University of California General Library/Berkeley
Regional Cultural History Project

Imogen Cunningham

PORTRAITS, IDEAS, AND DESIGN

An Interview Conducted by
Edna Tartaul Daniel

Berkeley
1961

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FOREWORD

Imogen Cunningham Partridge--professionally Imogen Cunningham--came to the attention of the Regional Cultural History Project of the University of California at Berkeley because of her outstanding portrait photography and her long identification with local, national and international activities in photography. Her participation in exhibits, selection juries, and symposia on photography has been stimulating to her colleagues and of lasting value to the field of photography.

Miss Cunningham agreed to a series of interviews on her life and work. These were tape-recorded in June of 1959 at her home at 1331 Green Street in San Francisco. In the course of the interviews she revealed an interesting combination of simplicity and complexity in her appearance, surroundings and flow of ideas. A small blonde person, neither thin nor thick, she dressed in garments of easy cut with accents in either color or design of pleasant and occasionally picturesque nature. Without concern for fashion, she wore clothing useful and interesting to herself, and shoes appropriate to a working photographer who transported herself, with photographic paraphernalia slung about her, on train or bus.

Her studio-home was of adequate size and functional arrangement, with graceful interpolation of striking fabrics, and

small objects and attractive plants.

Seated in a comfortable chair, Miss Cunningham enthusiastically shared her ideas on a vast variety of subjects. Humorous and ironic incident and ready fact issued from a mind crammed with an immense wealth of life impressions. Balancing this exuberant flow was quiet persistence in carving a thought down to its innermost, essential core.

By accident it was possible one day to observe the perceptive skill she brought to her work. An overlarge, trumpet-shaped white blossom, almost gross in appearance, resting its base in a glass of water, happened to be on the kitchen table at the time of the interview. Miss Cunningham brought forth a Poloroid Land Camera print she had made of the flower, revealing grace, light, and spirit; qualities immediately apparent to the artist which, on reexamination, the flower could be seen indeed to possess.

The transcriptions of these interviews, initially edited by the interviewer, were corrected and modified by Miss Cunningham. The manuscript is illustrated by the photographs of William R. Heick of Mill Valley.

The Regional Cultural History Project of the University of California, headed by Willa Baum and under the administrative supervision of Helen Worden of the General Library, has been established to preserve the memoirs of Northern Californians whose activities have contributed significantly to the life of their time. In this endeavor, the project has conducted a number of tape-recorded interviews with Bay Area artists and art leaders. This interview is part of that series.

When an appropriate introduction to Miss Cunningham's work was being considered, photographer Dorothea Lange was approached for her advice. She felt quite certainly that Beaumont Newhall should write the introduction; moreover, she persuaded Mr. Newhall to carry out this assignment. Director of the George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, and a bibliographer of Bauhaus publications, cubism, and abstract art, Beaumont Newhall is the author of _The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day_; _The Daguerreotype in America_; and, with Nancy Newhall, _Masters of Photography_. He has also written many texts accompanying catalogues of photographic exhibitions.

The following introduction by Mr. Newhall came to us tape-recorded September 1, 1961.

Edna Tartaul Daniel
Interviewer

10 October 1961
Regional Cultural History Project

University of California General Library
Berkeley, California

INTRODUCTION

The work of Imogen Cunningham spans more than half a century of the history of photography and represents the leading pictorial trends of this important period. She was first attracted to photography by the work of Gertrude Käsebier, a portraitist and a member of the Photo Secession, that band of devoted amateur photographers headed by Alfred Stieglitz, who determined to place photography in the realm of the fine arts. She saw reproductions of Gertrude Käsebier's work in 1900. "I kept thinking all the time," she recently recollected, "I wish I could be as good as Gertrude Kasebier."

She bought a 4x5 view camera in 1901 and while a student at the University of Washington she took a job in the Seattle studio of Edward S. Curtis. Edward S. Curtis was famous for his remarkable documentation of North American Indians and for portraits from which he made his living. He was a link with the 19th century. From him she learned to make platinum prints in both quantity and quality.

She won a scholarship for foreign study and attended photographic courses at the Technische Hochschule in Dresden, Germany, in 1909. The school had recently revived its photographic department under the direction of Robert Luter, a photoscientist of international fame, and at the time was one of the best schools for photography in the world. While abroad, she visited another member of the Photo Secession, Alvin Langdon

Coburn in London, and on her return to America in 1910, she visited Alfred Stieglitz himself. From both she gained great inspiration.

She opened a studio in Seattle and soon won national recognition, not only for her portraits, but for her pictorial work. A portfolio of these pictures was published in Wilson's Photographic Magazine for March, 1914. There she stated a philosophy which has guided her ever since. "One must be able to gain an understanding at short notice," she wrote, "and at close range, of the beauties of character, intellect and spirit, so as to be able to draw out the best qualities and make them show in the outer aspect of the sitter. To do this one must not have a too-pronounced notion of what constitutes beauty in the external, and above all, must not worship it. To worship beauty for its own sake is narrow and one surely cannot derive from it that aesthetic pleasure which comes from finding beauty in the commonest things."

Imogen Cunningham married the etcher, Roi Partridge; three sons were born, and the family moved to San Francisco. There she became a friend of Edward Weston. At that time Weston was working in portraiture and was just starting to develop a style of photography based upon the appreciation of the functional capabilities of the camera. When Weston was asked to nominate the work of outstanding American photographers for inclusion in Deutsche Werkbund's great international exhibition "Film and Photo" in Stuttgart, 1929, he chose eight examples of Imogen Cunningham's work. They were handsome platinum prints of plants which she had seen closely to emphasize their form.

She joined a band of enthusiastic photographers founded by Ansel Adams and Willard Van Dyke in 1934 under the name of f/64, a title chosen by the group because it denominates one of the smallest openings in the lens of the camera which gives great depth and definition. Both Adams and Van Dyke were great admirers of Edward Weston, and in their enthusiasism they exhibited, wrote articles, and promoted this approach to photography.

Imogen Cunningham has since worked on assignments for magazines and has had much experience in the field now called photojournalism. She has conducted a portrait studio, and she teaches at the California School of Fine Arts. Thus, over a period of sixty years the work and career of Imogen Cunningham is a summary of the history of photography since 1900.

It is difficult not to type a photographer. In an interview published in U. S. Camera magazine between Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Imogen Cunningham, this very point was brought up. Dorothea Lange complained that she was put into a niche called "documentary photographer" and she pointed out that Ansel Adams was typed as a landscape photographer, and then she went on to include Imogen, saying, "As far as Imogen is concerned, because she enjoyed photographing plant forms--" but Imogen did not let her finish. She said to her friend, "Oh, people have forgotten that, Dorothea. They've forgotten that I ever did plant forms. You know, I've tried my best to sell people on the idea that I photograph anything that can be exposed to light."

BEAUMONT NEWHALL
Rochester, N. Y.
1961

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PREAMBLE

Cunningham: People take photography for granted. Everything is photographed. This is a quotation from a New York magazine, Knickerbocker, written in 1839, which I think is very clever:

> We've seen the views taken in Paris by the daguerreotype and have no hesitation in avowing that they are the most remarkable objects of curiosity and admiration in the arts that we have ever beheld. Their exquisite perfection almost transcends the bounds of sober belief.
>
> Let us endeavor to convey to the reader an impression of their character. Let him suppose himself standing in the middle of Broadway with a looking glass held perpendicularly in his hand in which is reflected the street, with all there is in it, for two or three miles, taking in the haziest distance. Then let him take the glass into the house and find the impression of the entire view from the softest light and shade vividly retained upon its surface. This is the daguerreotype. There is not an object, even the most minute, embraced in that wide scope, which was not in the original, and it is impossible that one should have been omitted.

Think of that. Doesn't this seem a very charming description of the daguerreotype? It is on silver, you know, and was remarkable then. As you look at it now, well, nothing is remarkable now.

The following quotation was in an article by Norman Corwin. It's really just the way people look at it.

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Cunningham: The camera is a cross between a practical joker and a poet. It can make man's noblest work look like a clothespin, or invest with cosmic implications a portrait of ham and eggs.

Of course there are all kinds of things that people have written about photography.

There is one very famous photograph in daguerreotype that is a picture of a Paris street. A man is getting his shoes blacked at a corner. And that is the only place where anybody remains. The vehicles and all the things that were going along during the time of the exposure lost their form. But the figures are still there. The picture conveys some idea of the tremendous change there has been in photography. Of course we're trying the same thing now, making a long exposure to convey the idea of motion in a still.

EARLY YEARS IN SEATTLE

Home and Family

Cunningham: I know more about my father's family than I do about my mother's. They both came from the same origin, practically. I know only that my family originally came to America, to Virginia, when all the rascals came, early, before the "Mayflower." Originally from the south of Scotland, they went to north Ireland; then to Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Texas, Oregon, Washington, and finally to California. My father* is from Missouri. Up until this time I don't know who they all were, but I know that my father left Missouri and went to Texas. He hated it, he said, because it was heaven for men and dogs, and hell for women and cattle, and he wouldn't live there.

Daniel: What attracted him to Texas?

Cunningham: Well, they hadn't struck oil, I'm sure. Farming was what he planned on doing, because that's what he had expected to do until the Civil War. He was a freshman at the University of Missouri when the Civil War started, and he never got back to it. He was married when he went to Texas and had three children there, and his wife died. He lived not far from Austin. I don't know what the land was like. I do know that my older sister was accused

*Isaac Burns Cunningham

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Cunningham: of having eaten grasshoppers. They were very big.

Daniel: Your father didn't have a very prosperous time.

Cunningham: That's just it. Then he went to Oregon and there he became a grocery clerk for a short time, and then a farmer. The mother of his three children was dead, so he wrote to a widow with one child whom he knew in Missouri. She came out. They started with four children, and I was in the next group, the first of the third lot of six children.

Daniel: How did your mother's family happen to get to Missouri?

Cunningham: I don't know. Her father was a district judge in what is now St. Joseph, Missouri. She always called it "St. Joe." His name was Johnson. That's just about all I know. She came from a very large family. After her husband died she had to go back home with her child. Apparently she didn't have any money, so she was very glad to marry my father just by this invitation. I guess that was not uncommon in those days anyway, especially when people came to the West, the very great West, you know. He had known her, so that was it.

From Portland they went to Port Angeles. My father was very much ahead of his time as far as his sociological outlook was concerned. He was a

Cunningham: cooperator. He believed in sharing, and there were plans to make a big communal district in the area around Port Angeles that's near Port Townsend. Of course logging was the chief and almost the only gainful occupation there.

But it failed. He couldn't make a living for that big a family, so he went to Seattle to buy the kind of equipment one needs to grade the muddy streets, and that's what he did for quite a while. After that he started a business in wood and coal. Everybody used wood and coal to heat their houses. It was really a primitive town, then. That was before the fire; it was 1889 when he went there.

Daniel: When did you come along?

Cunningham: I was born in 1883 in Portland.

Daniel: What is the first image you remember of your surroundings?

Cunningham: I don't know whether this is a remembrance or whether someone has told me, but I think it is a remembrance. I always can see what I thought was a great big picnic table under a big tree in the district we lived in near Portland. That's now Garden Home and a beautiful residential district, but then it was farmland. As a matter of fact, I was told later that the table was a butchering table. But I didn't see it used as that. I

Cunningham: understand that if it ever was while my father was there he would never have allowed me to see it because, you see, he was a complete vegetarian all his life after Texas. He never would eat any meat after Texas. This was because they were so horrible to cattle down there. And that wasn't the only thing. He became a theosophist, and that cuts out meat. But he was never a meat-eater as long as I can remember.

Daniel: Your memories are visual. What about your feelings?

Cunningham: Well, I can remember that I was a very ill-tempered person. I'm much better-behaved now, though maybe no one will believe it.

Daniel: You mean you remember being pepperish when you were very young?

Cunningham: Oh, yes, very quick with a stick or anything like that.

Daniel: Do you recall an image of yourself hitting someone?

Cunningham: I see a picture of myself in a yard of turkeys. They were taller than I, and instead of being afraid of them, I picked up a stick and went at them, so that I walked right through.

Then I never was very patient with a younger sister I had. I remember that I was always supposed to comb her hair, and she was very, very irritated, and I guess she didn't like the way I did it. Once I got real mad and I just threw the

Cunningham: comb and it went through a window blind instead of the window, and I walked out on the job. I don't remember now whether I was ever called back or not. She irritated me. She was always...well, I guess brothers and sisters always do get irritated at each other, don't they?

Daniel: You had a swarm of them around. How did this work out?

Cunningham: Because the older ones were so much older, they were not at home; in fact they grew up and got away very quickly. When I went to Germany I had one sister at home, and she made all the clothes that I needed for a year. In fact she always did all the things.

Daniel: This was a maternal relationship rather than a sisterly one.

Cunningham: Oh, absolutely. That is one of the things that makes a large family easier than a small family.

Daniel: You didn't feel limited by brothers and sisters?

Cunningham: Well, I can remember that once when I expressed something to my father about if I were an only child what I would have, I was well chided. He was the kind of person who didn't like to see anybody harbor a wish without expressing it. He said, "If there's anything you really want you should say so, because everything that we have is

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Cunningham: ours, it's everybody's."

There was a time when I wanted very much to have a new box of water colors. I didn't say anything about it and it was a long, long time before I finally expressed my desire. He was very astonished and said, "Well, you should have said that before." As a matter of fact, they cost only thirty-five cents. But it seemed like a lot. You know, it's hard to imagine now. All children have so much more.

Daniel: It's curious that you should not have expressed your wish.

Cunningham: I thought it was an extravagance. I thought that was a terrific thing, to want a whole box of water colors for myself alone. But I was always inclined to draw and paint, and that was why I wanted the water colors.

Daniel: When did you do this? Before you went to school?

Cunningham: No, I can't remember. I was a backward child from that standpoint. I wasn't put into school until I was over eight years old. It was because of where we lived. We were too far away from the school. And you know, it was really a bad walk from the school, right through woods. In the morning when we went to school we would see bear marks on the earth, and that was really true!

Daniel: Were you fearful?

Cunningham: Oh, a little.

Daniel: Well anyway, school may have introduced you to painting and drawing.

Cunningham: I don't remember having it even in the first grade. I remember only learning.

Daniel: What do you mean, "only learning?"

Cunningham: I mean the three R's. I thought it was marvelous to learn to read. I should have learned long before that. I can't understand why an older sister didn't teach me. I knew all my letters, but that was only from picking them up. I knew very little. I was much more stupid than my own children were at that same age.

Daniel: What was there for you to read in your own home at that time?

Cunningham: I remember one book that I spent hours and hours on, Dante's Inferno.

Daniel: Good heavens! Did you understand it?

Cunningham: Oh no, of course not, but I loved the pictures, I studied them. Of course there were the Bible and a few other things--oh, the kind of books they had in the eighties: books of information, books of doctoring, all kinds of things, but nothing really good. Shakespeare, yes.

Daniel: Well, perhaps the illustrations of Dante made it attractive.

Cunningham: I grew up on pictures and I liked them better than

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Cunningham: reading. You see, my mother didn't help me on any of these things because she was almost completely illiterate. I remember she could sew, but not terribly well. And I remember exchanging a day's baby sitting while she sewed me a dress. That was about the only time I remember. I remember a picture of it, how the dress was made. We still lived on Queen Anne Hill. The sleeve had a bunch of tucks, and then a puff, and a bunch of tucks. I remember it was a painfully difficult dress to make. Oh, I think the mothers nowadays do so much more, but they have so much more to do it with. I'm perfectly sure that taking care of this child was a nuisance. He's a very nice sweet man now.

Daniel: A brother?

Cunningham: A little brother. There was another one on the way.

Daniel: Were you aware of all these children arriving all the time?

Cunningham: I don't think I thought a thing about it until they got to the nuisance stage.

Daniel: You did have to mind them, though, occasionally?

Cunningham: Not too much. That one time I remember. I think the reason that I wasn't expected to do it was that I was not too good at it, nor too willing. I think an older sister was much better. She was

Cunningham: better in every respect than I. I was very selfish.

Daniel: Did you think you were selfish at the time?

Cunningham: Oh no, of course not. I just wanted my way and got it.

Daniel: Among the members of the family was there someone with whom you felt a particularly comfortable relationship?

Cunningham: Not really. I felt grateful to my older sister, especially when she made me ready for Europe, but I didn't feel any communal interest with her, not really.

Interest in Art, Friends

Cunningham: I was always absolutely on my own, going somewhere, doing something, being interested in something, and no one in the family was interested in the same things.

Daniel: Can you remember some of these interests?

Cunningham: I didn't do anything but art every summer, and my father, I must say, was extremely indulgent to me in that respect. I had private lessons every summer.

Daniel: From what age?

Cunningham: Before the end of the grammar grades I was having art lessons with a well-known artist who took pupils

Cunningham: only in the summer. She lived in the city, downtown in an office. She had a studio in a big building. I went downtown and took lessons every Saturday morning.

Daniel: Were there many children doing this?

Cunningham: Well, yes, there were quite a good many, maybe ten, a regular class. Her name was Ella Shepherd Bush. Locally she became quite famous as a miniature painter. She also painted huge portraits, which were, in my present judgment, quite bad. But at that time I thought they were wonderful. I think if you read the history of the Seattle Art Society, she will be mentioned in that.

Daniel: It sounds as if you didn't have much time for social activity.

Cunningham: Nobody bothered about that. The funny thing is that now I have difficulty thinking up something to offer my grandchildren; you know, like taking them somewhere interesting. I have no car. Their parents take them to the museums, to everything, to the popular sort of theatre, anything that is wonderful. Nobody bothered about our doing those things. Of course there were no movies.

Daniel: No nickelodeons?

Cunningham: Well, I wasn't that type. I never cared about anything like that. Of course my father was really

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Cunningham: quite austere. We lived on the edge of a town that wasn't really even a big town. I don't remember going downtown, except with my older sister, maybe to look in a shop or to buy something--a dress or a ribbon, or material. We always made our own clothes.

I don't think I felt the lack of entertainment. I had friends. I had one friend--an only child, no!--she had a brother, but he was away at school always. She had a grandmother, and they had a wonderful house with a great big attic that was left completely to her. And there were all the clothes that her mother and grandmother had had for years. So we dressed ourselves up in those and made ourselves plays. We also had paper dolls. I never cared very much about real dolls. If I had one I dressed it and set it up. But paper dolls were whole families, and we played for hours.

Daniel: Did you draw the paper dolls or did you get the kind of thing that you cut out?

Cunningham: No, we didn't buy the regular kind. We begged the old fashion books from shops. They were very elaborate in those days. I don't know if they are as elaborate now. We had "Mrs. Astorbilt," you know, and all of her clothes. She was dressed in a different fashion for every occasion.

Cunningham: I had a Swedish friend at that time, too, and I learned a lot about the customs of Sweden--or maybe it was Norway. I was introduced to wine for the first time; it was in some gelatine which this Swedish mother had made as party food. Of course, if I had told about it at home, it would have been the end of my going there.

We were teetotalers, terrific! At home we never even thought that such a thing existed as wine. When I discovered the flavor I said, "What is this?" And then I was told that it was wine. Well, I just kept my mouth shut.

Daniel: Were there other nationality groups in your neighborhood?

Cunningham: I remember by thinking of the different places where we lived. On Queen Anne Hill I can't remember anything at all about the children that I went to school with. But when I still was in the grammar grades, maybe the fourth or fifth, the girl with whom I played paper dolls was from somewhere in the Middle West, and very American. The name was Bell. And the Swedish friend's name was Sigrid Frisch. I remember that well. Her father had a jewelry store downtown. I still have a belt that they gave me that was made of solid silver linked together with green stones,

Cunningham: not real, of course. Funny, I can't get it around me now. I guess that isn't unusual. [Laughter]

There were a great many Swedish lumber people, you know. My father had a lot of Swedes working for him, always. They really settled somewhere near Everett, Washington, but there were a lot around Seattle, too.

As far as religions are concerned, I remember mostly the Seventh Day Adventists because we got milk from them. There was a large group of Seventh Day Adventists, and my father always said they were very, very nice to deal with if you don't bother about your milk on Saturdays.

Daniel: Had they been there a long time?

Cunningham: Yes.

Daniel: What about your schooling? You went through...

Cunningham: Grammar grades, and then high school.

Daniel: Were any of the people in the school particularly interesting to you?

Cunningham: In high school I had a teacher by the name of Miss Piper who was very much interested in me. She gave me a chance to do anything I wanted to do. In fact, in the eighth grade--at that time it was in the Denny School--there were specialists for special things. For instance, one teacher in the whole place was best in music, so she went from room to room. And another one was better in art, so she

Cunningham: went traveling to the other grades. From fifth grade on Mrs. Stevenson was my art teacher. She was my regular teacher when I reached the eighth grade. She put me in the back corner of the room and said, "When you've finished your studying you can paint."

I would draw portraits of the people in front of me as well as I could. The person who sat right in front of me was a fellow by the name of John Moran, who was the son of the man who built the battleship "Nebraska" in Seattle. I heard about him the other day and I thought I should write to him. But I have no more of the drawings that I did of him at that time. It would be funny if I had.

Daniel: What did you use?

Cunningham: Just ordinary graphite.

Daniel: You directed your attention towards drawing at an early age.

Cunningham: I should say from the fifth grade on, I did. I didn't have any art after I left high school. When high school was over I decided to learn shorthand and stenography, or typing, and I did in two and a half months. When I went to the university I had that as a sort of help.

There was one thing I missed as soon as I got to the university. There was no history of

Cunningham: art and no art of any sort.

Daniel: There was no art department?

Cunningham: No, none at all at the University of Washington at that time.

Daniel: When was this?

Cunningham: in 1903. I had plenty to do without art. The first year I didn't do anything but just work on whatever was required. The second year I came under the guidance of a man who was interested in my wanting to be a photographer.

Daniel: Let's go back a bit. How did you work out the financing of college?

Cunningham: Well, I was the only person in the family who really wanted to do it and we lived in the city. We had moved then. By that time we lived on Queen Anne Hill, but farther down the hill. It wasn't any problem, really, except to have enough carfare. I took my lunch to school, bought my books. And my father was very generous. I don't think people paid tuition at the University of Washington. We paid lab fees, but I can't remember paying tuition. If I did, it must have been terrifically low because my family didn't notice it. And since I always made all my own clothes in the summertime, carried my luncheon in a bag, and rode on a streetcar, what was the expense? I had a little book--I wish I had it now--in which I kept all my expenses.

Cunningham: I remember my freshman year cost about one hundred dollars. Of course I hadn't come to expensive lab fees yet. From my sophomore year on, I paid my lab fees by being my major professor's secretary and making lantern slides for science courses.

Introduction to Photography

Daniel: How did you get from drawing to photography?

Cunningham: The way I got there was just from seeing something, and I never have forgotten the impact of the photographs I saw in a number of the Craftsman, I don't know what number it was. The magazine ceased publication long ago.

It was the work of Gertrude Käsebier that interested me. I've always been sorry that I didn't look her daughter up when I was in New York in 1956 because I hear that she became a photographer too, but is also retired. Now fancy, I've outlived both of them, photographing madly all the time. Of course when I met Mrs. Käsebier in New York in 1910 she was already an old woman. She had begun when she was pretty old; she had grandchildren.

I don't remember other photographers of that particular time. I can remember to this moment the things in one article in the Craftsman: her daughter standing in a doorway, her hand on her

Cunningham: child--mother and child--things like that.

Daniel: So Gertrude Käsebier made the strongest impression on you.

Cunningham: Well, at that particular time, but then later I went to see Stieglitz.

Daniel: Where was he?

Cunningham: He was in New York City and had the Photo Secession Gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue.

Daniel: When did you see it?

Cunningham: In 1910, when I came back from Germany. But of course he began earlier. He was a product of the same sort of a school that I went to in Germany, not an art school, but a technische Hochschule. He was from the Charlottenburg one. He must have been there in the eighties.

Daniel: He studied photography there?

Cunningham: Yes. It was all scientific, not like a photographic school now. It was almost completely physics and chemistry. Nothing to do with how you do it. But I was still interested in practicing how you photograph, and I did a great series of photographs of my professors there, which they thought enough of to make transparencies so that they could make themselves another negative and possess them.

Daniel: Let's go back to the university and find out what you did there in photography.

Cunningham: You mean the University of Washington?

Daniel: That's right. Was there photography there as such?

Cunningham: No, no. Mine had to be my own adaptation of it.

Daniel: Is there any place now that offers work with photography at the university level?

Cunningham: Well, of course the California School of Fine Arts is now affiliated with the University of California. But they don't go at it in the same way that they did in those days, not so scientifically. In fact, if you're not going to be a scientist, perhaps that kind of study is a waste of time. But I enjoyed it.

Daniel: What were you doing in photography while you were majoring in chemistry?

Cunningham: I didn't have much time while I was in the university to work at photography, actually. I did learn to do lantern slides, and worked in the botany department making lantern slides for botany. I photographed my friends. I fooled around, always, never with any great purpose or idea of doing anything wonderful or showy.

Daniel: Were you exploring the machinery that you used?

Cunningham: Well, I thought I knew all about the machinery I used. I had such a simple one.

Daniel: What did you use?

Cunningham: Oh, I had a most awful camera. It was a 4 x 5 camera

Cunningham: that I had gotten in 1901, when I was in high school. I sent to Scranton, Pennsylvania, and got a camera and a book of instructions from the International Correspondence School. I worked with it from then on.

As early as 1901 my father built me a dark-room in the woodshed and lined it with black paper. He even put cold water in the room, which was something unusual, of course. You must remember that films were very, very slow in those days. The lamp was just a candle inside of a little square, red, oiled cloth. It didn't burn the cloth up, and it didn't give very much light. Altogether, I don't know how I managed.

Daniel: Your father had a part in your early photography. Was your mother interested in what you were doing?

Cunningham: I had no indication she had any comprehension of anything I was doing, ever. I was just her child like any one of the other ones, only I was a little more erratic and much more trouble. She had a maternal attitude.

Daniel: And she probably would have understood you better in a domestic situation.

Cunningham: Oh, yes. When she saw me in my first happy years of marriage and children, she liked me much better, I think. She really didn't have any way of expressing

Cunningham: herself. You had to get by intuition how she felt. And she felt that you were all right when you were settled. When I was a struggling artist I know very well that she was worried, because when I went to Germany I saw her crying at the station.

Daniel: You apparently had very little real communication with her.

Cunningham: Hardly any. I was a very mean child.

Daniel: But perhaps she didn't have much communication with any of her children.

Cunningham: Well, no I wouldn't feel that she had.

Daniel: This was not unusual.

Cunningham: At that time I think it was not, because there were always many things to engage her attention. Each child, as it became independent, was really off her mind. I know she was concerned about such things as my not eating breakfast, or studying too late at night. She didn't see where I was going with studying. I think she liked me quite well when I was home in the summer and sewing like mad.

Daniel: What kind of communication did you have with your father?

Cunningham: Complete. He was a reader, and so we could talk about things. He also liked me very much.

Daniel: Did he talk to you instead of to your mother about what he had read?

Cunningham: I can't remember that he talked to her at all, really, after I was grown up. I think I'm the one person in the family he did really talk to; otherwise he was very much the same to everybody. We had more in common than the rest, much more. He didn't always read the kind of things I read. For instance, I never could understand why he was very much interested in a man by the name of Oupensky. You probably know that name.

Daniel: I know the name but I don't know what it means.

Cunningham: Well, it's tremendously esoteric stuff. I can't follow it at all. Also, higher mathematics was his subject. I was pretty stupid in all of that. He went to the University of California Extension after he was seventy and took a correspondence course in algebra. One man who was a professor there retired and became a neighbor of his, and they got to be very great friends. They were chess players and talked mathematics.

If he were alive now I think he would be very interested in the philosophical side of higher mathematics. That's where he was tending toward but he didn't have the means; he didn't know how to get there. I know that work is being done on it now. It's beyond me. I never could understand mathematics. I did it. I got pretty good marks in algebra and geometry and trigonometry, but I

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Cunningham: didn't like it.

Daniel: Was your father interested and enthusiastic about your interest in photography?

Cunningham: No, he didn't care very much about my interest in photography. He didn't think it was anything but a dirty trade. He often said, "What's the use of going to school and becoming a dirty photographer?" Maybe there was some truth in that, but I kept on going to school and kept on working at photography. His idea, of course, was that I should become a teacher. He thought teaching was one of the great professions. There weren't many desirable work opportunities for women; female secretaries were not as common as they are now. You see a lot of pictures of girls at switchboards and at great big typewriters in the eighties, but there were more men in it proportionately than women.

Daniel: Was not photography a bizarre occupation for a woman at this time?

Cunningham: Well, there weren't many people in it. I didn't know any photographers when I first wanted to have a camera.

Daniel: Was it a respectable occupation?

Cunningham: Yes, perfectly respectable. Of course if you read history, the earliest woman photographer was around 1849; she was a woman of means who took it up as a sort of pastime. She was very, very good--Margaret

Cunningham: Cameron. But she wasn't in competition with anybody for anything. She didn't try to be a professional person. Photography had hardly become a profession at the time that she was doing it. It was still in its early stages.

Daniel: It was a curiosity, actually.

Cunningham: Yes. It's simply remarkable that she went into it because it must have been pretty difficult in her time, much more difficult than in mine. You know, some people think I'm old enough to have used wet plates. Well, I wasn't, not at all. You've read too much of the history to think that. The beautiful stuff that was done in the West by Sullivan was wet plate. But I've never even known anybody who made wet plates.

Daniel: As you were coming along, was photography beginning to assert itself as a valid art form?

Cunningham: It was, but not in the West. I feel that most of the people who were working in the West were like the ones I call Market Street photographers today. There were big galleries. The family went in a whole group and sat under a big skylight and had two or three shots made. I didn't see any really expressive work in Seattle. I knew it was somewhere, but I didn't know where to find it in Seattle.

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Daniel: While other young ladies may have been preparing themselves for teaching or office work, you continued to make prints.

Cunningham: Yes, I did. I made negatives and I made prints and I had a wonderful time doing it.

Daniel: What were you photographing?

Cunningham: Mostly I did people. I started out, of course, liking to see the things around me, but mostly people. People began to interest me very early. I don't know why. Perhaps there is this interest because in people there are no duplicates. You must say that. If you see a sunrise it happens another day, too, but people are always different; they are different every second.

Daniel: Yes. You weren't basically a bird-watcher, a rock-collector or a tree-fancier.

Cunningham: In fact, since I really grew up, that is in the last ten or fifteen years, I would say that I've been rather sorry that I didn't study botany, because my greatest interest is plants, now.

Daniel: More than people?

Cunningham: Oh, not more than people. The reason I really turned to plants was because I couldn't get out of my own backyard when my children were small. That was when I started photographing what I had in my garden; it was mostly succulents, which I called cacti. When I learned that all succulents were

Cunningham: not cacti, but that all cacti were succulents, I decided to learn a little. I've been working at it ever since. That was nineteen-twenty-something.

I had strictly one idea, that of photography, after I started working with my camera. And of course, I cherished learning. I thought it was quite necessary to go to school. Now I can't quite understand that. As I said previously, my father didn't either.

Daniel: Did you think this was a prerequisite to what you wanted, or did you just enjoy learning?

Cunningham: Oh, no. I enjoyed it. Before I had any intention of doing anything with German I studied German. I enjoyed being in plays, acting, speaking and reading. But, you know, one doesn't really become educated by going to a university. Really and truly, there are very few people who are what you call educated, I think. They go to school, but it takes a long time to become an educated person, and a certain type of brain, too.

I finished in three and a half years. And I decided it would be a good idea to learn how to make platinum paper prints, then in vogue and very difficult.

Daniel: Why difficult?

Cunningham: It's hard to say now why it is difficult because we don't use it any more. The kind of paper that we do

Cunningham: use is not easy, either. Nothing is easy in printing. Printing is an art in itself.

But, anyway, I wanted to learn this and so I went to the one big shop in town that made platinum prints. I asked to assist the printer for nothing for two months. I began in January, right after Christmas. In June the woman who had the job got married, and it was given to me. I stayed there for two years until I went to Germany.

STUDY IN GERMANY

Daniel: How did you know about Germany?

Cunningham: I didn't know about it at all. I just knew that the Pi Beta Phi sorority was offering a scholarship nationally. I think there were about forty different groups that would be applying for it, so I applied without ever thinking I'd get it. I think my major professor was really the one who was the most instrumental in my getting it.

Daniel: Were you a Pi Phi?

Cunningham: Yes.

He had studied in Leipzig, and he felt that Germany was the place for science. He knew about the school in Dresden where there was a man famous for photography, the chemistry of photography. He wrote the most influential letter I had, I think, and I sent quite a lot of prints and things that I had done up to that time. I wish I had the things I used to apply for that scholarship now. I've no idea where they've gone, not the slightest!

Anyway, I got the scholarship, and I was very much surprised. It was only five hundred dollars. That seems like nothing now.

Daniel: For a whole year?

Cunningham: I made it last a whole year. I already had enough money to pay my way to London, or thereabouts, in addition to the five hundred. I don't know how long

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Cunningham: it lasted me. My major professor borrowed two hundred and fifty more from the women's clubs of the state of Washington. That was a loan. I paid that back within two or three months after I got home.

Daniel: You had been saving your money?

Cunningham: I had saved enough to pay my way. I don't know why I didn't have any more than that. I didn't spend much of anything. Of course, as soon as I worked I gave my mother board and room money. I always did that. She didn't ask for it, I just felt it was coming to her.

Daniel: What about your trip? Was this the first time away from home for you?

Cunningham: I had been as far as Vancouver, B.C. to visit a sister who had gone up there. That was the only time I had been away any great distance. I don't remember very much about it.

Daniel: What did you know about Europe?

Cunningham: Well, I wasn't uninformed because in wishing to study art, I had very assiduously studied the Perry pictures. They were reproductions of art from all over the world.

Daniel: You knew where these things were?

Cunningham: I did. And I took a magazine; I don't remember the name. It isn't printed any longer. Years ago I gave a whole file to Mills College. It had very beautiful reproductions, but always in sepia or

Cunningham: black and white, not color. There was no color reproduction. As I look back on it, it is a very false way of getting an idea about a painting. I suppose the size may have been printed on the Perry prints. I don't know, but I did have a very false idea, as it struck me in 1956, when I saw the Sargent painting of the apostles for the first time, and found they weren't life-size. I was rather startled.

I don't feel the same way about things that I saw that were full wall surfaces like the Puvis de Chevanne, because you imagine a mural large and it is large. Well, I studied those things much more than I do now. I kept sending to Boston, where they were printed, for additional sets.

Daniel: These came in sets according to the period?

Cunningham: No, I think subjects. I think you could get subjects or places or artists. I remember I had a tremendous pile of them.

Daniel: What were your favorites?

Cunningham: Oh, I can't remember that now because that's so mixed with reality. I threw them out very long ago. In fact, I never looked at them at all after I was in the university.

But I didn't study just to go to Europe. The reason I went to Germany was mainly because my major professor, who was in chemistry, felt that Germany was the place for me to study. He had two good

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Cunningham: reasons. It was a good school for photography, and I would be learning another language. He said, "What's the use of going to England?" Besides, they hadn't the schools for that particular field. I was very satisfied with Germany and I've never regretted going.

Daniel: Did you know enough German when you arrived there to get by?

Cunningham: Well, I had had five years of German, two years in high school and three years in the university. I wouldn't say that I had a very conversational German. I belonged to a German club at the university and I was in German plays. I really manipulated it as well as one does, but I think, of course, that students do it better now. But I know this: I got along from the very start. Even though I sometimes couldn't put a sentence together, I could make myself understood. That's what language is for, isn't it?

Experiences on the Way

Daniel: By what route did you reach Germany?

Cunningham: I went with another gal who was going to Berlin to study. She had a great-aunt there, who was giving her housing and complete schooling. She was going to study German in order to teach it in America.

Cunningham: We went from Seattle to Vancouver, B.C. and across by Canadian Pacific to Montreal, and sailed from Montreal on a Canadian Pacific boat. That was the reason we went to Vancouver.

When we got to Vancouver we had about four hours to wait. On the platform a girl came up to me and spoke to me. She said, "Aren't you waiting for the Overland?"

I said, "Yes."

And she said, "It won't be by for four hours, and I'd like to take you down to my house."

"But we have to catch the Overland."

"Well, that's all right. We'll come back in a handcar."

"Well, are you sure you will be responsible for us?"

"Absolutely," she said. We went down in a caboose on the train to a place off in the woods, and we came back on a handcar and caught the Overland.

Daniel: You didn't know this person at all?

Cunningham: No, not at all. She was a Pi Phi and she saw that I was wearing my pin. That was the introduction.

Daniel: You were sisters.

Cunningham: You know, I look on that now as complete silliness, but at the time, you know, you're still flexible, and you accept things like that. I was frightened to death of it, but we went. The gal I was with

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Cunningham: was a Kappa from the University of Washington. That was our last adventure. You wouldn't believe the way we traveled on that train. There was a stove at the end of the car. We were traveling tourist. We sat up.

Daniel: You didn't have a berth?

Cunningham: I think we had berths, too, but it was very austere. We had food with us that we ate all the way across the continent. It consisted of things from the health food store, which were concentrated and full of nourishment: dried fruits that are made into candies, and sandwiches with a dry bread, hard and black. I remember that it seemed like no hardship at all. We enjoyed every bit of it. People in the car cooked on the stove at one end of the car. There were children in the car and they had orange peels all over the place. It was the messiest trip I've ever made in my life.

Daniel: What about your luggage?

Cunningham: Oh, it was incredible what we took, unbelievable. I had a huge trunk, not a steamer trunk, with three tiers in it. I was going for a year. I had all the shoes I would need, all the coats I would need, all the stockings, all the underwear, everything I would need for a whole year.

Daniel: You didn't think you could get anything in Germany?

Cunningham: I never thought of it, and I didn't buy a single thing in Germany. Nowadays, nobody would dress like

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Cunningham: that or have the burden of that luggage. Think of having to tow a trunk around, having to look after it!

Daniel: Were you on the same train clear across the country?

Cunningham: We changed, but of course we didn't have to take care of the luggage. We had a suitcase. The heavy luggage was checked through to Montreal. We had to see it onto the steamer.

The steamer was something incredible. I'd never been on anything like it in my life. I was very excited about the whole thing. My companion hadn't been anywhere at all. We were first-class on this steamer that had only two classes. We met one man who was connected with the steamship company and who was extremely interesting to me. If it were now, I would have photographed him and I would have had his story. But that was beyond our abilities then. (I took a camera, a 5 x 7 camera, to Germany, so I had luggage all right.) But this man spoke about eight or ten languages; he could speak to every different person. You see, he met passengers coming in from Europe, and he put those who were dissatisfied on the boat, going out. The steerage of that ship must have been something terrible, it was so crowded.

Daniel: He was the agent?

Cunningham: He was the agent. I don't know what his title was,

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Cunningham: but he was a go-between with the people. He could understand what they wanted. He spoke almost any possible language.

I musn't forget to tell you some of the great doings on the boat. There were two young men who took special interest in my friend and me. One of them was an English lieutenant from the navy.

Daniel: Was this your first English lieutenant?

Cunningham: That was the first one I had ever known. The other man was, I think, an advertising man. He was an Englishman who had worked in Los Angeles a long time. He was very attractive. Both were interesting, but the lieutenant was the strangest. He had been interested in making jewelry, so of course he entertained me a lot with his art. He asked all sorts of personal questions about us, asking each of us about the other, and we didn't tell anything. He wanted to know how old we were, so one day he went and asked the purser. He was that curious. I've often wondered what ever did happen to him. Two wars have happened since.

Daniel: It strikes me as quite unusual, an English lieutenant interested in making jewelry.

Cunningham: He had been in India and he had the most magnificent lot of stones that you could ever hope to see--moonstones--

Daniel: He had these with him?

Cunningham: Yes, he was going to make a necklace for his mother.

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Daniel: He was on his way home across the Pacific back to England?

Cunningham: Yes. I would find out a lot more about him now than I did then. Anyway, he was wonderful for my friend because he did so many things for us.

London

Cunningham: We landed at Liverpool and we had some time in Liverpool. I don't remember just how much. Our lieutenant decided just what we were to see and he escorted us. We went to a museum. We knew where we were going to stay in London; I remember that it was Bedford Square. All the time we were in London he took us around.

Daniel: To the first big galleries you had seen?

Cunningham: That's right. I had never been to New York. He took us to Claridge's for tea, and he took us places for lunch. He took us to museums and said that the reason he was doing that was because he had never been in one in his life. You see, he didn't care for museums. He didn't care for art. And he'd never been to the Tower of London, so he took us there. It was fun and very nice.

Daniel: What were some of your first impressions?

Cunningham: I think that everything was a little different from what I had imagined. I think I was most impressed by the paintings at the Tate Gallery. They were

Cunningham: fascinating, because I had never seen them in color. Looking at sepia prints is a very bad way to learn anything about paintings. The portraits in London didn't strike me so much as the things in the Tate Gallery. I think I liked them better. The Turners, that's what got me. I just loved the Turners, and the drawings.

Daniel: Turner is very free.

Cunningham: Yes, that's right. It was strange, wasn't it, for me to like it at that time!

Daniel: You came from the open country of the West; perhaps you had a built-in appreciation of space and line and movement.

Cunningham: You know, I didn't realize that the West was so wild and woolly as I feel it must have been when I think of it now.

Daniel: It wasn't open and big?

Cunningham: No, I didn't think anything about it.

Daniel: You lived in the city, of course.

Cunningham: Well, I know, but the edge of the city was absolutely a wild wood. It's a terrific pity that Ravenna, a park which is north of the university, has gotten to be a civilized-looking place with a few big trees in it, because it was simply a wild, thick, dense forest, and it should have remained that way, I think.

Daniel: When you put your feet down in London did you think of your ancestors?

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Cunningham: I didn't think about my ancestors at all. I only thought about what I had read. I felt as if I'd always been there. That's very strange, I think.

Daniel: No, it isn't. This comment is often made.

Cunningham: Oh, I was more comfortable in London then than I would be now, I think. I think now I would look at all the places that are grown up with flowers and weeds because they were bombed out, and I'd try to think of what had been there, and of course I would not be able to remember.

I felt at home in the British Museum because here the sepia prints had given a good impression of the Elgin Marbles. The other day I was reading in the _New Statesman_ that Greece wants the Elgin Marbles back.

Daniel: Do you think they are going to get them?

Cunningham: I hope so.

Daniel: Didn't you feel they were out of context there?

Cunningham: No. I felt then just the way I feel now: I would never have seen them if they hadn't been in London. I would never get to Greece. But I don't think it's right.

Daniel: This is true, but they seem so odd there.

Cunningham: They do, of course.

Daniel: Mostly you were thrilled at seeing them.

Cunningham: That's right, and I think the reproductions of those things leads you better into them than any reproduction of a painting leads you into a painting.

Daniel: In your day sepia didn't live up to a photograph; today photographs can sometimes overdo a subject.

Cunningham: They can.

Daniel: You had a feeling of being perfectly at home in London and very pleased about everything. Was there some place besides the gallery that you liked a lot?

Cunningham: I still have one of the photographs that I did while walking along the Thames at six o'clock in the morning. I went into Limehouse and walked along and watched the men working. I later discovered that that was a dangerous thing to do. Nobody even whistled at me. I behaved to them then just as I would now. Now, of course, my age protects me. [Laughter]

I remember once in Dresden I was walking along with a girl. It was some strange place, I guess. I'd never paid any attention to where I was, as far as taboos were concerned, I mean. A baker boy came along, shouting at us, "Where are you going?"

We just laughed and didn't answer him; he laughed and went on. You can tell by the way in which people say those things whether they have an ill meaning or not. I've never been afraid anywhere.

Daniel: How long did you stay in London?

Cunningham: About a week.

Daniel: You saw quite a good deal?

Cunningham: I saw it on the way back. I came through London both

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Cunningham: ways.

Daniel: Did you go out from London to other places, Cambridge?

Cunningham: No, I didn't go to Cambridge. I went to visit a friend out from London, and I went to visit a photographer in a very remote part of London. I went to Hampstead. Those were long underground trips. They didn't involve a great deal of traveling. I did go to see Windsor Castle. But that was all. I suppose I would do a great deal more now. I suppose I had to be careful of my money, too. I spent most of my time at the things I thought I'd never get back to see.

Daniel: Did you go to the theatre while you were there?

Cunningham: Yes, I went to the theatre. I can't remember what we saw, except that the curtain-raiser--I don't know if this custom persists--was a woman whose name was Helen Mar, who imitated Americans. The English lieutenant took us to that theatre, and the performance was very, very funny. He thought it was just exactly like the Americans; we thought it was a little exaggerated. I specifically remember the name Helen Mar because one of my best friends at school was Helen Mar Gibbons--no relation.

Daniel: From London you went where?

Cunningham: From London we went across the channel on a very rocky boat to the Hook of Holland. Naturally, we were sick. I don't remember the name of the town

Cunningham: from which we left; you leave London on a train to reach the boat. I remember that I went to bed directly because I knew that that was the best way to preserve my equilibrium. The channel is pretty rough.

When we got to Holland and found out that nobody understood anything we had to say, it was terrible. But finally we made our arrangements. We had tickets, you see. The ticket took us to Hanover. My friend was going straight; she didn't change trains from Holland to Berlin. But I had to change trains at Hanover to reach Leipzig. I had never been in a big station in my life, and Hanover had a big station. I kept watching the clock and thinking, "Well, now let's face it. That train is supposed to go at a certain time." Finally I decided to say two words to a great big uniformed man walking up and down. And I said, "Zug Leipzig."

"Folgen sie mich," he said, and grabbed my stuff and ran. I ran after him, and we went downstairs along a long corridor, up another flight of stairs, and he threw me into a compartment. Fortunately, I had my trinkgeld already in my hands and I handed it to him. Off the train went. There had been no calling of the train. Since I had never been in a station that wasn't all on one level, I didn't know that there was another level. You had to go below

Cunningham: to get up to another track. That showed me what a little town I had come from, where you could see all the tracks at once. From then on I knew what I should do.

Daniel: This was the first time you had experimented with your German, wasn't it?

Cunningham: Yes, absolutely, and it worked!

Leipzig

Cunningham: When I got to Leipzig some people knew I was coming and that I was due on that train. They were the old spinsters who ran a pension on Arndtstrasse in Leipzig.

Daniel: How did you know them?

Cunningham: My professor had recommended that pension. It was absolutely elegant! I had a room that was as big as this whole house, practically, and filled with furniture. They had huge bedrooms, but nothing you wanted except a bed: chairs, tables, mirrors, sofas, chshions--everything under the sun. I don't know when all that furniture was invented. It was all very elaborate and there was very much of it. Plenty of parquetry and gold, yet the only bathroom in the house was in the basement and you had to make an appointment for that. You had a wash basin in your room.

When I arrived at the place a woman came out onto the balcony to meet me. I fell into her arms.

Cunningham: She spoke English! She knew what to do for a person who was coming to a foreign country. But from that time on she never spoke a word of English to me. She was a schoolteacher and so was her sister, and her mother was the lady of the house. I met a lot of foreigners there and I stayed just two weeks.

Daniel: What do you mean by foreigners?

Cunningham: Everybody but the Germans. I met a French woman who gave me the address of a place to stay when I would go to Paris, and I did stay there. Practically all of them were traveling schoolteachers. This was just at the end of August.

Daniel: The schoolteachers there were paid enough to afford travel?

Cunningham: Oh, yes. I think they always have been, don't you?

Daniel: I don't know.

Cunningham: Travel in Germany, travel in France, from France to Germany was about even. Oh, I think they do. They don't go to as many shows as we do. They don't do any of the little things we do. They don't entertain as much. A schoolteacher wouldn't be feeding anybody but herself, would she, mainly?

Daniel: Probably not.

Cunningham: No, not really. These people of course just fed me to death. When they found out I was a vegetarian they were just appalled.

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Daniel: You were still a vegetarian?

Cunningham: Oh, yes. They kept trying to invent dishes that would be fine. They discovered that tomatoes are used in the United States. (They were not generally eaten in Germany at that time.) They would make a wonderful dish of tomato and rice or something like that. Much too rich. I must have gained ten pounds in the two weeks I was there.

Daniel: By the way, when did you stop being a vegetarian?

Cunningham: When the twins were born in 1917.

At the time I was in Leipzig the 500th anniversary of the founding of the University of Leipzig took place. There were parades. The students coming home at night from big parties, the chorus students especially, sang "Gaudeamus Igitur." I think it's beautiful at three o'clock in the morning. It was really wonderful.

Daniel: All this was absolutely new to you.

Cunningham: It was absolutely astonishing. I never minded getting up and rushing to the window when I heard something going by. That happened quite often. Then, also, there was a chemistry student who was a friend of my major professor and he called on me, and he and some of his friends took me to the park and rowing on the river, and walking, and also to their houses for musicales.

One of his sisters was a dressmaker. I don't know what it would be like now, but she was a dressmaker of what was known at that time as <u>reform-kleider</u>.

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Daniel: What were they?

Cunningham: They were the kind of clothes that were worn by people who believed in the natural figure. They had never worn corsets; they did not restrain themselves in any respect. The dresses were more or less on princess lines. You had to have a very good figure and you could not put it in a corset. The clothes were streamlined absolutely from the neck down. The reform-kleider is a famous period to this day. You can read about it in the history of costume.

They discovered that I had never worn a corset. They were amazed. They invited me to their show in Dresden and it happened that they were going there at the same time that I was. They found me a room to stay in until I had answered all the responses to an advertisement I had put in the Dresden papers to get pension for a student who wished to learn German.

Dresden

Clothes Modeling

Cunningham: I advertised while I was in Leipzig so that I would have two weeks of responses at the Post restante from which to choose. They found me a place to sleep, a room, and then they invited me to the show, which was at a very beautiful place. They did not tell me before I went to the show that they had a little object in inviting me. I was the model for the show!

Daniel: Oh, no! [Laughter]

Cunningham: Yes, the first and last time I've ever been a model. I had to walk on and off a stage with different dresses that this woman was presenting to the public.

Daniel: How did she know the clothes would fit you?

Cunningham: I was really very slim then.

Daniel: Were you announced as a famous American model?

Cunningham: No, indeed, I wasn't announced as anything, but it wasn't common in those days. She had not made any preparation to have a model.

Daniel: Did friends model?

Cunningham: That would be it. There was no such thing as a professional model. There were models in the art schools but I don't think she had any idea of spending money on a model. She didn't give me a thing for modeling, I think not even my carfare to the place.

Daniel: She was being a good businesswoman.

Cunningham: She surely was. I remember the dresses were very princessy. That's about all I remember. If I had an occasion to do that now I would insist on having a photograph of myself in every one of the dresses, wouldn't you?

Daniel: Of course. You had never heard of <u>reform kleider</u> before, had you?

Cunningham: No, but I guess I've always been addicted to something like that. I wouldn't wear a corset. All the women in my family wore them, but I didn't like them.

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Daniel: What did you do with your stockings?

Cunningham: I had sort of a harness that began at the shoulder and extended down. And there must have been some other people who did the same thing, or I wouldn't have been able to buy the harness.

Quarters

Daniel: After the fashion show you were settled in Dresden?

Cunningham: I answered all the different advertisements. I went from one house to another. One house was extremely interesting, but I was sort of afraid of it. It belonged to an elderly professor's widow. She knew all the people who had worked with the professor, and Nietzsche, who had been a professor at the same school at an earlier time. I decided that no matter how good her German, it would be too involved to follow her conversation about these people when she would be lonesome and wanting to talk. I didn't take it.

Finally I went to a house where there was a young woman about twenty-six years old, who was a concert singer and pianist and taught. There was a young boy of seventeen, who was in the last year of the gymnasium and was a real "dig." Of course I didn't know it at that time. And there was a young girl about fourteen; she was in Höher Töchterschule, which was really a high school for girls, and is supposed to be very fine. The father was a bookkeeper

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Cunningham: in a graphite factory, and the mother was a gabby old lady. But I thought: This is it, because there were four of them and I could ignore them if I wanted to. Their reason for taking in a roomer was that the grandmother had died, and I would inherit her place. That appealed to me tremendously. I took the place, and it was ideal. The members of the household were very, very good to me and they didn't take too much of my time or do anything annoying.

At the time I was in Dresden all foreigners were made to register with the police. I guess it's also true in other European places. My landlord was afraid of letting me do my own registering because he had already asked me wha my religion was and I had said that I had no formal religion. He said, "Oh, that won't do, _fräulein_. You'll be called a Social Democrat." So they put me down Protestant.

I'm pretty sure that that is probably still true today in Europe. I think even in the eastern part of the United States people are almost more respected for what they represent than they are out West.

I suppose you didn't hear about Padraic's experience there as a non-member of a church. When he was working in a little bit of a village, he told me what church they were going to. I said, "Church!"

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Cunningham: And he said, "Well, if we don't turn up once at church, we'll never do any business in this town."

You see, that's the strangest thing and it's hard for us to understand. We are pretty much alone out here. We don't know what the small community is like.

I can't imagine how much difference it would have made to me, or to anybody I knew in Dresden, if anybody had thought I was a Social Democrat. The worst part is that none of them thought anything about me at all.

Daniel: Your landlord was concerned because you were living in his house?

Cunningham: Well, he didn't want to be disgraced by me. That's the main thing.

Daniel: What kind of accommodations did you have?

Cunningham: I had a beautiful room on a corner. The only complaint they had about me was that I opened the windows and let out the heat of the house.

"Oh, fräulein, if you hadn't opened your windows there wouldn't be ice."

I said, "I didn't complain."

But, you know, they didn't open their windows. They aired the house every morning; they opened up the windows after breakfast when everybody had gone to school and they might have left them open for a couple of hours; then they shut them up and that was

Cunningham: the air for the day.

Daniel: What kind of heating did you have?

Cunningham: None at all in my room, not a single bit. The building itself was reinforced concrete, and I was on the third floor. There was a basement, first floor and second floor. There was what they called kachel-öfen. That's a tile stove which is stoked with coal. It was in the dining room. The dining room was also the study and living room. It was the family room. Next to it was a salon.

At the same time that I was choosing living quarters, I was perfectly conscious of what was going on in the world of photography. I don't remember the exact date, but before school began, there was a big exhibition of photography that was drawn from world-wide sources. It's strange that the person whose work I remember best at that time was Baron de Meyer, who later came to America and worked for the Conde Nast Company. At that time he lived in Europe and was doing all sorts of delicate and beautiful things with table decorations and fancy elegant women. Later he became the society photographer in New York.

I remember I also very much admired the work of Käthe Kollwitz, who was an etcher, of course, not a photographer. I think Alice Boughton was in that show, too. That exhibition was shown in a park in Dresden.

Daniel: How had the selections been made?

Cunningham: I have no idea; I didn't know anything about it until I got there and saw it.

Daniel: Did Dresden have a group that was a part of the Linked Brotherhood?

Cunningham: I was rather unconscious of world movements, or even of local movements, in any town at that time. I considered myself a beginner and still a school person. There was one photographer in town, Ehrfurt, whose work I liked very much. I never had the nerve to go into his studio to make his acquaintance; you can understand how different I was then from what I am now!

Daniel: Can you remember the general characteristics of the exhibit?

Cunningham: The prints were in the main rather large. Some photographs by an Englishman, resident in America, were there. It's too bad I haven't kept a few catalogues. Stieglitz must have been there. The pictures were of places, in general: early morning with the fog, a city with a big college, steam coming out of pipes, and sometimes, portraits of people. They were the best, I think. Maybe it was because I was interested in that. Alvin Langdon Coburn's stuff was there, too. I had met him in London, on my way to Germany. He lived in New York, too. Stieglitz thought he had influenced him a great deal. Whether he did or not, I wouldn't be sure.

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Daniel: You went to Dresden quite aware of the photography that was being done at the time. Had you any feeling that there were differences of opinion among the photographers?

Cunningham: I don't think I thought about what photographers thought. I don't believe I knew anybody, even at that date, who was really working at photography outside of Seattle. The other day I came across a catalogue of a Denmark show that was in 1920 which I was in. I noticed that Edward Weston was there. That was ten years later, and still that was early.

Daniel: Probably you didn't become aware of these currents until you began to exhibit yourself.

Cunningham: That's right, and I began to exhibit as soon as I got back to Seattle and started in for myself. Almost every year I was in some English publication. I don't think there were those things in America then. In 1912 and around there, I was in a lot of German ones, too. I had a big show that year at Brooklyn Museum; I have never been invited since.

Technische Hochschule, Dresden

Daniel: It would be interesting to hear about your life in Dresden.

Cunningham: It was a strange sort of life for me, very different from anything I had been accustomed to because there were so few women going to the school. There were plenty of women attending the various lectures. I

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Cunningham: took in some of those, too. A very famous man by the name of Cornelius Gurlitt had the whole city of Dresden going to his lectures in the evening. The women just flocked to them. The series was entertaining and it was on the history of art. I took in things like that. I went to one class that was Deutsch für ausländer. There I met only foreigners, of course, learning German. It included a great assortment of people.

A Polish woman and I took a fancy to one another and became very good friends. The people that I lived with disapproved of that because they said I should have a German, not a Polish girl, for a friend. The Poles spoke terrible German. Since I thought I wouldn't learn good German, anyway, it didn't seem to make much difference. She was a mathematics and music student. We went to the theatre a great deal because it was so cheap. The staff of the opera house gave a new play every week, and we could go every week for very little money. I think I was able to see practically all the well-known operas except the new ones.

I had laboratory work, of course. I was the only woman in the laboratory, but despite all the terrible tales you heard at that time, nothing was unpleasant for me. The people who taught were very nice. I'm sure they thought I was a bit of a freak, but that didn't seem to make much difference.

Cunningham: In Dresden I think the teachers were nicer than they were in Berlin. There were still professors who didn't like women in their classes at the University of Berlin.

Daniel: What curricula were offered?

Cunningham: It was a school just like Cal Tech or M.I.T. There was a school of architecture whose classes I didn't attend, except for an evening lecture on Pompeii given at one of the museums by a lecturer in the department. Although it was in the architecture school, anyone could go. There were geology, physics, and chemistry; practically every science, and plenty of literature, too. In fact, that was the school at which, earlier, Nietzsche had been a professor of philosophy.

The photographic laboratory was not in the main building. It was off to itself some distance. Very often when I was going to a lecture I would walk with the diener of the laboratory over to the main building where the lecture was being held. No one else ever did anything like that, of course, but it didn't seem to bother me and it didn't bother him. I learned a lot that way because he was such a genial person. He was flattered by any students walking with him. He told me about Nietzsche: "Ah, he always had a big crowd!"

Cunningham: (Of course I don't know how many years ago that was. This man was an old man.)

The *diener* in the laboratory does not exist in American schools. He is an illiterate person. He's just a servant. He cleans up everything. You leave everything in a mess, and if you don't want him to take away your experiment you put a note on it. He doesn't do anything he shouldn't do; he never seemed to make any mistakes.

Daniel: You don't have to clean up your own mess?

Cunningham: You are not expected to. You are on some sort of higher plane.

Daniel: After you completed your course of study at the end of the year did you travel?

Cunningham: No.

While I was there I wrote a paper on the manufacture of platinum papers substituting lead salt for the platinum.

Daniel: How did you come to do this project?

Cunningham: My professor knew that I had learned platinum printing and that I was interested in that. He suggested to me that I make some platinum paper, and then some other paper without platinum, to see how it compared with the platinum paper. I'm sorry that I haven't kept any record of those things. I think that was a great mistake on my part. I don't even have the article. I wrote it in German and a Dane corrected it.

Daniel: In what publication did it appear?

Cunningham: It appeared in some German publication whose name I have forgotten. You know, I wasn't very egoistic, was I? It must have been that. I didn't think it was very important. It was the first time I had every earned money for anything like that in my life. I sent the manuscript to a photographic magazine and the postman came and paid me some real money; I think it was a little over ten marks, which was quite a little bit in those days.

Later, it was translated into English and published in an English yearbook, whose name I don't know, without my permission.

Daniel: Was this in the course of 1909?

Cunningham: That was in the spring of 1910.

I didn't keep any of the prints. Perhaps I began working on it before 1910, because during Christmas vacation when I went to Berlin to visit the girl that I went to Germany with, I photographed her and I made the print on the lead substitute for platinum. Of course I put the prints in the manuscript, but I don't think they were reproduced.

Daniel: What was the value of lead substitution?

Cunningham: Lead is a very inexpensive mineral compared with platinum. But it was never used commercially. Platinum is no longer made. I think we've come to want something different in the reproduction of the

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Cunningham: negative. We want more exactness. Platinum isn't too exact; it has a certain softness about it. I have a lot of platinum prints and I have sold a few to Eastman House.

Daniel: Is this a process which is no longer used?

Cunningham: Well, I wouldn't say that it isn't used, but I don't know where it is made. There was one great big factory in Germany and I visited that. It's called Jacoby platinum; it was on platinum paper that I learned to print all the Indian things for Curtis.

Daniel: Did you actually do the prints in his collected Indian prints?

Cunningham: Those are reproductions. They are on Van Gelder paper and they are photogravures, but I did the original print. I'm sorry I haven't any of them now. The Jacoby paper was coated on water color paper and it was rough . I'm not sure whether they used those to send away or whether they used something else. Besides I wouldn't say that I did them because I didn't arrive at his place until a good many of those books were already finished. They were published over a long period and were being done when I was there. I wasn't the only person working on them; many people must have.

Daniel: Back to Dresden: what was your couse of study in the spring?

Cunningham: Both semesters were somewhat alike except that we had to get up much earlier during the second

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Cunningham: semester; classes began at seven o'clock in the morning.

Daniel: How long did the school day last?

Cunningham: We'd get through about one o'clock and go home to dinner. In the afternoon we were supposed to have a nap. I never did.

Daniel: You studied after that?

Cunningham: Yes, and went to the theatre.

Daniel: I see. It doesn't sound too grueling.

Cunningham: Not at all. But I didn't have what anyone would call very much of a social life.

Our professor was really a very wonderful person. When I photographed him he said, "Now I want to do a mathematical problem in my mind, and when you think I've come to the point of greatest intensity of thought, take the picture then." I think his idea was a good one. Eastman House bought this print of Professor Luter in 1960.

Sometimes when people get embarrassed about being photographed I tell them to think about the nicest thing they know. I think that makes a difference. Some people don't think it does. Sometimes people think about nothing at all, and it's hard to get an interesting photograph.

Daniel: Luter, although he was a technician, had ideas useful in the non-technical aspects of portraiture.

Cunningham: That's right. I think he did.

Daniel: Did you do much photography in Dresden?

Cunningham: Very little. I have a few things that I did. One is a photograph of the main church; I have a large platinum print that I made from it after I came home. It was photographed on 5x7. I did a series of Luter. But I didn't do many people, not as I would now.

First of all, I had to count my pennies like everything; though material wasn't nearly as expensive as it is now, I still couldn't buy it, so I didn't do very much. If I went now I'd probably do hundreds of films.

Daniel: When you did pictures for people, did they pay the cost of materials?

Cunningham: No, not a thing.

Daniel: Portraits and architecture interested you?

Cunningham: Yes. I don't know how I got around with a 5x7 view; I certainly couldn't do it now.

Daniel: It's very large?

Cunningham: Well, it isn't easy. I had a little Kodak but I wasn't sure of it. A person who worked in the Curtis studio gave me that as a farewell gift. I remember I still have one thing that I did with that. It was the fountain at Trefalgar Square, London. I think I did it in June as I came back from Dresden.

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Vacation Travel

Daniel: Did you travel out of Dresden during your stay there?

Cunningham: Yes. At Christmas time my school closed before the Berlin school of my friend who had accompanied me to Germany. I visited her and went to a session or two. I believe that Benjamin Ide Wheeler was an exchange professor at that time. I didn't hear him. I had to take in what there was in the few days there were. But there were lots of interesting and amusing incidents at that time. There was an American student there who was from a theological school in America. He was trying to be so much like a German that the Americans there called him "German Varnish." He carried a cane. Whenever he sat in the streetcars he read a newspaper and always held it out full width in order to take up as much room as he possibly could. Whenever he went in front of anyone he always said, "Gestaten bitte." He pretended he was German. Everyone knew he was an American.

In the spring semester I did do a little traveling. I went to Munich. I had a choice. This I know won't shock you, but it might shock other people, because Oberammergau was extremely popular. When people were in Europe they went to Oberammergau. I didn't have any religious ideas. The girl with whom I went to Germany came down to Munich, and she and I kited around Munich for quite a while with a

Cunningham: third girl. She was a student from the Quaker college, Swarthmore. We went to the great big hofbräu there and she wouldn't take any drink, of course. We drank beer. It was the middle of a hot afternoon and I really got silly. I think I never had had any beer in my life. When we got out into the courtyard where there was a fountain, I said that I must find my cup. I said it was in my Baedecker. That set them both to laughing, because how can you have a cup in a Baedecker? Well, it was a flat paper cup! I found it and we all had a drink of water from the fountain. We really were giddy! The third girl, though, because she had promised her Quaker ancestors, wouldn't take a drop.

Then the two of them went to Oberammergau and I stayed in Munich because I felt that it was more important to me than seeing some peasant dressed up like Christ, and I said that.

Daniel: You decided in favor of the museums.

Cunningham: Oh, I remember the Spitzweg paintings and all the curious little paintings of that time that were so detailed, you know. A woman looking out of a window; every detail of it. And then, of course, at the Glyptotek there were the sculptures, a fantastic collection! Then I enjoyed the Deutsches Museum. That's where you see all the old tools of alchemy.

Cunningham: At that time you could look through yourself in a fluoroscope. That was kind of remarkable; now they wouldn't have it. I wonder sometimes if that radiation business isn't exaggerated a little, because I suppose the few minutes it takes to look through yourself and have a little fun looking at your "innards" doesn't hurt you any. I remember, too, that I was immensely interested in a laboratory that was supposed to represent alchemy in the Middle Ages.

Daniel: What did you think of what you saw in the museums?

Cunningham: You have to remember that I couldn't have been very critical, never having seen anything much before. My whole standard was based on what I had seen on the way over, in London. You see, having gone from Montreal, I had never been in New York. I learned as I went and I hadn't seen any great museums, ever. Everything was quite wonderful to me.

When I was in Dresden the Raphael Madonna was the thing that everybody came to see. I don't care very much for Raphael now. When I went there I used to stand and look at the people looking at it. It was unbelievable how the peasant type of person would just come and gaze; it was more worshipful of the meaning of the painting than it was appreciation of the painting itself. There were huge Correggios in that Dresden Museum, too. And then the Dutch were

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Cunningham: well represented. I enjoyed them.

I certainly couldn't have been as critical then as I am now about anything; I think other people weren't either. The period was less critical. Of course there are always a few iconoclasts about everything, and there were certain things that were not accepted. It wasn't very long after that that the Dadaists began, was it? They certainly were not accepted at once.

I don't remember any modern show in Dresden in 1909 and 1910. I never saw a Feininger, Klee, Kandinsky; I didn't see any of those painters when I was there. What I saw was Winslow Homer and another American painter who was just sleek and beautiful.

There was a big show--I think it was in Munich--at that very time, of modern American paintings, but I didn't see any French. I think that's been pretty typical of Germany for many years. They cut the French out. Later on, of course, they were. But in the twenties they were not accepted.

Daniel: What about your photographing when you went to Munich?

Cunningham: I don't remember doing anything. I really had so little time. I didn't do anything until I got to London, and I had very little of that. I went home by way of Paris. I stayed a week in Paris.

RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

Cunningham: In June I left and went to Paris. That week in Paris was a great salvation. I was in Paris on the fourteenth of July, which is Bastille Day, and there was dancing in the streets and a big parade in the Bois de Boulogne. I was near enough to the king and queen of the Belgians to see them very, very closely. They drove through the park in a procession. I don't know how I managed to do all that. Also I stood in line that day to get a seat in the opera house for _Aïda_ for free.

Daniel: How did you happen to get a free seat?

Cunningham: They were given to the hoi polloi. All you had to do was to stand all night to get it. Instead of standing all night, we paid somebody. The people who really stood in line all night did so with the idea of selling their places, so we paid one franc and got in.

Daniel: Oh, good heavens!

Cunningham: Yes, it was a horrible idea that anybody who would have stood as long as they had to stand would sell his place for a franc!

Daniel: How much could you buy for a franc then?

Cunningham: I don't remember, but it must have been a good deal. A franc was about twenty cents in our money at that time, and a mark was about twenty-five. The

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Cunningham: one place that I do remember what I paid for living was in Leipzig. I was in a most elegant pension for six marks a day, which would be $1.50. I don't remember what I paid in Paris, but it was a kind of schoolteachers' pension.

I remember Paris quite well. I photographed quite a bit there.

Daniel: What did you do?

Cunningham: Versailles with my little Kodak. After I got home I enlarged those things to 8x10 and made platinum prints because I thought it was necessary to make platinum prints. I have none of that stuff now.

Daniel: And what did you do besides Versailles?

Cunningham: That's about all. I can't remember. I apparently wasn't very--maybe I didn't have any more material, you know. It could be that I couldn't find anything to fit the thing because I can't remember now why I didn't do more of everything everywhere. I didn't do any photographs on the steamers. I haven't any Kodak snaps of my friends. That's strange!

The other day a woman brought me two snapshots that were done of me and her mother, and the other one was her mother and her father in Dresden when they visited me in the spring of 1910. I don't remember it at all. I must have done them, but I don't remember it. Well, I imagine there are many things you don't remember. I used to think that I

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Cunningham: remembered practically everything, and all the people that I've ever photographed. But now I'm sure that I don't. Not long ago someone reminded me of having photographed her when she was seven years old, but I have no recollection of it. It's like school friends who come bursting into the house and say, "I knew you in the eighth grade." I don't think it's a very kind thing to do, myself.

Daniel: Probably not.

You went from Paris to where?

Cunningham: To London again, and from London I went to Liverpool and sailed from there just as I had the first time. Only on the return I was on a ship that went to Philadelphia. That was the biggest shock of my life because I had never been in a big United States city. I must say that the docks are in a very strange place there, very unattractive. I thought, "Oh my, this really is the back door of the whole United States!" I don't know whether it's that way now or not, but I suspect it is the same.

I was overpowered by the effect of being in the harbor of Liverpool when I left for the shores of America. I can't remember the name of the little ship I was on. In the harbor of Liverpool there were the two largest steamships of their line,

Cunningham: the "Leviathan" and the "Titanic," and they were both like seeing a great big skyscraper sitting on top of water. They looked huge. I don't know why I remember it this way, but the water came practically up to the top of the dock, and then these ships sitting up there so huge, quite a little way away from where I was, it was overpowering.

Then when we did get to Philadelphia--I've been reading a book now called The Exploding Metropolis, which says that when you arrive in any American city by train or by boat you are coming in the back way. Well, that's what affected me so terrifically. I was shocked by it because the Seattle harbor, the only one that I had ever seen at the time, was really not unattractive. It's a little bit more like San Francisco. It was all docks. And this Philadelphia harbor was just plain dingy, a real slum area. Maybe that's not uncommon, but it affected me very much, and to think that I've remembered it all these years! I've never seen Philadelphia since. I'm sorry I didn't go in 1956.

Daniel: Western cities seem much cleaner. They haven't been under a layer of coal smoke for as many years as a lot of the eastern cities.

Cunningham: Well, of course that is true, but Seattle is very dingy from that standpoint. It is a sooty city.

Cunningham: Perhaps it didn't look that way to me before I left because I had nothing to compare it with, but whenever I've been back there I've been very impressed by the dinginess of the downtown district, especially the part that is being given up, you know, around Yesler Square and where the totem pole is. That was the main center fifty years ago; now the main center has gone north.

I remember I wandered around the streets of Philadelphia and photographed Betsy Ross House, and then went to New York.

Daniel: Where did you stay in New York and for how long?

Cunningham: I don't remember how long I was there. I remember an old school friend met me and took me to dinner. Oh, yes, I know where I lived then. I lived at the Pi Phi house at Columbia University. Some woman was running the house to pay the rent. She had breakfast and dinner included, and I know I paid very little. So I would eat two bananas on Union Square, or any place I happened to be at noon. I knew New York quite thoroughly all the way from Columbia University to the Battery.

Stieglitz

Daniel: Did you go to the Stieglitz place?

Cunningham: Yes, 291 Fifth Avenue. I'm sure that in 1934 when I visited him again he didn't remember my first visit.

Daniel: You met him?

Cunningham: Oh yes, we had many conversations.

Daniel: What were the circumstances of your meeting him?

Cunningham: This 291 Fifth Avenue was his gallery.

Daniel: Was there a continuous exhibit there?

Cunningham: Well, it changed, of course. But he always had something on the wall, and for the life of me, I can't be sure whose work was on the wall at that time. I think it was Marius de Zayas.

Daniel: Did he seem to you to be a very important person in photography in this country?

Cunningham: Oh, he was the one person who exhibited photographs. He was brave enough to try to have photographs in a gallery for sale. There is almost no such person, even today. There are few such galleries. There was one in New York in 1956, and I made the acquaintance of two young people who had one on West 84th. It has vanished. A man by the name of Julian Levy had one in the twenties. I don't know what happened to it. He didn't return any of the photographs of mine that he had at the time. I'm sure he just put them in the ashcan.

The Limelight has exhibitions from time to time that they attempt to sell, but they don't work

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Cunningham: at it. That's, as far as I know, almost the only place anywhere in the United States which makes an attempt to show, like a private art gallery. Of course Eastman House has, and the Museum of Modern Art has a show from time to time, not all the time. Someone started up something like that out here in 1960. I was dismal about it. It failed the same year it started.

Daniel: At 291 Stieglitz had photographs on exhibit and for sale?

Cunningham: Yes, I presume they were. I couldn't have been a purchaser, but I'm sure they were. When did you say he started the gallery?

Daniel: In 1905.

Cunningham: But he didn't start the publication until much later than that, did he?

Daniel: He started publication in 1902. This is a comment that's made in the American Journal of Photography, which was called Photo Era in the issue which came out in January, 1903. It says:

> The year 1902 will go down into history as a period of transition in art photography in America. The previous year saw the breaking away of a large number of prominent workers from the rank and file and in 1902 that movement was crystalized in an organization known as "The Photo Secession".....
>
> A large portion of the year 1902 was given up to waiting for this publication. [Camera Work]. There was a general feeling of suspense in the photographic world throughout the entire year, and a half-audible feeling on the part of those not in the movement

Daniel: that it would be unwise to move forward along any well-defined lines until it was known how far the Secession movement was going.

Under such circumstances, it is not strange that nothing of much note was accomplished during the year, but when Camera Work appeared at last, it brought with it such an air of absolute finality that there is no longer any reason for suspense.

True, the nature of the Secession movement is not set forth in so many words, but reading between the lines and more especially when read in the light of the editor's recent article in another magazine wherein he stated that he was not at liberty to disclose the innermost workings of the organization, it is clear that the movement is a most exclusive one, and the organization itself one which requires the applicant for membership to imply pledges which would be most repugnant to those progressive and truly independent American workers who are not already on this roll of art.

Cunningham: Well, as a matter of fact, I think Stieglitz was the motivator of the whole thing, and if he had very strange ideas about who could belong, it would be just a very personal one, and he could be like that because he was a frightfully dictatorial person. He ran everything that he had anything to do with.

Daniel: Stieglitz wrote an article in October, 1902, which appeared in the Century magazine.

Cunningham: I think I have seen that.

After the Secession, an organization called the Pictorialists of America made its appearance.

Daniel: Was it different from the Secession?

Cunningham: Well, I don't know that it was meant to be. The

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Cunningham: Secession hadn't gone anywhere. I belonged to the Pictorialists. I never belonged to the Secession because it sort of vanished by the time I was ready to belong to anything.

Daniel: What did Stieglitz mean when he said in his article on the Secession: "It battled vigorously for the establishment of newer and higher standards and is at present doing everything possible still farther to free the art from the trammels of conventionality and to encourage greater individuality."?

Cunningham: Well, you see, those things are just talk. This sort of thing goes on in every era. People want to do something that is better, but they don't, necessarily, do anything better. In fact, photography has become decadent during all this time. If you ask me who is the greatest Pictorialist or the greatest portrayer of people, it was one of the first men, D. O. Hill. So you see we haven't improved even with all our great facilities. So that's just kind of a newsman's talk.

In some issues of the old Camera Work you get some tremendous articles. There was one man by the name of Benjamin De Casseres, who was full of theories. I'll get out some of that stuff if you want to look at it.

Daniel: Stieglitz talked about showing photographs with paintings and statuary: "In the spring of the

Daniel: present year the painters and sculptors of the Vienna Secession likewise threw open their exhibition to photography, allowing photographs to be submitted to the jury's selection on the same terms as paintings, drawings, statuary, and other examples of individual artistic expression."

Cunningham: They don't do it now. The San Francisco Art Association doesn't.

Daniel: Apparently Steichen got into the Paris Salon along with his paintings.

Cunningham: He was a student there, you see. He became interested in photography afterwards.

Daniel: Stieglitz mentioned color, saying, "He [the photographer] can introduce color or such combinations of color by means of successive printing similar to those resorted to in lithography so as to produce almost any effect that his taste, skill, and knowledge may dictate."

Cunningham: That refers to what I think is known as bromoil, or some such practice that is now not considered good taste. There were several tints. It wasn't like our color photography now.

Daniel: This passage about individual prints as creative works is interesting:

> This fact has special significance for the collector. The Brussels and Dresden art galleries were among the first to realize the individual quality and value of the pictorial photograph as original artistic creation, and have for some years thus

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Daniel: been purchasing examples for their permanent art collection. Large prices are frequently paid for choice prints; as much as three hundred dollars having been refused for a picture exhibited this year at the National Arts Club of New York."

Cunningham: When was this?

Daniel: This was written in 1902.

Cunningham: It sounds very much like 1902. It's absolutely all in the junk heap now. Nobody prints that way now except a lot of phonies that belong to the camera clubs. I had one that I did very early that I submitted to Eastman and they didn't even take it. It's gum bichromate. It's kind of a mess, and it doesn't show what's in the negative. That's very, very dated. It has little value. It isn't as good a method as platinum. Platinum still has a certain integrity and still can be considered quite beautiful.

You know, it's strange that Eastman House wouldn't have everything that's ever been written on this Photo Secession subject. Possibly it has. But you know, I think that when things start like the f/64 group, they don't think of it's being at all important.

Daniel: There was an article by Sadakichi-Hartman called the "Photo Secession."

Cunningham: Oh, I knew him. He lived in San Francisco. He knew Bruguiere, and I knew Bruguiere when I first came to San Francisco. I don't think Sadakichi-

Cunningham: Hartman was a photographer. I think he was a writer, one of the great, oh what do you call it--you might say "phonies" of his time. He was a very opinionated person, an insincere and strange man. He was part Japanese and part German. He was more Japanese than German in looks, except that he was very tall.

Stieglitz started the Photo Secession. It was his own idea; it was precious, and it excluded certain kinds of people.

It was the same way with the Pictorialists of America.

Daniel: I haven't been able to find out what kind of people he meant to exclude.

Cunningham: I think I know just from instinct what kind he meant to exclude. For instance, there always have been just millions of photographers, and I have taken it upon myself to call them, in San Francisco, the "Market Street" or "Powell Street photographers." That means all of these people who blow things up to a tremendous size and retouch all the reality out of them. That is not really photography.

Daniel: This evaluation has nothing to do with subject matter.

Cunningham: No, I wouldn't say that it has, except that it mainly applies to people because they are the subjects. You don't do that to trees and oceans.

Cunningham: You know they don't take everything out of a tree. They put everything in.

Daniel: These are the commercial photographers.

Cunningham: Well, commercial, yes. The other day I insulted a colleague of mine by speaking of him as being commercial. And he said, "Oh no, I'm not."

"Don't you take money for it?"

"Yes."

"That's what I call commercial," I said.

Well, theoretically that is, but he specified that "commercial" meant photographing a chair or furniture or a stool, but not people.

It isn't a good term. It has lost its meaning. When I grew up, I think that was the way practically every studio--they were called galleries--did business.

Daniel: The kind of thing that Stieglitz wanted to minimize.

Cunningham: He didn't want to minimize it; he just didn't want to have anything to do with it. You see, he went in for doing things as he saw them. It was quite interesting.

Daniel: Now we have an idea of what he meant to exclude from his group. What do you think he meant to include? It would be interesting to consider what he meant to develop.

Cunningham: I can't say that I know what he meant to develop. It's funny I wasn't smart enough to talk to him about any of that. You see, I should have made

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Cunningham: a little inquiry. Now Dorothy Norman, who was taken to him to be photographed when she was fifteen (this I gathered from my visit to her), became a terrific devotee of him and his work. She might have some idea, although she comes into the picture later than the actual Photo Secession.

He did mean to secede from banality, I would say.

Daniel: This meant not pursuing things in a mediocre way--using imagination.

Cunningham: That's right.

I think that with a movement of that sort, one is not conscious of whether it is going to be important or not at the time. Stieglitz was the complete motivator of it. He always had the idea of using photography as a medium of expression, and he always had his favorites, and showed a few people the same way he did in his gallery, you know. He had just a few people like Dove, and of course O'Keeffe. The gallery was filled with a few people he thought were great painters.

It's really difficult to talk about prices on things that are apt to be mentioned, a bichromate being sold for three hundred dollars. Stieglitz put a terrific price on his stuff when he wanted to. He was the one who boosted the price of O'Keeffe, too, and made her precious. He had a

Cunningham: way of doing that. She didn't have to sell, so she wouldn't sell until someone paid the price.

Daniel: Was his gallery, at the time you first visited him, the most important in the country?

Cunningham: Oh, I don't think you can ever make that kind of a statement about anything. You mean when it was photographic? It was the only one, you might say.

Daniel: Did you go there because you were curious or because you thought it was a wonderful place?

Cunningham: Well, a little bit of both. Of course I don't think I was conscious of the fact that there was not anybody else doing it, because you know when you are in a thing that is sort of new, you don't think about how new it is. And I just knew that New York is a great city and here's a man who has a gallery where you can see people's photographs, so naturally you go to see them because there wasn't anywhere near the amount of stuff printed as there is now, you know that.

Daniel: How did you know about his place and how did you know about him?

Cunningham: That's what I don't know. I don't remember how.

Daniel: Did you see his magazine?

Cunningham: Oh, no, I hadn't at that time. Well, I might have at that, because I might have seen it in a public library. It was very expensive and I didn't buy it until I came back. There were just four numbers

Cunningham: a year. I think I have the issues from 1910 or 1911 to 1917. I have some earlier ones that a man from New York sent me at one time.

Daniel: What is the value of Camera Work?

Cunningham: I think it's the most important contribution to reproduction photography that has ever been done.

Daniel: Ever?

Cunningham: Oh, ever, anywhere, not excepting a magazine like Du of Switzerland or any of the photographic magazines that are current today, because at the time at which it was published there was nothing so far as I know that was of any esthetic beauty. It is beautifully done. It was just too extravagant. Well, I suppose in a way it might have been the war that made it cease publication. The United States went into the first World War, and very likely the subscription fell off, you know, in 1917.

Daniel: What did it mean to you at the time you saw it?

Cunningham: Oh, I really studied it avidly and was tremendously interested in it, and read every word. I entertained my friends with an article written by Gertrude Stein that was called "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Corona," and nobody could understand it. So I'd read it out loud to them and read it out loud and read it out loud until they finally conceded a certain understanding.

Cunningham: I loved New York on that first visit. I didn't investigate it, though, as much as I have since. I don't remember not liking the crowded conditions. I thought it was all very picturesque. I ate my two bananas for lunch every day in something like Union Square and thought nothing of it.

Daniel: There were other things that claimed your attention.

Cunningham: That was the point. I didn't have much time and I wasn't as conscious of recording it as I should have been, I would say now.

Daniel: Did you feel that you had come to an important center as far as your work was concerned?

Cunningham: As a matter of fact, my ideas about photography and what was being done with photography adhered more nearly to the American stuff than to any foreign stuff, and after I was abroad I felt the same. The people whose work I saw in the 1909 show at Dresden, the ones that I liked the best, were some of them from America, and the one that I remember the most vividly, Baron de Meyer, came to America later and remained here.

So you see I always thought that America had more and I still think it has. Of course we have a lot of very prominent European people who have come up in this day of quick photography; people

Cunningham: like Cartier- Bresson, Haas, Doisneau, Brassai.

Daniel: Did you feel that you were being deprived because you were working in the Far West?

Cunningham: I don't think I knew how stupid we all were. I think I felt we were just tops.

Daniel: You think you were stupid?

Cunningham: No, I think that as a matter of fact, the one photographic place that I got into was as advanced as anything in the United States except what Stieglitz, himself, made. If I had been in New York I don't know whether I would have gotten in with the Stieglitz cult or not. He was very nice to me.

Daniel: You didn't yearn to stay, in other words?

Cunningham: Not at all. I didn't have any idea of staying. I don't know why that was. I suppose I was afraid of New York.

Daniel: At this same time a San Francisco magazine about photography spoke with great pride of the western work.

Cunningham: And the words were worth nothing; the work was trash...I needn't be quite so vivid about it... that magazine was Camera Craft and I knew all those people. But Camera Craft has never been a terribly good magazine. To me it more nearly represents, at least in the last few years, the attitude of the camera clubs.

Daniel: The issues in the early part of the century attract

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Daniel: attention because there weren't many publications.

Cunningham: Not at that time. They were better than they would be now. In relation to other things that were being done, they were better. But the awards that people got were unimportant.

Daniel: Do you think there is a fashion in what receives awards from time to time?

Cunningham: I imagine it's not any more so in photography than it is in painting, for one thing.

Daniel: No, I'm not putting it in this context.

Cunningham: Well, it's right in with whoever is the jury. Oh, I've seen it so many times! It's a very personal thing. It really doesn't mean much of anything. I don't think it does, but maybe I'm wrong. That Camera Craft, of course, made a great stir in its own way.

I don't think that I was smart enough to think New York needed me, or that I could cope with it. It never occurred to me that I could handle New York. I kept thinking all the time that I had to be near somebody I knew who could lend me this or that. It was financial, mainly. I didn't have any money.

When I got through with my trip and arrived in Seattle, I had twelve dollars in my pocket and no place to live. I think now that if I had stayed in New York I would have done all right. In 1934 I

Cunningham: wanted a job in New York and it was not difficult at all to find one.

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SEATTLE

Return to Seattle

Daniel: Did you go straight on to Seattle from New York?

Cunningham: No, I didn't. I went to Southern California and visited a friend who had been a classmate in school. I stayed a couple of weeks.

Daniel: How did you go, by what route?

Cunningham: I went all the way by railroad, stopping off in Washington, D. C. to visit a sister who was working there as a nurse.

I bought a Magnolia grandiflora at the Arlington cemetery. The stock was taken from a tree that George Washington had planted, or something like that. Mind you, all the way across the continent I paid someone on the train to water and take care of that plant. I remember that it arrived in San Francisco in good condition and it went with me to my father's ranch in Sonoma County. It was in a gallon can, so it was a pretty sizeable tree I was carrying around. And if you knew how hard it was to get to Sonoma County from San Francisco! I liked this plant very much and I thought it would be wonderful on the ranch, but it died later

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Cunningham: because my father relocated it.

Portrait Studio on "First Hill"

Daniel: After visiting your father you continued on to Seattle and got yourself back to work?

Cunningham: Yes. I went to Seattle and I had a tremendously interesting encounter with a woman by the name of Mrs. Andrews. She had a little cottage that she had fixed into a studio. It was in the apartment house district about two blocks from a big hotel, and had lots of old residences. It was what they call "first hill" and was a remnant of ancient splendor. The building was an old farmhouse. There was an orchard around the property, which covered about a quarter of a block. There were two other little shacks on it. Mrs. Andrews had done quite a little to revive one. She built herself a studio in the country.

She was a painter and the wife of a banker. I don't know why, but I just happened to mention to a painter friend of mine by the name of Jessie Fiskin, long since dead, that I was looking for a place. Jessie was a Scottish woman, and one of the very sweet and wonderful little dabblers with water color. She said, "Oh, Mrs. Andrews would love to have someone take her studio."

Cunningham: I went to see Mrs. Andrews and got it for ten dollars a month. I arrived early in September, and it didn't take me two weeks to begin business for myself.

Daniel: What kind of business did you go after?

Cunningham: Well, I didn't have to go after it. It just came.

Daniel: Why?

Cunningham: First of all, the place was singularly attractive.

Daniel: Were people having lots of photographs taken?

Cunningham: Everybody had photographs taken, and they'd order them. They don't do it now. At that time people would have their whole families, separately and together. They never fussed about anything. I used a 5x7 camera to begin with, which was a real drawback.

Daniel: Why?

Cunningham: It's difficult to handle, and of course the light and the speed of the film and everything. Well, there were many drawbacks to it if you compare it with now. You just wonder how you ever managed, but we did.

I'm sure there were lots of commercial photographers who did the big flashlight on a pan, you know, but I didn't go in for that kind of thing. I went in for doing people naturalistically. In fact, I photographed many a bride coming down her stairway in her own house shortly after she was

Cunningham: married or something like that. There was a superstition that you should not take them before the wedding, you know.

Daniel: Were there many photographers in Seattle?

Cunningham: Oh yes, there were. And there was still this great big studio where I had studied. There was plenty of business for everybody. I'm sure there was. It was the fall of 1910.

I don't ever remember feeling neglected or forgotten or injured or anything. I had a great many who came to me from the navy. They were across the bay, you know, at Bremerton, and then Fort Lawton was on the north side of Seattle. I can't remember why Fort Lawton people came to me. Somebody told somebody.

Daniel: You had an immense clientele.

Cunningham: Oh, I photographed pretty near all society at some time or another.

Daniel: What kind of money did you make?

Cunningham: Oh, I made enough to live on. I wouldn't say that I made a lot of money. I guess I was a little bit on the lazy side too. I liked to do a lot of things myself.

Daniel: What were you photographing?

Cunningham: For myself? I'll show you some of those things some time. I liked to photograph people in the nude in strange and difficult situations, like standing around in pools of water--regular "September

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Cunningham: Morn" stuff, you know.

Daniel: That's interesting. What tempted you to do this? Was it stylish to do this at this time?

Cunningham: Oh, I think it was, yes. I don't think I was any innovator.

Daniel: "September Morn" was very popular. The San Francisco Fair showed it in 1915.

Cunningham: Well, I don't think I had seen it. Anyway, when I began, I hadn't seen "September Morn." I remember paying a whole family as models, a man and his wife and child. All these things were reproduced in a local paper, called the Town Crier, and I have some copies of it somewhere.

There was one man who wrote a terrific tirade on my stuff as being very vulgar; that I should be run out of town, and so forth.

Daniel: Did the paper publish prints of your nudes?

Cunningham: Yes, but the man who wrote a very harsh criticism was on another paper. It didn't make a single bit of difference in my business. Nobody thought worse of me.

John Paul Edwards

Cunningham: There is one man, John Paul Edwards, who is now in Oakland. He has ceased being a still photographer; his way of earning a living was as a buyer for a big store. When I came back to Seattle in 1910, I

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Cunningham: discovered that John Paul Edwards was the motivator of an organization in California whose members sent prints to each other. That is, you belonged to it and you sent your stuff in a group. We sent our stuff everywhere. Well, I must say that what I did at that time, and what Edwards did at that time, all of it is terrifically dated. Some of it was as good as almost anything that was being done.

In that organization I became a very good, what you might call, pen pal of John Paul Edwards. Afterwards, when I came down here, I became very well acquainted with him. When I was in New York in 1934 he was just back from a trip to Europe and we had many, many good times together seeing things, doing things. He is now what people call a "rosarian." I don't know where they get that word, but that means a person who cultivates and studies the rose. [Laughter]

Daniel: I see. It's not a religious cult.

Cunningham: No, it's not. And in his front yard he has--I wouldn't dare quote the number of varieties of roses in it! His photography is mainly moving pictures of the progress of the rose. So he has a very nice avocation. I don't think he ever made his living with photography, but he was very good in his day. I hate to speak of anybody's being "good in his day;" someone might say the same of me! I think

Cunningham: I'm as good as I ever was. I don't know whether that is true or not, but I remember that someone said to my sister, "Your sister has had a very interesting life, hasn't she!"

She said, "Why use the past tense?"

And of course I do have an interesting life, but every time I think I'm slipping I try to find out why. All of us have to slip some of the time. You can't be good all of the time!

Seattle Fine Arts Society

Cunningham: Also at that same time I became a member of what is known as the Seattle Fine Arts Society.

Daniel: Who was in it?

Cunningham: Oh, they were all <u>the</u> people of Seattle.

Daniel: What do you mean by <u>the</u> people? The people with money?

Cunningham: Aren't they always <u>the</u> people?

Daniel: I don't know.

Cunningham: [Laughter] Where have you been?

Daniel: Were they people with esthetic interest uppermost?

Cunningham: If you take the museums in San Francisco, the Ladies' Auxiliary, or whatever they call the people who run it, they are almost always people of means, and they also may have some taste, and they may have some interest in art. But in Seattle I

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Cunningham: remember I thought some of the people who belonged to it were extraordinary. There were young architects, doctors' wives (seldom the doctors, unless they were dragged along. Doctors are not usually terribly keen on the esthetic. They have too much to do.) I have a history of the Fine Arts Society which includes information about its membership.

Daniel: What motive stimulated the group?

Cunningham: I think it was altruistic. It wasn't anything at all for themselves. What they did was for the benefit of the city, I think.

Perhaps you remember the name of Mr. Torrey of Vickery, Atkins & Torrey. That's a very famous old firm in San Francisco. (Personally I like to think that the history of San Francisco is extremely interesting in spite of what someone wrote to Herb Caen. He wrote an article on it in last Sunday's Chronicle. Did you read that? I thought that was a very good column, and I disagree with that woman, because I feel that the history of the city is something that is not a trend. It's a permanent interest and we ought to appreciate it.) Well, that is really what happened in Seattle. I think Mr. Torrey was very instrumental in getting people interested in the arts. He traveled up and down the coast carrying collections with him. I remember that his shows were always in a department store

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Cunningham: on First and Madison, which is a dingy quarter now, the great emporium called McDougall-Southwick. Later, they were held in Frederick and Nelson at Second and Madison. That's where we saw his stuff.

Daniel: Why did he exhibit there?

Cunningham: There were no other places to exhibit.

Daniel: The items on display could be bought?

Cunningham: They were for sale, naturally.

Daniel: What kind of things did he show? Was there any Oriental art?

Cunningham: Of course, at one time he brought a great many Japanese prints. That happened to be one of his great hobbies. In fact, he made a big collection for some people in Portland, who later sold it. I don't know where it went.

But, anyway, in Seattle he sold a great many prints. I knew a man by the name of Dr. Edgars who bought a lot of them. Edgars was a member of the society, too.

Daniel: This was also an age of interest in medieval art. Stone effigies began to appear in museums.

Cunningham: I don't remember his having anything as valuable as that. I can remember water colors. I don't think he ever brought anything that was a highly valuable medieval thing, in the early days. I mean in the early 1900's.

He was a dealer and he was a very intelligent

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Cunningham: dealer. You know, in 1913 I saw him in his home here in Berkeley. The stairway went up about three steps and there was a platform, and then the stairway turned and went up the other way, and in this space he had the "Nude Descending the Stairs." I asked, "Oh, Mr. Torrey, why ever did you buy that?"

And he said, "I'm keeping it until the day I need it."

He bought it in 1912 at the big exhibition in New York City. In 1913 I saw it and I don't remember what year he sold it, but do you know to whom he sold it? The Arnsbergs. And I saw it there in nineteen-thirty-something. That collection went to Philadelphia.

Daniel: Did the Fine Arts Society have exhibits?

Cunningham: They did. The first exhibits that they had were small.

Daniel: Where did they show these things?

Cunningham: At first in the public library; later we rented an upstairs room in an office building. That was the beginning of the Fine Arts Society.

Daniel: What was in the first exhibits that you had?

Cunningham: They were mostly prints. I think Japanese prints owned by many members.

Daniel: Do you think this would reflect the taste of the period?

Cunningham: It doesn't completely reflect the taste. It reflects what you can come by. If you liked some one person's

Cunningham: work you could write to that person and say, "Will you send an exhibition?" That often was done.

When the Roi Partridge exhibition was there it sold enormously because he was a hometown boy. I don't think that was the only reason. Mr. Torrey introduced him to Seattle, his own town, and Torrey had bought Partridge in Paris in 1910. Anything that Torrey had was all right.

Daniel: The exhibits depended on who was doing what and what you could get.

Cunningham: Yes, and there were some local people, too, who were shown. I remember a man who was a water colorist, whose work we put on show. I'm sure he hasn't gone anywhere. A painter, Paul Guston, whose work we showed, hasn't changed one single bit in fifty years. His things look like ice cream cones labeled "Mt. Rainier" or "Mt. Hood."

Daniel: Did the society exhibit photography?

Cunningham: I don't remember the Fine Arts Society ever having a photographic show as long as I was there, and they have never invited me to exhibit.

The Metropolitan of New York, though, collected photography from an early time, but I didn't really know about it until 1953, so they never invited me.

Daniel: In 1910 had the Fine Arts Society only recently been organized?

Cunningham: It was 1906 or 1908, I think. I was one of the original members.

Daniel: Did you spend much time working with this group?

Cunningham: Not until I came back from abroad. Before, I just went to the meetings. At first we didn't have a meeting place. We met around in people's homes. The reason I can so vividly remember about that is that one time my father insisted on calling for me as if I were still a child. Nobody does that for a young woman nowadays.

Daniel: Was this mostly a middle-aged group?

Cunningham: I won't say they were mostly middle-aged because I remember one house we met in, the house of Manson Backus, whose niece was a graduate of Wells. He was a banker and Mrs. Backus had been a professor at Wells College in Aurora, New York (established too, by the way, by Wells of Wells Fargo). It always seems strange to remember that, but it's true. Her niece came out from New York and visited her and she was very active in the society.

Daniel: How long did you have your studio?

Cunningham: I arrived in 1910 and I gave it up in August, 1917.

Daniel: Did you do about the same kind of work during all the time you had your studio?

Cunningham: Always, pretty nearly: children, people, and then fooling around for myself.

Daniel: Why did you leave Seattle and where did you go?

Cunningham: It's a long and difficult story.

Marriage to Roi Partridge

Cunningham: Do you think I dare tell a big family story now?

Daniel: Why not?

Cunningham: I credit it to my son who is always so well spoken. Someone asked him, "How shall I introduce your mother: as Mrs. Cunningham or Mrs. Partridge?"

Ron replied, "Well, when we are present you had better introduce her as Mrs. Partridge. It makes us seem less like bastards."

Daniel: [Laughter] That's a nice story. When did you marry?

Cunningham: In February, 1915.

Daniel: And whom did you marry and what was he doing?

Cunningham: I married Roi Partridge. He was an etcher and had just come back from Paris in 1914. He was thrown out because of the war.

Daniel: How long had he been in Paris?

Cunningham: He had been in Eurppe since 1909. He had left Seattle by the same little railroad station, and practically at the same time that I did--1909--when I went to Europe. He studied first in Munich, and then he went to Paris.

Daniel: What about his training before he went? Did you know him?

Cunningham: I didn't. My father knew his father, but I didn't know him.

Daniel: Where had he been doing his work?

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Cunningham: He studied with all sorts of people who taught every kind of thing. When he first left in 1909, he didn't go to Munich. He went to New York, where he studied at the National Academy, and with someone who is a very famous sculptor now, William Zorach. Zorach's name was Finklestein then. After he married he changed his name. He and his wife made up their minds that they didn't like either of their names. Hers was Thompson and his Finklestein, and they just made up Zorach. They were in Paris together from 1909 to 1914.

You know, about a year and a half ago I had both the Zorachs and Roi at my studio, and Zorach was so intrigued by the photographs of their time in Paris that Roi brought that night! Zorach just adored himself! "Look," he said to me, "couldn't you copy this one for me?"

I didn't undertake that, but Zorach was a very handsome young boy. Oh, the stories they told!

Zorach was so proud of the photographs Roi had done of him. It was just Kodak stuff, but actually they were all good-looking kids. I don't know when they went to Europe, but they went at the same time.

Zorach did not go to Munich. I know that Roi did because he studied etching there and went to Paris. He wouldn't have come home in 1914 if there hadn't been a war. But before that time I had sold

Cunningham: a lot of his stuff.

Daniel: How did you sell it?

Cunningham: By having an afternoon tea party and showing it.

Daniel: How did you become interested in doing this?

Cunningham: Well, this was after the Fine Arts Society had a show. By that time, you see, there was a girl sharing my studio who was a friend of Roi's mother, so the mother and I were very well acquainted then. The show with the Fine Arts Society netted him enough to live on for another year.

One afternoon I had the navy in for tea. They were just tickled. (I had more time then for afternoon tea parties than I have now. I don't know why, perhaps because now I haven't the nerve to ask people to come to tea because it's such an interruption of the day's work. I only ask them to dinner and I have no time for dinner, so I never invite them at all.) Seattle was great on tea parties, and you just do what people are doing around you. We are all sort of victims of our time.

Daniel: You sold Roi's etchings?

Cunningham: Yes, and I must say that I'm more effective as a letter writer than I am as a personality to meet, because it was my letters and I suppose the big checks that---

Daniel: You corresponded directly with him?

Cunningham: Yes, it made it more interesting.

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Daniel: He came back in 1914?

Cunningham: Yes, in the fall of 1914, and we were married in February of 1915, perhaps too hastily. We went on working. He got a studio next door. We had two studios then. He had his etching studio and I had mine.

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CALIFORNIA: CHILDREN AND MOVE TO SAN FRANCISCO

Cunningham: Then about 1917--well, I shouldn't tell you all the misfortunes that happened to me, but they were the things that made me move, in a way.

Daniel: Your child didn't stop your photography?

Cunningham: Only for a few months. Gryffyd was born near Christmas of 1915. In the spring of 1916 I came to California and stayed just for a couple of months at my father's. Then I went back and had business galore.

In 1916, after I went back, I got a mother's helper, who was a poor, sad, maladjusted girl about sixteen and she set a fire in my studio when I was away and rescued the baby. She did that three times: once when Roi was away on a sketching trip up on Whidby Island; the second time when he was in Carmel; the third time when he was also in California. A supervisor in the fire department said, "Well, I have recommended this maid of yours be investigated."

"When did you think of that?" I asked.

"At the first fire."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Mind you, here I was so pregnant I couldn't bend over, and he hadn't told me. So I made up my mind to quit. I just decided I would clean up the studio and

Cunningham: I'd quit. The man who owned the building was a great friend of my father's.

Daniel: This was not the Andrews property.

Cunningham: No, no, it was the same property but she didn't own it and long since I had been paying them money through the man who built the Coleman dock, Lawrence Coleman, who was a very, very important old-timer in Seattle. He did everything for me--of course he had insurance--but he did everything about redoing that building. I don't know where I got the tenant. I can't remember. I rented it and bought myself a ticket and came to San Francisco.

Daniel: Where was Mr. Partridge?

Cunningham: He was in Carmel.

Daniel: When had he come?

Cunningham: He had left that spring for Carmel. I told you that this gal always took an occasion when he was away from home. Well, he was at Carmel where he had several friends, and he was having his last fling at painting.

I had never ceased work except for a few months. But I knew that I couldn't go on working there when I had another child, so I decided to move. Roi liked it down here in California; I decided I would come to California. I had plenty of people here. My parents had a ranch in Sonoma County and my sister was a nurse in San Francisco. She invited me to come to

Cunningham: her place.

Then Roi came to San Francisco and met me and found a house. I stayed with my sister until he got it fixed. I remember that we didn't have a place to put Gryff so that he wouldn't scramble, so we turned off the water and put him in the bathtub every night on a pillow.

Daniel: That's using your imagination.

Cunningham: That's my sister. She's full of tricks that people can do when they don't have the right facilities.

Daniel: She must have been a visiting nurse.

Cunningham: Most nurses are pretty clever, I think, in a certain way.

We lived up on Twin Peaks. We had a charming lookout from there. In fact it always amuses me to think that three or four years ago a friend of mine who is a jeweler moved into that same house. She paid fifty dollars for three rooms; we had paid seventeen for five in 1917. Her three rooms were fairly small. They had divided a house that I thought was really indivisible. We moved from there in 1920.

The twins were born in 1917. You see, when I arrived in San Francisco I really went against the doctor's orders. He told me that if I got my call I was to get off the train, no matter what town it was in and go to that hospital.

Daniel: Had your pregnancy been difficult?

Cunningham: No, it wasn't that. The doctor hadn't prophesied twins. He had only prophesied one big girl. But I knew that I didn't have room for myself, and I didn't know why that was.

Then my sister took me to her doctor here. He was in the most beautiful and picturesque place you can imagine, right where the Clift Hotel is now. The Clift Hotel was on the corner. Next to it was a little two-story brick house where Dr. Louis Allen had his office. Mrs. Allen is still alive, and her collection of lamps is out at the Academy of Sciences, so there's a little bit of the Louis Allen family still in San Francisco.

I went to St. Luke's Hospital. The doctor in Seattle who told me I should get off the train was right. The delivery was too quick for words. I was in the hospital three weeks, an unusually long time, because the doctor wasn't sure I could nurse both babies. They were weighed before and after every meal.

Daniel: Did you have a woman come to help you when you came home?

Cunningham: Yes. Of course I didn't have Gryff at home then. He was taken to my mother during all this time.

Our house was way up on Twin Peaks and there wasn't any transportation except from the foot of

Cunningham: the hill. It doesn't seem like anything to me now. I can still bounce up that hill and back, but this gal who worked and wanted her Thursday afternoon and Sunday out didn't see it that way at all. She just started banging the doors. She never said a word until she remarked to me once, "How is it that you never leave the house?"

And I said, "Will you please tell me how anybody would leave the house when they have two children to feed every four hours?"

She knew nothing about maternity. My sister, who was always the great helper, decided that could not go on. So she said, "We're going to the ranch!"

We wrote Father that we were bringing both the babies. When we got there we found beautiful little cribs that Father made of something like apple boxes. They were perfect for temporary use.

Daniel: Was Roi here or at Carmel?

Cunningham: He stayed on in the Twin Peaks house.

Daniel: He didn't go to the country with you?

Cunningham: Oh no, no. That would have been only one more person for my mother to wait on. I couldn't have done that. I just couldn't stand the business of having a maid who wouldn't do anything but bang the doors. So I decided I would get myself strong and well, so when the twins were a month old, we went out there. I don't think we stayed very long, and that was it.

Cunningham: Roi didn't have any job at all then and he knew he had to have one. He hadn't had jobs before, but at this time he felt the necessity of having a steady income. Von Schmidt, a friend of his who worked at Foster and Kleiser billboards and who is now a famous illustrator, came to the house and begged Roi to come to Foster and Kleiser. At first Roi felt he couldn't do anything like billboards, but he did go there and they were very good to him. He still sold his etchings, of course.

One day Mr. Torrey said to him, "I know a woman who wants a teacher just for one day a week, Fridays, and I think you ought to see her."

Of course Roi said, "I couldn't teach. I never have taught."

Mr. Torrey said, "Well, you go up and talk to her and see what happens."

That was Miss Ransom, of Ransom and Bridges School. You probably know that; it was in Piedmont. Anyway, he did agree to teach there and it was most successful for him. First of all, they paid him an enormous amount for that one day compared to what he was getting, and Foster and Kleiser didn't dock him for the day off. So we really were more prosperous.

A Faculty Wife at Mills College

Cunningham: Roi became acquainted with Eugen Neuhaus. I don't know how they became acquainted, but they were very good friends. Neuhaus was teaching at Mills College and he didn't want to go on doing it. He was teaching at the University too, and he wanted to give up his work at Mills. He asked Roi to go over there and take that job. Well, Roi thought he couldn't do that, but he already had been introduced to teaching through that one day a week with Miss Ransom , and teaching at Mills was a great success. Not only that, but he made a lot of very wonderful friends there. It didn't hurt his work in any way, and he learned how to teach. So the substance of it was that he finally did go to Mills College and gave up the advertising business. We moved in June of 1920 and in the fall Roi began his work at Mills.

Daniel: Did you begin to photograph again?

Cunningham: Well no, I didn't. There were many reasons why I couldn't begin my photography when I went to Mills. First, because we didn't have much water. We had a well that gave out about two days after we got there and we had to carry all the drinking water up a hill. And I didn't have a darkroom.

Cunningham: I didn't really begin to do any work until 1921, and then I had my first big job. From the arrival of my first child, I photographed the children, but I always took the films to Pillsbury's, a little shop in the Bellevue Hotel. I happened to know a man there, Mr. Banfield, who did my developing and printing. I didn't try to do any exhibiting. I just took care of my children.

In 1921 I had a job photographing the Bolm Ballet. Adolph Bolm was very famous at that time. He was from Russia.

Daniel: How did you happen to get that job?

Cunningham: I knew Caird Leslie, one of his male dancers. He was a Scotsman, and the chief dancer outside of Bolm. I saw him in New York in 1956. He must be over sixty now, and teaching, of course.

We didn't hit it off too well. Once, when we were talking, he had said, "I can't get into my leotards anymore."

I said, "If you take that pot off you'll be able to get into your leotards." [Laughter]

I'm sure he didn't like my remark. Well, you don't have to get fat.

Those photographs never received any attention at all, and wouldn't receive any, I imagine, except by the dancers. I always keep wondering, "To whom should I give them?" Of course Caird told me I could

Cunningham: give them to him when I saw him, but I decided I wouldn't because of the way he took care of the things he already had.

Also, he told me that he had decided that I was a much better photographer than Helen McGregor, who had photographed him here at that same time. And I said, "It took you a long time to find that out, Caird." As a matter of fact, he was judging chiefly by one who had made him the handsomest, I think. That's no way to judge it, though people judge that way.

Can you imagine where I photographed them? In the building that is now being trumped up for rejuvenation.

Daniel: The Palace of Fine Arts?

Cunningham: Yes, against those huge hedges and against the great pillars. You see, Bolm had a dance which was a Roman dance, and I took him with his spear and accoutrements against that pillar. It was just as if the set had been made for him. I don't know whether his wife has these photographs or not. When he came back to San Francisco much later I photographed him again, and I photographed the man who did his sets, also a Russian, and who is a well-known painter in Chicago. His name is Nickolai Remisoff. I think he's now in Beverly Hills, probably working for the movies.

Cunningham: From then on I began working off and on.

Daniel: What kinds of things did you do?

Cunningham: Well, I got a lot of girls from Mills shortly after that. Roi called it the "Jitter Studio," the "Acne of Perfection," because there were so many girls who had to be retouched. You know, freckles or pimples or something.

Daniel: It was a nice group to work with and you had fun?

Cunningham: Yes, very much so.

Daniel: What other than Mills College girls did you photograph at this time?

Cunningham: Well, I made some trips to the Indian country. I didn't do very much. I went there with my husband and children but care of the youngsters was arduous. And Indians are so difficult. You can hardly dare to photograph them; they really don't like it. And so I have nothing from the reservations. They did not object to Roi's sitting and working on a plate. That was the summer of 1926.

I didn't have a small camera then, of course. I had nothing smaller than a $3\frac{1}{4}$x$4\frac{1}{4}$ Graflex, and it's bulky and awkward. If I had had a smaller camera I probably would have done something. I didn't have a small camera until 1938.

Daniel: Now what about portraits?

Cunningham: Oh, I always did portraits. That was the main thing that I earned my living by, and I often did things

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Cunningham: for people who were artists, not always for money.

Daniel: Did people come to you at your house?

Cunningham: Yes, they did. I even photographed some people from San Francisco when I lived out at Mills. I don't know how they learned about me. It's hard to know how you get known. You always think you aren't very well known and then all of a sudden you realize that somebody must know about you. I would not say that I ever had very much business, but I had enough. For instance, when one of the quartets was at Mills College Mr. Warburg saw my stuff. He often visited our house--Gerald Warburg. He had me photograph his children. It was one of the good jobs that I had. I remember that it sent Ron and Pad to summer camp the whole summer.

After the children were in school I had a good deal more free time. Of course we had quite a lot of interruptions. I wasn't working all of the time because we had sicknesses too. I can remember when Gryff had whooping cough; he had to be in bed a half a day every day; he couldn't get up until noon. During that time I taught him three hours each day and in a few months he covered about three grades of reading, writing, and arithmetic. People don't really have to go to school to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. So I saved my work for the

Cunningham: time that they were in school. I always was fairly well organized then.

And, of course, I had a great many parties. I had enormous numbers of people in what I call faculty trades. Did you ever live in a faculty? Don't you know what they are like? They invite you to dinner; you invite them to dinner. Also, I still had lots of friends in San Francisco.

I can remember that one time there was a newsman coming to our house with a woman who lived at the foot of the hill. Her husband was on the Tribune. He was coming to interview Roi on etching. Ron was accompanying them up the hill. This woman was trying to fill the interviewer with a lot of stuff about etchers and etching, and Ron piped up and he said, "Well, I know a better etcher."

The man was very interested and asked, "Who is that?"

Ron said, "Rembrandt." [Laughter] He had a book of reproductions of Rembrandt.

Daniel: Was Roi exhibiting too?

Cunningham: He was very active, very.

Daniel: Did you help him with anything?

Cunningham: Oh no. Well, the only thing I helped him with at all was when the Mills College gallery was built. He was named head of the gallery, and there was no committee of faculty or anybody to help hang pictures.

Cunningham: We did the work, and we used to go over at night after a big day's work and hang the stuff. Of course, sometimes when there was really a lot of it we had a carpenter to help us. But we had him only in the daytime. At night we planned the work to be done the following day. That was just one of those thankless jobs. You just do it, that's all. Teachers are still working like that.

Exhibiting

Daniel: Could you review your experience in exhibiting prints?

Cunningham: Oh, it's so complex that I just didn't even read my book [record of prints and their disposition]. It's so agonizing to look over the past...

Well, in the early days in Seattle I used to send to London all the time. I was reproduced in magazines.

Daniel: What was the first time you were shown in London?

Cunningham: Oh, I imagine about 1910, 1911, 1912. There was a whole article about me in 1912 in an American magazine.

Daniel: Which one?

Cunningham: I could find it, maybe. I have it somewhere. I've thrown away an awful lot. I'm not very good at keeping a record of myself.

Cunningham: I was also reproduced in German magazines. I told you the other day I found one from Denmark. I have no recollection of having exhibited in Denmark, but I seem to have had five things in a show then. Edward Weston had six things in that show, and Margarethe Mather, who was one of his early apprentices, also had six things in that show. There were several people that I knew who had things exhibited. I had ten things in the Stuttgart show of 1929.

Daniel: What about New York? Did Stieglitz have any of your things?

Cunningham: No, he didn't. The only western photographer that I know he was interested in at that time was Ann Brigman. She was almost exclusively interested in the nude. She was the wife of a sea captain, and she had gone on one trip to sea with him and had fallen into the hold of a ship. She had to have an operation and have one breast removed. That was a great handicap because she was her own model. She always used to get herself up in a pitchy tree, set the camera (it was some little old Kodak, you know, nothing better) and sort of try to conceal that one breast, and photograph herself and call it "The Dryad." Then she would retouch anything that was necessary, put it on. When I look back on what she did and what Stieglitz picked out, I felt that

Cunningham: his judgment at that time was just as faulty as anyone else's.

Daniel: There are the photographs that were missing from your magazines. Now I can understand why she might have wanted to take them out.

Cunningham: No, she never was ashamed of her work. And besides, they were quite perfect in magazines, much more so than her prints. Her prints were for the most part very poor.

Daniel: They don't sound very attractive.

Cunningham: Well, they were not unattractive. They have to be considered in relation to their time. They were just as attractive as anything that was being done at that time except that she did have a very defective technique. Anyway, Stieglitz evidently liked it.

Daniel: Did he exhibit only the people who were part of his group?

Cunningham; So far as I know it was sort of a little coterie, and those were the ones that he had. I don't remember ever having an invitation to his gallery at any time. Of course, by the time I really knew him, in 1934 when I photographed him, he had paintings mostly. His gallery was called the American Place, and showed mostly Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Sheeler, and two or three other painters. Oh, one man, Arthur Dove, was a Dadaist, you know, who painted

Cunningham: somebody's old overalls and a bit of wheat, that kind of thing, sticking it together.

Daniel: What were the most important exhibits in the country, let's say between 1910 and 1920?

Cunningham: There were quite a number of good things that had been done in Chicago, I think. I remember sending to some of those exhibits.

There is an organization that is called the Photographers of America. It has always been what I've called the "Market Street Photographer." I very early quit that and I began with something that called themselves the Pictorialists of America. There were a lot of good names in that, but they just evaporated, and I don't know why. You can find that out easily in the books.

Daniel: When did they come together?

Cunningham: They were all started by eastern people. I remember some of the people who belonged to it. The one man who was very prominent in the Pictorialists, Ira Martin, is the photographer for the Frick Library in New York City. I went to see him at the library in 1956, but I didn't see him at all. He had had a stroke. He didn't get well enough to come to work, and I didn't want to go to Rye, New York, because I felt it was an intrusion since I am not a family friend; I'm only a photography friend. I can remember his coming to meet me in 1934 and being

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Cunningham: a bouncy young man.

But I believe that Carl Struss, who is now a moving picture man, was one of those Pictorialists. He is an old man now, too; everybody is old that I knew. I refuse to admit it, you know. I can't think of anybody of that group whom I know who is working now. Of course John Paul Edwards is all right, but he quit.

Daniel: Did these people exhibit en masse?

Cunningham: Oh, yes. They were still active in 1934, because they had a big meeting and I was introduced to them and showed my photographs and talked.

Daniel: Where did they exhibit?

Cunningham: New York, always New York, as far as I remember. It was a New York organization, but they had people from different parts of the country. You see how I've barely interested myself in the history. I don't keep track of what I do. I have to keep track of what I send to a certain place and when it's returned to me. I put this information in a book.

Daniel: I'm interested in knowing where you were showing your work, what recognition you had, and how you enjoyed it.

Cunningham: You know, I don't believe people paid so much attention to it in the old days as they do now. There are more fans now, you might say. Nobody but other photographers went to a photographic show.

Daniel: What sort of work were you exhibiting in the twenties?

Cunningham: That was when the children were small and I became interested in plant forms because I couldn't get out anywhere, and I had a garden. I didn't know plants, I just planted stuff. I had a lot of succulents. People would give them to me. I decided to do things that were around me, and that's when I started doing plant form things that I have never shown together. I've discarded a good many of them. I don't think I even have prints of them anymore.

It is a period in which I did a lot of work. Some of the plant things are as early as 1925 or earlier. One thing that has been very popular and was reproduced in the Architectural Review and in Natura, an Italian magazine, is the magnolia flower, just the blossom of it. Every once in a while there was something that I did that people liked, you know. It encouraged me to go on.

Daniel: You always were sending things to agents.

Cunningham: Yes, at that time I had many invitations and was always sending things. I had an exhibit in Berkeley about that time, too, about 1929.

Daniel: Where?

Cunningham: Sam Hume had it in some sort of a gallery. It was something like a store, right on the street, I remember. It was something that Sam promoted. You know, he often got an idea that we should have a

Cunningham: little more culture in this town. He invited me and I sent prints. It was quite a big show, really, and they were all huge prints.

Daniel: Do people buy prints shown in this way?

Cunningham: Oh, it's hoped and expected that they will, but they seldom do. In New York I sold one print. I'm sure that if I had had more prints handy of Morris Graves I could have sold them. But only one woman handed her name and address in, which was the way to do it. I sent it to her in New York City later. She was a collector.

Daniel: What about the collection of photographs?

Cunningham: It's almost an unknown thing. Very few people collect photographs, almost no one. The Museum of Modern Art, of course, began to collect quite early. The Metropolitan Museum collects to some extent. The biggest and most important collection is at Eastman House in Rochester, I imagine. I don't know when it was begun. I received an invitation from them only recently to submit prints. Now they have a pretty good collection, actually.

Daniel: On what basis are additions made to these large collections?

Cunningham: That's one of the things I don't know either, mainly because I don't often get an invitation. A great many people, I know, send prints without

Cunningham: an invitation. Maybe that's the thing to do, but I have never done it. I'm thinking of it, though. I'll wake them up and tell them I'm still alive and kicking.

A lot of my things are in the Eastman collection. And I've got quite a lot of things in the Museum of Modern Art, but nothing recent.

Daniel: What about the Metropolitan?

Cunningham: Nothing. I don't think they know I exist.

Daniel: Do any western galleries collect photographs?

Cunningham: Oh, yes. You know, I think that's one of the very outstanding liberal and intelligent things that Mr. Neumeyer has done. He buys, and he does not quibble. He pays your sale price for prints. He has bought quite a number of my things. I don't know the range of his collection. Once he had an exhibition of Mills' photographs. All of them are not what I would have bought, perhaps, but then that would have been true of any collection. I think it's quite unusual for universities or colleges to make a collection of photographs, even if they have an art gallery. I don't believe that the Henry Gallery, at the University of Washington, has. I gave two photographs to someone who was going to give them to the Henry Gallery about 1950, or a little later, and I never had any response from them. Whether they got them or not,

Cunningham: I don't know.

More than a year ago a friend of mine suggested to the Henry Gallery that they have never exhibited my work. I had a letter from the director asking me if I would be interested in having a show there, and I said I would, because I had just had a show in 1957, and I had the stuff all together in the spring of 1958. I've never received the invitation. Either they have their schedules all filled--that can happen, years in advance--or he's forgotten me. I don't know one way or the other, but it would have been more interesting and easier for me to have done it while I had the stuff together. Now the stuff has gotten kind of pulled out. I'd have to start in and make selections all over again. Of course I think that if I had a show now, which is three years later than the one in New York, it would be different.

Printing and mounting is my hardest work. If I weren't making a living I could do it easily. You know, I have to get out a lot of stuff each week, and I haven't the extra time to prepare stuff for show. I can make four or five prints, but fifty--that's different. I guess I'm lazy. Maybe I don't work as many hours as I used to. Actually, I am a

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Cunningham: rather compulsive worker, but not always at photography.

Daniel: Do you make fresh prints for each show?

Cunningham: I'm trying very hard to preserve my frames and my mounts so that I don't have to reprint. The print is perfectly good, but people put their dirty hands on mounts and that ruins them. There is a young man here now who is trying to get together a gallery. He wants to have prints for sale, and he asked me for five prints. I told him I would give them to him. I asked him if he was going to use glass, and he said no, he was going to try not to do that because it was so reflective.

I said, "All right, I'll put something more reflective over mine, cellophane, a very thick kind, and wrap it around. I know it isn't pretty, but it preserves the mat."

Even the best gallery in the world usually returns prints somewhat damaged.

In 1956 I had a show in the Cincinnati Museum. I saw it and it was beautifully hung, but I don't believe anybody ever saw it. I don't think Cincinnati is much interested in photography.

Portrait Photography

Daniel: Do you think the quality of your work changed during these years?

Cunningham: I always hope that I'm better, and I try, but I don't know.

Daniel: Better in what way?

Cunningham: As you get more accustomed to people you are better with people. There's no doubt about that. A person who does portraits for the first time is not good with people, usually. They may have difficulty handling their cameras. They have to be automatic and they have to feel at home with people and they must be able to make people feel at home with them. I do think that I have improved in that way. I hope I have.

Daniel: When you start on a portrait assignment how do you get under way?

Cunningham: It is a terrible confusion. Most of the time you feel completely frustrated. Only once in a great while do you get a person who is completely natural, a person who looks herself or himself with no effort. Most people assume an unnatural look.

Daniel: Do you interview your portrait subjects before you photograph them?

Cunningham: I try to become a little acquainted with them before the first sitting. One of the persons whom I had

Cunningham: never seen before was Anna Freud, who is a complete natural. I had a very poor chance to photograph her. Out of twelve shots I got at least four that are extremely good likenesses.

Daniel: How did she happen to come to you?

Cunningham: She didn't. The psychiatric society came to me and asked me to photograph her for them. She wouldn't have wanted it herself. In fact she never has been willingly photographed. She's never gone to a photographer or been photographed and will not have anyone photograph her. I don't know why. She must have been photographed sometime by somebody who caught her too unaware. It wouldn't be too difficult.

I won't say that she was easy. I was very uneasy all the time I was working because the conditions were quite difficult and because I had such limited time. Her time was so taken up. She was programmed beyond all reason. She didn't have the time to be photographed, but the psychiatric society was interested in the pictures.

Daniel: You mentioned photographing Stephen Spender. How was that arranged?

Cunningham: Someone in the Poetry Circle asked me to do it. People like that I may invite to be photographed. I photographed James Stephens in 1937. That was Albert Bender's idea. He brought him to me.

Cunningham: When I was with Vanity Fair [see chapter on Vanity Fair] I was given assignments photographing people, and that was different. Here, now that I have no connection with a publication, I get different people, unexpected people all the time. For instance, lately I got some people from Tacoma. The way the woman happened to find me--she had never seen a thing I did, didn't know I existed--was that she went to the museum and asked for a photographer for portraiture, and they recommended me, which was very interesting, I thought. Can you imagine? I was recommended by the San Francisco Museum of Art. I felt immensely flattered.

Daniel: Is this unusual?

Cunningham: It shouldn't be. It should be exactly the right way to go about choosing a photographer, and it was tremendously helpful to the Tacoma people. But there's not one person in a hundred who would think of doing it.

You could walk around New York City and never find a photographer that I would want to go to. That wasn't true in Mrs. Käsebier's day. She had a display case right on Fifth Avenue. But I looked up and down the streets when I was there in 1956 and I couldn't find anybody that I would go to. And yet there are a lot of good photographers in New York City. You don't know how to find them.

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Cunningham: The strangest part about the Tacoma woman is that I was not _the_ photographer for her; I was _the_ photographer for her husband.

Daniel: How can you characterize a photographer as being _the_ photographer for someone?

Cunningham: Because this woman couldn't face herself. She didn't like herself. She didn't like anything about herself. I can tell the minute I talk to people whether they are going to let me photograph them as they really are or not.

Daniel: I think it would be valuable to hear more extended comment on portrait photography from you.

Cunningham: I think it's terribly complicated and terribly frustrating. I have an extraordinary illustration of it: (I fail too, a lot of times, and when I do I know it--at least I hope I do.) The other day I photographed a whole family, a huge one. I had been working on it a day and a half. I was living at their place. There were four children, the youngest eight months old and eldest not eight. I had done them all in every combination that you can imagine, and in every activity, everthing except horses. They didn't seem to have horses. They had a swimming pool. They had tricycles, bicycles, balls, a golf course, everything you can imagine, and they were all done in every kind of way: groups, singly, and in various combinations.

Cunningham: The mother asked me if I would do a portrait of herself and her husband. I knew this was futile.

Daniel: Why?

Cunningham: Well, because first of all, I was keyed to speed when doing children. I was really trigger-happy because you have to do children fast. You don't ask them to do something. You photograph what they are doing. And I had done that so much, and the whole set-up was...

Daniel: Snatching candid views?

Cunningham: Well, yes, and I felt that she wouldn't like that. And when she came out dressed for the ordeal, I realized she wanted to be outdoors.

Daniel: What did she wear?

Cunningham: She wore a sharp white jersey dress, and I had already explained to her that I loathed white. You see, I'm temperamental. I wouldn't loathe white under certain circumstances, where you can really control the light, but if you are working outdoors the problem is the degree of exposure to the film that the white causes in comparison with the face, even with dark-skinned people. Now if I were photographing a Negro boy and I wanted to make that contrast, I might not dislike it at all. But you can't get quality out of white when you have to photograph a face not too dark in the daylight.

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Cunningham: And then they giggled all the time. Finally I said, "Wouldn't you like to have something that showed you took life a little more seriously?" I got one shot, and I didn't show them a thing. They were ecstatic over the things I did of the children.

She said, "We didn't see anything of ourselves."

I said, "Well, I wasn't pleased with them. I just thought the situation wasn't right for serious portraiture."

Daniel: If you don't feel satisfied you don't show prints?

Cunningham: They don't see them. Why should I show them my failures? I show them plenty of failures anyway, things they think are failures.

Daniel: Yes, but perhaps the print would have a quality that wouldn't seem a failure to them.

Cunningham: Well, if I don't like it I throw it out, regardless. They don't see it, that is, they don't get a chance. Once in a while I miss. There is something very subtle about photographing people.

I think I should really tell my most shocking and horrifying failure. I photographed a man and I thought I had done an extraordinarily good job. While I think that I don't value the subject's opinion if they hate everything, the fact is I'm a little bit irked, but I try not to show it. Now

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Cunningham: with this man I had taken great pains. I put the prints that I thought were alike and the best on certain cards, four on a card, as I usually do. In that way they were classified. I don't expect to do a print from everything I show, because some are less good than others. They need to see that.

This man looked at them carefully and he said, "If I hadn't thought I was going to get something distinguished I would have gone to an ordinary photographer."

And I said, "It takes two."

But I should have said, "You bring the whiskey and I'll furnish the glass!" [This refers to a contemporary advertising presentation in popular magazines. "Men of distinction" are shown drinking a given brand of spirits.] But you know that was really shocking because I swear to this day I not only did a bang-up likeness of him, but a good one and not even unpleasant. I would love to see what he has decided upon having. He's not bad-looking; in fact he's quite good-looking.

This was the first time I was ever what I call insulted by a man. They usually like themselves pretty well, and usually they don't mind looking like themselves. Of course it was realistic, I'll say that. I never do a man putting the image

Cunningham: through a bath towel, you know, the regular old way of trying to make a person look pretty. I never do that.

Daniel: What do you mean, putting it through a bath towel?

Cunningham: I mean enlarging it out of focus. There is a little trick you can do. Put a piece of cellophane over the lens.

Daniel: To blur out the lines and so forth.

Cunningham: Yes. I never do that for a man, no matter what. I tell some to go away rather than do that. A man who is that vain shouldn't come to me in the first place.

Daniel: What's the most time-consuming problem that you have in doing portraits?

Cunningham: Well, I suppose all work in the darkroom is time-consuming. The other day Dorothea Lange told me, "Why, no photographer in New York has been in the darkroom for years."

There are certain very, very careful labs now, which will do your work for you. They do it the way you want it done if they can. I have never done that yet, and I don't know that I can do it. I'd rather do a more limited amount of work. Some photographers do an immense amount of shooting. Margaret Bourke-White doesn't do darkroom, never did, so her problem is entirely in being able to hold the camera and do the shooting.

Daniel: Are most people self-conscious?

Cunningham: Oh, of course everybody is, practically. I usually try to work them over a little bit. You can break them down in some ways, seduce them, that's the idea. Most of the people I've had have even told me that they had a good time! I always say I'm the one who is doing the work. The subject has nothing to worry about.

Of course, after that article in _Modern Photography_ [_Modern Photography_, May, 1951, "Imogen Cunningham, the Straight Approach" p. 36], there followed in a later number of the magazine a very nasty letter someone wrote about me, saying that he made it out, in a way, that I was pretty chatty. And I am, naturally. Sometimes I'm not really connected; you know, you're thinking about the picture but you are talking about something else to wake the person up. That man made a terrific dig at me for using conversation as a means to photography.

Daniel: In the Pollack book, which shows several examples of early portrait photography, the photographic subjects look perfectly comfortable and relaxed although they have been sitting for a long time.

Cunningham: You mean people like D. O. Hill, whose subjects remained still so long--for minutes--that they just had to subside. Of course later, the photographers put a rack behind their subjects.

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Cunningham: Hill did huge murals, you see, for public buildings, and he had to have faces in them. That's how he happened to go off on the business of photography, so that he would have something to work from that wasn't a model. He photographed the people around him and used their faces in the murals.

With exposures as they are now, you can make a short exposure and your victim is still allowed to be speaking somewhat. But you know there is something about the long exposure which I'm afraid we'll never get back to, though I do know people who use it. I believe that Minor White is one of those persons who uses the long exposure. You get something a little more static and maybe relaxed. It depends upon the person.

I don't believe that people in general know how much a photographer gives out during a sitting. It's exhausting, terribly exhausting. That's why I felt that I failed so on these two people. With children you are exhausted in a different way. You're exhausted by not getting everything you see because they're so charming and natural. Of course some children are not that all the time either. With these children the older boy, over seven, got ready for me a terrific lot of the time, and I had to find something that would interest him. He was very much--

Cunningham: I think he'd been what I call coached a little. People don't know that they shouldn't coach a child--tell him that he's going to be photographed. He wouldn't have even thought about what I was doing if he hadn't been coached.

Did I tell you what Anna Freud said to me when I handed her a box of American Indian jewelry? She said, "Oh, you bring something to me like a child to engage my interest."

And I said, "Yes, so you won't think about what you were thinking about this morning."

She'd had a very intense session and I thought that coming over into another culture would ease her. But she is a natural. She didn't really need it. She looks like herself all the time, a very pleasant, agreeable woman. She doesn't need analysis.

Daniel: Is it possible for a photograph to reflect personality? Artistically, this may or may not be important but the quality of photography sometimes seems to make it possible almost to know a person.

Cunningham: That's a very good question. I think a good illustration is something that was published in Aperture. Did I tell you about Minor White giving my photograph of Morris Graves to his class? He teaches a class in what he calls "reading a photograph." Of course personally I don't believe in teaching how to read a photograph. I believe each fellow should learn for

Cunningham: himself. What Minor does in teaching I don't know. But he gave them this photograph of mine. They knew nothing of the person who was photographed. They wrote down their ideas about it, and at the end he sent the articles to me and asked me to make a comment on each one.

I said I believed he had more poets in his class than photographers. Of course I didn't know he was going to publish my comments too, which he did. Did you ever see that?

Daniel: Yes, and the photograph of Graves is immensely expressive.

Cunningham: I think it tells you quite a little bit. Of course I think he has some rather superior students in the way of psychology--not the ordinary run of people who go tc see a show. But the comments were very interesting because they did pick out a lot of stuff that is extremely like Morris Graves, so maybe I did say something about him.

That photograph had a tremendous amount of comment since 1956, I would say. But I did that in 1950, and in 1951 at my show at the museum it was never mentioned or seen or commented upon, as far as I know. So you just wonder what it is, who it is, who sees something in a photograph. It takes some person...

Daniel: ...to respond to it.

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Cunningham: I always think that public relations is one of the professions that is completely unnecessary, but a great many people are built up by public relations men. Maybe that's what I need, somebody who finds out if I do a good thing. I don't seem to know.

Daniel: Do you consider the portrait to be satisfactory mainly on the basis of the quality of the photograph or the photograph as a reflection of what you think the individual is?

Cunningham: It has to render something that comes from the person himself, and if I don't get that at all...well, I won't say that I haven't sold things that I did not think were very good. One I did of the woman from Tacoma--she could just as well have gone to a Market Street photographer because what she wanted was to be put through gauze. She wanted a flattering picture. Maybe that was the way she saw herself.

Daniel: What is the reaction of most people?

Cunningham: Oh, most people are shocked by their photographs and I have come to the point of very seldom having a session with anybody showing them their proofs. What I now do, and I think I'm going to do it always, is send in the proofs by mail. When they get them they may take the agony out of their souls before they come to me. They bring them back and then we can have some kind of a session talking about it. But when I see them seeing themselves, I am so pained. It's embarrassing, humiliating, destructive.

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Cunningham: I can't take it any more.

Daniel: Does this always happen?

Cunningham: With women, almost entirely. The only people who aren't that way are the people that I pick out as models, like certain friends of mine that I know are good. I guess I told you about my encounter with Marianne Moore. I showed her photographs and all of this to Stephen Spender, and he was immensely interested. He thought I did a speaking likeness of her and he thought the letter was completely characteristic of her. All she wants is to be twenty-five years younger than she is. That's really all she wants. She cannot take time. She can't reconcile herself to her age. Now, you see with me, I don't give a damn.

Daniel: No, it doesn't make any difference.

Cunningham: I was going to show you that thing right there which will show you what sort of a subject I am. [Photograph of Cunningham] That's just for you to look at for your own amusement.

Daniel: Yes. Well, you know my criticism of the photographs of you is that they depict all of your work paraphernalia and you are shown as a working mechanism.

Cunningham: You know, the reason was this: I was photographing with the 4x5 camera and using the Polaroid, and I was photographing this gal up in the corner. Her husband snatched my Rollei and took those of me, and

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Cunningham: they happened to answer a very good purpose because the Christian Science Monitor wants a photograph of me at work. So I sent this one.* I think that's like me. Oh, I don't have any ideas about myself at all.

That was the same reaction that Stieglitz had when I sent him the photographs. I never heard any comment from O'Keeffe as to whether she cared for it or not. They've never been used in the East at all by anybody who did anything on Stieglitz, but that's partly because other people have done him as they see him.

But Ansel still likes mine.

A photograph is a static moment. And of course it lacks a lot, and even color photographs, which are not as good as black and white, actually are not any better rendition of people.

Daniel: It's occasionally possible to snatch a moment which seems to be a reflection of thought.

Cunningham: Well, I think I must have mentioned that before, that this man with whom I studied in Dresden asked me to photograph him at the moment when I thought his thinking was at its peak, and he was doing a mathematical problem in his head. He felt that the photograph was extremely successful.

Daniel: Did you?

Cunningham: Oh, absolutely! But he was another one of those

*The Christian Science Monitor did not accept the photograph.

Cunningham: persons who was always natural. He wasn't vain. He wasn't thinking about himself at all. Well, we all have a certain amount of vanity.

I can give you an illustration. The other day someone brought a friend to see my work because she wants to be photographed, and the first moment she made herself an impossible subject for me, though I didn't tell her because after all, I'm in business. But I said, "Do you like literal photographs?" She kept liking things that I had done.

When she said, "I would like textures," I showed her one of Anna Freud. You could just see everything in the face.

I said, "Textures like that?"

She said, "Yes."

And I said, "On men they are fine. How are they on women?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want a line to show," she said.

Well, I'm just not her photographer. I don't mean that I would make her look ugly or that I would show every single line, but I couldn't be her photographer.

She asked me how much I charged and I said, "I charge double for face lifting," just kidding her.

Daniel: Is it age, then?

Cunningham: It's always age that bothers a woman, always. Some

Cunningham: of them begin thinking that way at thirty, and certainly at thirty-five they have already something that they don't want anybody to look at. It is what time has done to them more than anything else. But I think that time does interesting things to people. People who are not really beautiful when they are young are much more interesting when they are old, and people who are very beautiful when they are young suffer terribly when they are old.

Daniel: Unless they become interesting.

Cunningham: Well, they don't usually. Beautiful women don't become interesting. They become sad, really. I knew a woman who was like that. The other day I went over the negatives that I have done of her--she died recently--some of the things that she had rejected. The rejection was only on account of the way she felt about herself. Now, I think that for her children that would be a marvelous thing to have. I'm trying to make up my mind to throw everything out that I did twenty years ago. Once Dorothea said to me, "Oh, you shouldn't do that because the next day they die, and then the families want them."

Well, that happened to me recently with some people who hadn't had any great appreciation of the stuff at all when it was done in 1951. Then they asked me for some prints. I found the whole lot,

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Cunningham: rejected and all, and I sent them a complete set of proofs, and they've written me a very appreciative letter. What the man looked like when he died must have been--oh, he must look young and beautiful compared--now, that's only eight years, but the last eight years were very bad for him, at least the last two years. Our attitude depends upon what happens.

Daniel: Men are not as vain as women?

Cunningham: No, they aren't.

F/64

Daniel: From time to time we have talked about the photographers known as f/64. What do you recall about the beginning of this group?

Cunningham: F/64 originated in a little studio that belonged to Ann Brigman, I think, where we were meeting.

Daniel: Who is "we?"

Cunningham: In the main, the person who started this off was Willard Van Dyke. I've been told that Ansel Adams claims he started it, but I would swear on my last penny that it was Willard who did it.

Daniel: Some sources indicate that the group gathered around Edward Weston.

Cunningham: That is not true. I'll tell you, Willard was one of the persons who was very much impressed by Edward, and he even has been said to have said that he was a

Cunningham: student of Edward's. Now, if he was a student of Edward's it was for a very short time. I would say that Edward couldn't have taken him on to teach, but that he associated with him. Edward lived at Carmel at the time this started.

Willard Van Dyke was starting to be interested in making moving pictures, but he was interested in this, still, and had been always doing it. His girl friend, who was John Paul Edwards' daughter...I don't remember all of the people who met there and I can't say when we had our first exhibition or how it got down to that number of people, but these are the ones. They are listed alphabetically, the f/64 group. I am sure that was Willard Van Dyke's idea for the title. There were Ansel Easton Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak--she was working with Edward at the time--Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke and Edward Weston.

This announcement that I still have announces the exhibition of photographs at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum from November 15 through December 31, 1932. That was the first and only exhibit. In this thing from time to time various other photographers would be asked to display their work with the f/64 group. We must have thought ourselves something very big. Those invited for the first showing were Preston Holder, who later became an anthropologist and whom

Cunningham: Gryff met out in the Solomon Islands. (One moment someone came into the room and was standing in front of Gryff and he was a fellow all covered with whiskers, and Gryff didn't recognize him. After all, Gryff was quite a bit younger.)

Consuela Kanaga was the second one. And Alma Lavenson, who is Mrs. Wahrhaftig,--they can always blame me for making her into a Lucy Stoner--and Brett Weston. Those were the four people who were invited besides the people who were members.

Daniel: Did you give yourselves a name because you wanted to have an exhibit?

Cunningham: Oh, no. We had given ourselves our name, as you can see, because we thought we were an organization.

Daniel: What did you talk about in your meetings?

Cunningham: What does anybody who is a photographer talk about? Nothing but photography, not always about f/64. Photographers always take everybody else apart who is photographing.

Daniel: What in photographing interested you most?

Cunningham: You see, the whole point is we all lived in so many diverse places that we never got together really. We had the exhibition and people came here, and we floated away. I made a proposition to the different people: "Why don't we, each one in the group, photograph each other and have a show of ourselves being seen from different aspects?" But no one came through

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Cunningham: with it. I did a few things but no one really--I have a portrait that I did then of Edward Weston in 1932 that practically no one has ever seen.

When you are in a group like this it just begins and then fades away. You don't realize what is the most important thing or what you are especially interested in. Every sort of thing comes up, even new cameras, new stuff. But you know, we just didn't think about this being at all interesting except that we were having a good time. I was very fond of Willard Van Dyke and all of the people that were in that group, actually. They all were very good friends of mine, and there isn't one now that isn't except maybe Noskowiak.

Daniel: What might you talk about in the group?

Cunningham: Oh, what material you're using now, who has done something interesting. In the era of platinum everybody who was anybody used platinum. You'll notice in the very old history books when they show a list of things they'll say, "Platinum, gum bromide." Well, people, since they use the silver bromide papers, pay no attention to that unless right now there are people who are fans of this and that.

Daniel: Were there any photographers commanding a lot of public attention who might have annoyed you?

Cunningham: I've always had one special dislike. Do you want me to divulge it?

Daniel: Why not?

Cunningham: I don't know about him now. I remember him when I was teaching over at the art school. Someone in the class asked me what I thought of Mortenson and I said, "I don't really have to answer that question. I'll just describe a photograph of his that I admire very much. It is a great big gorilla dragging an almost nude woman over a hilltop and it is called 'L'Amour'." [Laughter]

He works down at Laguna, and he's written many books. If you look through the books on photography you don't miss Mortenson. He just piles it on.

Daniel: Did your association with photographers in f/64 extend beyond the exhibit planning?

Cunningham: Well, we had the exhibit and the only close associations that I can remember from that time on were with the people from around here. Henry Swift and I were very good friends, and Willard, and of course Edward Weston I had known since 1923, and I was a very good friend of his but didn't see him very often because he was in Carmel. John Paul Edwards was a good friend. But later on he sort of eased himself out of photography. I don't know why. He was an amateur, strictly speaking, who devoted a lot of time to photography. He was a buyer for Hales.

Daniel: Where did he live?

Cunningham: In Oakland.

Daniel: What about the rest of the people?

Cunningham: Adams lived where he does now, when he's in town, on 24th. Weston was the only one that lived far away. Oh, and Sonja lived down there too, Sonya Noskowiak, she lived in Carmel. We didn't see those people very often, and we didn't get together, really. And of course Willard was working here.

Daniel: How do you account for the fact that this group took shape at all?

Cunningham: It isn't that it took shape at all that impresses me, but it's the quotations you read about it. I mean if you read in a London magazine it'll mention the f/64 group. It sounds so funny that something that was started in 1932 and didn't last even a year, that wasn't formally organized and wasn't formally dissolved, made such an impression.

Daniel: How would you characterize the show if you had to describe it?

Cunningham: I thought it was extremely interesting. Of course, now, I don't remember the people whose work I knew pretty well as distinctly as those I didn't know as well. The thing that I remember distinctly, Preston Holder's beautiful stuff, people with beautiful skin textures and the quality just as good as anyone could do. Consuela Kanaga did Negro people

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Cunningham: in an interesting and esthetic manner. I remember she had one photograph of a Negro girl smelling a flower that looked like the water hyacinth, which hasn't any odor, actually, but it was a beautiful flower. The contrast of this light flower and the dark skin was beautifully done.

I don't remember what Alma had in it. Brett Weston's was always something that was done well. I always thought, especially at that time, that he was a decided reflection of his father, and I still think so.

Daniel: F/64 is mainly characterized by its "straightforward" approach.

Cunningham: F/64 connotes that because that's a very small opening in a diaphragm of a camera. That means that everything from here to there will be sharp. This doesn't mean that we all used that means; but we were for reality. That was what we talked about too. Not being phony, you know.

I wish I could remember why we never really got together on any one field or theme. I think it was perhaps because the great motivator had left us, and that was Willard. I think that nobody else was sufficiently interested. Now, I believe that Edward said that he withdrew from it, but as we had no formal organization, nobody paid any money

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Cunningham: or had any secretary or did anything at all.

Daniel: Why do you think he would make this statement?

Cunningham: He didn't want to be classified with anyone. I don't think that he formally withdrew, but I have heard him make that statement.

Daniel: Was the exhibit well received?

Cunningham: Yes. But I would have a hard time finding any notes about it.

Daniel: Was the attendance good?

Cunningham: Oh, tremendous.

Daniel: How many prints did you have in this? At least two?

Cunningham: Oh, more than that, I think. De Young would have a record of that and also the newspaper comments on it.

Daniel: Let's look at the names of the people who exhibited in the f/64 show and put down your comments about them.

Cunningham: Ansel's stuff was not any less good then than it is this very day, except that he hadn't done so much of it. At that time I think it was mainly mountains. He had perhaps just practically come out of the mountains. The first book he did was something on Muir of the Sierra. You know he went to the mountains having prepared himself to be a concert pianist, and he was having really a slight breakdown from it. I mean it was just the tension of nerves. So when he went to the mountains with a camera he came back a photographer. If all of us could learn that easily

Cunningham: it would be nice, wouldn't it?

He's a tremendously intellectual person as well as talented. Where he gets all of his scientific learning I don't know because he was a music student. But, you know, music people have pretty good heads. I always think it's connected with mathematics. I've never know anyone who was a musician who didn't have a fairly good understanding of numbers. Ansel is really a brilliant and extraordinary person for wideness of understanding. He still plays very well, you know. And he understands all the intricacies of photography as very few people do. I mean you can do it without knowing things, but he can do it knowing them. In fact, Edward was much more of an instinctive person and limited himself in his ways of doing things. Now Ansel could be sent on a job and he'd come back with it, but Edward couldn't put himself into the frame of mind of doing something someone else's way or for that other person. Oh, he did it often in portraiture. When he first photographed, he photographed people, for them. But still he always made his own limitations and stayed within them, whereas Ansel can start out with a 35 millimeter camera and do as good a job as any of the people who are always using that camera. I mean from the standpoint of technique. I don't mean from the standpoint of

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Cunningham: seeing because he is not a trigger-happy photographer. He can't do it quick, like Cartier-Bresson. He hasn't that same sense of humor. He's too serious in a way. Mountains are better for him. They stay put.

And John Paul Edwards--I'm sorry to say I haven't seen anything of his for twenty-five years. And Sonya Noskowiak, so she told me, has turned herself into a commercial photographer. That is, she does chairs and sofas and objects for illustration or for manufacturers or for interior decorators.

Henry Swift gave it up, too.

Willard Van Dyke is one of the educational moving picture men in the United States. He's gone on government assignments and all kinds of things like that. I understand he is working now for Lowell Thomas. I saw a TV program that he did.

Daniel: F/64 has always been considered reflective of American work in photography.

Cunningham: It is not only American, it's western American. It isn't even American, it's western.

Photography in the West

Cunningham: You know, we're classified.

Daniel: You mean contemporarily you're classified?

Cunningham: I don't know whether you saw that copy of U. S. Camera where Herm Lenz, the camera editor of the San Francisco Examiner, took it into his mind to make a tape recording of Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange and me. [U. S. Camera, August, 1955, "Interview with Three Greats," p.84] And in that the f/64 group is mentioned.

You know, I always thought that Dorothea Lange had been invited to this, but according to the data she wasn't. About this time, or shortly after this, she of course was engaged in the Farm Security Administration work and was terribly busy and did some of the most beautiful work that was done at that time.

There's another mention of the f/64 group. Latour had a round table discussion at San Francisco State College. He wrote that up in this magazine in England. [Photography] The subject, which was given him by Norman Hall, the editor of the magazine, was "Is There a Western Photography?"

We discussed this. But I'm puzzled. I was puzzled to discover that the subject was not announced to us at first. We were asked to come to

Cunningham: a room at San Francisco State College, and this was all extemporaneous. We hadn't made any preparation. We were in a room that was about right for sixty students. One wall was lined with glass bricks and it was, I think, hermetically sealed, and we had klieg lights on us. There were about four hundred people there, all those in the front row taking photographs of us.

There was quite a bit of controversy. Mainly Ansel was a little bit peeved at the subject, at the idea of being classified as a western photographer. I said, "Well, Ansel, you do mountains in the West and that in some way or other does classify you." You see, it really did.

We agreed that there shouldn't be any "western photography." Photography is photography no matter where it is done, and because a person works here is no reason that he--look at Ansel, he runs all over the United States anyway.

However, we are much less commercial than the people in the East.

Daniel: What do you mean by commercial?

Cunningham: I mean that we don't count our time so seriously. Some people, of course, do. But I mean the people whom I call the real photographers; people who do it because they really love it and can't get away from doing it; people who are not so crazy about making

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Cunningham: money that they would turn a thing down if they weren't getting any.

Daniel: The western photographers pursue an interest in their own photography as such?

Cunningham: Well, I think we are not so pressed economically. I don't mean that we are rich or anything. We don't make money, but the speed of life isn't the same here, I guess.

Daniel: Do you think this influences western work?

Cunningham: I think it does. Look at the mad way in which a man like Karsh photographs! Why, no one can do as much work as he does. It gets to be a complete formula, you know, just terrific!

Daniel: What do you mean by formula?

Cunningham: I think that where people do a lot of work, too much work for one person to encompass, that they have a fixed idea about it. For instance, there's a colleague of mine who has--I've been told; I haven't been done by him--who has a certain setup where he has his flashlight and people come in under it, and he takes a couple of bangs and that's it.

I don't think that Karsh works that way. I think that he does take more pains, but if you'll notice he does have a kind of circular spotlight that he glorifies everybody with from Helen Keller to--I don't know, of course he didn't use that with

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Cunningham: the best things I think he's done, like Churchill and Bernard Shaw. Those are both beautiful and what I call photographic naturals. They don't freeze, for one thing. Anyway, he motivated Churchill to an expression of ferocity, which is characteristic and rather good.

Daniel: Do you think that western photography particularly relates to our "wide open spaces?"

Cunningham: Well, there is more country in New York nearer New York City than we have country. I was terrifically impressed by it. I lived there. I worked outdoors a lot. I think even some of the fashion people are beginning to work outside, but they have been accustomed to having a painted scene and a twig that they use. For instance, a woman like Louise Dahl-Wolf. She does remarkable stuff within that limitation. And then, of course, she goes over to Bermuda and photographs right on the seashore and does beautiful things.

Daniel: I would like to extract from you a characterization of western photography.

Cunningham: What do you mean? Am I not saying enough about my colleagues?

Daniel: The very earliest photography that was done in the western United States...

Cunningham: ...like Sullivan and Jackson...

Daniel: ...was simple, straightforward, and very beautiful,

Daniel: and it's on this background that the photographer of the West is placed. What do you think of this idea?

Cunningham: I think we've become almost as sophisticated as the East Coast. In fact, there is a great gap; nobody thinks very much about the Middle West except in Chicago where they have a school of design. When Moholy-Nagy was there I think that they emphasized photography. And they have two men now, Callahan and Siskind, who are remarkable. So there must be some people coming out of that school that most of us don't know, though the whole thing is that we should have more traveling exhibitions, which does not seem to happen.

Daniel: The "Family of Man" had an immense reception.

Cunningham: That was a traveling exhibition in a big way. But it wasn't the kind of exhibition that photographers themselves get very much out of. I don't know a single photographer who worked seriously who would have said that it was a good photographic exhibition. It was an exhibition of people for people, and it was very interesting. It showed what was being done in photography. But the magnitude of the things, the photographic prints---in it is one of Ansel's most beautiful things, rocks in the foreground. That was enlarged to such a proportion that you couldn't find a room big enough to bring it together again. That

Cunningham: is just my own personal reaction.

The theme was very interesting, and I think that was good. The point is that it was designed for the Museum of Modern Art, and it must have been better there, that is, it must have read better and things must have been at a greater distance so that you could have seen them better. For instance, in the show as it was laid out here, when you came around a corner you were immediately faced with something that was about 8x10 feet high. It was water, a river. It was Cedric Wright's. You just couldn't get away from those big out-of-focus photographic blobs. But I attribute that to the difficulty of moving the show from one building to another. Although there were several sets of prints made, I don't think they were made to the sizes of the buildings. I think they were made like the original ones because they had to print them all at once.

THROUGH THE THIRTIES, FORTIES AND FIFTIES

Vanity Fair Photographer, 1932-1934

Daniel: What else did you do in the thirties? How did the depression affect you?

Cunningham: I didn't feel any effects of the depression. We were already so poor that it didn't matter, and we had a fixed salary. Of course, earnings in photography varied. From 1932 to 1934 I worked for Vanity Fair, doing photographs in Hollywood for them.

Daniel: Did you live there?

Cunningham: No, I didn't. You'd really and truly be surprised to know that the letters Vanity Fair wrote to me were as if I were right next door to the South. They never looked at a map. They would say, "Go to Hollywood," you know, any afternoon, just like that! I would take the train and go down there for three or four days or a week and then come back, and I'd go again.

Daniel: Who were you photographing?

Cunningham: First of all I'll tell you how I came to the notice of Vanity Fair. In 1931 we spent the summer in Santa Barbara and I met Martha Graham, who lived there. I photographed her in front of the door of her mother's barn. I sent those prints to Vanity Fair. I don't know why. A young man by the name of Freeman wrote me the most excited letter about them. He was very

Cunningham: intrigued. *Vanity Fair* took two of them. At that very same time Mr. Steichen was on the staff of *Vanity Fair* in New York and had done a portrait of her. It was placed on a large page and my two prints in smaller size were placed opposite, because they used his as the main photograph. After that I had letters from Mr. Crowninshield. He was the editor. (By the way, this Mr. Freeman was killed. He ran into a stanchion in his car.) Crowninshield took me on.

Daniel: Who took Mr. Freeman's place on *Vanity Fair*?

Cunningham: I wouldn't be able to say that because I only know the people from whom I heard. One was Clare Boothe Brokaw. I went to New York in 1934 and met all of those people. I worked there for about a month. I did certain assignments. Then I came back home and went to Hollywood again.

Daniel: Let's find out more about Hollywood.

Cunningham: When Freeman asked me what I would like to photograph I said, "Give me ugly men."

Daniel: Why?

Cunningham: Because first of all they always look better in a picture than they really are, and they don't complain. Women are awful, you know. I did mostly ugly men. Well, I wouldn't call Cary Grant ugly...I did James Cagney. Cagney described me as the only photographer who hadn't blown a fuse at his house. The reason I didn't blow a fuse is that I took him right out in the

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Cunningham: garden and photographed by sunlight. At that time he was in a play--of course I had never seen him in a play--and he was taking the part of a prize fighter, so I took him stripped in the sunshine. He was redheaded and a mass of freckles, just exactly like my kids are, and so I felt quite at home with him.

Then I did Wallace Beery. If you can imagine all this with an 8x10 camera which I packed around! And I photographed Wallace Beery at the airport at Burbank when he came down in his Bellanca. A description of his wearing apparel was really something! One of my photographs shows it, but I think that one was never used. He had on gray flannel slacks that were very much spotted, a dirty leather jacket, and a beautiful brown silk scarf. He laid one hand out on the edge of the plane. I put it all in, with his Bellanca. He had a ring on with a row of diamonds in it, and patent leather pumps, his old evening shoes, he was wearing.

Daniel: What an outfit!

Cunningham: Yes, and he had a toothache, he told me, but he behaved very well.

Vanity Fair did astonishing numbers of movie and literary people. In fact it's a magazine which I think hasn't been replaced. It folded. I don't

Cunningham: know why.

The magazine in London which puts out the photography annuals, and that I've been in several times, has now been bought by Conde Nast [Photography]. I don't know whether the editorial policy will be the same. Norman Hall is still the editor, but I keep wondering what Conde Nast is going to do with it. I presume they'll pay us now in real money instead of in shillings; the last time an English publication paid me for a photograph it was one pound, and that's $2.80. It seemed so little to me that I decided not to take it. I said I'd take an extra copy of the magazine--the annual--and give it away. But if the publication pays from New York it will be real money.

Daniel: Real money is very handy.

Cunningham: Well, real money isn't as little as one pound for a photograph. Real money in the United States is ten dollars, at least, and that's very little, too, for publication.

Daniel: You photographed in Hollywood for two years?

Cunningham: Yes, until the summer of 1934. I had another assignment from Vanity Fair after that. It was Herbert Hoover, but it never was published. He became too, I should say, controversial, and the prints weren't used. But the United Press bought the negative from me--not my favorite one.

Daniel: What did you do in New York? What jobs did you have?

Cunningham: The kind of job I did there was for an advertising agency. I photographed President Roosevelt's mother, Mrs. James Roosevelt, with a child from a model agency. The photography was done in her house in the Sixties, and they were ready to go to the country and everything was covered with white dust covers. The furniture was covered and the rugs were rolled with moth balls. The house was looking pretty terrible. The picture was done for the Travelers' Aid or some such organization. The advertising people wanted a photograph of her with this beautiful baby. She said to me, "Do you think anyone will think this is my own grandchild?"

"Well, if they do, Mrs. Roosevelt, you needn't be ashamed of it," I said.

She loved that. It was true. It was just a gorgeous baby. And can you imagine a mother bringing this baby as a model, taking her baby out and selling its time as a model? It just seems inhuman to me, but the child behaved just perfectly. I didn't have a bit of trouble with it. And she was nice, too.

A dealer visiting here* who sold the first Gutenberg Bible in the United States, asked me to photograph

*A. S. W. Rosenbach

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Cunningham: Gertrude Stein and several other people who were writers, book people, for certain publications he was making. Funniest thing, he asked me to meet him at the Greek Theatre because he was going to a Sunday performance. Can you imagine anything so vague, and we met, just as he and I were both coming up the hill to the door!

I photographed Somerset Maugham in that assignment, and the poet laureate of England, who is still alive [John Masefield]. Can you imagine that? I asked Stephen Spender the other day and he said, "Yes, he is, but very ailing. He lost his son in the war, you know." And I thought he was frail then. That was 1937, I think. That was the year I did Gertrude Stein, the year that she came here on a tour.

Daniel: Was she fun to do?

Cunningham: Yes, really fun. She's a natural. I couldn't get away from her.

Daniel: And she speaks more consecutively than she writes?

Cunningham: Yes. I heard her lecture at Mills College and she's very understandable. You know, she's one of the great appreciators of poetry. Evidently Miss Alice B. Toklas is getting along quite well in the literary field herself. Did you read anything of hers?

Daniel: No.

Cunningham: Cookbooks too, she's coming out with now.

Daniel: There's more money in cookbooks than most anything else.

Cunningham: Everybody buys them, you know. I don't know why. I can't follow any of the directions.

Daniel: They're fun to read.

Cunningham: Hers is really fun to read but it's not fun to cook by. I've found only one recipe I can afford. Stacks of butter and quarts of cream. I don't eat that way.

The Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939

Cunningham: The one thing that happened at the end of the thirties was the fair at Treasure Island. Ansel Adams was _the_ person who collected the photographic show there.

Daniel: And he compiled the catalogue.

Cunningham: Yes, the catalogue was extremely elegant. The cover was a D. O. Hill portrait, the one of the woman and the birdcage. It was very beautiful and would impress anybody. Even if a person weren't interested in photography, he might have been interested in the picture because it was taken so long ago.

Ansel had done a photograph of Stieglitz, but he used mine in the frontispiece. He used some things of mine that were old and some that were new. In fact, I was very flattered by a colleague's being so generous. He used diverse things, too. One thing that I did that's never had any attention is the dome of the Mount Hamilton Observatory. Well, that's in

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Cunningham: the catalogue.

Daniel: Do you think that exhibit introduced photography to a new audience?

Cunningham: I have a dismal attitude toward that. I always feel that no one looks at a photographic show except other photographers. That really shouldn't be true.

You know, the write-ups were extremely good at the time. There was a young man here who wrote for the Chronicle, who hadn't been in this country from Germany any time at all, and he wrote the most remarkable English, just beautiful!

Daniel: He liked the pictures?

Cunningham: Yes, he did. He looked at it.

It was very beautifully done, actually. You know, if that were going on now, a thing as important as that, I think I would have the sense to go there with a camera and take a shot of it, and thereby have a record. I shouldn't wonder but Ansel has some sort of record like that.

Daniel: While you doubt that the 1939 Fair extended the appreciation of the art of photography, would you consider that the "Family of Man," at a later date, aroused interest in photography as well as in man?

Cunningham: I think people looked at the "Family of Man" just as they look at a copy of Life magazine, and that's all right too. They find out what people are doing through

Cunningham: the pictures, but they don't think of the pictures as such. They just think of them as something that is showing you something. It was not a show by photographers.

But this show at the fair was more history and it was very carefully done. It was perhaps harder to look at than a thing that shows you how people are working. You can't classify a thing like that.

Comments about the Forties and Fifties

Daniel: Coming along through the forties, are there some landmarks along the way in your own work or in the field that you think are worth mentioning?

Cunningham: The forties seem very near to me. Isn't that strange? Well, first of all there was the war. I was very busy. Can you imagine why? Photographing people who like themselves in uniform! Photographic material was quite limited. You had to think about it. There were signs up keeping your photographing away from so many things and photography was limited. I had rented my big house in Oakland and was living in a little cottage. I didn't have a darkroom. Roger Sturtevant offered me his place at 730 Montgomery Street in San Francisco, and I worked there for a year and a half, until the end of 1945. In 1946 I bought this house.

Daniel: When did you leave your house near Mills?

Cunningham: I sold it in 1944. I left it in 1942 and rented it to a Mills College teacher. I went to Los Angeles for six months. I had an injury to my arm and I couldn't work. I stayed in the San Fernando Valley for six months. I didn't do any laboratory work or any photographing of any importance. When I came back I lived in a little cottage on the edge of Berkeley on Colby Street near Woolsey where Ron lived at one time. It was one room, you know, with appurtenance. I thought all the time I was there I would do a great deal of listening to lectures at the University, and that I would get myself re-educated and have a very good intellectual time. Actually, I trotted back and forth to San Francisco practically every day, or out to my old lab which my tenants didn't use, where I had my darkroom still. That was a pain, just sheer painful. It's a time I just don't want to remember. After I got into Roger Sturtevant's place I commuted there from Colby Street, which was completely convenient.

Daniel: Where was that?

Cunningham: He was on Montgomery Street, as I said, and I didn't find it difficult at all to travel back and forth.

That was the first and only time that I have ever lived away from my work. It's more convenient to live where you work, but when you're separated from it you can't do anything about it, so you have a little

Cunningham: more free time. It's quite remarkable. Photographers never have free time. There's always something that has to be pulled out of water or hung up or this or that. For instance, if you've been developing all afternoon, at five o'clock you can go into your kitchen and cook your dinner. Your stuff is washing while you're cooking. Then you go down and take it out and you've saved a lot of time. That's one reason that I've always lived with it; I rather like it this way.

I bought this place in 1946 and we tried to get contractors for repairs and we finally did. It took a full year to get into it.

Daniel: How did you happen to work in Roger Sturtevant's studio?

Cunningham: He was a photographer for an architectural magazine and was away a great deal of the time. We made an interesting sort of trade. He asked me to come in there and I took care of his son, who was a student in high school, when Roger would go on month-long trips to the Northwest. When he was there I just came in during the daytime and then went home. It was really one of the finest experiences I ever had in my life. For one thing, to come into a place at 9:30 in the morning and go home at 5:30, and never be able to take any work with you--that's something

Cunningham: I had never done in my life before.

Daniel: What work have you done while you've been living here? Anything for magazines?

Cunningham: No. I did work for <u>Sunset</u> earlier in the thirties.

Daniel: What kind of things did you do for them?

Cunningham: Covers. And since I've come here I've had one job with them. It was a plant. And now they seem to have gotten a large staff. They don't need to hire outsiders. I did quite a number of covers, in color always.

But here I've done mostly portraits, and I've had quite a good deal of stuff published here, there and everywhere.

Daniel: In what, mainly, now?

Cunningham: For instance, the UNESCO. One of the things I did of the blind sculptors. In 1940 or so David Myers did a moving picture of me photographing the blind sculptors there at the center for the blind. It was for a museum program, the San Francisco Museum. They had a regular television program; the film was shown on that, and I was on their television program live, too, showing the photographs.

Then I went to Yosemite with David Myers to do the stills on a film he did on Ansel in 1953. Those things haven't been used very much. They were shown in the museum separately and together at the time of the showing of the television and later.

Cunningham: And I had a comprehensive show in 1951 at the San Francisco Museum, and that was when that article was written about me in the Modern Photography.*

In 1956 Limelight, a photographic gallery--the only one in New York, and adjunct to a bistro--presented a show of my things. It is very unfortunate that photography never seems to get itself enough purchasers to have a permanent gallery where people can go to see photographs. That's why I say that people who are not photographers don't go to see them. And photographers don't buy them.

When I opened at Limelight, the opening night was just one big crush of young fellows with cameras hanging on them. Of course they all photographed me. I never saw what they did but I know that they were doing that.

One man who was there was an old, old friend of mine. I thought, I wonder who that old buzzard is. And then I didn't go up to him at all because I thought, Well, he can tell who I am because I have an orchid on. (Padraic and Gryff sent me an orchid, a big white one.) So I didn't go up to speak to him. Finally he came up to me and he said, "Do you know who I am?" This always makes me furious. It's not fair because if you guess wrong the person is insulted. We all change, but we don't realize that we do. We only know that the other fellow has. He has gotten

*Modern Photography, "Imogen Cunningham and the Straight Approach," by C. Berding, May 1951, p.37

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Cunningham: old.

Daniel: Once you said that your work falls into three periods.

Cunningham: In these three periods, you might say, because of the way I moved. Well, I did have a period when my children were young and I was doing mostly plant forms, things that were in my own garden. I've mentioned that before. That comes up into the thirties, and since that time it has been mainly people. Once in a while I do some other thing. I've done quite a little documentary. Some of it I did just rambling around the streets, but some of it was motivated by that organization that called itself the Bay Area Photographers and still does. That group began in 1955, I think, around that time.

The first show they gave was really outstanding. It was called "San Francisco Weekend." That whole show was selected later for traveling in Europe by the state department.

One of the things that I did was some Negro children down near South Park in San Francisco. Oh, I always want to go to those places again and see what I can do. But this is the way my time goes: when someone is coming to see me,like you, I couldn't do it today; I wouldn't be back. Someone else is coming to see a proof tomorrow. I cannot go. Someone else is coming Thursday. I cannot go. Now we're up to Friday.

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Cunningham: That's the way my week goes.

Daniel: What you need is a little automobile to quickly transport you when you have snatches of time.

Cunningham: I don't have to go that far. The automobile would be more in my way than not. Still, there are some things I would like to have a car for.

Daniel: You've never driven?

Cunningham: No. I never have, and of course now I know that I would be just that stubborn kind of an old woman that wouldn't know when to quit, and I think there are too many on the road already.

Daniel: Is the 1956 exhibit that you put together for New York your most recent large exhibit?

Cunningham: No. In 1957 I had a show at the museum in Oakland which included some of the New York stuff and later things.

Daniel: Did the New York show go anywhere else?

Cunningham: Yes, to Cincinnati. Not all of it was shown there. There wasn't enough room.

Daniel: Did that exhibit cover the total range of your work?

Cunningham: No, not quite. I didn't put any of the movie people in that which I had done so long ago. I put in nothing as old as that. I think I may have had Gertrude Stein in, I don't know. That portrait has been seen a lot. It was published in the Saturday Review of Literature and it's been bought by the Yale University Press. They can use it whenever they want.

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Cunningham: They are very, very nice to me in this sense. Someone in Texas wanted it for a publication. The person in Texas was instructed to write to me to ask how much it would cost. I received the money. That was the only time I think I ever got a break. Of course people who run museums haven't very much money, but I always insist upon a token payment because you do everybody an injury if you give your stuff away. How will photographers ever learn to make a living selling their stuff to publications if they always give it away?

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EQUIPMENT USED IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Daniel: Since you are a photographer of distinguished accomplishment, your comments on equipment used in photography are valuable. Are you willing to share your ideas on apparatus?

Cunningham: I have no secrets. I think it's ridiculous to have secrets about anything. But I haven't anything really to divulge because I'm very simple in my equipment. It's humiliating to me to think over what I have when Ansel starts to explain what he uses. He'll tell you the focal length of every lens and how it's used in combination. I am not so addicted to equipment that I do that.

I began with a rapid rectilinear lens on the 4x5 box camera, the first one that I got from the International Correspondence School. Even in 1901 I paid only fifteen dollars for it, and the lessons couldn't have been very good. Years later, when I had my first working studio, I bought a 5x7 Century View with a Cooke lens.

Daniel: What papers did you use in your early work?

Cunningham: Those were the platinum days.

Daniel: For everything?

Cunningham: Yes.

Daniel: What about solutions?

Cunningham: Well, platinum is a very simple sort of developer and requires only one solution with hydrochloric acid and water as a fixer. It's very, very simple, platinum is. But the paper itself is not simple, However, if you can't buy it you can make it, and people do.

Just before I went to Europe in 1909 a 2¼x3¼ Kodak was given to me. I used that somewhat on the way, but I have none of those pictures.

Daniel: By this time you were aware of the most desirable camera, weren't you?

Cunningham: Well, I of course thought the most desirable camera was what I had just bought, the 5x7 Century View with a Cooke lens. It was a beautiful camera even in that day. It was not a day of little cameras. The only little camera I had heard of at that time was the Eastman Kodak, which was made in various sizes. You just guessed the number of feet from a subject and looked in a little glass finder. There was no precision in the focusing device, and yet people did pretty well with them in a certain way. I never became completely addicted to it. I liked the more exact procedure of looking on ground glass, and focusing exactly. I was addicted to that clumsy instrument for many years, you know. I have several prints of a small child photographed with

Cunningham: this 5x7 Century view. And they are just as natural and easy as if I had done her with a present-day precision instrument. One view showed her after she had picked up a great big maple leaf from my porch and had turned it around to me. Another presents her sitting at a very little table, pouring, using dishes like a grown-up. Of course I had to make a set-up for her and keep her in that place.

You couldn't keep a present-day child in a place like that. Children have been brought up permissively and they just don't stay put. You have to follow them to catch realistic and natural behavior. I could never go back to a 5x7 view. Even the 4x5 would be the same. A view camera is very awkward.

I used the Kodak somewhat in London and did some things of dock workers and of the fountain in Trafalgar Square. The 5x7 I used on the continent. But I was very restricted as to money. I remember that I did the big thing of the church in Dresden. I think some of the things that I did, I didn't finish. I did quite a number of portraits there.

I did have another little thing that was handed to me. It was a fixed focus kodak. I think it was an Ansco. I don't remember what years, but somewhere around 1913, I used to photograph groups when

Cunningham: when we went on picnics on Lake Washington. I still have a few negatives of that.

In 1911 I had a robber in my studio. He stole a 4x5 that I had borrowed from the university and my 5x7 which had the Cooke lens. I paid for the 4x5 and replaced the 5x7 with a new kind of view camera, not the boxed Century view, but a more flexible view camera. I think I sold that to someone here in San Francisco after I came here. Then I replaced the Cooke lens with a Ross homocentric. The Ross is a convertible lens, which means that you can use a single meniscus and still get a longer focal length. For that reason it added variety. I can remember once going on a job having forgotten the second element of it, and was restricted to doing everything with a long lens. Since long lenses were not so fast, I was really hampered. Well, I finished with that, too. In 1941 I traded that lens for the one that I now use on a 4x5 camera, which is a Deardorff.

In the meantime, in the thirties, I had an 8x10 and also the 4x5 view. Both were the same make. I used them alternately and together, or separately. I was doing portraits then. Most of the portraits I did in Hollywood between 1932 and 1934 were with an 8x10 with a 10-inch Zeiss Tessar lens on it.

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Cunningham: Oh yes, I forgot another one. In 1920 I had an Ensign reflex, an English make. It's a reflex camera like a Graflex, only it wasn't as heavy. That I sold to Roger Sturtevant because I had a $3\frac{1}{4}$x$4\frac{1}{4}$ Graflex given to me by my husband's uncle. And it has a Zeiss Tessar on it, and I thought it was a better camera. It wasn't as small as the Ensign, and Roger wore that out completely. This Graflex that I inherited had a Zeiss Tessar on it, a 1-c Tessar. I still use it on another Graflex which is now 4x5. My first 4x5 view I gave away to someone who was interested in learning photography, and then I bought the Deardorff and used a Goerz Dagor on it. I also had a wide angle for that.

Now I've gotten myself down to fewer things. Right now I use the 4x5 view when I want to do something close and very exact. I used to use it for portraits. I now realize the difficulty that lies between me and the subject when I have to focus on the person, turn the shutter to the place that I want to make the exposure, get out a holder, put it in, and pull out the holder. In the meantime something can happen to the sitter. What I really like to use it for now is either for a distant view if I am doing views, which I do seldom and think very little of, or of some sort of a still life thing

Cunningham: like the thing I showed you--a flower, or a plant in the garden. And if I do a record in my garden then I do it on that very often.

Daniel: You use it when time is no problem.

Cunningham: That's right, and now that I've been given this Polaroid back, which is 4x5, I have to have a view to fit that, or a Graflex that has that kind of a back, and my Graflex doesn't have that kind of a back, so I use a magazine which holds eighteen. I have two such. Also I have a lot of holders for my view camera, naturally.

But both of those are now, to my way of thinking, a little bit insignificant compared with what I like to use. I like to use the Rolleiflex, and I'm so addicted to it that it's almost an obsession. I didn't have a Rollei until 1945.

Oh yes, I have forgotten one thing. In 1938 I got a Super Ikonta B, which is a German Zeiss camera. It has a focusing device. You don't look at the ground glass. I used that for a long time and then I gave it to Gryff. He had it for a long time.

I have had three Rolleis. I still have two. One is new and the other about twenty years old. It is called a Standard Rollei, which I should dispose of.

There are many new Rolleis now. The new Rollei that I have is not the fastest. The fastest one, I

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Cunningham: think, has a lens that is open at 2.8. Mine is a lens that is 3.5 and I prefer it because it's sharper at all of its different openings.

Daniel: What about papers through all this time?

Cunningham: Oh, that will really make you groan because I've had various fanatical ideas about them. There was one period, between the twenties and the thirties, or a little after, when I was doing large floral things, that I used Ilford paper. I haven't used it since; I don't know what it's like now.

I remember at that very time some paper being made here by Mr. Dassonville. Dassonville was a photographer who had a studio in downtown San Francisco where he did people, prettying them up quite a bit, but not in a nasty way. He just soft focused them as Genthe had. In his last days Dassonville worked for the laboratory at Stanford University Hospital. He offered to make a complete set of prints on his paper from all my floral negatives, but I had tried the paper and hadn't been able to get as good results as Ilford paper had produced, so I didn't accept his offer.

The stuff that Eastman House took of the Stuttgart show was all done on Ilford paper. After that time I became a complete addict of Velour Black which is a DuPont product, and now I'm back

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Cunningham: to DuPont again using Varigam. In the meantime I've used a lot of Eastman papers which I haven't liked as well as the DuPont. The reason I go in for Varigam is because you can make different contrasts on it by using filters. You use the same paper but you use filters to make the contrast. You don't have to have all these different values in paper, stacks of which get very quickly thrown away.

Daniel: You have a set of filters which you fit on the enlarger?

Cunningham: Yes, and I find the arrangement very convenient. A lot of people think that it has limitations. I don't believe Ansel uses it, and I think he is supposed to be the great technician in our midst, but I fooled him on it. So I guess you can't tell always. I did a contact print of Stieglitz on Varigam and Ansel didn't know it was Varigam and he thought it was very adequate, so I go on using it. I'm lazy. I can't get as much done as I used to, and I have a lot more to do.

Daniel: I understand that the cameras being imported from Japan are satisfactory and inexpensive. Have you had any experience with them?

Cunningham: No, I haven't at all, but I'm sort of hankering to. There is a new copy of the Rolleiflex, but it has a bracket which gives it a long bellows. There

Cunningham: are three lenses for it. I was fooling with the idea of buying one because a long focal length would be very convenient. There's just one thing that I think is the matter with it. I've had it in my hand and I've looked through it. I think it is a little heavy. If you had it on a tripod it wouldn't make any difference, except that with children I don't use a tripod. I walk around on my knees. I'm thinking about it because I do not want to go into 35 millimeter. I don't intend to, ever. You just accumulate too many negatives. I cannot look at them with the naked eye to find what I want. So I'm going to stay with a camera not smaller than $2\frac{1}{4}$x$2\frac{1}{4}$.

There is another Japanese one that is $2\frac{1}{4}$x$3\frac{1}{4}$. It's an eye level camera. I don't know how heavy it is. I haven't seen it. You know, I always think Rondal is my authority on the new stuff and he says it's no good. But I haven't seen it yet and the person who recommended it to me--it's called Optica--was Laura Gilpin from New Mexico. She has to have something that gets people quickly and she doesn't want to use a 35 millimeter either.

Daniel: What about the Polaroid?

Cunningham: I have worked with a Polaroid. I worked with it as a contribution to a couple of street fairs, taking a lot of people in a short time. If you are getting

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Cunningham: a lot of people all of the time you have to have an assistant to surface the print. It has to have a goo put over the surface to keep it from fading. Somehow, I don't feel very free and happy with it. Maybe that's my fault. But I photographed Ansel with a new Polaroid back 4x5 and for that little job was given the Polaroid back by the Land Camera Company with my correctly spelled name engraved upon it. So I'm trying to use it. I was also sent four dozen film. But even with four dozen giveaway film I am stingy. I hate to use it unless I think I am going to do something that's good.

Daniel: Is it expensive?

Cunningham: Oh, terribly! It's just unbelievably expensive.

Daniel: How much does each print cost?

Cunningham: Well this dozen is over seven dollars.

Daniel: Is there a need for this kind of camera?

Cunningham: Well, of course the brains that went into it are just not understandable. Mr. Land is right up with the top scientists in this world, really unbelievable! I can't comprehend it at all. It is great. I like it. I don't feel at home with it yet, and I can tell you the drawbacks for me. Perhaps some people wouldn't notice it with the Land camera itself, which is a little more flexible than the back. The back is 4x5, being put in a 4x5 view camera, and that in itself means that you have what I've previously spoken of

Cunningham: as the difficulties of the view camera. When your person is ready, he may not stay ready while you go through all this monkey business, but with a Land camera itself the meter is on the camera, you read it at a certain place, you turn the lens to a certain place, and then you snap it. The amateurs who don't know how to photograph like it. Mr. Land tried to make it foolproof for them. But it is not infallible. I've seen even the greatest experts make five or six shots before they got what they were aiming at.

Another thing, you can make only two shots with the camera before you have to develop the prints. That means that you cannot conveniently photograph a series. With a Leica or a Rollei you can just keep on shooting and you have a series. Action doesn't stop for you, and a Land camera requires at least sixty seconds every two prints. Nobody speaks of the disadvantages lately. Of course I'm not paid for recommending it, and I hope to heaven I won't be.

Daniel: Do you think it will continue to be important?

Cunningham: I think it will be important just as it is now. I'll give you an illustration of its proper use. A safety engineer whom I know goes to an automobile accident and photographs the tire tracks which are still visible. If his Land camera views are

Cunningham: adequate, he may never have to develop shots taken with his other cameras.

In fact I know a man who was invited to Kaiser, a big plant in the Dakotas somewhere, and he went there with a Leica, a Rollei, and a Land camera. He used all of them. He went right into a conference afterwards with his Land camera shots and he never had to develop his other stuff. He just threw it away because the Land camera shots illustrated what was wrong in their plant to the people who needed to know!

There is another use for it. Land is always experimenting with speed, and he is going to have color, so they say, and they are going to have something that is so fabulously fast that I don't know how you could ever get a stop on a camera. You'll have to use a pinhole. It's going to be up in an A.S.A. rating of 2000 or some fantastic thing like that.

Daniel: Why the preoccupation with speed?

Cunningham: I've no idea. I think it's just a show-off really! It's very fast now. I call 200 on the meter fast, as fast as anybody needs, as far as I can see. But the stuff is very much in its quality like color. It hasn't the great range that ordinary black and white has. It has a narrower range. You know that if you under-expose black and white film you can

Cunningham: still rescue it. If you over-expose it a little you still can rescue it. This, though, has a narrow one, like color, so that if you were going to take a color shot that was very special, you could take a Land camera shot first to check your procedure. I haven't tried it that way, but Ron says it's absolutely perfect. And the other night the man I insulted by calling him "commercial" told me that he liked it for that reason.

Of course the great need for it and where Mr. Land is going to make his big money, and already has, is with people who are rich enough to entertain their friends by showing them an immediate photograph. Also, I've been told that it is fine if you go down in the Indian country. Laura Gilpin, who is going to get out a book on the Navajo, tells me that she wants one. She said that photographing with the Land camera and immediately giving them a print is absolutely gold. The Indians love it. They have gotten somewhat over the business of thinking that they are going to be injured by being in that box. That's the old tradition.

Daniel: What do you do in color?

Cunningham: Well, I'm not sold on the idea of color as it is. I've used it and my most successful use of it was when I was working for Sunset and did 5x7 Kodachrome

Cunningham: which they reproduced. If you take a transparency and reproduce it in a magazine, that's very good. I have just tons of 2½'s of plants that nobody's ever seen.

For quite a while there has been some stuff on the market called Kodacolor. Prints are made from it. There is now a new developing process for it and it's better, they say, but I haven't tried it yet.

I tried some Ansco Superfast and did very well with it. I don't know what I'll do with the things that I did, but there you are! If you don't have a job in color then color isn't very useful, to my way of thinking. It's wonderful for projection, though. It's usually 35 millimeter and it's quite good.

I have a wonderful illustration. Some friends of mine went around the world. And a friend of theirs went around the world just about a year later. This spring they came up to see him and we had an evening at his house going around the world. They just screamed with delight at all of the stuff showing where they had been. I had just "been through" Norway and Sweden and also Thailand with some friends, so I was completely bored. As a matter of fact, I didn't see very much that was new. It was just like any little travelogue or

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Cunningham: postcards from a foreign country. If I were photographing on a trip in Norway or Sweden or Lapland, I wouldn't forget when seeing one of these very beautiful and ancient wooden buildings that after a general view, it is a good idea to go up and take details of the doors, the textures on the walls. Every view should be shown in detail by three or four shots in place of one shot. Very few people do this. Once I saw an evening of Italian things by an architect, and he did that. He did the designs in the ceilings and the details on the doors.

Daniel: What about dim light and color?

Cunningham: Oh well, poor lighting means nothing to the new film if you know how to do it. For the amateur it is a matter of education, but the real use of color for the professional is for reproduction in magazines, I think. Then it's quite beautiful and also permament. But no one seems to want permanency these days. If you have a magazine with your stuff in it, you also throw it away because you haven't got room for it. It's really true. Everything gets thrown away. I'm beginning, now, to try to throw things away.

Daniel: Without regard to the quality of the material?

Cunningham: Oh, no. But nobody has enough space.

Cunningham: You know, I always thought that my daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Partridge, was rather smart in that way. She said, "Why should you store up stuff when if you really want it you could go to a library and look at it?" Libraries are the storage places. You see, maybe you can go and find it at the library.

Daniel: You haven't discussed lighting yet in any detail.

Cunningham: I have always been a daylight worker. I have always used what people now make a big headline of. Photographic magazines speak of existent lighting. What they mean is non-existent lighting. They mean that in a dark hall with very little light you still can work. When I'm in a pinch I know how to put in supplementary lights. But I have only one that I use now. When I began in this house twelve years ago I had two great big floodlights, but you see, the negative material has gotten faster so we don't have to have so much light. The problem of light has been reduced tremendously. And I don't go in for artifical effects, like Mr. Karsh's putting a spotlight behind the head and all that kind of junk. I like to do people as they really look in a room, not the way they would look if they were on a stage, unless they are stage people. Then I would probably go to the stage and photograph them with stage

Cunningham: lighting, and that I would know how to do, too. It isn't too difficult. You have to read your meter more carefully, and also your film is less sensitive to artificial light than to daylight.

What I do use when I'm using daylight and want a little extra light is a blue bulb which is a daylight bulb, and then I don't change my meter. And I never put it on the person. I put it on the ceiling and it bounces back to the person. I use it just as a little fill-in sometimes.

The mad thing about photography right now is developers. There's just so much new stuff on the market that you can hardly keep up with it. I don't mean developers for papers, but developers for negatives. The other day a kind friend--I suppose it's kind--sent me a bottle of something that is called Unibath, which means a bath that is the developer and fixer in one. It's the same idea that Mr. Land had when he made the developer-fixer for Polaroid. Also, this friend sent me two rolls of film from Germany that is fast. I showed it to Ron, and I said, "What do you think of this?" He always seems to be ahead of everybody on what's going on in the world.

He said, "You're a professional. Don't waste your time on that stuff." But I'm going to, because otherwise if you aren't a bit curious something

Cunningham: might come along that is really better and you wouldn't know about it. But I can't try all of the things that come along.

I think that photographers who live in a community like San Francisco and associate with each other, know and are in touch with new materials and techniques. Whenever I meet friends from distant places without colleagues close at hand, I find they work in a different way. That is, they remain old-fashioned. Edward Weston was simply stubborn about that. He had an idea that there was nothing as good as ABC Pyro. He insisted and always used that and never did anything else.

I like to know what is new and to try it. If you don't like it in comparison with what you have been using, go back to your old. I don't think I'm going to acquire this Unibath, for instance. It sounds a little too uncanny for me. I would never be sure it was fixed, you know, and I wouldn't find out for maybe five or ten years, you see. When you use a developer and a fixing bath you know that the film is fixed. But anyway, I'm going to try it. It's a little too fast a developer for me. I don't like fast ones because I like to inspect. Most people now go by time and temperature, and don't look at it. But I look at it. After it's nearly developed I inspect it with

Cunningham: a very small green light. If it's over or under, I know.

Daniel: Then you can do something about it right then.

Cunningham: Yes, I can give it a little more time.

Daniel: What about the control of light in printing?

Cunningham: There's one illustration that I have for this in the use of Varigam paper. It has occurred to me, I think, once or so, but I have never used it. I once had a job in which I had to photograph a baby in a carriage with the older child looking into the carriage. The little child was in the sun and the baby was in the shade. When I printed that with Varigam paper I used a soft filter on the side that had the sun on it, and I used contrast filter, higher number, on the shady side. At that time I was working at Roger Sturtevant's studio, and he said, "That's a perfect illustration of a Varigam use."

Daniel: It equalized the light.

Cunningham: That's right. There's a man who works on Sunset, Clyde Childress, who is teaching at the summer session at the art school. He has invented a developer, or rather a "redeveloper," because after you have developed you can put a film through this solution and equalize a situation like that. He wanted to sell that to Eastman Company, but Eastman wouldn't buy at his price. I think that somebody else will probably

Cunningham: appear with it because developments seem to occur from many directions. He may have something. I'm ashamed to say that I had all the solutions here and didn't use them. I had one shot that I did of Dorothea Lange that could have been treated with that. In fact I've been carrying it around in my purse for a long time because Clyde told me if I gave it to him he would redevelop it.

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WOMEN IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Daniel: Is photography a particularly congenial occupation for women?

Cunningham: Well, of course right at the present time and for the past twenty years, it's been really full of women.

Daniel: Why?

Cunningham: I wouldn't know at all. Of course I think a good many people go into photography because they think it's easy. The ones who succeed don't think that, but people go into it thinking like the old slogan that Eastman Company put out, "You press the button and we do the rest."

For one thing, I think that people like the freedom of photography whether they are women or men. You can be your own boss. Teaching has been the great field for women, I suppose. Everyone knows that teachers are becoming disgruntled because children are so badly brought up that they don't give the teacher a very good life. I'm sure that must be the reason.

Daniel: And it's possible to do photography at home.

Cunningham: Well, yes, I know quite a number of people who do. I could show you a gal here now who is frightfully frustrated though, because she is trying to do photography and she has two little children. I said

Cunningham: to her, "Well, I think the only trouble with you in doing it is that you are trying to pretend you are completely free when you know you're not. And the thing you have to do is do what you can do when your children are small, and do what you can do when they are out in school."

Her children are small and she should make herself interested in what is around her. She just acts as if she's butting her head against a stone wall. She's very unhappy, miserable all the time. But she wants to be going out and portraying the world.

Daniel: You had no problems in this respect, did you? You simply adjusted to what there was.

Cunningham: I wasn't very ambitious. I think that's the solution. I just took things as they came. I wouldn't say I didn't have any problem, but I didn't care. I didn't think I was going to save the world by doing photography as some of these people do. I just was having a good time doing it, and so I still had a good time no matter what I had to photograph, so I photographed the plants in my garden and steered my children around at the same time.

But I can think of the times we went into the mountains and into the Southwest when, if I had had a little camera, I would have done a lot more work than I did. I didn't have anything but a big camera, and the big camera and the children were just too

Cunningham: much for me.

Daniel: Basically, you like to photograph and it doesn't matter too much about making lots of money at it.

Cunningham: All the money I made I considered found. Every once in a while in my what I call "era of plants," I sold prints. Nowadays I sell very few prints. In fact, the woman who ran the gift and book shop at Mills College had a portfolio of my things and she often sold them.

Now my money comes from portraits. I had commissions then, too, portraits of students. That worked itself up to being quite good at certain times.

Daniel: Yes, but there isn't much promise of success for women who embark on a career in photography?

Cunningham: There's as much for a woman as for a man if the woman works at it. It is overcrowded, but what isn't?

Think of the fantastic career that Margaret Bourke-White has had! It isn't all sheer luck on her part. She's had a bit of that too, but she's been a very determined and ambitious person. Another point is that she has never been afraid of anything. I don't know any woman who has tackled the kind of thing she has. You know she was in Russia when there was shooting all over the place!

Cunningham: She was in North Africa in the same sort of thing. She's been shot at and had to crawl on her belly.

Daniel: You've never felt impelled yourself---

Cunningham: Oh, I have no ambition, never did have any ambition to be a reporter. That is something different. I still feel that my interest in photography has something to do with the esthetic, and that there should be a little beauty in everything. Reporting is very useful and very necessary but I'll leave it to people like Capa and Eisenstaedt. They've done it so well.

From my standpoint, the whole trouble with the present attitude toward photography is that the attention of the world is on stories. People think nothing of the individual photograph. They don't appreciate it. They don't look at it. They don't study it. They don't think about it. They simply want a whole ream of things to tell something, and that's interesting, but I think there is room for the other side, too. And I think an interest in it will come back.

Daniel: Series photography has stimulated developments of photographic apparatus.

Cunningham: It definitely has something to do with what we have done in the way of camera speed and emulsion speed because even now two photographs of the same child mean more than one photograph of that child. Many

Cunningham: times when I'm photographing portraits of children, especially when they are eating, it takes about four, and they are done very, very quickly, one right after another, to really tell the story. But in adults I think that it's different.

Daniel: When you do storytelling with your photography of children.

Cunningham: Oh, I do, especially with children. But I don't feel that's so necessary with grown people. Sometimes you get something that is just a point of view, like you said about that one that Larry Cowell did of me. I am standing near my front door with some leaves from a plant in my hands. Some people call this an "environmental portrait." The other things that you have seen of me have been those in which I'm doing some sort of work, and it's a moment thing. And this one that Cowell did of me was taken with an 8x10 camera, which means that I was left to my own devices for a few moments. I was just standing still, waiting for him to adjust his camera.

Daniel: An adult face reflects more than a child's.

Cunningham: I think it does. A child is occupied with observation. They do have more clear, beautiful expressions, but they're quick, they're instantaneous. You lose them if you are not fast.

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Daniel: They're still in the stage of observing everything around them. At least the process of thinking hasn't reflected itself on the face.

Cunningham: Once in a while there's that too. I'm very inclined to like people when they go into themselves, but they very seldom like that themselves as an expression of themselves. "Oh, you've got me looking too gloomy," they say, or "too pensive." Well, I like it. It depends on who the person is, of course. Some people are never pensive.

BOOKS AND REPOSITORIES

Daniel: For some time now I've meant to ask you about The Picture History of Photography by Mr. Peter Pollack.

Cunningham: I don't own it, but I know that one thing that's good about the book is that he has a huge number of photographs of every period. They make it sort of interesting, much more interesting than the texts are, I think. Don't you?

Daniel: I think that the early part which covers what he calls the "Beginnings" is well done.

Cunningham: Well, everybody knows about Daguerre. You see, that is not difficult to do. In the old things before 1950 I'm sure he hasn't forgotten anybody.

Daniel: There is a section on Roy Stryker and government documentaries.

Cunningham: That was a most admirable period. A lot of people made themselves a big reputation by working for Stryker. He knew how to choose his subject matter.

Daniel: Do you think some photographers should have been included in the book who weren't?

Cunningham: Well, I think it's ridiculous that Strand wasn't. It's just impossible to mention present-day work without mentioning Strand. Nobody knows it, but in fact Strand was really the forerunner of Weston's

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Cunningham: particular way of working. Strand was also a person developed by this Stieglitz group. I don't know whether he was in the Secession or not, but he wasn't much later than that. And of course he did do a series of things--they are in the Camera Work--of New York people. When I mentioned that to other people they said, "This isn't really documentary except in a single photograph."

I said, "Well, even a single photograph that tells something about a person sitting on a bench with a label in front saying 'Blind' is a document. It's a document of the time."

He did that for a short time, and then he did beautiful things of plants and woods. I think that's the time when Edward first saw it. You see, I knew Edward in 1923, and in his early days he had learned retouching and he did people in the traditional fashion of the photographer who makes the skin appear to be without any quality at all. Then he went to soft focus. Well, I guess it was about the same time that Clarence White did, too. Clarence White had a very, very marked influence, tremendous. Of course, he had a school. Laura Gilpin went to his school. So did Dorothea Lange. They are both very good photographers.

After Stand left the United States he did two notable things: one of France and one of Italy.

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Cunningham: Then he also did a book. Mrs. Newhall did the text for it. The illustrations are of notable New England places. He has done an immense lot of work.

Karsh can't be compared to him. I mean Karsh is an upstart compared with Strand. Of course he has done some notable things like the portraits of Shaw and Churchill. Those are the two that I remember very vividly. He may have done a lot of others that I haven't seen. But when I know people whom he has done, like Martha Graham, it's just dreadful stuff, and he always makes mistakes, of course. But it's used in an annual as if he had done something big.

Well, I had ten dollars that I was supposed to spend for something that I wanted very much, and I thought I'd buy Pollack. But I'll wait until it's on sale. A friend of mine owns it and she said I could borrow it at any time. She said, "I don't think it's anything that you'd want." She looks only at the pictures. So I bought the Cartier-Bresson book of the Europeans. Well, I'll wait around and maybe I'll get it. How much is it?

Daniel: I think it's $17.50.

Cunningham: Oh, that's a lot of money! My only reason for having it is that I'm trying to build myself a

Cunningham: little collection of books about photography. If I can afford it I do that in place of buying books that I just want to read. And I'm going to keep on doing that. But anything over twelve dollars seems exorbitant to me. And of course picture books are expensive.

Daniel: You mentioned going to dinner with two gentlemen, one of whom was from Eastman House.

Cunningham: Yes, that was Mr. Doty, a young man from Harvard who is the assistant to Beaumont Newhall.

Daniel: What did he have on his mind?

Cunningham: Apparently he was interested in my stuff and bought two prints for himself, not for Eastman House. He doesn't have that authority.

Daniel: Eastman House has the collection...

Cunningham: They have the very things that he bought.

Daniel: Which ones are they?

Cunningham: The portrait of Morris Graves and the portrait of Stieglitz, which of course always makes me think that they think they are the only two portraits I have ever done, and it makes me a little furious. There's something about the Morris Graves one--if you know him you're very intrigued by it, and the Stieglitz because of who he is, I guess. Though as far as having any attention paid to it by the real authorities, it has not had that--I mean the people who write about Stieglitz, like Dorothy

Cunningham: Norman. She did a portrait of him herself, and so naturally hers is the one that gets used, though Ansel did use mine in the forward of the catalogue of the 1939 Fair.

Daniel: The NBC man who accompanied Mr. Doty on his visit to you had nothing to do with photography?

Cunningham: Well, he's a moving picture man. He's interest in photography, of course, because he is making educational pictures from historical photographs, and that was what he was out here for.

He spent a long time in Bancroft. They helped him a great deal and were tremendously polite. He thought they did a lot for him. He went to the historical society too. Apparently he makes a moving picture out of stills. What he wanted was faces of old people, old-time people. I did give him the names of some photographers in the Northwest. They are dead themselves, but you can see their collections there, still. For instance, Asahel Curtis' work was all given to the University of Washington, I think, and the historic society, and in either case he can find it. Webster and Stevens had a lot of Klondike and gold rush times and people, and he can find that, too. But he said he wasn't going to the Northwest this trip. The NBC representative usually takes his camera right with him and photographs, copies, pictures if he has permission to do that. Then he uses the copy

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Cunningham: to photograph with the motion picture camera. You know, that was the same thing that Lou Stoumen did in the Camera Eye. Did you ever see that? They call it the story of Edward Weston. As a matter of fact, he began with Margaret Bourke-White and Weegee, and then Weston, oh yes, and Eisenstaedt. I call it three pictures in one because it really was. But when he came to Edward Weston he used less than eight to ten prints, and came up close to them and photographed them. Sometimes, you know, you can't tell whether it's a live shot or not, the way it's done.

Mr. Doty, by the way, is doing his master's thesis at the Rochester Institute of Technology on the Photo Secession. I said, "Well, you'll surely find very little of the Photo Secession."

He said, "I intend to look everywhere."

So I told him I thought he should make an effort to see the few people who are still alive and might know about it. He said Demuth was still live, and I didn't know that. He's a painter whom Stieglitz showed quite often. I had thought he was dead.

It's a pretty small subject for a master's thesis. If Doty really goes at it, he might unearth something that none of us know about the Photo Secession. He's not a photographer himself.

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Cunningham: What he aims at is being a museum curator, and he's been at Eastman House three years. Then he gives part-time to school and part-time to Eastman House. It seems that since he is at Eastman House and it is a repository of photography, he takes that up as the subject of his thesis.

Daniel: Besides Eastman House is there any other museum which collects photographs?

Cunningham: The only other repository that I know of is the Museum of Modern Art, and Steichen is at the head of it.

Daniel: There isn't one in the West?

Cunningham: Oh no, there never has been. And the only place I know that really acquires photographs at all is Mills College. They've bought from me and they bought a good many photographs. I've always been rather surprised at it. I think it's pretty wise of Mr. Neumeyer to do that. He doesn't have much money to spend, as you can imagine. He is interested in it; that's why he does that.

The San Francisco Museum acquired a large collection of Mr. Stieglitz. The recommendation for this collection was given the museum by Ansel Adams. I don't know how many prints there are in the collection, but they paid two thousand dollars for it. When the collection was put up on the wall, they had no portrait of Stieglitz and they asked me to lend

Cunningham: them my portrait of him. I did, and they returned it. They could have had it for ten dollars, and they returned it! I made up my mind that I would never lend it again.

The whole point is that they had a bill of goods sold to them. They knew nothing about photography. They are not interested in photography. They only bought it because it was Stieglitz. And some of the prints were not even good. I'm sure that Georgia O'Keeffe was pretty sharp. She just put in everything that she could pick up, as it were. It isn't even what I call a very representative collection of Stieglitz. And two thousand dollars for any number of prints is an enormous amount of money. If I were the museum director, I would have said, "I would prefer to have a few prints of Stieglitz that I select and some of other people." There are many things in it that aren't worth having. I don't believe that Georgia is so poor that she has to sell the collection, but that was apparently the attitude, that it was for this poor widow.

The Oakland Public Museum has a very good collection. In fact it's quite interesting to go there and look at the stuff they have of the old city of Oakland. But from the standpoint of photography which is beautiful in itself, I don't believe anyone around here has it.

Daniel: Does somebody have a collection of all of Genthe's pictures of early San Francisco?

Cunningham: Ansel Adams made a wonderful set of prints from the old negatives,which were in very bad condition. He did a monumental job on it. I saw that at the Legion of Honor.

Daniel: Are there any other little tidbits you'd like to include before we close our roll?

Cunningham: No, I think this is enough.

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