



Smithsonian Institution Archives

New United Motor Manufacturing,  
Incorporated Interviews, 1990

by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives  
Washington, D.C.  
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## Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., <i>osiaref@si.edu</i>
Title:	New United Motor Manufacturing, Incorporated Interviews
Dates:	1990
Quantity:	(Reference copies).

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## Administrative Information

### Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9550, , New United Motor Manufacturing, Incorporated Interviews

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## Historical Note

In an effort to regain some of their share of the domestic market for automobiles, in the 1980s American car manufacturers embarked on a variety of reforms of manufacturing processes and management techniques. In February 1983 General Motors (GM) Corporation entered into a joint venture with Toyota to produce automobiles using Japanese management techniques at a GM plant in Fremont, California. The plant was, at the time, the least productive in the GM system. The combined corporate effort, known as New United Motors Manufacturing, Inc., or NUMMI, opened for production in December, 1984. Within five years the plant operated as efficiently as Japanese manufacturing facilities.

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## Introduction

The Smithsonian Videohistory Program, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation from 1986 until 1992, used video in historical research. Additional collections have been added since the grant project ended. Videohistory uses the video camera as a historical research tool to record moving visual information. Video works best in historical research when recording people at work in environments, explaining artifacts, demonstrating process, or in group discussion. The experimental program recorded projects that reflected the Institution's concern with the conduct of contemporary science and technology.

Smithsonian historians participated in the program to document visual aspects of their on-going historical research. Projects covered topics in the physical and biological sciences as well as in technological design and manufacture. To capture site, process, and interaction most effectively, projects were taped in offices, factories, quarries, laboratories, observatories, and museums. Resulting footage was duplicated, transcribed, and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution Archives for scholarship, education, and exhibition. The collection is open to qualified researchers.

## Descriptive Entry

Peter Liebhold, museum specialist in engineering and industry at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History (NMAH), toured the NUMMI factory and its production lines to document the mechanical applications of Japanese managerial philosophy. Liebhold surveyed increases in automation, the "just-in-time" inventory system, assembly line quality control through *kaizen*, and the emphasis on teamwork which relied on multi-skilled workers cooperating with managers. These policies differed sharply from traditional American approaches to management and production.

Liebhold interviewed several employees throughout the plant for their responses to the organizational changes. Among those interviewed were Michael Damer, NUMMI's public relation officer, Gary Convis, the senior vice-president for manufacturing and engineering, and George Nano, the NUMMI United Auto Workers (UAW) bargaining committee chairman. The interviews took place in a single session, which was recorded on September 25 and 26, 1990 at the NUMMI plant.

This collection consists of one interview session, totalling approximately 6:00 hours of recordings, and 109 pages of transcript. There are three generations of tape for each session: originals, dubbing masters, and reference copies. In total, this collection is comprised of 18 original videotapes (18 Beta videotapes), 6 dubbing master videotapes (6 U-matic videotapes), and 3 reference copy videotapes (3 VHS videotapes). The collection has been remastered digitally, with 18 motion jpeg 2000 and 18 mpeg digital files for preservation, and 6 Windows Media Video and 6 Real Media Video digital files for reference.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- Engineering
- History of science and technology

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Interviews
- Oral history
- Videotapes

### Names:

- Convis, Gary.
- Convis, Gary. interviewee.
- Danner, Michael.
- Danner, Michael. interviewee.
- General Motors Corporation
- Liebhold, Peter interviewer.
- Nano, George.
- Nano, George. interviewee.
- New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc.
- Toyota Motor Corporation.
- United Auto Workers.

## Container Listing

Box 1

Transcripts of Interviews

Session 1: 26-26 September 1990

Video Recordings of Interview

Session 1: 26-26 September 1990