thing that changes history is when the culture or the framework through which we view it—the lens through which we see current ideas—changes so that the view of the thing is somehow altered or changed or transformed or distorted. But I somehow can't imagine that if you were having this interview with me ten years from now that I would have said anything much different from what I've said in this interview. It's a past part of my life and I look back on it and value it and feel that I've made a contribution. I think that my assessment of that contribution will not change. It's still a contribution relative to what followed it. You know, I had a really weird experience because I've been doing interviews all week. On Tuesday, I had a fellow from Japan who is a professor who's doing a Ph.D. dissertation on contextualism. He wanted to come and talk to me and he had been in New York and talked to Steve Peterson and Barbara Littenberg and Michael Schwarting and he'd been to Boston and talked to Fred Koetter and Mike Dennis and he'd been to Baltimore and talked to Steve Hurtt and Tom Schumacher. Then he'd come to Chicago to talk to me. He was interested in contextualism not just as something that was a point in time and historical, but as if it was a still-living part of architectural theory and method. It's not. It's something that happened in the past that I was part of doing. I can identify the impact that it had in various ways and in various places. I said to him that I thought it had simply been absorbed into what architecture was and that, ultimately, I hadn't made anything new but had simply helped to remind architects of something that had been forgotten during the early part of this century: that the site and the circumstances of where you're building are an important starting point in the design method and in the process of making decisions of what you're about to design. In that sense, it seems to me that modernism isn't really gone either, because nobody really believes in functionalism or that you can generate a form of a building from its function. There are not a whole lot of practicing architects who would make a building and ignore the site or the program of the building. There are some well-known architects who can get away with that because they're making avant-garde art. But I think that in general there is a consensus that you can make the form anything you want but there is still an obligation to the client and the way in which the client's



money is spent to make a building that can be used as the client wants to use it and to accommodate the things that they are building that have to happen within. Almost everybody believes that, because that's modernism having been absorbed. If you go back a couple of hundred years, public buildings were universal in the sense that Mies talks about universal space. You built something that looked like a Greek temple but it could be a theater or a bank or a library. What difference did it make?

Blum: Are you saying that the best parts of modernism have been retained and are a component of another kind of architecture now?

Cohen: It seems to me that modernism—this is independent of the revival of modernist forms that has been going on for a few years now—that some of the theoretical parts of modernism have simply been absorbed into the way we think about making architecture. I think that my contributions to architecture ultimately will be part of what people breathe, they'll be invisible. They won't be something where someone can point and say, "Stuart Cohen did that," or, "the Chicago Seven did that." They'll just be part of the place. I think that pleases me.

Blum: For what would you like best to be remembered?

Cohen: Well, if you're talking about remembering me, then it's the fact that I helped create those things that we now take for granted. Nobody knows that Steve Hurr and I coined the phrase "contextualism." It's just part of the larger vocabulary. If you read the literature, you find out, right? You could go to UIC and half the students there wouldn't even know what the term meant. If they did, they would just guess at it from what it sounds like, but maybe they'd come close. What difference does it all make?

Blum: In the ebb and flow of history, I suppose it will.

Cohen: Well, if this oral history survives, they'll be able to find it at the Art Institute library. I'm just impressed by all the papers you've collected, some of which

I've apparently never seen before. I guess I've left a paper trail. I guess my fantasy is that all the houses I've done on the North Shore, in fifty years, people will run real estate ads that say, "house design by Stuart Cohen and Julie Hacker," and that people will run to see it, even if they don't want to buy it, and that it will be something like a David Adler house or a Howard Van Doren Shaw house. It might be something perceived as special and that we would have created something of lasting value. That's our thought. I think that we all, ultimately, no matter what our aspirations, come to terms with who we are and what's possible. I think that it's the people out there who look so driven who actually haven't come to terms with that. I think that when you're fifty years old the thought that you didn't get enough love from your parents is just preposterous. Those aren't the overriding motivations anymore by the time you're that far advanced in life. If they are, then you're in even more serious trouble than other people might think. You know, the aspect of how we're seen and how we're perceived both while we're here and after we're gone—it's hard not to think about that a little bit. But you know, as a young man, it was really hard to come to terms with the fact that I wasn't going to be Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier.

Blum: But you've been a Stuart Cohen.

Cohen: Yes. Although perhaps I shouldn't say Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, but just somebody who's genius and inventiveness had an impact on the profession or who made things of lasting and important quality. I don't think that our things are like that. You know, with a few drinks, maybe.

Blum: Maybe it's too soon to judge. Anyway, I have almost come to the end of my questions. Have we overlooked anything that you would like to talk about?

Cohen: I don't know. You know, the University of Illinois has had its moments. I think that one of its moments was clearly when Tom and Stanley and I were all teaching there and all doing very different kinds of things. I think that Tom Beeby is, for me, one of the most interesting people in Chicago.

Blum: As an educator or an architect?

Cohen: Both as a person and as a professional. Whereas Stanley is sort of in-your-face, Tom appears not to be moving. I don't play chess but I know that the difference between the men and the boys—if you'll pardon the expression—is really the ability to plan moves ahead. So when you're thinking three moves ahead and you make your move and the opponent makes their move and you realize that in three or six more moves you're checkmated, you begin to understand that the way they think is categorically different from the way you think. At UIC I used to watch Tom—this is going to sound like he's rather Machiavellian, and I don't think that he is, or if he is, I don't think that it's necessarily a bad thing—he used to engineer things and set things up. They were like Rube Goldberg things where Tom would say something to one person and he'd assign someone else to do something and then as a result of that they would become friendly with that person and they would do something together and suddenly someone would go to Tom and ask to pursue some great idea or start some great project. You'd realize that Tom had gotten them to do something that he wanted and that he had thought of and that he wanted to have happen, without having it appear that he was involved in any way.

Blum: Is that called manipulation?

Cohen: Absolutely. It has a pejorative meaning, but Tom never appeared to be a dictator and if anyone had ever accused him of being one, he certainly would have been, unlike Stanley, a quite benign one. But Tom was one of these people who actually understood human motivation and behavior in an incredibly sophisticated way. One of the things that I really appreciated about Tom was that he—I know he did this with absolutely everybody—whenever there was something that he was thinking about doing he always sounded people out about it. It was never, "Well, I'm going to do this," it was more like, "Well, what do you think about this?" Every time some decision was taken, he made a point of involving all of the faculty. So if, in fact, you didn't like what happened, it was clear that someone could

easily ask, "So, where were you when we were all talking about it?" I found that kind of invisible management style seductive. He was making things happen and never breaking a sweat. One of the things that Tom did that I thought was just incredibly intelligent was that we had senior faculty that had carved out little fiefdoms—they had been teaching the same studio and the same class for years—and Tom either moved different people into those positions or he'd take the person and say, "Well, I know that you've been teaching this for a really long time and I know that so-and-so's been teaching it with you and they really know how you teach that course. But I need somebody to do this new course because so-and-so's been teaching it and I think you could make it even better." So he moved people around in a really interesting way. Then what he did was to take people who thought that they couldn't stand one another on not only a personal but an ideological basis and he put those people together so that they were actually forced to reassess. He did this with me and another faculty member who I had just thought was a technocrat and who probably thought that I was a pompous idiot. Tom put us together with three other faculty members and actually put us jointly in charge of the curriculum. We both realized that we actually had more in common with one another in terms of how we thought things should be run and how we should teach than the other faculty members. Our relationship as faculty has been very different since then. What Tom understood is that when you come into a school, for the most part you have a tenured faculty that isn't going anywhere and even if you've got a few positions that you can fill, you have to direct. So you figure out how to make a curriculum and how to make something out of the players that you've got by putting them in the right place. The right place is where they do what they do best and where they're happy and productive and where they're not feeling threatened.

Blum: It sounds like he may have missed his real profession by becoming an architect.

Cohen: Well, if Tom missed it, then what about Stanley? Stanley would have made a fortune on Madison Avenue! He's clearly demonstrated that. Forget

Madison Avenue, what about as a publicist? Think of what your run-of-the-mill rock star could have done with Stanley as a publicist. Stanley would have made twenty percent and made a big career. But clearly that wasn't what either of them was interested in. Their skill has a lot to do with what they've been able to accomplish for themselves. If I were to characterize what Tom did in that way, I would characterize Stanley as being the polar opposite. In the same way that Stanley thought that it would be fun to do the architectural club nights as Helmut versus Bruce—battle to the death—Stanley took faculty members who he knew would butt heads and he put them together. Jim Nagle walked out of the place saying that he would never teach again after Stanley had him teach with Catherine Ingraham, who is a Derrida disciple and a theorist. While her mother was an architect and grandfather was Frank Lloyd Wright—what Nagle basically said was, "I'm sorry, but this woman doesn't know what a building is."

Blum: Catherine wasn't an architect.

Cohen: No. I think that her degree is in literature. Why are all these literary critics so interested in architecture? Anyway, Stanley actually did this. It was really just to see what would happen. He was like a kid who has gotten bored and wanted to throw a toy out of the window to see if it will break and what you get when you break it. That's a legitimate intellectual methodology, in fact. But it had a toll on the faculty. Stanley also had a vision of what he wanted to make the school into, which I think the faculty was enamored of and faculty subscribed to. Stanley wanted national visibility and he brought in a series of very well-known people to teach on an on-going basis. In some cases they were coming as a favor to him. There was the case of Peter Eisenman who came to us every year because I think he was getting the Louis Sullivan chair and I think it was paying him something like \$25,000 to come for ten visits. Where everybody thought that Stanley had worked wonders with his best friend Peter, Peter would probably have missed his mother's funeral if he thought that he could get an architectural commission or if he was being paid well enough to go make a lecture somewhere. He'd just send flowers and a note to his father. So here was this scene that Stanley was

making that everybody thought was fabulous. Stanley was bringing in incredibly bright and talented people. There was Greg Lynn, who I think is a very interesting guy, who taught for a couple of years. I taught with him and really enjoyed getting to know him. He had been a student of Peter's. There were a number of people who were coming from different sources and Stanley hired them all as adjuncts. I think I said this to you off tape before, but for a long period of time, no one was put on tenure track because I think that Stanley understood that in terms of supporting an image of the school that he wanted to create if these people were beholden to him for the renewal of their contracts then it put him in a stronger position. But ultimately, some people who I thought were fabulous teachers just left.

Blum: You are still teaching at UIC. Is Tom?

Cohen: Yes, I am. Tom is not. He teaches one semester a year at Yale because he's so close to retirement that the pension he would get from Yale for doing nothing after he retires at sixty must be very attractive—it would be nuts for him not to.

Blum: And Stanley was ousted from UIC a while ago.

Cohen: Yes, Stanley is gone. He took a settlement and is completely gone. Stanley was so angry that I can't imagine the circumstances under which he'd come back to UIC.

Blum: So you're the sole survivor of the Chicago Seven at UIC?

Cohen: Yeah. What happened over time was that Stanley had a vision of the school and the real problem was that the senior faculty who were initially excited about it didn't have a place in that vision. They were people for whom Stanley had no respect and whom he thought were not effective as studio teachers. He actually set about moving them out of positions where they were teaching design so that he could put in people whom he thought were better. You know, in every case, Stanley's judgment was not just about who

were good and effective design teachers but what they were teaching. The people that he moved out of the design studio had areas of knowledge that were then lost. But Stanley moved these people into the technology and building science courses and these were not necessarily areas of teaching strength for them. When these people were moved in, the adjunct people from the city who had been teaching these courses no longer had jobs and I think that our building science courses were seriously weakened, as if in fact they were of secondary importance. I think that Stanley was bent on creating an institution that was known for teaching architectural theory—if somebody said that he would probably have agreed. No matter that it didn't fit the demographics of our students, or that the architectural community was beginning to ask what the problem was because our students were not hireable. They didn't even know enough to fill entry-level positions. That's created a problem that we're still trying to work our way out of. I think that it was an intentional thing and it was part of Stanley's grander vision for what UIC could become.

Blum: As you're describing this, I can't help but think that Jim Freed went to IIT with a whole set of ideas about how he could help the school become more than he felt it was at the time. It didn't work and it was probably for some of the same reasons you're talking about.

Cohen: Yes. But in Freed's case, I think the tenured faculty opposed what they perceived as his goals. In Stanley's case, everybody was on board, it's just that Stanley did not perceive the senior faculty as having a role, ultimately, in what he wanted to create. I think that at this point, Stanley had really put all of his eggs in one basket, or at least his heart. I think that Stanley went from hoping to be remembered as a really significant practitioner to hoping that he would make a place for himself as a really great educator. What I think Stanley lost sight of was that institutions are the people that make them. In some cases, where Stanley thought that people would just go away by being asked to teach courses that made them unhappy, I think he misread the situation, and rather underestimated the people. In some cases, these were people who didn't have any other choices because they didn't necessarily

have outside practices. If they weren't teaching, they wouldn't have had anything else to do. These were people who, in fact, should have been teaching, because they had contributions to make, just not the kind of contributions that Stanley wanted for the school. What happened, ultimately, was that Stanley made a real effort to push those people out and he was abusive to them, which I think was sad.

Blum: Well, it seems that UIC survived Stanley and you survived at UIC.

Cohen: Well, my role through all of this was that Stanley was alternately very supportive of what I was doing academically, while he made it clear that he didn't like me. While he was very flattering and very supportive of the coursework and the curricular things that I did, a series of things happened. One of the things that happened—I don't even remember why Stanley was angry at me... My ex-partner Anders, who I think is a wonderful and gifted teacher and a talented man, was on tenure-track at UIC. For some reason, Stanley decided that Anders didn't deserve tenure. What he told Anders, basically, was, "You haven't done shit. What you have done, Stuart designed." I actually sat with Stanley and I said, "Here's how Anders and I work." I have now, and have always had, in the true sense of the word, collaborators. Anders and I, and Julie and I, make very different kinds of contributions to the work, but the work wouldn't be the same if Anders hadn't been involved and the work I'm doing now wouldn't be the same quality, I genuinely believe, if it weren't for Julie's involvement. I said to Stanley, "Here's what happens." People used to joke that Booth and Nagle were Booth or Nagle because you if you hired one, you never even met the other partner. Anders and I didn't work that way; we did the work together. It really is, as it is with Julie, a wonderful process where we did the work and critiqued the work together.

[Tape 9: Side 1]

Blum: Considering, the way you shared design responsibility with Anders, how could one assess who did what?



Cohen: But Stanley wasn't right. Anders deserved to be credited with those buildings. Stanley was insisting and arguing that they were solely my work.

Blum: But part of it was your work.

Cohen: Yes. Anders had cited in his tenure and promotion papers the publications of the work that we were doing together. Stanley argued that these were things that should be credited entirely to me. Anders had edited the first CAC journal and he had occasionally written things. He was a very, very bright guy, and a wonderful teacher. I couldn't quite figure it out, because Stanley was like a bulldog, he was actually vicious to Anders. Somebody once told me that Stanley had someone in the office go to the library to look up every citation that Anders had put in his vitae, double-checking that the page numbers were right and that it was about something that Anders had done, and that it wasn't something where it was an article about me and Anders was mentioned only in passing. I thought about this and I asked myself what was going on and why was this happening. What happened was that no one had ever gotten tenure without the recommendation of the director of their department. Anders decided that he would go up for tenure based on the strength of his record and our awards and his publications and see what happened. Of course, he didn't get tenure, so he left the university. He was devastated psychologically. He literally fell apart during the period that this tenure battle was going on. He was reduced to about zero productivity in our office. He couldn't focus because it was as if his livelihood was being destroyed. As one might imagine, Anders left because he was convinced that the practice couldn't support him full time. He was fired from the university. In the practice, I finally said to him, "Look, it's been a very difficult year for you and I understand that, but it's also been a very difficult year for the practice because I've needed you and you haven't been here. I understand what's going on and I don't know whether we can support you or not, or how much money we'll make next year. I need to know whether or not you want to continue being my partner." Anders said to me, "You know, I can't make a decision like that right now." I said, "Well,

this really hurts me, but I have to make the decision.” So we split up the partnership at that point. Julie had worked for us and then she had wanted to work for Tom Beeby. She had had both Tom and me as studio critics in school and had decided that we were the people whose work interested her the most. It turned out that she had other interests in me. I had had her as a freshman graduate student and I was convinced that she was flirting with me but what Julie said was that she wasn’t flirting with me, I was flirting with her, but that she figured she would get more critique time from me. About a year later, after she was no longer my student—although it didn’t make any difference because people were already convinced that something was going on—we waited for what we thought was a comfortable period of time so that we were sure that I would never have her as a student again and never be in a position to evaluate her work, and then we started going out. She was, I think, among the most talented of my students and I think that if not the most intelligent, then she was right up there among the very top. And she was cute and I liked her a lot.

Blum: Well then you owe the university something.

Cohen: Yes, I do, I do. Julie wanted to work for Tom because she felt that it would be uncomfortable working for me. Tom wanted to hire her, but he didn’t have a position, so she actually came to work for us for a period of time. Then Tom got a project—maybe it was the Lincoln Park Children’s Zoo, because Julie and Tannys Langdon designed that—anyway. Tom called with a job and Julie was there for a couple of years. At a certain point, when she decided that she wanted to leave Tom, Anders and I were looking for an employee. We had one or two employees at the time and we were looking for someone with between one and two years of experience. Julie said, “Look, I’m as well qualified as anyone you’re about to hire, and probably better. Why won’t you hire me?” I said, “Well, I’m just nervous.” So it turned out that we got married and I hired her the same year, which was just like all-or-nothing. It was scary. But in the year that Anders was trying to get tenure, Julie was convinced that in spite of whatever I thought he did really well, Anders would always leave at five o’clock to go home to his family and I would be

left asking my employees if they could work overtime or if they could finish a drawing in time. Julie just started taking up the slack. When Anders and I split up, it was starting to seem like it was almost inevitable. Julie and I have gone on to make it our firm since then. She does many of the things that Anders did well that I don't do well, and in addition, she's just fabulous with people. I think that she handles a lot of the difficulties of dealing with clients. I also think that because so much of the work is residential, when we go for an interview or we go to work—the kind of relationship that I establish with the client is different from what Julie will establish in terms of the way communication takes place. We have had a few male clients that prefer to deal with me, but only rarely. I always joke that women are embarrassed to talk to me about residential appliances or to tell me how much closet space they want, but they feel comfortable telling Julie that. As far as I'm concerned, that's just fine. The combination of the two of us really works out nicely. In a very funny way, I really have the university and you-know-who to partially thank for that. I suspect that what Stanley was doing, was breaking up my partnership with Anders, because he knew that financially we couldn't pay Anders enough from just the partnership and that he had to have the teaching position. It would have to eventually dissolve. I suspect that's something that Stanley set out to do on purpose.

Blum: Do you think that could partly be your own paranoia?

Cohen: I don't think that I'm a particularly paranoid person.

Blum: The story ends with "and they lived happily ever after."

Cohen: Yeah. I suppose Stanley could take credit. I guess he just knew that Anders wasn't the right person. Stanley will take credit for everything, right? What I love is Stanley taking credit for Thomas Gordon Smith being named head of the department of architecture at Notre Dame. Here's Thomas Gordon Smith, who's Catholic and has five kids and who arrived at Notre Dame saying, "I have a vision for your school. You have a one-year program in Rome and we're going to make Notre Dame the only school in the country

that teaches classical architecture.” The provost must have thought he’d died and gone to heaven! I was teaching there while that search was going on. My friend Norm Crowe, who was teaching the graduate studio with me, dragged me to lunch with one of the dean candidates—I cannot tell you the man’s name—Norm said to me, “You have to come to lunch with me, I can’t find anyone to go to lunch.” So I went to lunch with this candidate who didn’t say anything during the whole lunch! He was a complete nonentity and he was a short-listed candidate. So how could it be that it was Stanley’s recommendation alone that got Thomas Gordon Smith the position? It’s interesting the way we all see ourselves. Anyway, so what finally happened at UIC is that we went through an accreditation process. The accrediting team sort of decimated the school. I think that we got a two- or three-year accreditation instead of a five-year accreditation. We weren’t teaching technology or building science very well, we weren’t integrating it into the studios, and we didn’t have a computer lab. At that point, SOM had given us twenty-five machines and the software, but it was all sitting in boxes! The reason it was sitting in boxes was that Stanley didn’t want to hire a computer person and I suspect he didn’t want to allocate money to actually set up a program and to set up a computer lab. It would have meant that there would be fewer people teaching design theory. So the accrediting team came and walked all over us, basically. When we got the report Stanley was livid. He was like, “Who are these guys?! So-and-so from Podunk U. in the middle of Kansas or Nebraska? What do they know about an urban university? What do they know about our students? How dare they make these determinations!” He didn’t say anything of this to us, he just got on the phone and he went to Washington and demanded either that we be given a five-year accreditation or that we be reviewed by a new team of people who came from comparable urban universities. And they buckled! They gave us the five-year accreditation. Of course, the next time out, they came with knives sharpened. What happened during that period of time is that we were reviewed yearly and we had to send a letter explaining how we were addressing each one of our shortcomings. Of course, this was done by Stanley. So, finally, what I think was the straw that broke the camel’s back was that most of the senior faculty were unhappy with Stanley, although

most of the junior faculty were either enamoured of him or at least they understood that he was the one who was going to renew their contacts. Stanley was up for a five-year review. Dick Whitaker, the dean, tells us that there will be a faculty vote—a secret vote—and he will make an evaluation of Stanley's appointment. At the meeting when Dick comes in to hold the vote, he says to us, "I understand that many of you have complaints about Stanley, and that the committee structures are not doing anything, that he makes decisions unilaterally, and that some of you are being mistreated in terms of the staffing. I think that these complaints are legitimate. I've talked to Stanley about them and I think that he understands that he can't run the place this way. He has told me that he will be more collegial, that he will reconstitute some of the advisory committees that no longer meet. After thinking about all of this, I've decided to reappoint Stanley. And now, let's vote." I just got up and walked out of the room. Somebody said, "Where are you going?" I answered, "Well, what am I voting on?" Even after Whitaker spoke to us, the faculty vote was still in favor of dismissing Stanley. Well, did anything change? No. The only thing that changed was that Whitaker retired the following year and became a teaching colleague. Whitaker was supposed to be the director of the UIC's program in Rome. Sounds like a vacation to me! But something happened—I'm not sure what it was, so I can't really say—but Dick didn't go to Rome. Not only did Dick not go to Rome, but Dick was assigned to teach in a studio with a junior faculty member who was put in charge of the studio. Now what happened was that the woman who was teaching the studio was, I thought, a fabulous teacher. What she did with the students were these incredibly poetic projects that always involved making constructions. She had third-year graduate students do a device for viewing the moon. So suddenly she was teaching freshmen, which I don't think she was mature enough to do, and she had Dick Whitaker and John Macsai as senior faculty members. Dick kept saying, "If she'd only tell me what the course is about and what the projects are about and what I'm supposed to be doing—I think she's a perfectly interesting teacher and I'd be happy to do it." She wanted to teach by taking a couple of students off in a corner and making magic with them and inspiring them. But that isn't the way you organize and run a course with ninety students in it. So, Macsai

and Whitaker were really unhappy about this course. The upshot was that we lost Lily Zand, who I thought was a fabulous young teacher—she will be a significant teacher in the future, I promise you—she was a Cooper Union graduate. The other thing that happened was that Dick, who I think Stanley thought was inept at best and inane at worst, but certainly not someone who could harm him—along with John Macsai—organized a little house revolt. There were a lot of people who were sort of neutral. Stanley wasn't exactly a benign dictator but he was certainly doing some interesting things for the school, even if he was ignoring other things that were important. But then Dick came by—or was it Ken Schroeder?—with some papers and said, "Here, read this." What I had in my hand, which Dick had clearly taken out of the dean's office files, were the letters that Stanley had been sending each year to the accreditation board. When I read them I understood that this was no longer a matter of ideological difference or personality difference. They were letters in which Stanley claimed things were being done that weren't being done, and that people were being hired to teach courses that weren't being taught. I said to myself that we could be in big trouble and this could not continue. I think that Macsai and Whitaker and Gelick and some of the other senior faculty approached the new dean about removing Stanley. I was not a part of this first phase. The story I started telling and never finished was about the reason I was not promoted to full professor. Stanley had encouraged me to apply and then wrote a letter of recommendation pointing out to the committee that while he thought I deserved promotion, my academic production and my scholarly work had fallen off dramatically since the time that I was last promoted. Stanley actually read me this letter and I said to him, "But I thought you were supporting me." He said, "I am. Right here I am telling them that you should be supported." Obviously I was not promoted. I just said to myself, I'm not writing anymore, I'm not really being invited to lecture anymore, but I don't care because I have a practice and I'm happy teaching. I'll be an associate professor forever. Finally years later, the promotion and tenure committee said, "You know, we've spent years making the argument that practice should be recognized the same as scholarly work. All you have to do is put your papers together and make a very strong argument for the fact that you went from dealing in theoretical

issues in writing to exploring theoretical issues in building because you have the commissions and that's what you chose to do. It's not like you got promoted and got tenure and stopped doing anything and were just teaching your classes and going home and watching television." So there must have been some question about whether or not I was a supporter of Stanley's. In fact, Stanley got wind of the plot to remove him and organized the junior faculty. Doug Garofalo and Mark Rakatansky—Mark is another interesting teacher who is not with us any more—came to me and said they were all getting together to figure out how to deal with this and to solicit letters of support from all over the country to support Stanley's retention. I said to Mark, "I don't know if this will come as a surprise to you, but I think that for all the good Stanley has done, I think that he's also done damage to the school. What we really need is a school that is on a more even keel to prepare students better to enter the profession. Stanley is not doing that. I'm sorry but I can't support his retention." The whole thing from the outside looked like it was a big fight. The new dean, Bebe Baird, was asked to deal with this as her very first chore. She said, "I will do this and I will be fair and even-handed." She proceeded to talk to the faculty collectively and to talk to each faculty member individually and to talk to the alumni and significant practitioners in the city who were not alumni to find out what the perception of the program and the curriculum was. She talked to everybody!

Blum: What did she conclude?

Cohen: Well, she concluded that Stanley should go. But everybody was so nervous about what she was going to do. I was part of a meeting in which the senior faculty went to the dean and said to her that we knew that she had to do this but to be advised that if she decided to retain Stanley, within the constitutional by-laws, we would vote to change the structure of the department. I think it was Mike Gelick who said all this and both he and John Macsai had taken enormous abuse from Stanley. We just said in that meeting that we would as a faculty vote to change the structure of the department from a directorship to a chairmanship. Within the college we had a director, the art design department had a director, and art history had

a chairman who was elected by a vote of the faculty from within the faculty. We said that we would do this and then vote Stanley out ourselves. It was clear that at a personal level for many of the faculty and at the level of concern for the curriculum and for the school that in our opinion the situation had become untenable. In his quest to make UIC into a place that was seen on a par with Columbia University in terms of theory and status, he had just gone over the edge and come to believe that he could do anything he wanted, and that he could do it to anybody he wanted to and that there was nothing that anybody could do about it. It must have been an enormous shock to him because I don't think that he saw it coming. I think that he blamed the senior faculty and he blamed Bebe Baird and called her an idiot in a newspaper article. It was fabulous because they interviewed her and she explained about all the people she had talked to and what the faculty felt and what her reasons for the decision were. Then they interviewed Stanley and he said that nobody understood what he was trying to do with the school, that we were all idiots and we were fighting with him because he was trying to make UIC a place of excellence and the faculty was mediocre and this woman was an idiot. Wow!

Blum: So Stanley's career at UIC ended but not yours.

Cohen: Stanley, it would seem, has reinvented himself once again. You know what I think about all of that. In saying all of this and in pairing pieces of my career with Stanley's, I guess what I'm saying is that I see the two of us, in our very different roles, as the driving force behind the Chicago Seven and all of what happened. Without being egomaniacal, I do believe that to be true. I think that Tom was a part of it, but that he basically sat back to see what would happen.

Blum: Stuart, listening to your story has been interesting indeed. Thank you.

Cohen: If I think of anything else, I'll just scribble it on the transcript when I review it.

Blum: Thank you very much.



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## STUART EARL COHEN

Born: 21 July 1942, Chicago, Illinois

Education: Cornell University, 1961-65, B. Arch.; 1965-67, M. Arch.

### Work

Experience: Richard Meier and Associates, New York City, 1967-68  
Gruzen and Partners, New York City, 1967-68  
Philip Johnson and John Burgee, Architects, New York City, 1970-71  
Stuart Cohen Architect, 1971-77  
Sisco/Lubotsky Associates and Stuart Cohen, Architects, 1977-81  
Stuart Cohen and Anders Nereim, Architects, 1981-87  
Stuart Cohen and Associate, 1987-91  
Stuart Cohen and Julie Hacker, 1991-present

### Teaching

Experience: Columbia University, New York City, 1971  
Visiting Professor, Various Universities, 1971-83  
University of Illinois, Chicago, 1974-present

### Honors

and Awards: Fellow, American Institute of Architects, 1985  
Design Award Citation for New York City Public Housing, 1970  
AIA Service Award for "Chicago Architects" exhibition, 1976  
Illinois AIA Chicago chapter Distinguished Building Award for Mackenbach House, 1978  
AIA Chicago Chapter Distinguished Building Award for Evanston Public Works Building, 1983  
AIA Chicago Chapter Distinguished Building Award, Honor Award for 175 North Franklin Building, 1984  
American Wood Council Merit Award, Morgenstern Residence, Highland Park, Illinois, 1986  
American Wood Council Merit Award, Ruskin Street Pavilion, Seaside, Florida, 1987  
AIA Chicago Chapter Interior Architecture, Honor Award for Carrigan Residence, Chicago, 1987  
Preservation Award from City of Highland Park, Peck Residence, 1991

Service: Landmarks Preservation Council, Member Board of Directors 1973-76  
Visiting Critic, Graduate and Undergraduate Reviews, Various Universities, 1976-92  
Chicago Architectural Club, President, 1987-88

### Selected

Exhibitions: "New Pluralism," Bergman Gallery, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1975  
"Good-bye Five: Work by Young Architects," Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, New York City, 1975

"Chicago Architects", Cooper-Union, New York City, 1976; Time-Life Building, Chicago, Illinois, 1976

"Drawings for a More Modern Architecture." Drawing Center, New York City, 1977

"Mouse Museum & Ray Gun Wing: Exhibition Pavilions, " Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois, 1977

"Seven Chicago Architects," Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1977

"The Exquisite Corpse," Walter Kelly Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, 1977

"Cornell Architects in Chicago," Chicago Architecture Foundation, Glessner House, Chicago, Illinois, 1978

"Town Houses," Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago, Illinois, 1978.

"American Architectural Alternatives," London Architectural Association, 1979

"Urban Open Spaces," Cooper-Hewitt Museum, New York City, 1979

Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 1980

"New Chicago Architecture," Verona, Italy, 1981; Graham Foundation, Chicago, 1982

"150 Years of Chicago Architecture," Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, Illinois 1985

"Revision of the Modern: Postmodern Architecture 1960-1980," Deutsches Architektur Museum, Frankfurt, Germany, 1985

"Arquitectura de Chicago," Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal, 1989

"Half-time: A Celebration of 75 Years of Chicago Architecture," The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1992

"Chicago Architecture & Design: 1923-1993," Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1993

"The Turn of The Century House," Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, 1994

"The Chicago Villa," Chicago Athenaeum, Chicago, Illinois, 1994, 2000.

"The Art of Building Cities," Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, Illinois, 1995

"At Home in Chicago," The Art Institute of Chicago, 1999

"The Other Modern," University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy, 2000

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