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Oral history interview with Douglas Crimp,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Douglas Crimp on 2017 January 3-4. The interview took place in New York, New York, at Crimp's home, and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Douglas Crimp and Alex Fialho have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Douglas Crimp, January 3, 2017 at Douglas' home in New York City, NY for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

So, let's start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I was born in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, August 19, 1944.

ALEX FIALHO: And just tell me a little bit about your family growing up in Idaho.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: My mother's family lived in Coeur d'Alene. My mother grew up in Eastern Washington, initially, in Endicott, Washington and then the family moved to Coeur d'Alene. My mother eventually went to the University of Washington in Seattle, which is where she met my father. My father is from Ellensburg, Washington, a little rodeo town in Central Washington State. So, I—the town of Coeur d'Alene is a small town. I grew up in the house that my great grandfather, my paternal—my maternal-father's father's home that he built on the lake, a second home. His name was John Dingle, and after he died, my family moved into that house when I was four. So, I grew up on a lake, a very—Coeur d'Alene lake is an extremely beautiful lake. I spent my summers—it has a sandy beach and clear-bottom lake. I grew up spending my summers on a beach. I—the town is small, bigger now, but the town was about 12,000 when I was growing up. It's now a tourist town. At that time, it was a logging town, for the most part. It's near where the Coeur d'Alene mines were.

The Coeur d'Alene mines were important silver and lead mines. They were sort of famous for—The Wobblies were there, and there were major important strikes with this Communist Union and, uh, I mean that's not something that I, so much, knew about as a child, but the wealthy owners of those mines lived in my hometown. It was a richer town, not a mining town, and my grandfather owned a hardware store. It had been my great grandfather's blacksmith's shop, and my father worked for my grandfather; that is, my maternal grandfather, worked with him, and eventually owned the store with him. So, I was the child of a businessman, basically, a small businessman and grew up in a middle class family, went to public schools. It was a town where, basically, the only thing that I remember being important to anybody was organized sports, and I did not play organized sports [laughs], so—even though I came to realize, after I left, that I was extremely athletic as a kid, I didn't play the right sports. I water skied and ice skated, and swam, and, you know, I was basically a healthy kid, but I didn't play football or basketball, and that's all that mattered. Basketball was very big in my family. My grandmother played it; my grandfather played it. My sister married a basketball coach. My brother became a basketball coach. He was a basketball player, as well. My nephew is a major basketball player. My—I have a niece who is a pro basketball player. It's very big in my family. I did not play basketball.

ALEX FIALHO: Because?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I didn't like team sports because I was gay, because I didn't like the whole culture, the butch culture of team sports. And I think I wasn't especially—I played those things as a kid, of course, because we all did, but I wasn't—I hated the roughneck thing about football. I didn't—I didn't throw well. I didn't catch well. I didn't—I wasn't—I wasn't gifted as a—anything to do with balls, I hated, basically [laughs], but I was a good swimmer, and I was in—I was an incredibly good water skier. I never skied on two skies in my life. I started on a slalom ski and, you know, there were things that I was—I was coordinated and strong and things like that, but I threw like a girl and all those things that are clichés about gay men.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about siblings and your upbringing?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I have an older sister and a younger brother. My sister is two years older; my brother is three years younger. We—you know, I grew up in a very WASP-y family, so we weren't close, I wouldn't say, in the way that I have come to understand families can be close. I—my brother was very much my father's favorite child, and I was my mother's favorite child, and I think my sister got away with not being anybody's favorite child, and there was a lot of sibling rivalry between my brother and me. I think because I resented—my father ignored me and treated him very well, but we're close now. I'm close to both my brother and sister. My sister was the mayor of my hometown for three terms, until quite recently, and very successful mayor.

ALEX FIALHO: She still lives in Idaho?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes, my—it wasn't an unusual thing to leave my hometown [laughs]. I went away to college. I—eventually, my brother went further away to college, not as far as I did, but he went to both Oregon and Colorado. My sister went to the University of Idaho. I had some instinct to get away from where I grew up but really not a—not coming out of any knowledge about what there—what the world offered elsewhere, but just that I didn't like where I was and what I knew of the University of Idaho, for example, where my mother initially went to college and my grandfather had gone to college and my sister went to college, and they were all in fraternities and sororities, and that's what would have been in store for me. So, because I was—my close friend, my girlfriend in high school, was Marilynne, then Marilynne Summers, Marilynne Robinson now, and her brother, David Summers, who was older than we were, went to Brown. Marilynne went to Pembroke, and so since Marilynne was going away to college, I decided I would apply to colleges, and I thought I was interested in studying architecture and I applied to schools that were known to have good architecture schools, and I got a scholarship to Tulane, so that's where I went.

ALEX FIALHO: Did your parents encourage an interest in the arts or development in the arts in any way?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, well, my mother played the piano, if that's an art, and I took piano lessons as a child, but I wasn't particularly good at it, and I didn't particularly like it. I wasn't—my mother played the piano, and we had an organ, as well. She played an organ, but she played, like, show tunes. So, I wasn't—there was no culture of classical music, which is the only music, I think, that would make sense to learn how to play if you're going to play the piano, but in fact, I did—I remember I played—I was advanced enough to play a Haydn concerto, for example, but then I quit, and now I can't even read music. But there was no art, as we understand it. When I was growing up, there's no—I had no knowledge of art at all. The nearest city was Spokane, and I don't think there's an art museum in Spokane even now, and I never went to any larger city until I went to Seattle the summer before I went to college. I went to the Seattle World's Fair—my family went to the Seattle World's Fair, and there was actually art there. So, that's the first time I saw art.

ALEX FIALHO: What was that experience? Noteworthy in any way?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't remember it that well. I think I remember not thinking much of modern art that I saw there. I think I was more attracted to historical art. I don't remember—I should actually look into what the art exhibitions were at the Seattle World's Fair. It was a family outing, and that was never so easy for me, so I remember that more than anything I saw there. It's when the Space Needle was built. [... -DC].

ALEX FIALHO: Why was a family outing something that was difficult for you?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, my family was not—I didn't—it's not that I didn't get along with my family, but I didn't love being with my family. Let's put it that way [laughs], yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your interest in architecture? Where did that stem?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I didn't really know. You know, it was an uninformed decision. I thought—I—my knowledge of world culture would have come from like an encyclopedia as a kid.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Really. I had—education in Idaho is not funded, and I went to public schools, and I did not get a good education, particularly, although Marilynne will claim that we got a very good education. She wrote an essay called "When I was"—a memoir essay called "When I Was a Child, I Read Books," and it's about growing up in my hometown in Idaho. Basically, I think she credits, like, her Latin teacher in high school with forming her, in many ways. I don't have any kind of experience like that. I didn't—I don't feel that I—I was a good student in school, but I don't—I don't remember learning [laughs] anything in particular. So, there wouldn't have been any education which would have told me what—it wasn't until I actually got to New Orleans when I even saw real architecture.

New Orleans is very rich in architecture and has a great architectural tradition. In the town that I grew up in, you know, it's—Idaho is a new state, or a relatively new state. So, there's one historical building in Coeur d'Alene,

which is a chapel at the park that I mention in the book. There was a fort there called Fort Sherman, and there was a little chapel that exists from that period of the 19th century. So, it wasn't until I went to New Orleans and then I took—I took an architectural history course because I was in architecture school, and that's what made me determined to become an art historian, and that's when I first encountered, through pictures, through slides Egyptian temples or Renaissance palazzi or Gothic cathedrals. Maybe I saw a Gothic cathedral in my encyclopedia. I don't have any distinct memory of it, but—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Marilynne seemed—seems to have had influence on you. Can you talk just a little bit more about that relationship?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Marilynne was—Marilynne and David both were extremely bright people. She was one of the—there were a group of us in my high school class, who were a group of friends, who were the smart kids, sort of, and Marilynne was, she was perfectly modest, but she was clearly among the gifted people that I knew, and I liked her parents, and I liked David, her brother, who became an art historian; he's a fairly famous art historian, David Summers, teaches at the University of Virginia, and works on the Renaissance mostly and, you know, we were friends who went to classes together, but we hung out together after school, and I remember playing badminton in their backyard with David and Marilynne's father, and it was just a typical sort of childhood friendship, but we went to the junior prom together. I have a great photograph of the two of us [laughs] at the Junior Prom.

ALEX FIALHO: She's since become of note as a writer?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, she's—Marilynne is a very famous writer. She's—she wrote—she eventually went—we lost touch for a certain period of time, and then she got back in touch with me before she wrote her first novel. She had, in the meantime, gone to—this was in the mid-'70s. She had gone to the University of Washington and gotten a Ph.D. in Shakespeare studies, and she was—when she got back in touch with me, she was married, had two children. She was married to Fred Robinson, who was a Beckett scholar, I believe, teaching at U-Mass, Amherst, and they lived in one of those five towns and maybe in Amherst; I can't remember. I visited them there, and they visited me in New York, and eventually, Marilynne wrote *Housekeeping*, which was immensely successful and won, like, the [PEN/Hemingway Award -DC]. It was published by [Farrar, Straus -DC]. It was made into a Hollywood movie that was very successful. It's set in Sandpoint, Idaho, which is a town north of Coeur d'Alene, where her parents eventually moved on another very beautiful lake called Lake Pend Oreille, and then for many, many years, she did not write another novel.

She wrote a nonfiction work called *Mother County*, which was about an environmental scandal in England. I think she and Fred lived in England. He must have had some sort of a teaching appointment there for a year or something, and then, eventually—and then, eventually, Marilynne and I kind of lost touch again, and now, maybe—is it 10 years ago or so?—she published *Gilead*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, and since that time, Marilynne has been—all along, really, but since that time, particularly, since *Gilead*, she's been a very major literary figure. She writes for the *New York Review of Books*. She's a friend of Obama's. Obama gave her the Medal of Humanities or something like that. There was a long interview that she did with Obama that was published, her conversation, that was published in the *New York Review of Books*. She writes for the *New York Review of Books*. She's written quite a number of—so she's written two subsequent novels. They are a trilogy of novels, all set in the same town in Iowa and—but she's also written a number of nonfiction, collections of essays. She's religious; she's a Congregationalist, so a liberal protestant, but she's done—written studies of Calvin, and she's quite, in an advanced way, I think, into theology.

And she, actually, is, I think, a deacon or whatever it is in her Congregationalist church. I think Congregationalists don't have like a minister; they all minister or something like that. I don't much about it, but you know.

ALEX FIALHO: How about—how did queerness or homosexuality come into the picture at that time? High school or before?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: You know it was the '50s [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It didn't. I was seriously in the closet and seriously conflicted and didn't know anything about homosexuality and didn't—there was no images of it. There was no—there was no context for it. I just knew that I was attracted to boys and not girls, and I didn't know what to do about it. I didn't know what it meant. It turned out that my closest friend in high school was also gay, but I didn't know it. So, yeah, it was difficult, of course,

and I think it's probably one of the reasons that I went away, not knowing that I—what I would find, but I mean, I did find what I found, which was—which was a gay culture, but in my high school days, there was no—there was just nowhere to go with it, you know. There were—I remember one sissy, who was really obviously gay, who was picked on mercilessly, and I knew that he was what I was, but he wasn't—he wasn't a friend of mine. He was, I think, not even in the same grade I was in, but and I didn't—it was—and I didn't want to identify with what he was, and as I said, it was a super jock culture, and my way of dealing with it, in a way, was to identify with this group of more intellectual kids, and so I think not being a jock, there was something else for me to be, which was a student, a good student. It wasn't particularly honored to be a good student; being a good football player mattered, or a cheerleader, if you were a girl, and Marilynne wasn't the cheerleader type either. The girls in my circle were not the girls on the drill team or the—you know, they were not sort of feminine side of sports, which wasn't, in those days, women's sports [laughs]. It was supporting men's sports, but we all—my parents had a boat. We would all go out and go across the lake and have picnics and water ski and things like that. I don't think Marilynne water skied. She was not particularly athletic, as I recall [laughs], but other of the girls in my circle were, more so, but usually, I think, when I went water skiing, it was with my boyfriends or male friends who were also not—who were, maybe, also water skiers but weren't football players. You know what I mean?

ALEX FIALHO: And how about moving now into a more urban context in New Orleans?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: You speak about it, of course, in *Before Pictures*, your memoir, but was that eye opening upon arrival?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was terrifying upon arrival. It was—first of all, I had never experienced heat and humidity like that [laughs] before, and I went there in very late August, so you can imagine, I was flattened, literally flattened. I couldn't, like, get out of my bed. I was drenched in sweat and miserable. There was—we didn't have air conditioning in our dorms. It was extreme culture shock. I went from a little town to a relatively good-sized city, a homogenous culture to a very diverse culture, in fact, a majority black city. I suddenly found myself in a college with students who were considerably better prepared to go to college than I was, better trained, those students. So, I was out of my depth intellectually from the very beginning, although I do remember—we were required, as architecture students, to take physics and calculus, and I somehow was really good at math when I was in high school. It's one of the reasons why I thought that I could be an architect, I think, and all of my other—my fellow architecture students were really struggling with math and physics, and I wasn't so much. At the same time, I was—what attracted me was the History of Architecture course taught by this very flamboyant homosexual and—

ALEX FIALHO: Named?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Bernard Lemann and—but if it came to studying or taking courses in English or philosophy or history, I just hadn't had the training for it and, of course, I also was determined to be a good student. I was brought up to be a good student, and I was in college on a scholarship, so I did okay, but I didn't do so well in architecture, and I wasn't—I was—I don't—I think that architecture is a subject for graduate school and not for undergraduate school. The training was, really, I would say, sadistic almost. It was very much—there were very few women among the students, and the further you went up—it was a five-year program. The further—the more senior you became, the fewer there were. They really got rid of women students, and there were no women faculty. There were gay students, but the professors were all extremely macho, and the crits for, you know, the things you would design would be brutal and sadistic, and I just didn't—I just knew that it was not for me, and so after my first year, I transferred to—you know, the School of Architecture was a separate school, so I had to transfer to the college in order to major in art history, in order to major in anything else, so that's what I did, and the art school was in the sister college, Sophie Newcomb College, and that's—so that's—I did—of course, my degree was from Tulane, but my classes were on this adjacent campus, the women's college.

ALEX FIALHO: So, it was architectural practice?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative], but there was a History of Architecture. There were required history of architecture courses, so in your first year, you took this general History of Architecture class, so that was my first art history class.

ALEX FIALHO: How did your family respond to your interest in direction towards architecture?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't think they cared that much one way or the other what I did. In those days, you didn't go to college to become a professional. You went to college to get an education [laughs].

That's I think the way my parents thought about college. It's certainly the way I thought about college. I had no idea that I was actually training to be something. I guess I could have figured that out, but it wasn't what I was thinking. I was thinking about getting educated, and I did—I think through my parents' connections, through my

father's connections, in downtown Coeur d'Alene, there was one summer, maybe after my first year, I think it was probably after my first year in college that I worked for a local architect, and I didn't particularly feel that I was learning anything. I didn't—I don't think they could find much use for me. I hadn't—I hadn't, you know, I was learning how to draft and things like that, but I didn't know anything—I didn't learn anything in my first year, particularly about design. What I remember of my education, there's a couple of things I remember of my education as an architect. I learned about modern architecture to the extent that, today, I'm still—I still remember things that I did. For example, this fall I went to San Francisco. I went—I wasn't teaching in the fall. For the first time in my life, I went to the Folsom Street Fair. I figured I have my fall off, and I'm going to do that. It was before I had arranged all of my book events, and I went with a friend, and we rented a motorcycle and went to see Sea Ranch. I don't know if you know about Sea Ranch.

ALEX FIALHO: No.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But Sea Ranch is a—

ALEX FIALHO: S-E-A?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, it's about two hours, two-and-a-half hours north of San Francisco on the ocean. It's a development that was designed by—it was laid out by Lawrence Halprin, the great landscape architect [who - DC] was the husband of Anna Halprin.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: He designed the dance deck, the famous dance deck, and Charles Moore, one of the early, postmodern architects, and there were four architects involved in it, and it's a really extraordinary development. A huge, huge piece of property, and you can buy lots, and one of the things that Lawrence Halprin did was to have all of the lots not parallel, but perpendicular to the ocean, so that there are these gigantic meadows between the lines of houses, which follow the lines of trees that had been planted as windbreaks when it was actually a ranch, a grazing ranch, cow ranch, I guess, sheep ranch—I don't know—and a friend of mine had just built a house there. The houses are all—they have to be approved by a board. This was something that was developed in the 1960s, so right around the time that I was in architecture school, and I knew about Lawrence Halprin from that time, and part of my interest in seeing Sea Ranch was just this memory of knowing about it from my college days. I could tell you many stories like that, where an interest in a particular architect or an architect that would be—for example, one other story.

I went to Bogotá some years ago, and while I was there, I discovered someone who was something like the National Architect of Columbia, similar to, say, Oscar Niemeyer in Brazil. His name is Rogelio Salmona, and I happen—there was a conference that was organized around my work, and it was in the—at the National University of Columbia in Bogotá, and the building that we—this conference was held in was a Salmona building, and it was truly extraordinary. I was just really taken with this building, and so I spoke to my friend there, and he managed to get—to organize a tour of Salmona's buildings with someone who was a Salmona expert, and the first building we went to were these towers around the bullring, and he knew someone who actually had an apartment in one of these towers, and I realized, when we went there, that I knew these towers; I knew them from architect school.

It's probably the only project of Salmona's that's widely known, actually, so it was something that was published at that time. So, that—so learning about modern architecture in that moment—it was a very important moment of mid-century modernism. It was '62 that I went to school—has continued to inform my interest in architecture, which I teach, also, now, and it's something that I do when I tour. When I go to any city, one of the things I want to do is look at whatever the monuments of modern architecture are there. So, there was that, and then the other thing was that a group of us spent our weekends driving up the river road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge and looking at the old, mostly ruined plantation houses and slave quarters and the whole—the Antebellum Louisiana, but particularly the architecture and photographing it. We even made a book of photographs of—but we were completely entranced by—I don't know if you would know him, but Clarence John Laughlin, who was a [... -DC] photographer, a sort of American surrealist photographer, whose most famous book is called *Ghosts Along The Mississippi*, and its photographs of these ruined plantations but with—some of them with superimpositions of, like, sort of, ghost-like creatures and things like that. [... -DC]. So, he was our model for, like, why we were doing this, and so there was—I would develop an interest in the local architecture of Louisiana and, particularly, New Orleans, but also of modern architecture in general, of which there wasn't any, particularly, in New Orleans, so I was looking at 19th-century architecture in the city, but, like, formed a kind of image repertoire of modern architecture.

ALEX FIALHO: You've touched on this, but just as a follow-up, have you felt that that interest, particularly in the practice of architecture, has it informed your work since?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I'm not exactly sure what you mean. My interest—my training as a practitioner?

ALEX FIALHO: Your training, yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, I don't think—

[They laugh.]

I don't remember much about my training. I remember taking a drawing course that—in which—I took sort of art courses. Part of our training as freshmen was not strictly architecture because it was toward rendering, I suppose. I remember making a woodcut, and I gave one of these woodcuts to my mother and, in fact, something really weird happened to me recently, where one of my colleagues in Rochester got an email from somebody somewhere—I don't know—who had a woodcut by Douglas Crimp, a print by Douglas Crimp and wanted to know from my colleague whether this was *the* Douglas Crimp [laughs], and she sent me a picture of it, and it was that woodcut that I had done, and I think, as I recall, I gave one to my mother, and I think my sister has that one. I'm quite sure my sister has it, but I think I gave one, having seen this one, because it was a different color—I did use a different color of ink—I think I gave it to my grandmother and somehow somebody found it somewhere in some—but I guess I signed it. So, anyway, we did that kind of thing, and I had a drawing instructor who thought that I was gifted as a draftsman, but what I most remember was doing these crazy drafting exercises, where we had to do this thing that was a semester-long project on a sheet of vellum, and it was divided into many, many, many squares, and you had to use something called a rapidograph, which is a kind of pen that puts—you put real ink into it, and you screw the point down, and it—you can change the width of the [line -DC] that the pen makes, and it's very easy for the ink to spill out and destroy what you're working on, but you would have to do things like, you know, extremely close together horizontal lines in one square and vertical lines in the next square. It was sort of like a Sol LeWitt wall drawing, and they had to be—each line had to be exactly the same distance from the previous line, things like that, and you could work for hours and hours and hours and days, and days, and days, and weeks, and weeks, and weeks on this, and then you could destroy it because the ink would spill out, and then it was finished, and you had to start all over again. That's what I meant by the sadism of the teaching.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't think that has made anything possible in real life [laughs] frankly, except dis-identification with the kind of nastiness and macho culture of architecture. To this day, it is, you know. It's one of the final professions that is not hospitable to women or to gay men. The famous gay architects like Paul Rudolph were treated very badly in their profession.

ALEX FIALHO: Did that exercise, in particular, maybe more subconsciously, [result in -AF]an interest in Agnes Martin or something?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: In Agnes Martin?

ALEX FIALHO: In Agnes Martin

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, I don't think so [laughs], but it's interesting that somebody like Paul Rudolph became a brutalist architect, I think, which seems, on the surface of it, to be—literally, from the surface of it, to be a very macho style of architecture, but no, I think—I think it's only—I have remained—I have maintained a lifelong amateur interest in architecture. I love looking at buildings and, especially, especially 20th-century modern buildings.

ALEX FIALHO: How about queerness in a bigger city context?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: In New Orleans.

ALEX FIALHO: In New Orleans.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: New Orleans had a large, Bohemian, queer, in the widest sense, but also in the narrow sense of gay, culture, and in one way, it's expressed in Mardi Gras, and one of the events that I remember in my freshman year was—of course, Mardi Gras there is a very big thing in New Orleans, and the Mardi Gras parades were extraordinary; in those days, they were kind of terrifying and wild, and the floats were beautiful, and there was—there were different—I don't know if you know the organization of Mardi Gras, but there are these things called krewes, and each one has their own parade, and the Krewe of Rex has the ultimate parade in the final evening of Mardi Gras. There's a black krewe, which does a kind of parody parade where they—instead of throwing these cheap beads into the crowd, they throw coconuts at the crowd, and it has it's—it doesn't have a prescribed route, so you have to find it; whereas the others have prescribed routes, but—

ALEX FIALHO: Black in the sense of diasporic African?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, yes, yeah so it's the black community of—and there was also another group of African-Americans, who identified as Native Americans, and they did these—this whole Native American, sort of, ritual thing at Mardi Gras. There was a lot of—there was an enormous amount of really interesting black culture. Of course, there were jazz funerals, which I was able to see. There were jazz clubs. There was a whole world of African-American culture in New Orleans, which was influential in my social life from the very beginning. There was a whole black blues scene there that—they would play for, like, our college parties and stuff like that, so people—the people who wrote all of the music and originally performed all the music that was used by the Rolling Stones in their early albums, so—and anyway, what I was going to say was that, on Bourbon Street, on the day of Mardi Gras, there was a huge stage built on the street where there was a big drag show, and of course, it was the first time I ever seen anything like that, and I was, like, kind of blown away by it, and also it's—it was interesting because I think I never was interested in wearing women's clothes, and I never had a kind of cross-gender identification.

That was not what my sexuality was or how I felt about it or my gender identity, but at the same time, I could recognize that what I was looking at was some aspect of my culture that is—these were also gay men who are dressing as women, and there was a club. I never went to it; it's something called the My-O-My Club, which was one of those transvestite clubs of the type that Esther Newton wrote about in *Mother Camp*. It was drag acts for a straight audience, I think. I only knew of it, but there were drag queens in the bars that I eventually did go to, probably in my second year, in the quarter—in the French Quarter, which I write about them in my memoir, were sailors bars along Decatur Street, and I used to go to this bar called the Acropolis, and there were drag queens there. It was a Greek sailor's bar, and I also went, often, to a Spanish sailor's bar with someone who became a very good friend when I was a student, a woman named Marimar Benitez, who is from Puerto Rico, lives in Puerto Rico now. She eventually became a director for the School of Fine Arts in San Juan.

When I got back in touch with her, she came to—she came to New York around the same time I did and went to Yale to finish her graduate degree. She—I think she was—she was doing graduate study at Tulane when I was an undergraduate, probably getting an M.A., and then did her Ph.D. at Yale, and then I got back in touch with her in the '80s, and we became, again, very close friends, and at that time, she was the registrar at the art museum in Ponce, and Marimar and I used to go to a Spanish sailor's bar, and she taught me Latin dancing. There was a dance called the Pechanga, which we—I learned at that point, which then later, you know, when I started going to La Escuelita in New York, and I started doing the merengue and the salsa, I did this motion that I had learned as a, you know, college student with Marimar. The Pechanga served me to, like, figure out how, you know, how your hips are supposed to sway as in [Latin -DC] dancing.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. RIP La Escuelita.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, right [laughs], yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And then I—last question, in terms of the college moment, is the transition from architecture into art history, which I know you touched on in the memoir, but I'm curious about it. At that point, in terms of a viable career option, that's what you were thinking, like a trajectory that it seemed like you could have?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I didn't, I didn't think about it that way. I—as much as I can recall, it's strange, especially in today's culture, to think this way, but I really was interested in learning my subject, and I didn't—I had teachers who thought that I was very gifted as an art historian, and I was a very good writer from the papers that I wrote for their classes and encouraged me to go to graduate school. I didn't—I wasn't—I didn't think about becoming a professor or an art historian, even, I guess. I just—it was just a thing that I majored in because it was the thing that I liked, and I—it was what I was accumulating credits in, and then along the way, when I went—would go to the library, I would read art magazines, and I would—and probably, more importantly, I had friends who were MFA students, and so I was part of—I—my circle of friends were artists and other art historians, still people from the School of Architecture, artsy types, theater people, and we—so these artists, these MFA artists, were part of, also, a local art culture, so there was something of a gallery scene.

And some of them would actually have exhibitions, and they would know other artists, and there were artists who taught in the art school who had exhibitions, and so the whole world of going to art openings and seeing gallery exhibitions already was happening with me when I was a student in New Orleans, and I became interested in what was then contemporary art, probably a little bit earlier—I became interested in abstract expressionism, so in '63, '64, of course, that had been displaced already by minimalism and pop art, as we know now, but I didn't know that back then, particularly. There was a local woman artist whose work I liked, my friends and I liked. Her name is Ida Kohlmeyer. She painted sort of Rothko-esque paintings. She was a local art star, I guess you could say. Another local art star—[coughs], excuse me—another woman, was a sculptor whose name is Lynn Emory. I don't know how well Lynn Emory is known, but if you go to what is now—I hate to even say it out loud—the David Koch Theater, the New York State Theater, the one designed by Philip Johnson, all of the grill work along the balconies and the stair cases is by Lynn Emory, so Philip Johnson knew who she was. She was a local art star when I was a student, and so because of that, I developed an interest in finding out what was



happening in the world of contemporary art, and I started reading art magazines, and that's why I determined that I wanted to move to New York.

I figured that I wanted to somehow work in the field of contemporary art. I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know how the art world was structured. I didn't know what sorts of jobs there were. Of course, I knew there were museums. I don't think that I had any idea I wanted work in a gallery. Of course, now that's fairly common for people first coming into the art world, but—so I—to the extent that I was preparing for a career, it was more about this more amateur interest or more ancillary interest in contemporary art, which you couldn't study when I was a student. We stopped at Pollock.

ALEX FIALHO: But it at least gave you a sense of a social milieu around art—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —making and living artists.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: To fast forward to New York, and I think obviously your recent memoir, *Before Pictures*, covers the '70s ground very thoroughly.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [Laughs.] Right.

ALEX FIALHO: But in that moment, I'm just curious, in particular, and you touched—more than touch on it, you expound upon it, the development of your career as an art critic. I'm particularly interested in your development of a method for art criticism.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [Laughs.] Right.

ALEX FIALHO: I think, for me, it's even a personal question, as a young art critic; were you following your instinct? How were you responding to work or were you—obviously, you were in immediate dialogue in writing for editors and publications, but how did your particular voice, how did you find it developing in the context of New York, in particular?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I didn't have much in the way of—I didn't have any particular training in art criticism. I had training in art history, so I knew about writing about art objects. I particularly remember—well, there's a couple of papers that I can remember from college [laughs], actually. One—I was—I studied pre-Colombian art quite a lot because the chair of my department was a specialist in, actually, post-colonial manuscripts, but pre-Colombian [scholar ... -DC]. Tulane was one of the universities that did digs in Latin America, so their archeology department did Central American archeology, and I took an archeology course, as well as a couple of art history courses, and I remember writing about a particular configuration of Mayan sculpture between two cities, between Copan and Quiriguá, and developed some kind of a thesis about—I don't know—influences. I can't remember exactly, but—so it had to do with a combination of reading the scholarship, the existing scholarship, to the extent that I could as an undergraduate. I think, at that point, Mayan hieroglyphs were not—had not yet been deciphered. I think they were deciphered [soon -DC] after that. So, it was—the analysis was very much a visual analysis from looking at, not the actual objects, but photographs of the objects. I was very—I know—I remember being very, very attracted to pre-Colombian art and particularly to the [Frederick] Catherwood etchings of one of the—Catherwood was one of the—I don't even know now that much about him, but someone—I think a British draftsman who went along on initial discoveries of various sites in Latin America and did these extremely beautiful drawings and prints that were used as illustrations of archeological [sites -DC]. So, I—there was a visual attraction that was very much a part of how I wrote my term papers; let's put it that way.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Combined with reading what literature there was, and the other paper that I remember writing—this was a truly avant-garde paper at the time. I had—the chair of my department, not the one who was a pre-Colombian-ist, but another one, she [... -DC] had, I believe, a son-in-law who was British, who came and taught a modern art course, and that was the important modern art class that I took as an undergraduate and, you know, I don't remember his name, but, in fact, his name appears—I found his name in order to fill it in the other oral history [laughs] that I did with Johanna, and I wrote a paper for him on Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*. So, you know, I think the first important exhibition of Duchamp in this country was right around that time. It was in Pasadena.

ALEX FIALHO: California?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, it's the one that Warhol went to. It's a famous exhibition of Duchamp's work, which sort

of brought him back to notice, but this guy, this British art historian, got me interested in Duchamp, and I figured out, to the extent that an undergraduate could possibly figure out—something as complicated as *The Large Glass*, I wrote a paper that, like, was [an ...-DC] analysis of it. *The Green Box* had been published, so you could get all of Duchamp's notes. Anyway, so when I came to New York, when I first came to thinking about writing criticism, I didn't have any—I was reading what was being published at the time, and that's—I was learning by seeing what I liked that I was reading, I suppose, but I didn't have any—I didn't have any particular teachers. I didn't have any particular method. I was drawn to things, and I—so I developed—I think I talk a bit about it in my memoir—interests in certain kinds of work. I think alongside, Diane Waldman, who was the curator at the Guggenheim that I was working with, Betsy Baker, who was my first editor—

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —who was the managing editor of *Art News*. They were certainly important to me, and then, also, artists that I met around that time. Pat Steir became a very good friend of mine.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And—so when I started reviewing, which was in '73, I think—'73, '74—for *Art News*, I had published a couple of articles before that. I think, at that point—the two articles that I had published first were on, first, Georgia O'Keeffe, and that was a commissioned piece from Betsy; O'Keeffe was having a retrospective at the Whitney. The second was on Jack Tworikov, who was a friend. His daughters were very close friends of mine. I admired Jack's paintings, and I pitched an article to *Arts News* and, eventually, was able to publish it.

I think I was somewhere between, you know, the influence of the dominant critical practice of that moment, which would have been Greenberg—Greenberg and Fried, for most criticism, and also feeling suspicious of that and, in some ways, trying to get around it and rebel against it. But I—by the time—so, in '73—I guess it was '73 when I started writing for both *Art News* and *Art in America*—sorry, *Art International*, and in *Art International*, I was able to choose the artists that I was going to review, and so my taste is more reflected in those, I think. I've looked at some of those; some of it is embarrassing to me, and some of it's not so embarrassing to me. I was just grappling with trying to write descriptive prose and, you know, figure out a style of judgment. But I—at some point, I realized that I had reviewed Warhol's Mao paintings that were shown at Castelli; Warhol had not shown for quite a while, so this was '73; it was a sort of—one of his many comeback painting shows. And I think I kind of got it right. I mean, I liked them, and I found them really interesting. There's much more to say about the Mao paintings than I said, but I didn't embarrass myself in writing about Warhol's paintings.

But I was attracted to, eventually, what—to minimalism and post-minimalism, and that was the world that I found myself in. And so that wasn't—it wasn't so easy to figure out a language to write about that stuff. I don't think I really figured it out until I started writing, like, my '80s essays, that stuff that I published in, like, after the *Pictures* show, the stuff that I published in *On the Museum's Ruins*.

ALEX FIALHO: And then, how about developing a language of writing about folks like Joan Jonas or performance contexts as well, on top of those conversations that were a bit more art historical?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Writing about Joan was—came about because of a commission. I had a—one of—my closest friend at the Guggenheim was a woman named Lucinda Hawkins, who was the secretary of Thomas Messer, the director. And Lucinda eventually moved to Europe; she moved initially to Rome in the early-'70s and early—after I left the Guggenheim was '71, so it was after that, or around that time, and she married a British guy, and she moved to London, and she was working for *Studio International*. They were doing a special issue on performance art, and she asked me to write something about Joan. So she knew, of course, that I knew Joan and knew her work and was interested in it. I think—I don't recall exactly, but I'm sure there's—that I would have a correspondence between me and Lucinda because we were really close friends. And so I had been following Joan's work since the first piece I saw, which was in '71; this commission was in '76. I had been seeing, not in any systematic way, but I'd been seeing performances, as they were—as performance art, and video art, and it was really Joan's video performances that I was seeing constantly in that period.

So I began to figure out a way of describing and analyzing what Joan was doing, and it was—by the time I got to the book that I did with Joan in the early-'80s—that was a catalogue for an exhibition that was a survey of her career from the beginning to that moment—I—it's called *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions*, and it really was that. It was scripts for the later performances and descriptions of the earlier performances written along with Joan, but I wrote a short introduction to the book, and that introduction became, for Joan, one of the—I know that she felt it was one of the things that really got her work. It was republished in the gigantic tome that just came out that John Simon edited on Joan, and in fact, I—it was republished, and I wrote a kind of—I contextualized it in a—something that I wrote for the book. And that's—what is it called? I think it's called "Desynchronization in the Performances of Joan Jonas."

ALEX FIALHO: How about, concurrent with that time you were in New York, the '70s, the gay liberation decade,

more or less—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: Was there a turning point for you around your own sexuality and coming into your own in that sense? Was it the whole time, or when did that really click?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, I remember it really clicking, I think, when I started going to the Firehouse dances. That's the Gay Activist Alliance Firehouse on Wooster Street, which was their headquarters, and they had Saturday night dances. Before that, my queer—

ALEX FIALHO: When was that?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: '71? '70, '71. Let's see, before that—no, because I had moved to the Village, so it might have been '71, '72. Before that, my queer life was mostly the Max's Kansas City scene, in the back room of Max's and the Warhol Theatre of the Ridiculous scene, and then street cruising. I was living in Chelsea at that time, so this is '69 to '71, and I began street cruising and meeting people. I didn't—I wasn't really going to bars so much; I was going to Max's. Eventually, I found my way to the Eagles' Nest, just by following a guy on the street, and—

ALEX FIALHO: Max's was not a bar in what sense?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, it was a bar. It was a restaurant, actually, but it wasn't gay. Max's was an art bar—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —one of a series that Mickey Ruskin had, but they were really restaurants. The first one was the Ninth Circle, which was a steakhouse, and Max's was also kind of a steakhouse, but it was mostly a bar. It was a hangout, but you could get dinner there.

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And, in fact, a lot of artists traded work for booze and food.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But you could also hang out there. You could be there all night and just have a cup of coffee. It was—so it was a club, but it was very specifically divided between the front room, which was the hardcore artists, and the back room, which was the drag queens and where Warhol hung out, and that's where I went. It was a scene. Yeah, it was—I just remember it being a kind of—it was—it felt glamorous and exciting and fun and interesting, and people—the conversations were interesting. It was the world around Warhol, so it was a lot of competition for the limelight. And I wasn't involved in that. I wasn't wanting to be in a Warhol movie or—but I liked being around those people. But that wasn't so much—the sense in which I meant that it wasn't like a bar where you could cruise and pick people up. It was—

ALEX FIALHO: It [wasn't -AF] like a gay bar.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: You sat at tables and ordered drinks, and you were, you know, at your table. You might get up and walk over to another table and talk to people. You might stare at somebody across the room, but it wasn't really—when I started going to gay bars, it was about walking around and looking for somebody that you found attractive and getting them to pay attention to you—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —and go home with you. But it was also about listening to the music you wanted to be listening to, and just being in the crowd that you wanted to be in. It was a different kind of queer world, I think, much more tied to immediate sexual gratification, and I think that's a product more of the culture of gay liberation. So gay liberation wasn't only about coming out of the closet and being political about your sexuality; it was also about being free about your sexuality; that is, about freely expressing sex and getting sex and having as much sex as you can and experimenting with sex and meeting different kinds of people. But it was done through sexual attraction, for the most part. Of course, it was many other things. It was social; it was—there was a whole life around it. But sex was at the center of it, for sure. That wasn't so much true at Max's. At Max's, it was more personalities and celebrity and art, you know, theater. But then, at the Firehouse, it was—first and foremost, of course, it was a dance party, but it was a cruising dance party. I met a lot of people at the Firehouse and had a lot of fun dancing and cruising and so on. And then—

ALEX FIALHO: Were its roots in the activist or organizational capacity?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, it was run by the—it was presumably a fundraiser for the Gay Activist Alliance.

ALEX FIALHO: Did that mean you met a lot of like-minded people?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. But I think a lot of people went to the dances that hadn't—that didn't go to the meetings.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I didn't often go to the—I went to a couple of meetings, but it wasn't—you know, it was all about Roberts' Rules of Order, which is just, like, deadly [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So, for me, it was the—it was—I loved dancing. I always loved dancing, and I—but, yes, I would say that it was a sympathetic crowd. It was a crowd of people—it wasn't—it was different from what eventually I describe in the disco chapter of my memoir, which was a much more A-list, clubby, more exclusive kind of crowd. It was—the GAA Firehouse felt more hippie-like, and more diverse and more—first of all, it was much more mixed between men and women. It was kind of equal, men and women, as I recall, and it was—felt more democratic, let's say. It felt more—it did feel, I suppose, a little bit like some kind of expression of political liberation, as well as sexual liberation, political/sexual liberation. But it—I think that awakened me to—I think it was at that point when I also was more interested in other aspects of gay culture, and then there's a sort of interlude starting in very early '72 when I met Christian Belaygue, my first boyfriend, and we eventually lived together, and for the whole time that I was with Christian, we went to bars together. He was someone who came from a pretty sophisticated gay culture in Paris, and—or in Europe, more generally, and so he liked being in bars. I remember going with him to Marie's Crisis. Have you ever been to Marie's Crisis?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It existed then, as exactly what it is now, a piano bar, and he found that extremely amusing, I remember, in a kind of ethnographic sense, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: In the '70s, and it was in the same spot?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Exactly. And it was guys standing around, singing show tunes. Christian had no particular interest in Broadway or show tunes or anything; he was just fascinated by that kind of a scene, I think. I'm not sure that there's a French equivalent to it.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But we would go to all of the bars, and then when Christian left, then I really kind of plunged into gay bar culture because I was then single and not interested in being anything else.

ALEX FIALHO: And discos?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And then disco starts, yeah. And disco's like—yeah, it's like right around that time, '74.

ALEX FIALHO: And I'll just say, for the record, just to point people who may be looking at this transcript, the disco publication that you worked on for *Greater New York* is a great resource for your discussion of that moment, and then I think of the Galerie Buchholz show you did—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —of a lot of the images and objects that illustrate your memoir—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —but for me, having read your memoir and then seen that show, it really brought it to life in a way to see the material that you were working on or that was informing it.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: I think, just for the record, people who are looking for some more information on the '70s moment, those seem like good resources.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: To zoom us forward a little bit to sort of the reason—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —of this particular context of conversation around visual arts and the AIDS epidemic oral history, when was the first time that you heard word of AIDS or what would become AIDS?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: At the very beginning, I read *The New York Times* article on the way to Fire Island, July 4th weekend 1981.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And I literally read that, you know, gay cancer in—or, cancer—"Rare Cancer in Gay Men," whatever the headline was, and it literally was 4th of July weekend. I was on my way to Fire Island, and I remember distinctively that—I can't remember now who the author was, but an article in the next week's *Village Voice* that [*The New York Times* -DC] article was, like, intended to ruin gay men's 4th of July holiday on Fire Island.

ALEX FIALHO: That was the angle of the article in the *Village Voice*?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, yeah. It was—it might have been Richard Goldstein; I'm not sure. But I think it wasn't. I think it was a straight person who wrote that article. But, you know, because there was a lot of skepticism in the very beginning about it, about gay—the possibility of gay cancer. It makes no sense, obviously, and so I think that the response to that is both, sort of simultaneously, terror and dismissal. It can't—it's an impossibility because one knows it isn't a possibility, if you don't—if you don't think of sexuality as something, as I don't, as genetic or biological, but rather, a complex psychic construction, then how could it be possible that homosexuality could be related to something which is clearly a function of biology, right?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And—but at the same time, there it was, you know. They had, in fact, discovered these rare illnesses in a cohort of gay men, and that's the way it was reported. In *The New York Times*, of course, after the article had come out in the publication for the Centers for Disease Control. So I knew about it from the moment it was—that it became public, and I can't say that I—I followed it, in the way that I think all of us did at that time. I read the *New York Native*—there were—there were many gay newspapers in those days. Every city had its own gay newspaper, and it's really what one read to find out the news of the—what we thought was unbiased news about gay life. The *Native* turned out to be a kind of peculiar source of information over the years because Chuck Ortlieb became something of a conspiracy theorist around AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But there were saner voices that were being published in the *Native*, too, and so I followed it from the beginning. I didn't—I didn't immediately respond to it. I don't think anybody—or, very few—immediately responded to it, and the people who did, like Larry Kramer, were somewhat off-putting to me. But at the same time, you know, the founding of Gay Men's Health Crisis and all of that, I knew people who were involved with it, and I went to the early fundraisers, like when they had the circus. So I was—it was very much part of what we—of the culture at large at that point, the gay culture at large. It was talked about; people had different opinions about it. It's what you read about; it's what you thought about; it's what you worried about. You didn't necessarily take logical action about it. I had a doctor; I guess I got to him, it must have been, in the late-'70s. There was an epidemic of amoebas among gay men, and I went to a clinic. There was a clinic on Sheridan Square, like upstairs on Sheridan Square. There was a gay health clinic there, and it's basically where everybody went to be tested for amoebas. It was horrible; they made—you know, you had to drink this foul stuff, and then they look for it in your shit, basically.

ALEX FIALHO: Amoebas meaning? I don't even know.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's a kind of parasite. It's a tropical parasite that somehow got into the gay population in New York and made you extremely—it fucked up your intestines and, you know, you basically had indigestion all the time, and some people—it's very—parasites, of course, affect different people differently, but it's what people often get when they go to India or to tropical countries or something. They get—from unwashed food or something like that, because it's passed in human feces essentially. Of course, gay men were great vectors of amoebas because, you know, as soon as you're, like, rimming somebody, you're eating their shit. So I had amoebas, and then you had—I didn't have a doctor at the time. I had had a gay doctor that was a crazy gay doctor, and I stopped going to him, and he was a terrible doctor, so this was one of the doctors who was

recommended by this clinic. His name was Dan William, and he was a very brilliant doctor and one of the great heroes of the AIDS epidemic. He has—Randy Shilts writes about him; in fact, Randy Shilts said something in his book that I—that was somewhat unforgettable, that Dan William was particularly sensitive to the peril of this life-threatening illness because he himself had a rare, life-threatening disease. Dan always seemed completely healthy to me and I had no idea what—I thought Randy Shilts made this up or something, but it turned out to be true, and he actually died of—I don't know the name of the illness, but it was some kind of an extremely rare illness, and he closed his practice at a certain point, saying that he only had a certain amount of time to live, and he wanted to travel.

ALEX FIALHO: He was a straight man?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, no.

ALEX FIALHO: .Gay man?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: He was a gay man. He—his boyfriend was his receptionist, and there was a gay phlebotomist, and it was a wonderful, like, extremely—Dan did something really brilliant when he—when AIDS really hit. He closed his practice; that is, he didn't take any new patients because he knew that his current patients were going to be all he could handle, and the result was that he handled the patients that he had extremely well, including people like me, who were not, at that time, infected, who he gave—he had the all the time in the world for you, even if you just had a cold [laughs], you know. He was—you didn't wait in his office; you made an appointment, and you went right in. He had plenty of time to talk to you. He was a brilliant diagnostician. He was wonderful. And I was still seeing Dan when I seroconverted. I was in Rochester at the time; I had very, very bad seroconversion illness, and the doctor that I was seeing in Rochester couldn't figure out what the hell was wrong with me. It was like a terrible flu, but you know, I didn't get over it. And finally, I came to New York and saw Dan, and he knew immediately what it was and was right. It happened to be, very luckily, he also knew that there were trials for protease inhibitors at that point, and he got me into one, so I went immediately from—I went into a trial where—I don't know if you—do you know who David Ho was, or is?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: He was an AIDS doctor, an AIDS researcher, who theorized—this was in '95—'95?—that—it was right when protease inhibitors were being developed; there were a number of them. And he theorized that, if you had a fully intact immune system because you had only just seroconverted and hit it with the cocktail, you could eradicate AIDS. So that's what he theorized. So I was in a trial of people who were immediate seroconverters, people who knew that they seroconverted, like, from one day to the next, to test these drugs, and of course, it turned out not to be. His thesis was wrong, but it meant that I went on protease—I went on a cocktail immediately, a really harsh—a horrible one, actually, and one that fucked up my liver, and I had to go off—I had to leave the trial. But—

ALEX FIALHO: What year was this?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: '95. Anyway, Dan—I'm not exactly sure how we got here, but I had a great AIDS doctor during the whole—

ALEX FIALHO: Who you began seeing in the late-'70s?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: That I began seeing when—before AIDS happened, and I—so I happened to have this great AIDS doctor. And he was a gay doctor; his practice was gay, and so he was—you know, he was the person who diagnosed my syphilis and my scabies and all these things. I was in Berlin in '85, and I developed a terrible rash, and I—and they couldn't figure out what it was, and it was a horribly traumatic experience for a number of reasons. First of all, they tested me for HIV without my permission or my knowledge; it wasn't even called HIV at that time yet. It was called HTLV-3, I think.

ALEX FIALHO: In the same moment as being tested for this rash or—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. So I was being—yeah, they were trying to figure out what this rash was, so that was one of the tests that they ran. So I came back to the office, and the guy said, "You know, there's an extremely terrible disease of the immune system," and I said, "Of course, I know about AIDS," and he said, "No, you're negative for HTLV-3," I think it was. But—so they thought I had lupus. So I didn't have HIV, but I had lupus [laughs]. But it turned out, when I—so I didn't—I guess it was shortly after that that I came back to New York, and I went to Dan, and I had scabies [laughs], something that should have been obvious to anybody, but it wasn't to these people because I went to, not only this doctor, but also to a hospital, to like a—some kind of a skin disease clinic and—anyway, so—but—so Dan was sort of my doctor and taking care of me throughout this whole period of the '80s when AIDS was mysterious and terrifying, and we didn't know what we should do. And Dan was, of course, one of the people who thought we should err on the side of caution, and I was sort of one of

the people who thought, you know, giving up sex is too much to ask. It was before we knew what would—that there—this—in the early-'80s, of course, we didn't know what it was, so we didn't know how to protect ourselves from it. So I was lucky not to have contracted HIV earlier, and I knew a lot of people, of course, who did get AIDS in that period. But I went to Berlin right in the middle of that, and it was when I came back from Berlin—

ALEX FIALHO: How long were you in Berlin?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I was in Berlin for a year. I went—I had a—I got a second of two NEA arts critics grants in '85, and I used it to go to Berlin, ostensibly to do dissertation research. I was working on the Berlin Museum, and it forms part of a chapter of *On the Museum's Ruins*. But basically, it was also, I think, to have a year somewhere else. AIDS was, I would say, as present in Berlin, in the consciousness of the gay world in Berlin, as it was in New York, which is to say that it wasn't—nothing was clear at that point still. But then I came back in '86, and I had a number of close friends who were really sick and one close friend who had died, and then it just became a more serious part of my life. Then it just, like—that's when I started thinking about—not immediately, but soon after that I began thinking about doing what came to be the special issue of *October*.

ALEX FIALHO: How about a little—let's stay a little bit in that "before Berlin" moment—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —of, you know, '82, '83, '84. Any moments in particular from that time that felt like it was escalating or that were real signals to you that this was moving from a gay cancer in *The New York Times* that was going to affect, 40—at that point, in the tens, to a much larger concern?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's hard for me to remember really chronologically. I was really—I have to say that, at that time in my life, I was really caught up in the world of *October* and debates about art in that moment, so this would be when I was writing the essays on photography, and when—the politics of *October* involved—you know, I've—we did an interview with Hans Haacke during this period of time, so that notion of political art. When *October* stood for a certain—well, first of all, a kind of hostility to the rise of neoexpressionist painting and a kind of continuation of the—of what I guess the form of art you would call institutional critique. The issue right before—for example, right before the AIDS issue in '87 was the Broodthaers issue that I did with Benjamin Buchloh.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And—but I mean, I'd have to look at the magazine to say for sure. I did in—but I—there was some—the only—there wasn't much queer about *October*, I guess you could say. The only issue that I did that I'm very proud of, or that I initiated [before the HIV/AIDS issue -DC], was the [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder issue in '82, and it happened to coincide with Fassbinder's death. We—when I started working on the issue, he was alive. And I had seen *In a Year of 13 Moons* and was completely blown away by it, and I loved Fassbinder anyway, and so I proposed that we do the special issue, and we were able to get the script of *In a Year of 13 Moons* for it, and I wrote for it. So that was one of my first—I guess it would be the first time that I ever published an article that was dealing with gay sexuality openly as a—from a gay perspective. And it was a pretty personal—I was following the—at this point, I can't say that I had a particular method. I was really writing in the method of the late work of Roland Barthes, so I was using, even, the kind of marginal notes, like from *A Lover's Discourse* and *Barthes by Barthes*, and the book—the essay is about Fassbinder and Barthes, because Barthes had also just died, and about a certain desire to fix these two figures in their separate discourses as—how I can say this?—self-expressive writers or artists, people whose own life and experience was ultimately what their work was about.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Two writers—two artists who, for me, were absolutely protean in their methods and positions, and, like, there was no core personality that was behind this. Barthes changed his way of working with every book he wrote, and Fassbinder's films cover a wide swath of territory. For me, that was—I was arguing against that, that sort of pinning their work to their personhood, and—which just seemed like an old-fashioned, humanist idea of the artist and author. Both of them seemed to me to be artists who worked against that notion of humanism. This was during a time when, of course, I was influenced by post-structuralist theory and by people like them. They were both heroes of mine. But that was also an important moment to me, for me, because I—because it really was—I guess it was really the first time I had ever written, published, something that was declarative, in a sense, about my own—even though I'm writing against a certain fixed notion or limited notion of identity in these writers, I'm also, in some sense, declaring an identity. There's a whole thing there about the dedication, and the essay is dedicated to a guy who was—to what—basically, I had a little fling with at the time. So yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: So that was the stakes of your writing.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Was the context of AIDS informing that or—as a backdrop, did it feel like a big backdrop at that point?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, that was in '82. It's too early.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's too early. I was, if anything, in kind of denial about AIDS at that point. I think it was—it took longer than that for me to become—to feel that AIDS was something that I had to grapple with in my life and in my work. It wasn't until—you know, the thing that I wrote immediately before going to Berlin, it was really a kind of—like I had to get this thing done before I got to—before I got on the airplane to go to Berlin—was the essay on Richard Serra, which was written for the Museum of Modern Art exhibition catalogue, so that was '85. And that's probably one of the most strictly Marxist texts that I ever wrote. That's an indication of how—of what my politics around art were at that time, I think. I was—I think it was mixed because I think I was—I was—the fact that I wrote about Fassbinder when I did is indicative of the fact that there was a part of me that was wanting to figure out how my queer self could become a part of my critical practice, and the trouble was that there weren't, at that moment—of course, there were artists at that moment that I could have been writing about or interested in, but I wasn't attracted to them, like David Wojnarowicz or Keith Haring.

They were too much part of the world of the neoexpressionist return to painting for my taste. I didn't—I think I didn't know either of them, or someone like Nicolas Moufarrege or Greer Lankton or any of that world of the queer East Village scene. I knew Nan Goldin, and I admired the *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, which I saw in early iterations, but I didn't—it wasn't something that I felt immediately, I guess, attracted to write about. So I think there was a kind of disconnect between the kind of art that I was dedicated to in my work at *October* and the—I don't know—the life, the sex life that I was leading at the time. I didn't see a reflection of myself in the work. I think, you know, when does—[Robert] Gober emerges around—the early Gober work emerges around that time, and I didn't really know Gober's work, I think, until around the time that I was doing the AIDS issue. I didn't—I don't think I saw the early shows of Gober's work, and even that work, of course, is so elliptically queer.

ALEX FIALHO: How about this year in Berlin, in the ways that it related to the response in New York that you noted?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, I had—I was interested in Berlin gay bar culture. It was West Berlin, of course, at that time. It was a divided city. I did go to the east a lot to hear music, and I do remember once going to a gay bar in the east, and all I can remember about it was the smokiest bar I've ever been in in my life. I think it was Prenzlauer Berg. I don't really remember. I was with a friend who took me there. But I went to the gay bars around Nollendorfplatz, and I happened to live—I got an apartment, just by chance, on—I wish I could remember the name of it; it's where one of Christopher Isherwood's characters lives. It's a tiny, little street near Nollendorfplatz. [Corbierstrasse -DC]. So I was really—I was within walking distance of all the gay bars, and I went often, like, to Tom's Bar.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I wasn't—I don't know. I didn't speak German well. I was learning German. I was—I've never been good at speaking foreign languages, and I'm just too shy and too unable to blunder along with not putting the right adjective endings on [laughs]. Of course, Germans spoke English, but not all. It wasn't—it's not like now, where every German speaks English. But I remember that I had a Turkish boyfriend, who was a professional belly dancer and taught belly-dancing classes. I guess belly-dancing is actually a male dance form, as well as female. And eventually, I had a boyfriend whose former lover was dying of AIDS, and so that brought it home in a very strong way, too. And then I had this episode, as I told you, with being—it was the first time I was tested, and I wasn't intending to be tested. But I think it was—I don't—I still think it was not until I came back to New York, so in late-'85 or in '86, that I fully grasped that this was something that was major in my life because I had friends who were sick, or friends who had died, actually, and then of course, that makes all the difference.

So then eventually I—I did something before the AIDS issue, which was the first of the Dia conversations, and I was responding to the fact that Bill Olander had done this exhibition called *Homo Video*, which was in the back room of the New Museum—this was when the New Museum was on Broadway—and in the front room was the Haacke show, and I was struck by the fact that there were these two, let's say, versions of art and politics that didn't—but there was no attempt on the part of the museum, or anyone else, really, to make any connection between the one which was actually dealing with—not just with AIDS, because *Homo Video* wasn't strictly an AIDS video exhibition, but it was an exhibition about gay sexuality, but there were AIDS tapes in it, and the Haacke exhibition, in the main part of the museum, and so, that's what I talked about in the Dia conversation, and there was—



ALEX FIALHO: It was a lecture or—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was—you know, the *Dia* [*Discussions in Contemporary Culture* -DC] were—the early ones were organized as panel discussions on a topic. So the topic—the overall topic of the first *Dia* conversations—it's a series, so they were week after week, and there would be, like, panels of [three- DC] people, I think. I should look at—I don't think I have—I think I had the first one in Rochester. But the first series was, I think, about art publics; I have to look it up and tell you exactly. But so—there was—the first one, Tom Crow, [Martha Rosler, and Craig Owens -DC]—Hal Foster edited these [... -DC]. But Tom Crow basically criticized what we would call New Left movements—feminism, the queer movement, movements around identity, racial identity, and so on—all of these as somehow fracturing the public sphere, and Martha Rosler was extremely critical of him in the Q&A. I mentioned something about that in my talk as well. And I am—have been an enemy of Tom Crow ever since [laughs], and he's attacked me every time he's gotten a chance. Somehow—even though other people were also critical of him, I'm the one who bears the brunt of his aggression. Barbara Kruger and Krzysztof Wodiczko were on the same [panel -DC] as I was, I believe. [... -DC]. But—so it was another occasion on which I began talking about queer issues in relation to art-political issues, and AIDS was inevitably a part of that because it was part of *Homo Video*, and of course, Bill Olander was an extremely important curator who dealt with AIDS and died of AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Co-founder of Visual AIDS.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: To my mind, I think, in *Homo Video* there was Gregg Bordowitz and Stuart Marshall [making work -AF] around AIDS.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't—is Gregg not—is he the—not the first AIDS tape, which is *Testing [the Limits* -DC], but the one he made when he was a student?

ALEX FIALHO: The one that he made as an artist, as a visual artist—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Right.

ALEX FIALHO: —*Some Aspects of a Shared Lifestyle*—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, exactly.

ALEX FIALHO: —I believe is in [*Homo Video* -AF].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. But definitely *Bright Eyes* was in it.

ALEX FIALHO: Are those published, that public—that conversation becomes a publication?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, yeah. The *Dia* conversations [*Dia Discussions in Contemporary Culture* -DC]—there's a whole thing; they're—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. That's what I thought.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. I don't know whether they're still doing—but they went on and on, you know. They got bigger and bigger, and there was one that was *Group Material*; there was one that was Martha Rosler, and the one on black popular culture—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: There was one on Andy Warhol. Yeah, it was—but the first—and they were called [*Dia Discussions in Contemporary Culture* -DC], at least initially, and initially, they were published by Bay Press in Port Townsend, Washington. Bay Press was owned by—done by Thatcher Bailey, who went to high school with Hal Foster and Charles Wright, who became the first director of *Dia*, whose parents are very famous Seattle collectors, Bagley and Virginia Wright; you may have heard of them; they collected Richard Serra, people like that—and Bill Gates. They all went to the same private high school. Thatcher is gay and has AIDS—had AIDS; he's fine now, but he actually—he sold Bay Press because he expected to die. But he was a friend of Hal's, so—and of Charlie Wright, who became the director of *Dia*, so it was Thatcher who did the initial *Dia* conversations, and then Thatcher became my friend, and he published *AIDS Demo Graphics* and *How Do I Look?* [*Queer Film and Video* -DC]. When *October* would not publish it, he published it. Thatcher and I are still friends.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's take a little stretch break before we dive into *October's* AIDS issue.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So you were gesturing towards integrating your critical practice with a queerness and consciousness around HIV/AIDS.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And I think that comes to full form in the *October* issue in '87, winter issue of '87, and can you tell me a little bit about the lead-up to that in terms of when you made this shift to realizing that this might be a topic, and then how that process unfolded?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Following this Dia conversation, there was—my—the response to my talk, the audience response to my talk, was complicated. It was generally very positive, but there was some negativity around it as well from—I think it was largely about as if I were—first of all, that there's—Craig, for example, was someone who was very critical of claiming an identity, which I didn't think was the point of what I was doing, but also that there was—I was understood as—

ALEX FIALHO: Craig Owens.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, who was part of the first conversation. It was as if I was adopting, somehow, the identity position of a victim or something like that; whereas, in fact, I was this powerful *October* editor. So, somehow the result of that was—I was—it was difficult. It's too strong to say it was traumatic for me, but it was psychically complicated, what—the response to what was for me, again, a place where I had brought my own sexuality and the issues—the current, critical issues around it, having to do with AIDS, to the fore publicly. What I did was to form a reading group to—of friends to talk about queer issues and AIDS issues, and this is the group that eventually did the conference called *How Do I Look?* and that—which is after the *October* issue. But the *October* issue also partly grew out of, I think, the fact that I was working with this group of people, reading—it wasn't yet queer theory; that hadn't happened—but gay studies and work around sexuality and psychoanalysis. You know, we were a group that met each week and we read something and discussed it.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were they?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I'm trying to think if I'm right about this chronologically. I'm pretty sure—one of them was—

ALEX FIALHO: You thank them in—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, in the AIDS issue? Do I?

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, you thank them in the AIDS issue.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay, then that's right. I'm right [laughs].

Yes. So the people that I thank in the AIDS issue are Terri Cafaro, who was my assistant at *October*; Carlos Espinosa, who was a friend at the time; Martha Gever, who continues to be a friend and is Yvonne Rainer's partner; Timothy Landers, who was a young guy who had studied at Hobart and William Smith, and he was, I think, an assistant of Martha's at the time. Martha was the editor of *The Independent*, which was an independent film and video magazine. And Tim wrote an early essay on AIDS videos, actually. Eileen O'Neil, [a friend of Terri's—DC]—yeah, anyway. So the configuration of the group changed because Tom Kalin eventually was part of it, but that would have been after I met him at ACT UP. So that would have been later.

ALEX FIALHO: The reading group?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. Well, it could have been around the time. I guess I was already going to ACT UP then. So it's probably a different configuration that you look at in that edited *How Do I Look?*

ALEX FIALHO: Which was?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Published in 1991. I think *AIDS Demo Graphics* was '90. But it was the thing that precipitated my leaving *October*, and I left in 1990, so we were reading—and we were looking, especially, because Martha was very much in touch with what was going on in independent video and film making, and so she knew about Isaac Julian, for example, and—eventually I asked Martha to write about *Bright Eyes*, the AIDS issue. And that might have been something that she brought to the group because we watched videos, as well, in the group and talked about them.

So my idea, initially, was to publish some—a configuration of things in *October* about AIDS, not a full issue. And initially, I commissioned Martha to write about *Bright Eyes* and Leo Bersani to review Simon Watney's book, which was called—it's in the issue. It's one of the first really, really important [books on AIDS ... -DC].

ALEX FIALHO: *Policing Desire*:—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: *Policing Desire*, exactly.

ALEX FIALHO: —*Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Right. So let me see. There were three things that I was going to publish. Maybe I was going to write something myself. I think so. So that was the idea, and then—so then I was—once I decided to do this, I decided I needed to learn a lot more about AIDS. And I happened to see in a small gallery in the East Village, a pilot video for *Testing the Limits*. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Do you remember what gallery that was?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, I don't. Maybe Gregg would know. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Maybe we talked about it in the [oral history -AF] interview I did with him.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. And I was very struck by it, and I got in touch with Gregg thinking that he might be able to give me—to talk to me and give me some advice about learning about—more about AIDS. And so we got together, and he told me that I should go to ACT UP, and this was probably June of '87. And ACT UP had been formed in March. I was aware of their existence. And so I took Gregg's advice, and I started going to meetings, and then, you know, the rest is history, so to speak [laughs]. I mean, I then learned very quickly a lot about AIDS. There was an incredible amount of information. You know, you would go to ACT UP meetings, and there was a table of flyers, and like, you would go in and take one of everything and, basically, have a week's worth of reading, articles that were reproduced, all kinds of stuff.

ALEX FIALHO: From that early?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So this is, you know, '87 so—and so it was everything from medical reports to activist material to, you know, bad stuff that was in newspapers that we were opposing and all kinds of things. So very shortly, I realized that I—limiting it to three essays and also limiting it to—essentially to AIDS and art, or to the kind of purview of *October*, the normal purview of *October*, wasn't going to cut it for the subject. And so, shortly, I decided I was going to do a full special issue. And I talked to Rosalind and Annette about that, and they agreed that it would be okay, I think somewhat reluctantly.

ALEX FIALHO: Rosalyn Deutsche?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, Rosalind Krauss [laughs] and Annette Michelson, who were my co-editors at the time. And I don't think that—oh, this isn't the—

ALEX FIALHO: The reprint.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: This is the reprint, yes, so it doesn't have the—I was just looking for the editors. I don't think Joan Copjec was in it yet. That's what I was looking for, but I could be wrong. It's spelled with a C: C-O-P-J-E-C.

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And so not only did I decide it would have to be a special issue, but the more I thought about it and the more I learned over a fairly short period of time, the more I realized that it would have to include more activist voices, people with AIDS, the configuration that I ended up with. And so I ended up having a prostitute write about prostitutes and AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Carol Leigh?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Carol Leigh, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Visual AIDS just brought her to New York for Day Without Art.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, really? Oh, wow.

ALEX FIALHO: And she spoke at the New Museum, still at it three decades later.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: That's amazing. I haven't seen her for so long. That's amazing. She was great. I loved her.

ALEX FIALHO: She was great.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: She had a red—this was 2016, just last month. She had a red shirt that matched her fiery red hair, and in the same font as Coca-Cola said "whore" across the front.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [Laughs.] That's so great. Scarlot Harlot, right.

ALEX FIALHO: Scarlot Harlot.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So I worked—this issue didn't actually come out until spring of '88 because it just got bigger and bigger and more—it really took over my life, including, of course, writing for it.

ALEX FIALHO: So it wasn't the winter '87 issue?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was the winter '87 issue, but it didn't come out in [laughs] winter '87. Winter '87 is the final issue [of 1987 -DC]. So the first issue would be spring of any year, but this didn't actually get done and come out, literally come out—it wasn't in our hands as a physical object until the spring of '88, but it was produced, and it was the winter issue of '87. Quarterly magazines aren't always on time [laughs].

And this one bit was particularly—at a certain point, I wanted to do it as a double issue. So to make it, basically, Winter '87/Spring '88, and MIT wouldn't allow us to do it because, supposedly, subscribers feel cheated if they get not four issues a year, but three issues, even if one of them is twice the size of a normal issue, which this was, but still. So that's why it was late. It would've been—we could have broken it into two issues. Anyway, or made it a double issue, and that would make sense for it to come out later.

But it was an immediate success, I would say. It sold in a way that *October* issues never sold before. Sold out. And then we did it as an *October* book immediately. That was Rosalind's idea, actually, to do it as a book. I think only later did the success of this issue become a problem for my fellow editors—it attached my name to the journal a little too much for the competitive instincts of my fellow editors. It was their journal, even though I was a full editor at the time.

ALEX FIALHO: You came on after them?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: They founded it, along with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who was pushed out almost immediately. And so it was Rosalind and Annette's magazine, and I was hired to be the managing editor after my first year in graduate school and while the fourth issue of *October* was being produced.

ALEX FIALHO: Where did you do graduate school?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: CUNY.

ALEX FIALHO: CUNY. With Rosalind?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. So starting with issue number five, MIT began publishing it, and we had to produce it on a timely, quarterly basis, and that's what I was really hired to do. So initially, I was the managing editor, and then I think I became something like the associate editor, and eventually, they allowed me to actually be one of the editors, even though, for a very long time, I had been functioning as much as an editor as they were. In fact, the idea of a special issue on photography was mine, Rosalind's, and Craig's [Craig Owens], pretty much simultaneously, and that was the first issue I worked on.

So we were all bringing material to the magazine, probably Rosalind and Annette more than I was initially, but eventually, I was more than they were, and that, I think, became a problem. In any case, by then, they didn't even read the manuscripts for the AIDS issue. They didn't see it until it was published, and I'm not sure they read it even when it was published. It was not in their area of interest. They didn't care. They were interested that it was getting as much as attention as it was. I think they were initially probably happy with that, but then—sorry?

ALEX FIALHO: In what ways was it getting attention?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was talked about. It sold out. I don't know another way that you learn something gets attention that isn't—in the big world, it wasn't reviewed in anything, but, you know—but, I mean, you don't review magazine issues anyway.

ALEX FIALHO: Was it influential? Was it talked about on the ACT UP floor, for instance? Or was it talked about more in academic circles?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I think, certainly, it was read by very large numbers of ACT UP people, certainly the intellectuals in ACT UP [laughs]. It was—but *October* was an extremely influential magazine in the art world, especially in art schools, the sophisticated art schools like Cal Arts, or—Cal Arts, at that time, was probably the

most progressive art school in the country. And it became something of—*October* had become something of a bible for the progressive art crowd.

And suddenly there appears this issue on AIDS, which is completely different from what *October* had been. The previous issue was on Marcel Broodthaers. So suddenly, you have issue, which is activist and which is more cultural studies than *October* theory and is not really that much about art, and at the same time, it's a subject that a lot of people in the art world were obsessed by. I mean, the art world was losing people right and left to AIDS by '87. And so everybody was—had a consciousness of it, but nobody in that world was tackling it, and then we did. And so—and we did it in this really unusual way, unusual for *October*.

So I think that it was—I think a lot—for a lot of people, this issue of *October* was both an eye opener and a sort of sense of salvation for a lot of gay men. I think it sort of gave them a way to think about what they were trying to figure out, what was making them crazy, and giving them—you know, terrifying them and whatever. Suddenly, there was access to interesting, progressive, smart thinking. And it's not all—it's not, of course, all the same tone at all. Some of it's pure *October* stuff, like—

ALEX FIALHO: —Bersani.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Like Bersani or even Martha Gever's article, in some ways, is a kind of straight analysis—straight/queer analysis of a very brilliant videotape about AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, right.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm just saying that for the record.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But then there's, you know, the vast majority of it is—well, there's also Paula Treichler's piece, which was actually reprinted from another journal. I read it and just thought it was so brilliant, which is really an amazing article about signification in AIDS discourse. That's kind of *October*-ish in a way. But anyway, so it's a mixture. It's a very interdisciplinary and has different kinds of voices, different kinds of discourses all put together, but all as a package, I think, adding up to a means of—or several means of thinking about the epidemic at that moment. And I think—I know that my essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," a lot of people over the years have told me how eye opening that was for them and how helpful it was.

So, you know—it also—I have to say, doing this issue changed my life because I suddenly was in a different world. I was in the world of AIDS activism, first and foremost, but then I was also propelled into the world of cultural studies. I was eventually ejected from the world of *October*, and I started teaching gay studies, and I continued to work on AIDS. I continued—I pretty much dropped everything else. The last essay I had written right around the time that I did this—in fact, I guess it was maybe after I finished this—I wrote the essay on Marcel Broodthaers that was published in the [Walker Art Center -DC] Broodthaers catalogue, and that is a chapter of *On the Museum's Ruins*, but chronologically that's the final essay of my '80s, pre-AIDS, '80s writing about institutional critique and the museum.

And from then on, for almost 10 years, I wrote only about AIDS and taught—I was teaching. I taught a course at Rutgers [in 1988 ... -DC] on AIDS video. That was the whole subject of the course. [... DC]. And I had been, around this period of time in the '80s, supplementing my income by teaching, mostly in art schools, a course here and there. People would invite me, and I'd be visiting teacher. I taught one semester at Princeton. I taught at Rutgers. I taught at, eventually, Cooper Union. I did some workshop courses at Cal Arts. I taught one summer at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. So I was doing that kind of work. And when I was, then, invited to teach at Rutgers, I ended up teaching a course on AIDS videos, which was pretty out there at that moment, around, you know, the late-'80s.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's take a step back to Gregg saying to you—Gregg Bordowitz saying to you, if you want to learn about AIDS, come to ACT UP, you going to those first meetings. What was your impression? What were some things that you were learning in an on-the-ground way?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, like I said, there's all this information you get at every meeting on a table of flyers, but it's more—it's what's going on in the floor. Very, very heated, enthusiastic, crazy discussions about, generally, the next demonstration that was being planned. But the atmosphere is completely electric all the time with everything from Rollerena skating around during the meetings, handing out flyers or whatever, to Ryan Landry doing puppet shows as a way of doing announcements at the beginning of the meeting.

Initially, when I was first going, the International Socialist Organization, which basically goes to every progressive, activist group and tries to take it over, and at every meeting, there would—at some point, somebody from the ISO would stand up and say, "We have to get the working class involved [laughs]." And then

everybody would shout them down and say "Get the fuck out of here," you know.

ALEX FIALHO: My close friend from high school [was involved in the -AF] ISO.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, really? God.

ALEX FIALHO: Christmas dinner was funny, fun.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: They were like—yeah, I don't know. But, you know, there was—ACT UP was such a mishmash of people. There were people who had a great deal of activist training, background, who had been in activist organizations since the '60s, people like Maxine Wolfe or I don't know, a lot of people who really knew. And there were people who could train us in civil disobedience because they knew how to do it. But people—everybody brought their own kinds of skills and backgrounds, and—I don't know—personalities to ACT UP. So there was a lot of expertise of various kinds. So I would be an example of that, although I'm older than most of the people that went to ACT UP, but I had—I knew about politics and art, and eventually, that's what I —

ALEX FIALHO: —brought to it.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —what I brought to it. And I knew about theory and discourse and all of the sorts of things that helped to think about the crisis in the way that I did. But there were people who had—there were a lot of artists who then became Gran Fury or other collectives or individual producers of propaganda. There were people who knew about public relations. There were people who knew about—there were people who learned the science of AIDS and AIDS medicine. There were people whose interest was primarily in issues of race and class. There were people who realized that homelessness was a serious problem and that we needed as a group to do—so there were people—there were constantly people bringing forth new issues that we had to cope with, even while we were planning a particular demonstration, which had a particular [target -DC] of issues. So City Hall had one set of issues; [Seize Control of the FDA -DC] had another set of issues, and so forth. And all of that got discussed, and there were many people—people disagreed. There were huge disagreements, and every now and then, Larry Kramer would come and scream at us all and tell us we were worthless and not doing anything, and of course, it was because we weren't doing what he wanted us to do.

And there were people who emerged within all of this as voices of sanity and voices of reason and voices of knowledge and people that you would want to hear speak from the floor, and there were people that you would want [laughs] not to hear speak from the floor, people who drive you crazy. The meetings were needlessly long. They started, I think, at 7:00. So nobody had dinner beforehand, and so you would be dying of hunger by the time you got out of there at 11:00 or midnight. But they were really electrifying.

ALEX FIALHO: At the LGBT center?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, initially, and then we moved to Cooper at a certain point, but that was much later because we outgrew [the center]. The place was—people were hanging from the rafters eventually. And it was also, you know, it became, eventually, your world. It became something that, even if it was tedious and difficult and dealing with an issue that was terrifying to everyone, and you know, we were losing friends, and people were getting sick, and so forth. At the same time, it was also a world of extreme conviviality and community and a real sense of rising to an occasion and doing something about this crisis and being effective. There was a sense that we were never accomplishing enough fast enough, but we were actually accomplishing things. So there was this sense of fulfillment in it. But more than anything else, I think there was a sense of—for me at least, I made a whole bunch of friends in ACT UP, and there's—a lot of them are still my friends.

And a lot of those friends are people who came from the art world and are still in the art world. So it was in a way a place where these two worlds of mine did merge, and I still feel that my art world now, in a way, is a, somewhat, a kind of function of those days. The younger people that I know are, like, another generation of the people—I mean, I'm still much older than even the people I knew from ACT UP, but now, there's yet another generation of people, of queers who are part of that legacy, for me, that constitute the kind of the art world that I feel comfortable in because there are vast segments of the art world now that I don't feel comfortable in, that are too much to do with money, and everything that goes with it. So there's a queer art world that I—that is recognizably, for me, in the tradition of the art world that I came to know first in ACT UP.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you in an affinity group?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Eventually, I was for the purpose of demonstrations, especially for the [Target] City Hall demonstration. I was part of a group called CHER. I think I write about it a little bit in *AIDS Demo Graphics*. It didn't—you know, it was the actress Cher, basically [laughs], but it was also an acronym, but it was an acronym who's meaning changed every time you asked somebody about it.

ALEX FIALHO: I love that.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was a group of—there were a few close friends of mine who were part of that affinity group, but I think it was an affinity group that was ragtag. So it was people who didn't belong to other affinity groups and needed to form an affinity group of the City Hall demonstration. Actually, that's what it was formed for. But I stayed with that group for a period of time. But it wasn't— it didn't have the cohesion and direction that I think certain of the other affinity groups did.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the process of opening up *October* to these other voices? Was it just intuitive, adding folks like Carol Leigh, you know, Amber Hollibaugh?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Amber I had known for a long time. Mitchell Karp was a friend of mine that I picked up at the gym at some point. He was like a—so—and I'm not sure now where I first met Amber, but I even have a feeling that maybe Amber was part of my reading group for a period of time. And so some of these people—well, like Simon [Watney] was a friend. I'm not sure where I first met him, but I met him before AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: Obviously he had published a central book around it, so [inaudible].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Right, but I knew him from the art world prior to that time, I think. But a lot of these people I basically came to through—like Jan Zita Grover—gosh, I don't have a very good memory about these things. I think there were—there began to be conferences around this time, but it's—I'm a little vague on chronology.

ALEX FIALHO: I love *AIDS: Keywords*. I think that's an important project.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, it's a great text. It may even just be that I read things or that I heard through grapevines. Paula's text I definitely saw in some other magazine, and it just blew me away, so I republished it. Suki Ports was somebody I met probably through Gregg, someone who, I think—who was—appears in *Testing the Limits*. So she's somebody who worked on issues of AIDS and Women. Leo I knew of course through *October*. I'd known him for a long time but not well. I only became really close friends with Leo much more recently. He was a friend of Rosalind's. John Borneman I learned about somehow through the grapevine of people who knew something about AIDS I guess.

So it's a mixture, but I would say that the people from PWA Coalition, so Max Navarre and Suki Ports and probably Carol Leigh were people that I knew through—ultimately though like Gregg and ACT UP and people that I got to know through the activist movement, and other people I knew more through, like, reading and—or were people that I actually knew. So Martha of course was a friend. Sander Gilman was somebody whose work I knew. And I can't remember exactly how I knew that Sander Gilman had something to write about because, you know, he wrote a book about disease and stigma.

ALEX FIALHO: Was it a pretty straightforward editorial process with these, or is there a story around how these final texts became each person's contribution that might be noteworthy?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, I don't think it was particularly different from editing anything. I commissioned texts; I got them; and they went through an editorial process. Some of them were harder to edit than others. That's usual because a lot of these people are not [professional -DC] writers. So some of them I did a lot of work on, made them more readable [laughs], made more publishable. Others of them, I don't think I probably had to do anything to Jan's text or certainly to Paula's, which had already been published, but probably much to Simon's—I know that I worked a lot with Gregg. I think that's the first thing Gregg ever published.

ALEX FIALHO: I love the story of that process in Gregg's collected writings. You both sort of speak to it in the intros.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: The one I'm particularly moved by in reengaging is the People with AIDS Coalition contribution portfolio. And those are I think —

DOUGLAS CRIMP: That's excerpts from stuff they published, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That you've parsed?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So I chose them, yeah, yeah. I really wanted to have the voices of people with AIDS in the issue. That was something that I determined I think pretty early on from my understanding of things from ACT UP, and I knew about the PWA Coalition and I knew about Michael Callen, and so I basically negotiated to make a selection, and I probably—I'm sure that I made a selection clear to them, and they were fine with it. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: One thing I pulled out that you wrote in your own contribution, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," you said, "Anything said or done about AIDS that does not give precedence to the knowledge, the needs, and the demands of people living with AIDS must be condemned." And the context is this idea of

communal values that is coming from a conservative right that's dictating, in this instance, federal funding that's precluding education for a different community that's not getting that information because of these communal values.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Right, right, right, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Which, even reading now, is stomach-curling.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, you know, it really was—it makes all the difference. Australia, for example, had a very progressive policy regarding AIDS where they turned over AIDS education to the affected communities, and it worked. It stopped the epidemic in that country, and we didn't do that. We still don't do it.

So, yeah. My tone, often in this issue, is probably more prescriptive than I would use now. Of course, I was pissed off, and it caused a very strong counter response. You know, there was this show that was done in Los Angeles that was basically a kind of negative response to the AIDS issue of *October* that Dennis Cooper and Richard Hawkins did called *Against Nature*, and I wrote a —

ALEX FIALHO: Was that at LACE?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, it was at LACE. And I saw it, and it was just very—you know, it was a response to my demand for activist art as opposed to, quote, non-activist art [laughs]. I mean, to elegiac art or art for fundraising. And I think this was—you know, I mean, Gary Indiana's response in *The Village Voice* was to say that, "Douglas Crimp is an aging faggot who thinks he's been put in charge of homosexuality." So there was a very—like, in addition to a lot of very positive responses there were extremely negative responses to it.

That was actually dredged up recently by—I always forget his name—Andrew Durbin in a very snarky review of *Before Pictures*, which he compares negatively with Gary Indiana's memoir, which was published this year, also. But he actually ends up returning to the fight over *Against Nature* and says that I'm still an *October* writer, which I think is completely wrong [laughs]. I think—first of all, I don't know what an *October* writer is, if I ever was one. Maybe I was an *October* writer when I wrote this, but I'm not Rosalind Krauss, and I'm not Benjamin Buchloh, and I'm not Annette Michelson, so I don't know what that means exactly. But I—but certainly, *Before Pictures* is not written in any style that can be associated with even my own writing from my *October* period.

Anyway, so—but it's—their—that—the polemical, prescriptive, moralizing tone that does enter my own voice in the AIDS issue at times, which also—which I regret, mostly because I do think that the notion that the only valid artistic response to AIDS is one that's directly recognizable as activist, is wrong—and that's why I put Felix Gonzalez-Torres on the cover of that book [*Melancholia and Moralism* -DC]. So yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the impact that—did you feel an impact to this issue? You heard a lot of positive response. Did you feel like it shifted any of the conversations either, like, on the floor, on the ground at ACT UP, or amongst intellectuals in a tangible way?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I certainly did. There's several ways in which I did. One is that I was invited to the big cultural studies conference in Champaign Urbana in 1990 that Paula Treichler and Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg organized that brought all the superstars of British Cultural Studies like Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer, or Australian Cultural Studies like Meaghan Morris. You know, you've seen the book *Cultural Studies*. It's this real tome.

I was invited to give a talk there, and I presented "Portraits of People with AIDS" and eventually published it in the volume. I had written it for another conference and when Paula asked me to participate in the conference, I said, "I'm not even sure I know what cultural studies is." And she said, "Well, you know, we're doing this reading group in order to organize this conference, and we're reading your work as, like, exemplary of cultural studies." So somehow, I had been doing—this representative cultural studies in some way. So there I suddenly felt part of an intellectual configuration that I didn't know that I was part of, and I didn't know that I didn't know enough about, and that made me learn about it and it changed my own work.

ALEX FIALHO: And that stemmed from urgency and the ways you were learning—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And of course, that's what cultural studies was in its best instances as well. But the other was that this was a beginning of queer theory, and so I knew that my—that the AIDS issue was taken as also—of one of the founding texts of what became an academic field. So that it, along with *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Sedgwick or *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler, those kinds of texts, this became part of that configuration, that intellectual configuration as well, too. So I felt immediately a kind of—that I belonged to various overlapping communities within the intellectual world, within the academic world, that I didn't know, as an art critic, that I had any connection to or that I didn't actually have any particular connection to in most cases. So I felt it, in that way, for myself, and I think that it had a pretty big influence in queer studies; certainly Leo [Bersani's] text "Is



the Rectum a Grave" has had a very important afterlife.

It wasn't really until somewhat later, when I wrote "Mourning and Militancy," which was 1989, which I initially gave at the English Institute at Harvard, which is a really crazy place to give it, but I also gave it as a keynote for the Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference at Yale, which was maybe the second or third of these big conferences that eventually petered out, but they were these—there was one at Harvard; there was a couple of them at Yale, I think, and I was asked to give the keynote, and I gave "Mourning and Militancy." And there was a really overwhelming response to it. And that audience—even though it was an academic conference, it was full of people from ACT UP, like half of ACT UP went there because it was this queer studies conference, and there was a lot of AIDS stuff going on at it.

I'm on Facebook now for the first time because I wanted to advertise my book [laughs] and advertise my reading tour. So a number of people who have become my Facebook friends are people whose names I know from ACT UP. I don't actually know them or only—they were acquaintances from that period. And, you know, one of those people cited the importance of "Mourning and Militancy" in the immediate aftermath of Trump's being elected.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [... -DC]. So I know that some of my AIDS writing crossed the lines between academia to the activist world. But of course a lot of the people involved in activist organization are not necessarily the people who read the kind of writing that I do. That's normal, I think. But then a lot do. And of course the—it's still, I think, young people grappling with AIDS. I know—I just had a book that came out this year in French. It's a collection of photography essays, and the editor of it came to my writing through ACT UP Paris, and his interest was in my AIDS writing, and he wanted to do a book of my writing in French.

It's a very long story, but it mutated over time, and the publisher who eventually published the final book is a photography publisher. So it was limited to my essays on photography, which includes "Portraits of People with AIDS" and "The Boys in My Bedroom." So there's a couple of AIDS pieces in it. But this young, very young Frenchman, whose name is Gaëtan Thomas [... -DC]. So he edited this book, which is called *Pictures*, actually, in French. I mean, it's called *Pictures: S'appropriier la photographie*.

So that's an immediate response overseas to my AIDS writing by a young, French intellectual. He's getting a Ph.D. in history of science, and he works on epidemiology. So nothing to do with my art criticism, but he ended up editing my book of art criticism. So my own—I mean, all I know, of course, is my own experience of how this work has proliferated in the world. On the other hand, when I published, finally, all of my AIDS writing in *Melancholia and Moralism*, it was 19—sorry, it was 2012. No, that's my Warhol book. 2002. And I think in 2002 nobody was interested in reading about AIDS anymore for the most part, and it didn't sell. It was kind of a—I mean, it did okay as an academic book, but not really that well. I think that it wasn't—AIDS is not a topic that people beyond our world think about anymore, although there are always young people, especially young students, who end up becoming interested in AIDS and art, and they find the texts that exist about it.

So I'm constantly getting emails and queries from young people, students mostly, who are interested in this work. I have a lot of my writing on Academia.edu. I don't know if you know this website, but it's where you can download, for free, people's articles. It's actually really useful because people—if you can get an article—if you can download, you know, the articles—I don't have the ones from my book, but I have them in their article form, and a lot of my AIDS articles are the most downloaded of all of my articles. So there's still—and I'm talking about up to 1,000 downloads for some of them, for like "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" or something like that. So it's still—you know that you have an audience for it in some ways.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I'm a case of that. We discussed off the record that I went to Stanford and I was working with Pam Lee, who's an art historian there, and we read—we just talked about it—the Cultural Studies [publication edited by -AF] Stuart Hall where "Mourning and Militancy"—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, "Portraits of People with AIDS."

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, yes, is published. And I went to Pam before one summer and said, "I want to read a few more books this summer. Where do I go?" She said, "What did you like the most off the syllabus this year?" I said, "That essay." She pointed me to *Melancholia and Moralism*, I went home, read that, blew the lid off my head, and, you know, 10 years later, I'm working at Visual AIDS and deeply invested in these questions. So I think —

DOUGLAS CRIMP: A lot of—I mean, this writing is taught. So that's another thing. I know people are exposed to it because there are a lot of people in the academy who find this work very teachable and very instructive. So I know that people teach "Mourning and Militancy" or this and that essay. So then people, yeah, discover the work.

I think, often, it's just a question of, certainly the people who teach it are knowledgeable about what they're

doing, but also you get, like, young, queer, questioning kids in a college class or something, and then suddenly, something, like, opens their eyes, and occasionally, I get, out of the blue, an email from some kid somewhere, saying, you know, "This is really"—it's really nice to get these things just saying, you know, "This really was very helpful to me."

So it's sort of the way, oddly enough, that your work—that you know anything about the effect of your work because, certainly, this book wasn't reviewed in *The New York Times* [laughs], and that book wasn't reviewed in *The New York Times*. None of my books—actually, oddly enough, the only book *The New York Times* ever reviewed of mine was *AIDS Demo Graphics*. It was a tiny, little capsule review, but it was noticed in *The New York Times*, which was kind of odd actually, but given that it was such a small publisher and such a—and that book is a real regret of mine because, you know, when Thatcher—that book is an eminently teachable book. That book really is great for, like, showing people how activism works, you know? That was sort of its intention.

ALEX FIALHO: It's a literal reprint of the *October* journal.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, no, no. No, this is —

ALEX FIALHO: —*AIDS Demo Graphics*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —*AIDS Demo Graphics*, yeah, which was published by Bay Press. And so when Thatcher thought that he wasn't going to live, he sold Bay Press to a couple of women, who were, like, Microsoft millionaires, and they played with it for a few months, maybe a year, something like that, and they got bored with it, and then just stopped doing anything. They wouldn't answer their phone; they wouldn't answer their emails; they wouldn't send statements. And so *AIDS Demo Graphics* just disappeared into the—to some warehouse someplace, and it's just gone, and you can't get it. You can get it on AbeBooks.com, but it should have been—it should still be—it could still be in print, except for these people just, like, got bored with their new toy. And Thatcher was never able to do anything about it. They wouldn't answer his phone calls or emails either. So it's a sort of a sad tale because it is, I think—it's a kind of primer about activism that can really be useful.

ALEX FIALHO: As a sort of wrap up question for today, the title *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism* is straightforward and to the point, but the one—"cultural activism" as a phrase, I'm just keen to prompt you to sort of parse that out, how that—and of course, the whole issue's doing that, but how, in that moment, the idea of cultural activism in a cultural studies capacity felt like where to turn your attention and your stakes.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: What's the question [laughs]? Honestly—

ALEX FIALHO: The formation of cultural activism—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. Honestly, I don't—I can't remember. I knew, of course, what the analysis of culture was, and of course, cultural analysis was something that I guess we did. But I also knew that, somehow, this issue was extending that activity of analysis to an activist dimension. So I think it was just kind of—like an alliterative way of claiming that or something, a way of getting activism into the title. It's hard for me to remember. Some titles just—I'm generally good with titles, and sometimes they just happen for me, and sometimes—like *Melancholia and Moralism*, for example, is meant to sort of rhyme with "Mourning and Militancy." And of course Freud connected melancholia and moralism, and I even talk about that in "Mourning and Militancy," and I knew that would be the title of my collection of AIDS essays. But this—yeah, I honestly don't have a clear memory of how I came to that title. You know, but it worked. [Laughs.] I think it is what I was doing, so yeah, I guess it was an instinct.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

[END OF TRACK.]

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Douglas Crimp for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project at Douglas' home in New York City on January 4, 2016 [sic].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Seventeen.

ALEX FIALHO: Excuse me, 2017.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Still getting used to that.

So we had a couple of back and forths yesterday that you did a little bit of research on and just wanted to touch base on that.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, just the part where you were talking to me about what I was doing between the moment that—what I was doing in relation to AIDS or how I thought about AIDS or how it was affecting my life and my work, I guess, in the period between '81, when I first heard about AIDS, and the AIDS issue of *October*, which I was working on in '87, and I tended to be a little vague about it, but at a certain point, I—there were a couple of things. One was the AIDS issue itself. I couldn't remember whether or not Joan Copjec had been a full editor of the magazine at that point, and indeed, she was. She had become a full editor with issue number 41; the AIDS issue was number 43, but she had, before that period of time, been a—she had been a student of Annette Michelson. And she, then, was brought onto the magazine as an associate editor. And her area of specialization was film, feminism, psychoanalysis, particularly, psychoanalysis.

But then it also came to what I was doing professionally, what I was—between, say, the Fassbinder issue, which was issue number 21 of *October*, which was in 1982, and '85 when I went to Berlin. And that's when I think I was quite vague and looked that—I looked up that run of *October* and just—it makes it fairly easy to say that—to say what the special issues were during that period of time. So there was a special issue on Hollis Frampton, a special issue—one thing that I did, particularly, was we did an entire issue that was a book by Leo Steinberg called *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Painting and in Modern Oblivion*, which he then published as what was in fact the first *October* book, but it was done not with MIT, but with Pantheon Press. It's a rather famous work of Leo Steinberg's and I worked with Leo on that. This gives you a sense basically, what I'm—what I'm giving you is a sense of how far afield from gay sexuality and AIDS I was, intellectually, in this period of time, or *October* was. We did a special issue on Hollis Frampton. We published, as an entire issue, also, Walter Benjamin Moscow Diary, and we published a special—there was a special issue on Bataille—Georges Bataille, which was something that Annette was particularly interested in.

There was an issue on psychoanalysis, and there was one—and yet another one that Joan was responsible for on Jacques Lacan, on Lacan's *Television*. *Television* is actually a television program that Lacan did. So, just—that gives you, I think, a pretty good sense of how—and indeed, there were a couple of interviews that I mentioned. One with Hans Haacke and one with Krzysztof Wodiczko, which I participated in. That was in that period of time, too.

So that gives you a sense, I think, of the art and politics around that time. I also noticed—this was something we didn't talk about at all, but I think it's interesting. I did—I published an interview in *October* at the end of 1981, so the year in which I learned about AIDS, in which we all, like us, learned about AIDS. An interview with Guy Hocquenghem—do not know how to spell his name.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was when François Mitterrand came to power—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —the socialists came to power in France, and it was an interview about that. And there is—I looked to see if Guy and I talked about AIDS at all because Guy, in fact, eventually died of AIDS, and we didn't. We did talk about—a little bit about gay—the social policy around sexuality for the new socialist government at that time. Guy, of course, was a significant figure in French gay liberation, and we didn't talk—oddly enough, we did not talk that much about gay material in that interview. It was really—it really was an interview about the—what it meant as the socialists came to power in France at that time, for French intellectual life, but also just, in general, political life, yeah. So I think that's—I think that's pretty much all that I remember that I—I just quickly looked at my run of *Octobers*, too, and saw that there.

ALEX FIALHO: Just a quick follow-up, was *The Sexuality of Christ*, Steinberg's piece?—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well—

ALEX FIALHO: —vastly different or far afield from the later work?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Of his? Or—

ALEX FIALHO: That you were working on? You said it gives you a sense of how far afield—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, yeah. It's—it—very, very serious Renaissance theological scholarship, iconographical, with all of the brilliance that Leo brought to everything he did. But yeah, it's pretty far [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It had nothing to do with my understanding of what sexuality meant. It was—it was about the humanity of Christ, as manifest through the emphasis on his genitals, basically, and paintings of the Christ with

the Virgin, and the Virgin [and] St. Anne, who often has her fingers around the penis. You know, it got—it's a—I don't know if you know it. It's a brilliant work, actually.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Is there a queerness in—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Not at all.

ALEX FIALHO: —any of it?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Leo was really, really not queer. On the contrary, but he was a great art historian of his generation, of course. And so it was a—I didn't—I had not known Leo before that. He was a friend of Rosalind's—they had taught together at Hunter College because there was a time when Leo was at Hunter, before he went to Penn. And in any case, they were friends, and it was through Rosalind that various things by Leo had been brought to *October*. He was probably the most traditional art historian whose work we published.

[Phone rings.]

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So to start today, I think we covered a lot of ground yesterday in terms of that '80s moment, and your work in it. But one thing I wanted to ask about was the energy of urgency at that time, or kind of the atmosphere, the feeling—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —of that moment. Just ask you to describe that.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's hard to separate the—my sense of urgency from, first of all, the way I got caught up in doing this issue of the magazine and how it took over my life. But of course, there was a sense of urgency that preceded that, a personal sense of urgency, which I mentioned last night in relation to the fact that, when I came home from Germany, I had more friends who were sick or friends who had died. And so the sense of AIDS being very present, and determining, and terrifying, and all of the things that was—that made it feel like a crisis were—and this is not just about the sense that—of my—that—of fear and confusion, and of course, sadness and all of those things that we all felt personally. But also, the sense of being—the feeling of being under attack, essentially, in the society at large. And that's something—it was pretty present.

You had figures like Jesse Helms, who were really orchestrating attacks on gay people for—throughout that period, and of course, it was the time of Ronald Reagan who would never say the word "AIDS." And he was someone whose—it was a conservative period, also, with Kohl in Germany and Thatcher in Britain. So there was a sense, also of this being a very, very bad time politically, as well, not just for people who were directly affected by the AIDS epidemic, but for all kinds of reasons. I mean, this is the point in which the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich really started happening in earnest in this culture and in other cultures, as well. And that was—that was new in my lifetime, in the whole post-war period of time since I was a child. The distribution of wealth in this country was more equalizing, and of course, Reagan changed all of that—began the change that has resulted in where we are now.

So there—and at *October*—*October* was a quite politicized cultural journal. And so, for example, when we interviewed Hans Haacke, he had just done the painting—the portrait of Margaret Thatcher, which was one of the only actual handmade oil paintings that Hans ever did, and so that was part of the topic of the interview. But anyway, there were—we were interested, in general, in the way artists were dealing with the increasingly conservative political cultures in Europe and the United States. Krzysztof Wodiczko would be another very good example, whose work on homelessness and also the early projections that were—projected images of missiles on monuments, and that sort of thing.

So, what I'm trying to say is that the sense of being under attack wasn't exclusively about the nightmare of AIDS, but it was a general one of a turn to conservative politics in American culture. And this also included Ed Koch, as the Mayor of New York City, who I wrote negatively about in an essay called *The Art of Exhibition*. So it was before—it was—this was [1984 ... -DC]. Anyway, it was an article largely about one of the Documenta exhibitions, but there was a little segue into something about Koch's policies. And so that's the, kind of, general atmosphere.

And then—so that's—I think all of that contributed—the cultural, political attitudes of the magazine itself, and the fact that I began to feel this very specific threat from the AIDS epidemic. So that first got articulated a bit in what we talked about last night, about the Dia discussions. And then—so that lead to my wanting to do something, and that something was initially to publish some material on AIDS specifically, or on AIDS, and then ultimately to do the special issue. But between the first interest in doing a few essays and the desire to do a

complete special issue and, eventually, a very large one, I went into—I was in ACT UP.

And then the urgency gets articulated in a much more vibrant way and you really know—then you really know what's going on, and you really know what needs to be done. And so that was an urgency that was a, kind of—a more communal urgency that you couldn't—you couldn't make that go away, you know. It became—it took over my life, as I said. And it changed—it changed my intellectual being. I'd begun to work on something different than what I had worked on before. And even now, I would say that the voice that I developed in my AIDS writing has spilled over into, certainly, my book on Warhol and I think all of my writing subsequent to it.

ALEX FIALHO: That's a question I have here prepared—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —that I'll ask that may be repetitive, but may allow you dive a little deeper.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And it's, did you have a vision for the trajectory of your work through the '70s? Did you think you had a project that you would continue to work towards? And then how did AIDS—the AIDS crisis—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Through the '70s? Or the '80s?

ALEX FIALHO: Through—approaching the '80s. When you were in the '70s—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —developing a method, developing a critical practice. Did you have a vision for how that would continue over the decades?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, no, no. No, I was—you know, I was a kid, and I was finding my way; I was figuring out who I was. And I was also spending a lot of time playing and dancing and having sex and being semi-serious, and then more serious, and then less serious. And so I was floundering a lot, and that's a lot—the subject of my memoir that I—that's why I—I mean, I wrote a project for a Moroccan cookbook because I needed to make money, but it was also something that I could find an interest in. I wrote a project—started to write a project on disco, because disco had such a challenging effect on me. I, like, wanted to explain it to myself, so writing is the way I do things like that. But it also is an indication that I didn't really know what the subject of my writing should be, although I was all of this time, more or less, involved in the art world.

So around the time that I wrote the fragment on disco, which I published in the memoir, I was also working with Helene Winer, who was the director of Artist's Space, on this crazy project called Art Information Distribution, where we were—we were—we were composing slide sets of contemporary art to market to art schools and university slide libraries, because in those days, it wasn't so easy to get images of contemporary art. And I was writing some of the essays that went along with these slide sets and the annotations of those slides. So it was a pretty intensive project on contemporary art that was a—you know, it was an entrepreneurial thing, in a way, on Helene's part, but I took it very seriously as a writing project and a kind of curatorial project, as well, because it was about determining, in the volume on contemporary painting, who would be included: contemporary sculpture, who would be included; performance art, women's art, artists' films, the various volumes of these slide sets. And you know, so that was—that was in '74, '75, before I wrote on Joan Jonas' work, and before the *Picture* show in '77.

So I didn't—I can't say that there's any particular coherence during this period, in terms of my sense of what I was doing career-wise. Eventually, it—I did come to the realization in 1976, probably in '75, that I was being exploited teaching as an adjunct at The School of Visual Arts. I wasn't making enough money, that I had to have some kind of a career which would allow me to make more money. And that's when I decided to go back to graduate school to get a Ph.D. and eventually, presumably, become a professor, although then I got sidetracked by becoming, first, a managing editor and then an editor of *October*, which took up 13 years of my life.

ALEX FIALHO: What did you write your dissertation on?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's *On the Museum's Ruins*—

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —my dissertation.

ALEX FIALHO: That's what I thought. And you finished that when?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: After I published it [laughs], '94; I published it in '93. I have a very weird career trajectory [laughs]. It's really hard when my students ask me advice about applying for jobs. And I just, actually, had an exchange with one of my students, and I said, "You know, I never really applied for a job in my life. I was always"—or I walked into the Guggenheim at the right time. The husband of my boss at the Guggenheim asked me if I would teach at The School of Arts—of Visual Arts. I—after I—Rosalind Krauss asked me to become the managing editor of *October*.

After that, I was out of a job, and then suddenly, someone invited to apply for a gay studies position at Sarah Lawrence College. I was invited to come to Rochester as a visiting professor. So I don't know how to apply for a job, almost [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Nice. Where did you go after [leaving -DC] *October*? What types of projects? What type of writing?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: After *October*?

ALEX FIALHO: After the AIDS issue of *October*?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, okay.

ALEX FIALHO: How did your writing around AIDS develop from there?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I'd made a decision—I can remember this fairly calculated decision. Most people in ACT UP didn't just go to ACT UP meetings and demonstrations and participate in that way, but also joined one or another of the various committees to work on some specific issue. And I didn't do that, and there—and I—there was a period of time when I felt like I wasn't doing my full part. And maybe during the time I was working on AIDS issue of *October*, I felt like I was doing my part because I was—I was so utterly engrossed in it. That it—I couldn't have done anything more. But then after that, I came to the conclusion that what I could do was to bring the knowledge, expertise that I already had developed as an—as an art critic and as an editor of *October*, that that's what I could do, that I could write.

I—from the very beginning, while I was working on the AIDS issue of *October*, I was often, in that whole period of the 1980s, invited to give talks at art schools, museums, universities, and so on. And so from the early-'80s, right through the '80s, I gave quite a lot of these kinds of lectures, and they were usually versions of what I eventually published. And sometimes, I wrote something not for the purpose of publishing it, but for a conference. And then eventually, I would retool it and publish it. And that's how almost all of my writing has been done; it's been for a particular—I've had an invitation to do something. It's been occasional in that sense. But I was also always—or have been mostly working on a subject or a series of subjects. And so someone says, "Would you contribute to this? Would you write a paper for this conference?" And I think, well, if it can be about AIDS, I will. Or if it can be about Warhol, I will—or depending on what I'm working on.

So when I was invited to give lectures in this period, they were—the first one that I remember giving as a lecture was "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic." I probably did it on several occasions, but the one that I most remember was that the Society for Photographic Education, which is a professional—academic/professional society, was having its annual meeting in Houston. And Edward Said was to give one of the—I think it was actually the 25th anniversary of the Society for Photographic Education, which by the way, was something which was essentially founded by Nathan Lyons, who died this year, but who started the Visual Studies Workshop, but he was at the Eastman House in Rochester before. And he brought all of these photographic educators to Rochester for a conference, and the following year, they all met in Chicago and formed this society, this professional society. Up until then, photography had no place in the Academy.

Anyway, I—it was the 25th anniversary, and Edward Said was to give a—one of the main speeches, and he cancelled at the last minute, and they invited me to take his place. And what I had prepared was "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," which I gave as one of the major talks at that very large national convention. And it was very well received; most of my AIDS lectures were well received. And there was this general sense of urgency, I think, by then throughout American life, intellectual life, art life, that AIDS was an issue that we had to grapple with [... -DC].

And so then, various conferences began to be organized on the subject of AIDS. And I think the next thing that I wrote was "Portraits of People with AIDS," for a conference in London, Ontario, which is coincidentally the town that John Greyson is from. And it was [at the University of Western Ontario ... -DC]. So this was in—this was in November of 1988, so it's probably half a year after the issue actually finally came out. And so it was fairly clear to me, from the moment of doing the AIDS issue of *October*, that I would be then working on AIDS, that my intellectual work would be on AIDS, and I—as I mentioned last night, I taught a course on AIDS video at Rutgers. I—there was a—by then, there were conferences [about AIDS -DC]. And so many of the texts that are published in *Melancholia and Moralism*—some of them are published for the first time in this book. They were written as

panel presentations. The one on the AIDS quilt, for example, was written for one of the various public showings of the AIDS quilt, or a portion of it.

And so that's what I was doing for—between '87 and '95, I suppose—"Painful Pictures" was written in '95—no, even later because that was written for the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras panel at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. I was invited back to the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras in '98, so the final essay in my collection is '98. So it's a full—it's a full decade of my life that that's more or less exclusively what I did. I think I wrote a response—in '96, there was special issue of *October* that was an attack on Visual Studies that I felt the necessity of responding to. I had pretty much avoided the world of *October* from 1990 until then, but it felt personal, in a way, because I was teaching the founding program of Visual Studies in America. And they did this—one of their questionnaire issues on visual studies, and it was very much couched as an attack. There were attack pieces by Rosalind Krauss and Al Foster and so on.

And I wrote something about that for a conference presentation, and eventually, I published it in an essay called "Getting the Warhol We Deserve." And that essay was published, probably in '98, but I wrote it in '97, I think. So there was—that's when I began to move, partly through my teaching, away from writing exclusively about AIDS. And over the course of my writing about AIDS and teaching about it—so it's not just writing because—many of these things are written as lectures. I'm teaching courses at Rochester on AIDS. I think even when I taught at UCLA in 1995—I was the Arts Council Chair Professor at UCLA—I think I—maybe I was doing queer theory at that point. But as I said, I also became part of this other academic circuit, which was queer theory, and I wrote about AIDS in that—in that context, as well, where other people weren't necessarily—they weren't necessarily AIDS-related conferences. They were sexuality-related conferences.

And in fact, even *Morning and Militancy*, which was written in [1989 -DC], I said—I think I told you last night, I was—it was written initially for the English Institute at Harvard, which is one of the stuffiest possible conferences. It's done in—it's done in August [laughs], if you could imagine. And it's—there are several different—each year, there are several different groups of talks on a theme, and this particular year, there was one called "Gay Men in Criticism." It was—

ALEX FIALHO: It's an annual academic conference in August?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: In August, yes.: "Gay Men in Criticism." The director of the conference that year was Eve Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and—the particular thematic grouping was organized by D.A. Miller. Eve and David had been very, very close friends, and they had—by the time of that conference—a falling out and did not speak to each other, and it was very awkward because I was friends with both of them. [... -DC]. And then I gave it—I think I told you last night—as the keynote at the Gay and Lesbian Studies Conference at Yale later that—in the fall.

And that—so I think my—there were—there are various different topics. I think it's one of the things that's striking is how little of it is—that how many essays are not really about art at all. Or generally, they have—they have something to do with art, so there's one—there's something that I wrote called "Randy Schilt's Miserable Failure," which was done for a conference that was organized by Martin Duberman. And in that eventually, I come to John Greyson film called *Zero Patience*, which was a musical about Patient Zero—the famous Patient Zero, so even if I—but essentially it's about Randy Schilt's *And the Band Played On* about the—it's a second critique that I did, essentially, of that book after "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic". "Accommodating Magic" was about Magic Johnson's coming out as HIV positive and the way the media responded to that, so it really had nothing—[... -DC] there was often a kind of art or culture hook to what I was doing, but it wasn't essential.

And "Mourning and Militancy," which was—it's for me the most important [work] I wrote about AIDS—was the last thing that I published in *October* as well. And it was the first—it was the first of my essays where I begin with a personal—very personal anecdote about the death of my father and a failure to mourn. And that implication of myself and that reliance on my personal—a personal voice, an anecdote, was another shift in gears in my writing and became increasingly—it affected my AIDS writing from that point on to the point where, eventually, the final piece that I wrote, which was also for a talk in Australia for the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras at a university, was a piece in which I deal with my own seroconversion.

And so then when I finished with AIDS, so to speak—that is, when I decided that I needed to write about other things and, I suppose, felt a certain amount of the burnout of—that AIDS activists—most of the AIDS activists I knew felt. It was very prolonged for me because I lasted in ACT UP longer than many of my friends, so going to the meetings was a little depressing because the meetings had become depressing anyway because of the in-fighting, but also depressing then because my friends had just stopped going because they just couldn't handle it anymore, but I stuck it out for a very long period of time and then, but then I prolonged it still more by continuing to take it as an intellectual subject for another [...DC] five or six years.

But then, when I wrote "Getting the Warhol We Deserve," I—in '98, I began to move toward what would become my next project, which was a book on Warhol's films. I didn't know exactly that that's what I would do at that point. I was thinking about '60s queer culture as a kind of prelude to '70s queer culture, which I came to write about in *Before Pictures*, but that—my interest in writing about Warhol's films was partly an autobiographical interest and memoir-like interest. It was partly about wanting to do a kind of critical archaeology of the world—the queer world that I had come into in New York when I started hanging out with the Warhol crowd at Max's Kansas City. So I started going there in 1969, Warhol made films from '63 to '68, so the films—the films that I knew after I became part of that world were the films that Morrissey made, not the films that Warhol made. It—I knew very few of the Warhol films before I began working on the book.

I had seen the *Chelsea Girls* in college, but there is—there was—an autobiographical interest in looking at this material and thinking about it, and even some slightly memoir-like, aspects to some of the writing. I tell, for example, the story of my—Holly Woodlawn living with me and giving her my mother's Adrian gown, which is something that I thought would be one of the stories that I would tell in *Before Pictures*, but I used it for the Warhol book instead. In any case, all of this is to say that I think beginning at that moment—not really just with "Mourning and Militancy" because certainly everything that I was writing in my AIDS work had a very direct, personal aspect to it. It came—a lot of it came out of my experience of being under attack, and I remember, when this book came out, which is much later in 2002, I had a therapist at the time, and she had a response to this book, which I found really strange [laughs], given that I had been in therapy with her for quite a while.

She said, "Until I read this book, I didn't realize how angry you were." And, you know, the degree of anger that comes out of this book for me is pretty mild compared with how angry we reasonably were at this time. So, yeah, it's—so it is fueled by my own—my own experiences and my own feelings about, you know, I'm just looking at the—talk about the AIDS quilt and my complex feelings about that quilt, my experience of the first time I saw it, which was at the March on Washington and seeing, as I wrote in the essay, not only the panels for people who meant something specific to me, like Michel Foucault, but also people who I recognized, not as specific people, but as types of people that I knew through the kinds of things that were attached to their quilts, the kinds of memories that they solicited.

So—also, I think another thing about my writing in relation to my AIDS work is that, particularly, not with this book, but with—well, I think it spills over into this book, too, and I think it's true—I think it's true of my writing, but when I wrote *Aids Demo Graphics*, which was 1990, I intended it for a non-academic audience. I intended it for a wide audience. I intended it to be what it turned out to be. I was using the academy a lot lately as a teaching tool, but it was about dispersing information about AIDS activism and how it was done and also writing a kind of synoptic history through graphic images and fact sheets and so on about ACT UP's demonstrations from '87 to '90, so I was really interested in writing accessible prose. I think that's mostly true of my AIDS writing in general, that it's written for a non-specialist audience. Even if the occasions for which I initially wrote them were academic conferences, I think my—the audience I projected in my writing was a wider, non-specialist one.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. A follow-up, and it makes sense as you segue into Warhol's films as a book project is, for me, it feels like video practices were really central—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —to the formation of cultural activism and cultural work around HIV—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and you said—when you talk about it, you talk about Gregg's videos that I didn't know; this Stashu Kybartas film *Danny*—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —but that seems really important.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Stashu is his full name, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And I'm just curious to know more about that AIDS course that you taught at Rutgers, just to parse that out a bit, if you can remember.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [Laughs.] I would be curious to know too. I—yeah and, of course, I was—

ALEX FIALHO: Maybe what year even.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [... -DC]. I taught at Rutgers in the spring semester of 1988. So it's right actually when the *October* issue came out and so, I told you before that I had—that one of the things that my reading group did



was to look at videos, including AIDS videos, as well as videos that were about gay material in general, gay-lesbian material. And—but at that point, a lot of it—a lot of what was happening was AIDS videos. So there was quite a lot already, really right off the bat. And there continued to be a lot. So I had written about some of it already in—in the AIDS issue of *October*. And, of course, Gregg became a friend and he was making videos with Jean Carlomusto for the *Living with AIDS* cable TV program, which was a GMHC-sponsored program. And I was in some of those videos, and I was interested—once I determined to do the course, of course, I looked into what else was available. I was also in my own writing [... -DC] looking at broadcast television programs—early programs on AIDS, like really, really phobic stuff and—

ALEX FIALHO: Was that part of the course?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't remember. I may have shown some of it, but it was inevitably part of the course because some of the early AIDS videos were using that material and commenting on it, criticizing it. I still have stuff that I taped off of television, or that somebody taped off of television up there somewhere among my old [laughs] VHS tapes. But yes, I think that video was the activist practice that was most visible in that whole period of time. And even to the extent that by the time that Gregg made *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, which I wrote about in one of my later AIDS essays, the essay called "Demoralizing Representations of AIDS," there's already a reflection back on the part of Gregg, on his own history of making AIDS activist videos. So there's already a kind of self-reflexive aspect of AIDS activist video within the 10 years these tapes were being made. And, of course, it was something happening within ACT UP as well, something that I write about in *AIDS Demo Graphics*, about how the primary audience for AIDS activists were AIDS activists ourselves, to make us cohere around the information that we were—that we were all dealing with and to give us kind of an image of ourselves to constitute us as political activists, as well as to represent us as political activists.

And so I was—I was making arguments about video production from the very beginning, and eventually, in my book, I take on some of the more mainstream films about AIDS as well, like *Philadelphia*, the Jonathan Demme film. So I think that, yes, that was something that I—it was something that I was also teaching when I went to Rochester. [... -DC]. Having been trained as an art historian and having taught in art history departments or art schools, having a visual object to talk about was central to my practice as a teacher. So it was kind of a natural in a way, where—although in 1988, to give a course in an art school at Rutgers exclusively dealing with this subject of AIDS video was probably pretty out there. But it was—as I recall, and it was a long, long time ago, but as I recall, it was something that the students really were taken with and really got into, too.

ALEX FIALHO: Jumping here, but let's talk a little bit about your move away from *October*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And *How Do I Look?*—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —and the work you did there afterwards, but then moving away from the journal in the '90s.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I've told this story—I've probably told it in the other oral history as well. It's a—it's a complicated subject, of course, because it's—and sometimes I analogize it to a divorce because we—I was there for 13 years. I had a complex and conflicted relationship Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, who are notoriously difficult people, but also people I admired, so I had a very ambivalent connection to them. I also owed them—they were my bosses [unintelligible]—I had my job through them, and they both had real paying jobs in universities with benefits and all that, and I had none of that. \$15,000 a year was the most I was ever paid at *October*, so I was—and I had no benefits. I was paid essentially as a consultant, so it was a not a good job, and I really screwed myself by hanging onto it for 13 years. I loved doing it, and it gave me an enormous amount of freedom, so—and it also put me at the center of an interesting intellectual world. That meant a lot to me, but financially, I was screwed, and it has made it hard for me to accumulate enough retirement money to retire with because, for 13 years, when I might have been getting benefits, I wasn't.

Anyway, as I recall it, I had—I had become more and more the person who was doing *October*. I was always the person who was at the office. Rosalind and Annette never were at the office. There was no space for them in the little offices we had—our office was a nook somewhere with a computer and a desk and another chair or something. We had meetings either at Rosalind's loft and at Annette's loft. And that's the way it always was. They almost never came by the office. If they had something that I needed to have, I would go and pick it up. So even though I was a full editor, in some ways they were always the ones in charge. But that being said, by the time I did the AIDS issue, a little before then, maybe, and more afterwards, they had de-cathected a bit from *October*, and they weren't—they weren't—I was having to find material to publish more than they—and they weren't doing their share. I think they were tired of it, frankly.

It is tiring to put out a quarterly journal the way *October* was done because it's not a journal, so far as I know,

even now, but certainly then, it was not run the way peer-reviewed, scholarly journals are with boards, people sending unsolicited manuscripts, manuscripts being sent out to readers to [evaluate -DC] them. None of that took place. We solicited what we wanted from whom we wanted. We very rarely got manuscripts over the transom, and [we rarely -DC] paid attention to them. It was part of the guilty factor of my job, was that there would be a stack of manuscripts that people mailed to us, and I never had time to look at those manuscripts.

Occasionally, you know, somebody would send an email, and maybe I would then look at their manuscript, but that's not the way *October* was done. So it meant that you had to go after the kind of material that you felt was what the magazine stood for and wanted. The particular—and, you know, it was something where you knew what your colleagues were working on and you could say, I want that for *October*, or you would have—I was close friends with Benjamin Buchloh at that period of time, and it was I who brought Benjamin to the magazine, and Benjamin's interests in Broodthaers was something that I was interested in, and he proposed we do we do an issue and, of course, it was obvious that we knew it made sense to do an issue on Marcel Broodthaers. But it's—it was an enormous amount of work to get the material that you need in this relentless pace to put out a magazine in a quarterly way. So, at that point, I had Joan Copjec and also my assistant, Terri Cafaro, who did a certain amount of the editing and, you know, the kind of daily work of the magazine. But we were—you know, I laid out the magazine. I did—I did—

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —everything. I did—it was, from start to finish, from manuscripts to completed object, I was doing it all, and initially, it was here, when it came—when I was asked to do it. I was doing it out of this apartment. Anyway, the point is that Rosalind and Annette had pulled back a bit. I was feeling in the gap. The AIDS issue is the most extreme version of that. As I told you last night, they didn't read it in advance, I'm quite sure. They just vaguely agreed that it would be fine for me to do it. I think in a—in a way, like, go ahead. It gives us a whole issue that we don't even have to think about. It's your subject, not ours. All of that implicit, and then as I said the response to the issue was quite overwhelming, and I think, over time, they developed a certain competitive attitude to that.

And then there was eventually—so this is issue number 43; my last issue was 51; that's where "Mourning and Militancy" was published. We were to do—issue number 52 was to be, *How Do I Look?* The papers from *How Do I Look?* And they refused two of the papers, and I think they did it intentionally to cause me to leave the magazine. I think they picked a fight; they knew perfectly well that we couldn't publish four out of six papers. It was—the papers were not mine to give the journal; they were my reading group's, so it was a collective. And it was a collective—*How Do I Look?* Was a conference with six papers and invited—we had a lot of money from a New York granting agency to organize this conference. And we were able to fly people in to simply be in the audience. So we flew Isaac Julien in from London and John Greyson in from Toronto, and we had a stellar crowd at this conference. The papers were given; we had a lot of—a luxurious amount of time for discussion. So the *How Do I Look?* Book consists of the six papers, plus audience responses to them, and that's what it was, a package. It was clearly a package; there was no way you could pull it apart, and they knew that. And I'm convinced that they knew it, and I'm convinced that they used it as a tool to pick a fight with me.

And I had no—there, literally, was a fight; there was a meeting; it was very hostile. I walked away from it knowing I had no choice but to leave. And I think—I think it's a combination of things. I think they felt they were losing control of what was, for them, *their* magazine; it had become too much my magazine, not only because of the attention to the AIDS issue but also what I was doing in the meantime because they were—they weren't paying attention particularly.

There was a very brilliant essay by Gertrud Koch, who is a German feminist film theorist, one of the founders of *Frauen und Film*, which was a German women's film magazine, someone who was in Frankfurt when Adorno was there, a brilliant woman, who wrote an essay on pornography. And I illustrated it with [laughs] a cum shot because part of the point of the—of her essay was that female pleasure is not visualizable in the way that male sexual pleasure is, through the cum shot, so I illustrated one. There was a magazine that had stills from a Jeff Stryker porn film with a big, throbbing cock and a cum shot, and I used it to illustrate Gertrud's essay, and I know that Rosalind was totally freaked out by that.

So—but that's the—the curious thing is, I mean, I can give you this analogy: they were the editors of the magazine; they shouldn't have been surprised by anything that appeared in their magazine. It happened once before in a very funny way. When we did the Leo Steinberg's *Sexuality of Christ*, Leo profusely thanked me in his acknowledgments for my work with him on the issue. And he thanked Rosalind for suggesting that he publish it in *October*, and he didn't thank Annette at all, which is my recollection of it. I mean, I could get you the actual acknowledgements, but—and Annette was humiliated and infuriated that she was slighted. She wrote him a note saying something like, "Decisions are taken at *October* by all of the editors, not one of the editors," assuming—meaning that, of course, that if the decision was made to publish this issue, it was not Rosalind's decision; it was Rosalind and Annette's decision." And Leo wisely wrote her back and said, generally, if there is a

problem with a book, the acknowledgments to a book, it would be noticed by the editor in advance of the publication, not after publication. So there you have it.

I was the hands-on person. I always was. That's why they hired me. And I got blamed if there was any mistake in any issue. Annette would be furious if there was a proofreading error. And of course, inevitably, there always were and once on a cover, actually; I think someone's name, a French name was misspelled, and I didn't catch it, but of course, she didn't read blue lines, she didn't read, you know—anyway. So I think it's—as Annette herself would say, it's overdetermined and complicated, and I was moving in my own direction because I had become an AIDS activist, and that's what I was doing, and that was different from what *October* had stood for and from what Rosalind and Annette's interests are, and that's perfectly reasonable in a way. If you look at what *October* has done since I left, you can see what the sensibility of Rosalind and Annette is and reflect on, first, the five men that they hired to replace me, five, straight, white men to replace me, and the—then as *October* developed over time, when even those people became tired of producing a quarterly magazine, then they began hiring new editors, and those editors have almost exclusively been their students. So that sensibility gets carried on, even, through generations.

Oddly very few of those students of all of them, so it includes Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, not so much Annette; there's one student of Annette's who's an editor. Rosalind, not such much Denis Hollier. So the art historians who are their students are—many of them are—they're not exclusively their students, but a lot of them are. And they represent a very similar sensibility about modernism. At one point, I gave—at the Whitney Program I gave, as a talk, "Getting The Warhol We Deserve," which contains a critique of Hal Foster, and Hal Foster is one of the main people who teaches at the Whitney program, and Ron Clark, who runs the Whitney program, who was infuriated by my talk, partly because the students at the Whitney program were kind of rebelling against Hal and his teaching, and Ron was trying to manage that, and then I came in and gave them a language for criticizing Hal. And he said to me, what we do at the Whitney program is modernist studies, not cultural studies, and I thought that was a very good expression of sort of a differentiation that was being made, even back then at *October* when I was pushed out. We don't do cultural studies. And truly they did not; they did not do cultural studies; they did high modernist studies in a sense.

But when I was there, from the beginning, it was, I think, more postmodernism and French theory and had a wider disciplinary compass. It wasn't so strictly what it has subsequently become, I think. Although, from the very beginning, Rosalind and Annette had, of course, had a very specific set of interests and group of artists that they supported and—I expanded that to some degree, and others who followed expanded it a little bit more and things changed a bit, but still I thought—I eventually came to think that that group of artists that they supported like Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown and Hollis Frampton and Robert Morris, Michael Snow, that whole generation that they were very much involved with, I thought of that, too, as the beginnings of postmodern art, not an extension of modernist art. Anyway, that makes the story a little long [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Good to know for the context, though, that we're moving through. By that point, we're at 1990 I believe.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: And to move back over to an AIDS conversation, at that point, you probably have lost—there's so much loss happening, and I'm just interested to hear if there are any artists who you knew or otherwise, whose work you think is maybe under known, who were lost to AIDS-related complications? Or maybe, you know, just even in reading *Before Pictures* or the conversations that we're pulling out, there's names like Antonio Lopez or, you lived with Stephen Varble for a little while; Craig Owens's very known and a critic or historian; Bill Olander as a curator. These are just names that I'm pulling out; if any of those jump out to be spoken about or anyone else comes to mind, I'd be interested to know.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, before I mention one of—someone who died of AIDS, it was around the time that I went to Berlin; one of the first close friends that I lost to AIDS was René Santos.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow, amazing artist.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. I'm not sure that I—there was enough, I think, maybe separation in between my art world and my queer world that a lot of people that I knew who died of AIDS were not connected to the art world at all. Or if they were, they were—their connection might have been through—they might have had mutual friends through me. Craig was, of course, someone who I was very close to before he got AIDS, and then we—Craig and Rosalind had a very bad breakup, long before my break up with Rosalind, and it was really—it was very traumatizing for Craig. Craig, like me, was a student of Rosalind, and he left graduate school, and he had been very involved with *October*, and, of course, he no longer was, and he went to work at *Art in America* at that point. And that was difficult for my relationship with Craig because he was very clearly wronged. I knew—I witnessed what happened, and it was very unfair, and I knew that, and he knew that I knew that. But I wasn't in

a position to leave *October* in solidarity with Craig because it was my job. It was not Craig's job. Craig was not—Craig was writing for *October*, and he was close to Rosalind, but he was not working for money for *October*.

So by the time that Craig became ill—and increasingly, when Craig was ill, he didn't see people; towards the end of his life, he only saw, I think, the three women who edited his collected writing and his lover, so the four people who edited his work were the four people that he saw. Everyone else was cut out of his life. But [... -DC] Craig's and my friendship had cooled by then, in any case. And I—I mean I encountered him in all kinds of situations, like he was part of that—the Dia conversations, for example.

So I'm not really sure that I can—there are people that I, of course, learned about later, but they weren't people who were my friends, or close to me, and the people—there were people that I named and that you named—Stephen Varble I had lost contact by at that time. Fernando Torm; do you know Fernando Torm? I knew him through Stephen; that's why he comes to mind. He was a Chilean—do you know him? Do you know his—

ALEX FIALHO: I know the name.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, he was John Kelly's pianist when John Kelly did his Dagmar Onassis recitals. He was trained by Claudio Arrau, a great Chilean pianist, and Fernando was Chilean and moved here, escaping the Pinochet regime. I knew him in the early-'70s. He was in—he is Fernando in Yvonne Rainer's film *Lives of Performers*, her first feature film. And Fernando was sort of in and out of my life, and eventually, in the period when I was working on AIDS, he was—became more back into my life, and then he eventually died. He wasn't an artist as such; he was a pianist and an actor, and—I don't know.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you want to speak at all to your relationship or the work of René, who I think is under-known across the board.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. You know, René and I were real—and his boyfriend, Brad, were close friends for—in the early- to mid-'80s. [... -DC]. One thing I remember about René, particularly, he was very sophisticated, and he was an opera queen. And he knew opera in a way that I didn't at all. I was only learning opera at the time I knew him.

I remember an evening that he and, I think, Brad and I spent with Richard Miller. Richard Miller was a—professionally, he was a translator for the United Nations, but he was a gay man, older than me; he was a very great translator, and he translated a lot of material for *October*. He was a friend of Annette's, actually, and he had lived for a long time in Paris, and he was a great beauty as a young man. And he was a classic opera queen, who had an extraordinary record collection. I just remember a hilarious evening of having dinner with René and Brad and Richard at Richard's apartment on the Upper East Side and listening to opera and just, like, being kind of dazzled by René's knowledge and his wit. He was a very funny, funny person.

René had a show at Artist's Space, and he did work that was *Pictures*-like work, but I didn't know it until two, three, four years [after the *Pictures* show -DC], but he did stuff with, like, actual film stills, I believe. And then, eventually, Bill Olander did a show with René at the New Museum—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —of these, what I remember are, the dog paintings—paintings in various different styles with their subjects being various breeds of dogs. Do you know these paintings?

ALEX FIALHO: I don't know those works.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And they were amazing. I don't know what happened [to them -DC]. René's story was one of those terrible kind of stories, of which you heard many in those days, in the early days—of people, days of people dying from AIDS. You know, his parents swooped in at the last moment; they took everything away from Brad, including the rent-controlled apartment; they—and I think they destroyed a lot of his work. And they wouldn't—they didn't want to acknowledge anything about René because they didn't want to acknowledge that he was gay. They didn't want to acknowledge that he had AIDS, of course.

I think a lot of—as I recall, this horror story, for the most part happened—I could be wrong about this, but I think it happened when I was in Berlin because I don't remember being present for it. I remember seeing Brad after the fact and hearing the stories. David Deitcher knew René as well as I did and I think stayed friendly with Brad longer and was particularly attached to René's work. But it was—so whether or not there's enough of René's work that survived, I don't know, because I don't know how much—I don't believe he had a dealer; I don't think the work was really collected.

The show, I remember, at the New Museum, was an extraordinary show. I don't know if there's a catalogue for it, even; I don't have one. I don't think there probably was. When did Bill die, do you remember?

ALEX FIALHO: '90, I would guess. ['89 -AF] He had cofounded Visual AIDS, and that's '88, and I don't think that he lived much longer.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay. So he might have done that—I don't think he did that show posthumously, though, I think. I think —

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, and I think René showed a bit with Hudson.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, that could be.

ALEX FIALHO: At [Hudson's -DC] Feature [Feature, Inc.].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: That would make sense.

ALEX FIALHO: But I know Hudson primarily worked with artists, living artists, if not exclusively.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And don't think of Feature as an '80s gallery—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I don't either.

ALEX FIALHO: We'll piece it together in a little bit. I'll look quickly because I'm curious; '86 he passed away. René.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: René. Okay. So—

ALEX FIALHO: And Bill passed away in—I think it's '89.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So that may be because I say that I was in Berlin in '85, but I went back [in 1986 -DC]. I wish I knew the chronology [laughs] of things exactly.

ALEX FIALHO: He passed away in '89, Bill.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay. I think I, I think I wasn't in Berlin for the calendar year; I think I was more, like, the academic year. But anyway, more like '85, '86 I think. Okay, anyway. There are other figures, of course, that I knew well, who died of AIDS, but they're all people who're well known like Marlon Riggs, for example.

ALEX FIALHO: Who you knew well?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes and Stuart Marshall I knew. Of course, Stuart was one of the people who gave a paper in *How Do I Look?* Someone just got in touch with me; someone is doing some kind of work in England on Stuart Marshall now, an exhibition or something like that.

ALEX FIALHO: Conal [McStravick]?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: He reached out to Visual AIDS as well. How did you know Marlon, or in what ways?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, I don't know [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: The rounds.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: You know, my circles, in that period of time, were among people who had involvements in the world of AIDS activism and AIDS cultural work, and I didn't know Marlon well, so—but I—yeah, I don't know. I can't remember how I would have met him. But I wonder if Marlon—I don't think he was at the *How Do I Look?* conference. Anyway.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm bouncing around a little bit with my line of questioning, but that's because you're answering very thoroughly with each prompt. So this is one topic I did want to make sure we touched on, which is the IV drug user community, and I think that's one central community in this conversation that's often overlooked or left out of discussions, and I think that, in rereading some of your work, you work to bring into the picture in ways that it's often not. And one thing that I was intrigued by was this idea of junky pneumonia that you—I think it's a footnote, but you bring up as, perhaps, predating 1981, which—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh right.

ALEX FIALHO: —is often thought about as the year of AIDS "beginning," but that's because it was found in a homosexual community that may have had healthcare. At any rate, I just wanted to have the IV user drug community and that prompt, to raise it to you, either in relationship to your own work or [in the context of ACT UP -AF].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, it was not as foregrounded in ACT UP as queer sexuality was, but it was always there. And there were groups of people who worked on it exclusively. And some of those people were my friends like Richard Elovich and Daniel Wolfe. Daniel Wolfe is still—Daniel Wolfe now works—I'm having lunch with him tomorrow; I haven't seen him for a long time but, he works for the Soros Foundation to do harm reduction education and HIV all over the world. Soros, as I'm sure you know, funds a fairly, what I would just call reasonable, but other people would call radical agenda on drug use, countering U.N. policy, U.S. policy particularly, U.S.-driven policy all over the world, which is extremely reactionary.

And that was—so fighting for needle exchange was a very big issue in ACT UP among certain people particularly. But for all of us, it was something we were educated about. And I think I wrote most specifically about it in my—what was initially a talk, but an essay called "Right On, Girlfriend," where I'm talking about alliances and identities. But I also remember Gregg, very early on, talking—like there's a rhetoric in—I think it's already there in *Testing the Limits* where he's giving a speech, and it reappears in *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, where he's saying, "Who are the faggots, and who are the junkies? Who are the drug users, and who are the"—you know. And he's—and that's partly because of Gregg's own identification of his alcohol use with his seroconversion. Richard Elovich is someone who had been a heroin addict. So, these are queer people who had drug issues and, therefore, could recognize that the separation of so-called communities, of identity communities, were not so hard and fast.

I think in a certain amount of my writing all along, I was interested in trying to bring—to shed some light on less visible and less mainstream communities. So, for example, I think I talk about in one of the—in the introduction of "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" in the AIDS issue, Columbian gay men in bars in Queens, for example. And that's because I had a very, one of the really close friends that I had, who I lost to AIDS, was a Columbian guy, and we used to go to the bars in Queens all the time. We used to hang out there and eat Columbian food when Jackson Heights was really a Columbian neighborhood more than a multiethnic neighborhood.

ALEX FIALHO: What's his name?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Hector Caicedo, C-A-I-C-E-D-O. And we, like, went to these bars; there was a whole range of them in Queens. I remember once going with Hector, the first time we went, and we did a kind of tour of the bars in Jackson Heights, and he would say to me, "Oh, all of the people in this bar are from Medellín." You could tell by their accents, and they were, like, that specialized [laughs]. But there was also one of the great hustler bars of New York of that period, the Magic Touch, which was, you know, a combination of, just, neighborhood bar, hustler bar, was a wonderful place. It lasted for quite a long time actually. There are still bars in that neighborhood, of course, but they're no longer strictly Columbian, I think, but they were at that time. Little, tiny bars with drag shows on the bar itself and things like that. And there were dance palaces, also, where you could dance the cumbia and things that were very native to Columbia. So, I had an experience of that, and I thought, well, these are people who, when we're thinking about, say, sex education or AIDS education for gay constituencies, we can't just think about the village in Chelsea; we have to think about other gay neighborhoods and other places where there are gay communities as well.

ALEX FIALHO: Another theme that I pulled out in looking back at your work was this idea that there was sort of a privileging of artists dying over ordinary people. And I guess even my question a few questions back about under-known artists might be doing that or maybe even this project even of itself through the Smithsonian—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, sure.

ALEX FIALHO: —is doing that, but it's also doing a lot of other work. And I'm just keen to hear you speak to that a little bit, in the sense of, how was that happening in that way? Was it because they were making a body of work that was speaking after they had passed or—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: No, it was because of a certain kind of attention that the media paid or that the art world itself was paying. Of course, the art world was feeling the losses due to AIDS because of the art of the people who—of the artists that were dying, curators and critics and people in the art world who were dying. So, there was—the art world was very drastically effected, but lots of worlds were very drastically effected. I think that, you know, if you read the obituaries in *the New York Times*, you're reading about people of a certain stature, for one reason or another. So, reading obituaries was one of the things we did in those days; I do now for a different reason. But I—we were, I think, parsing the language of obituaries; the term "long-term companion" comes from those. When it came to discussing survivors, who was included, who was not—whether or not AIDS itself was mentioned, all of those things mattered immensely.

I think I was—part of the polemic of the AIDS issue of *October* was that almost an argument with myself about a determination initially to do some art-related AIDS things in this cultural journal that I was editing because that was my area of expertise and then realizing that was way too narrow. And then in fact it was a problem, that the attention to individual people who were dying of AIDS, as opposed to the crisis of a huge epidemic that was affecting everybody, was a way of—one of the many ways that, in discourse, AIDS was being managed and made less of an issue that everybody had to deal with than it should have been.

There were other aspects of that polemic, of course, which was about how AIDS should be—or art [was being – DC] used to raise money for AIDS funding, rather than art actively engaging with the issue, so all of that sort of thing. At the same time, any of us involved in any particular world, the people who died of AIDS who were not my friends, but who were incredibly important in my life, like Charles Ludlam or Jack Smith—I mean, this could go on and on—

ALEX FIALHO: On and on.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —the names could. Certain of the great Cunningham dancers from that period, it just goes one and on, and so, of course, that's one way that I felt the losses of AIDS. On the other hand, I was also someone who occupied an ordinary gay world. I was somebody who went to gay bars all the time; I went to gay clubs all the time; and I had a lot of friends who had nothing to do with the art world at all and wouldn't know who Charles Ludlam was, if I had mentioned his name, or Jack Smith or any of these people, who were just people who I knew from the bars and that I had attractions to and developed friendships with or sexual relationships with. And in that world, I lost a whole lot of people whose names would not be known to anyone except their families and friends because they weren't deserving in the world of *The New York Times* of a public obituary.

So I was very acutely aware in that experience of a different—of occupying these different worlds, the art world, it's what I'm writing about in *Before Pictures*, is that these two worlds that were simultaneous and somewhat separate in my life and, in some sense, up through the time of—the time that I worked on AIDS, that was still the case, that I still had friends who were not connected to my professional life, gay friends, and they were gay friends who got sick and died. Hector would be an example of that; Hector was not an art world person.

So, I was—I think I was aware in my own—it's something I also write about in my experience of the AIDS quilt, is when I talk about ordinary people there, I mean ordinary in a sense of people that I recognized through things that I shared with them, in a sense that I'm an ordinary person, that we're all ordinary people, that we are—that we are not—that it's not about whether you're notable or not, but whether you share, as I shared, certain signifiers that I could see on panels of the AIDS quilt. And that was one of the things that really moved me about the AIDS quilt at the time, was seeing people of a type that I recognized.

There were so many ways in which AIDS was so badly reported on in the mainstream media that I was really sensitive to and that became the subject of my work, and that's one aspect of it, I think. And you know, we see the effects of that now because the epidemic continues, and we don't read obituaries daily in *The New York Times* of people dying from AIDS; we hardly ever do anymore. So it's as if people aren't dying of AIDS, but of course, people are, but it's because they are ordinary people, in the sense that they don't merit any attention, and I don't mean an obituary, of course, the obituaries have to determine whether or not they're going to write an obituary of a person in *The New York Times*, and I think that's done, I think, according to some rule of thumb whereby, if *The Times* has previously written about that person, that person has a file. But in any case, there are other ways in which you can report on the continued existence in the United States and the world at large of the AIDS epidemic and the causes for it, like the lack of needle exchange and so on. Occasionally, we do read those articles, but really not very often, and that's because the people who are dying are invisible to the mainstream media. That's something that, I think, I was noticing already then in a different way.

ALEX FIALHO: And shedding light on. Another question about that movement and I guess in relationship—or as something that you responded to in your writing—I'm thinking about "How to Have Promiscuity"—is the shift to safe sex practices at that moment; I'm just wondering, in a real tangible sense, about that shift, if it felt widespread. I know there was a lot of dialogue around a need for condoms, a need for conversation about status, a need for testing. Did that feel like something that happened? I know there's a lot of charged reasons.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I think it was a long process, and I think I only recognize it as such fully because it was debated on the floor of ACT UP, because there was a real resistance in the early days of ACT UP to calls for testing. And people didn't get tested. Some people did; some people didn't. I mean, it was a real issue that was discussed. It would have been an issue that I would have discussed prior to then—I already talked about having been tested against—without my permission in Berlin. But I think the adoption of safe sex practices, knowing what the safe sex practices would be, I don't think I encountered "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic," probably, until, working on the AIDS issue of *October* and through ACT UP.

ALEX FIALHO: The pamphlet by Richard Berkowitz and Dr. Sonnabend.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, for which "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" is named, of course. But certainly, I think we talked a little bit before about this whole period in the earlier '80s where we didn't know what was the cause, and we didn't know how it was transmitted, and we didn't know—so we didn't know how to be safe. I think once the virus was discovered, and it was clear how it was transmitted, it was never—it wasn't immediately really clear. Like, there was a lot of discussion about whether you needed to use a condom for oral sex. I guess, to some degree, there still is, but not very much.

So, it wasn't—I think, in my memory, the whole question of safe sex practice was not something that I fully, consciously embraced and understood and dealt with until I came back from Germany, and so this would have been in '86, so it's five years after the crisis begins, is made visible. But it took longer than people think, for people to figure out—first of all for the science to be done, and then secondly for the psychic adjustments and actual physical adjustments to be made to—of course, there were people who stopped having sex—because they were scared. And then there were people like me who thought, I'm not going stop having sex; it's just—it's too important a part of my life. Life was unthinkable without sex at that point in my life. I was too young; I was too happy [laughs] having sex, but at the same time, you didn't know; clearly it was going to be a gamble. It was pretty clear, I suppose, from pretty early on that we were dealing with something sexually transmitted. We didn't know for a fact, but yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I think it's a good pause moment.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay.

[Audio break.]

ALEX FIALHO: So as we move into sort of the last stretch of this conversation or oral history, I'm interested to hear more about you moving away from work centrally focused on HIV/AIDS. In some of the other interviews you've done, you've pointed to a few issues multiply determining burn out, larger structural issues; and you've said indeterminable ideas around healthcare and the global epidemic were involved; that you had contributed a body of work that felt substantial. If you could maybe speak to those issues or anything else that moved you into new directions.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that in my professional life [after *October* -DC]—and during the time I was working on AIDS was being a professor at the University of Rochester. And I had to teach classes; I had to have subjects for classes to teach. And one of those subjects, initially, when I was first teaching there—I started in '92—was AIDS. And then over time I begin inventing other classes. I moved, I think, my AIDS—my work on AIDS moved into the direction of queer theory, on the one hand, which was blossoming in the academy at that time and of which I felt a part and which was producing a lot of really interesting work that I wanted to teach.

I also taught for many years the required class for the incoming class of my graduate program, Visual and Cultural Studies, which was a colloquium just for that group of that students, where they form social bonds and share with each other the kind of interests that they come into the program with. So, it doesn't have a subject, per se, except for what we do in this program. And that for me meant the kind of theoretical material that we teach, which was everything from Frankfurt School Critical Theory to Poststructuralist Theory to Feminist and Queer Theory, and I would teach it that way. I taught it as a series of text that we looked at—and grappled with complex theories. But I was also teaching courses on contemporary art and eventually even in the late—I think I mentioned this; in the late-'90s, I developed a course on Los Angeles.

ALEX FIALHO: Off record, we talked about that.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh right, we were talking about it personally. But I developed this course on—I developed over time a series of courses that I think of as my amateur interest courses. So, things I'm not an expert in, things, in fact, that I don't know very much about, but that I have a love for. So now that would be dance. And sometimes those things turn into something more professional as dance has for me. L.A. hasn't, but I still teach the course and it's centered on the development of modern architecture of Los Angeles, which I had a kind of love affair with.

And so, I invented courses, and that inevitably moved my intellectual life in various directions. And one of the first ones was, as I said, a defense of Visual Studies after the *October* issue, and that pushed me a little bit toward what became the Warhol book. But that was also—the Warhol book was also a logical step from my involvement with queer theory. It also brought me back into the orbit of art with, in fact, someone who has, from the time that I began working on and until now, become probably the central figure of late-20th-century art, certainly in terms of the market, but much more interestingly, in terms of the prodigal nature of Warhol's involvements in all kinds of things.



One of my really good dissertation advisees has finished a book called *Andy Warhol, Publisher*, which is about his various involvements with all kinds of publishing, all kinds of—making books throughout his life; that's one aspect; that's a whole book's-worth, more than a book's-worth, of Warhol's career. So, he's—there are so many ways to approach Warhol. But of course, for me, fundamentally, it was about his queer sexuality.

I just saw a very interesting show at the Warhol museum where I was doing a reading from *Before Pictures* called *My Perfect Body, Andy Warhol and the Body*. Of course, Warhol was, as you probably know, extremely phobic about the AIDS epidemic and phobic, of course, about anything to do with hospitals and death because he essentially died and came back to life after he was shot, but for all kind of reasons, over-determined reasons. But there are ways in which the—certain of the tropes that appear in his paintings, towards what became the end of his life, so right around the time that I did the AIDS issue of *October*, in fact. He died in '87, '86?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I think '86.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. It was actually before the AIDS activist movement that he died but it's when—

ALEX FIALHO: '87.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: '87. He was, of course, involved in a—with a younger gay world with people like Keith Haring, but particularly Basquiat, not a gay world in Basquiat's case, but a drug user who didn't die of AIDS, but died of an overdose. And it's when he started making the Last Supper paintings and also making the paintings that were done in conjunction with Basquiat. There are all these ways in which the *Perfect Body* comes into his work, whether it's about the, you know, the perfecting of the nose in the *Before and After* paintings early on, which also come back late, to the sex parts and the torso paintings, the late, sort of abstracted torso paintings, body building; there's a fascinating obsession with the body that goes through all of his work as this show, pretty brilliantly, tells the story. But it's really interesting the way it works in the later work, which dovetails with the AIDS epidemic. And it's hard not to think, this is what Warhol is grappling with, at least unconsciously.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting. [There is a curator at The Warhol Museum, Jessica Beck, doing thoughtful research and writing on this topic. -AF]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So that's not something that I was—in my own work on Warhol, that I've had any awareness of particularly. But in any case, when I began working on Warhol, I also began teaching Warhol, and it was around the time I began teaching Warhol that *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* was published by a group of Duke students, then Duke students. They organized a conference and then did the book. And they were people that I knew. They were students of Eve Sedgwick. And one of them Jonathan Flatley has just written an extremely brilliant book on Warhol that Chicago is publishing.

ALEX FIALHO: On? What's it on, just curious?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Sorry?

ALEX FIALHO: What's it on specifically?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's called *Like Andy Warhol*. It's about how Andy Warhol's work entails a kind, through the—what Walter Benjamin called the mimetic faculty, a kind of liking and likeness that is neither identity nor difference but something in between. He sees his work as sort of technologies for liking things. And the final chapter is a long, very sustained, very amazing chapter about Warhol and race and is largely about *Ladies and Gentleman*, the series *Ladies and Gentleman*, but is also about the *Race Riot* paintings, about simply the way ink and blackness works in the silkscreen process. It's a little bit also about the collaborations with Basquiat. It's a very sustained analysis of Warhol's work in relation to race. It's, I think, really amazing.

Anyway, so there was—so the notion of a queer Warhol, after we had had a whole generation of excluding the queerness of Warhol, was something I was drawn to in my own work and in teaching. And my work was—because I was dealing with the films, the films were of course then neglected, the major neglected body of work of Warhol because they had not been accessible, but also because they were really queer and some of them really sexually explicit for their time; it's kind of hard to believe with a film like *Couch*, for example, that that film could have been made when it was made. So, I—by teaching Warhol, I was not only able to further my own research on Warhol, but to read all of the literature on Warhol and to develop a kind of perspective on the work and a perspective on the former scholarship and what I wanted to do in relationship to that, at the same that I was also furthering a project, as I saw it, of queer theory, and as I said, in some sense returning to a canonical artist to write about. But it wasn't about his being a canonical artist, but being a queer artist that attracted me. And I wrote about the queerest aspect of his work. And when you take on Warhol, I mean, you've taken on the world [laughs]. And he is so, as I've said, protean; there's so much to do with Warhol. If you did the films alone, it's a lifetime.

So, I've told this story in several of the interviews that I've given around the publication of my memoir, *Before Pictures*, which I keep referring to as a memoir. And you refer to it as a memoir. And I want to insist that's it's not a memoir [laughs]; it's a hybrid book that's criticism and memoir, and cultural history, and so on. But, anyway, people often ask me how I happened to write this book. And my answer is that both the Warhol book and this book are a product of ACT UP, not only because of the shift in my work towards cultural studies and queer theory through my AIDS work, but in a very specific way, which is that, I'm about 20 years older than most of my friends who were in ACT UP. And I experienced [gay -DC] New York in the '70s, and they did not except in its aftermath with the epidemic.

I told stories about it inevitably, as one does about one's life and also—but, also, more importantly, I think through the work that—some of the work that I criticized in "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic" and my other AIDS writing, a narrative was being put into place about gay liberation and about a liberated gay sexual culture of the '70s, that that was, you know, in the view of writers like Randy Shilts and Larry Kramer, whom I explicitly critique in "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," that was seen as a period of our immaturity, our irresponsibility, which lead inevitably to AIDS. With AIDS, we woke-up, became mature and proper citizens. And that narrative was being really put in place through that whole period. And then even more so, and worse so, in the work of Andrew Sullivan, and the people that I critique in the—Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile, all of these journalists who were writing about AIDS in the early-'90s and who were also attacking queer theory. So, I—back with ACT UP, friends at time said to me, "You should write about gay life in New York in the '70s." And so that was there; it was in the back my mind. I didn't take it all that seriously. But then it got deflected a little bit into this Warhol project, which was, as I said, a kind of archeology of the queer world that I came into. So, it's really—it's pre-'70s, '60s actually. I went to college in the '60s and I came to New York at the end of the '60s. So, that's not the queer world that I mostly experienced. But it's the one that I first came into with the Max's Kansas City scene. And so, that idea of writing about my own experience of queer life was there from that moment that my ACT UP friends said, "We need a counter narrative about queer life in the '70s, about liberated queer sexuality, which we don't want to lose to this conservative narrative," which in a way we did. I mean, gay liberation is something that people aren't so interested in. Gay marriage is what forms the interest, at least if you look at mainstream discourse in gay life.

So, I credit my experience with my young friends in ACT UP as having, in some sense, formed the idea of my writing some version of the book that I wrote in *Before Pictures*. That is a book about the first 10 years that I was in New York before I did the *Pictures* exhibition, where I wanted to look at my experience of this period where—the period that I would call the period of gay liberation. And the explosion of gay sexual culture in New York and how it provided a life for me, alongside of and in conjunction with, my life as an art critic, as an aspiring art critic at that point. So, there's a real—there's, for me, a very particular connection between my experience of my community in ACT UP with what I then went on to do, what I've most recently done, one of the things that I've recently done, because I've also been doing something else which is writing about dance.

ALEX FIALHO: And that leads me to another thing that you recently did, which was *Greater New York*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: —as a curatorial project.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Which I thought was a great show.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: You saw it?

ALEX FIALHO: Of course,

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh. Not very many people did. Oh, *Greater New York*, I'm sorry. I'm thinking—I was thinking not *Greater New York*, I was thinking -

ALEX FIALHO: *Mixed Use, Manhattan: [Photography and Related Practices 1970s to the Present]* .

DOUGLAS CRIMP: *Mixed Use, Manhattan*, yeah, sorry [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: The catalogue for which I have, which is great.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: *Greater New York*, I think a lot of people saw.

ALEX FIALHO: *Greater New York* actually has a lot of work in that was in *Mixed Use Manhattan*. It was my chance to bring some of that work to New York.

ALEX FIALHO: That makes sense to me.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: After the great disappointment of not getting that show to New York.

ALEX FIALHO: And I feel, obviously, the reverberations of that moment and a lot of those artists could be felt in *Greater New York*.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: I'm thinking of people like Charles Atlas, Gregg Bordowitz, Scott Burton, Rosalind Fox Solomon, Jimmy DeSana, fierce pussy, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, Nancy Brooks Brody, Carrie Yamaoka, Nelson Sullivan; it kind of goes on. And I'm just curious, for you to just speak about your curatorial practice, or the [four shows on your resume that you've curated -AF]. I was saying, off record, that I know about each show and they feel like important shows. So, I thought you had a lot more shows under your belt in a sense. So, anyway that show in specific, but also the ways that it relates to AIDS and the visual arts.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: I mean, there were, what, 100 artists in the show, so it wasn't specific in that sense but—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [... -DC]. I can't even remember. We haven't finished the final chap book that has the checklist in it. Well, first of all, I should say that *Greater New York* was, of course, a group effort.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, most definitely.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: There were great curators. And I was brought in by the three MoMA curators: Peter Eleey, who's the chief curator at MoMA PS1; his associate curator Mia Locks, who has subsequently gone on to [... curate -DC] the forthcoming Whitney Biennial; and Thomas Lax who is at MOMA proper as a curator in the performance—

ALEX FIALHO: —and new media.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —Media and Performance Department. And so, they were the curators for this iteration of *Greater New York*, which is an every five years' exhibition. And they decided that they wanted not to do a show of emerging artists as it had typically been in the earlier iterations. But one that included historical material as well. And it was partly [because there are -DC] enough emerging artists' shows already. There's one at the New Museum, there's the Whitney. [... -DC]. But also, that they were coming upon the 40 anniversary of the institution—

ALEX FIALHO: PS1.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —PS1, which was founded in '76. And so, they thought it would be interesting to deal a little bit with their own history and bring in some historical material. Peter Eleey had wished to bring *Mixed Use Manhattan* to PS1. But he had just come to PS1 at that time, and it was impossible to do. But I think that he regretted that not happening.

ALEX FIALHO: What was the subtitle of *Mixed Use Manhattan*?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: *Photography and Related Practices 1970s to the Present*.

ALEX FIALHO: At the Reina Sofia?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: At the Reina Sofia in Madrid, yes. The co-curator was Lynne Cooke. It was Lynne Cooke's proposal that we do the show, which started out interestedly enough as a show that had a configuration in Lynne's mind. She came to me, and she said, I'm thinking about doing a show around a core group of artists that includes Peter Hujar, who Lynne had talked to me about before, about our mutual interest in him, and then two people who had been very much influenced by Peter Hujar, David Wojnarowicz, obviously, and Zoe Leonard. And she knew of my interest in Alvin Balthrop, and she thought that that would be interesting to put in that mix as well. So, that's how it started. And then it just grew, and grew, and grew, and became an exhibition about artists using the city and coming up to the present and starting actually earlier than Peter Hujar's work. Or, yeah, because there's Danny Lyon in the show, a kind of prologue to the show *the Destruction of Lower Manhattan*.

And so, that's a configuration already of Zoe, an AIDS activist, Peter and David Wojnarowicz having both died of AIDS, Balthrop having documented this queer, sexual scene at the piers. So, that show had a kind of origin, actually, in something very connected to the world that I was interested in and the world that included—well, Zoe, for example, who I knew through ACT UP. I knew her not as an artist initially; I knew her as and AIDS activist initially. And so, anyway when it came to, five years later, being the person who was asked by this MOMA

curatorial team to provide something of historical experience. I was in New York in the period of, when PS1 was founded. None of them were. Well, Zoe I guess, probably was, but she was awfully young at that point.

So, sorry why am I saying? Zoe—no, it wasn't [laughs]—it was the curators that were not—scratch that about Zoe. Peter was not in—all of them were too young to have experienced that moment of the founding of their own institution. And it was very much of the moment that Lynne and I were talking about in the *Mixed Use Manhattan* exhibition. And so, it was a chance, as I said, to bring a certain amount of that work or artists from that period. So, probably the most obvious and striking examples were the prelude or the very beginning of the show, which was James Nares's film *Pendulum*, which was really the introductory work that you first saw when you—

ALEX FIALHO: It was amazing.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —were on the first floor. And then you walked immediately into the gallery that had the Alvin Balthrop photographs. And those works were in the Madrid show. Some of the people that you named, interestedly enough, were not—would seem to be connected with me—

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —like Rosalind Solomon, that was not my idea; that was Peter's idea. He is a big fan of her work. I had written critically of Rosalind Solomon's work in "Portraits of People with AIDS."

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Or not so much about critically of her work but of the rhetoric about work when it was shown at the Gray Art Gallery. Those portraits of people with AIDS were shown again fairly recently at the Bruce Silverstein gallery. And there was someone who worked there who—do you know Liam—Liam Van Loenen?

ALEX FIALHO: No.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's spelled L-O-E-N-E-N, I believe. I think it's a Dutch name. He's no longer there. But any way he got in touch with me and said, "We're doing this show of Rosalind Solomon's portraits of people with AIDS, and I know that you wrote about them, and I would really be interested for you to look at the show and see what you think about them now." And so, I did. And I was really favorably impressed with those pictures. And so, I felt very differently about them than I had when I wrote about them. And they have nothing to do with the Nicholas Nixon photographs, which I still loath.

So, then when Peter suggested that we show Rosalind Solomon, I thought that was a great idea. And Jimmy DeSana, too, I think it was possibly Peter, who suggested that we show Jimmy DeSana. I had recently seen of the really wonderful show of Jimmy DeSana's work at the Salon 94. I knew his work but didn't know it that well. I wasn't that attached to it but I was extremely impressed by that exhibition and loved it and was really happy to have it be in *Greater New York*. Charlie, definitely I had seen the show at Luhring Augustine. Charlie is someone I've written about, I've admired his work very, very, much. And I love *Here She Is*, the Lady Bunny piece. And that was actually, for me, one of the great successes of that show; it was very noticed. People loved it. It's a great work.

ALEX FIALHO: fierce pussy.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I—they asked me to—I wanted to—we all wanted to, but I particularly wanted to have an AIDS moment in the show. And that was sort of my brief. And of course, all of these things were worked out among all of us. But, fierce pussy and Joy, Carrie's work, which it was not all in the same room, in the same conjunction. But, fierce pussy and Joy and Donald Moffett were in the same room with Bobby Bordeau. Bobby Bordeau is someone that Peter is particularly interested in. But again, we were all perfectly happy to have Bobby Bordeau in the show. I knew Bobby from the GAA Firehouse actually. And—

ALEX FIALHO: Early-'70s.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. And Donald's—I don't know what that's—the Central Park series the Ramble series. It has a name. We'll find it. [Gold/Tunnel -DC]. That was also—we had several of those paintings in Madrid as well. I love that work. So, that isn't specifically AIDS-related work, but Donald was in the next room, as well, with AIDS-related work. So, there was that moment. And Nelson Sullivan was on a list of filmmakers that I wanted to show. And we ended up putting him in the galleries. I didn't make that selection. It was like by chance that the Lady Bunny appears in two places. I think it was Thomas Lax who actually made the choice of which tapes we would show. I did the film series entirely, with a little help from [... -DC] Jocelyn Miller who is—she edited the chapbooks. [... -DC]. She's [a curatorial associate... -DC]. And she had knowledge of film, and she made a couple of suggestions, which turned out to be fruitful. And then I asked various other people, people I respect in the film world, like Thomas Beard, and Josh Siegal at MOMA, to give me—basically say what the parameters were to see

if I was missing things. But there was one, I guess, we showed in the film program—well definitely showed *Last Address*, the Ira Sachs film. And I think, actually, that was something that Peter also liked very much. But so do I, so I mean—and we showed Nancy Brooks Brody and Zoe Leonard's [*East River Park ... -DC*], the film they made about AIDS. [... -DC].

I'm trying to think if there were other AIDS films in the film program. [Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop - DC*]. But—so there was—yeah, it was an opportunity to show some material that was—had some relation to my work on AIDS, but also my work on queer issues and my work for the show *Mixed Use Manhattan*. So, for example, the Roy Colmer photographs of doors; I don't know if you remember that work. But there was a very large gallery, which is the old gymnasium of the school, which was used for performances that had the two Louise Lawlers.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, I love those.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. [Louise Lawler's *Stretched-to-Fit*] paintings?

ALEX FIALHO: No, I'm talking about the Roy Colmer's.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Oh, so you do remember them, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: So, those were in Madrid also. But what we had in Madrid—

ALEX FIALHO: Small.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —tiny, yes, they're postcard sized.

ALEX FIALHO: Serial.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, they're [printed -DC] on cardstock.

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And they were—it was a project that involved—it was a conceptual project. And part of it actually appears in Hanne Darboven's work, which is on view at Dia right now, the one that they own, the huge work called *Kulturgeschichte, Cultural History*. Colmer was friend of hers, and she includes those door photographs in that work. But the project entailed him, for a year or something like that, every time he had an appointment anywhere, he would photograph every door on that block, on that side of the street. So, if he had an appointment in this building, for example, at 139 Fulton Street, he would photograph every doorway between Broadway and Nassau on Fulton Street. And he did that all over town, and I think it's 3,000 photographs or something like that. The New York Public Library owns a full set of them. And we showed—he also made these little, Xerox books at that time, from the photographs. And you can still get them at Printed Matter for like eight bucks or something like that. And there are the doors; there are trucks; there are theater marques, just a whole series of them. They're little artist books, and we showed only the artist book and the photographs that he selected from the vast series for the artist's books, you know, between. But then we had the opportunity of showing a great many of them at PS1. And this is a little off the subject, but—

ALEX FIALHO: I'm interested.

[They laugh.]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah it turned out to be a great opportunity. I was very skeptical of it at first because the idea of a vast survey exhibition doesn't interest me at all. A vast—you know, these kind of biennial-type shows. It just—it's too much art; it's too much work; it's too hard to figure out why this person and not that person. But in the end, because I had—one the one hand, I had a particular function on the curatorial team, which was to bring this history to bear on it. But then I was a full participant. So, I ended up also helping to make decisions or to be a part of discussions around many of the artists in the show. But it's a very, very big show and all of us also, in some ways, left each other alone. That is if we—if someone really, really, wanted a particular artist in the show, fine, unless it was somebody—there were a couple of instances where we had some real arguments and people that somebody really wanted did not get in the show. But, in general, we each had our own agendas, I suppose, as anybody would. But we got along very well. And we let each other make choices of his or her own that they were particularly invested in. And sometimes you can figure out who made those choices, and sometimes you really can't. One of the things that I wanted to do was to include artists who were in the original *Rooms* show, the first show at PS1. And I think we ended up only with Richard Artschwager, with the actual piece that was in the show which are these—you could easily miss them, but they are hanging bulb lights along the hallway that goes to the—that goes beside the café. And they all say "Exit" on them. Scott Burton was an artist that was in

the original *Rooms* show. Gordon Matta-Clark—

ALEX FIALHO: Was he next to Park McArthur, the Scott Burton?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Sorry?

ALEX FIALHO: Was Scott Burton next to Park McArthur? At any rate—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes, yes.

ALEX FIALHO: —I thought that was a really genius pair.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: There are two Park McArthur works. There's also one you could easily miss, which is, when you enter the building, there are a series of photographs of PS1, at various moments in its history, and she added a photograph, and it's of the real estate development that's like right across the street from the entrance now. But—so—

ALEX FIALHO: —Gordon Matta-Clark.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —Gordon Matta-Clark we actually wanted to open up—cut through the floors [and recreate *Doors, Floors, Doors* -DC]. [Laughs.] But we represented him with photographs; that would have been impossible. And—

ALEX FIALHO: —institutionally.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —Judith Shea was also a feminist artist who was in the original *Rooms* show. So, I think those were the four—the only four artists who—but then, of course, Alanna Heiss did a big show for the 40th anniversary that included an awful lot of the artists and sometimes even the pieces that were done for the original *Rooms* show somewhat later. But—

ALEX FIALHO: Later in the institution's history?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes. She did the 40th anniversary show after *Greater New York*. Just this last year, it was. So, it was immediately after. Yeah it was—I don't know what else you want to know about it [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: That kind of gets us up to a contemporary moment. And I'm just interested in the ways that you engage all these questions that we've had, so many around [. . . -AF] HIV/AIDS. Do you see it coming into your work in any projects you might be working on now or in the future? Are you still invested, if there's, you know, screenings in some way or an exhibition somewhere, [are they -AF] something that you're going and seeing, or is it sort of more on the periphery at this point?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Well, first of all, I'm trying not to do anything right now [laughs]. I'm going to teach for a semester. And I'm pretty wiped out. This tour that I did with *Before Pictures* this fall was pretty demanding.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And not only that, but leading up to it, the point where we really got down to brass tacks with the production of the book and getting all of the images and doing all of the proof reading, and editing, that happened last May, June, but leading up to that for quite a long time, in terms of getting the images. So, I was really working intensively during that period. And in the meantime, I had contracted to write four catalogue essays for major exhibitions this last year. And so, one of them was for—the first one was for the Merce Cunningham show that's opening at the Walker in February, at the Walker and the MCA in Chicago simultaneously. And these are all things that I couldn't turn down. The second was a text for the Louise Lawler exhibition which is opening in April at MOMA. The third is a text for the show that Lynne Cooke has been working on for a very long time, putting so-called outsider artists together with mainstream artists. It's called *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*. And—

ALEX FIALHO: At?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It's opening at the National Gallery in Washington and—in about a year or so. This is a show that Lynne has been working on intensively for a very long time. And I've just been interested to hear discussion, what she says about it, and I participated in a colloquium that she convened at the Clark about it. The long and the short of it is the chance to work with Lynne is always a chance I'm not going to turn down because I admire her as much as anybody in the art world. And the fourth and final one, which I have yet to do, is a text on Zoe Leonard for the major exhibition that MoCA is doing of Zoe's work, which will open at the Whitney.

ALEX FIALHO: MoCA L.A., yeah. So, that's—a lot.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —a lot. So, I've done three of them. And some of that was kind of simultaneous with the production of the book and the book tour. So, it's just been really—so, I just feel like I want to not do anything for a while [laughs]. I have a project in the works on dance film. And I've written a lot on dance and a lot—I've written a book-worth of essays on dance, which I thought I would turn into a book kind of right away. But I'm not going to. It's just too—I just want to wait for a while and make it make the kind of sense that I want and do more work on it, and I'm not ready to do that work right now. I'm ready to take a break [laughs] right now. But back to your question. Sure, you know, I have my own history, which I remain interested in.

ALEX FIALHO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOUGLAS CRIMP: I spent four hours with Lynne Cooke at the Agnes Martin show last weekend. I did a show of Agnes Martin's work in 1971, and I wrote a chapter about her in the memoir. And I'm going tomorrow to the Scholars Day at the Guggenheim, which is an all-day—invited-only scholar's day. I'm not participating. I'm just going as an audience member in conjunction with the show. So, sure, I'm still interested in Agnes Martin, for example. And I did that show in '71. Yeah, I was talking with Gregg recently about whether or not we were going to read *How to Survive a Plague* because it's like 500-and-something pages long [laughs]. I'm really curious, and I probably will. But finding the time is—

ALEX FIALHO: By David France?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: By David France. So, it's a major book on AIDS. It's made after—it's a book written after he made the film. I don't know—of course, it's got it—if it's 500-and-something pages long, it's got to be much more in-depth than the film. So, I'm curious to see what he's added, especially given the criticism that the film got, whether or not he's responded to that.

ALEX FIALHO: Which was? Just to rehearse for the record.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: That it was a very specific aspect of the AIDS activism, that most of those—a bunch of white guys, basically, a couple of women, as well, that did not adequately represent the range of issues and types of people involved in AIDS activism and, specifically, ACT UP. It's a film—it's a mainstream film. That is, it's a film that's made for television. And it's—I think it's an accomplished version of that sort of thing. It's not the kind of work, as you know perfectly well from my work, that I'm interested in. I'm interested in the kind of—I interested in—if we're talking about documentary practices, for example, in relation to AIDS, I'm interested in the way John Greyson's work intervenes in documentary practices. Of course, I'm interested—I've always been interested in radical art and avant-garde art and art that questions the mainstream codes. And there's nothing worse, I think, than the codes of documentary made for television. People can make documentaries for television that break those codes to some degree, but only to some degree, I think. And probably—I don't watch television anymore, so I don't know [laughs] what happens on television. But back when I was, yeah, it's just—it's something—I can't—talking heads drive me crazy. Only very few people have been able to make documentaries with talking heads that make any sense to me. So, the talking heads in Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip, Long Drop*, which parodies the talking heads, are perfect, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly [laughs]. I thought that was where you were going to go.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But I think [Isaac] Julian also did a tape on—I think it was the one on dance hall music. What is that video called?

ALEX FIALHO: He screened it at MoMA recently with his retrospective.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: [*The Darker Side of Black* -DC]. But it has a lot of talking heads in it. But he shot them so extravagantly and so beautifully that you actually like looking at them [laughs] as well as listening to them. And of course, he chooses people like Stuart Hall and people who really have something brilliant to say that you want to listen to. So, it makes all the difference if you know what you're doing. But if you just abide by the convention, well, there you are; you've just gone conventional. And that's the way most people do make documentaries; they just have experts yammering on.

ALEX FIALHO: Did *United In Anger* speak differently to you? Jim Hubbard directed and [produced by -AF] Sarah Schulman.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah, of course, it was completely different. It was sort of the opposite. And they had all of the material of the Oral History project, which of course, also, then, meant that it was pretty much talking heads. Both David France and Jim and Sarah had access to a lot of the archival footage from AIDS activist videos that were useful. I thought that Jim and Sarah's work was—they kind of erred in the opposite direction. They took on too much, I think. They covered too many demonstrations and too many issues. And it just became, for me, confusing. So, David France is someone who knows how to make a film without a through-line and a dramatic narrative and that sort of thing, in a standard kind of way. And Jim and Sarah didn't do that. It was sort of—for

me, it felt like, here we go again. It's like another demonstration and then another one and another one. It was too much. It was—but that having been said, of course, they got a lot of different voices and a lot of different points of view. And it was more my ACT UP, for sure, than David France's film was. Of course, that was a—but David France also didn't claim to be making a film that was representative, I think, of all of ACT UP. I think he was representing an issue.

And unfortunately, it was the issue that was sort of the first issue of ACT UP and the one that Larry Kramer seemed to think was the only issue and was constantly chiding us for moving away from and which was one of the issues that also was at stake in a kind of fracturing of ACT UP. So, it was a thorny issue for a lot of us. And I also think—I'm friends with people who were part of the Treatment and Data Committee and then who formed TAG. And I think some of those men and women were amazing. They really, really did amazing research. And they educated all of us. And I do think that the FDA demonstration was one of ACT UP—in fact, it wasn't just ACT UP; it was ACT NOW, was one of our most successful demonstrations in terms of the kind of media attention we got and the kind of changes that we—that probably came out of it. So, it's certainly an interesting story to tell. And I don't really fault David France for telling it. It's just that, in a way, it becomes *the* story, and that, for me, of course, is a problem, although I don't know how much it does become the story because maybe Gregg's *Fast Trip, Long Drop* is also recognized sufficiently that it is the story. And I think my work on AIDS is another story. And I think it's not—it can't be totally [ignored -DC] that it was nominated for an Academy Award. I think it's not that simple. So, I don't worry about it that much. But as I said, I've been kind of curious to see how he deals with it.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. This will take us back a second. But I'm just curious in terms of—you were mentioning demonstrations, were you at them in the middle of the protests, being arrested ever?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yes. I was arrested at the City Hall demonstration. I even—my being arrested even appears in—I think it might be something that Tom Kalin made. Anyway, yeah, there's footage of me being arrested in some AIDS tape. That was the only time that I was arrested. I wasn't as fully energetic as a lot of my younger pals. And I found—one of my favorite videos about AIDS is a video called *MARTA*. Do you know *MARTA*?

ALEX FIALHO: By?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: It was made by Matt Ebert.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: And Ryan Landry. I think Matt was actually the director of it. But it was the two of them: Ryan Landry, who is this kind of theatrical genius, who works in Provincetown. It's about—*MARTA* is the acronym for the transportation system in Atlanta, and there was a demonstration at the CDC, which I did not go to. It was kind of late in the game. *MARTA*, then, becomes a character in this video, Ryan Landry in drag, as a young, would-be, over-eager ACT UP activist, kind of patterned on Garance [Franke-]Ruta. She's—do you know? She's one of the main characters in *How to Survive a Plague*. She was one of the—and she was this young genius. She's now [a journalist for Yahoo News -DC]. Garance Franke-Ruta was her name, hyphen, Ruta, R-U-T-A, I believe. And she came to ACT UP; she was really young. And she became a part of the Treatment and Data Committee, and she was really smart and very eager. And so, the inside story it that it's a kind of parody of Garance. But it's about—for me, it's about what always felt, for me, like a kind of—I don't know embarrassment about screaming, or—being in a demonstration was not natural to me. I'd been in a lot of demonstrations, like going to Washington during the Vietnam War and so on, and being in a huge march. But being someplace where you're, you know, shouting things, and it just always felt awkward. I'm shy, I guess. And it's just—it's not my personality. And *MARTA* is sort of about that. For me, it's a sort of—it shows you know the Ryan/*MARTA*, the figure of *MARTA*, carries her signs upside down—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

DOUGLAS CRIMP: —and then notices that they're upside down. Like, lies down for a die-in and is constantly kind of looking around to see if she's doing it properly and things like that. It's hilarious actually. It's a really great video. And it captures a lot of—the reason I think I love it so much is because it captures a lot my emotional feelings about being in demonstrations. But nevertheless, I did. I went to our—I was in our demonstrations and very much—I was a pretty full participant in ACT UP. I didn't talk on the floor very much because talking in big meetings like that is not easy for me. But yeah, that was your question, right? That is was—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: But as I said, eventually I came to this conclusion that let me off the hook a little bit that my real abilities were about writing and lecturing, which didn't mean that I didn't continue to go to meetings and demonstrations and be a full participant, but simply that I didn't join a committee and do any kind of extra, other work within the organization.



ALEX FIALHO: This can be potentially our last question; we'll see.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: But just to wrap us up is that one thing—I may have seen you speak to, but I know that I speak around a lot, is the way a shift in AIDS and its repercussions is that there was a community at the height of the crisis or in the '80s and '90s and now it's much more individually managed, dealt with, handled—

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: —for context. [I'm just curious -AF] if that's something [that resonates with you and how that continued shift has played out in your experience, if at all?

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Sure, there was—I mean, I have the context for when there was—first of all when there was such a thing as gay social life [laughs]. I mean, when there was non-privatized—when there were community organizations and bars, and clubs, and all of what constituted the life that I knew prior to AIDS. And even then, through the time of ACT UP, I was pretty much a West Village person. My friends in ACT UP were mostly East Village people. I started going to the Bar, which was an East Village bar; it's not a bar that I had gone to, but because my ACT UP friends did. But—so, of course, it was way worse to seroconvert at a time when there wasn't a treatment. So, at the height of the crisis, having that community was more than—it was totally essential for people to psychically survive facing death and dealing with illness all the time and dealing with, also, other people being ill and everything that we were dealing with. Now, I think, even among privileged people, people with healthcare, with financial means and so on, I think, if you suddenly become positive, you don't have—you don't know—you don't have—I don't know if you have support groups. I suppose they exist, but it used to be the norm that people who were dealing with AIDS were in support groups.

And so, I think that for many people—I know that for many people now who seroconvert, it's a private trauma, that you have to make a decision about who you're going to tell, if you're going to tell anybody, and how you're going to deal with it: whether you're going to start taking a cocktail or whether you're going to wait, all of these kinds of things, all of the medical decisions that you're going to make. Well, you might have somebody that you could go to and talk to about it, or that you feel willing to talk to about it, and then you might not. And that did not exist for me when I seroconverted. I had a community of AIDS activist friends. It was late; I was lucky. It was still a huge, huge trauma because, first of all, I went into a trial, and it was an unpleasant trial, with an unpleasant drug. And being in a trial is not a fun thing anyway; you're just completely medicalized.

But I had friends, like Gregg, for example, who I could talk to, and that made all the difference. And Gregg is my friend—I mean, he's my friend in many, many, different ways, but fundamentally, he's a friend I made in the AIDS activist movement. And that's the history that we share. And there are others, but Gregg, in my case, would be the primary one. And you know, we still check in about each other's health and—as you normally do with your friends. But I think it must be really—I think, for almost anything that we deal with now, that young people deal with in terms of difficult issues around sexuality, many things, but around sexuality, the world has become too privatized, I think, for people to have a sense of where they can go with an issue. There are still some places, of course, but the kinds of, even social, purely social institutions like bars, and clubs, and sex clubs, and so on, gave you a sense that your—the way that you played was something that other people did, too, and liked to do and felt positive about and didn't have to be ashamed of and could do in public. And I don't think that your generation has that, has access to that in the way that my generation did. And I think that really matters when it comes to things like life and death issues or even—I don't know. When people now decide when they're going to do PrEP, who they talk to, or whether they talk to—I think they talk to their doctors maybe, only. Or maybe—

ALEX FIALHO: —or read the internet, for instance.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Yeah. So, I think it's not—it must be very, very, difficult. And it's not only that; I just don't think people talk about their fears or about—I don't know. Of course, you know, I'm older than a lot of the people I'm talking about, and I don't know how much they talk about with me—or in comparison to what they talk about with their own peer group. And I don't have, like, so many totally intimate connections with people who are, say, 30 or 35. How old are you?

ALEX FIALHO: 27.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: 27, oh, so you're really young. So, I don't have that much contact—that much intimate contact—I don't have close, close, close, friends who would necessarily want to talk to me about their issues. But it's not so much about having the intimate friend that you talk to. It's about—because I don't mean to say that I don't think there's such a thing as intimacy anymore or real friendship connections, but I do think that a constituted social world and a sense of community mattered. And it mattered—it made everything possible that we did in that time, and it made—if there hadn't been that community, the disaster would have been way worse.

We wouldn't have had the activism we had. We wouldn't have had the community organizations that we had. So, that's what I think gay liberation should be credited with [laughs], that we—that that movement that preceded AIDS actually contributed enormously to what we were able to do in relation to AIDS, and rather than being just sort of a bad, immature time that, because of our immaturity, lead to AIDS; on the contrary, we were developing a kind of maturity and an ethics about living a gay life that, I think, made a lot of the positive things that happened in response to AIDS possible.

ALEX FIALHO: I think that's an interview.

DOUGLAS CRIMP: Okay, good [laughs].

[END OF INTERVIEW.]