

Interview of CAROLYN BROWN

Merce Cunningham Dancer

KAREN THOMAS, Interviewer

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Interviews with Rauschenberg Friends and Associates. RRFA 08.
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

[Ms. Thomas interviewed Ms. Brown in Rhinebeck, New York. The interview consists of four separate files. Each file begins at 00:00:00.]

File 1 begins “in progress.” Thomas has brought the image of a costume that was at RRF, the dance for which was not known. Carolyn Brown identified it.]

Carolyn Brown Note: Bob’s design for this costume was used in 1957 and again in 1960. The first time it was a totally new design for *Springweather and People* two years after the premier of the dance in 1955 when the original costumes were by Remy Charlip, with the artistic collaboration of Rauschenberg, Ray Johnson and Vera Williams. In 1960, Bob’s design was used for my solo *Hands Birds*, premiered in Venice.



[INSERTED PHOTOGRAPH – *Costume, Springweather and People.*]

Springweather and People costumes had to be sewn on us before the performance and Merce wanted stage time and he was *so* upset that we had to stand there and these had to be sewn on us. Because material stretches so. It has to be on the body that’s going to wear it. So it was a big annoyance.

THOMAS: Literally, they would stitch--?

BROWN: Yes. And it happened in Venice too. This is an amazing story. Peggy Guggenheim kept a seamstress in the basement of her house who did all of her sewing. And she was called up from the basement. I thought the lady was half-blind because she looked like a *mole* or something. And she sewed it on me. I have that written in my book [Chance and Circumstance: Twenty Years with Cage and Cunningham] and it was very embarrassing because all these people stood around and commented on my body as this woman was sewing. Including Peggy. If you look at the Venice chapter. She was commenting as though I was an *object*.

THOMAS: As in “I wish I had that body”, mostly?

BROWN: Well no, I can’t remember exactly but something like “an exotic *snake*.” (KT: You? CB: Yes. KT: How lovely!) [She laughs] Anyway, I felt *so* humiliated and embarrassed (KT: Certainly.) to be this object.

THOMAS: And today a dance company would have stretchy fabric that presumably would fit. They would have doubles and triples and they would have--

BROWN: We had one costume.

THOMAS: You had one costume. [They laugh.] And I suppose you did the washing out, also.

BROWN: We did. In the beginning, absolutely. Until the world tour-- even on the world tour. But if we went into a proper theater they sometimes had people who did that, which was very thrilling for us. [She laughs.] No basically we did our own. Including Merce. He did his.

THOMAS: Those were the days. [side conversation] I love context, so I was curious to know how you first came to know Merce.

BROWN: Oh my god. [she laughs] Okay.

THOMAS: And John because it’s really the two of them that become so vital in this whole story.

BROWN: Right. My husband Earle Brown and I two weeks after I graduated from college, got married. We got in Earle’s Ford station wagon with our belongings and drove West. We eventually, and I won’t go on to how we picked on Denver, Colorado but we did-- and Merce and John were on a tour. John was doing piano concerts on his own and playing for Merce’s solo concerts. The woman that I then started to study and perform with, actually, knew Merce from New York. She had been a Martha Graham person and she invited him to teach a master classes, which I took.

And then John gave a concert of piano work. The woman who brought them there couldn’t afford to give Merce a proper theater concert so there wasn’t a performance. I never saw him perform at that point. She would give a party after each event and Earle and I were invited and

we met them both and basically sat at John's feet. I did. I was a philosophy major. He was very inspiring. Merce didn't talk a lot and unless you got to know him really, really, *really* well he didn't say much that was galvanizing or exciting but John was a whole other story. The first night we were among many who were sitting at John's feet. At that point he had just started working on a chance piece for piano and he was also just getting involved with Zen Buddhism. So he was talking about all kinds of fascinating things. And Earle and he hit it off because Earle started talking about [Anton] Webern and few people ever heard of Webern in 1951.

So they got talking about that and at the end of it, of those two times--, the second time was just pretty much Earle and me sitting at his feet. We determined we had to follow this man to New York.

THOMAS: What was he like physically?

BROWN: At that point he was almost 6 feet tall but he had terrible posture and he had spikey hair, went straight up and ears that stuck out to the side and well, as I say in the book, it seemed like his torso from his waist up was going in this direction [indicates John Cage posture] and from the waist down was going-- it was a kind of twisted posture and Merce could never get him to exercise until practically the last years of his life. I don't think he connected with his body.

THOMAS: It's all in his mind. It's all in that energy.

BROWN: And his ears.

THOMAS: So you followed him to New York.

BROWN: Well it took a year. We had to earn enough money to do it and then we followed him to New York and he was starting this project for magnetic tape which was in its birth throes at that point. And Earle was given a job with David Tudor and [John Cage] to work on these tape projects. And I had decided I would go to Columbia and get a Masters in Philosophy, and teach.

During the time in Denver there was a magazine that talked about Julliard and its new dance department with all the great greats who were there, amazingly. And Earle said, "*That's* where you should go. You shouldn't go to Columbia, you should go *there*." And as I also have said many, many times, he knew me better than myself. I mean I had danced since I was 3, my mother was a teacher, a dancing teacher. . I never wanted to be a dancer, never.

I went to Julliard. Meanwhile, Merce was starting to teach with very few pupils and because of having met him and taking his classes which had been astounding -- just watching him. I don't remember particularly what he taught. I remember him demonstrating. I remember *him*. And apparently according to Earle when I went across the floor, I didn't hear it, I don't know if it's true but this is what Earle said he heard-- that Merce *muttered* under his breath, "There is a dancer." Which I like to think is true. But who knows.

I mean Earle didn't lie so-- So I started going to Julliard and studying with all the biggies and then going downtown to study with Merce in this drab, hideous, filthy place. And at the end of

that year, he invited four of us to go to Black Mountain College for the summer. And therein is the birth of the company. 1953.

THOMAS: Black Mountain seemed such a crucible to me.

BROWN: Right. Now Bob wasn't there yet. I mean wasn't there *our* summer. He had been there the summer before, and that's when, to my knowledge, that's when he met John and Merce. And apparently he took Merce's class. I think he would have *loved* to be a dancer. I don't know how good he would have been, but he would have loved to do that.

THOMAS: He loved *being* with dancers.

BROWN: Oh yes indeed. He loved us. We loved him. (She laughs.)

THOMAS: He told me in one of the interviews that we had that he loved that world because he felt so at home with dancers because he felt that they understood him. I have that quote. I don't want to misquote him.¹

BROWN: I'll just elaborate a little bit on that. He loved community, he loved the activity of togetherness, of working together on a project of something. And I think he felt very, very comfortable with Merce and John who admired *his* work and admired *his* mind. Bob was a collector of people. He had *groupies*. After our day there were groupies. And you mentioned the Judson, all that whole period was again where he could work with dancers on projects. Where-- it wasn't just for the individual person, it was, together.

THOMAS: Almost a family?

BROWN: It *was* a family. The Cunningham company in *his* years, and years prior to him actually touring with us, *became* a family, absolutely. In *my* years it was a family which by the very end of my years became a kind of slightly fractured family. Well, when Bob left that of course fractured big time. But even after that his loft was open to dancers. He was very generous in the sense that "If you want to come and rehearse here, you can." Meanwhile he can paint. Most painters work alone, in quiet. I mean, compare him to Jasper? They're so different in their relationship to people. Jasper has *his* entourage but not in the way Bob does. He has people who work for him, a lot of them, but Bob had all these *friends*. It was groupies. (She laughs.)

THOMAS: I hadn't really thought of that before, or imagined that, that Bob would be painting and dancers would be dancing.

¹ Robert Rauschenberg: The people who really seemed to accept my work were dancers and musicians. While I was considered a clown by nearly everyone else – like a novelty. And I found a lot more rapport with their ideas about what art was than I did with a lot of painters. (*Robert Rauschenberg: Inventive Genius, 1998, Film Odyssey Inc.*)

BROWN: People could come and use the studio, because it was very expensive for the Judson Group, say, to rent a space. You know, where are you going to *do* that? Where are you going to have the money to rent a space when you're not going to make any money performing, et cetera? So he often opened that up to other people. And then he would give dinner parties, and cook, and produce too much booze and all of that.

THOMAS: It sounds very supportive, very creative, very "Whatever we need to get it done, I'll help."

BROWN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

THOMAS: What was the New York art scene like when you and Earle moved into it? If I remember correctly, you dropped down to-- I wouldn't call it Skid Row exactly, but it sounded that it might feel dangerous going home by yourself.

BROWN: Well, before we moved to New York-- we went to New York the summer before, after having met John. Went to his apartment. He was so generous. John too, an incredibly generous person. He talked about the future. He talked about Earle's work. Merce wasn't in town so I didn't get to see Merce. Afterwards John was working on a film that was going to be shot from Brooklyn of the skyline and he was going to do the music for it. We all had dinner at Morty Feldman's apartment-- and we had just heard about Morty in Denver and heard-- well, David Tudor figured in this too. I'm going to be talking about my whole entire book. [She laughs.]

David was in Colorado Springs that summer and he had been told by John, "Look out for Earle Brown and Carolyn Brown." So he did, another very generous person, and so we got to know *him* and he actually gave us a solo concert on an upright piano in Earle's little studio, just for the two of us of all this new music. And that was so thrilling. Then we came to New York.

THOMAS: How is the artistic world there?

BROWN: Well it was exploding. [Franz] Kline, deKooning and at least a dozen others. Well, let's go back to the Cedar Bar. If you went to the Cedar Bar it was full of 40s, 50s artists who *all* knew each other. It was electric. I didn't spend a lot of time there because I had to get up and go to class in the morning but Earle was very comfortable in that milieu.

THOMAS: Could you feel that the center of the art world which had been in Europe, which had been in Paris, was moving to America?

BROWN: Yes, I think that was felt. You felt the electricity. Something was different. [Willem] de Kooning for a long time lived out the back window from where Earle and I lived on 3rd Avenue. We got to know him a little bit. But *he* wasn't famous yet. All of this was just beginning. All of these remarkable artists. Really excited, but supportive of each other at that point. It doesn't last, that support. It becomes jealousy or whatever. Or about money. But at that time we felt a camaraderie among the painters, support *to* each other *for* each other, sharing their girl friends. [She laughs] There was the thing called the "Club", the Artists Club where

people spoke. John did also, many times apparently. I only went there once. I was living a dancer's life which is so different from a painter's life.

THOMAS: Much more structured, and has to be so.

BROWN: And Merce too, although he could go to the Cedar and he could hang out with these people but basically he had to be up in the morning teaching or rehearsing.

THOMAS: You hadn't met Bob at Black Mountain but you did meet Bob in--

BROWN: New York. Earle and I met him before he started coming to the [Merce's] studio. After Black Mountain he started coming to the studio to take pictures, but before that time, this strange young man named Ray Johnson who somehow we got to know because he had a loft adjacent to John's downtown on Monroe Street. And one morning he came and woke us up and said, "I want to take you for a walk," which he periodically did because he knew the city. And we ended up downtown outside Bob's then-loft. It was before he moved into the one in the same *building* as Jasper, not *with* Jasper and it was an amazing meeting. And we went up to his loft which satisfied my most romantic idea of what an artist's garret was like.

THOMAS: Tell me.

BROWN: Well it had a kind of cathedral ceiling and a skylight. And it was up a number of rickety, rickety, rickety stairs. And his art was turned against the wall and he had this famous platform which was where he slept. It was kind of a pallet that he picked up on the street or something where he ate, slept, whatever. And he had some mementos. One of them was the erased de Kooning [drawing], he had a few of those on the wall. He also looked so different from the Bob that he became. Because his hair was plastered down on one side. It was parted on the side and plastered. And he had navy-issue wire glasses. He looked more like a librarian. You know the picture that was sent out at the time of his memorial services, that joyfully smiling, wavy-haired man. That is on my fireplace, it's still there. I can't take it away. The difference between that man and *that* man, oh my god. What transpired in those years to change him so?

THOMAS: What do you think?

BROWN: I think a lot of it in the very beginning was the recognition that-- this is very one-sided here, very personal recognition he got from Merce-- Well let's start, first from John primarily and then Merce and their group, their friends, so that he felt their support and excitement about his work. And I tell the story that when he went from his black period to the color period, wildly colored period.

BROWN: It was amazing work and we went to this incredible loft. It was Merce and John, Earle and me. I don't know if there was anyone else there. And we were thunderstruck because to go from this black, newspaper, drip, black work to this riot of activity. Well, the story is that someone said the black paintings, or the white and black were negative, were anti-art, et cetera, et cetera. So he wanted to take the most-, this is the story I read, he never said it to me, that he

took the most difficult color which is red. And see what would happen. Well, we were thunderstruck and we just exploded with joy. It was joyful-- and so right there he was embraced, particularly by John who really cared about it. And it was *then* that he did the *Minutiae* set which was, again, red [in] color and it was at the beginning of Bob doing his first set for Merce, just a set, not costumes.

Also Bob is one of the most flexible, interestingly-willing –to-compromise persons. “If this doesn’t work then let’s try that. If that doesn’t work, ‘Oh that’s ok then we’ll do this.’” So when Merce asked for a set for *Minutiae*, Bob made something to hang. Well, we didn’t necessarily get into a theater that could hang anything. So Merce had to explain, no, no, no. It has to be something we can put on top of the Volkswagen bus and drag around with us. And so, “Okay.” He made it in I don’t know how many parts, 3 or 4 parts. I don’t know if he made a box for it. But he immediately changed his vision to accommodate whatever.

THOMAS: Did Merce say to Bob, “It ought to have these features” or he just said, “I need a set.”

BROWN: I think he said he needed a set and Bob came up with this thing to hang and that wouldn’t work, and so Bob came up with this idea that we could slide under and go through and this little doorway and the mirror that spun. Bob’s creative imagination just is limitless. And if he’s told, “No you can’t have that.” “Okay.” And another time the *Nocturnes [1956]* set which was this beautiful white, pure white panel and then a white scrim couldn’t be used at BAM. When we got into the theater in Brooklyn they said, “It’s not fireproof you can’t use it.” “Oh my god what now,” Merce asked. Bob said, “It’s okay, it’s okay.” He says he went out in the parks and took whole bunches of branches and constructed, instead of this column of white, a column of an arbor of greenery. Jasper was there. Jasper was there on almost all these projects, these sets, not *Minutiae*, I don’t think, but after that. I don’t know which version he tells. Some people say they went out and bought fire proof fake flowers and branches. Anyway he turned what was one kind of artistic expression into something totally different and he was fine with that. Merce was beside himself. He was amazed and delighted. He had been afraid it was going to be a disaster.

THOMAS: Bob seemed to thrive on “If something goes wrong, yummy! That gives me a chance to do something different”. I remember the story of his first lithograph. Or one of his first lithographs at ULAE and the stone breaks and everybody is thinking, “Oh my goodness this is terrible.” And Bob’s, “Well, just print it anyway.”

BROWN: I was there.

THOMAS: You were there? Tell me the story.

BROWN: That’s the story. It’s exactly like that. I think he attempted this several times and it broke each time. And then he called it *Accident*. It’s just so Bob.

THOMAS: It’s so Bob. I want to go back to when you were saying about this man who is librarian-like. If I understand what you’re saying-- that Bob arrives on those scene, maybe a little insecure, not sure if what *he* thinks is art is going to be validated. He’s validated himself in

it but perhaps not everybody else is with him and he discovers that John Cage is with him indeed. In fact sometimes sees him as a pioneer for *him*. And as he grows in understanding, self-respect, et cetera we see the blooming of a personality? That he steps out a little bit more? I ask that because someone with whom I spoke had described Bob, when they first met him, as shy.

BROWN: I think he was to a degree. Not with us but I think he was in relation to dealing with people who might want to buy what he'd made or dealing with the commercial aspects, the society aspects. Although I have to say he was *really good* at accumulating some really famous people around him.

THOMAS: Yes he seemed to like that.

BROWN: Oh yes. There was one time I went to his loft long after I had left the company and who is there but Margot Fonteyn. Well Margot Fonteyn is a goddess to me, and there she is with her husband in the wheelchair. How did they meet, you know? But then it could be some other incredibly famous person. He seemed to collect them. Everybody.

THOMAS: And who wouldn't want to be around that energy?

BROWN: Right, right. No it's surprised me. I didn't know what her taste in art was or what any or how that came about. I have no idea.

THOMAS: It *is* an amazing laundry list. When I was looking at the original list, which has grown substantially, of people to speak with about Bob, one of the people was the Dalai Lama and I thought

BROWN: Another one that I revere. (They laugh.)

THOMAS: It doesn't quit, the interesting people with whom he--.

BROWN: Well of course he did go on that R.O.C.I. tour and he went to all these countries and no doubt and met all these people. He was really on the one hand shy but on the other hand incredibly social. I don't know. He's a mystery. I knew Merce well for probably 40, not well, take away the word well. I knew him for 40 years maybe, but I never really knew who Merce Cunningham was. You knew who John was. He was out there. So out there. Bob was pretty outthere too in terms of being with people he cared about.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

THOMAS: You were talking about Bob being nervous about his work. Were the red pictures shown at the Stable Gallery in '53. Or were those mostly black and white?

BROWN: No it was the black and white and sort of amazing stone and rope sculptures. Work like that.

THOMAS: No wonder he would feel a little insecure. Nobody really came and bought it, did they?

BROWN: Except us.

THOMAS: Except for you and Earle?

BROWN: Well no, no. Morty Feldman bought one. My version of the story is he bought one for seven dollars. When Earle and I bought ours, he said, "I'll take whatever is in your pocket" and Earle had in his pocket a refund for the-- it was the first year we were in New York and we had been there a year and we had gotten a refund from the phone company which was about 27 dollars and 30 cents or something and so that's what he got for the painting we got. He gave them to John and Merce. They had no money. I think Paul Taylor eventually ended up with one as a gift. Like I said, Bob wanted to get rid of them so he could do the next work.

THOMAS: He once said when he thought he knew how to do something he would move on to the next. (CB: Yes.) Did he express that to you?

BROWN: No, but something like that. But that's true of Merce. Merce always wanted to discover new ways to move. Merce's method was to ask questions and see what answers "chance" would come up with. John also asked questions. But he was asking the I Ching the questions. And the I Ching would do the answers. Well, Merce, too, did that. They both did that. Bob was not interested in chance in that way, to my knowledge, ever. So that he, like we just mentioned, he accepts accident. He accepts chance as accident or happenstance. But not as something that is formally attempted using chance procedures. He never did that to my knowledge. Always accepted catastrophes. The good, the bad, the indifferent. Anything that challenged him, I think.

THOMAS: The organic in a different kind of way I guess.

BROWN: Yes, well I don't think using chance procedures is particularly organic anyway. I think it's as formal as choosing some other means of (interruption of conversation by cleaning staff.)

THOMAS: What was it like for the company when *Minutiae* was on the stage? Had you ever worked with a piece like that before?

BROWN: No, but again, Merce rose to *that* challenge by having us do sliding under it or walking through it or appearing with only part of us, so you would only see a profile. No, Merce loved that challenge too coming up with something new.

[Conversation interrupted by the sound of a vacuum.]

THOMAS: You said Paul Taylor was a friend of Bob's. How did that come about?

BROWN: Merce Cunningham. Paul was in the company, he was at Black Mountain. So that when we came to New York, after Black Mountain and we started rehearsing for the Theater de Lys programs Bob came to rehearsals to take pictures, and that is how, I believe, they met.

THOMAS: Everybody who has shaped our cultural world was living probably within 10 blocks of each other.

BROWN: And Paul was the typical starving artist-dancer who didn't have a shower. He used to come to the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School to take his showers. Until he had a proper place. People were really, really poor. And we didn't care. Earle and I were really, really poor but there was so much exciting life although we couldn't go out to fancy restaurants or do anything like that. We'd go to the movies together, we'd go to each other's houses together. Cook for each other but we were poor. It was wonderful. (She laughs.) Those were astounding years.

THOMAS: Almost too bad that everybody did better. (They laugh.)

BROWN: Yes. Precisely.

THOMAS: Bob was not making a living on his paintings?

BROWN: No. Jasper wasn't around then so this is later on that Bob and Jasper did windows for Tiffanys and--

THOMAS: Oh, right, Bonwit too?

BROWN: Yes, and Bonwit's. And they had Paul Taylor help. And Paul Taylor started doing his own work. He didn't stay with Merce very long at all. He thought Merce was going to always cast by chance. Merce *never* cast by chance. Ever. But Paul saw the writing on the wall. There were two men in the company plus Merce. Merce was *the* star of the company. In those years it wasn't the Merce Cunningham Dance Company it was Merce Cunningham *and* Dance Company, and remained that way, I think, until I left. Or even longer, until he no longer could be the main performer. So Paul saw that he would never get to do the really great juicy things that Merce gave himself to do and he was a very ambitious guy. Actually I knew Paul before he even knew Merce existed because he was at Julliard the year I was there. Paul saw a performance of Merce dancing on Broadway, then since he knew that I was taking classes with Merce he said he wanted to come and see. He was interested. I guess he must have started taking class because he came to Black Mountain in the summer, not as one of the four of us who were already like company. He was under the impression that he was a scholarship student but

when he got there he was told no, no you owe money. But he had no money so he became scholarship student. That's the way it was in those years. You didn't have money and "okay."

THOMAS: They didn't say, "Get back on the bus." They didn't turn you away.

BROWN: No, they didn't. Viola [Farber] also was not one of the original four. She *was* given, I think, a full scholarship. Anyway she ended not having to pay either. There was *one* "company" person who actually paid who danced with us that summer. And so basically it was Merce paying for us because he didn't take a salary and he ate the food we ate but he wanted the opportunity to have his own--

THOMAS: He wanted his people there.

BROWN: Yes.

THOMAS: You were saying Paul had left the company but he had been doing blueprints with Bob?

BROWN: I don't know if *he* did blue prints. (KT: I misunderstood.) No he did windows but I think it was before that. Before he did windows, he did some concert work and Bob did the costumes and the set and sometimes the music. Bob did a lot for Paul, many pieces. I think I'm right when I say that.

THOMAS: Oh my goodness, it's interesting because one thinks of him so much with Merce.

BROWN: Right, but most of that early, early work of Bob's, Paul dropped. But in this last season, in this very last season he revived a couple of them that Bob had done.

THOMAS: What's the best way to see Bob's development artistically and then Bob's development with the company? Did they move forward? After Bob did *Minutiae* he's got his combine period. Which looks like a lot of work to me. But he's also increasingly involved with the Merce Cunningham company.

BROWN: Right so this is what I was going to say. *Minutiae* was '54. And then '56 he did two pieces, '57 he did two, '58 he did two, that was *Summerspace* which of course is one of the great dances by Cunningham. '59 he did one, two, three—three. In '60 he did, supposedly four, but one of them he really didn't do and then '61 was *Aeon* and then '63 he did three, in '64 he did three, and then he left the company. And then didn't come back til '77. At that time, he could devote, for a single [dance] piece, he could devote a certain amount of time while he was doing his other art. In the beginning, he wasn't touring with us. He started touring with us in '61 and the reason was that he didn't like what other people did lighting his pieces. So he determined to *learn* lighting. He knew *nothing* about it. And this also came about through John. I think Jasper didn't like the lighting. John didn't like the lighting. The guy who was doing the lighting in 1959, (pardon the word), "screwed up" because he started doing typical lighting rehearsals. Merce hated them, did not want to waste time on them. And this guy started saying, "Would the company move here and do this and do this," taking up *huge* amounts of time. And at some

point he said, “ Will my dancers--.” Well that was it. I mean that just burned the bridges under him. *My dancers?* So I think Merce blew, and typical Merce, he didn’t go to Nick and say no, no, no. I don’t want lighting rehearsals, I don’t want this. No, instead he fired the man.

THOMAS: These three men, all of them seemed to avoid confrontation like the plague.

BROWN: Yes. Well John was usually the one that ended up having to do Merce’s dirty work.

THOMAS: So, this man is no longer the lighting director, but we have *Bob*.

BROWN: Well then Merce got a dear person, Rick Nelson (who actually became a Tony Award-winning lighting designer) but he needed to earn a full-time living. I believe by that time he was married and had a child. So Bob moved in to do that. The first time he hadn’t a clue. You have to relate to stage hands and they’re very touchy guys. And who should be there but Nick, the man Merce fired because he was there with another company and he taught Bob what to do. He helped him. And then Bob just began to learn.

THOMAS: I gather that the way that Bob lit these dances seemed quite unique.

BROWN: Yes. Well. You know I didn’t see it so I can’t tell you. (She laughs.) I don’t know.

THOMAS: He put flashlights on?

BROWN: Well *Winterbranch* was one very special lighting assignment. And right now it’s being revived with a brand new ballet company in California and we’re trying to find out what Bob really *did* do because [as] I kept explaining he never did the same thing twice never, but that was part of what he did, particularly with that piece. So that he would use hand held Leicos -- big lights, hand held flashlights. He would sweep the auditorium with light. Never in a harmful which happened when other people did do that. So sometimes the stage was really, really dark. And we would be out there pretty much in the dark. [She laughs.] It’s a great, great piece in my estimation. One of Merce’s greatest pieces and Bob’s contribution was terrific. Wonderful.

THOMAS: Did he sit down with Merce in advance and say, “Okay, so my idea [is]...”

BROWN: Are you kidding? (They laugh.)

THOMAS: Tell me how it worked.

BROWN: You’ve got to be kidding. As I understand it the only thing Merce said to Bob about *Winterbranch* was “I would like the lighting to be like that of headlights on a highway that pick up things, whether it’s an animal or a sign or a tree or whatever.” Random, right? Randomly. So that’s what he got. But no, did they sit down to discuss it? No. They didn’t.

THOMAS: They never did.

BROWN: Well I won’t say never, I wasn’t there. I don’t think so I really don’t think so.

THOMAS: How delicious. So he didn't say, "Okay here is my lighting scheme for *Winterbranch* and we have these different performances and so know I need the kit for those different performances. He simply--,

BROWN: Went into every new theater, worked with what was there lighting-wise -- On the world tour he traveled with Alex Hay, painter, so they talked about what they were doing. They knew what they were doing, but they didn't need to talk to Merce. Merce didn't want to talk about it, anyway.

THOMAS: And for the dancers? How did the Company---?

BROWN: Sometimes we were *blinded*, sometimes we were totally in the *dark*. Also, there was a *monster* and there has been much questioning about what this monster was and when [in the dance] it happened. The monster was another thing that Bob created from *theater to theater*, from *night to night* and it was on a little dolly probably about the size of, like the inside of this [indicates size of 36" x 36" table]

THOMAS: Small.

BROWN: Yes, and then on that he would construct, god knows what, a pile of chairs? Just think "Rauschenberg" anything. And *after* his day, when he had gone, the lighting designer-stage manager, whoever was doing it then, I guess it was Rick Nelson, I can't remember. Whoever was doing the lighting at that point, you know, they *weren't* Bob, they *knew* they weren't Bob. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to construct a Rauschenberg monster. Once they got the composer named Pauline Oliveros who is a large woman to sit *on* the chair, *on* the platform and this thing was dragged across the back of the stage. I mean it *always* was dragged across sort of mysteriously. And of course everyone remembers *that* performance particularly. Pauline Oliveros, remembers what great fun it was. And Merce loved that. Merce loved that. And then there was the other incredible piece called *Story* and that was, again--, From theater to theater he made sets, constructions. I have to say he was very good at upstaging, and Merce was very good at not liking that. Merce did not like to be upstaged.

THOMAS: And it became progressive the upstaging? It sounds a little bit.

BROWN: No, it depends on the theater but one time in a very, very little tiny little theater at Darrington Hall in England there was no *room* for a set, so what Bob did was he set up two ironing boards and he and Alex Hay ironed their shirts. Well, Merce did *not* like that. That was so upstagy. Can you imagine? I mean it's not a still object. It's two active people.

THOMAS: Distracting for everybody. Distracting for the dancers also?

BROWN: No they're behind us. Look, this company was so mobile mentally. Whatever happened was fine. We loved Bob no matter what he did. It's like a gift you know, you just--,

THOMAS: Isn't it *Story* where there is one backdrop that he painted?

BROWN: No. Not a backdrop. During a performance in London in 1964, he made a painting on stage during 4 performances of *Story*. Leo Castelli got word of this, flew to London and whisked the painting to NYC. That's much more recent--, You know the newer pieces that Bob did when he came back after '77 are breathtaking paintings. One is on a front scrim, black-and-white, and the back one is exactly the same, but in color, a lot of red. And when you first see it, your breath is taken away. And this is for big theaters, this was first done in Washington and you could hear the audience gasp. But the work that he did in my years---

THOMAS: Right, when you all are all traveling around working out of the back of a bus.

BROWN: Right. Well, or on the world tour. God knows what we were traveling on you know. A big bus or plane or who knows what.

THOMAS: David Vaughan told me that Bob was doing transfer drawings (CB Yes.) on the European tour.

BROWN: No. On the Volkswagen bus. *We* did them. Well. He let us, he let us play around. (She laughs.)

THOMAS: How do you do them?

BROWN: It's a kind of rubbing technique. We're talking '50s now. Early '60s. I don't know. How do you do that? They're rubbings of a certain kind.

THOMAS: With lighter fluid is all I know.

BROWN: Yes. There was a time when John was hired to earn some money making Christmas cards for Jack Lenore Larsen. He would design them and John never does anything simply so these were all with pieces of newspaper. So we had to tear the paper. We're in the VW bus doing these projects and then John also did for Jack cut outs for snow flakes, *hand by hand*. These guys were *crazy*. In the most wonderful, wonderful way.

THOMAS: It sounds like the most amazing group of experiences. And conversation? There's only, what, six of you, seven of you, in the bus.

BROWN: Six. [Dancers]

THOMAS: Six.

BROWN: Yes. Six of us, Six.

THOMAS: Is that what really brought the glue for the Cunningham group at that time?

BROWN: Yes, traveling in that bus. There were two, actually. One broke down or died. John got another one. Yes, that was where we became really a family. Before Bob's day Remy [Charlip] was there and I think Nick Cernovich, the lighting guy who eventually got fired. John

or Merce drove. I sometimes drove but I really didn't like to be responsible for six human beings. But I did. So wait a minute. Is that the right number? It must have been nine of us. It had to be nine, three, three and three. We had six *dancers* and then we had David Tudor, who was playing, and then we had John, also playing, and then the lighting person.

THOMAS: I filmed an interview with Merce for the show I did about Bob and he told a very sweet story about playing Scrabble all the time and Bob would make up words.

BROWN: He probably did. (She laughs.) In the Scrabble years Marilyn Wood was really good at it and John *loved* to play Scrabble. John loved games. When Earle and I first moved to New York he took care of us. He would take us to his mother and father's apartment on Sunday nights and feed us, thinking that would probably be our only decent meal. And we would play games, we would play O 'Pshaw or Scrabble or any kind of game. Everybody seemed to love games. I don't think Earle loved them at all but he played. So John always loved that and so on the bus, yes, he played Scrabble, mostly with Marilyn but I don't remember that part about--

THOMAS: about Bob doing it.

BROWN: Probably making up words. He probably did.

THOMAS: I read in your book that *Antic Meet* was actually a *collaboration* with Bob.

BROWN: Yes, I think that was one of the rare collaborations, and it was an early work. Merce had some definite ideas and Bob realized that. You talk about Bob's generosity. He wanted to have lace dresses for the ballet duet. But Merce's budget couldn't afford them so what Bob would do is buy the lace that he wanted. I don't know where he got the money. And then just charge for the less expensive lace. This is the kind of thing Bob would do. The idea of a fur coat was Bob's. I think much of the creative stuff was Bob. But Merce did give him many ideas of what he wanted.





[INSERTED PHOTOGRAPHS-*Antic Meet*]

THOMAS: I read that Merce had this really generous sense of “I am a choreographer and I make the dance. But you are an artist and you’ll make sets and costumes and I’ll do what I do because I do it very well. You’ll do what you do because you do it very well and then we’ll meet (CB: Yes.) and put it together.”

BROWN: But you add music to that.

THOMAS: And you add music to that.

BROWN: What I mean to say is you add the *composer* so there are three people involved in doing what they do. (KT: Independently?) Independently. Now if it doesn’t work-- Sometimes Bob came up with costumes that simply were not feasible for us to move around in. Then Merce would speak up. And Bob would say okay. But he tried to get around the rules, he always tried to get around the rules.

THOMAS: Did you have costumes that he did that you particularly--

BROWN: Hated? Yes. It was called *Labyrinthian Dances*. The dance got dropped pretty soon too. Yes, because the only person who had a decently pleasant costume was Viola [Farber.]. Bob adored Viola and he put her in white with yellow polka dots big ones. That was nice. But the rest of us women were in all kinds of stripes like prisoners, like old fashioned jail suits. No matter what costume, if the stripe was horizontal it made you look fat. If [the stripe] was vertical, and I think mine was this way, it made you look bizarrely strange.

THOMAS: A vertical sort of thing.

BROWN: Yes, but one’s body isn’t exactly vertical so that doesn’t work. Anyway I think we pretty much loathed those costumes. The dance didn’t last either.

THOMAS: Oh really, perhaps because of the costumes, or no?

BROWN: No. I don’t think Merce made great, great work every time. Does anyone?

THOMAS: And look what I found. Here’s an image, *Hands Birds*.

BROWN: It's *Hands Birds*. And that's the one I said in Venice had to be sewn on me. But that shape was done earlier for the second version of *Springweather and People*.

[Locates Labyrinthian Dances in Cunningham costume book.]

THOMAS: Here it is, the one you hate.

BROWN: Oh hate it. Yes and Holly Farmer, who Merce adored, like they adored Viola. She gets the good one. I've got it! [She claps.] *Springweather and People* had *two* costume designs. The first costumes were by Remy [Charlip, Ray [Johnston], and Bob doing something, I don't know what. I don't know what his contribution was. They were accordion-pleated, very stiff garments that came up and sort of out to the side and then in to the waist and then short, going that way. Well, they were not very successful so when it was done again--my mind is really working now. (She laughs.) It was done again at BAM with orchestra [for] which the music was Earle's (Earle Brown). That's when we got that shape. And that was Bob.

THOMAS: He knew how you moved.

BROWN: Yes. He did another *beautiful* costume for three of the women which was *Field Dances [1961]*. That was early and that was described by somebody in London--a ballet critic as one of the most beautiful costumes he could think of. They were tie dyed, beautiful pastel-y tie dyed and then we had almost like wings that were attached behind us. So the body was full view but also there was this veil which made it more feminine and we loved those. And we loved having a skirt, which we almost never got.

THOMAS: Did it change the way you danced, the costumes?

BROWN: Oh I think so but when we did *Springweather + People* the very first time the dance was brand new and we were pretty brand new ourselves. We were very scared. And it was a horrible time when there was a flood, and people were bused to the performance but it couldn't start for an hour because there were floods or something. And so by the time we went on, we were pretty tense. But those costumes looked like lamp shades.

BROWN: I think that was pretty much Ray Johnson's idea.

THOMAS: Was it *Story* where you got to choose your own costume?

BROWN: No. What happened in *Story* was that we had a basic tights and leotards, sort of our uniform, what we always wore. And then Bob collected "stuff" from all over the place. Back stage where things have been thrown out, or in thrift shops. He'd go in and pick up stuff, all sorts of old garments. Mens pajamas, crenoline skirts, ragged undershirts, hats. He'd stuff a huge duffle bag and then we could put on anything we wanted from this duffle bag and that was so much fun. And one of the things in it was football shoulder pads and, oh gosh, I can't remember but there are many, many, many photographs of all of the varieties. One wonderful time was when Barbara Lloyd, now Barbara Dilley, put on *everything* and we didn't have

anything and we were so mad at her. She was like the gross obese bag lady. She put everything on. Another time she took everything off. How Merce dealt with that was beautifully. He didn't comment. Well, it was Judson time now. She was very discreet, sort of upstage, and just stripped. But her husband who was there on tour was so offended, deeply, deeply offended. I wrote about that in the book because it was pretty amazing.

THOMAS: How *was* the Judson?

BROWN: Oh, I'm going to get in trouble here. Sometimes the Judson work was really interesting [and] "out there." Truly unusual. Altogether too much of the time, to my mind, it looked like a not very good college dance company. The problem for me, and I think for Merce, was that the technical demands went out the window so that technique didn't exist. It was mostly to shock or for novelty or --, You know there are exceptions. Tricia Brown was an exception, Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon, Steve Paxton. They were exceptions but a lot of that work was what, not in a very nice way, kind of trash art. It was taking the idea that Bob could gather all this trash, but it didn't fly, I mean it just it didn't work. Because they *weren't* Bob Rauschenberg.

THOMAS: And as you say they didn't have the technique or the creativity.

BROWN: No, they threw away technique so that wasn't something they were concerned with. But not just dance technique – but also technique in the sense of timing, intellectual rigor, production values.

THOMAS: Did you think that *Pelican* was creative?

BROWN: Yes. In my mind that wasn't a Judson piece anyway. It was arranged by a woman in Washington.

THOMAS: Alice Denney.

BROWN: Alice. The Judson group was *there*. It's true. But *Pelican* was an amazing work -- how did he think this stuff *up*? A theme that runs through a lot of his work is parachutes, umbrellas, so what does he do in this case? In *Antic Meet*, he gets four parachutes and they have these strings that pull them into scalloped ruffles and on *us* they look like Dior dresses. They are incredible. But in *Pelican* he takes them and stretches them out and puts wires in so that the parachutes are open. When he and the other male dancer (there would be 3 different ones eventually) come in they are on their hands and knees but not really because they're on axles. The knees are on axles and they are walking in prehensile-like movement like big insects and this huge parachute is horizontal. Then they stand up and start to skate. And the wind fills their sails, so to speak. How does one think up this stuff?



[INSERTED PHOTOGRAPHS-Pelican 1963]

THOMAS: I guess it was Alice Denney who said that she had taken Bob to a location in Washington. It was a big skating rink and Bob became intrigued with this space but he didn't know how to roller skate. (Carolyn Brown laughs.)

BROWN: I'm not so sure he didn't know at *all* how to roller skate. I had to put my entire trust in that guy because he skated around with *me* on his skates. My feet are on *his* feet and he's got this [parachute] on his back and he's skating around. I tell you it was really thrilling. It was really thrilling but by the time we did it the fourth time, I got injured because many of the Judson folks did not rehearse much. But they drink a lot. The last time we did it which *was* Washington again, and we had not rehearsed at all. I injured my shoulder, and I was used to Merce Cunningham rehearsing, rehearsing, rehearsing and I thought I can't do this any more. It's too risky. But the first time was *very* thrilling and it worked. Bob tried to choreograph it in his loft which is pretty darn big but it wasn't big enough, so he rented a roller skating place in Brooklyn. And that's where he made the dance, in about two days. And not all day long either.

THOMAS: You come here, we're going to do this, we're going to do that. It is gorgeous.

BROWN: It is gorgeous.

THOMAS: I've just seen excerpts but the contrast between these big lumbering creatures and you, and you're looking fragile.

BROWN: And I'm in pointe shoes. He wanted me in pointe shoes.

THOMAS: Calvin Tompkins said, "When we saw that we were afraid they were going to drop her."

BROWN: Me too. He never did, that never happened. It was something to do with my shoulder that I hurt in the last performance. And the performance before that in LA was where, again there was no rehearsal.

THOMAS: He adored you.

BROWN: I adored him. We did adore each other that's true. I'll tell you a generosity story just jumping, this isn't anything you're asking me but you did mention his generosity. And this is after I'd left the company and he called up and said, because I still saw him a lot and he was doing the First N.Y. Theatre Rally when we did *Pelican* again. Anyway he wanted to buy his sister a birthday present. He wanted to buy her a coat. And he said, "Would you come and try them on so that I can chose one?" And I said, "Of course. I'd be happy to." So I did and he chose one and he said, "Now you have to pick one for yourself." And I said, "No Bob, I don't have to," he said "Yes you do," and he made me pick one for myself. This is what he would *do*. It was amazing. Oh well, talk about amazing. I was at his loft, this is a year after he had left the company. I don't know what we were doing but I was there. And he said, "Stay to dinner" and I said "No, I have to go home because it's Earle's birthday" and he said "Oh". So he took a Dante proof, rolled it up and said, "Give it to Earle. Happy Birthday." That's what he would do. When I moved into the apartment that I had in New York in '62, he showed up one day with a silk screen painting. I saw him come in with Steve and they came up the stairs and this was a house warming gift. This was a *painting* and I said, "Oh my god, Bob. Where will I hang it?" "What do you mean, where will you hang it? Over the fireplace, of course." I thought that was too conventional. And when I did blue print[s] with him he rolled one up and said, "Here." And [decades later] I gave it to the Museum of Modern Art.

THOMAS: I saw some Life magazine photographs of doing those blue print pictures.

BROWN: In those years in the early, early years. I don't know which year it was but it was before I moved to Third Avenue, which was '54 or '55, something. Anyway we were the only people with a bathtub.

THOMAS: You and Earle.

BROWN: Yes. And so people came to take baths and showers, but also Bob could put-the blue print into the bathwater, which you needed to do. I modeled some of them. I don't know what ever happened to those. He put the blue print paper on the floor, you lie on it, or I would lie on it

and he had this kind of sunlamp type thing that he would go around and do whatever he does and then he would, I guess, put it in the bathtub. I had two of these. One was with twigs and flowers and leaves on it and then the sunlamp process. At the end he gave two of them to me. I just didn't know that they were worth anything at all. I rolled them up. I didn't even cover them, as I remember. I stuck them in the back of the closet, and years later when they were doing the "early years" show in Washington--

THOMAS: Walter Hopps at Corcoran.

BROWN: Walter Hopps. I was sitting at a table with Walter Hopps and he turned to me and he said, "Do you by any chance have any early Rauschenberg?" And I said, "Well I have some old blue prints." (She laughs.) He took them both and he was able to take them and do what you have to do to preserve them properly. Only with one of them, the other one was way, way, way too big. So the little one he took and then I always thought that must have happened there in our apartment. It turned out that the one Bob gave me had already appeared in a magazine and David White told me, he said, "No Carolyn this is an earlier, earlier period." Anyway Earle and I donated it to MOMA because you can't take care of these things, you cannot take care of them. The big one, Earle and his wife, eventual wife Susan, had it framed and they have it hung in a dark area pretty much. It's gigantic. It's just gigantic but Bob didn't like it anyway. I think he just thought it was fun and games, frankly. Not serious. Not real. But the one we gave had a foot, it must have been Bob's foot. I don't know. I have seen it hanging there [at MOMA] a couple of times.

THOMAS: I went to see Hermine Ford who is Jack Tworkov's daughter, and she was telling me that when she was at Black Mountain one summer and it was her 13th birthday. Bob was there. She adored Bob and he gave her a blue print picture for her birthday.

BROWN: This is what he does.

File "4" – lunchtime at Tavern – duration: 40:58

KAREN THOMAS: Did you ever go to Captiva?

BROWN: Once. With my friend Jim Klosty we drove there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

THOMAS: Did you go to the Jewish Museum Show?

BROWN: Of course.

[interruption]

THOMAS: I liked Alan Solomon who was the curator of that show. I read his interpretations of Bob's work a long time ago and it was very helpful to me.

BROWN: Where are they? How can you read them?

THOMAS: I'll send you what I have. There was something he had done as an "intro" for Alice Denney in Washington and then there was something that he had done for the Jewish Museum Show because he had curated that and so he had written an essay.

BROWN: And hadn't he curated Venice?

THOMAS: Yes. He also curated Venice.

BROWN: Because he was in Venice when we were there. And in 1965, he and Steve Paxton organized "The First N.Y. Theatre Rally"!

THOMAS: Yes, exactly. I was at a dinner party six or eight months ago and I was seated next to this man who had been cultural attaché in Paris, and London, and also the Balkans, and he said what are you working on, and I said one of the things I was working on was this oral history. And he said "Oh, in 1964, I was an intern at the State Department and I was responsible for getting Bob Rauschenberg's paintings on the Air Force plane." And then, because he had been working with Alice Denney, he helped her in '66, I guess, when she had the NOW Festival. He described Venice as a great time, and a little crazy. It must have been equally crazy for you.

BROWN: Yes, the thing is that Bob was having this show and being fêted in all kinds of ways. Meanwhile he was doing the lighting and the décor at the Fenice [La Fenice], the theater, and the people that were in Venice at the time were either pro-Bob or *fiercely* anti-Bob [with respect to the competition taking place for the Venice Biennale]. And so it was electric, and our performance-- everybody wanted to get in because of Bob. Not because of Merce and John and

us, so much. There had been a cocktail party, I think at the American Embassy, that Bob had been to, that *everyone* had been to. (Not the dancers, of course!)

But Bob had to get back to do our lighting. The audience, in Italian style, were very slow to arrive so I don't think our curtain went up for a half-hour, an hour after it was supposed to. And then there were these factions in the audience *booing* or *rah-ing* because of Bob, and Bob did the most *spectacular* thing because at the Fenice, it's burned down before and since, but at the time we were there, there were all kinds of trap doors on stage. All things go up, down. He used *everything*. Anything he could *do*. It was *extraordinary* what he did. We were as amazed as the audience.

THOMAS: It's really too bad that the relationship went awry with John and Merce and Bob because as an inventive team it sounds like there was *never* anything any better.

BROWN: Right, right. Now, you know, it was a two-way problem because psychologically, or sociologically, Bob was not sensitive to the fact that Merce and John were envious of his *incredible* success in Venice and after Venice everywhere we went people wanted to meet *Bob*. And just brushed by John and Merce, the very reason Bob was on this tour. These men talk about no ego but they have as much ego as anybody else. Bob simply was not sensitive to that problem.

THOMAS: John had been really well-known, hadn't he?

BROWN: Yes but Merce was not well known in '64 although we had been in Europe, but not the whole company, just two of us.

THOMAS: Star was rising, it sounds like.

BROWN: Right, but the "star" particularly in Venice and then after Venice was Bob. And then you could just see what was going to happen. They were envious, they were hurt. Bob made a terrible mistake by saying to the press. He may not have even *said* it, but it was reported that he said the Cunningham Company is my biggest canvas. Well--

THOMAS: Does it sound like something he would have said at that time?

BROWN: Not in the way that it comes across. Only in the sense that he's had the opportunity to work with Merce that gave him this amazing exposure around the world. And so one understands if he *did* say it what he meant. Then there was another time when it was *not* his fault. We arrived in town and the headlines were all about Bob. This was tough stuff. In the end, the bad things that happened were coming from John because he and Merce had become estranged. This was a terribly, terribly difficult tour for Merce. To go off around the world, [with] nowhere near enough money or enough dates or anything and a company, a big company.

The other thing that happened in Venice was that the people had made an agreement to pay the company a certain amount of money and Lew Lloyd, our business manager at the time, was distraught because they weren't giving him the money and they said, "This was not the

agreement.” It was Alan Solomon who made this agreement. Apparently it wasn’t sufficiently legally binding in whatever way and Lew was beside himself on the stage, saying to John, “What am I going to do? I have to have enough money to pay the dancers so they can pay their hotel and buy their food.”

And John said, “Oh, don’t worry Lew we’ll take...”, and he said, “No! I have a payroll to meet every week,” and he got really, really angry. Lew picked up a bottle of Coca Cola. Threw it against the wall. At which point Bob comes up to Lew and says, “It’s okay, I’ll take care of it.”

And the money that was needed was almost the exact amount Bob got for the [Venice Biennale] Prize. So when the bad things happened at the end of the tour-- The other thing, of course, is it’s very hard to accept that kind of generosity if you’re Merce and John, because it somehow diminishes them in a way.

Again, it was only that Bob wanted to get the show on. It was terrific what he did, absolutely terrific. I talked to Jasper about *all* of this because he called me *immediately* when we had returned from that world tour and wanted to know, “What has happened.”

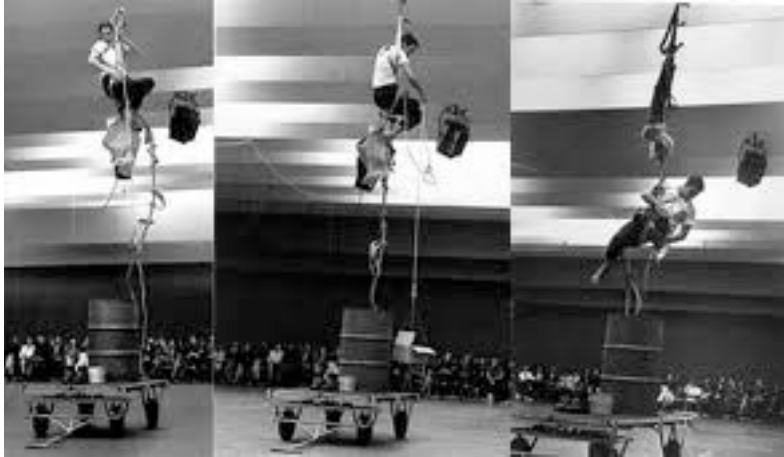
THOMAS: Was he surprised, Jasper?

BROWN: I don’t think so. He knew Bob well and by this time he had been very, very hurt by Bob. But Jasper has always been one of Merce’s most loyal, devoted supporters. I’ll give you my version. I don’t know what the real truth is. But John also felt that Bob was alienating *us* from them.

THOMAS: From John and Merce?

BROWN: Yes. It’s really complicated. I describe it in my book [Chance and Circumstance: Twenty Years with Cage and Cunningham]. John had always been our leader and suddenly now with Bob on this tour and feeling very up and happy and joyful and creative and eager to share all this with us, left John feeling abandoned. Merce and John were estranged as well. The responsibility of touring with such a large group took its toll on them both. Merce was unwell and withdrew, from us, and from John. It was a very very difficult time for them both. And then Bob did this amazing thing in Sweden. The company probably would not have *had* the performances in Sweden if it hadn’t been for [Pontus] Hulton.

THOMAS: Oh, Pontus Hulton. Is that when he did the *Elgin Tie*?



[INSERTED PHOTOGRAPH-*Elgin Tie*]

BROWN: Yes. (KT: It sounded such an amazing--) Oh that piece was so amazing but the situation began to unravel in Sweden. It was really, really sad.

THOMAS: You can see it happening. You tend to think of it happening in junior high school. ~~That~~ You can understand the jealousies, "He's more popular than I am." And again, this sort of inability to sit down and say, "We've got some things to talk about."

BROWN: Right. Well apparently when John tried to talk to Bob, he blew it all together and hurt Bob so badly. Bob was devastated. By this time they were *all* frazzled.

THOMAS: All of that [time] Bob is becoming increasingly more successful. (CB: Affirmative.) That had been going on for some time, since '63 or so.

BROWN: But not so evident as in Europe in 1964. Particularly after Venice.

THOMAS: In your book it sounded like everybody would have been more than happy to get on a plane and go home. Or, did you find that everybody was thinking, "Okay, we're just going to soldier through"?

BROWN: Oh I don't think anybody wanted to go home. Not that tour. It was too amazing. I mean, eleven European countries, India Japan, Bangkok.

THOMAS: What was the Sarabai's place [in India] like?

BROWN: I wish I could remember it better. Well, it was this *big* compound, probably gates that closed and opened. And then you drive in, winding--, There are statues and sculpture from many periods all over the place, gardens, fountains. *Amazing* home, I mean the family home, it was like a huge, huge hotel. And I was trying to remember where Bob and Steve stayed. Because Bob, his introduction to the Sarabai family, was right then, in '64. I don't remember if he stayed in the great big, big huge house. Unfortunately, I really can't remember.

THOMAS: When I read in your book that John [Cage] and Gita Sarabai had been together in the early 50s, I thought there can only be one family with that name, so I sent an email to Rosamund Felson and I said, “Would this woman also have been in the same family when Bob went with Gemini to Ahmedabad and did, I think it was, *Bones and Unions*, and she said, “Absolutely. That’s the same family.” So there you have John Cage again. With that interconnection. Even though Bob left the company it sounds like he was still *around* the company, *around* the performances after ‘64.

BROWN: No, not around the company or our performances.

THOMAS: He didn’t abandon *you*.

BROWN: No. Not at all. Because almost instantly after he left, he and Steve and Alan Solomon came up with this First New York Theater Rally. And that’s when Bob started making *more* performance art work, even with his son in it. That’s where we did *Pelican* the second time.

THOMAS: And that’s when he put the flashlights on turtles, I think.

BROWN: Mm hm. [Affirmative.] Meanwhile, in a piece he did in ’61 called *Aeon* for Merce, he had little flash things on our wrists that we would set off at random.

THOMAS: *You* could?

BROWN: Yes, when the stage was dark the flashes appeared like little fireflies.

THOMAS: Is there anybody in the dance world today who does really original multi-disciplinary performances?

BROWN: I see very little work these days but there is a young man named Daniel Arsham, who has done pieces with Merce and has worked with Jonah Bokaer who was a dancer with Merce. They do very unusual, original, very creative kinds of work.

THOMAS: I was reading Clive Barnes, a review that you quoted about, essentially, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in the years between say ‘58 and ‘64 as “Camelot.” That’s what I thought when I read it, that he said, “Now is not the magic that there was.”

BROWN: No, it’s Bob. Really. It was. *Everyone* talked about missing Bob’s work when he left. And there’s nobody--Jasper didn’t want to do it. It’s not *how* he works. It’s not the *kind* of compromise he would be willing to make. He definitely didn’t want to *tour* with us. Bob *loved* touring with us. And Bob was very, very social, a social animal. John liked to be around people too, Merce not so much. {She laughs.}

THOMAS: When I was doing interviews for this documentary I wrote to John and asked if he would talk with me about Bob, being unfamiliar with the politics of it all, and he very politely declined and he said he was getting up in age and he had to really measure what he was doing.

And then I at another time I asked Merce if he would talk with me. And he was absolutely willing.

BROWN: By this time Merce and Bob started working together again.

THOMAS: And he said that Bob Rauschenberg was one of the best set designers he'd ever known.

BROWN: I'm surprised he didn't say *the* best.

THOMAS: Maybe he did. You just have to know that if you're working in that kind of partnership that you are both raising the levels one for the other. You'd like to think that anyway. And it sounds from what you're saying that that's what they did. (CB: Yep.) But do you think there are people in the dance world now who study Bob in terms of choreography or lighting? I just don't know.

BROWN: I don't know either. It's just a kind of strange dance world. And for a long time I didn't go to new work because I felt like "I've seen this before." All too few dancers know their history. A young artist like this Daniel Arsham clearly knows who Merce is because he's an artist, and, but *dancers*? I don't know how much they know. Or care to know.

THOMAS: If they're quoting someone else or they think a movement or idea is original.

BROWN: Yes. Have you interviewed Tricia?

THOMAS: Yes. She explained to me that when Bob was learning how to [roller] skate he would show up at her loft for dinner *on* his roller skates and pick her up in his arms and skate across the loft from one end to the other.

BROWN: That was when she lived above him? No, she didn't. She lived at another Broadway place.

THOMAS: I don't know. Probably where she is now. She was really funny about that. She's special. I was speaking to somebody yesterday who had helped with the screen printing on the costumes for *Set and Reset*. The material that wasn't used on the costumes then was used in a whole other way, in, I think it was called, the *Salvage* series that he did. It made me reflect on the amount of cross pollination there is for Bob between the discipline of dance and the discipline of [silk]screening or creating combines or whatever he's doing. All these experiences seem to *talk* to him. Did you ever go looking for, rummaging for *stuff*?

BROWN: No. We never had the time to do that.

THOMAS: Rosamund [Felsen] said that she had driven him through the alleys in Los Angeles because she said, "I know where all those [alleys] are and he didn't and I had a car." Most important. When you look at the dance world and the music world, I do scratch my head thinking

where would we be going next because it seems after this big jump, we are still there. (CB: Marking time.) Marking time until there is another John Cage or another Merce Cunningham.

BROWN: I don't think there's going to another of either of those or another Bob. I think, I know, I was really, really lucky to be alive at that beginning.

THOMAS: Absolutely. It says so much about the spirit of the time that you and Earle just picked up [and moved from Colorado to Manhattan.]

BROWN: Oh, you mean leaving Denver?

THOMAS: Don't you think?

BROWN: Yes, because all that people that gathered in New York of our generation that is Bob, and I think the only native of our smaller group was Morty Feldman who actually was a New Yorker, but Bob was from Texas and Jasper was from South Carolina.

THOMAS: And Cy Twombly was from Virginia. But he wasn't there really when you were there, was he?

BROWN: He and Bob were a pair. I witnessed *that* break up and him crying. Bob broke his heart. Just that, and then he moved, he left and went to Italy. He left altogether.

THOMAS: Bob didn't seem to have ended his relationships well.

BROWN: Not from what I could figure out. Again I think it's a kind of insensitivity to other people in *that* period. I mean Jasper was broken-hearted too.

THOMAS: Trust is such a critical component of a relationship that if you can't go there, then you shouldn't enter into a relationship.

BROWN: Easier said than done. The thing about his time with Steve [Paxton] was Bob was never healthier because he was more physically active, he drank less, except on those rare occasions when Leo would show up and take him off to a buyer.

THOMAS: An event?

BROWN: I mean he could *get* drunk but not *be* drunk all the time.

THOMAS: Is that because Steve just put his foot down or he kept him busy. Or--.

BROWN: I think Bob liked the idea of being with a dancer who was taking care of his body so he started--, Steve probably encouraged him to take care of his body. Actually, don't know anything about any of Bob's relationships. I never asked. We just didn't talk about them.

[End of Interview}