Q: The date is November 13th, and this is the first interview in the Pauline Trigere oral history presentation. Pauline Trigere is a good friend, and she is in many ways a rare human being. One of the reasons I was terribly interested in doing this is because, as an admirer of the clothes that Pauline has produced over many, many years, there are whole elements that I never quite understood. And I imagine there are a few other people in the world who haven't understood either. I was curious. I wanted to know more, and so, I'm here.

Pauline, the nature of this kind of interview is basically to produce a forever group of words, material, that will allow people for many generations to be able to go to a library and pull out and discover who is this woman and what did she do? Think of it in these terms: We have lots of pictures of Chanel sitting at her collections, up the stairs, looking through those bars down at the press and the buyers, but none of us have anything of her voice, anything of her intimate thoughts, anything of.... that sense of who this woman was. So that the nature of this is to do three tapes that are just "talk tapes," as it were, and then one tape which would also be video, and one talks but the camera will wander around and take a look at the atelier and whatever you'd like. In that sense, we will get visually who Pauline Trigere is at this point in time. This will also be locked in with all the available pictures and material that library research can produce, and we know that, Lord knows, if one were to get every clipping about Pauline Trigere you would need a separate building.
However...I would like to start with a very simple question, which is, 
where you were born; date, if you wish. No date, if you not wish. And tell 
me a little bit about who your parents were, and let's take it from there. 
I want to know about you.

A: Okay. It's very interesting, but then maybe we can start 
making the beginning of the galley for my book, that everybody wants me to 
write. Okay. I can go back to your tapes and....

Q: Absolutely. You will have a copy of this, as a matter of fact.
A: Oh, good.

Q: In other interviews I have done it stimulated immediately the 
answer by the person calling me up and saying, "It's a book!"

A: Yes, well, if it's a book, then I never wanted to give it the time.

I was born in Paris. I was born in the 9th arrondissement which is 
right smack next to the Place Pigalle, which makes every American laugh, 
because if they don't know very much about Paris, they used to know about 
Place Pigalle. My father was a tailor; my mother was a dressmaker. They 
both came from Russia at different times. My father left Russia during 
the war. He was a tailor when he came to Paris, and my mother came many 
years later. So, that's why I was born in Paris.

Q: They were married in Russia?

A: Yes. Married in Russia; my brother was born in Russia. He came, 
as a little tiny boy, with my mother. And so I was born.... I know 
nothing else, but my French education in what you call the public schools, 
until I went to Lycée. My education is completely French, whatever is left
of it. I never learned to speak English -- as you can see or hear.

Q: Did you learn to speak Russian?

A: No. No, because my parents, when they spoke Russian, they really wanted us children not to understand what they were saying. But I have a little; when I went to Russia, I picked up a few things ... it was a very amusing experience, as a matter of fact. But that's beside the point. No, my father, I believe, never learned to read or write. Whatever he did in French he picked up from the newspaper. My father was a contractor for Galeries Lafayette and Bon Marché, like we have contractors here?

Q: Oh, yes.

A: That's how he was making a living. And mother was a dressmaker; she was making custom made clothes. So I was really pushed in the thing. My pocket money came from picking up pins or doing a few little menial things in the workroom, which, in France, was just back of where we lived. We didn't have a Seventh Avenue and live somewhere else; we had a rather big apartment and the front part or whatever, the back part, we had the dining room, a few bedrooms, and in the other part of the apartment was the workroom and everytime I came back from school, no matter if I wanted or not it impregnated, let's put it that way, and that's how I watched my father cutting. This was my learning process, because I went to Lycee Jules Ferry and the Lycee Victor Hugo, you know, to become a Bachelor, to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree would you call it? And it just didn't work out like that. I wanted to become a surgeon. Not only a doctor. Doctor of medicine always interested me, but I really wanted to become a surgeon, and
this was my dream. And my father took a look at me, and he said, "What do you mean you're going to go to those hospitals and play with dead cadavers? Not with men cadavers!" That was out; that was ruled out. So that's how I became a designer. Quite by accident.

Q: Was there any conscious training? Did your father say, "Look, I'll show you how to cut...?"

A: No. I'm just joking, right now. It never happened like that.
I worked... I saw my mother do what she had to do. I made for me a dress when I was 14 1/2, knowing absolutely nothing, but I had a vision. I wanted to have a special dress to go to some kind of a ball. My father belonged to a society of, you know, what you call it? of good will... And the children had the junior thing, and I wanted to be very chic, so I made my... But it had nothing to do with knowing what to do.

I married very young, you know. I wasn't yet 18 when my first born was born. But I was a hausfrau, really. I never worked, until I...

Q: Whom did you marry?

A: In Paris. Oh, whom did I marry? I married a Russian emigre also, who was, and I suppose still is, a very intelligent man. I had two children with him, and he was a tailor also. My father trained him a little bit. But...

Q: Was this an arranged marriage at that time?

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: You fell in love?
A: This boy, this man came to Paris. He was from Odessa; so was my father. And somehow, somewhere, old friends... You know. We didn't have any communication with the Russians. They sent this young boy to my father as an apprentice, and he took one look at me; I was 13 1/2, and that was the end of me.

Q: He was older than you?
A: He was older than me. About eight, nine years.

Q: You waited?
A: He waited. My father... He waited a long time. That's right.

So, then... my brother wanted to have... When I married, my husband was a tailor. I was really practically nothing, and my brother wanted to have a wholesale house, really like the prêt-à-porter of today, but which was, you know, in 1929-30 was kind of a very special thinking.

Q: What was the name of the man you married?

Q: Lazar...L-a-z-a-r?
A: L-a-z-a-r. The truth of the matter is that years ago the name was Radzinski, which was a much prettier name, but when we came to America we switched it to Radley, here. You know the story.

So... And when we were working a little bit, we bought a firm which was declining. A firm that was making some dresses or something. We bought it with absolutely no money, but we bought it. It was on Boulevard Poissonniere which was over a cinema. I will never forget it. And we started working there, and this led to a wholesale firm by the name of Trigere-Maggay. It was funny, at that time. Trigere-Maggay was the
combination of this house, called Maggay, which was probably Marguerite, or something, and we were in business selling wholesale, prêt-à-porter to... I was only there a very few hours a day, just trying to sell. I wasn't designing or anything because my husband really didn't want me to work. He had this kind of European idea that women should stay home and...

Q: Have babies?

A: Have babies. And that's the truth. But from one thing led to the other, and we had a few fashion shows. My brother traveled everywhere, from Menton to Marseilles to Toulons to Toulouse, all those French names which are equivalent of Chicago, Pittsburgh and the rest of it, except that the country is much smaller. And, to go a little faster on those years, on the horizon a man, or a brute, called Hitler appeared, and my husband, I must say, had the vision; he didn't want to stay. He had the feeling that nothing good would come, and in 1937 we came to the United States for six weeks. We had a transit visa for visitors. We couldn't get... I could, being French. My husband, he didn't even have... He had what you called a matelot's (for navy) visa. He didn't even have a visa. We couldn't stay, because we came in for six weeks, enroute to Chile. See the piano that I have here? And the couch? I mean, all that came with us from France, on the Santa Clara, the Santa Margarita, or the Santa Rosa, on the way to Santiago. But it came to New York and waited for us. I took one look at New York, the 6th of January 1937, with a tiny little hat and very high heels...I remember all this; my hat flew at every corner because it was so cold the 6th of January...I never knew cold like that.
I never understood.

And then we were at a little hotel.... My brother, my husband and I, on 47th Street, some very second class hotel -- I've forgot the name of -- and we start going to 57th Street. Then we took those two-decker buses, on the top, to see the city better. And we took the bus from 57th Street down to 34th Street, which we were allowed on the 10c we were paying then.

Q: On Fifth Avenue?

A: Fifth Avenue. And then we proceed by going back. The first store I saw was on 34th...36 34th I think, and Fifth... A store named Russeks I think. Remember the name Russeks?

Q: Yes. Of course.

A: Well, we were eagerly looking at all those fantastic stores, and in Russek's window were six or eight dresses, all in navy blue and white. Mind you, it's January 6th, 1937. It's freezing cold, and they have navy dresses with white pique. Now, in France we don't see that, because we were doing the collection of whatever to sell women who were selling winter clothes in January. We were not making summer...

This was very intriguing to me, because it said... Our import... Lanvin, we paid, I've forgot what was the price, our reproduction, that I remember, $19.98. That was the price. $19.98.

Q: Nineteen dollars and 98 cents.

A: Yes. Then there was a dress from Lanvin, a dress from Molyneux. A dress from Lucien Lelong. And I looked... The actual dress bought in France, and the copy, and that was something that I couldn't.... It was a revelation to me. Because in France, if you did just a little bit of
copying, so much as a collar, you could be put in prison. They had that kind of trade protection which we do not have in America.

I opened my eyes, and I said, "I don't believe that." And the clothes, in those days, imported from France, were about maybe $300-$400, no more. And to see the copy that looked exactly... I remember. A pleated skirt with a little white... Anyway... so we continued to walk and we saw all those stores and we finally arrived at Saks Fifth Avenue. Now, by that time I am positively frozen. And in the windows at Saks—a peculiar window; very high—what is in the window but ladies, very sunburned, in bathing suits, which—I could sketch it. They were big suns. A sun. A glaring sun with glaring rays. I said, "These people are nuts! I don't understand them." By the time we got to Bendel, and Herman Patrick Tappe, all of that on 57th Street, going back to the hotel, I said to my husband, "I'm not going to Chile. You can go; I'm staying here!"

Q: I love it!

A: And there was something... He said, "Are you crazy? We can't." And I said, "Well, we'll find a way. Because this was something..." It was unbelievable.

So, we went to see some family we had, in Philadelphia. My mother had some brothers and sisters here. And my husband had a brother in Detroit, of all places. Detroit, Michigan. We went there. The city, which is pretty now, was an atrocity then. It was a terrible town. There were spaces with cars and cars. That was also...and two small kids, who wouldn't drink even the milk. Because the milk here was so good and so straight... You know, in France, everything was cut in half. Anyway...
Q: Watered down?

A: Watered down. That's it. Anyway, we stayed in Detroit about a month. We came back to New York and I was convinced I had nothing to do in Chile. This was the country for me. And we start investigating to find out how we could stay, with very little money. All the money we had went to paying some not too honest lawyer, who took practically what we had. And we went to Canada. I went with my husband and my two kids, and my mother and my brother, who went with us, went a month later. And we re-entered the country, completely, legitimate, with papers. And it took, you know, six months. And in June, 1937, we came back to New York. Found an apartment on Madison Avenue, 1326—I lived there for 15 years—and we lived there.

Q: That's at what street?

A: 94th. 94th Street. The kids went to school at 82nd St., P.S. 6. It's funny I remember all that.

And then we took a little place on 47th Street; 1 West 47th, which is now the Longines building. It's 580 Fifth Avenue; we used to enter through 1 West 47th. We had a room and a half, the back was the workroom, and my husband started making clothes. I was minding the kids at home, and my brother was the salesman. And he made a couple of coats, or something. And we prayed. And we tried to make a connection.

The only person we really knew here was Adele Simpson. She is a very, very old friend of mine. That's another story, but I'll tell you why one day. And my brother went to see her and she said, "Well, I want to see what you're doing." So she came to see us at 1 West 47th, with her
sister, Anna Smithline Magnin, and they looked at us, and she said, "In this building, you cannot do coats and suits. In here you have to do dresses, also, because nobody..." It was so divided—as it is today—the building for coats and the building for.... But 1 West 47th Street was semi-couture and semi-this and semi-that; it really wasn't strictly wholesale, as we understand it today. And Adele and sister said, "Unless... Well, Pauline, you can make a couple of dresses." And I said, "I think I can," and she said, "Well, you should, because if you have a rounded out collection -- and a couple of dresses, a couple of suits -- And that's how I started.

Q: Did she send buyers to you?
A: No. Well, that I don't remember. Probably. I mean, I was no threat, I'm sure. But this is because of Adele that I started because my husband wanted me to be home and that's it. Then, also, since we had no market and we didn't know the customer, somebody said, "You should travel." So Robert, my brother, took a suitcase full of, you know, two dozen pieces, and started to travel by bus. Well, when he traveled, somebody had to watch the front door, so that's how I got back into it. I was in the front.

Q: All right. Let me stop here for a moment. There is an element that I want to round out. You last said you made a dress when you were 14½ to go to a junior ball, and you wanted to look chic. You made no reference beyond that 14½. Now you are a mother of two children. Now you are living in America. You're about to make some dresses. Was there any dressmaking in between? Were you making clothes for yourself?
A: No. No, no. I made a few things for myself, or my father who, as I said, was a tailor, used to make something for me and I would say,
"I wanted this." Well, yes. This is silly, what I'm saying. Because when I got married, I cut my own bridal dress, which I have the picture somewhere here. And, you know, in France you have a day for the civil marriage...

Q: The civil ceremony.

A: Civil Ceremony. And three days later, the big chichi with the temple and so on. I made for myself a green dress, almond green, and an almond green coat, in a marvelous fabric, like a velour with blue fox. I did all that. This was an accidental thing, because I couldn't find the clothes that I wanted. I really was very chic, I must say. I wore a little hat, which was a bonnet, completely covering the...well...it was very nice. With blue fox. So... It was not an experience.... I just cut dresses, like that, it's probably something I have in my hands, since I have no special training, as we see it today, at F.I.T., where the students go, to making a sketch and making a muslin and making under my supervision and of many other people. I had none of that. None of it at all.

Q: You mean like Vionnet, Mainbocher, Balenciaga... You simply cut directly into fabric?

A: I don't think Mainbocher did. I think Lanvin did; I think Vionnet did; I think Balenciaga did. I don't know about Mainbocher. I think maybe Mainbocher did sketches. And the difference in clothes is very extraordinary, because Mainbocher.... They're beautiful clothes, but if you look at them, there is not.... It's a different kind of invention. When you take a fabric and you drape it...I think I'm getting ahead of my story... I sketch sufficiently for me to understand where I want a pocket and where the buttons... Sufficiently, because I know exactly my proportion. But I
would not give you a sketch to put in a book, if it isn't pretty, you see.

So, I had this kind... And when I started making the dresses for the
new firm of Radley-Trigere at 1 West 47th Street, I think I had about six
or seven pieces. And we had no fabrics. I really made mostly woolen dresses.
Mostly on the bias... I thought that was...

Q: The wool was coat fabric?
A: No. The wool was a dress fabric. I couldn't touch the coats. My
husband was the coat maker; I was a dress designer. So...One thing led to
the other, and that was 1937, '38, '39.

Q: What happened to the six or seven dresses?
A: Well, we sold them.

Q: Who did you sell them to?
A: We sold them to Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue, and then the
stores around the country, that Robert discovered as he went around... Not
the big ones, you understand. There are millions of stores. We were not
that expensive; in 1937. In 1937 the dresses were probably $29, wholesale.
Which meant $45 retail, since they didn't double in those days. And the
clothes and the suits...

Q: Medium priced line, then?
A: Yes, but it was not a cheap thing at all, because we made very
beautiful sewing and we worked with three people, you know, for... And
then it went on and on. And then when we started selling Bergdorf Goodman,
I decided to go up and see some of the buyers with my special little coat,
beautifully made....Maybe a little bit different. You know, in a way people
said it was very French. Well, it was. We had no influence with the American designer. There was no such thing as an American designer. There were American makers. Remember, in 1937 you were not... There were no designers' pure name. There were people who were making clothes: Mr. Adler, the building that we are on, the two buildings, was making shirts, blouses and skirts, and he put them together. But who was there... If you go back, you had Nettie Rosenstein started on 47th Street in 19... Let me see now. They must have started to be dressmaker and being known by '41, '42, '43? These women were making dresses for, you know, your sister, your mother, your friend, and all of a sudden this store came to buy. That's how this system of--I think--of ready-to-wear, started in America.

Q: What about a name like Hattie Carnegie?

A: Hattie Carnegie was a custom made firm who, in 1941 maybe, opened a store. Or maybe before that. And then... Since she knew the value.... Hattie Carnegie used to go to France and buy an awful lot of fabric. You would not think... That's what she was doing. She went to Paris and had the clothes copied, and in those days, Pauline Potter, who became the Baroness de Rothschild, who had great taste... She used to adapt them, change this and change that. I think Norman Norell was working for Hattie. And the clothes were very expensive. At that time, she opened another firm called "Spectator Sport," I think she was one of the first ones, with a man named Bruno something as a designer. But she still had her designer. They were always influenced by the French. She went to France and bought a slew of fabric, of clothes there.
Q: She bought clothes; actual...?

A: But then she decided... The store was 49th Street. Hattie Carnegie couture. And she thought the clothes were a little too expensive to put into the boutique, so she had the idea, and she started this at 711 Fifth Avenue (that's another story, because I worked there later on). And she started a business to supply her own store, and as it happened, a good friend, Stanley Korshak in Chicago, said, "Well, Hattie, why not sell me some too?" So she sold Korshak, and then she sold Magnin. And they were very, very friendly with the Magnins. That's how that thing started. Hattie was a fabulous lady. But in those days, it was Hattie Carnegie with the influence of the French, and it was "Spectator Sport," and it was Nettie Rosenstein. Now, Nettie Rosenstein did not go to Paris. They were making really a dressmaker, with the little black dresses, you know; the thing cut properly, beautifully made and so on. I guess there must be many more that I don't remember, than the makers of coats. Zuckerman came later. I know I'm ahead of my story.

Anyway, in 1937, we started this little clothes business, and we went on until 1945, I think; '44...No...Wait a minute. I'm sorry. '41. When was Pearl Harbor?

Q: '41.

A: In 1941, I kind of separated from my husband. We were not divorced, and I was looking for a job, because I wanted to work. By that time I was a so-called designer, and my first job was with a firm named Ben Gerschel, a coat firm. He had seen some of the suits that I made for me, and I went
to work there. I had absolutely no knowledge of working for anybody. I've
never done it. Working for myself, I came at the time I wanted. Cut and
worked till midnight. I had no rules, no direct...you know... So it was
very hard. They gave me two assistants; I didn't understand them; they
certainly didn't understand me. And I stayed about 3-4 months I guess. Their
designer was a marvelous man by the name of Bobbie...[Knox] Oh, what was his
name? He was a good friend of Norman Norell's. Charming man, who was doing
the whole collection. Who told me, since I was in direct competition to
him, he said, "You have great talent, Pauline, but don't stay here." And
I didn't, because I couldn't get on with anybody. But I learned a lot.
I found out how to put a swatchbook together. The owner was a man who
always, at all times, had a big cigar in his mouth. Always. And spitting
all over the place. That's why I have a spittoon in my place in the country,
because of him, I guess. And I made pretty clothes. But they were out
of their scope. The customers who came to buy the Ben Gerschel line did
not understand those very soft, tailored suits, which didn't belong in a
cost and suit house. It was something else. We sold them very well
somewhere else, but... You know, it's like today. You come to Trigere for
a certain thing; you don't come to me to buy blue jeans, for instance.
You don't come to me to buy men's shirts. I don't do that. They come
for a certain type of merchandise. Same thing with.... So, I was looking
for a job, and I landed at Hattie Carnegie, I want you to know. I think
it must have been August or September of 1941. Now I'm not a designer; I
am a little assistant. $70 a week, and two small children. And I took the
job because, first of all, I love to work. And I had to learn. I had to be somewhere. I was the Assistant to Travis Banton. Does that remember...? Travis...

Q: Oh, absolutely. I first met Travis Banton when he was assisting Madame Frances. Did you ever know Madame Frances?

A: Sure, I knew Madame... Of course. I mean, I was her guest many times. That's another story, which.... Travis... What happened is that Norell was courted by Mr. Traina, who took him away on Seventh Avenue. And then Jean-Louis was working for Hattie Carnegie. He was taken away by Paramount Pictures. And she had no one. Travis Banton, after Frances, came in and did something for Lily Dache, who wanted to become a dress couture house. That didn't work out, so Hattie took Travis, at $325 a week. That was in 1941.

Q: That was a lot of money.

A: Yes it was. Like today, $1,500, at least. Maybe more. I was making $70. But I took the job. And she had a little shop, a little place, at 18 E. 56th Street, where there was a Hamburger Heaven. I don't know if...across from Harper's famous pharmacy, where Harper's Bazaar used to be. Almost at the corner of Madison Avenue. So, I got there. I had the back of the floor with three machines and a table, and the sketches of Travis Banton, who used to get--let him rest in peace--but he used to get really nice and plastered every night and used to come by 12:30...

kind of dizzy. He would bring me beautiful sketches with trains going up in the air and plumes and things, and I had no idea what he was talking
about. I tried to make some dresses out of it. He came in about 12:30; took a nap until 1:30, went out to lunch, and that was the end of it. And every day at 8:30, Hattie Carnegie used to call me from her apartment—a beautiful apartment at 94th Street and 5th—to find out.... She knew... She never came, but she knew what dress was in work... By the way, she never believed in women designers. I'll tell you that story later. She thought I was pretty good as an Assistant. She said, "What happened to the red dress in the second machine?" She was an extraordinary person. And I had to give her the Conte Rendue. I mean, to tell her exactly what happened the day before. And, I was making the collection. And until December 7, 1941. At that time I was terribly happy; I got a raise. They gave me $5 more. I made...

Q: So you were making $75.

A: I was making $75 a week. Which was.... So, I told my three and a half girls that for Christmas we will have a party. I was all excited, you know. My mother was minding my children. It was all right. And the 7th of December, you know what happened. Two days later Mr. ... which Magnin was it? Grover Magnin was a very, very good friend of Hattie's; he called her, and said, "The Japs are at the door; close the door...," this that and the other thing. And, you know. So she got very panicky. On the 12th of December—something like that—Herman Carnegie (she had two brothers; Herman and, I've forgotten the name of the other one at the moment) came in the dead winter and said that he was closing the place. And I said, "Well, what do you mean, you're closing?" And he said, "We're going
"This was a little work room besides what they had at 711. Well, I didn't know what to do, really. He said, "You can stay here to the end of the year and finish up whatever is to do." And I will never forget it, Robert. That my Christmas party consisted of one bottle of Cinzano (in those days it was 78¢ I think); that's what we had. You know? .... With the three girls. We were all crying, saying goodbye. And that was the end of me and Carnegie.

Well, now, I have to do something. My brother was then working, as a traveling salesman for Rodier, an old French house of material. And I had very good friends in Boston who invited me to come and spend Christmas and New Year's. I said I couldn't do it at Christmas but I went there for... It never happened to me since or again... I went to Boston—Ruby Newman and Ceil Newman, he had an orchestra and they were very dear friends of mine—and we had drinks; they had children. I was very low. But we were drinking wine, and I must have drunk too much or something. I fell asleep for 24 hours. I never woke up; they let me sleep. 24 hours I was asleep. I wish I could do it now. When I woke up—I don't want to tell you it was like Joan of Arc, but it was something like that that happened to me. I said, "I've got to do something for myself, and that's what I'm going to do."

I came back to New York on the 4th... This was the 2nd or the 3rd of January, and the first thing I did was to ask for an appointment with Hattie Carnegie, and I went to see her on 49th Street, and I told her my position. She was sorry to let me go, and so on and so forth, but that's all she could do. You know. She was very worried about the future...
Q: How old was Hattie Carnegie at this time? Approximately?

A: Maybe sixties, something like that. I don't remember how old she was when she died. I don't know. It's easy to... I forgot. She was petite and terribly chic. And I said, "Miss Carnegie, I would like to do this. Would you help me?" And she said, "What do you mean, help you?" and I said, "If I make some clothes, would you buy them from me?" And she says, "If they are good, we'll buy them. If they are not, I wish you luck." I said, "Thank you, Miss Carnegie, but there is another thing I must ask you. I have no place to go. I've got no machine," and it was, you know, immediate war and everything was restricted. You couldn't get a thing. You could get nothing. It wasn't like today; it was pretty serious. I said, "Could I please occupy the place that you have at 18 East 56th? I will pay half of the rent," since in the front part of the building, or the back part of the building she had an embroiderer. She was doing beautiful embroidering. And the man who was doing all that embroidering was sharing that place with me. She says, "I don't see any difficulty in doing that." So I became the tenant of Hattie Carnegie for $50 a month. They were paying $100. And that little situation lasted until February. I made a collection. I got nine cuts of fabrics from Rodier and Meyer woolens. I had no money. But I did have two diamond clips (which I wore last night by the way) and a diamond barette which came to me because of the birth of the two boys, so I pawned that and I got $800, and my brother decided to quit his representation of the woolen people and he would come and we would be in business. Little did we know what it was to be in business.
So, I made eleven dresses, and he started travelling. And these
dresses, in 1941... '42 it was, by then were $39 wholesale. The first
people who bought them was Nan Duskin in Philadelphia. The second was
Polly which was Evelyn Byrnes. And the third was Carnegie. This is the
way we went. Anyhow... In the middle of February, Herman Carnegie came
up with a cigar, and he says, "We're closing. We don't want this. We're
closing." It was like a bomb. If somebody told me today...I don't know.
I cannot explain to you what this did to me, that day. The whole ceiling
was falling on me.

Q: The world was collapsing.

A: Absolutely. And I didn't know what hit me. And I said, "Well,
I'll take over the full rent. $100 a month, you know. When you don't have
any money, I tell you, it's a lot of money. Everything is a lot of money
when you don't have it. It's very simple. And that's the way we started,
Robert. I will never forget... When the embroiderer left, they had some
machines...drills, to make the designs; you know, like a dentist drill?
They were all hooked into the ceiling. They took the machines but they
left those wires hanging down. We put hooks on them. That's the way
we showed our dresses. We had no...Oh. Miss Carnegie allowed me to keep
the few dummies. I paid for them...I forget how much. I have the bill of
sale somewhere. And I bought three machines from Hattie Carnegie, and
some screens, which I still have in the house in the country. I never
wanted to part with those screens, because they were the partition for the
future showroom from the work room, you know. I don't know, it's...
Q: I think that kind of sentimentality is lovely. I think it shows very direct character of warmth and belief. And it also shows a kind of vulnerability. We don't like to give up the things that are really part of our lives...

A: Those damn screens! They were full of holes. I transported them in the country because.... And the desk, the first desk that I bought... Anyway, it was all very cheap. But, you see, my main difficulty after that was not finding the workers—we had them; as long as we had enough money to pay for their weekly salary. But to get pins. I couldn't get pins. Adele Simpson...

Q: War shortages, of course.

A: So, we used to take the pins at night and we used to put them in something; some liquid, some alcohol, to... You know, it's not allowed.... with the union...the pins on the floor are not supposed to go back on the table. You know that. Today, it's not allowed. Because they don't want the workers to get an infection by putting the pins in their mouth or sticking themselves, or whatever. And in those days, my dear, we picked up all the pins because we didn't have any. And the thread.... It was very difficult to get all the trimmings and things like this.

Q: You put the pins in alcohol to...

A: To wash them up, from the floor.

Q: Antiseptic. Like surgery.

A: So that's... It was the very first... It was like the under days of Napoleon, I guess. I cut my first on the dresses myself.
Now, during the war... It was a small building. The elevator stopped at 5:00 or 6:00. We ran it ourselves after hours, because we had to work. We worked 11, 12 hours, 14 hours a day. I am very amused today at the hours that we work. Seven hours a day. You know. Union rules. Seven hours a day. That's what we work. When I think of the time I spent cleaning, sweeping.... I mean, I've done everything in the place. For a long time, you know, until we could afford somebody to do it.

Q: Of course, it is the great delusion of the world that when people are successful, they become the star. But one always thinks the star is born overnight. That somehow or other one is tapped.

A: It can happen, if you are a singer.

Q: In today's world of communication it can happen. But certainly, in the whole history of fashion, there really are no overnight stars, that have remained shining. There may have been some successful fads.

A: Yes. That happens.

Q: But my point basically being that I think when you talk about the number of hours to be worked each day--the changing in the current patterns--it is important, I think, for young people to understand, who are starting out, even now, within the limits of that work period.... You know, the fact that there is the 7 hour or 8 hour work day, the real success comes from being able to extend your work, whether it be reading, whether it be going to see things, whether it be looking at old magazines, books....

A: In fashion, I think that you must be interested in all ways of life. The theatre, the concert... Today, when I teach at F.I.T., or Parsons, and
you see a young group of young people—young; they are 19, 20, 22—I'm sure their motivation is great. I'm sure they feel... But really what they want is to be the designer with the name in the papers, lunching at la Grenouille or being seen at a premiere. All of that comes, maybe, but it isn't given immediately. I've worked very hard, I still do. Long hours. But it was... I don't think... I don't remember having.... You know what? I think I get more aggravated today than I was in those days. In those days, I was young and hopeful. I never set my course to become a great designer; I just had to make money to live. That was the only thing that was interesting me. I had to support two kids and my mother, and this is all I cared for. To be able to sustain myself. I didn't set my course to be a great designer. That came later. Not too much later, as a matter of fact. Because, within two years, a year and a half, we took over another floor, at 18 E. 56th Street, running this damn elevator up and down. We had the keys to the building, because the elevator boy left, you know. And I remember that I employed a cutter who was working down on Seventh Avenue who used to come to my place at 5:30, and he worked till 9:00 to cut the things that we had, one by one. What did I know about patterns? I learned, my dear. My technique and my knowledge of patterns, the inner fit, comes only from my own doing. I learned by mistakes. I know where the seam should go. It shouldn't go in that way. I hope that Trigere clothes fit. That's a very important thing. You can make the most beautiful designs, but if the woman cannot move in it forget it. It's also got to be functional. So all of that, you know. The training process was very interesting.
Q: Did you sell as well at that time?
A: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.
Q: Because...my...
A: I said, you know, the day before yesterday in the showroom, we were absolutely overloaded with people. One customer came late and the other came early, and we didn't know what to do. It happens in market week. And so we had to put another little table, and one of the girls said, "Why don't you start with this customer?" And I said, "You know it's not the first time." But it doesn't intrigue me so much. I do sell...I compose, let's say. When we had windows. When we have windows, at Bergdorf or anywhere, I am in it to decide... But selling per se I don't do that anymore. I haven't got the time. And I just don't see myself... Once the garment is done, hopefully I like it. I hope it's going to sell. That's all. If it doesn't sell... If I love a dress very much and it doesn't sell, I'm heartbroken, but I learned to do another one quickly.

Oh, I don't know. It goes back soon enough. In 1945, we were cramped for space, so we moved to 37 West 57th Street, and we had a big place, you know. It wasn't so big, but it was enormous compared to what...

Q: When you walked in and looked at it you thought, "Oh, what have we done?"

A: 37 West 57th is a big building which is now... I think it was bought by Life...Time-Life building. I've forgot. And we stayed there about four or five years, and then moved to 19 West 57th Street until we took the place that we occupy now, since 1952. On Seventh Avenue. But in 1945... We went into the war and then we declared peace...
Q: Did you have any government contracts during the war?
A: No.

Q: No. You were still doing essentially semi-couture clothes?
A: Semi.... Yes. Because we cut everything almost by hand. It still does the same way, but... No, we never.... We were too small. You see, what we had was a work room, right where we had the showroom. It's only when we moved to 19 West 57th Street, next to Longchamps, that we took our first contractor, who is still with me today. He, and then a second contractor--we still have them today. But for years we did everything in the back of the.... And then we presented collections.... I don't know....

In 1949, I got my first Coty award.

Q: '49?
A: Uh huh. It's a long time ago. And then the return award I got in 1951. And then in the Hall of Fame in 1958, or '59. I have to check that. So I'm in there for... You know...

Q: Go back a little, in terms of... You know. We see the obvious development of this. And some of it was motivated by your survival. But also I feel the inevitability of talent. I've always felt that about the people that I admire. That whether they did it here or there, it would erupt. It's like a volcano. It has to come up to the surface. It will manifest itself in some way. I've always maintained that if you threw Pauline Trigere into a desert island with a group of people and a Monsoon swept all their clothes away...
A: Yes, you're right.

Q: She would find some way to take the pebbles, the bark, the leaves
to put together, and everybody else would be standing there saying, "Pauline, make that for me."

A: That is true. I don't know. It's like today, too. You say to people... When I went back to Paris with my clothes, my American clothes, the French, my French friends, were quite surprised to see what we did here, because the French--I was born one--but they have this kind of superiority complex, that we cannot do good things in here, which is total...how do I say? It's false. We do beautiful clothes here and we do them well. I don't know.

You know, Robert, one thing leads to another. When you said something before, that you can't have a star overnight.... You've seen those examples, of a young star designer, making a marvelous collection, and then the newspaper praises it to the hilt. Terrific. Fine. This is divine, if you can make a second collection. But if you don't, forget it. You've seen it happen many times. I think the survival is very important. That the continuation of what you are good at is very important. For me, I'm as good as my next collection. Today too. Never as good as the last. You have to go on doing the thing that you do the best, and trying your best always.

Q: I think the key, maybe, in just what you've said...to find the thing that you do best. To be able to create an individual, original statement, as opposed to copying statement, either of yourself or of someone else.

A: Well, I think we have that in my firm. I think people know what Trigere means. I think they come to us to get the Trigere. I think there is a certain stamp which I....
Q: Right. You say that you think people know what Trigere means. What do you think they think Trigere means?

A: They think it means... First of all, a quality of merchandise. A quality of workmanship. The design comes, of course, with it. Not everything I make is... I think it's salable. We don't sell everything, of course. But I think over the years I've learned what my customer wants. It's always simple, at least on the surface. It's got intricate cut. Darts that are invisible; I don't like darts that point to a bust or to a hip. We try to eliminate that. Or to hide it. I think that comes from the fact that, first of all, I fit on a live model, and I drape on a live model. And so I'm able... It's a little bit like sculpting. I think probably one day, G-d permit me the time, I would love to sculpt. I love to paint, but I would love to sculpt, because I think I can do things with my hands. And this is really what I do. And when you do a sketch... Now, I'm not belittling the sketching ability or talent of my... You make a sketch and you give it to an assistant, it's never the same as when you take a piece of fabric.... You do other things with a piece of fabric that you let hang and drape and form. I think. I do some sketching too, for the coats, for instance, where they have a certain seaming and it's more classic. I think that people come to us for... Well, how do I say that? It's not going to have chi chi.... I think it will have a durability. I think that people buy Trigere because it has all the quality of sturdiness, but also a design that will be wearable for more than one season. I say that each time that I make a collection. We have clothes that disappear in the first season, if they are a little bit extravagant or so. But most of the clothes that we do... That's the thing that I hear all the time.
"I have a coat of yours..." Only a week ago, Carol Gimbel... Do you know Carol Gimbel? I haven't seen in 5 or 6 years...I didn't recognize her; she was blonde and now she is a brunette. She says, "You know, I've got a coat of yours of ten years." I said, "My goodness." But everyone tells me the same thing, but what am I supposed to do? Starve in the meantime? No. It's fine. I like it when people tell me that. I think they are... I love when people say that they wear the clothes with pleasure, and they enjoy them, and they stand by themselves, I think. It's difficult for me to express...

Q: Well, I'll tell you, one of the reasons why I was curious as to how you would respond to the question as to what you think people think of as Trigere, is that in my experience, in talking to people over many, many years, about various designers, the thing that has always come up when your name is brought up is a reference to the fact that if you see a retrospective of most designers, there are many things that are almost laughable; many things that become sort of, "Well, he couldn't have designed that," or "she couldn't have designed that; nobody could have worn that." Because it is out of context with the times.

A: That's true, I think.

Q: And, yet, more people have said to me... And I felt...Once I went to see, without your knowing... You did a presentation. It was out of town. I think it was in Houston, or some Texas town. I was there and I went to see what you were doing. And you presented some things from 1943 up. And what struck me at the time--and that's been reinforced by what other people have mentioned to me--that in that collection there were an extraordinary high number of things that could be worn today. Now that "today" was like 7-8 years ago. But I have the feeling that the same would apply today.
A: All right. I can tell you what I've done. It's all right with the tape to say...

Q: Anything you want.

A: Last week we had a show. The show for the spring. And, you know, we saw the things coming from Paris. I mean, I saw the pictures. I was interviewed on the phone, what do I think of the short dress, and what do I think of the collection? I always avoid an answer, because I'm cagey. I always say I don't know the collections; I only see what this reporter or that reporter chooses to select from the Parisian or Milan...Italian collections. I don't know that had I been there I would have selected that particular dress or coat or suit. I may not find something that I like. I thought the clothes were outrageous, some of them. The way they were photographed. The way the photograph...So...But I did something...After the eight models came out with the first group of Trigere clothes, I made this outrageous statement. I stopped, and I said, "You know, I've got to tell you all that Lucy and I (my Assistant, Lucy Porges who is with me many, many years), we were kind of bewildered by this length. Up...down...mini... Call them what you want. And I got myself a little bit upset, since we don't do clothes like that. But at the last minute I decided to put in this collection a group of clothes with all kinds of lengths, and you are going to tell me, after you see them, if you like them, we'll put them in. We'll put them in the collection. If not, we'll just destroy. And out came the same girls, with dresses from 1949, '52, '62... They were not that short. But I want to tell you, that three of the dresses, where everybody wants them; I should put them in the collection in the fall. They are absolutely superb. They really are. And as I took the clothes from (we have what we call our own museum collection that we keep in our cutting room; my
girls, my boys went to get me a big group of clothes), and two things came back. One is a coat dress I made for myself, in an Obi. When I went to Japan I bought an Obi. I made a coat dress, and it was so superb that I wore it two weeks ago, a big black tie thing, and everybody says, "My G-d..

Q: I saw you there.

A: Well, of course. Well, that dress... That was 1964... This is 1964. I didn't touch it, Robert. Thank G-d I'm not, maybe, a little fatter. Two days later I wore a black broadtail dress with fox at the bottom which I didn't touch. Absolutely superb. And I decided it's all right. So people love it. They say "I haven't seen that in that collection. That's... Mrs. Kissinger saw me at her own house. She said, "I haven't seen that." I said, "Honey, I didn't know you when I made that one, because this one was 1968." I wore them without touching a thing. So... It isn't that I want to wear the old clothes, but it's satisfactory to me that I knew how to do something that had... They were not ridiculous is what I mean. There is not one that's ridiculous. Maybe the few that we can show are the ones that are very short, that came back to me from different customers, you know. I keep... Now we keep every season. We keep two or three of the things that I think are representative of each collection. So, you know, it's endless...

Q: Do you have any difficulty selecting those two or three? Because they are babies in a funny sort of way, aren't they?

A: They are. And if I have something that is very special to me, that's no problem. But women know that, in the country, and they will gladly send you an old Trigere, which I take with great glee, you know. So we have... We had so much two years ago that I sent an awful lot of things to a museum. We have a good representation at F.I.T. and we have in Philadelphia... Everywhere.
We have clothes... And I hope it will be a good lesson to the student, because the cut is remarkable. My problem was that I didn't know how to conserve those clothes. Because you're not supposed... I wanted to borrow some clothes from the museum, and they don't let them go. They said that it would spoil them to change temperature and all that business. I didn't know that.

Q. Yes. They treat them like rare objects.

A: We don't. We have them in those bags. But they last. But, all in all, it's fun to see. Because we have a dress in the collection that I showed... One of...a girl who worked for me, who is now very successful in her own right; she's in the bag business. Reva, you know her?

Q: Oh, yes. Of course.

A: Reva used to buy... She worked for us, a long time ago. She had a dress which became too short; she gave it back to me. I showed it last week. It is so beautiful. It's all on the bias; black and yellow and white. It's cut...but divinely. I don't think I could do it today. It's very difficult. In those days we had drapers who knew how to put the material... Today you have to go more machine and less handling. We don't have the workers we used to have. They all retired.

You see, the schools... They teach everybody to become a designer, but nobody wants to sew. Nobody wants to cut. Nobody wants to make a pattern. They don't want to do that. The glamor is not attached to that.

Q: It is interesting. As you know, I teach at F.I.T. also, and I always open up the first lecture and look at the class, all of whom come to be designers, and I ask them to take out their pencils and their pads, and please list for me 25 names of designers around the world. And of course they can't do it.

A: They can't?
Q: No. As a matter of fact, you'd find it not so easy to do yourself, in terms of living designers that are functioning today.

A: Well, 25 is a lot.

Q: Exactly. You get to, well, 14-15, and then you begin sort of try to begin to think of names. And my point is that there's no way in which every school, every session, every semester of every school around the world that has fashion classes is going to produce a name designer. Or, you'd have no difficulty naming 25 designers.

A: Well, yes. Also, the name designer is kind of vastly over-used, if you want to... You know, there are makers of clothes; there are people who are adapters of very good trends, and they are very successful in their own right. Because they know exactly what to do in taking a line from hers, and there, so forth and so on. It's rather difficult. I have another contention with the school. I teach a class which is about 20-22 students, and I begin, as you do, "Tell me what you want to be." There is a dead silence up to about five minutes until they relax, and then "What do you want to be?" "I want to be a designer." Everybody wants to be a designer. I say, "Fine. We have 22 of you. And there must be five classes that are going to graduate from this school alone. That makes 100 future designers. And then there is Pratt, and there is Traphagen, and there is Parsons. That makes 500 designers per year on the city of New York. Now, there are not enough customers for all those future designers." There are none. They may go into other things. It's a strange... I think it's very difficult.

Q: Do you suggest other things they can go into?

A: Yes. There is a lot of things. Listen. We lack merchandise people. We lack sales people. We lack... Oh, I don't know. So many things. Not everybody can be a designer.
Q: No, I've tried to communicate to them—and I think I'd be interested in your reaction—that the understanding of clothes, or the appreciation of clothes, the excitement of clothes, the fantasy of clothes, can be applied to advertising copy, illustration, to stage design, to...

A: Oh, lots of things.

Q: To window display. All of these things require, if you do them brilliantly, some understanding of clothes.

A: And also, a willingness to work. Work hard. This is one thing I stress all the time. It's very rare that you see a young person coming in and becoming the fashion designer that he or she wants to be right away. There is a period of adaptation... You have to work. I think it doesn't come just like that. Easy. It's tough for them I'm sure. And I have two examples. The boy to whom I gave first prize in my class last year. He's Chinese I think, Chinese. Speaks very poor English. And I gave him... And he came to work. He wanted to work at Trigere. So he came for a week. And the boy is talented. He makes beautiful sketches. And he has something in the sketches, and he executed this costume brilliantly. I mean, it was well done and it was very complicated; I can describe it to you: pants; trousers very tight; and a bra... it's difficult. And a coat on top of that. And he did all that very well. And he came to us and he stayed a week. And he reminded me of me when I was at Ben Gerschel, because anytime I went into one of the halls, to go to the shipping room or to the material room or to... He was always looking at something that he wasn't supposed to look at, but it showed interest. He looked at the swatch book, he looked at the way we put the material together. I mean, he was very interested. And on Thursday night... He started on a Monday... I said, "Do you like it?" "No, not really." And I said, "What does that mean?" And he said, "I want something else. I want more,
quick..." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "When I go back to Hong Kong," to his family, who apparently have a factory or two of clothes, he wants to be able to produce en masse or something. So I said, "Well, I understand that. And I wish you luck." And he says, "I'm not coming tomorrow..."

End Tape 1 Side 1

A: ...night. He started on a Monday [repeat of above...]... I said, "Yes, come tomorrow and finish up the toile," that he did. It was very hard for him to make the muslin of something we gave him. He could do his own sketch, because he had it...which I understand. What we gave him he couldn't do. So he came back on Friday. I said, "We pay on Tuesday, I'll send you a check." He said, "No check. Nothing." I said, "What do you mean? We don't...," you know. He says, "I don't want it. I learn here more in one week than at three years at F.I.T." And I tell you, I blushed for joy, because that was nice. And I'm sure he did.

Q: Sure. But what I think all students also have to remember, however, is that you are prepared to learn more in the one week, as a result of a lot that you have been exposed to in an academic situation. You can't....

A: ...Sure.

Q: ...go to school, and you know nothing. You have an image—which you put your finger on before when you said that people want to go to the premiere; they want to go to lunch; they want to be interviewed; they want their picture in the paper; they want to win a Coty Award; see their clothes in a Fifth Avenue window. Very often I find that students do not understand (and I would like your reaction) that even the technical things that they learn are not the total
process of education. You have to understand the world that you live in. You have to be able to evaluate the lifestyles of the forces that you're going to be designing for.

A: Well, listen. It's like everything else. There is a learning process. I suppose it exists even if you are a young writer. I guess that you learn to pare down your phrases, your sentences. In the clothing business, it's a different thing altogether. Lots of things play... The price of the garment; the material you're going to use; what you want to do. I think that school doesn't have enough time to tell these young people of the difficulties they're going to encounter. I think they are not prepared not to be a success right away. See, I never had to do that. I really had to work all the time. But I can understand their worry... Worry, no. It's not worry. I don't think they know that. It's difficult to explain.

Q: I find that I keep trying to encourage them that it is imperative that they know what people are watching on television. That they know what furniture is being designed. That they know what architecture is doing in terms of direction; where lighting is going...

A: What do they say to that?

Q: Well, they look at me absolutely blankly, but there's always... The reason I stay, doing it, is that almost every single class there is at least one or possibly two people who are hanging onto every word that you say and come and ask for some direction.

A: That's good.

Q: They say, "Give me a book; which magazine..." And you find yourself thinking, "Well, if you get one or two each semester..."

A: It's satisfactory.

Q: That justifies all the other work.
A: Sure.

Q: And, perhaps, it affects people in different ways.

A: But listen. There are... My younger son, who's been teaching Russian for the past 10-12 years and he has his doctorate from Harvard, decided four years ago that he wanted to become a lawyer. And he just took the bar examination—we don't know if he has passed it or not; he's not as young as he used to be, like everybody else—I know the effort it was for him to go back to school, every night, while he was teaching. Five nights a week. To go back—especially being a lawyer. We see now he's going to become a lawyer. I hope he's going to work in a law firm. But it's very difficult. It's been relinquished dinner invitations. Not going out to the movies as much as he wanted, with his young wife. Or maybe watching his little daughter as much as he wanted. I have great admiration for my son Philip to have done that. But he wanted to. But it's funny, because when he left Harvard, he went to the University of Chicago to become a lawyer, and he stayed there a year and a half and he couldn't take it; he said it was too dry; he didn't want to. He came back here, Thanksgiving, he said, "I don't want to," and I said, "Philip, over my dead body." I thought it was the whim of a young man, and I was all alone, paying for Jean-Pierre, who was at M.I.T., and he said he wasn't going to go anymore to school. I said, "Uh huh. What do you want to do?" He said, "I want to learn Russian." I said, "Never mind that." Well, he went back to Harvard, and he told his teachers. And at that time the Russian problem was, you know, starting on the horizon. They said, "Philip, if you come back to us, we will give you a scholarship." So he did that too. So he got...I mean, you know, I paid for the clothes but I didn't pay for his study. He left the law school after a year and a half and, 12-15 years later, now he's done it. So everything is feasible, I guess, if you really want to.
Q: I always operate on the principle that if you really want it... but you must really want it, you will find a way to produce some relationship to it. That doesn't mean that if you really want to be a star you're going to be a star. It means, however...

A: But, you see, I read yesterday, at the hairdresser, the story of Bette Midler, whom I never saw live myself for one reason or another. And now she says everybody wants to know why she started in the baths, you know. She would perform in front of people with towels. She said, "So what? I perform just the same, and they gave me my first audience." And that's what it was, you know. You have to have the reaction to yourself, I guess. As I said, you see, now, if you wanted to sing like Bette Midler—she knew what she wanted to do—it must have been hard. I don't know. I was making clothes. I wasn't going to be a designer. I was making clothes, Robert. It came out that I had to earn a living. It turned out that G-d...that super element up there...gave me something in my head, and I'm thrilled I was able to do it. But I think I probably would have gone into home decoration, I think I could have done that. I think I could have done... I could have become a chef, a cook or something. Not like you, but I could have. If I wanted to. There are many things that I would like to have done. I don't want to. But I think that if I really had to I would have done something else.

Q: I feel exactly the same way about my own career.

A: Absolutely.

Q: And I also recognize that if you are a person who has... You used the word earlier in the conversation today, saying that even when you were very young, in Paris, you knew that you had chic.

A: Well, I hope that I still have it today.

Q: You do. But my point is...
A: I was a little bit always different from the kids at school. Always.

Q: I love the use of word different.

A: I was a little bit different. I cannot tell you why, but I was. My mother dressed me; it was different than buying a dress at the Galeries Lafayette or wherever you bought dresses from. Also, I did not have any hand-me-downs like the big family in France: if you had a bigger sister you wore her dress. At school you were not... And we did not wear uniforms at first; I never went to a school where you had to wear a uniform, so you really had to wear clothes. All except at the Lycee Jules Ferry, you had to be in beige smocks. They were awful, I remember.

Q: I think what I'm trying to get at is that that difference, that you refer to; the fact that one is different, is really the first reflection of real style. The style is the individual statement, not the statement that everybody else is identified with.

A: Style... Now, how would you define fashion vs. style?

Q: Well, I think that style is motivated by the individual expression, which has little to do with whatever the large group of people are responding to. And fashion is that which has been accepted by a large number of people.

A: That's exactly the way I feel. Yes. Fashion is what they say you should do, and style is what you do yourself.

Q: If you are capable of doing it.

A: Yes. If you are capable of doing it.

Q: See. I always felt that the designer who is really good is the person who is able to translate a sense of style into the garment, and create it so that it's salable, so it doesn't depend upon them...

A: I learned fast enough.... For instance, when I started, and I will
always remember Mrs. Blum in Chicago, one of the most extraordinary, chic stores. I mean, it was like Carnegie here. Mrs. Blum said she discovered me. She did not, but she was a very good customer. She used to tell me, "Don't put all that thing in the back of a dress. A woman is going to look at herself in the mirror and is going to pay for what she sees in the front, and not necessarily..." I mean, it's very funny. I mean, all right, you have a train. But this always stuck in my mind. Don't put too much work in the back, because the woman is not going to see it unless she really starts looking at herself in a three-way mirror, which is my recommendation at all times to anyone. And then, as a woman, the practicability of putting on a garment. I learned that fast enough. Because I have a very, very fast moving life. I come home at 6:30 to go to an opening...there used to be the 8:00 p.m. openings; now they are earlier. And I knew that whatever I had to wear had to be put with one zipper and not so many buttons and things, because that's impossible. That I learned in the process of dressing myself. I remember Mrs. Blum telling me, "Don't put so many scarves. The American woman doesn't know what to do with a scarf." And I said, "Well, she can learn." And they say that a scarf around your neck, or a scarf around your shoulders, typical French, that the French ladies know how to do. Well, now the American woman has learned a lot, but I'm talking about 20 years ago.

Q: That's always interesting. I once said, about men wearing ascots, that the way to check whether it was the thing you should do or not was that you put an ascot on and the first person you met who asked you when you hurt your neck...

A: Oh, my goodness.

Q: Because there were many men who put on ascots, and it looked like a bandage.

A: Oh, that's funny!
Q: Whereas, if you can wear it so that it is an extension of the total outfit, and doesn't seem to be something which is superimposed upon you... Style, by its nature, creates a total image.

A: Right. In your books you can read all this, and I hope you have it reprinted and give it to students, first class students.

Q: Thank you.

A: No, but it's something... With all the explanation, it's very difficult. Yet, I have seen through the years, women that I met in Chicago and that I met here and there, who have learned to just define their own style. It took a few years. And I think that we designers who go on the road, because of the fashion shows, good or bad, because of the hats or bag, shoes, or whatever you show, the woman finally sees something the way the designer wants. It's got to sink in somewhere. So they learn something. I find that the American woman, in the last ten years, have made an enormous progress in reacting to what we designers show them. For instance, 10 years ago, when the mini or the midi came about, they didn't know how to resist, so they bought the mini and they wore them. They bought the midi and had to cut it down. Today, you don't dictate to the American woman anymore. She looks at the thing and says, "No, it's not for me. I'm not going to buy that." I like that. I like the woman to have her own identification with herself, with what she does. And I think that we in America, the New York designer has done an awful lot for the American consumer by going to the little city--Oklahoma City, Chattanooga, Duluth--whatever. You go and you show your wares. You may never sell anything, but a woman, unless she's a complete... I don't know, I wouldn't call her... They learn something. "That's not for me." But in the meantime, they have a certain image of what they don't want to look like.
Q: I've always thought it was summed up by recognizing that what fashion, style is all about is the education of your eye. Your eye has to be able to walk into a room and see that the room is marvelous. The excess pillows are superb. If your eye is sufficiently educated, this comes from enough experience... The same is true of clothes. I think you're absolutely right. The more she sees...

A: The more she knows at least... Because the reaction to clothes is not to be told by a salesgirl that this is a marvelous buy. It used to be like this. Not any longer.

Q: Oh, yes. It used to be the business of the sales person... I've thought of it in terms of Hattie Carnegie... where the technique was always to say, "My dear, this was made for you."

A: Yes, right. Maybe. Sometimes. But in those days, people like Hattie Carnegie were very few and far between, so Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Whoever was very lucky to have the knowledge and the taste of Hattie Carnegie, or Pauline Potter. I mean, I kept... The last interview of Pauline de Rothschild, who was to me... I met her at Carnegie many, many years ago; she's dead now. She was... That woman who has done something for the French and American born lady, who had--of course, with the money that they had, the Rothschilds--I don't know if you remember that interview in Women's Wear, where she trained little girls from the country from the vineyard next to Bordeaux, the girl that she thought had the most taste, taught her how to make a bouquet. Girls who never went to school...

Q: A bouquet of flowers?

A: A bouquet of flowers. Taking field flowers and making an extraordinary thing. And that girl was doing that day, after day, after day. And the way she... I think this is terribly important. Well, that's something
that bothers me, speaking of flowers. There are flowers that people send you that are stiff and things. I take them apart immediately.

Anyway, at 12:00 I have to leave you because I have an appointment with someone.

Q: This gives us 15 more minutes.
A: Good... You don't think it's too much?
Q: No. It's terrific. You're saying many, many valuable things.
A: Really?
Q: Yes, indeed. Now. Go back now. Because we've allowed ourselves the relaxation of drifting a bit into some concepts. Which is a good thing to do. But we've now... Where we are now is, Trigere has moved to 550 is it? Seventh Avenue. And is certainly part of the total fashion establishment in the sense that that's exactly where anybody would go to find the best designers in the American couture, in the America ready-to-wear, on the top level of design. Now, many designers go on... For instance, Bill blass goes on an organized tour three or four times a year, to relate to the customers. To find out the lifestyles of his customers. Now, he's a man. Therefore, part of that has to be superimposed. He has to really, he can't...

A: Not really. Not really. Bill is fantastic at it, to begin... My favorite remark, he knows, because I sent him the article many years ago. Somebody was asking me something--I've forgotten what city it was--Do I enjoy traveling? And I said, "Yes. Of course when I travel, I have to think, 'Where do I go?' And it doesn't matter. Because if it's winter, and it can be $105^\circ$, if I show a winter collection. I wear a winter dress with the furs and the things. That, I am used to it." But I said, "This is the time in my life that I want to be Bill Blass," and they said, "Why?" and I said, "Because last
year's flannel jacket or blazer, black tuxedo-- if it's black or navy blue--
and maybe one or... That's it. Nobody is going to come back to him and say,
"Mr. Blass, that jacket? Isn't that last year's?" Six, five years ago, I
was in Palm Beach, and a lady came to me and she said, "Didn't you wear
that blue suit last year?" And I said, "I certainly did." You know, it's
very funny, but being a man in things like this, it's easier than being a
woman. But it's fun to travel. You learn a lot about your customers. You
have to. Going into fitting rooms is a very, very, very valuable thing for
anybody. You have to go and see what the clothes... What they do on
Mrs. America. What it does. And it teaches you never do that waistline
again, because it's too hard to sell. At least I get that reaction.

Q: Do you get a reaction also on the basis that you must stay on top of
what's developing in the society? I was interested that you mentioned Bette
Midler. Bette Midler is... I went to the opening of her movie.

A: Yes.

Q: And I left in a state of absolute, almost exhaustion, in one sense,
because I had the feeling I had the privilege of seeing.... Not a great movie,
but a great star. The ability of this girl to register on film is extraordinary.

A: That's what somebody said. That she was probably a better actress than
she is even a singer.

Q: Well, I thought she was absolutely sensational and I was also.... I was
terribly interested in the relationship of the costumes to the film. But that's
another, whole other tape. But you, obviously, recognized that it's
important to be identified...

A: I didn't go to the premiere, which bothered me; I was doing something
else, I don't remember what....
Q: But New York is like the largest smorgasbord in the world. And you would die if you tried to eat every single dish. There would be no way in which you could remain alive.

A: No. But you try to do a few....

Q: Exactly. And I've always maintained that, one, you don't have to be at the premiere. It'll play. You can go see it quietly.

A: The movie, yes. But I go out a lot, Robert, and you know, it's valuable. I go to premieres as much as I can. If the play is good I may go in a year to see it again, but I really go... And I used to love to do the premiere and the dressing. Today nobody dresses anymore, which is one of my greatest sorrows. I don't know why. But I think it's important for me anyway. I don't go everywhere. I don't go to football games and I go to a baseball game and I don't understand it. This is a thing I am completely blocked. But I do go to the concert a lot, and the concert is good for me because when the music plays, my mind designs continuously. It's very strange. My program, in time of collections, it's full of notes that I want to do, because I'm not disturbing....I go to the theatre a lot.

Q: Is it that the music stimulates the design, or....?

A: No... Gardening has the same effect to me. Gardening and... Because I don't have to talk. I am with myself. I don't like to use the word, but there's a kind of communion if you want. My mind is free, and I plant my tulips, or whatever I plant. Gardening is very good for me. Health wise too. I think, by the way, speaking of designing, I always say to be a designer, to be a designer today you have to have great stamina. It's hard work. Everything is hard work. The pressure...four or five times a year. I mean, the deadlines. It's tough, to always... You are no longer
We finished a collection last week, I am busy buying fabric for next fall. Imagine. I mean, I like to go and take a rest... which I will do I suppose, in December.

But I do a lot of things. The museum. I don't go as much as I would like to. But I do, and it's fantastic. I do a lot of things. I don't walk enough.

Q: Do you read?
A: Oh, yes. Four or five books at a time.

Q: Because I've found that I do that. I find that I dip into things. I savor them. And I find that I like to think about them... It's interesting. You design when you garden. I don't do that in any sense, but what I do do with my gardening and my tractor is that I get on them, and whatever I have taken in that past week, it begins to bubble and edit and sift and simmer and dismiss itself. In other words, that which was valid... Sometimes I latch onto an image that a poet has presented...

A: You know, I read... For instance, last night I didn't sleep at all, so at 4:00 I finished the Lauren Bacall... I'm late reading it; I just got it for my birthday, so I'm reading that. I got the Kissinger book for my birthday. That will be attacked, not in bed because it's too heavy.

Q: Well, you can't read it the way you read the Bacall book.
A: No. But I also read the New York Times every morning. First of all. The New York Times first. And the News. The political thing. I'm not detached from the world. I think it's terribly important. I'm very offended, the life that we have now, and the scale, and the whole thing. It's a tragic world we're living in.

Q: It's a period of terrible change, I call it. Changes are occurring all
over the world. I think it is necessary for us to retain some sense of balance. When the French had their Revolution, and Marie Antoinette lost her head, there was a reason.

A: There is always a reason.

Q: There's always a reason.

A: On the other hand, when you design, and you feel that something is not going right in the world, it upsets me, and you never know what can happen. Today, I think, well, we, at our prices, are directing our ware to the woman who has a certain amount of money, and when the stock market goes down, and you have a fashion show that day, you always wonder. You know. Everything is related.

Q: It's all related.

A: But you cannot detach yourself. I'm going to make clothes and I'm going to do this and that's it. You can't work like... I can't. Now, what brought an enormous change in my thinking, and in designing, was the traveling. When the planes were available to everybody, all of a sudden the mood of dressing changed too. The trousers came into being. And the reversible coats and all that. To think that a woman goes to San Francisco for two days or three days and comes back and goes to Paris. And goes... that influences me a lot, you see.

Q: Well, for instance, one of the things I've always admired about you is that you have avoided what I call the dinosaur syndrome.

A: What's that?

Q: The dinosaur syndrome is the person who achieves a level of success, and has an audience, has customers, has editorial response, and then refuses to make any change. Whatever happens, they consider themselves an arbiter of taste,
an arbiter of fashion, and--but this is an important point, Pauline--because I can remember you saying at one time that you would not do pants.

A: I certainly did. And I ate my words.

Q: Yes. But you see, the dinosaur would never change.

A: Oh, I see.

Q: You see? The dinosaur...

A: I ate my words. Because I thought it wasn't ladylike. Today I wouldn't have a wardrobe ... I wear pants today. You can't do without pants. You can't.

Q: You have to be attuned, I think, in my own head, not only to the obvious changes in the society, but I think if you really are a good artist. If you are a designer. Because I've always maintained that the statement that the artist is ahead of his time--the poet is ahead of his time--is not valid. The real truth is that all of us non-creative people--the mass public are slightly behind the times. It takes a while for me to catch up to whatever the changes are.

A: Yes.

Q: It is the creative person who sees in advance. It is like...

A: For instance...

Q: You made a wonderful statement one time... and I've used it; I've used it a lot. I must tell you, I've always been honest in giving you credit. It has to do with Picasso. You said one time that you look at the Picassos that one is familiar with, and you see the distortions and you see the double images and you see the oversized heads and the peculiar noses and the fabulous, interesting, fascinating, strange use of color. But it is the same man who could draw an absolutely beautiful...

A: Always. I was just going to come to the painting thing, where I could
have bought the Jackson Pollock. I could have bought a Vera de Silva in Paris, for $200. And I didn't understand it. And I could kick myself, many, many, many times. Today, I regret it, but I can't afford them. So, that's that. But you change. There are things... For instance, today, if I could, if I had the time—the time mostly; the money too—I would probably throw out everything I live with in the apartment and go very modern, very...I don't know. I say that...

Q: Pauline, I don't think you would. I'll tell you, I think I know you well enough, and I adore you. First of all, one retains the couch, one retains the piano. It isn't that you can't afford to buy a new piano or...

A: No. The piano is out of the picture. But the simplification of life is probably something that I'm trying to say, when I think of all the turtles, and all the things that you have to dust, at least once a week if not more. All the bottle collection...all that. And it's difficult to get people to do that. Sometimes I think maybe I should just throw out everything and just... But I don't think I would.

Q: I don't think you will. I find that we really... You know, it's very much like work patterns. People really get what they deserve and what they really want in life. They really do. I maintain that...

A: You think so?

Q: Well, I think levels find levels. In other words, you talk about a Hattie Carnegie and a connection to Jean-Louis and Travis Banton and Pauline Trigere, and Lord knows who else might have been involved that did not, for one reason or another, continue to use their talent. But the level of people that would be hired would be hired because the eye of Hattie Carnegie was sufficiently skilled to recognize the difference between someone who is inadequate, inept,
fake, had no talent, and the person who did.

A: Yes.

Q: And I find it's true with friends as well. You look around you at a dinner party table, I look around mine, and you think, "Ye G-ds. Every single person in this room is somebody who has made an imprint and influenced lives."

A: This is a thing that I like to tell the young people. That my life, the fact that I became a known designer, recognized and so on, I love the fact that because of that situation I was able to meet people that are extraordinary, Leonard Bernstein, for instance, who was the first person to me who was an idol, when he came here to dinner or supper after a concert. I was thrilled to pieces. If I meet Mr. Kissinger, it's extraordinary; it became because of whatever, you know. I am terribly grateful to have been able... I don't take it lightly. And I think people who know me enjoy having me in their home. And I think it's fantastic for me, that came from absolutely nowhere, with an education, all right, maybe. But my position in New York, my American designer stature, has enabled me to meet people that I certainly never dreamt I could even spell the name of.

Q: And the thing that's marvelous, that you may not even be aware of, is that, if I were to talk to Leonard Bernstein, who's an old friend of mine, if I were to talk to a dozen different people that I've seen in this house, most of them would say, "Isn't it wonderful to go to Pauline's? Isn't it marvelous to be invited there?"

A: Well, that's nice.

Q: "Isn't the food superb? Isn't the evening charming? And enchanting?" And it's true. Because I remember leaving a dinner party here with Bess Myerson, and to me...I'm always amused at myself when I'm with Bess because I like her enormously. I always forget how tall she is. And somehow or other, in the
elevator, going downstairs... And she has the great skill of allowing herself to be very feminine in situations like that. And she becomes somebody that you want to take care of. But, as we were walking home in New York, at this period of time when one is leaving a Trigere party, somewhere between 12:30 and 1:00 in the morning, and one is a little nervous about what's going on in the streets of Manhattan, I had the feeling of, "If she thinks I'm going to protect her, she's out of her mind." She'll wind up protecting me.

Well, this ends the first of these tapes, and I must tell you, I couldn't be more delighted. Because you've said very, very valuable things, but always, as I expected, it is the intelligence that comes through. The ability to...

A: Merci, monsieur.

Q: And we will, you know, make our date for the next one, and we will continue the development of all this. Thank you Pauline.

A: Thank you very much... I have to go, because I have an actress who's coming...

[Part 11]

Q: This is Robert L. Green. This is the second part of the Pauline Trigere oral history interviews, and this takes place on November 16, 1979, at Pauline Trigere's Park Avenue apartment.

In talking with you, Pauline, there were a couple of things that were sort of left loosely hanging that I wanted to pursue. One of them was that, in discussing your career, you mentioned, realistically, that when you started there were no American designers. There were no names that one automatically associated with American design. And you talked about people who were manufacturers and cutters and people who just simply produced clothing, as tailors, as opposed to the few people who were couture designers.
Trace for me in your own head, from your own experience, the evolvement of the American designer.

A: I think it came, Robert, when the firms who were manufacturers, in America... I don't know much about the beginning, because I was myself a very struggling beginner. But I do remember there were people who were selling, let's say, clothes; they were selling skirts and they were selling tops and they were selling pants. And they did create...and some...probably toppers...that's an expression that I forgot. And they put them all together. The people who were selling more expensive merchandise, I think, went to Paris to pick up a few ideas and brought, maybe not necessarily couture, but they went to Paris and they brought something here to their so-called...Well....They used to be called designers. And they made clothes. Nobody was interested in finding out the name of the designer. They were just interested in having garments to put on their body. But when the war stopped communication, and you couldn't go to France, naturally, it evolved here. And I think maybe Eleanor Lambert should be credited for having created the very first couture, while she made us all realize that we had talent in here, and everybody started putting names on labels and things like this. But I don't think it's before 1945.

Q: It's interesting if you think of that period, Pauline, that I remember it well. I remember looking at the fashion magazines of that time and...whenever I could get a hold of them in the service...and realizing that much of what was being done in the initial stages came out of the military. If you remember the Eisenhower jacket...

A: I think that maybe we didn't dare, maybe we didn't dare...also making extravagant... I don't think, you know, the period that we have today--the photographs of the things that are coming out of everywhere are kind of peculiar--
there is not one direction, which is okay too. But in those days during World War II... And then, of course, I remember...I remember--maybe I'm ahead of my story--when the W...what was the name of it?

Q: The WPA?
A: The regulations, that you couldn't use...?
Q: Yes...(OPA regulations; also L85 which prescribed use of fabric.)
A: You couldn't use more than 2 yards and 1/8 for a coat and you couldn't make a jacket longer than 24 inches. They wanted to conserve material. It was a way of doing it, you know. I remember that I made...I have the coat in my collection, in my museum collection--I made a coat with a one piece sleeve, attached, and that wasn't allowed. But it was a short cape. It had no sleeve, but it's a cape that's cut with the body, and... We sold it very well. I was called in front of a bunch of examiners and I had to prove that my coat was not taking more than whatever it was. That was a funny experience.

I think, anyway, it was in 1945, and '46, when we couldn't go; when the manufacturers couldn't go to Paris. And I think that's all they went. I don't think they went to Milano; I don't think they went to England. I think they just went to France; to Paris. At that time, America became the makers of designers, per se. I think they just evolved.

Q: Do you think the initial, careful identification by these designers with military things...silhouettes...was perhaps because they were not ready to leave the nest and assume that they could create directions?
A: No. I think maybe we felt a great responsibility to the man in the army and the conservation of certain things. And I don't think anybody really dared to be different than the other. And I think they really didn't
want to be singled out if they went to... wherever you went, showing that you
had a dare... I suppose, I don't know... And, of course, when you leave... When,
after this, the American designer became what they are today, slowly but surely,
and presented their collection maybe twice a year, and really had to do something
for spring and something for fall, and really separate the woolens from the silks
and the lightweight... I think at that time, when you start making a collection,
not just a group of clothes, when you make a collection, you naturally go in
many more directions. You know, don't forget, in 1945-46 when all that started,
what the people needed were simply cover up. They needed to put a new coat on, or
something on their body to be warm or to be cooler. It's later on, when we
started with the showings, and all the things that were already... what you call
it? You decide the dates, everybody had this kind of competition. I think that
started... Look at what we do today, we do five collections. That's ridiculous,
too.

Q: Which was the first designer name that you can associate with America?
A: In America it was definitely Norell. Because he was the first one to
have the stature, and also the first one who was acclaimed and decorated and
singled out to get the first Coty award in my days... Oh, wait a minute. I'm
sorry. The one really that comes to mind is Nettie Rosenstein, the little black
dress. Nettie Rosenstein and her sister-in-law, Eva Rosencranz. They were the
ones... Because, I was on 47th Street and they were right there too; there was
a little group of 47th Street, so we knew, through the workers, the name.

Q: What position did Claire McCardell have in this?
A: It's later on that I was aware of the great Claire McCardell. It took
me a little time. You have to remember that in my own life, I was certainly
busy with my own life; let's put it... which was tied up with raising kids,
having my mother with me, and it was a responsibility. And trying to establish myself as something here. And when you have that in your mind... And we didn't have the communication we have today, where everything is meteoric, today. I mean, a new name. You see it splash... Anything! But in those days, the communication was slower. We didn't have that many customers who came to New York and would tell you, Claire McCardell did this... The names were not circulated as fast as they are today. Claire has a unique place in...

Q: How would you describe her place?

A: I would describe her... I'll tell you when I discovered Claire McCardell. Now it comes back to me, and that's why these conversations are very good for my future, to see I'll remember my life. In 1947 I took my very first trip to California, and I went to San Francisco. It was a pleasure trip, if you can call it so. A friend of mine was in Los Angeles and I said, "Well, if I go to the Coast, I'm going to go to San Francisco. I mean..." And it was a long trip, I've forgotten... But I went to San Francisco and I visited Magnin. The great Magnin, that you heard had gold... 24 karat gold faucets. And I went there and I met a lady by the name of Julia Trusell, who was the buyer of the bathing suits, and she showed me around. For some reason, somebody said to go and see Julia Trusell, so I went. I will never forget... I bought 17 bathing suits. I bought maybe a few for me. I thought they would be marvelous to bring back to my girls as presents. Twelve of them were Claire McCardell's. Very typical. You could wear... I'm so sorry that I got rid of those. Because they could be perfect today. And they had little hooks in the front, and they were so special, and they were so much "me," as a wearer of her bathing suit, and so much "me" as the maker of the simple clothes I'm in. That's when I became aware of Claire. And when I came back, I was still on 57th Street, until I
moved, I told you before, in 1953. So I was still... That's when I discovered Claire.

Q: The reason that I asked about Claire is because the name that is associated in many people's minds as being the person who was probably the most important in developing the American designer was Dorothy Shaver, who was then the President of Lord & Taylor.

A: She had vision.

Q: And faith in the fact that...

A: She had vision. And I think she picked very good ones. She picked Claire. I am very happy to tell you that I have somewhere in my books, marvelous... Let me tell you something about Dorothy Shaver. I knew her very little. The first time she put some clothes in the window, I was thrilled. Okay. It was maybe '45-46. Later on there was... I've forgotten the name of the display man. But I remember he called me, and he said, "The corner window on 38th Street..."

Q: Henry Callahan?

A: Maybe it was Henry Callahan. That's probably who it was. "We're going to make it very personal. We want to have a piece of furniture and what is your favorite flower?" And that is the first time that somebody brought a little table, before I had those, a Louis XV table which I have in the bedroom, that we transported, and a chair, which belonged to me, with two little vases and I remember a yellow flower and a red rose, plus a Trigere dress. The association of the person with the designer. I think Henry did that with the support and direction of Dorothy Shaver.

Q: Because I have great affection and admiration for Eleanor Lambert. Eleanor could only have done what she did if there were already American
designers that had been established.

A: Now, you see, you're probably right. I don't retrace it so much because... I tell you again... I was so involved with really trying to make a living; it wasn't easy. It wasn't anything... sometimes you are kind of... right now I know what's going on. First of all, I read much more. Well, there is much more communication, I guess. When was Time magazine created? In those days you had Life. You had... I don't know. Maybe... It's very strange, what you say. Now, there was Claire McCardell and somebody else that she promoted. I've forgot. Bonnie Cashin came later, no?

Q: Yes. But also supported by Dorothy Shaver. And recognized.

A: Yes.

Q: You see, I feel that the myth that Americans could not design was exactly that. That the myth created its own insecurities. Thus, designers felt that they really didn't have the talent unless the direction came from Paris.

A: Yes. But you see, there is this kind of an extraordinary aura on the French couture which started there. So, okay, we have it there. But it's no longer true. We have the same talents here. We don't do the fittings like Mainbocher used to do here, or Lanvin. I don't think they do much of that there either, I don't know. Balenciaga for instance; everybody's into pret-a-porter.... And they dare more here. But my goodness. Look what we have here. It's fabulous. It took 25 years to...

Q: Go back to the French couture for a moment. As you knew it when you were living in France...

A: I knew it little. We were completely separated. If you touched a button, or if you just imitated a shoulder, you were not put in prison, but
you were fined. It was a very... First of all, the French magazines never printed anything. Suppose a collection was shown, let's say, the 7th of July. You know when we would see it in the magazines? Sometime in September. Here, if it's shown the 7th of July, you will see it in print on the 5th of July. Before. You know, it's Women's Wear and all of the communications... But in those days, we knew the couture way after it was already bought and sold to those women. I didn't know very much about that at all. We knew the names and...

Q: Are there other reasons why the creativity in France has always seemed to flow more actively?

A: I think it came from the exchange of the designer with his customer. I remember the greatest... When I first got married, the great things that I did in France, not having too much money, (but more than when I lived here because we worked and we'd be okay,) was going to the races on Sunday. And when you go to the races every Sunday, you saw Mrs. Martinez the great Argentinian, very, very chic woman, who every Sunday was dressed by couture, in a different way. Every week she had another dress, another hat, and everybody followed suit. I think a woman like Mrs. Martinez would go to Paulette or another milliner and say, "For next week, at the Grand Prix, I want a big hat," or, "I want a small hat." There was that exchange. I think that it came from the relationship of the couturier with Mrs. Whoever-it-was, who, because of the excitement created by seeing one lady, wanted to have something else. We don't have this here. We have it now, a little bit, by looking at the windows. But actually everyone of us, we work in... Well, it's not exactly closed, but we really work for each other; for ourselves, in a compact workroom. That's why I like to go on the road. I think why Bill Blass goes
on the road; everyone goes on the road to follow what Mrs. Jones of Whatever wants. She may not tell me, that lady, that she wants a special thing, but her reaction to what I do, and what she's going to wear, teaches me something. Unless I would be completely blocked, which I'm not.

Q: It's interesting. Because when I left here and thought about the conversation that we had, there were lovely little moments that I wanted to pursue. One of them, for instance, was that you had contact with Travis Banton. Now, Travis Banton, in the minds of people who know fashion, is associated with Hollywood, and Dietrich dresses--the famous Dietrich dresses.

A: But really not at all with Mrs. Average American, who works even on Fifth Avenue. Forget Third Avenue. He had none at all of that. I can remember vividly the sketches that I had. First of all a day dress he made never. I mean, a day dress--he didn't know what it was! His client, his customer, in his mind, started living at 6:00 at night, and then, of course, they bloomed for the great big party. I don't remember anything daytime at all. For him, daytime was for sleeping and recuperating from the night before, I suppose. It's true. But....

Q: Were his clothes that he made for couture as theatrical as the clothes that he made for the movies?

A: Well, I'll tell you something, Robert. I started working with Travis in July...July...

Q: You were talking about Travis Banton and you were...

A: Anyway... Travis Banton. I met him sometime in July. I worked with him, maybe, August. No, wait a minute. It was September. Excuse me. I started working at Carnegie's in September of 1942, and I worked there September, October, November. And so I worked with Travis... By the time he
gave me his first sketches... First of all, Miss Carnegie had an Assistant there, who couldn't understand a line or anything of Travis's sketches because they were so outrageously funny. I mean, really; they had trains, they had plumes. The scarf was standing up by itself. I don't know how; I don't know by what miraculous bones it would stay there. So I did one collection for the couture. That was the couture collection of Hattie Carnegie. And she had a system, Hattie. If she liked a dress, then she would give it to... I told you the other Spectator Sport... and they would take out a little bit, and that went into... She was one of the first pret-a-porter... ready-to-wear. So I made one collection with him. And then after that, he disappeared. I saw him a long time after that. We became good friends and we saw each other for dinner with his wife. But he didn't do anything after that at all. He was gone. Hollywood didn't want him anymore. Yet, the dresses he made for Marlene--weren't they something?

Q: If you look at the stills, and some of his sketches, you get the sense, of course, that he understood one simple truth: That clothes in the motion picture industry were never made to be worn; they were made to be photographed.

A: I suppose.

Q: The function of clothes...

A: And then, also, there was an enormous relationship between the clothes to the car, to the surroundings; to the living room--which doesn't exist today. Did he do the clothes for Marlene and Gary Cooper in...where she steals pearls? What is the name of that?

Q: "Desire."
A: Do you remember those...? (Cross conversation)... Well, I will never forget it. It's incredible; the whole thing. And her hats and... She also had great allure. Fantastic.

Q: Did he have any influence on you?

A: No. Not at all. We never worked at all in the same direction. I really, frankly, didn't understand the clothes. I tried to execute them because I was there to do that. It's really like reading a recipe. I don't know what they put in, but I would do it if I really want to do it.

No, not at all. Hattie Carnegie had... Because Hattie Carnegie... I saw the reaction... You know, when you have a designer like Travis Banton, I remember a dress that he made. It was a very Spanish dress, with about 17 volants, (ruffles) white organdy with red piping. The dress must have cost Hattie Carnegie, in those days, probably $1,000 in labor. I don't think the dress was ever sold. As a show piece, it was fantastic. It's like the thing that I saw in the theatre yesterday. He didn't care. He did things that had no relation to that time's life. Not at all. He was a dreamer.

Q: I was going to say, perhaps he was working out of his own fantasies. I find that when people do things like that, they have no interest in reality. They don't want to hear anything about labor costs and...

A: And yet, I remember his wife... I've forgot her name... Beatie, Bette or Beatie... who was a kind of blonde, very string-beanie; very thin. And I remember that for 3-4-5 months, this lady wore the same black dress. Sometimes with a little beanie; sometimes with a big hat and pearls. And he had the theory... I mean, one black dress can take you very many places--which is maybe... I don't think it influenced... I'm just thinking about it now.

I don't know; I never have any curiosity. I love to look at other
people's work like I look at paintings in a museum. I get something of the complete look. You know, I have a peculiar attitude when I go to stores. I don't look at the outside of the dress. I always want to know how the hem is finished. I want to see what they do that I don't do, or what I do better. That's what I... The first thing I do is to turn a dress inside out and see how the seams... I couldn't care less about what other designers do. Why should I? I admire them. But I'm not trying to emulate them at all. I am Trigere, and I've got to keep doing what I do best.

Q: Trace for me then... When you start a collection--you know that you have a collection that you now must start on--what are the specific steps that you take?

A: Well, the first thing we do is to buy fabrics. And then, something happens in the process of buying. We see... Yesterday, for instance, I saw about three enormous collections of silks and things... Until I didn't know what I was looking at. But when we buy woolens for instance, I would select a plum or green--just like that. And we buy a piece or we buy five yards; whatever. And then we see another collection. Somehow, after three weeks of buying, the collection turns... either green or purple... something. I don't even match them. But something happens in the process of buying. So we have a base. The collection might be... There will always be black. There will always be red, because they are basic and classic. The fall collection may be purple next time, or maroon or whatever. It's something that happens without me knowing it. Then, we buy the classics. We buy woolens for the dresses, the jersey that we use year in, year out and we do the melton and the velour that we do for coats. These are the classic, and we know we are going to have to do certain things in those fabrics because we sell them to...
everywhere. Then comes the collection of silks and chiffons and satin. And then, of course, whatever the French or the Italian or the Swiss come here with, it directs the collection. If the collection is very taffeta, very stiff, then you know you're going to have a stiffer collection and the skirt will be fuller. If it is chiffon, it is going to be... It's not something that we decide in advance.

Now, we have that. In my mind, when I start working, we try to continue, for the very first garments, the silhouette that's been good for the preceding season. Not making it exactly, but we know that buyers, if they have loved a certain shoulder or a certain waistline, they will feel secure if they sold it. Understand what I'm trying to say?

Q: Yes.

A: Another thing, then. I am totally ready to make a revolution or an evolution. But if you make the same thing, the buyer will feel very comfortable. She sold, you know, 20 pieces like that, she'll buy it right away. So we start like this.

I start in many ways. The coats and the Jersey dresses—-the ones that I don't drape, I make baby sketches. My Assistant, Lucie, puts in better sketches, and we give them to the Assistant. But the new...

Q: What is a baby sketch?

A: It's a sketch about an inch and a half that I do on my program or a piece of newspaper. Mostly on envelopes. I'm a very extravagant person, but my notes are always on beautiful envelopes... The invitations that you throw out... I love to write on those little cards. You know the stockings... Not the stockings; the pantyhose? They are always wrapped on those... I keep those. I think they're fantastic to make a telephone list. I make sketches
on that too. So...I make that. But the beginning of a collection may be trying sometime until we get the first 5-6 fittings. And something happens. Something. We make a dress out of that; we make a coat, a suit, and then as we go nearer and nearer completion of the collection -- three weeks before is when we really work -- then we know the direction. We force a silhouette. What I mean by forcing - we make more of it. It's very bad to have, let's say, balloon sleeves and then the flat sleeves, and then something... Then the customer is confused. If you believe in something, you have to do it a couple of times so that the viewer will know, "Well, Pauline believes that," and "Joe believes in something else..." A collection is made of many moods. I can be working at fittings (and I work at fittings a great deal), and the people who work in the material room come with some new fabric that just arrived from the plane. I drop what I do - I'm very unruly in my real working. I drop what I'm doing and I start playing with the fabric, and the fabric is really my dictator. Always has been. If it's a panel print - you know what a panel is? It's a fabric that's a certain length. You cannot just cut it any old way. You have to just go in the direction of what it is. I play with it; I pin it; I drape it on the model. Then I throw it away. And something happens in my head. I mean, sometimes nothing comes out. And if I'm lucky and a model of mine wants to stay after 6:00 p.m. that's when I work the best. From 6:00 to 9:00 at night, I can do an enormous amount of work. The telephone rings less. The creative process... I cut, I do all kinds of peculiar things, late at night.

Q: Do you do a lot of experimenting and rejecting of things that you may have cut in terms of fabric?
A: Well, yes. Sometimes it doesn't work out. Sometimes we buy a new fabric that we don't like to... See, I wear a lot of the clothes, Robert. I think this is probably one of the strengths of Trigere. I wear... I don't mean style wise. I'm dressed pretty much in the same kind of feeling. But I do have to know the performance of the new fabrics. If I sit at a concert, or am driving my car, and the fabric doesn't do what I want, I try not to use it again. I mean, I'm very sincere. Sometimes I wear... For instance, silk. I know what it... With some fabrics, some cotton, I tinker—if I like them I keep them in the collection, but that's something else again. The collection, after we see 18-20 pieces; we see them on two girls. The trick is to take two new models, who have never put the clothes on, and we put... And you know, their reaction... "Oh, I love it." Sometimes they don't make... That doesn't mean anything. But I like to see the reaction of a model who comes from maybe 20 other designers. If she... I know she won't tell me if she doesn't.... They don't do that. They don't... They put the garment on and that's it. But when you see they are very excited, you know you've got something.

Then we have, maybe three times, let's call it... I don't know....a reviewing. A rehearsal. And we show unfinished garments—some, the bottom is hanging; no hem, no top, to the people in our... Sales people, the material people, the production men, and they sit there. And they look. And to me this is the worst thing in the world. It's like having an exam that you know you're not going to pass.

Q: You're being judged.

A: Oh! Well... I judge myself very severely. I am my own most severe critic. I hope. Sometimes they discuss with me... "Why did you do that?"
And I say, "Because I like it." If I like it very much, nobody's going to talk me out of it. Nobody. I'll finish it... Like the last collection. We made some things, and they said, "That's not for us," and I said, "Well, I know it is for us," and it's the hottest selling... I don't know. I had a feeling. I cannot say that I am always right - I'm not - but... We do that with the people. And the sales people, they keep you on the right track. Because... "We haven't got a dress with sleeves." "We haven't got a dress with a jacket." And I say, "Oh, for G-d sakes. We've done those." "Well, that's what we're going to sell." "I don't want to make them." "Well, we have to make them, because there's this lady in Dubuque or in Chattanooga that's what she wants."

So, they keep me on the track. And so we make those simple things which are not... Which are the backbone of the collection, to sell from Size 4 to 20. We need them. You know. It's like bread and butter in a restaurant.

Q: How many pieces in a total collection?

A: In the fall collection, we go up to 120. We're trying to get it down now. The last collection we showed was 108 pieces. This one, this spring, is a small one and I'm very happy about it, because to make a small collection - it's like writing a book. You have to have time to eliminate. You will remember my dear friend, Victor Hugo, he wrote to his friend, he says, "I'm sorry, I sent you a long letter. I didn't have the time to make a short one." It's the same thing. To make a shorter collection, you have to eliminate the thing that you think you are not going to sell. And I've stopped, many years ago now, Robert, to make what I call the "eccentricity
of finishing a finale." It's lovely to look at. I mean, the explosion. I haven't got the time. It's a very costly proposition. And then, finally, what for? In the showroom, when the customer comes in and buys from the racks, or wants to put a dress or two on the model, they reject the fancy one. They love to look at it; they laugh at it, and what do I do about it? So, as a woman who's been French, I don't do those anymore. I don't do a dress just because it's going to be a funny dress for the "finale."

Q: Let's take the round figure of 100, because it's an easier figure to work with. Let's assume that a collection was 100 pieces. In your description of your sales force "keeping you on track," you define the reality that they recognize that lifestyles in the various parts of the country are very different, and the attitude toward fashion, therefore, is different. And they remind you that you need a dress with a sleeve or a jacket...

A: With sleeves, with sleeves, with sleeves....

Q: And perhaps the reason for sleeves is that more and more women in middle years are recognizing that their skin and their body construction begins to change...

A: Exactly.

Q: And they really should be covered....

A: Yes. And they are the ones who have the kind of money to buy our clothes.

Q: Right.

A: You see...

Q: Right. Now. In a collection of 100, how many pieces would you say are the solid, salable, practical, you've-done-it-before but this is a slightly different version of it?
A: You see, out of 100 pieces, we will probably produce 78, which is a lot. We will make 78 patterns. It's a lot. We keep the other 22 (Is that 22? Yes.) for show pieces or sell for charity or something. Sometimes we don't produce something because the fabric is not available on time. Sometimes we don't get the order. But it's very strange, you know. Sometimes... Everybody looks at a dress and says, "Well, it won't sell," and everybody is very surprised it sells. The jersey dress, for instance. Sometimes we make a dress that's got sleeves and it's got no waistline. We make six of those every year. I have to because my customer, who is over 40, maybe over 50, lets herself go a little bit, wants no waistline; she doesn't want to be cinched with a waistline. The belt's always too tight for her. She doesn't want to have that. So a straight dress; we know we have to make those. And the wool one that... The famous Trigere that we have used for 20 years or more; the famous jersey that I know... I'm wearing the pants in it today because I know it performs. We make those because the customer, the woman wants to buy two or three dresses like that for her everyday life.

So, a collection... Right now I think in this collection we have only 64 pieces. It's a short collection. We are very happy with it, because there is less discard also.

Also, the time is short. We don't have as much pattern makers. You see, in my world, in my Trigere organization, I am terribly involved, which is maybe not true of many designers, I don't know. The designer, per se, designs and then goes off somewhere and the production man takes over; changes a neck, softens up the shoulder... I don't know what they do. They couldn't do it with me, because I protect my design and I also know if it's going to work or not, since I'm a technician. I'm a very busy person. I would concede to...
When we make a dress with a difficult sleeve, I will myself find a way of making it simpler, for production. Sometimes you have to do that, you know. I have to get the clothes back; the contractors have to make them. They have to function; they have to hang on a rack - on hangers - and a woman in the stores has to look at a dress. It's got to have a certain appeal on the hanger. All of that is... The process of making a collection for me is not an amusing thing of making only something that will be good for the papers. I am trying to make something that is good for me, for Trigere, that will sell. It's a different thing than being employed as a designer and let.... I discard my own stuff. A lot.

Q: You edit your own things?

A: Yes.

Q: But then again, you make the final decision, don't you? If not, who does?

A: Not always. No. Not always. Sometimes something comes out too expensive, according to the sales force, and if we can't sell something, you just take it out. I made, in the last fall collection, fabulous velvet. I think they were velvet dresses and velvet coats. I made them in pure silk. The fabric was so expensive that you couldn't sell them. Because, all of a sudden, there is rayon velvet, and I didn't want to use rayon velvet. Well, we didn't sell them. We took them away. We didn't even try. So, I wear them myself; maybe.

It's very difficult to explain what I do. I'm terribly involved with... I mean...when a piece of fabric comes along, sometimes it flows and sometimes with this and with that, it's... I am part of many things in Trigere.

Q: Much more so than most designers. And I think the reason, realistically, is that most designers do not have the technical skills. They have an attitude
toward style, and fashion, in the sense that their point of view sometimes can be very exciting, very stimulating. But if asked to either sketch or drape or to walk in...

A: Sketch, yes. They all sketch. They all do. They don't drape.

Q: Not all. Not all. I know some who don't sketch at all.

A: What do they do?

Q: Well, it essentially is a business of taking something out of another context. In other words, you might go through a collection of Goya's paintings and simply point, "that shoulder," or "that decolletage," and they have people who can sketch. And, like anything else where somebody works for somebody, you learn how to second guess them. I once asked a famous stage costume designer what he thought the best qualities were for such a person, and he said, "The first talent is that you must be a mind reader." And in an interesting way, there is some validity to that, because what you say is that you are able to follow through on this and control all these things, which may explain why a Trigere dress stands completely identifiable as a Trigere dress or coat....

A: Well, I do control. I also know that the clothes wear very well. Now, let's say... Tuesday night I went to the Pension Fund Concert. It's a special, you know.... Special tickets and special this and... I was in the first tier and I came early enough, I was watching the people, and all of a sudden I saw Alice Tully, who is a very good customer of Bergdorf, and buys regularly lots of Trigeres. And she was wearing a short dress. I was wearing a long gold skirt and a new jacket - which was perfect for the concert. And I said to my escort, "This is Alice Tully, and I think she is wearing an old Trigere," and sure enough, I went down to her and, she talks to me in French
all the time, and she says, "Madame Trigere, please make me another dress like that." And I said, "Do you realize how old that dress is, Miss Tully?" And she says, "I know. Six years old." She bought it at Bergdorf. She loved it. What can I tell you? I know she trusts me. She trusts.... It was fun to see that. Again, we go back to the same thing. I don't want the customer to wear old dresses. But this woman is comfortable with what she wears and that's it. She knows the way a dress functions. She can sit in it. She can go to the restaurant afterwards, and nothing will happen to it.

Q: Well, that supports what you said before, about every collection must have those things that become Trigere classics, that women are comfortable wearing. But let me ask you....

Let's take another, slightly different direction here because you did stimulate something in my head. The nature of publicity and image building in the fashion industry is largely related to fashion editors, fashion trade papers, such as the Fairchild papers, responding to the glamour, the hysteria, the excitement, the bold statement, the avant garde, the news catching direction. And the reality is that everybody seems to forget that they are not in the business of selling clothes. They are in the business of selling newspapers or magazines and they do that by creating a whole sense of artificial or real excitement, depending on how valid the new directions may be. One of the things that's always fascinated me is that you are like the tides: The tides come in, the tides go out. They go on constantly, and I've always said, I can tell you, some will come, some will go, but as long as Trigere is alive, there will be a Trigere.

A: Thank you very much.

Q: And there will be customers who want those clothes, and the clothes
will always be satisfying and gratifying.

A: I hope so.

Q: Now, if you don't do the finale, are you risking rejection by some of the press?

A: Yes...

Q: On the basis that they have seen these clothes before?

A: They haven't seen the clothes before. That doesn't work like that. It isn't true. Because it's the continuation of the clothes and there is always something new in the collection. But what you're saying is very true. I'm not going to have an explosive... I don't know what - a cabbage rose on the behind? Because I don't think it's pretty to begin with. It's true. You reject that. But at the end, at the end, the customer is really the judge. At the end, the customer is what makes, not the rules, but the final decision. And our customer, who in turn buys the clothes and gets them in their shops, sells them to Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Smith, whatever, and this is the final judgment, I think. Of what happens. I don't say that the extravagance, that the short skirts are not going to catch on with certain women; I suppose it will with some of them. But some of them never do, because I go out a lot and I see what's going on. When you talk about trade papers, the thing that bothers me - maybe... Let's take the music world. You have Harold Schoenberg in the Times for 20 some odd years, I suppose. And you have Clive Barnes and then you have the others, who know something (I hope) about music. Then you have the theatre critics, who've been doing that for a long time, who allow themselves to say, "Well, that play stinks," or, excuse the expression, "It won't work," and maybe they are right. But they are technicians in their own world, and that I respect. In our world, and I won't name the
papers now, but one day you have a little reporter who's been working on food, who all of a sudden is given the job of being a critic. That bothers me because first of all, those people don't wear the clothes. And most of the women who are doing the reporting don't even wear any of the clothes. That bothers me because you do not have any more... Let's say a woman like Virginia Pope, who used to - she invented the columns, and reported the collections, she really did. Or even a Kay Vincent. And they were telling you a little bit, in a soft way, that something was better than the others. But actually, in the dress business, except for Women's Wear, which will put a big X on your collection if they don't like it, I don't think it's too fair, but I would admit that it would be fair if the same person was... What is the good correct word? I don't know... Everybody's collection, which is an impossibility. We have too many. If that same person would go from Seventh Avenue from the 20th floor to the first floor and report on this collection, I would say, "Okay. That person compared me to Robert Green or this one or the other." But they don't. They come to me once. The next day they go to somebody else and I don't think that's fair because they don't know enough about what they see. And I don't know if I'm making myself clear...

Q: Very clear. I think there is a reality of...and a lag, between evaluating clothes (or anything else) without proper credentials, without proper...

A: That's exactly what I... You know what I mean. And I'm glad that you are putting it in English. It is, it's very difficult for me to accept that someone is going to pass a judgment on something that they are not expert, or at least, having learning. That's bad for me, I don't care. Because at the end, again, I say I don't think that... Well, I don't know. Do you think
that somebody who said the Trigere collection is very bad, would really influence my customer? My customer has seen the collection at the same time, and I think... I don't know. Maybe it would.

Q: Well, I think there is what I call the corruption of small power.
A: Oh, my G-d. It's terrific!

Q: ...Which is really people who have positions which... Such as columnists, or people who are responsible for given pages of a magazine, with a specific point of view. And it's very easy for them, living within the small island of their own experience and their own friends, to begin to believe that they really are the most important thing that ever happened, and that they're....

A: That's bad. But this is very American, isn't it?

Q: Yes, it is. I think also another thing has happened. You see, since the sixties, and the change of direction, where.... I always thought that the fashion (and you see it all in the earlier years; it's interesting that you mentioned Virginia Pope and people like that) was almost a tyrannical force in the sense that whoever it was that was motivated to decide that perhaps the direction should be....come out of the matador; come out of the Spanish world, or come out of the belle vie of France... Lots of ladies across the country were saying, "Well, the new direction is such and such. I have to be a matador, so I will dress accordingly."

A: I told you at our last session that I think that it was true. Now, let's go back to the mini and the midi, and let's name Women's Wear, for instance, who really has, or would like to have, a terribly important say in the world of Seventh Avenue and the designing world people. They try to dictate, and maybe they succeeded, in 19-whatever-it-was when we had the mini
and the midi but everybody cursed them. The midi was a disastrous season. It was disastrous for everybody. Nobody sold them. It was bad. I told you last time that I don't think the American woman is ever going to be dictated again. Maybe some newcomer or nut or....Maybe someone....I think the American woman is logical, she buys clothes that she wants to buy, and she's learned to respect her kind of life and her figure. She buys what she wants. A good sales girl may sway a lady from one color to the other but I know the women. I know them in the fitting rooms. "Don't show me this." And I say, "Well, try it," sometimes. And I, as a sales person in a fitting room, never push. As a matter of fact I take off more dresses from customers if I don't like them because we don't have really things to sell, you know. After all, we're not pushing the merchandise that's hanging in stock. But I do know the reaction of those women. They are pretty steady in their feelings. They know.... They have husbands who look at them, or, whoever. Lovers; whatever it is; who like them in certain things and not in others. And this has developed lately, in the past 15 years.

Q: Yes. I think there's another thing that's also happened. I completely agree with what you're saying. But I think there's another direction, that I find absolutely fascinating, and one that I think will influence the whole fashion industry enormously. And that is that people are beginning to change the priorities in their lives.

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. Now, in our world, it's a very strange thing. I don't know if it has to do with designing, but I would see a woman who would buy the most extraordinary furniture for her home; the most fantastic pieces of velvet-silk-brocade to put on the sofa that cost $100/yard, who would not spend over $250 for a dress. Now, it's silly to compare, because
there are good clothes at any price, but to me, that's funny. She doesn't understand a dress in relationship to her home. That's very strange.

Q: One of the things that happens with that (and that's a very good example) in the minds of most people, what they put in their homes will last for a very long time. And they amortize the cost by saying, "Well, I'm going to upholster the couch in that terribly expensive fabric, but I will have the couch for 20 years."

A: Absolutely. And they're right too, unless they're crazy. But, you know, it's funny. But you see, also you have... I'm not going into customer's detail, because some women are difficult to deal with, and we know all that. But in terms of designing, when I do a collection, my first priority is to do something for the firm that I own, of course, but I represent, and I do respect the name. There are some things I won't do. There are some things I will end up doing. But you have to do soft things. I have the responsibility for 200 people or more, depending on the next season. I can't fluctuate like a yo-yo, and decide today I'm going to make chiffon pants that are not going to sell. Well, I won't say I won't, like an evening thing. But I won't go to those things. I can't. Maybe I would, if I were working for Mr... I don't know whom, because I wouldn't care. Let him have the... I have to pay the rent, Robert. I've got to pay the employees who are there by the year. I have two... I've got a sister. I've got to live myself...So...There is something in the process of working, making a collection. I would try to make it as salable as I see in my mind—never being sure, of course. You never know. Then, all of a sudden you send a dress to...I made a fitted dress in the fall last year with a plunging neckline. It was very pretty, and fitted. And I remember vividly somebody said to me, "Well, you know, it's fitted. They
won't buy it." Bergdorf alone used 72 dresses. It's a lot, today, for my kind of clothes. You know what they bought? Six. They bought six pieces.

Q: At the beginning?

A: At the beginning. Yes. Which is a nice order for Bergdorf's. Mon dieu. Six of that dress, in probably three sizes, four sizes. Seventy-two pieces. They kept reordering and reordering. Then, it's fun, because the sales girl gets used to that dress. If she has a customer she doesn't know, she brings the dress and puts it on, and they see it's a good dress and it fits, she has a 50% chance to sell it. It's strange, because the whole thing works like this. I remember a buyer who used to be at Bergdorf 20 years ago, and retired, who used to tell me, many years ago--this goes back 18-20 years ago when she told me--"Don't lose that body." And I said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" "Don't ever lose that body. Change the neck, change the sleeve, change the..." And I said, "I don't know how to do that." Well, I learned how to do that because she was right. It helps everybody around. We are not dealing with... Who is customer today? Who buys couture exclusively and it depends if it is a French sales girl from Givenchy... Who can we name today? But the customer that we are going to see is a woman who needs to be directed a little bit. Our go-between is a sales person.

Q: Do you have any direct contact with the sales people in the stores?

A: Only when I go to do a show in the stores. When I go to Bergdorf the girl will come to me, "I've got a customer for that," and I work with them for two days. I know them, they know me. If I go to Chicago - like I'm going in two weeks - I know the custo.... I know the sales girls and I know the customers. Everywhere I go I tell them..... And you know, we have those 9:00 meetings with the sales girls explaining....
Q: That's what I meant. You usually do have that.
A: Oh, yes.
Q: Do you have that in stores, out of town?
A: Always. And here in New York we have them coming to us. We rent a bus and they come at 6:00 p.m. and we give them a drink and a sandwich or something.
Q: Tell me what you say at that time, to them.
A: Well, let me tell you...those girls are exhausted when they come, so first of all we give them a drink and they try to relax and I try to amuse... So, we show to those girls what the buyer has selected, plus a few things. For instance, some buyers will buy the dress and not the coat, or the coat and not the dress, and they may not buy the extravagant ones. We put a few of those too, on several models, late at night, in a very relaxed fashion. And I would say, "You see, that dress, I think...a customer who bought that famous coat last year, should have that today. Also, it's a very easy dress to alter because the fitting"...the fitters come too. And the display people come too.
Q: Interesting.
A: Very interesting. The fitters, you see.... Don't lift here if you want to do that dress...do this or do that... It's easy to make an alteration. That's also a problem. So we have that relationship and the girls are excited in seeing it. And they would say, "Well," Mr. so and so, did you buy it in a 14, because I have Mrs. What's-her-name, remember? She could buy that in a 14. Did you buy it in blue? I would prefer the green." So we change the orders. That happens about.... Let's see.... We showed the collection about three or four weeks after we showed to the buyers. We always have three
evenings and we show the girls of Saks, the girls of...we used to have Bonwit's, and...Unfortunately we only have Bergdorf and Saks now. And Lord and Taylor.

So we have lots... They come, and they love to do that. Out of town, when we show the collection out of town, let it be myself or my sales people or my son, there is always a meeting scheduled for 9:00 or 9:30, with the whole store. You take Neiman Marcus. When there is a meeting like this, it's an order. The people who sell toys; who sell shoes, stockings--come and listen to the designer.

Q: Why?

A: Why? Because if blue is the main color, they know they have to have a pair of shoes or a sweater, or something to go...even in the lingerie. I think it's all tied up. Very few stores do that, but I think it's excellent. And they also come for the enjoyment. Well, I can be funny. Sometimes it's dreary. But they do come. At Neiman Marcus you have the whole store: The furriers, the sales people, the shoe people--they all come. You have an audience of 150-200.

Q: I find that completely believable as a process, and I'll tell you why, Pauline. The sense that I've always had about fashion is that it doesn't lead anything; it simply reflects the changes in the culture, in the times. And the person who is wise enough to see those changes and translate them so that the direction that is given to the customer allows them never to be behind the times; they are always, in the true sense of the word, "with it."

A: Well, let's see. My last trip at Neiman Marcus in Houston, even the hairdresser came. When I came to the salon to have my hair.... She says, "Oh, you had a marvelous show." And I said, "Well,...?" And she said, "I was there." And you know I have a customer whom even the hairdresser will
advise. You know, there is a very special relationship between someone who touches your hair and your face and so on. It's very good. But also, the sales girl, who leads a difficult life, she can't walk at the end of the day because sometimes it's, you know, kilometres or miles...loves to pick up what the designer...I'm not talking about myself; I'm sure the others do the same thing. They pick up, "Well, Miss Trigere said that." She's so pleased to translate it to the customer. It gives her something to think about. I mean, it could be very difficult to sell that merchandise.

Q: Doesn't it also educate her eye, as to how to look at this dress and how to really see it?

A: And then also not to put it backwards, with the loose darts. You get more backwards to front where there are no darts in the front. Sometimes it works. Well, you know, I laugh a lot because even when we rehearse the thing...You know, when we go to a store, you don't have time to rehearse. We select, let's say, 25 pieces to show in the morning, things that we think are more representative of the collection, the new silhouette. You'd be surprised that time and time again the model will put the back to front and sometimes it creates some very amusing things. If there is a very low decollete in the back, it makes for a very vivacious meeting in the morning. And the boobs are coming out, and...It's funny.

Q: Have you ever found that by somebody doing an accidental thing of that nature that they actually created something else?

A: Oh, absolutely. Oh, sure. Now, you talked about McCardell before. I have read years... Maybe it's in the book too, that Claire said that she never left a dress unturned. She'd turn it upside down. She did a popover (dress). She'd put it back to front, all the time, and I can understand...It's true.
Because she extracted all the possibilities. And her creations were absolutely pure. Nothing, nobody did anything like Claire. She did her own stuff.

Q: Yes... The reason I had suggested her name perhaps as the first lady of American designers was because she was so original.

A: She was original in a way that is extraordinary. The woman was a.... really perfect for what she was doing, because she was a skier. She was a sportive lady. She knew that when she was cold she had to put... She didn't worry about a hat that was flying; she was going to cover her head with a hood. She did the first jersey hood. It was extraordinary. And she also dressed herself, I think....that woman. She was tall.

Q: Yes. She was very American in her body structure.

A: She never went to Paris for that. Never. Yes, she was. But she... Talk to her...talk about her with, you know who? Sally Kirkland.

Q: Yes. She knows her very well. Let me pursue one other point that you made. And that was the display person. I find that absolutely fascinating that the display person from the store would come and see the collection and hear you talk about the collection.

A: Well, they don't come... Well, they do. They do. Because when we go to a store there is always a couple of dresses in the window. In the case of Bergdorf, the relationship is so close between the backdrop, the colors of the clothes that will be in the window, that they have to come to see what they are going to put in back of the clothes. And it's interesting because they also learn the difference about the clothes they put in the windows. It becomes, instead of an anonymous dress, almost a friend. They know they are going to put it that way, and not that way. The dummy will face Fifth Avenue, it won't face 58th....and it's funny, the way they see the dress, when
they see it worn by a model.

Q: Is it because they see it as a live...

A: Well, we're talking about very special stores right now. When you go in the provinces, you send four pieces; maybe it's all red or maybe it's all blue. I try, when we talk windows, to stores; when we have a Trigere show--To have at least four pieces that relate like a purple and a red and a yellow. I don't like that. So, on windows... For instance, in Chicago, next week, the window is all black and white. It's fun. You know... We don't do a window... We work at it. It's time consuming.

Q: The backdrop interests me, because the backdrop really sets the stage for how the clothes....

A: In some stores.... In some stores it never changes, Robert. It's always the dark thing, or maybe a mirror. Sometimes....they've stopped with the mirrors. Because sometimes what they put in the windows is a size 12, and the size 12 is too big for the dummy so you have to put a pin in and if you put a pin in, you see it in the mirrors. So that is tough. Some stores do a lot. Take stores like Saks, like Lord & Taylor, the backdrops changed all the time. It's very costly. They do it simply, but they do it beautifully.

Q: Do you think of the total design of a dress as similar to sculpture? Because what one sees in sculpture is, looking at it from every conceivable angle...

A: Well, you must. I think that a dress has to look like... I told you my incident about not putting too many things in the back, except for the train. I think actually that a woman at a party is going to be seen ... from the front, from the back, if she stands up, if she goes out of the theatre, everybody is going to see the back. I think it's very important that everything matches; is constructed properly. But let's not go into
sculpture and things like this. I don't know. Maybe clothes deserve to be put into cages. It is... I mean, you know. The thing that Diana Vreeland makes, it's terrific.

Q: Well, you see, I don't even dismiss fashion from one of the arts. I've always thought of it that way because I think it is wonderfully three dimensional. You know...clothes on a hanger... How do you feel about this? There have been designers who say unless you can look at the clothes on a hanger and see that it's a beautiful outfit--a beautiful coat, a beautiful dress--the designer hasn't done their job. Other people feel that you have to put it on somebody.

A: Well, if you put it on somebody.... In the ready-to-wear, since you're going to show the clothes on racks, at least they must close properly; you cannot have things hanging, because that's ugly. If you have too many things... If it's a two piece, for instance--which we do a lot of--I tell you, until we decided to put longer straps so that the skirt looks... Not a Toulouse Lautrec show. You have to try to do something to attract the eye. Of course you do. I, being always the practical person that I am, I think, try not to put too many closings and too many things that are difficult for a woman to hook. Not everybody has an elevator boy at her disposal, or a husband, or a butler or a maid. Maybe she has to dress herself. And we have to think about these things.

Q: For example, there is that wonderful story about Calvin Klein. Calvin Klein went to the Balenciaga show at the Metropolitan, and he was completely confused. "I don't understand these clothes," he said. "Who wears such clothes? How do you get into them? How do you get out of them?" And the answer, of course, very simply was, when Balenciaga designed, it never
occurred to him that the women he designed for didn't have two maids, who were putting her in, and...

A: Exactly. Exactly. But you see, today... First of all, life is much too fast today, and to Calvin Klein, and to Trigere and to Blass, we know that we have to be practical, alongside... You know, when you make buyers' dresses a lot, it is sometimes very difficult. I remember (I have them in the museum) a buyer's dress that was spirally, and I couldn't, because the fabric started from the right and it went to the left, there was no way that I could put the zipper on the left side, which is the normal thing if you are right handed. Most people are. But I had to put the zipper on the left side, and I tell you, you couldn't zip it like that. And I turned the dress completely over; I shifted it the other way around, because I knew that in the store, the woman invariably would not put it here, she would put it back to front. You have to think about those things. So, sometimes you are limited in doing certain things. Everytime you have a bow that doesn't bow, that doesn't tie properly... We see it in the showroom when we have shows, and the girls, the models, are putting on the dresses seven, eight, nine times a day, and at the end of the day the bows are very fatigued; you have to press them. A woman wears a dress once, and hopefully she has it pressed by a maid, by herself if she doesn't have anybody. But when you put the clothes in and out all the time, and you have to make a fresh bow perky, you have to have an iron next door to you, to refresh it. All of that comes into the processes of designing for a wholesale collection that will be driven in trunks. We used to travel with trunks, you know. Like a steamer trunk. We can't anymore; the planes don't take that. We still travel with enormous big suitcases, and the clothes are
packed in pliofilm things, with hangers. They come out with hangers. But they have to be pressed, and I tell you it's a disaster, after the collection travels for six weeks. You don't recognize the clothes because they are pressed many times by people who don't know what they're doing, and if we have something fresh, it's creased. You know, it's like the pants you wear. You want the pleat, but you don't want it so sharp that it's a knife.

All of that, you know, goes... A chiffon dress that travels, a big skirt that travels, it's very difficult for everyone to.... Now, we have shows... We start on a Monday; we leave on Sunday and then the collection is to be shown at 11:00 on Monday morning. I tell you, Robert, I don't do those shows. If I don't go... If I have to do a show on a Monday, I'm going to the store on Saturday, to do my fittings on Saturday, because I want my clothes pressed. If I come Sunday night, by the time they open the store and my show is at 11:00, I don't do the show. Because I'm too difficult, and I don't like to see the things unpressed. All of that is tough. And we know that a fabric sometimes.... My G-d, that fabric didn't press! Or, it's limp after three pressings. And next time around I won't buy it.

Q: Do you ever think about what your responsibilities are from the drycleaner to the...?

A: We do... The drycleaner is a difficult thing to deal... We used to have the fancy ones and the good ones. Today the drycleaner, you know, kills the buttons, kills the things... But I remember people, 15 years ago, who told me they would never wear a dress more than twice, and out it went. I think that's ridiculous too. You don't have to do that unless you just spilled soup on it, you know. And that's bad, because you can't fatigue
a garment. Also, the French drycleaner—the so-called French dry cleaner—who were precise in taking out the little spots—they just dump the dress in a big vat of something; sometimes it's a glue. Listen, we just had an accidental thing the other day. We did a duplicate of a dress from the summer collection...the resort collection, which was what? Six weeks ago. It's black and it's orange print, and then we made the duplicate. Just the day before yesterday. And I have the duplicate on the model, looking perfectly all right, and then I said, "Well, let me have the sample. I want to see what the neck looks like." And my sample is completely...the whole top, because of the lights—very, very sharp light, you know, on our stage—it has faded. Well, we called the manufacturer in Italy. I can't have that. How can I have that? I cannot have a woman sitting somewhere for two days, and then the top of her dress is going to fade? Out it goes. That was the first time it happened to me. The first time I realized that a dress faded after five weeks of showing. Well, it was a bad dye, I'm sure, because it shouldn't happen.

Q: No it should not. Of course, lighting, in our society, has become another situation that presents itself as affecting fashion; affecting clothes. As interior designers change the direction of lighting... Do you see any relationship with that to the function of designing clothes for new kinds of lighting areas?

A: It used to be.... In France, it used to be when you received people at night, you softened the light, it was better for the women's complexion, and so on. I hope that I don't have to add this to my worries. I hope that I don't have to do another investigation of whether the fabric
is going to fade or not, because, my G-d, I'll retire then! That's too much. But we do have... You know what happened? A customer will buy a coat... would wear a coat a long time. With dyed to match buttons. But after she puts on the coat 50 times, if it's not... Your buttons, on a man's suit, is natural something. We dye red or purple or yellow to match, and after the friction of the fingers and so on--they fade. We get buttons returned, and then we have to dye them again. We don't like that very much; it's time consuming. But I understand the problem of the customer. She wants to have a button that matches her coat. That again enters in the fabrication of the sample. Because again, every time a thing like this happens, it costs the firm money. Everytime somebody writes you a letter, saying, "Dear Miss Trigere (it will mostly be addressed to me), I love the clothes, blah-blah-blah, BUT..." Well, you have to answer back, and you have to take it.... Some are unrealistic about things like this. But most of the women who write to me... I will usually tell them to go back to the store where they buy the thing. I would rather deal with the store than with a private lady. Naturally. Because that's.... But everytime you get a little complaint, it's time consuming. And money.

Q: Yes. So that it cuts into the profits.

A: Always. Always.

Q: I always find myself thinking about the relationship of architects to fashion, and the reason I do is because when I look at collections and I see somebody presenting... For instance, the whole period of the layered look, when there were coats worn on top of coats, and four scarves, and I found myself thinking, apart from the fact that if you travel on the subway that becomes an impossible thing to wear. It's Isadora Duncan time. It's
a wonder there weren't more people killed.

A: Indeed. You'd get caught in the door...

Q: Absolutely. But I was thinking of closets. The function of closet space. We don't live in the kind of mansions that allowed women to have endless closet space.

A: Well, the hangers, I tell you, are not made to carry scarves. I don't think we have one scarf hanger that's proper. I had some made for me. I had some bars. It's like an exercise. Really like an exercise barre. That's where I put my big scarves. Because I had no way of putting them. If I wanted a scarf, it was always the one below and everything's on the floor, and I go to the theatre with the damn things on the floor. You know, it's a marvelous remark that you've done. I have always been told that our clothes are very architecturally conceived and constructed. I think they are well constructed, and I think if I have a seam somewhere, it has a purpose. It's going to give me the shape of the bust, the godet. It doesn't have any... This other thing is my forte... I don't want to sound immodest about it, but it's true. I respect... I know how to cut. When I make a cut it has a feeling, and people will refer to that as typical Trigere. It's a Trigere cut. It is difficult to reproduce sometimes, because I avoid darts that we used to have. Italian tailors for instance. For years, I used to joke with them, their women with big bosoms, and big darts here. And another dart under the arm and, you know, it was almost like a brassiere, before we had the John Kloss things. I avoid that, because it's not pretty. I think I know how to work the fabric until it gives me the feeling of a shape, without adding... You don't know where it comes from. That's hard. But I know how. Not that everything is
successful, but I know how.

Q: Do you see any relationship between the construction that you talk about and an earlier designer named Charles James?

A: Yes. Except that he was extremely difficult, and he was...his clothes, I understand, when they were flat, were exactly like puzzles. And you really had to have golden hands to put them together. That's why he did not want to become a little modernized. He just went ahead with the feeling of being a great stubborn man, a great designer... But I tell you that he should have softened up, because there are some things that you can't have today. You don't have the people to make them. I remember there is a dress... I told you, I showed an old dress in my collection, and there is a picture taken in 1949 by the New York Times, and there is a dress by Jimmy Galanos, a dress by Norell, and a dress by Charles James and myself. And each one with a prototype. The Charles James dress is an absolute beauty. It's fantastic. It's got a small corselette in velvet, and it's curlicued in a fantastic fashion in white satin. To have done this must have cost, I don't know, 100 hours of labor, which nobody can afford today, to pay. And, you don't find the hands to do it. So you've got to find another way of doing it. To simplify it. He didn't want to. It was all of one piece. He wouldn't have any...concession, would you say?

Compromise.

Q. Because there is an element of compromise. When I spoke before about architects, I was thinking of the reality that apartments--even expensive apartments--do not have enormous walk-in closets.

A: They sure don't. Well, that's the new fallacy of space. Everything in this apartment, which is still high-ceilinged, if they rebuild that they will
put one more floor in the same space. That's... look at the lobby. I always marvel when I go to the Four Seasons, at the extravagance... the space used for nothing, just enjoyment of people. Well, the buildings, I suppose they have to do it.

I went... Yesterday I saw an apartment in... I visited Eugenia Sheppard in her new apartment across from Carnegie Hall. Well, it's sensational. She has a living room that is about two and a half times this. It's tremendous. You're not going to have apartments like that anymore. Nobody will pay the rent for that. It's too bad. We lose a beautiful way of working, but you have to adjust. That's all there is to it. My assistant, Lucie Porges told me last year something very extraordinary. We came... we used to line the jersey dresses with matching China silk. Pure silk. China silk. Which you cannot get. It's as simple as that. You can't get it. Unless you want to pay $6-7 a yard for lining, that a woman doesn't see until she puts it on. So, you put the lining with a little polyester or something. That's a concession. She said, "Are you going to do that?" I said, "I've got to." But then, we used to dye the green with the green, and the purple with the purple—always. I can't do that either. And we had to compromise. So we now line in a nude, inoffensive color. You know. A flesh color.

Q: Something that will go with everything.
A: Well, except the blacks. Navy blue, maybe. And some red. She came to me... I said, "Let it go." And she said, "How can you say that?" I said, "I can say that because that's the way..." She said, "You can't! You've taught me for 20 years to be so perfect..." I said, "Lucie, I want to be as perfect as possible. I've got to make concessions." The girl practically... she thought that I had made, with myself, such a... How would I
put that in English? She said that I was giving away some of my deepest belief...I mean, what can I do? What can I do, if I cannot get the merchandise to go with that?

Q: If you cannot use your ethics, your beliefs, your direction, the traditional Trigere touch, at a price, because if you can't do it...

A: A touch I still can get, but...

Q: You can't make a profit though?

A: No, but you see, if I continue to dye... You know when I discovered I was stupid in putting my pure silk in? When I looked at a dress (that, by the way, was our friend, Bill Blass), I turned it around, and I said, "My G-d, he's lining his jersey dress in something with polyester." I came back to my office. "We're going to do the same thing." Why not? If he can do it, I can do it too. You have to learn...Listen...It's difficult to say that you're not going to compromise. It's like politics, I think. You must. You cannot be all of one piece. You cannot be Mr. What's His Name? The fanatic? Mr. Khomeini. You can't. Everybody has to give and take a little. And that goes for...

Q: It's just like interpersonal relationships. Isn't...In some funny sort of way I always think of the fashion designer, doing the collection for the unknown customer—the person who will buy these things—it only works effectively if your relationship to them is like a marriage. You do know who they are...

A: Absolutely.

Q: You do understand the way they live their lives.

A: You know, when you go on the road... There is no such thing of working....clothes.... Sometimes I will make an extravagant...and I say,
"Forget it. It's not going to work. It's not going to be 'puttable' on the woman's body." So out it goes. But it's true that when you work, you think of Mrs. What's-Her-Name there. Also, in my trade, in my work, I do a collection that will, I hope, be attractive to the New York customer, which is probably the same as the Chicago customer. And then maybe San Francisco. Then we start switching. The Los Angeles customer has to have something different in tones, in coloring. The one in Houston and the one in Dallas, that's a relationship. but they don't buy the same thing they buy in New York. Maybe an evening dress. But the coats, for instance...

Q: Is that merely a climate difference?
A: It's a climate difference... Well, yes and no. Because in Dallas, Texas, where you don't many times need a fur coat, they sell more mink coats and sable coats... This is just a symbol, maybe. But when I talk about cloth coats, or coloring... In California, you don't sell too much black, see. You don't. The coloring of the sky wants you to be in beige and blue and maybe brick and maroon...but black...At night, maybe so. But in California, we have different colors in the books, because we know that certain buyers cannot buy what we will wear in New York.

Q: Yes, black is for mourning in California.
A: It is?

Q: Yes. I don't mean morning. I mean mourning. For death.
A: For death. Well... But, it's funny. Because women who never wore black... Let's say Palm Beach. Palm Beach is a very interesting thing. In Palm Beach, for years, at night, well, you know. Palm Beach is an extravagant city. The conglomeration of people there; it's the cross section of the world. You have people from Venezuela, from Mexico, from Cuba, from Chicago...
Q: In a high concentration of power and money.
A: Yes. And Canada...and the rest of it. You see almost everyone there. And at night we used to sell just all the colors of the rainbow. You know that. And right now, in the past three years, a woman....she says, "I'm tired of all that. Can I have a little black dress?" And it's funny. Because when I go to the famous theatre in Palm Beach, if I'm there at the opening of Monday night, which is kind of a very peculiar evening, and fun, I wear a black dress! And I tell you, Robert, just because of the color I stand out, before they even look at what I wear. And I...I wear a lot of black for two reasons. I like it on me and I wear gold jewelry. But also it's very practical for me. My shoes, my bag.... I wear a lot of red, but in the evening I wear black a lot, I think. I don't want to make generalities because it's silly.

Q: Well....except that there is a reality. The basic, the little black dress has been with us forever, because it's a functional dress.
A: It never went, you know. It was only in the papers that it went. The little black dress has always been there.

Q: I think also there is something else. When you talk about Palm Beach, you're essentially talking about an aging population. Palm Beach, I once said, on a television show, was a wonderful place to live for old people and their parents.
A: Did you say that?! Robert! They killed you?
Q: No. Yes and no.
A: Well, you take your chances you see. I do that too. You have to. It's strange. No, you see a few younger people, Robert, but not much. Not much.

Q: The younger people that you see in Palm Beach are probably grandchildren visiting, essentially.
A: But in Palm Beach...Something that's funny now, is when we go with
the collection, you don't sell Palm Beach. Well, you sell Palm Beach clothes;
you are there. To be worn at that ball tomorrow night--they have balls
every night. But what we do sell in Palm Beach, especially now, is the
collection of spring--you know, we take 6-8 weeks delivery. Let's say, when
we will be going to Palm Beach is the end of January. Most of the spring
delivery won't be done. You sell Mrs. What-Have-You a costume or two or
three when she comes back to New York, when she goes back to Toronto, when
she goes back to...I go to Toronto....

Q: It will be warm when she goes back. She's...

A: You sell her, really, things for the future. Because the thing
in Palm Beach is, the season is very short. And what they want is a black
dress or an evening dress to wear tomorrow night. During the day, in Palm
Beach, they don't wear many clothes. They wear pants. Trousers. Jeans
quite a lot. And sweaters. T-shirts and things like this.

But it's an interesting...I like to go to Palm Beach because you really...
I have met more people....There was a.... "Remember, Miss Trigere? I met
you at a..." I don't remember, but they remember me. Thank G-d. That's
good. But it's extraordinary the amount of people that concentrate in
February in Palm Beach, from all over the world. From England, if they can
afford it. It's fascinating.

Q: Well. It's a comfortable area for people who have great money,
and who want ways to use that money.

A: And reassure themselves.

Q: You see, in a funny sort of way, Palm Beach is not unlike, culturally,
an area like Fire Island. Fire Island, certain parts of Fire Island, are
essentially a gay population. It's very comforting for someone who is gay to go and build their lovely house and give their parties with their gay friends...

A: Yes. And feel belonging.

Q: And feel that it's their community. It's their territory. Their turf. And, their culture. In other words, all their behavior patterns become acceptable and reassuring.

A: You're right. It's a very good comparison.

Q: And when you go to Palm Beach, you feel it in terms of people who are aging. Women who no longer.... You always see in Palm Beach what I call the reflections of great beauty. Great handsomeness....

A: Do you think it's only particular to Palm Beach? Would you not say it's the same on the Cote D'Azur? I haven't been on the Cote D'Azur except...

Q: There is a difference on the Cote D'Azur. I have a house on the Cote D'Azur. And Cap D'Antibes... Well, not quite at the Cap.....between Juan les pins and Hotel du Cap. And I've seen changes develop. The difference between Palm Beach and the Cote D'Azur is that Palm Beach still has not been invaded by the middle class merchant who has made some money. It still is the great name of American robber baron fame, and international fame. Whereas at the Cote D'Azur you get the Germans, the Japanese, you get people who are rich and...(cross conversation)... And a lot of marching. You know.

No Palm Beach is a mecca for people who... It's all relative. When my father, for instance, was given a testimonial dinner by a hospital that he had been treasurer for for 25 years, I think I was in my fifties; early fifties. And I remember going to the dinner and having men who were in their
seventies and eighties--his contemporaries--turn to me and simply say, "What a nice boy you turned out to be." You see? It is a relative kind of thing. You are bound to feel a little younger. And your standards of beauty are the same. It's very interesting to realize... You talked about Bette Midler on the previous tape--I realized something when I saw her on screen. When she's on the screen alone, it is a remarkable face. A challenging, interesting, handsome exciting woman. As soon as... But it is not conventional beauty. As soon as you put her on the screen with other women who are truly conventionally beautiful, she looks unattractive. And the same thing is true in Palm Beach. If you take ladies who are aging and surround them with other ladies who are aging, and men that are aging, the eye adjusts to a relative acceptance.

A: But, you know, Washington is becoming a very good city for me. It's becoming a very good city because we've dressed very prominent ladies there, who are very well dressed, and it's a copy cat thing. Palm Beach is the copy cat. What did she get? What did she not get? Because they see each other. They see each other constantly. That would really drive me crazy.

Q: The other thing... The two cities share something in common. I know both cities, because I've spent considerable time in those cities. They are what I call seasonal cities.

A: Washington too?

Q: Also. People go back to their congressional, senatorial moneyed areas. The people who are the lobbyists have to go back to the headquarters of whatever they're lobbying for. The senate, the congress, they all have to return to place some relationship of themselves into their home towns, their regions, their states, that support and elect them. They have something
in common. The people in Palm Beach can copy one another, because in "real life," they've lived everywhere. From Buenos Aires, Brazil, to Toledo, Ohio to Boston, Massachusetts to...Big Sur in California.

A: And it's funny when you go to a dinner party. You see the same people. Hopefully you see... And you also see the same waiters. The same... You know. The food sometimes is different, but you can see, when a hostess makes her own selection of the flowers, and when she sets the table, a bit differently, that pleases me. Most of the women... Very few know, really, a lot. And it's funny to see that what you saw last week at one party will be copied... It's amusing to see that.

Q: One of the realities, of course, is that we are all influenced by the forces that enter our lives, and style, in terms of being able to develop it for oneself...comes, as fashion does, from the education of the eye. I mean, you have to learn...

A: I think it's fabulous to be exposed. I think that people... I am going to give you a little example. When I buy fabric, I need the girls on the stage to hold them for me; to see the color, what is going to go on it in the light, what it does. You know—blah-blah-blah. And my models know how to do that very well.

[End Tape 2 Side 1]

A: And the other day we were very busy, and the two models were busy putting on clothes for the customer, and I took a boy who has been with us for two years, who sketches the garment for the book, as a reference for the future, and I said, "John, you're going to hold those fabrics." And he took the fabrics, and it was so peculiar. And so clumsy. And I looked at him, and I said, "You haven't learned. I don't understand. Why did you...?
Do you know what a selvage is?" He said, "What?" I said, "A selvage. A selvage is this way. This way. You roll the fabric like that." And to me this would be something. It's like holding a frying pan by the handle. You can't take it by the middle. If you do, then you haven't learned that a handle is there to hold it.

It's very hard. You know, I told you about this Japanese boy that I had for a week? He would know how to... Because he wanted to learn. Some people are blocked in a way.

Q: Also, we live in a world of such unbelievable specialization... That young man, who can sketch, believes that he has finished his training. He has finished his...

A: Not his one. Because he sketches only the thing we give him to sketch, when the garment is already being ready to ship. For the book, you know.

Q: Yes, but you know what I'm saying.

A: Yes.

Q: He has not learned the total relationship to all these things. Now... We're going to close here Pauline. This is the end of our second session and we have another session...

A: Are you sure?

Q: Yes, we do. I'll tell you why. Because I have a whole large list of questions that have been presented by the forces of the Fashion Institute of Technology, for historical reasons, they want to know certain things.

But also, in talking with you, of course, one constantly registers in the back of one's mind the unfinished things. Let me just prepare you for the next session. You mentioned Lucie, your assistant. I want to talk about assistants. I want to talk about the development of assistants. And what
qualifications people should have to honestly enter that particular role. I want to find out about Adele Simpson. You dropped that in the first interview, and said, "That's a whole other story." I want to know that story. There are many questions. So we will meet again, and we will do this, and then at some point, we will make another date for you, at your atelier. I want the cameras...the video cameras to simply come in and look and see...so that forever, everybody can see the nature of where you worked.

A: How good.

Q: That has to be wonderful, I think. And exciting. And then some of the forces that you mentioned. You mention the boy's sketches for the book. You mentioned....

A: Well, everybody works in a different way, I guess. I don't know how they do. I have no system. I invented my system. I always said...I've said many, many times that I would have given I don't know what for a week of my life to be working with Balenciaga. And I really mean it, because the man, to me, was a genius in the way he cut his garment. He never sketched...You know in the exhibition of Balenciaga, I saw his book, with the little swatch...in red...(cross conversation)...about the kind of a sketch that I do.

Q: It may not have been his... I have always suspected that maybe he didn't do those.

A: Maybe he didn't do that. He was a pure tailor, you know.

Q: Exactly. And also, so into the mental process of his relationship to clothing...incredible. So we can pursue all that. Thank you so much, Pauline Trigere.
A: Oh, listen. Thank you. I think it's fun. Marvelous, to be able to go back to all those things...I don't know. It's difficult for me to express myself well.

[PART III]

Q: This is Tuesday, November 20. And this is the third of the interviews with Pauline Trigere for the Oral History program at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Pauline, when we talked last, I told you that one of the things that I wanted to pursue was something that you dropped lightly in the first interview that we did; that you made reference to the fact that you would get back to it. Now I'm going to make you get back to it. I want to know the whole story of your relationship with Adele Simpson.

A: Well...It's very funny. My mother, I told you...I had a brother here, who came from Russia, many, many years ago. And he was a sample tailor, I suppose. He also was one of the first workers who really was involved in the creation of the union. I mean, he was one of the first guys who always...I remember the letters. I was a little girl when I heard my mother and her sister bemoaning the fact that the brother--the rich uncle from America--really was on strike. He was always striking. Always striking, because they were trying to form the nucleus of what the union is today.

Q: This is the ILGWU?

A: That's right. But that was way before that. And my uncle was always on strike. Anyway, one day I guess he got--he was living in Philadelphia--but then he couldn't find work there, and he came to New York, and became a sample tailor for a firm named Ben Gerschel, which comes back in my life a little later on. And then one day--I've forgot what year it was--I was a
small little girl, but I remember the great agitation. We got a letter from America that everybody read around the table, that my uncle's designer was coming to Paris to buy G-d knows what, or to see. But anyway, he wasn't even buying couture, because they were making coats, I suppose. The man's name was Goldstein. And my mother and her sister got all money together to give a great big gala dinner for this apparition from America, who would bring the two sisters friendly regards from their brother. You know. Their little brother from America. And my brother was delegated to go to the Gare St. Lazar to pick up this man. In those days, you took the boat to Cherbourg or Le Havre, and the train took you to Paris. And my brother was, I don't know, age 15. He was very young. Maybe not even that.

He went to the Gare St. Lazar and what does he discover but that Mr. Goldstein is accompanied by two ladies. Two women. And he was charged to ask him, in his broken English, to come for dinner that night. They had to bring three people. And he brought to our house Adele Smithline and her sister Anna Smithline. And that's how I met Adele, and it goes way back.

Then, she came to New York....My brother...She was...At that time, Adele wasn't even designing. She was just assisting her sister, who was a designer. She married Cyril Magnin. She's dead many years now. Anna Smithline married Cyril Magnin, of the Magnin branch, but Joseph Magnin, not the big Magnin. And Adele and her sister used to come to Paris to buy things and see couture, by the, for the firm of Ben Gerschel. And Robert Trigere was the delegate to show them Paris. I mean, the Louvre, the Tour Eiffel...And so we became very good friends. And one day we lost track of her. We didn't know when she was coming. And one day on Rue St. Honore, in April '29, my brother bumped into Adele, who was there for three days. She was not yet
married, and he said, "You must come to my sister's wedding on Sunday," and she came to my wedding. It's a funny story.

So when we came here, the first person we went to see was Adele. Her sister was then living in San Francisco. So we've been good friends ever since. Always.

Q: She was helpful to you when you arrived here?

A: She was helpful in the fact that... First of all, she's a no-nonsense person. She didn't understand why we came here. I mean, we were on our way to Chile. We didn't speak any language. We had no knowledge of what America was at all. We didn't know the requirement... I was going to be--I told you--a hausfrau and a mother. And I guess she probably found it very strange. She had a very successful business by the name of Mary Lee, then. And, honestly, at first she thought we were nuts. But then when we had this first new collection of coats, she came and told us that that wouldn't do. And she was right. You just couldn't do coats in that building. This is what it was. And so she told us that we really should do dresses, and suits and ensembles and coordinates, and she was right, and that was that.

Q: I love these threads that make the total tapestry of one's personal as well as professional life...names of people...Adele Smithline? Becomes Adele Simpson in the minds of everybody in this country.

Another area that I wanted to pursue with you is that throughout the interviews you've made light references to Lucie...what is her name?

A: Porges. P-o-r-g-e-s.

Q: As your assistant...But I sense that when you talk about her that it's larger than the usual association.
A: Right. It is indeed. Because Lucie is with me 28 years now, so it seems absolutely improbable and stupid or crazy to say that somebody has been with you 29 years. Would you believe it? Yet, when she became pregnant for the first time, 22 years, 23 years ago, my desire was to have her have the baby on the cutting table. I thought it would have been terribly nice.

Lucie has been part of my life; I'm sure I'm part of her life. And she came as a sketcher, you know. In those days, she came from Paris...She was born in Vienna. She was born in Vienna, and came here. But she was educated in France, so everybody thinks she's... For a while, they all thought she was my sister, because we have the same kind of French accent. And we work together now. And can I say the word training? At first she watched, you see. Doing sketching. And now she's part of the Trigere organization, as...How would I say that? A boss? We don't have very many titles in Trigere. A Vice President... We're too small for that. But I guess that's what she would be.

Q: But outline for me how you conceive of the role of the Assistant. Because for most people, the only way they're going to get started is to...

A: Well, that's a different kind. Now, you see, you talk about assistants...The word assistant... To me, when I think of the word in the French way, it means someone who really assists you in the designing room. Most of the time, women--or men--are given a sketch. They make a toile--a muslin--and when that's very fine, it all depends on what direction and what...how you divide your work. Most of the time, you give your sketch to the so-called assistants, who are supposed to be technicians. They are supposed to be technicians in making the garment. But then, when you go to
school and teach (as I've done, and as you do, Robert), you find that the word Assistant would probably get twisted around to someone who can make sketches for the designer. It's never been my case. I don't need them and I don't want them. I don't need anybody to sketch for me anything, because we have many more clothes in my head and Lucie's head that will never be produced. So we don't need that. But it can be both ways. An Assistant is someone who produces the first sample. After a while, you're supposed to cut it, to fit it, to put it together. In my case, my assistants, who are rather capable... Unfortunately, for me, don't fit to my satisfaction, even today, after 25-26 years I do practically 90% of the fittings. Most of them. Maybe I go faster and have no patience to watch. You see...

I remember pictures of Mr. Christian Dior with his white shirt or white blouse. You know, what... What do you call it? A smock. And a big stick, like at school, pointing to his assistant, to do that lapel a little higher or... I don't do that, because I go faster in doing it myself.

But... At Trigere, we have an assistant who does the soft clothes, with more specializing in the chiffons and crepe du chines, and we have one who will do a better buyer's dress in wool, and certainly a tailor...

Q: Now, are they working from a sketch?
A: They're working from a sketch.
Q: Who does the sketch?
A: Well, I do baby sketches. Lucie makes them better. But what I do frequently is to take a piece of fabric and cut one half. Then I give it to them, and then they put the other thing; they put that on paper. But the sketches... My baby sketches are understood by Benny, who is with me twenty... You see, I've got a very bad reputation, Robert. I'm terribly
...so they say...I'm terribly difficult to work with. To work for, and so on. But if they pass the six month period, they usually stay. Benny is with me over 24-25 years, and Lucy 28.

Q: Benny is another assistant?

A: Benny is a man assistant. The tailor. And he is with me many, many years. He is a patternmaker also, and I have a marvelous Japanese girl that I really trained. She came to us as a finisher. Sewer; you know. And we felt that she had an ability, so we gave her something to cut and something to do. That one... I not only like to work with her, but she works my way. It's the first time I was really able to train someone in the technical part of the business to work the way I want; to trace the way I wanted. Because the old system, Robert, is very antiquated. Very antiquated. The assistants that we have usually come from Italy, and they were all tailors, or finishers or sewers. They never learned, like we teach them at school today. Those assistants... The boys and girls that we teach at school, they all want to be designers, as you know. But some of them will be patternmakers. Maybe. But it's two different trainings.

Q: What is the difference?

A: Well, from Europe, they come from the ranks, as sewers. Mama was a sewer; Papa was a tailor. The kids naturally went to sew. And they do the technique of sewing....They know how to do the feather stitch. But that doesn't mean that you're going to be a good cutter. because you do a very beautiful sewing. It's two different things. You have to have something in your finger. Some have it and some don't.

I think that working well with an assistant is an extraordinary rapport. When you watch on television the doctor who does an operation...Without
talking, the nurse gives him the scalpel, or whatever the name of the instrument. Quickly. She knows, or he knows what the doctor wants. This kind of training doesn't exist in the tailoring business, in the dress... It doesn't. We don't train people to do that. Especially in America, because everybody wants to be on top before they begin to build the foundation.

Q: All right. Now, let's pick that up for a moment. If you had your position of power, that would allow you to direct the educational process, say at the Fashion Institute of Technology. What would you change in the training of those people?

A: Well, I thought about it a long time. In three years--I don't know what the courses are; 3 years or 4--I think that I would give those so-called "kids"--young people--who want to be designers; I think that I would stress the technical part. I think that I would let them work much more on a dummy, to really...with fabrics...to really have a feel of what a fabric wants to do.

It is very strange what I'm going to tell you. I cut, with scissors made for me, with my hands (I'm sure that you write with a pen that you like better than another, except that it's a pencil to make a note. Each one of us has his own idiosyncracies). I think that everybody should learn to have this kind of rapport with the fabric, with a certain pair of scissors. That's the first thing I would throw out. The baby scissors.

It's stupid what I'm going to tell you. You can't cut straight with a tiny pair of shears. You have to have something bigger. It's a stupid thing, but I think it helps. You see, in another... I would let them work... Of course, it's difficult at school because they don't have too much fabric
to work with. It's expensive I suppose. But I think the school has made a bad... They don't know how to ask. Everybody on Seventh Avenue would be very delighted to give the school lots of fabrics for free but they don't ask. Or maybe the student has in their mind some extraordinary piece of velvet or something, which costs a lot of money. But if you could train them to work with what they have, it would also be very good. It's like cooking. If you don't have a turkey, you can do something with a sausage, and you can have a good dinner too. The process of designing--really designing--is a marvelous one because you can do things with all kinds of stuff. You know, if you really want the training of an assistant and a future designer they should have more technical base than they have. They do too much of sketching, choosing the fabric, cutting the garment, pressing the garment. That's a lot of things for two years. It's too much, and nothing is in depth.

The person who sketches, the student who sketches well, probably has it easier than the other, if he sketches well. Because it gives you immediately the aura of having a great talent. It's possible. If a sketch is beautiful, unless it's executed in a dress, forget it, you know. But, I mean, at least you have that to show the teacher. To do the garment, to have something that has a feeling, either on a girl.... It's really tough, Robert, to tell you that. Because I would prefer to really do the thing on a dummy. And do it well. I have a theory that if it fits a dummy well, it will fit somebody. It's very difficult to tell those kids (I call them kids because they are young, and willing I suppose), I find it very difficult to try to fit a garment on a live person. This comes later. You have to... It's like that Picasso we talked about. First he knew how to draw; then he can make his eccentricity. But before he had to know how to draw. We have that
great difficulty at school. There is not enough basic training to have in their heads. It's strange, I don't know. I think it should all be re-evaluated. I think the school wants to have the beautiful fashion show at the end of the trimester or the semester, or whatever, and to have something to show. I don't think it's necessary, you see. I think it would be much more valid to have two years of perfect training, without having any garment, and not having anybody tell you after six months, "I've designed that dress." There is a difference between designing it and making it. Making is one thing; designing is another. It's all very involved, and I think that the first prize at the school is sometimes very dangerous. You know, to have your sketches put on a board, and you won first prize. Where do you go from there?

Q: It can be deceptive, in terms of allowing a person to believe that they have nothing more to learn, and that what they have now [to do] is to contribute their creative talent. On the other hand, I suppose the reason that sort of thing is done is that we live in a society which is based upon rewards. As we grow up in our families, we are given rewards. If you're good you get dessert; if you're bad, you don't get to watch television.

A: It's true.

Q: And because of that, part of the educational process has also been directed to the reward system. But... Let me pursue something else with you, Pauline. When you talk to people about Trigere, oh, I think, almost to any person, they will tell you that they are fascinated by the fact that you can take a pair of scissors, and take some fabric, and you start to cut, and voila! You have created a dress. And most people, of course, do not understand how this magic occurs. To a lot of people, it's a vaudeville act.
A: It is, I've done it many times. It becomes really funny to do, because I enjoy doing it. It's the ham in me. And the theatrical career that I never pursued, that comes out.

It's fun to do. I realized that, the first time I did it in public (of course I did it at many schools), but the first time I did it for the paying public was in Chicago, at the museum, and I had an audience that asked to repeat the act twice. It's very funny.

I think that comes with an enormous experience. But the process of draping. Taking a piece of fabric and draping it, like, I suppose, Madame Gres does; like I'm sure Madame Lanvin used to do and possibly, Balenciaga. I know Norell did it too, though he sketched beautifully. But when he wanted a special effect, because there is something that happens when you put the material. Somehow, in some way, somehow, it dictates something to you. It doesn't happen often. But...

Q: Let's concentrate on that word. What... See, the essence of this is what is dictating to you?

A: The fabric.

Q: You wield the fabric and you have the scissors. Do you have a previous idea from it, of the direction you want to take?

A: Sometimes. Sometimes I do, if it's a plain fabric, and I say, "Well, I'd like to make a very full coat." My sketch will never give the effect of the fullness I want. I take it, I drape it. If it is a panel print... You know what a panel print is? Something that's 60" wide and has a border at the bottom. That, I have to put it on the model; on the dummy, and start playing with it. That's the way of it. And I put it on the right side and the wrong side - I mean, the right side, of course - on the cross,
on the bias, until all of a sudden, in the mirror (I always work with a mirror; in front of a mirror. I never look at the model), I always look at a model at about two yards.

Q: You work with the reflection in the mirror.
A: Always. And you see, this is...

Q: Is that a straight mirror, or a three-way mirror?
A: No, no. A straight mirror. I couldn't work with a three-way, because then I would get myself in the way. I always work in a mirror. If I see a length, if I see... We always look in the mirror to see if something is right. And there is something that happens. I drape and my poor model sometimes... My back aches... I work them. In time of collections, we really are on our legs quite a bit. More so in France than here, because in Paris I understand that the models stay up until 2-3:00 in the morning. Forget here. They would call that slavery here.

Anyway. At 5:00, 6:00, I take a piece of fabric, and sometimes I can see my model's face having some reaction, a sweet reaction, and I know I'm on the right track because I can feel she likes what is happening. Sometimes she will make a funny grimace or something, and I don't pursue it.

It goes fast. I can do very beautiful, very superb clothes sometimes in ten minutes. I mean, just one half... you know. Sometimes you slave...

Q: When you do a half, which side do you do?
A: The right side. I always work on the right side. Always on the right side. My assistant, Benny was a left handed man. It's very funny, because he uses left handed scissors, which are made specially for his left hand. And my scissors are made for my hand too. Nobody touches them. I have a long pair of shears...
Q: When you say "made for you," were they actually....?

A: With the hand. It's like the people with their guns, or the gold...
The loop of the scissors (it's a big one) was made for me in Paris 20 years ago.

Q: Made to your hand?

A: Yes. So, the balance of the shear, which is heavy, really doesn't weigh. It's a strange thing, but it doesn't happen often. It's a very special pair of scissors. It's like everything else. I don't think I could get one made like this, ever.

When I start working, I can go on with no stop for hours. Sometimes the creative process is not... Sometimes you feel not so well; sometimes you're tired. Sometimes I will say to one of the models, "Stay with me for an hour or two tonight," and I would have within 10 minutes 10 pieces of different fabrics, making a big mountain of mess on the stage where I work. I touch them and I feel them and I drape them, and then at night, I think about what I've done. It comes back to me. I leave the fabric completely untouched. Unrolled. Before the man comes to sweep we put them away. Because actually they are very fragile. But I wouldn't cut anything. It's something that, somehow, there is a period of digestion--can I say that? Or ingestion. Call it what you may--and I will come back to it, and the picture is extremely clear in my mind of what I am going to do with that. I can... Well... I don't sketch, but I could make you a decollete of the dress, good or bad. That doesn't mean that you have to like it - but with a very sure hand I would cut on the dummy a decollete which would be exactly right, in 5 minutes. Where, if I made a sketch and gave it to my assistant, it would take hours, days.... And when it comes back to me, I said, "When did we ask for that?"
Because I don't recognize it.

Q: You mentioned in an earlier interview that you are stimulated by many things that happen to you, during any day or during any evening, and you make notes on the backs of invitations--whatever it may be.

Now, after you've played with the fabrics with your model, who remained, you come home and you think about those individual things, and they begin to I think...

A: Gel...

Q: Yes, gel is a very good term. Because, one edits in one's own mind to eliminate this, so you add this or subtract that, and suddenly you have something that visually you can see in your head. Do you ever look over your other notes, and then find yourself thinking, "Ah, I could make that this direction!" Or...

A: Yes. I also find that in my little sketches that I keep sometimes, on the program, those clothes get never made because I am so sure of them... I know so vividly and so perfectly well what I want to do, that I'm trying to get other things done. And the dress that I should have made in the first place doesn't get made.

You see, it's a very peculiar thing, the process of really creating a design. Because, in my case, let's say, at Trigere, I am responsible to a firm which sells certain things. First we have to have enough, we hope, enough work for the contractors. For that, we do basic things. So, in the fall collection, we know what we're going to do, approximately. Before I look at a new Challis or a new print or a new velvet, I know that my jersey dresses in the new colors--6 or 8 of them--should be made. These are really made mostly on paper. Little sketches. And we know we have to get rid of
that. Then we have to have a certain amount of coats or suits. This is the backbone of the collection. Things that we feel, I feel, that our customer will want to find in the Trigere collection. Then, after that, we'll put the little embroidery. It's like, maybe, the little pastry trimming. The cake may be very good, and then you begin to trim it up with funny things. So... Then we start by adding evening dresses, fancy fabrics, and all of that. It's different.... For me, it's a great responsibility to do the thing that I hope will sell for Trigere, because we need that to live. Too, the fabric that I buy... Let's say... We are now in November. November and December I'm going to buy fabrics which will come to us in January and February. Then we'll make it, and we are going to show the collection in March or April or May. Then we ship them, G-d knows, in August. The fabric that we buy now, to make and show in April, I can't afford to have them on the shelves. If I made a mistake in buying something, I've got to find a way to get rid of it somehow. That's very difficult.

Now, when you're a designer, for a firm, incorporated X,Y,Z, you may have that in your mind, but I don't think so. I have this responsibility en plus, you know, on top of all that, because it's my money; it's the money of the firm, and I can't afford to just let the fabric on the shelves you know, that's too costly. So that's another responsibility.

Q: One of the areas that, of course, I think everyone who knows fashion industry is aware of is that you may be one of the last of a dying breed.

A: Why?

Q: Well, meaning that you are interested in quality, and you're interested in the hidden quality in garments. It's almost extreme in the sense that you...
A: It's nutty. I'm telling you. Because, it becomes prohibitive price wise. Since everything is so expensive. So we try to, I would call the word, compromise a little bit. We have to. We used to finish every dress by hand. We can't. And, sincerely (and I don't think the customers really appreciate. Well. They don't know. They used to know. They don't anymore.)...

Q: I think that's an important thing to understand for designers; that the world of people who bought couture clothes, 50-75-100 years ago, was a world of women who had a career in relationship to their wardrobes. Their role was to understand their clothes; to enjoy their fittings; to compete with their world around them. They were educated to the world of clothes. They knew...

A: You see, the world of fittings, the way I understood it when I was listening to the people talking about couture in Paris, and when I met Balenciaga, who came here to talk with me one evening, right in this apartment, and we talked... He told me, his first fittings were in white thread, or something like this. The second fitting was blue thread. And the third fitting was pink. And at each fitting, and the changes on the.... You haven't got... There is no money in the world that can af... You can't anymore.

But, the tailor at Balenciaga, who was under his direction, fitting Mrs. What-Have-You, knew what he was doing--I hope. But she knew that she had to stay... She had to stay for an hour so they could fit her for a dress... Those women, they don't know anymore. They don't exist. The woman has no time. Take the length, get finished. Nobody has the time. It's a double case of rapport between the tailor and the designer, and the woman who stood in front of the mirror to be fitted, and enjoying it.
Q: It's not only the fact that the reality of the woman's role has changed, so that many women who can afford couture clothes know very little about clothes other than the satisfaction of looking in the mirror and saying, "I like it. I'll take it." That's a big difference. But also, I think the designer... For instance, you said something the other day that Mrs. Kissinger --Nancy Kissinger--was in your place and was there for three hours, and you said it like maybe she has nothing to do, but I have much work to do. Because three hours for you to spend with one customer...

A: I didn't really spend it with her. Actually, what she was doing was playing around. She was really waiting for her mother, who disappeared...I don't know... So she stayed for a long time. And she watched me buy fabric; she was very amused. And you know what she said? "You're lucky that you're working." And I said, "Yes, I am. I guess." But, just to tell you about Mrs. Kissinger, for instance (I don't know what you're going to do with those tapes, but...), I remember Nancy when she came to us the very first time. She's tall, and very small on top; a little bigger in the hips. I know her body by heart; I can fit Mrs. Kissinger on the dummy and it will fit, because I've prepared the thing before, if I want to do that. That's another thing. Maybe that's one of my capacities, abilities...is to...somebody in the fitting room will say, "But you didn't take my measurements," and I'll say, "No, I don't have to because I know how your body looks in comparison to my model, and I can have it cut on the table." That I know. But with Nancy, we started to fit...me fitting.... I could do anything I wanted with her. And then she, after two years, she said, "Pauline, don't you think it should be released...?" In the past three years this lady has learned so much about her own self. She knows what
a dress does for her at night. In the beginning... She still buys an awful lot of clothes everywhere... But she knows. She sees herself in the papers, and she knows the reaction she has; which is a process of... But she would tell me before - if I fit the top, she says, "What about..." And I say, "Just a minute Nancy, I'm not there yet, you know. I start at the top and I go down like this." It's funny, because she learned a lot. I personally... I put on a dress... You know, all my clothes are fitted for me. I very seldom--except a sample which has been fitted by me on a girl, a coat I can get by by wearing a coat, but otherwise I wear bigger clothes and I like them loose and I like to feel comfortable. When I have something to do for me, I do my own fittings on a Size 12 dummy, and I know exactly that I need a bigger back, because I have a big back, you know? I know all my funny little things. I know that I want the... Whatever it is. I fit on the dummy, and I put the dress and it goes. I know my body by heart too. Lucie, for instance, who is tiny. She is an 8, sometimes a 6... She gets, of course, her clothes at Trigere and somebody fits them and fiddles with them. She always tells me, "Pauline, can I have your fitting?" Once every season, I have to fit her dress personally. She feels, I hope rightly, that it has another fitting because I know how. What can I tell you?

Q: That's a very special skill. Can it be taught?

A: Yes. I think it can. It can be taught if the person has eyes. Do you know what I mean by eyes? Some people don't see. They look but they don't see. And it happens... It's very strange what I'm saying. Some people... If you have this ability... My little Japanese girl, I try, I say, "I don't understand why you did this." I said, "Why did you do it like this?"
Yes. She grasped... Some people, you talk and talk...

Q: Does she have a name?

A: Does she have a....? Yes. Her name is Yoshimi. You know. She's petite, and nice and...

Q: It's interesting that Lucie, Yoshimi.... You think these are people...

Obviously Lucie has ambitions to go out on her own?

A: I don't know if she does have an ambition to go out on her own. I think she's doing very well at Trigere, and she's my partner in design more and more. I go much faster than anybody so naturally I would have, you know... I can do... I'm a fast worker when I work. When I don't work I'm fast anyway.

No, no, no. Lucie... Her ambition is to design, and to do extraordinary things, and my little...how do you say? It's not...discussion with her right now, is not to go into the extravagance that we cannot do any longer. You know, the... She says, "You taught me all that, and now..." I said, "Well, I taught you things that I knew... You have to compromise a little bit, in the cut of things." It's so expensive. Everything. So we have to try to... stylize maybe? That's not the word...to simplify. See, what we lack today in workers and technicians, we try to put on paper in better made patterns. That's another one of my beefs. I would like to have lots of people going into patterns. But for that, again, they have to have more technique than they have.

Q: Perhaps the reason they don't like to go into patterns is that the fantasy of being a designer, being a name, being a star, of course, is not applied to the patternmaker.
A: That's right. Their names are not in the paper. But it's a very rewarding, it's a very clean work. It pays very, very well. I don't know. It's tough. It's like everything else. When you get your car overhauled; when you get your car... You used to go to a garage and 25 years ago I used to go around the corner from me in the country and there was a young boy there who could take the car apart and put it back together. Today they send you back to where the car comes from. They don't know how to change...They'd rather forget a bolt instead of putting it, you know... Everywhere else.... I mean, everything is quick, fast, change. I don't know. It's the world of...

Q: Yes. And we live in an instant world, you see.

A: Absolutely.

Q: Instant foods, instant beverages, instant love affairs, instant marriages, instant divorces. All of these things are important to understand because it makes it increasingly difficult for the fine people who are willing to take a program that will really allow them to grow over a long period of time.

A: Time... It's very, very rewarding to see people who really want anything, in any kind of profession. Everywhere. But I think the world of traveling, everything goes fast. You go fast with your car. You take a plane, you are in Paris in three hours, or in Frankfort, or wherever. It's a world of rapidity and mechanism, I think.

Q: Do you think a designer is influenced by that reality? That people don't want to take a lot of luggage when they travel anymore?

A: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Though, years ago, when you used to pay for every pound of luggage, you were... I was never careful, because I always
traveled with 15 pairs of shoes; it's heavy. But today they don't weigh you. But I think that... This is what's interesting in my work today, when you go into a fitting room and a woman says, "I'm going to [wherever they go] and I have to get..." So we form a wardrobe. I like that. I like a woman who's intelligent about her wardrobe, not buying everything in sight, and then nothing matches. Yet, I have a friend of mine who told me last night she's going for three months on a boat--I don't know; she gave me the name of the boat; it's a fabulous trip, around the world--I couldn't.... I said, "Three months. Think what you have to pack! Three months, to have to be with the same people on a boat!" I couldn't do it, but I guess some people... That also takes time. It's an organization.

Q: Do you have an attitude toward planning a wardrobe? I mean, what would you advise a person?

A: Oh, yes, I have an attitude. Sometime.... I always say I have nothing to wear, but when I go on a trip, I am going to Chicago and I know that my morning work will be a pair of pants and a sweater--Chicago is cold. Then I have my so-called dress for the evening, naturally. For the presentation of the thing. I do my wardrobe in one color. Always. Now this time it's going to be black, because it's only two days and if I go to Palm Beach, it's going to be white, blue or red. I don't know. And it's going to be that. It's going to be red. From the day of the morning to the week I spend in Palm Beach.

Q: Do you simplify the relationship to the accessories?

A: To my bag and my shoes. The things that go with it. You know, the scarves that go with two or three outfits. I think that women have learned to do this a lot these days, some of them anyway.
Q: We are, at this moment, in 1979, the end of '79, facing a number of obvious, series of crises in the world, including an economic crisis. There is, whether one wants to believe it or not, there is a recession. As a designer, dealing with rather expensive clothes, do you find that you think about that in terms of how extravagant the dress might be?

A: Yes. I do.

Q: Expand on that.

A: It's very strange Robert, that a dress, expensive as it may be, if it's pretty, you'll sell it. It's not always true of a coat, of a jersey dress, because the people are going to be... We attract...many more women, and so some will graduate themselves to a Trigere jersey dress because they know they will wear it for many, many seasons. But you have an extravagance in evening clothes, it's a different thing altogether. Because if you go over $2,000, which is a tremendous amount of money, you have to have the woman who can afford it; who knows that she's going to wear it in New York, two or three times, and then she goes somewhere else and wears it again. You have to have a woman who travels to be able to get the run of that dress.

Q: I was thinking of another direction. I was thinking of the fact that as a designer, you look at the society and say, "This is not a period of ostentation. People are going to be very nervous about showing that they have a great deal of money, when other people are really in great financial difficulty. You don't want it to be..."let them eat cake time." Do you design with that in mind? Keep things simpler and more...

A: The clothes at Trigere are always simple, but we also try to make them to work both ways, for the cocktail and dinner... I try to have a dress that will really be of interest for a woman to buy, and she can really have...
a long run out of it. We used to make fabulous embroidery. We cut that out, because the price is ridiculous, you know. Very ridiculous.

But, it's very bad, really, when you try to be too practical. Because then you get the enchantment of the thing out...

Q: It's lost.

A: Is lost. You cannot... Sometimes I feel that a dress I have which is in the process of being made, I'm going to have to watch the patternmaking of that, and I know that. Maybe it influences me badly, I suppose. I've stopped making something that has too many little pleats, because the labor is going to be so prohibitive that you won't be able to sell...Yet...It doesn't make any difference. We made, this year, a very, very pretty dress in a fabulous fabric that cost $80 a yard. It was gold thread, very fine. The supplier came to see me last week, from France, and he said, "Thank you very much, you did so well," and I said, "Gee, I'm curious. How many times did we do that dress?" We call it "Dynasty." It was a marvelous lady from China... I don't know... In the finesse of chiffon. And we did the dress 104 times. The dress sold for $1,800, I think. That's a lot of dresses at that price. And the woman who buys that certainly doesn't want to see herself coming and going. But if a dress is pretty, and it has femininity, you'll sell it. Extravagance in America is something marvelous.

Then there is also the fact that a woman wants to show off. She knows that her friends will know that a dress coat cost more than a thousand dollars, and she will maybe be more... That kind of snobbery, I suppose, is attached to it. Thank G-d for that.

Q: Yes. There's a certain amount of status symbol involved with being able to wear something which is so beautifully cut and so beautifully
made, or so luxurious in fabric, or so fragile in fabric, that one is saying, 
"I don't have to worry about whether I get a great deal of wear out of this 
or not."

A: Yes. But I, in my work, try to be very sensible in the things that I do. Because at the end, I think that the customer who will have bought and worn a dress, no matter what price she pays, with pleasure is going to come back to us and say, "I loved it. It served me well." And I try to continue to do that in the workmanship, in the lining inside. I try to make it attractive to her so that she really feels that she's got something.

Q: I'll tell you, because I was involved with doing this tape with you, I began to talk at dinner parties, just dropping the name Trigere, to get a reaction, to see what would happen. Like turning to my dinner partner at the right and saying...

A: They say it's too expensive.

Q: No, no. What I got was, as a matter of fact, one of the most fascinating responses was from a lady from Houston, Texas, who said to me, "I have a Trigere dress that I wear and I wear and I wear." And I said, "Tell me about it." Well, really what she was describing was a black wool dress. And I said, "Why do you wear it so much?" She said, "It is exactly the same as going to my jeweler." And I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "When I go to my jeweler, he puts out the black velvet and he shows the jewelry on the black velvet. When I realized that, I thought 'Ah, I will buy my Trigere dress, and it will always serve as my black velvet for my jewelry.'"

A: Well, I'm pleased with that remark.

Q: I thought it was very intelligent.
A: What I get at cocktail parties is the woman comes to me, "I've got a coat from you." "Don't tell me it's ten years..." "Yes, it is ten years old." And I very facetiously answer, "How do you want me to retire if you buy a coat every ten years." You know. But it's satisfactory.

Q: It's interesting, because some of the museum people around the country say that they find it difficult to collect Trigere clothes because the women don't want to give them up.

A: That's right. But we have a few. But something happened to me yesterday. I went to a huge black tie party and a woman came in with a jacket I wore at the Pension Fund last week. I didn't have the dress to go with it so I wore the jacket -- gold and black brocade -- very simple but it's gold and black and sensational in the fabric. I wore the jacket, and then yesterday at this party this woman comes with the jacket, but without my dress -- she has some sort of a skirt on, I mean it's long; I don't know the lady; she's very pretty and a Size 12 or 14, and I said, "Oh, what a pretty jacket." And she said, "Thank you. It's a Bill Blass." And I said, "I beg your pardon." Yesterday it was. She said...I said, "Where did you get it?" And she said, "At Nan Duskin in Philadelphia." And I said, "It's not a Bill Blass; it's a Trigere." She said, "This is my husband." I said, "I'm Pauline Trigere, and I know the jacket. I made it." And she said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Could I?" So I picked up the back and of course she has a Pauline Trigere label. I mean, there was no mistaking it. It was a thing we shipped two weeks ago. And she bought it and she thinks she's wearing a Bill Blass. I have to tell Bill that story, because I think it's very funny. She was a little embarrassed after that, but it didn't bother me. I thought it was very funny.
Q: Now, of course, her assigning the jacket to Bill Blass was something
that she did in her own head. But it is true that lots of people (I don't
mean Bill) but other people have knocked you off. I mean, one sees copies
of Trigere dresses.
A: Yes.
Q: How do you feel about that?
A: Well, at first, years ago, I felt incensed and furious. Today, I
go with.... Who said that, Robert, that probably it is the best form of
flattery, so what the hell.
Q: Imitation is the best form of flattery.
A: If I am not dry and I can make another dress and another coat, I
got resigned to it. I had a very funny incident. I'm doing coats for
Abe Schrader's, and it's been the very first season and very good, and we
made a coat with special buttons that I had made by my button maker and
then he ordered, I don't know, maybe 10,000 buttons, maybe more. I don't
know how many buttons he used. And he said, "You know the coat has been
copied, but they can't get the buttons." I said, "Abe, when they want to
get the buttons, they'll get..." In the meantime, the coat has been
copied down to, whatever it is. Watered down, not the same fabric. They
can't get the buttons. If they get... What can I tell you? I hope that
the people who buy the copy recognize the difference in the making of it.
It's... In America, it's copied immediately.
Q: I think it's a logical process. I mean, after all, in the nature
of people going to Paris and buying couture, and making copies of couture...
A: It's a different thing, because they buy the dress to be copied.
To copy it. Maybe they water it down; they take out a tuck or two. Here
they don't pay me anything. They go to Lord & Taylor, they go to Saks, they go to wherever—they buy the garment—and sometimes they have the audacity to return it, which is really not very nice. So they do that. It's annoying. It is. But there is no defense.

Q: No, there is none. And I think it's the nature of the American system. You know, it's its own kind of all's fair in love and war, and competition, in that sense.

A: This is not even competition. But it happens in almost everything. You get it in the cooking equipments. You get a Cuisinart for $200, and you get something that costs much less, and you can probably do almost the same thing.

Q: The fascinating thing is that the design remains almost the same. Your use of Cuisinart was interesting. Because Sunbeam....a mass manufacturer, has brought out a new one as well, and at first glance you think you're looking at a Cuisinart.

A: But I don't know if in the end Cuisinart is going to give the owner a longer... I hope that my Cuisinart will serve me longer than the copy. I don't know. I may not be here to... I am, by nature, a lover of quality. I love quality. If I buy something, I try to buy the best. Whether it be shoes or whatever I buy, in the house... In my kitchen, the pots and pans that I use. We talk cooking because you are such a great chef. My frying pans are from France. I have had them, I cannot tell you, 30 years. But they serve me well. I don't go buy a frying pan every six months. I talk to people and they say, "I have to go buy a new frying pan." And I say, "What for? I've had mine forever." And they are still perfect. We take care of them.
Q: Part of the thing is that you do take care of them. One of the interesting things to realize is that... I find that students, for instance, because their own backgrounds have not brought them up to appreciate, respect the quality of something...

A: Oh, that's... You've said it. This is something that I like to inject into people. You asked me before what would be my advice to someone. Suppose someone doesn't have too much money. I would say, "Try to get the best you can with the money that you have." To get a little more... pay a little more for better quality so that you have something that you can keep much longer. If you buy something cheap, you've got something cheap. No matter what it is. Except maybe in jeans. I don't know. They're all made out of the same denim, so... I guess that will last the same way.

Q: Well, that interesting quality is a fairly rare thing today, Pauline. Why do you think it's rare?

A: I think again it's a process of everybody wants to look like somebody else. They buy quickly something. I don't know. It's very... I don't know. I've seen people buy silverware twice in their lifetime. Well, I have my silverware, I cannot tell you, so long.... It still serves me very well. I mean, I may want to change my mood. I may not want a Louis Quinze so I get something from somebody else. But it's.... I don't know... When I wanted a table, I went to the best maker and I got a table 25 years ago. I had the man, who made the table, here for dinner last week, and he says, "My G-d, I never realized you could keep a thing like this. What do you do to it?" I said, "It needs refinishing." He said, "No." "I don't know. We try to keep it..." Because I respect things.
Q: I think the operative word is respect, and taking care of things. It's just the simple business of people who hang up their clothes properly, and put them away properly.

A: Oh, yes. My clothes are hung up immediately. That's one thing I do. I may drop it when I come on the floor... But I hang up my clothes, I don't leave... I respect them. And the clothes are pressed before they are put in the closet. Maybe I'm lucky, I take them back to the office. But even here, my girl will press something for me. And I don't send clothes to cleaners. And that was my first beef. A woman wears a dress once, she...out it goes to the cleaners. That's bad.

The whole thing is a process of education, I think. I don't know if today the young people, because they want to change clothes so much, and they want to be a la mode, or if today's fashion, they change a lot and they buy funny little things -- I'm not used to that. I can't....

Q: Well, it's another world. And I think one of the reasons that it does exist is the instant quality of our life patterns. We move very rapidly. We talk about this being a decade society; things last for a decade. Now, Trigere has lasted for many decades. Based upon the quality. And people who come to you to buy clothes--because they range in age from 20 to 80--and somewhere along the line there is always that person who fills in with an identification with quality and wants it, and finds out where it is. But the mass of people in our society don't really believe that anything will last, including their lives.

A: Well, it has something to do with what... You know... It's been a dangerous 30-40 years. Young boys go to the war; go and get killed. You get this surrounding you, you think, "What the hell? What do I care?"
I mean, you know, if you can lose a life, it doesn't matter if my coat doesn't last. It's true. And there is this lack of wanting to attach yourself to something. It's strange.

Q: It's an impermanence that people feel, I think.

A: Well, we have this kind of thing in life today. I mean, floating. Today, when you read the papers, this morning, it's frightening. You never know. Maybe in 1914...what starts a war... It's a frightening situation. When you have that in the back of your mind, I think that everything becomes, not frivolous, but not really of great importance. I'm terribly, in my life, interested in life, generally, around me and in the world. I just don't work and say I don't care about what's happening. In Iran, for instance. Or in Israel. Or in Russia. I am really terribly involved with all that, and I realize fully well that my collection is important to me and to Trigere, but, after all, it really doesn't have too much of an importance when you have the gravity, the seriousness, of the situation in the world. It's very difficult to just say to somebody, "I want to be a designer, and forget the rest of the world." I couldn't work like that.

Q: Well, evidence of that is that I remember, the biggest bit of fashion gossip that really is imbedded in my head, was the year that Pauline Trigere introduced the black model to the world of fashion. Nobody had ever seen a black model.

A: You don't know...Or do you know? Do you know the explosion...!!?

Q: I'd like to talk about it, because I do think it's important. It also...to me...I remember it. I remember it very well. But I remember the talk. But I also thought at the time, what a marvelous use of one's own world to make a statement.
A: You know, when I think about it, Robert, I did it. The girl was pretty. She was going to work for me, hopefully, as I wanted to. It wasn't.... I never thought two minutes about the repercussions at all. Yet, we had a few... First of all, her clipping book is amazing, because from Afghanistan we have clippings; from Russia we have them. I have the clippings. It was a revolution. Look at what happened to the black world of models today. I mean, on a fashion show, if you don't have seven vs. six white, you don't have a fashion show. I think it went a little bit overboard, but if the girls are pretty and do their job, fine.

But when I did that, and people said, "Are you going to keep her?" And I said, "Sure I'm going to keep her." We lost a few customers. One from Birmingham, Alabama. She said, "If this woman is going to show me the thing..." And I said, "Well..." And she took the door immediately. We never saw her again. It didn't bother me. But in the world, in the fashion world...in my little room where we had this black girl for the first time, instead of having black people around to do menial work--It was unbelievable.

[TAPE 3]

A: ...That was 1950.

Q: '61.

A: '61 It was? Well, Audrey Smaltz? Do you know Audrey?

Q: Yes. Of course.

A: Audrey, every time she speaks about Trigere, she says, "Remember..." She did the show in Washington for all the blacks. She told me. That's a fabulous girl, by the way. She knows many people who don't... But, you know,
it happened by accident. I'm very pleased that incident in my life. I really am.

Q: I thought it was a marvelous reflection of something that I think people lose sight of, and that is whether you were consciously concerned with the repercussions, you at least allowed yourself to work through any resistances that might have occurred, and said, "I don't care. She's beautiful. She can wear the clothes. And I want her to do it. It is my firm, and I want to make a statement." It's reflected in your attitude toward the woman from Birmingham who leaves. It takes a certain amount of courage to take any stance and make any change.

A: Yes. And when I took a stand, voting for Carter, on Seventh Avenue, the last time around, they looked at me and said I was crazy, because nobody was... I have, I hope, the courage of my convictions, and I hope I don't lose that.

But this has nothing to do with the world of designing. It has something to do with the fact that I was maybe an immigrant once in this country, and though I didn't have to suffer too much, the beginnings were very hard. But then, had we stayed in France, G-d knows, we may not have been here at all, with the.... I don't know... It was... The holocaust, of course, was for everyone. So I am pleased to have had a few years of great... I mean, it was difficult. And I could only attach myself in, how you say? Drape myself to the only thing I knew how to do. My husband too. So we worked very hard, and I don't think working hard has ever killed anybody, which is a thing I like to keep in the tape, for all the boys and girls who really want to become anything in life. And I don't think that growing older or more famous makes you relax more. That doesn't work like that. I think
the responsibilities toward your own entourage is just as big, maybe because you grow older you don't take it as easy as maybe you should. Maybe I'm more fatigued, I don't know. But there is one thing sure. I just don't work less now than I worked 20 years ago.

Q: Well, don't you find that there are a couple of things there that operate? One is the reality that you now have other people who depend upon your talents and your business skills for their own living? You have people who have...

A: Yes, it's a great responsibility. It really is. And sometimes I feel the pressure, in time of collections. It's not because the creative process is difficult, but if I miss... You see... I told you that before... We are as good as the next collection; never as good as this one. That's fine. We'll sell it now. Next winter, what's going to happen? And that's tough. Because all those people out there are practically looking at you, and the eyes darting at you. And now I'm making another collection for Schrader. The first one was very good. And now I've got to make one that is equally as good or better. And stronger. It's tough.

Q: If you were doing a composite woman... Who is the Trigere woman? Do you see yourself as the Trigere woman? Do you see...

A: I couldn't see myself... But I think the Trigere woman is a woman who is interested in her family, in her husband, or lover. It is not just to take but to give. I think it's the woman who has something in her brain, who's interested in the world affairs, who, certainly, is interested in her children's work at school. I hope that I work for the woman who is not static. I hope I work for a woman who is not only playing cards, let's say, or playing golf. I hope that she has some interest in the life of her
entourage and certainly her family. That would make her more interesting to me. Though, the lady who used to be called the "doll of fashion," is an interesting creature, because she can just buy clothes and wear them and that's it. I love a woman who has an idea of why she buys her clothes, besides covering herself. Actually, the people who buy Trigere clothes probably don't need another dress in their closet. I'm sure they all have plenty of clothes, and plenty of fur coats, and so on. And so, she has to know why, and how she uses her money and I hope she's not frivolous. And yet, I probably cut my own appeal because the woman who years ago was kept and just had nothing to do but buy clothes, clothes, clothes, clothes, is certainly a marvelous animal in our world of fashion. We welcome her.

Q: Speaking of, well, let's say, the mark and the identification of Trigere, I think if we were to do a simple sketch in a magazine, or run it on a television screen, of a turtle placed somewhere unexpectedly on the dress—the side of the arm, the middle of the hip, the hem of the skirt—a jeweled turtle, a piece—I think everybody who saw that, who knew anything about fashion at all, would know that one was saying "Trigere." Tell me about the turtles.

A: Well, yesterday I wore an extraordinary dress—I will show it to you—and Norma said, "It's fabulous, but where is the turtle?" I thought it was funny. It was there, on the bottom, but you couldn't see it in the embroidery.

The turtle. I had once a friend who was a jeweler, and he was trying to do something. He said to me, "Make me something that won't take too much gold but that will be interesting," and I doodle. Really. I have it; I have the sketch. We made this famous turtle. He had a very good model
maker, and he made the grandmother of this turtle. I'm wearing the bigger one. You know, I made this... I'll show you the sketch, because I'd like to have it published one day. So we made that turtle, and it was about an inch long. It's like a turtle, but it didn't take too much gold because it's kind of transparent, you know. Then we made one that was a little smaller--the same one, reduced--So we had three turtles. That was in 1947 I think. '46 or '47, and in 1948, '49, I got my first Coty award. My brother Robert went to La Virelle Russie (they were still on Fifth Avenue) and bought me, as a present, a Faberge turtle in tiny sapphire, small little thing, so here I had another turtle. Then I got another Coty award and he bought me another turtle; another Faberge. Very pretty. So now I have five turtles. Then in 1952, '53, I went around looking for a house, and I saw many houses. And the house that I own now was an old decrepit nothing, tiny old farm house, with a pond. And on the pond was a rock, and on the rock were three turtles, sunning themselves. You know. Three turtles about 10 inches long. And I looked at those turtles, on a dismal, end-of-March day, and my brother was with me...

Q: Where was this?

A: In Lewisboro, in Westchester. I said, "If I get that house, I am going to call it La Tortue which means, "the turtle." I bought the house, I call it La Tortue, and from then on the turtles are... You don't know. I have something like 875 turtles, counting the plates and the dishes and the... I've got turtles everywhere. And that's the story of the turtle.

Q: Is this because people give you things that have the turtle on it?
A: Yes. Everybody gives me a turtle. I'm trying to tell everybody that I want diamonds, but they still give me turtles. They give me turtle chocolates, give me turtle embroidery somehow—the turtle is not a pretty animal.

Q: No. And it's also thought of as being plodding, slow moving.

A: Yes. But it's sturdy; a sign of longevity and happiness. In the world of the turtle in the Orient; it's almost G-dlike there.

Q: Did you know that when you designed it originally?

A: No. Absolutely not. I found that out when I went to Japan in 1962. I bought many turtles and embroidery. You know, I bought some things about 18 inches square, with a turtle on top, and I said, "What were those?" They were baptismal. I can't pronounce it...pillow cover for the rich Japanese, who would present the baby to their grandparents. But they would put the baby on a turtle kind of an embroidery to bring... It's like a fairy godmother giving the child, you know, gook looks, and this was a promise for the child to have long life, sturdiness, etc., etc., and they are fabulous. I was just given a book the day before yesterday by Melanie Kahane, a tiny little book that belonged to Ben Grauer. It's a tiny little thing on parchment, that she found in Ben's papers showing turtles in the old...in Persia. The turtle is there because it's an animal that you can trust in a way. So... I don't move like a turtle, I hope.

Q: I always found that... That's always interested me because you are a fast talker, you are a fast sketcher, you are a fast cutter—everything you do you do rapidly. A high level of energy, and I'm always amused that you are also associated with the turtle.

A: Well, it's a pure accident.
Q: Was there anything in your head when you did that first little doodle?

A: It was a joke. I just did it, and... Not at all. It's a very strange thing. But now, when the house is called "La Tortue" you don't know. But you see, you discover things. In collecting things—I don't have many in here—but in the turtle world, from all the world, is something extraordinary. In Italy—of course, the shells and so on—It's amazing. I saw a man at the theatre at intermission last week. He said... I hadn't seen him in ten years. I saw him the last time in Mykonos. And he said, "I was thinking of you this afternoon." I've forgotten his name. I said, "Why?" He said, "I just made a piece of furniture with two fabulous shells of turtle." So here I am. I'm in the head of people because I'm a turtle collector. Oh, boy!

Q: What about "La Tortue" as a place to escape? Are you a different person at La Tortue than you are here at 525 Park Avenue?

A: I think so. First, I love the place. It becomes an insanity. I guess. I guess I'm getting too attached to this. It's like a.... I don't know. I haven't got the time, Robert, to do all the things I want to do. And if I were to change anything in this apartment, or in the house... You take a decorator, you take a painter and redo it and that's fine. If you decide what you want. I am terribly involved with the garden, and this is something that is a passion. And I just planted, not that much but plenty. I can't wait until I see... I hope G-d's given me this year—if my planting of the oranges and the yellows is going to come out the way I want to. And as I design a garden, which is something new to me—I mean, it's new, it's 20 years of experience—but really solidly designing, I feel sometimes, it's a passion. I love it. I go there and I work all the time.
This Sunday I read a little bit, which is something I don't do as much as I want to. It gives me... The country is an escape. First of all, health wise. I go mostly Friday night. Now, yesterday, at a big dinner party, someone said, "I want to invite you but I know you won't come," and I said, "Why won't I?" And they said, "Because it's Friday night." And I said, "You're right. I won't come." Why should I go to another cocktail party on a Friday night when I can be in the country. And it's true. Breathe the fresh air. I don't put on any makeup. My hair flies any direction and it doesn't matter.

Q: What about clothes?

A: There? Oh, that's funny. I wear old dungarees and I have practical clothes with big pockets because I'm always with my clippers. In the country, at night, if I receive people I may -- probably in the country I'll wear trousers, pants, and my famous turtle shirt. You see, we made a turtle scarf, years ago. And I have 20 shirts; they are all the same shirt. It's like a man's shirt in fantastic colors--white pants, blue pants--I have that. So that's the backbone. If I go to people in the country, I wear... Maybe a long skirt with a very simple top. I don't dress, there, I mean. Ever. But during the day, it's very funny. Anything goes. It doesn't matter.

Q: Do you cook?

A: Oh, yes. I cook. Not as much as I would want to. I cook. It's funny, because I do things... This year I had great fun doing all kinds of things with the vegetables from the garden. We had too much. I over planted and all of a sudden it grew...

Q: But it all comes in at the same time. That's one of the problems. You have to... You learn... As you know, I garden a great deal myself. You learn if you have to. You have to plant these things by delaying planting.
A: Now, you see, it's like everything else. I'm learning. It's making a collection. I know that I planted my peas too much together, and I didn't have enough when I wanted them. So you learn that too. So I make the plans in advance. And luckily my housekeeper adores gardening and adores the garden, so we plant exotic things. We are going to have our own gourds on the table for Thanksgiving. Beautiful! That was her idea. Fabulous! It's fantastic, the shape of those things.

Q: And the colors are wonderful too.

A: And I will mix them with just fruit. That I like. It's experimental. I love to do things with branches. I'm not going to buy flowers for Thanksgiving. I like what I have.

Q: What is your role...We know about your role as a designer. We know your role as a public figure, celebrity, your private role in terms of your relationship to your garden. What is your role as a mother, as a grandmother, as a mother-in-law?

A: Well, I would say that this question should be directed to my children and to my daughter-in-law and to my grand-daughter. I think that my relationship... I think that for a while my boys never took me seriously. Now they work... One works with me constantly, the other one part-time, and there is.... Because I'm the mother, I suppose, there is maybe lack of patience; maybe they criticize me more than they would their boss if they had one. I think they love me. I think they respect me. They also think that I'm.... That I don't make too much sense. I think. I think they are good friends to me. I think I am a good friend to them. Which is more than just having a son that you see every... I think, with the every day contact, which is never too easy between people who love each other..
Q: You're a very strong lady. Are you a dominating mother?

A: I don't think I'm a dominating mother. I may be a dominating associate. In the work. I don't think I'm a dominating mother. I don't think they would have stood for it. Yet, I raised the two boys by myself, you know. So that was not... It wasn't easy. I think we have a marvelous relationship now. When my daughter-in-law.... It's fun, because she asks all kinds of questions--what to do--and we discuss all kinds of things, with her.

Q: You never had a daughter, so it gives you the fun of having that.

A: I think that my daughter-in-law, the mother of my granddaughter, for a while wouldn't trust me very much with Karen. She thought I was Auntie Mame, which probably I am in her eyes. You know. Really. Until she let me have Karen for an hour, it took the child four years of her life before she came here... Now, thank G-d, I am trusted. I don't know. It's fun to...

Q: Have you ever found yourself baby sitting?

A: Oh, yes. Uh huh. Not often, because they have... But.... Last week she asked me. I'd like to do it a little more, but... I want the child alone for me for one solid day. I had her. I had her a day that it was raining cats, dogs, mountains. And the child came to me -- I took her for me on a Friday night, and Saturday it poured.

Q: This was in the country?

A: I was in the country. I said, "Karen, did you bring any books?" Nothing. She comes to me with her parents, with packs of toys, of cars, of games, anything.... That day? She came with nothing. What was I going to...? We were going to swim. We had this deluge; we couldn't go to the pool. So I took the car and went to New Canaan and bought books and toys, I had to. We had a good time. I think she enjoyed it. I hope she comes again very soon. She's coming for Thanksgiving.
Q: Are they all coming to you for Thanksgiving? It still is the traditional role for you to play isn't it?
A: I didn't invite them; they invited themselves.
Q: Well, that's the nicest thing.
A: Yes. I was going to be invited. But they said, "What are you doing for Thanksgiving?" I said, "What, do you want to come?" "Yes." "Okay." I'm cooking a turkey, naturally. What else am I going to cook?
Q: Do you bake pies and things like that?
A: No, I don't bake. I don't bake, first of all, because I find that people are always fighting their weight so I don't bake. The only baking I do is making a quiche; a quiche lorraine. That's all. You bake cakes. And bread, of course. Your fabulous bread. But I don't. I love bread and butter. It's probably my favorite food, if anybody asked me. With bread and butter I'm fine. And a glass of wine. I'm perfect, with that.

No. I don't bake. I don't have the time. I find myself a poor cook in a way, because when you cook, and you want to cook well, and you make a white sauce or something and the telephone rings, goodbye the sauce. And I can't resist the telephone. So what do I do?

Q: Do you use La Tortue for the press or other business? Do you have buyers, clients...
A: Sometimes.
Q: You do?
A: We had some last week. But I have to have the buyers who have some rapport. I don't just invite buyers because they, as they say on Seventh Avenue, "push the pencil." Not that. There is no time, Robert, for that. The country... I have a very funny setup. I have to work on Saturday in the garden, because I don't have a gardener by the week, you can't find them,
so I have a crew that comes on Saturday when they don't work somewhere else. And so I'm very involved and for me to have a party on Sunday, it's a lot of work. But I love it. I love the country. I love it in the winter, I love it now. I'm telling you. I have cleared some woods in some places, and the vision of what I would like to do is to get a bulldozer and get a few rocks away, I don't know that I'm going to do it now, because when you do that, then you have to reseed, you have to.... You know.

Q: How large is the area? How many...?
A: Not big. I have four acres.
Q: Well, that's a lot in Westchester.
A: It's a lot when you have almost 3 under cultivation which is what I have. It's a lot. I have a neighbor across the street from me, a charming man who bought a fantastic property, and one day he invited me.... And I came out of his property, which is directly opposite of mine, and I saw that what he saw coming out of his property was a bunch of messy trees, and I said, "He can't do that," so I started clearing the property. I always tell him that he cost me money because I cleared... But it's beautiful. I've got rocks, fabulous rocks. I'm built on rocks. It's fun. I love it. That's part of designing, you know. To me.

Q: Yes. I think it's very much a part of designing.
A: Very much a part of designing. You know, I didn't know that. My favorite story in gardening is when I left (and I had a gardener who was there all the time), I said, "Stanley, you're going to put that tree here and then this there," and I came back the next Saturday, and I said, "Uh huh. I don't like it there." So we moved more trees. It's like moving a pocket. It doesn't work with a tree, you know.

Q: Yes, it's very difficult to do that.
A: Yeah, when the tree is sensitive, it doesn't work.

Q: Do you have a plan when you garden?

A: When I plant my tulips, yes. For the big beds. And then the rest of it. But there is an area that I clear where I won't have any flowers. I will only have greens and different colors -- maples -- very pretty, but no flowers there. I want the flowers on the left and...

Q: Do you have an area to swim?

A: Oh, yes. I have an enormous pool. But that muddy pond that I cleared and cemented in the bottom, it is 90 ft. long my dear. Uh huh. It is a beautiful pool. It's not pale blue. Like my mother, when she came to me and she said, "Pauline why don't you paint it blue like every other pool?" I can't; it's stone, you know. No... It's a pleasant place for me.

Q: One final question on this particular tape. When you talk about your family, I love what happens to your face and I love the sense that you have that it is their judgment of you that has to be evaluated, not the other way around. When you go to the college, when you go to the Fashion Institute of Technology, working with students.... Because, I know, for me, when I teach there, they are in some way, I am the father; I am the Daddy; I feel responsible to them. The industry and my profession has been very good to me, as it has been very good to you.

A: Yes.

Q: And I feel that there is a need to give back and offer something. If you influence one person it's a major contribution that you're making to this whole fashion world. What is your basic feeling about dealing with those students?

A: I hope I do give them something. It's time consuming, Robert. You know.

Q: Yes, I know.
A: Lots of time, taxi fares, etc., etc., which is fine. And get up... Well, I always get up early, but it's... Many mornings, instead of doing your own work or staying in bed (which I never do anyway), so I feel like giving.... When I do that job, I do it seriously. I don't show any impatience with them. I am a very quick worker. I don't have that much relationship with those young people, because in four hours, or three hours, you have to see 22 or 23, so you don't have enough time to give each one. And I find myself giving more to one who I think responds to me and my... let's call it teaching, more than another. I do find that some students are not responsive to me; maybe they fight me a little bit. Maybe they resent my position, or the fact that I know a little more. But I love to do it. I wish I could do more. I've been asked to do it again, and I don't know that I can. I... You know... Parsons, and F.I.T., and all that... I do it not every year. It's a satisfactory... If I feel that I find two or three people in that class that have learned something from me, then I'm terribly pleased, I must say.

Q: Is it possible that you could develop some sort of an apprentice program at your own...?

A: Yes. And it's really, maybe... You know, Jerry Silverman always told me, "Why don't you just train some people?" And I said, "Well, it's difficult." But this year I did; I trained a girl. I'm having one now, who seems to be quite pleased with what she does. And who listens. I told her, "Just listen. If you don't understand, come and ask again." It's very satisfactory to know that you have trained someone and that they in turn respect what you've told them.

Q: This is somebody you got from F.I.T.?

A: Uh huh.
Q: That's a very good beginning. See, I think there should be an increased responsibility on the part of the major designers to train.

A: I'd love to do more... In an organization like ours... I know there are some designers on Seventh Avenue who take every year two or three of those kids who graduate. I don't have the room. I also don't have the time to go and watch over everyone.

Q: Well, there's also a difference.... If you take two or three people and they simply become go-fors, that they simply...

A: They are not go-fors, but they become to me sometimes something of a burden, because you have to spend 10 minutes every hour to go and see what they do. Actually, I am not a teacher and we are not a school. Everything that we do, we pay the people; it's an expensive program if you don't get a little bit, something in return. Maybe a lot more patience. I'm trying to get more room in the place to try to get a few more, because I think it's very essential. I mean, if a few can be trained for the future, I'll be very happy.

Q: I think that's a wonderful place to close this interview. The fact that we really are talking about the realities of the fashion world, which will continue, always...

A: Oh, definitely.

Q: And that one of the contributions that any major force, such as yourself, can make is to assure the growth and continuation by offering something to the young people; to train them.

A: I hope that I did my part, and I hope to continue to do it for a few more years. You never know, naturally, what is in store for you. I try to, for myself, I would like to be just a little more organized in my days. And the division of my hours. Which...it doesn't relent. It's an
amazing accumulation of things. And sometime I have a day quite planned, and I come to the office and the first five seconds, everything is destroyed. Everything I planned to do--out. Goodbye. It went the way of... I don't know what. Because the problems arose when you were either sleeping or when you were not there for an hour. That bothers me. I should be able to just do one thing. I don't think I ever will though.

Q: I think we are, as human beings and talents, we cannot be all things. We cannot be rigid, organized, executive of the American corporate structure. The business graduate from Harvard Business School or Wharton School of Finance...

A: No, you can't.

Q: ...and still be this wonderfully exciting, creative personality who can bubble at any given moment.

A: I remember an interview given by Gerry Stutz to Life Magazine, many, many, many years ago, when she became the President of Bendel's and it was very new then to have woman President of store. She gave that interview and she said she knew exactly how to separate her life -- her private life and the world of Bendel and her world as President of that store. She said, for instance, that she never took a piece of paper or a suitcase or a briefcase or something with the work of the store to her home. And I remember me telling her, I said, "Gerry, you will have to tell me how to do that. Because I cannot. I make notes and I bring them here and in my bed at night, before I go to sleep, there is a lot of things that I... And certainly on Sunday, paying bills, doing this.... And even the thing of running the place. I can never separate them entirely." I guess there are some people who can...

Q: Well, I... Perhaps there are people who can. But I don't think anybody ever separates anything entirely. Because you cannot lock your mind up. You do respond. The eye absorbs. Your ear hears and takes in new sounds,
new directions. Simple gossip at the dinner table may affect the whole direction of something that you want to do.

No, I think there is a lag, very frequently, between what we say and what we do. And there are.... One of the things, of course, that the American male has been attacked for is that he lives, breathes, eats, sleeps his business and his work to a destructive element for himself and his family and his children. And I think it's conceivable that when Gerry became President of that store, 25 years ago, that she found it necessary to establish the fact that she was not going to become a victim to all that.

A: Maybe it was true. I don't know. I admire that very much, because I know I could never do it. That's why I love the country so much, because though I work there and have... In time of collection for instance, I have a little work room on the top floor of my house, and a couple of dummies, and I very frequently take old pieces of fabric—not necessarily new ones—and will make dresses which I will bring back on Sunday morning — on Monday morning, to the office. I don't consider that work. It's fun for me to do. And sometimes we need that special dress that I will do in the quietness of the country. But, actually, the country is good for me, because I want to escape there; I want to get there. I came back Monday morning instead of Sunday night, and I felt so good about leaving... just Monday morning. I took that extra night and I watched television late.

Q: I find this a renewal. I go up to the country also, in another direction, but... It is a renewal for me. And I come back to the city just as excited about returning.

A: Oh, me too.

Q: And plunging into my professional activities. You have said one thing -- and I think we should close here, because I know you have to get
on to the Fashion Group. I have found that there is a very strong reality in my life and that is that I don't consider my work, 7/8 of my work, as a negative term, such as, "I have to go to work."

A: Or as a burden.

Q: Not as a burden. No it's not. I enjoy it. It is the thing that keeps me sensing that there is so much more to learn, constantly. And it feeds... The very thing that you have. We share something in common; I've always known it, for many, many years. It is that we are both intensely curious people. We want to know more.


Q: Thank you, Pauline Trigere.