



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Sunil Gupta, 2017  
May 26

Funded by the Keith Haring Foundation.

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Sunil Gupta on March 31 and April 1, 2017. The interview took place at the Smithsonian in New York City, NY, and was conducted by Theodore Kerr for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

Sunil Gupta has reviewed the transcript. His 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

THEODORE KERR: This is Theodore Kerr, interviewing Sunil Gupta at the Smithsonian in New York on March 31st for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Hello, Sunil.

SUNIL GUPTA: Hello.

THEODORE KERR: I was thinking to start, a good first question could be: What's your earliest memory?

SUNIL GUPTA: That's a tough one.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know if I can point to one singular earliest memory, actually.

THEODORE KERR: You can share all of them.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] I think most of it involved being carried around. I'm very physical. I remember being mostly—mostly being picked up, and handled, and moved around a lot. Yeah. And it was this—it was very pleasurable. That's what I remember. It was a very happy time. Being squished, and squeezed, and all that, and handled.

THEODORE KERR: Who's doing the carrying, and handling, and squishing?

SUNIL GUPTA: The parents, and they had domestic help. Yeah, so, I think, kind of between them. But I think my father had waited for three children before me to have a boy, so he was really excited. I think he kind of couldn't stay away, and would carry me everywhere. I remember being carried around on his shoulder a lot.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And where were you? Like, when you—if you picture yourself on your dad's shoulders, what are you seeing?

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm seeing the ground very far away. It was a bit spooky. [Laughs.] So, I was anxious about being dropped.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what's your dad like?

SUNIL GUPTA: He was—with me, he was very warm and physical, and obviously very delighted about the idea of my being there. But from the outside, he was an ex-military guy, and he used to solve problems by using a stick.

THEODORE KERR: And you don't mean to draw a line in the sand? You mean to hit?

SUNIL GUPTA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: What would the stick be used for?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, to beat up any transgressors.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So there was, like, at least two sides to your dad that you knew about?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And was he—did he bring that side home with him? The beating of transgressors home with him?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, he was mostly not very violent at home. He did have a drinking problem.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he wouldn't—like, for instance, with me, I was never hit. I think maybe once, and there was a lot of remorse, like, straight after.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I think he realized he crossed some kind of line. So, it wasn't—there wasn't domestic abuse in that way, but—yeah. I think—but on the other hand, both of them were, had quite full lives of their own. And we were—they could afford domestic help, so I was—very early on I was more aware of these other people who were looking after you, who weren't your parents.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And who were they for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: They—when I—as I grew up a little bit, they became more like friends, and confidantes, and the people I spoke to more freely with, perhaps. But yeah. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And they were obviously older than you, but were they younger than your parents or older than your parents?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, they were quite young. They were young adults, usually. Or sometimes, maybe even—they shouldn't have been, but I think sometimes they were teenagers, or, you know, in their late teens. Well, that was technically, probably illegal.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But from my vantage point, everybody seemed really old.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Of course. And you said there was three before you, and they were all sisters?

SUNIL GUPTA: They were.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. How was it coming up in a—with three sisters?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, only one—my immediate sister—lived with me, because we shared the same mother. The other two had a different mom from an earlier marriage, so they didn't live with us. So basically, I grew up in a very un-Indian way in a nuclear family. There was four of us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Parents, and a boy, and a girl.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we didn't seem to have many relatives around, it seemed.

THEODORE KERR: Why do you say it "seemed"?

SUNIL GUPTA: Because—well, she didn't have any, so that was pretty clear from the outset. She had been left behind.

THEODORE KERR: Your mom?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, she had been left by her family. So, abandoned. So, there was no family, like, blood family on her side that would be traced.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he overcompensated, so it turned out he came from a very typical, very large feudal family that was grounded in a rural part of the country. And in the last decade or so, I made some work to find out a little bit more about it. And I've found out there are 500 living relatives, if I can be bothered to go and meet them.

THEODORE KERR: But growing up, they weren't part of your life?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because they had both come from elsewhere, and they were brought together by circumstances in a very unusual way. And for the culture, because they were both in Delhi.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And this was the '40s, so it was after the Second World War. He had been in the Army, in the British Army.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: So he was quite anglicized. English-speaking, Scotch-drinking soldier—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: —career kind of officer type. And he had been in the war. And she had been raised by British missionaries, because she had been left—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and been educated in English and was trained to have a job. So, in the—by the mid-40s, they were both career people in their own right, which was a little bit unusual. Like, what I mean is, like, not embedded in their families.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then they were both in this big city with no immediate relatives around them. And they were—they used to date. My parents met on a date. So that's very unusual circumstances in that country and at that time. Not only that, but she had a housing. She lived in the Y [YMCA].

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And she transport, she had a bicycle. And she had a job.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And she used to dress up like Greta Garbo. You know, she was very unusual. And she was free. She didn't have to answer to anybody.

THEODORE KERR: It's incredible, no?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And then she met this guy, and then—and he had come back from the war, and he was in uniform, and he had muscles or something. And she was sort of swept away. She didn't bother to find out what's behind him.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He was this very kind of intact medieval feudalism patriarchy, all combined.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But by the time she found out, it was too late. They were already—[Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Do you think she dated men before your dad?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, she did.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There are pictures of them.

THEODORE KERR: Really? You found them?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, we used to have pictures of them. And he used to refer to them. And when they lived in Canada, his death involved one of her exes who came to see them.

THEODORE KERR: His death?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because one of her old boyfriends came with his second wife—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —on some world tour and stayed with them in Montreal. And then my father got, like, super jealous about it for some reason, because all of this happened before his time anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I remember, as a child, the couples were quite friendly, socially.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I don't know where this suddenly came from, but my father got into a rage about it and wanted the other couple to leave.

THEODORE KERR: And he had a heart attack or something?

SUNIL GUPTA: He did, actually. That's what I'm—yeah, because the other people wouldn't leave. Indians don't leave so easily.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Indian visitors, I mean.

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: I think, also, they had a set itinerary, and they couldn't really just suddenly have a change.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they were on this world tour, that sort of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it didn't seem plausible that a man was getting upset about something from 1945.

THEODORE KERR: Right. Right, because so many years had passed.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And they were married.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they hadn't been married. They were just—they had had a fling. I mean, it wasn't—

THEODORE KERR: Right, right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So he began to tell the wife, the man's new wife, about how her husband had been fucking his wife—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and like it was happening yesterday. So—and then walked out in a rage, because they wouldn't go. So, he walked out, and went for a walk, and had a heart attack. And that was it.

THEODORE KERR: I'm sorry. That's a very intense story.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I like it. It's full of passion and rage.

THEODORE KERR: It really is.

SUNIL GUPTA: And jealousy and—you know, because everybody likes to pretend, "It's not important. You must be polyamorous." I'm thinking, "Oh yeah."

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: "Only when it suits you." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Totally. And how did your mom feel after that happened? My God.

SUNIL GUPTA: She was quite shocked. Well, first of all—but also, she thought he was being completely ridiculous, like, obviously. It was 40 years earlier.

THEODORE KERR: Did she think he was faking the heart attack at first? Or did she believe that he—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, no. He went for a walk. It all happened on the street. He had the attack on the street when he was out on his own.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: So then there was a bigger—that led to a bigger crisis—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —because he was—he was lying in the morgue for a few days. So all she knew was that he left the house and never came back. And, you know, the—so basically, when you would tell the police that somebody's missing, they wait.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Right, they wait for 24 hours and all this. They waited, and then there was no sign of him. So, then they tried to look. This went on for two or three days and—before he was finally located in this morgue. And that—she had to identify him. And so that was quite shocking for her, the body.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the kids—you know, we had all lived away for a long time, my sibling and I. So, there were—yeah. And then by the time we arrived and then we kind of figured out what's happening, and then it was—to the children, to me and my sister, it was very clear case of kind of systemic institutional racism. This was racism, because this was an old man of color, who they didn't bother to put him together with his family.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he had actually inadvertently crossed over the border of a municipality.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So he died in the neighboring borough, so to speak.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Just because they lived on the border. But the neighboring borough was like upper-crust and white. Anyway, for whatever reason, they didn't look very hard, because they gave us his—what are—his contents of his pockets, and which were full of ID cards.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean, and medical records. And he had a kind of heart—because he was a heart patient anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He had "what to do if you," you know.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so that became a big issue, because my mother lived in Canada under the presumption that everybody was very nice.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, she didn't want sue the police, who she thought were there to protect her.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it became very complicated. [Laughs.] So, we had to drop it all and just go with the flow.

THEODORE KERR: What a terrible week for your mother.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, but she got over it. Then she decided she was liberated, because we thought she should marry again.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But this happened ages ago. He died very young, in his 60s.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: He died—I'm nearly the age he died at.

THEODORE KERR: What's the age difference? How old was he when you were born?

SUNIL GUPTA: They had me very late, so they were nearly 40.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. So you were in your 20s?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and he was in his 60s.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Okay. And then your mom, did she end up remarrying?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, she's—that's what—she decided she was free of having a man around.

THEODORE KERR: What decade was this? Is this the '70s? The '80s? No, this was 40 years ago.

SUNIL GUPTA: This was the '80s. Yeah, mid-'80s.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Okay, so it's the era of *Dynasty* and like—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And so, she was liberated.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, that's exciting.

SUNIL GUPTA: She wouldn't be tied to a home and cooking dinners and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. So, let's go back a little bit. We kind of got a very—yeah. What was it—so you, and your sister, and your mom and dad lived together in Delhi, yeah?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And your sister was how many years older?

SUNIL GUPTA: Four.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Were you guys close?

SUNIL GUPTA: We were, because we were living with this—yeah, because there were just the two of us, and we have a slightly unusual—we had a sense of family that was a little bit unusual in our surroundings, meaning we didn't have too many other relatives around. And our parents just felt different, because she was Tibetan, so she looked different.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And underneath his veneer, he was a villager, which we soon figured out. So—[Laughs.] And they were both, and they were—yeah, there was a kind of awkwardness about it, so we—I think we were, like, on our own a lot, but basically we just—we kind of had to deal them. The best way to do it was together as far as we could.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did you look up to your sister?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think I did up to a certain point, and then I got taller than her.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: I think when I got physically stronger, then things changed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But what I didn't realize—and this I have discovered subsequently—is that it—from my point of view, that she was an already-existing person who was there to look after me. But from her point of view, everything she had was taken away by me.

THEODORE KERR: Was this something you guys talked about later in life?

SUNIL GUPTA: Like, in the last couple of years, yeah. When we have bitter arguments, this comes up, that I ruined her life and all that sort of thing. So, it goes back to this—which is true. I can see what happened now, because I just got doted on, which was great for me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because there's this Indian obsession with the male child.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think she was neglected a bit.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And her achievements and all of that. She was always trying to draw some attention, and then they weren't interested enough. Whereas, I could never do anything wrong or any stuff like that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And when did you—were you aware of that growing up, or is that something, again, that's just kind of come into focus in the last few years?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it's something I became more aware of when I did some therapy post—like after the diagnosis.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I had a period of isolation, and then I had some therapy. And I had, not shrinks, but psychotherapists, I guess, yeah, through the London HIV Services Network thing. So, they were not consistently the same person. So it was a little bit makeshift, you know, after-hours thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I finally met a guy there, who was interestingly—was the one black one out of three white ones and then him, who made the most sense to me, because he's the only one who mentioned my color. Nobody else would—everyone else talked about me as this person, not as this brown, not as this non-white person.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So this black guy said, "Your problem is that your Indianness, that childhood Indianness is a problem." He said that, basically, for the first half of my life, I was just adored.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know? Nothing prepared me for rejection.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So later on, when I felt rejected, generally but also specifically, because when I got diagnosed, the person I was with left and all that happened. Nothing had prepared me for this. You know, that people turn their backs on you.

THEODORE KERR: Right, because it hadn't been experienced.

SUNIL GUPTA: Never happened, no. Everything was, like, marvelous. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right, right. And when you were little, when you were growing up, did you feel like things were marvelous? Or did—

SUNIL GUPTA: I did. I felt very—a little bit conscious of—I have a memory of being in a—so I went to a private boys' school, but a day school. And we were picked up and brought back. And in India that was a huge privilege.



And I began, in my teenage years, began to be class-aware that us in the bus were very privileged compared to the kids on the roadside—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and that there was nothing but sheer chance that separated me from them. You know, it was just like where you were born. It was—I suddenly began to sort of see that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was that something that you could talk about with your classmates?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, not very much then, but soon after—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in college. But not in the school, because school was—it was a very particular kind of—very competitive, academically inclined, but run by Irish Christian brothers.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was a Catholic boys' school, and they beat you for not learning the Shakespeare, or the physics, or whatever it was. So you were, like, constantly having to perform every day.

THEODORE KERR: And were you a good student?

SUNIL GUPTA: I was always the one who could try harder. They always said, "He could try harder."

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And they would put—I enjoyed my play. Let's put it that way. So, I just did what I—I knew I could get away with only that much effort, so that's all I did. I wasn't planning to [laughs] put all of my energy into it.

THEODORE KERR: And was art even a subject? Was art a subject that you could take in school?

SUNIL GUPTA: We had it as little children in—like, in grade school—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —up to about grade six.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: After that it was all masculine, and your choices were biology and physics and chemistry and mathematics.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did you like art when you were a little kid?

SUNIL GUPTA: I did, but I wasn't very good at it, because they wanted us to make—to paint pictures of nature that looked like nature. Mine never did.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What did they look like?

SUNIL GUPTA: They looked very two-dimensional, and actually, look very artistic now, in retrospect. But they're not what they were looking for. I was a failure at it.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Did you have friends?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes. I had—I had my gang, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Who was your gang? Tell us about your gang.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, it was boys' school, so there were these intense friendships, and they were quite—they were full of jealousies and changing loyalties. So, I had two or three. We were all together, also. In our system, you were in the same school throughout. So, patterns were set quite early, and things would last for many years. So I had two competing best friends. So that was complicated sometimes. I had to go with one or the other. And then I had a gang where I lived, because I was a day scholar, so in the afternoons, I was back in my neighborhood. So I had a little gang of kids on my street who didn't go to my school.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I was their little ringleader for a while, because also, I was a tall kid, which meant a lot in India. And I think I used to bully the little ones a bit, push them down the stairs and things. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And what was your neighborhood like? Like, how would you describe it?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was—well, at the time, it just felt normal.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It felt like everybody lived in a place like this, but in fact, it was a postwar residential colony, they call it. So, it was newly built and the people were—it was people mostly with refugees from Partition—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and people like my parents who were renters all their life. So, they just rented a flat. And it was physically right at the edge of this colony, so I had this extraordinary, in retrospect, experience of growing up on the first and second floors of this duplex, looking out from the terrace at fields. They were on the edge of the city, literally. And then there was a river, the big river that flows by that you could still swim in. So, I used to go swimming in that river. And then next to us was a medieval emperor's tomb, a Mughal tomb—

THEODORE KERR: Ah [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which was the model for the Taj.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Were you near the Tibetan Colony, where the Tibetan Colony is now?

SUNIL GUPTA: No. That's Majnu-ka-Tilla, you mean. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. It sounds like—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's near—it's near a Muslim shrine.

THEODORE KERR: Huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But there were these two tombs on either side of this colony. But this one tomb was very—Humayun's Tomb—it was large structure and the basis of the Taj Mahal. So, if you imagine the Taj without the minarets on the corners, it was like that.

THEODORE KERR: And it was white?

THEODORE KERR: Made of red—no, it was red sandstone.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: With a big park around it, and medieval walls. So, it was quite spectacular, but I thought it was normal and everybody had tomb like this. Because it was our playground, because in those days they were kind of being looked after very badly by the state guardians of such things, of heritage. And so, they were wide open. We used to play hide-and-peek in them and everything.

THEODORE KERR: That's beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was, yeah. And we had this—hours were early, it's a hot country. Our school was seven to one.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Then you would come home, have lunch, and then you were free.

THEODORE KERR: All right, so you had day and all evening—

SUNIL GUPTA: I had all day, and then I had my gang, and then we used to go around doing things.

THEODORE KERR: And were you ever inside or is your memory mainly of you being outside as kids?

SUNIL GUPTA: We were outside a lot, and—yeah, we only came in to be fed and, yeah, if it was too hot or something. And also, then all the experimentation happened, sexually. So, I can't remember a time when there was not something physical happening. I can't remember when it went from baby being cuddled to something

sexual and my wanting to respond to something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like four, five, six, seven [years -SG], you know.

THEODORE KERR: Your bodies were always, like, enmeshed.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I think it's partly it was warm, and the culture was—we were in this hot place. People didn't wear very much—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and people were quite kind of physical, I mean, in a sense. It wasn't unusual to see people holding hands. Grown-ups, I mean.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And grown men.

SUNIL GUPTA: And grown men and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And transvestites walking by and all that kind of thing. It was all quite normal in the outer world around you. So—it's just that nobody talked about it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And was it, was it mixed-gender, even as kids? Or were you just playing with boys?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was segregated, so the boys played together and the girls played together. Except in our case, at home, my sister had been raised as a boy till I came—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so she was—in her pre-teens, was a tomboy. So she preferred to play with the boys, so she would climb trees and all that. And then she had acquired these girlfriends. Around the time I was nine or 10, she had acquired a kind of girl gang, and then they would play doctor and then I would be the patient. And then I would be stripped naked, made to lie on the dining table. And these teenage girls would come to play doctor with me. [Laughs.] So, I think that was the kind of I always had to endure.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And you laugh, but did it feel like abuse, or did it just feel like play?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, to me, it felt very asexual.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm one of those people, I think, who was always gay. I've just never had a—it didn't seem very exciting—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —because they were girls.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And also, because by then, I had already trained my boy gang. So we used to wank.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we trained the little one, who was about five or six—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —to jerk off all of us. We would also sit and wait for this little child, [laughs] who now lives in Toronto, and is happily married. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] And he remembers it? And you guys talk about it?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I haven't been there to say hello to him, but my mother tracked him, and she wrote me a letter saying, "I found that little boy who lived down the road." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's sweet.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Yeah, I mean, I think in general we don't talk about our sexuality as children. But it seems like—I think we all have stories. Yeah, but, you know, the sexual activity didn't have a label in my childhood, so we didn't know what to call it. And nobody was calling it anything.

[Siren wails.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Does that matter?

THEODORE KERR: No, it's fine.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I mean, us stalling is fine.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Is it getting closer?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, no.

THEODORE KERR: There, it passed.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. No, I guess what I mean is there was no name-calling either.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. Like no one was, no one was—

SUNIL GUPTA: There was no abusive version or anything, you know. So in fact, the activity didn't seem to—seemed very invisible that way. Didn't have any reference to it, positive or negative.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, it also seems like even though it was a homosexual activity, it wasn't a gay activity, because it was something you were all participating in.

SUNIL GUPTA: It didn't have a name. Yeah, everybody seemed to participate. And I had the impression that everybody did it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh huh [affirmative]

SUNIL GUPTA: I hadn't met anybody who didn't want to do it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh huh [affirmative]. Because it was about pleasure? Or because it was about curiosity, or—?

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm not sure, but I was—I became quite aggressive—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —as a child to seek it out amongst any of the kind of males around me, other than my father, of course, or something, but, or his circle. But all kinds of other people who were within reach who would be—I'm talking about—so there was domestic help, or a lot of, in those days, a lot of goods and services came to your door for the middle classes.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So like milk, and bread, and those kind of food essentials, somebody would bring to you. Milkman and bread-man, like that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I became this very enthusiastic collector of the stuff. So, I would go down, and we had shrub-like cover over the gate. And I discovered these guys were very happy to be wanked—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —while I was collecting.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And this carried on, and it became, you know, an event that in my conscious calendar of things for the day—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —you know. But nobody ever said no, so I got evermore kind of emboldened to seek it out.

THEODORE KERR: Right, because every time you got told yes or sometimes someone agreed, then you thought—like, permission, universal permission seemed to grow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Nobody said, "No, don't do it."

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: If I reached for their crotches, they were like, "Yeah, come."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And when do you think—like, do you have a memory of the first time it didn't go well?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, once in a cinema. A lot of happened in—and in India, because there's this culture of crowds and close proximity, so then all of that was presenting all as I got older. And then I stopped taking the school bus and public transportation. So public buses were notorious for that, and cinemas, wherever there was possibility of some kind of contact.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Unseen by the rest of the public.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: The likelihood of something happening was very high. You didn't have to go to a special cinema. They were all like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] So, in one such time something negative like that, someone rejected an advance. So, then I thought, "Okay, this is not as universal as I presumed."

THEODORE KERR: And did it become more exciting after that, or less exciting?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I wasn't there much longer after that. That was—unfortunately, so I was—by then, I had—I had figured out how to get a lot of sex—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —as a teenager, till we left. Yeah, it seemed to be everywhere and always available, so there was—I was very comfortably being catered for that way.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: The only thing is that it was because it was in public or semi-public, there was never enough private space. There was only that much you can do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I remember that—except once, somebody tried to penetrate me behind a bush in my neighborhood, which I thought I wanted, but then I thought I—but actually, it was very unpleasant, and it was—it wasn't successful. The whole thing felt like an attack, like a, you know, like a—very quickly, I didn't want it. And then there was no turning back by then—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and I was much smaller and unable to do very much else about it by then. But because it was in public, it also couldn't go too far—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —with me unwilling and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I have this very probably overdramatized memory, but kind of being face down in the dirt literally and being shoved down into the ground, yeah, with someone trying to—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And do you remember how you felt, like, in that moment afterwards?

SUNIL GUPTA: I felt like that was a close encounter and that I had—that was a close call that something I really didn't want and very painful might have happened.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Made me more wary about offering myself like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. How old do you think you were?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think 14 or something.

THEODORE KERR: And were you dating as well?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, you see, I had these two different lives. I had this very rampant sex life with all and sundry —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which was very—which was kind of like not really—what's the word? It wasn't very selective.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was, like, with anybody.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And sometimes I didn't even see the person, because in a crowded bus you might be facing the other way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so I didn't—you just put your hand behind you, and then somebody would have their dick out. And you didn't have turn around to see what it would have been. God knows what they looked like, you know, doing that.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was like being in a bathhouse, except it was on a bus or something. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: A bus-house.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that. But none of that involved any kind of romance, because there was no speech.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: There was no talking. All of that happened in this boys' school, which was full of love and romance, but no sex.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. So, the availability of bodies was not possible at the school?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, that was my slightly mistaken impression. So, I somehow evolved, without any training or knowledge or anything, this two-way, two, double system of poetry and romance and love in the school, which was unspoken and never could be acted upon, and, like, boundless sex outside that was never going to be anything more than that.

THEODORE KERR: This is almost a tragic tale.

SUNIL GUPTA: Do you think?

THEODORE KERR: Almost. Like, here you are trapped every day with all these boys that maybe you're falling in love with, but you can never quite touch.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, but then they were also kind of—I didn't find them very attractive on the whole.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. So, it wasn't like you were aching for any of them.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because they were my age. They were gawky teenagers.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I didn't think that was very sexy. I liked guys who are a little bit older than me then.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, just—I mean, to me, older would have been 17 upwards.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: But certainly not 14-year-olds like me, or—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But there was lots of drama in the school? Like schoolyard drama?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, there was about—yeah, who you're going to have lunch with and all of this kind of—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and there was—it was the age when we were doing sleepovers. And I had one kind of best friend. I think for two years we were inseparable. Like he would either sleep in my place or I would sleep at his. And that could've been something, but it never was. And he was—he turned out to be quite straight. He never heard any of this. I had this other life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I became aware that my other life was a secret life, and I wasn't sharing that detail with these other schoolboys.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, when did that happen? When did you kind of start to understand that the life that you were leading was maybe not as shared as you thought it was?

SUNIL GUPTA: There was something about the school that was very—that was suggesting that this is not a good thing.

THEODORE KERR: But it wasn't verbal?

SUNIL GUPTA: It wasn't—it wasn't verbal, no, because it was Catholic school.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But they didn't talk about sex in the first place. And I didn't realize that there was any sex happening in the school.

THEODORE KERR: But you think there was now?

SUNIL GUPTA: I discovered later there was some in the back row, but I'm never sitting in the back row. [Laughs.] But there was a lot of teenage boy banter, you know, so it was all covered up with that as well.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Wait, well, let's define. What's teenage boy banter? What does that mean?

SUNIL GUPTA: Like straight boy. You know, sports and girls. And there was a—our sister—we had a sister school, where the nuns ran the girls' school.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: We were divided by a hedge.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So everybody had some sort of interest across the hedge. So even I had to—I knew I had to display some kind of interest in this—in the girls over the hedge.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, so you would be like—

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I had to fit in, you know. Yeah, I realized there was some kind of fitting in had to take place.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you got some non-verbal cues. It's like, "See that girl over the hedge? You think she's pretty?"

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And we were all in the same bus stops, and they were our neighbors. But because I had a sister, I had access to girls. So, some boys didn't.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Except mine was too old for the boys.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I had access to—so when I was 14, I used to hang out—because I became my sister's chaperone. She couldn't go out without me.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Disco dance, which was then possible suddenly in the '60s. So I had to be taken along as the kid brother. So that was fun for me. So, then I had these 18-year-old girls that I had access to, which the boys thought was, like, too exciting for words.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I wasn't—because I was more interested in their boyfriends.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so there was a bit of that going on.

THEODORE KERR: And is there language at 16 for gay or homosexual or same-sex desire?

SUNIL GUPTA: There was some in the—so I began to—I heard through my sister's circle, because they were a bit older. So when they were in college, and they were using, which now sounds very funny, but a kind of antiquated, British-English version of vocabulary. So, they would talk about queers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But in the old sense, back then.

THEODORE KERR: So like in a negative sense, like a pofter or something?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not negative, just in an identifying way, so they would be part of their circle.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They were like upper middle-class kids.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So there was some well-known, but very wealthy, gay boys who were in their circle, who were just—who were queer. So, I began to figure out that there's this—something called queer, that these people were, like, kind of different, something. But I couldn't approach them directly, because I was—you know, they just put me in the corner with a Coke while they did their thing.



THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Meanwhile, your brain is turning, and you're watching all the scenes happening.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And I wasn't too bothered, because, you know, my sex life was overfull anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I wasn't—I was just lightly—but they didn't—but the ones that were queer also seemed very fem, slightly more kind of limp-wristed, kind of. It was very English, that whole British—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —aversion of the whole—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And that didn't sexually arouse me, so they didn't really—I didn't think I wanted to be part of their gang. But—not that I could have been, but—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So what I was interested in, very much so, was what looked like just regular guys on the road—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —who my class of people didn't even mingle with. So there was that kind of background. So, I kind of also grew up with this class problem. You know, so—this probably didn't make sense here, but in countries like that, there—my social class didn't sexually arouse me at all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was this other class that was more publicly outside.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah?

THEODORE KERR: I think that computes.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay, so that's what it was kind of like.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like, it's about class, for sure.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But it seems also a little a bit—yeah, it's about—I mean, here you might say, like, you were attracted to the working class.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, but although those kind of labels—yeah—that's true.

THEODORE KERR: Is it?

SUNIL GUPTA: I guess so, yeah. They were—they were obviously—they were more available. They were more in public, because the upper-middle classes drove around in cars.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, they were never, you know, like, physically available that way. And they lived in private spaces, so that would have been much more complicated. The only private sex I had was through a granduncle of mine, who was not exactly a relative, but he had been adopted by the family. He had been a freedom fighter in the British days.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he had a lot of clout, a kind of resistance fighter, you know, in his dotage sort of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he had been given—he had become an MP that way, which meant that—so he was also in Delhi, but he had the perks of an MP, meaning he had privacy, a house, drivers, and cars, and all that, at a time

when very few people had that. So actually—so he's another subplot. So, when I was little, he would have—my father would—he would séances, like, so he would sort of sit up in his bed and have audiences. And so, people would come pay their respects, so to speak. And so, my dad would go, and then I would be taken along. And then the old man would say, "Well, put the child next to me." So, he would be propped up in his bed under a quilt.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I would be—you would be kind of placed under the quilt next to him. And then he would just fondle you—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —talking to your dad with a perfectly straight face. So, this went on for a few years. [Laughs.] So, but when I got older and more, like, after puberty, then he got more interested. And then we were in Delhi—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and he was in Delhi. So, then he was to send his driver to have me over. So at first, it was a little weird, because he was, well, very old. He was very old, I think. [Laughs.] Certainly felt very old. And he smelled old, and he didn't—he smelled funny, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But the only thing is that because I was a teenager, anybody who was showing any interest in your body was very exciting.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I would—so that was still quite—and then it was in the privacy of being inside a room—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —which was a novelty.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, a different sexual experience altogether.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. It's just that I don't think he could get it up very much. So finally, so then it escalated to him—he would send the driver, would come back with another kid.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. That you didn't know.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who I didn't know. And for all I knew, in retrospect, might have been rent boys.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because they found one too quickly.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so then me and this other kid would do the sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the uncle, he would kind of just be a kind of mostly onlooking participating.

THEODORE KERR: Like a voyeur.

SUNIL GUPTA: Sort of. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It's interesting to hear you talk about it in terms of class, which is obviously a frame to think about it, but also in terms of public and private. Like your sex life as narrated so far is very public, and it's like a networked kind of like community activity.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Like there's a communal body, and we're just—sometimes we're separated, and sometimes we're connected. And then as you get older, sex starts to become a little bit more like broken off into these

private moments, for better or for worse.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Well, I—this was only the private kind of sex I was having.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and then suddenly we migrated to Canada in the middle of all this. And I was 15.

THEODORE KERR: That's a big shift.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was. And when I arrived there, I thought my sex life was over.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And was that a conscious thought?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was. I think—because although I thought I had been reasonably well-exposed to the larger world, because it was the days of the hippies and all that, and there were Westerners traveling through. And often, my parents would keep one at home, like a paying guest or something.

THEODORE KERR: I thought you were going to say like a pet.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Because they had a spare room, and then—and once, so the ones we had, the more serious ones we had towards the end was young couple of lawyers, student lawyers from Berkeley.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They were the most critical ones, actually, because they stayed a fair amount of time. And they got this, the Berkeley rag, but it was called the *Berkeley Barb* or something.

THEODORE KERR: Like a newspaper?

SUNIL GUPTA: Like a student paper, yeah. And in it, there were personal ads for gay guys. And I—the first time I had seen that. So, then I came across—and it took me a while to figure out what they were going on about, because it was all in this special language.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, coded words, coded letters, even.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. But then the graphics of the whole thing. It was all very sexual. It was the '60s. It was all full of, like, West Coast-y kind, magazine-y, sexualized, sexual liberation stuff. Straight and then this gay stuff thrown in the back. So I thought that was very exciting. And they looked to us like, you know, because they were kind of hunky Californian guys, and we had never seen this kind of specimen before. [Laughs.] So, they were a novelty on my street. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And would you guys gossip about them?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. But they were dead straight, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But they used to play the music and—so they had the whole California culture.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like long hair?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not too long, because they were lawyers, remember?

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: They were going to be corporate lawyers.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And what languages did you speak before you left India?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, well, my school was English-speaking.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because the Christian brothers were Irish.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And my home was bilingual. It was English and Hindi.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is kind of quite common for middle classes in India now, in the big cities. It's kind of bilingual.

THEODORE KERR: And even when you're recalling these times, are you thinking in both Hindi and English?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, a bit of both, because my public sex life was in Hindi. But neither language really had a word for something that became "gay" later on.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Even homosexuality didn't really come up. Sex didn't come up.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: My parents never talked about it. The school never did. And the boys in school only talked about sex in this bravado, fake kind—I knew that was all fake kind of stuff about—and the girls next door, but I knew none of them would have the—really had the guts to do anything—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and nothing would happen. Because there was this hedge, that was policed by the nuns.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And what about your sister? Do you think she was dating and having sex before you?

SUNIL GUPTA: She was. Yeah, no, she was. And we didn't discuss it at the time, but—so she was keen that we all leave the house. So, I think, so—

THEODORE KERR: Like she would bring people home?

SUNIL GUPTA: She needed privacy, yeah. So, her guy would come over, and they need privacy. They couldn't be in the public.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They needed us all to kind of go out. And so, they were doing that. And, but I just, the thing with —because I left at 15, I left just before—had it been a bit later, I would have had a better sense of, like, transition into it in India, but I didn't. I had it quite cut off.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Then I came into this, like, year zero in Canada, which was completely different.

THEODORE KERR: Why do you call it year zero?

SUNIL GUPTA: Because nobody knew where I came from. I did a year of high school, because of the—I came in September in the last year of my school, so I missed my, like, high school finals or whatever in India. So I had no credentials. I had to do a year of it here.

THEODORE KERR: And why did you—why did your family move from India to Canada?

SUNIL GUPTA: I used to always wonder about that, but I think it was partly driven by my mother now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They were financially, in the city, in urban terms, not that secure, because they were both working people. And I don't know if they had foresight, but in retrospect, in Indian cities either you're in some kind of private business-y self-employed situation, or you're in a government job. But if you're in a salary job, the inflation was crazy, so you could never keep up. You would have been priced out of housing and everything very quickly. Which is what's happening here. Like, everybody has to live in—like, London, right on the outer edges of it. Unless you have a private income or—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —or the government bought you a flat, you know, "they come with the job" kind of thing. It was that kind of thing, but it was—what I think was also driving it is that my mother was—so despite the—so there was a novelty factor of this Tibetan woman who didn't have any family, but—and she looked very cute, and she

was very popular because of that. But on the other hand, under the surface, the place was very conservative and old-fashioned, and everybody's located, socially. And I'm sure she had—she was aware that she—people couldn't place her. So she was just very keen to travel, and I think the two of them, being middle class, didn't have the means. In those days, only very rich people traveled abroad.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the only way to travel was to leave altogether.

THEODORE KERR: But Canada's very far.

SUNIL GUPTA: Hmm?

THEODORE KERR: Like, was there—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, well, that was because they didn't want to go to England, because they had both worked for the Brits, and they were very much part of that generation that became free.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So England was, like, not the place they wanted to go to. And Australia was closed to them, because it was a whites-only time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And Canada was easier. I think that one of the young men that they kept in their house, who was British—a lot of young Brits migrated to Australia by land. They drove cars, and then sold them, and then took a ship to Australia—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —kind of thing. So, this young man was one of those. Except he didn't like Australia, ended up in Canada, and then they had kept in touch somehow. And so, he had said to them, "Come here. The, like, land of opportunity," and all this, blah, blah, blah. And so, they went. [Laughs.] And so—without knowing anything about Canada. And then, you know, they give you a little packet about it. So they had no clue they were even going to, like, a French part. Nobody mentioned the French to them.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: They had no idea there was a French Canada. And I didn't know, and then no one told me anything. And I really hadn't thought about it, so my only information was from the movies.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, so like from Western, like, Hollywood movies that came. So, when I got off the plane, I thought, this looks like one of these movies.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, all the streets are paved, and they drive on the other side, and the cars are very big, and there's no dirt. It's like, everything is paved.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, it's hard to imagine what you imagined.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because I was used to open ground, you know, and dirt.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and lots of brown people.

SUNIL GUPTA: And lots of brown people. And lots of street life and people, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And a hot country and limited clothing and—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and I came with the wrong clothes. I was so completely badly prepared. I came with, like, open sandals or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And yeah, I had to throw everything and start again—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —from the clothing upwards.

THEODORE KERR: You had to remake yourself.

SUNIL GUPTA: I had to reinvent myself, and I went to this high school, and they [didn't have -SG] uniforms, which I wasn't used to. So then—and I still had some of my Indian clothes, and then one day somebody said, "Why do you dress like a Christmas tree?" [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Meaning, so ornamental?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, they were like red and green, colorful.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And it was a mixed school, I'm assuming? Boys and girls.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was a mixed school. It was downtown. We lived downtown. It was full of racial tensions. I was completely unaware of this.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There was ethnic strife between the white people. It was mostly white people there, right? So there was no other Indians. I had no group. But the white immigrants were all in this—there were Italians, Greeks, Armenians, you name it. And then there were some Chinese, and they were always—but I didn't have a group.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. And they were infighting?

SUNIL GUPTA: Lots of it. And then there was all this issues about—and you couldn't speak to the girls from—the Greek girl, or there were the Italian—or the boys would come, and all this. And we had a boys' and girls' separate entrance. This was a Protestant school, because Montreal had four school boards. So, I don't know if you've ever

THEODORE KERR: Uh-uh [negative]. I'm not familiar.

SUNIL GUPTA: —looked at that. So, in Quebec there was Protestant, Catholic, and English, French. We ended up with four. I was in the English-speaking Protestant school, because my mother was a Protestant, having brought up by the missionaries.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So the people she disliked the most were Roman Catholics. And then we were in this Roman Catholic province. [Laughs.] And so—so the only option was to go to an English-speaking Protestant school. So anyway, so then a lot of things—some things happened very fast. I learned very quickly that was India useless, as baggage. Nobody had heard of it.

THEODORE KERR: Oh really?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. The kids couldn't place it on the map, even. They said it was like coming from Mars or something.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was never mentioned, but why would—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, there was no—they just had no clue about it.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was beyond there. So, my whole previous life suddenly had no value. There was no point in discussing it, because nobody wanted to really know about it, could relate to it.

THEODORE KERR: But when did the Beatles go to India? I'm trying to think of, like, did India pop up in pop culture? And I think an early time—

SUNIL GUPTA: '60s, yeah, they did.

THEODORE KERR: '60s.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. So, there was that bit of hippiedom.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I went to the—I remember the first hippie record shop opened in '69 or something, soon after I came in Montreal. And you could lie there and listen to—I think they only had two records. They only had that *White Album*—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and *Sgt. Pepper* or something.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they would just play it continuously.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: But they had lots of cushions and things. You could lie on the floor, and listen to it, like, all day long.

THEODORE KERR: But so they're—so, like, as much as people couldn't place you, there was also no, like, exoticization of—

SUNIL GUPTA: But that was college kids, you see? So, at the high school level—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and this immigrant high school level, it was a different—they weren't interested in those hippies, they were interested in something else.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: In hockey and stuff I had never heard of, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah. Yeah, they had different futures in mind than the hippies did. Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So then I had to adapt, so I learned to wear Levi's and t-shirt forever after that.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Haven't changed since, haven't bothered to change. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And so you did high school there. For one year, or three years?

SUNIL GUPTA: Just one year, luckily.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: They tried to make me do two years, but then my mother—in India, there's this weird sense of urgency: your kid has to be put through school as quickly as possible.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the parents lie about their ages, and come and battle the school. So, my parents were saying, "He's already nearly finished, and why?" And so, then they gave me—and I think part of the thing was that because we had come from India, they were a little bit suspicious of the kind of education we had had.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And how much of the language we could speak, so they made me write an essay in English—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so—in which I described how both my parents died in a car crash kind of thing, and—so that got a very good grade, and then I didn't have to do another year of school.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So actually my school was much tougher than their school, because they were still doing—So their school, for example, in English, was something like, you know, the—what's that called? That story about the boys who crash-landed on an island.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, and there's Piggy—

SUNIL GUPTA: Piggy, that's it, that's the one.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Whereas I had already had three years of Shakespeare, where we had to learn verses and all this, and *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. And so, this was all, like, kid's stuff now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because, yeah. So, then school was very easy, and then I did, like, incredibly well in this high school. I suddenly got these—because in the English and Indian system, to get 60 percent is, like, really high.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So suddenly I got 95 percent. My parent thought this was, like, shockingly good, like, what happened? My transformation into academic brilliance overnight like this.

THEODORE KERR: "We should have moved earlier," they thought.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: What did your mom do? We haven't talked about her job.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, she was a schoolteacher.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So she tried to that, and that became a problem because she was an immigrant, and from Asia, so. They only would keep her as a substitute teacher. She couldn't get a job doing proper teaching.

THEODORE KERR: And did you see how your parents were dealing with racism, from early on, once they got to Canada?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because they didn't want to see it like that. I don't think they—I feel like they had to believe in this, that they had arrived somewhere better, and that they were wanted. I think that would have been too unbearable. And also, they lived in this sort of genteel poverty, because their status was down.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Their economic status was down, but they still had all the—in their head, all the rather grander ideas.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so that was happening.

THEODORE KERR: That's a lot of tension, too.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because he became unemployable, so—because he didn't have any real skills, he was ex-Army.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not only that, so then—even if he did get a job, his bosses would be 30.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].



SUNIL GUPTA: And that was always a problem, because of his whole military thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And ego, would you say ego or pride?

SUNIL GUPTA: Probably that, too, and kind of unbending in certain ways.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they—it was a—they struggled, you know, it was a problem.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then they had the two of us, or I came with them. My sister didn't want to come. She was already working, and she didn't want to migrate. She stayed back. So at first it was only me with them. And it was very weird for me, because they were mostly absent in India, because they worked, and then they had a nightlife, and I hardly saw them. And I had this very big life of my own.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then suddenly I was in a little apartment with them, like, day and night. And nobody knew anybody. We were, like, squashed in together. It was kind of horrible, and you were suddenly, as a teenager, like, stuck with your parents.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. At the exact age you want to just run from them.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And then I thought that there won't be—yeah, so then this—my big public sex life, it just ended overnight.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Or overflight.

SUNIL GUPTA: I didn't know how to—Yeah [laughs]. Well, you know, I didn't realize. I thought that Canadians didn't do it.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Because nobody had told me otherwise.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: See, I thought that all the sexy stuff was something Indians did in India.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And white people didn't do that, because I had never seen it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I had never seen them do it, nobody had ever mentioned it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean, from all the news from here, it never came up.

THEODORE KERR: Right, of course, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Aside from that little thing in the *Berkeley Barb*, but I thought that was—I mean, that was still very far away from where I was.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I would never get to California for many years.

THEODORE KERR: And so you—and I guess—

SUNIL GUPTA: So I thought—and then it was like—it seemed impossible. I mean—so I thought "I'm going to have to give up on this for a while." So then I had no sex life at all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is a disaster.

THEODORE KERR: And did it feel that way? Like, did it feel like a crisis?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it did. I had no sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And—

THEODORE KERR: But no masturbation?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, lots of that, probably.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But none of that excitement of undoing somebody's, you know, zipper or anything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So that relationship with other bodies?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then until I met actually a very blue-eyed white American kid from the Midwest, whose mother had brought him and his older brother to get away from the draft.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's quite funny, because—anyway, we—so he didn't find any other Americans. There weren't any other American kids at that moment in this high school. And so, we got kind of—we got together because we were like the—we didn't have a group, either of us, so we became the odd misfits. So, we became a twosome—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in the school. And so he decided to educate me. So that's how I got—I learned everything about North American boyhood from this boy.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who was probably—I mean, I didn't think about him in those terms, but he was probably white, working-class kid from Michigan or somewhere. But very typical, and I guess like—it would have been a porn fantasy, because he was all blonde and blue-eyed and toned, like, just naturally.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So—and clear complexion and everything. But you see, I hadn't thought of white people like sex objects, so I wasn't—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it wasn't placed in your head as a desire yet.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I didn't realize he was, like, a walking sex toy. I just didn't think—

THEODORE KERR: Right, right. Because he wasn't, to you.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he was the wrong color, for a start.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, so I was trying to find my Indian types. And there weren't any Indians around then, in Canada. They were all hidden in the suburbs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There were none in the school, and there were none to be seen on the streets. Anyway, so then

this boy and I used to—began to do everything together. But that I was used to, from my schoolboy days. So I thought, "Okay, I've got a kind of best friend figure."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Without the romance. And then he just kind of educated me into—

THEODORE KERR: Like teaching you about how to play marbles, or how to drink Coca-Cola?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, so we would double-date the girls.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But the girls always had to home by nine or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he and I were on the streets.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we would drop the girls home, and then we'd say, "Well, now it's just—we have to entertain ourselves."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So he taught me about—there are these predatory kind of gay men. Not—he didn't say "predatory," but like there were gay men around. Like, adult gay men.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Downtown, who we could kind of have fun with, I think was his plan. Sort of in a kind of gamey way. So basically—and this worked, I remember we deliberately would walk down the High Street. And because I was oblivious to all these signals, he would say, "Okay, somebody's following us now." And I would say, "Really?" And then yeah, sure enough, there was maybe somebody following us. And then we'd come to a corner, and he'd say, "Okay." And we'd go around the block separately, and then we'd see whether he's after the dark one or the fair one.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And this was our entertainment. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And would it go any further than those games?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it wouldn't. But it made me aware that there was these adult men in the city who were interested in boys.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But there was the possibility, so I was kind of my—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So, then I had to—so I had this interesting thing with him where he became my source of information, but I couldn't tell him that I was interested in it more than he thought.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]

SUNIL GUPTA: In that aspect of it.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want water?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: You've got coffee, okay. That's a really fascinating story.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I got kind of informed about it. But still nothing had happened, because this wasn't going to lead anywhere.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you were starting to learn the signals and signs?

SUNIL GUPTA: I began to become aware that there was such a thing. That these white guys did do something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's just that I didn't know how to, like, react to it, and what would happen. And it certainly couldn't happen on the road, in Canada, so.

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I wasn't sure what happened, you know. Like, this going home hadn't happened. I had never done that. It never occurred to me that that was another possibility.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, all your training was not helpful.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, not working in this case.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was all like in limbo, like this. For the longest time. And I stumbled into sex by accident. I was—there used to be, like, an ethnic supermarket, for Chinese and Indians, in a particular part of—do you know Montreal at all?

THEODORE KERR: A little bit, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: On St. Lawrence Boulevard.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Downtown, kind of, on the eastern side.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was very colorful in those days, kind of ethnic. And there were these sort of low-rent cinema halls that would show past—movies from the past. And I was kind of a bit of a movie buff, actually. So, one day I saw this—*Zorba the Greek* was playing there, and I had never had an opportunity to ever see it, but I knew about it. So I just went in to see it. And it turned out to be like a proper sleaze cinema. So, the movies were just like—they did play the movie, but people really just went there to have sex.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Like kind of cinema sex. So, it was a norm that I was used to. So when somebody approached me, the person next to me in the cinema, I immediately—I recognized all the signals from India.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I thought, "This I can do."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Like the warmth of another close body triggered an awareness.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That's kind of lovely.

SUNIL GUPTA: So then I found this outlet, and I kept going there. Except my parents went to shop next door.

THEODORE KERR: Like, you guys would go to St. Lawrence Market together?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I kind of had to go on my own also, and not, like, maybe go too often. And sort of—anyway, there was a—so that carried on for a bit, and then one day I met somebody there who I thought was Indian. And he said that we'll go, and he knew of—so around the corner, you could rent rooms by the hour. So that whole area was like that, actually. It was like the sex trade, I didn't realize it. But so we did that.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember the cross streets, or like, the geographical—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was St. Catherine and St. Lawrence.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And St. Denis, you know, which was kind of run-down—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and kind of red-lighty, slightly, back then.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It all got gentrified then, after.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But so then—so that was my first proper sex encounter in Canada, was in this room that we rented by the hour. And where I had this—I had to confront the, like, the racial thing, because there was this guy, turned out to be Italian who I thought was Indian, but he was Italian. So, on the outside he was kind of brownish.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But when he took his clothes off, and remember I had never really had, like a "we're naked, face-to-face" experience in the light of day. And suddenly his penis was the wrong color. It was like, too pink or something. And I thought, "Oh, this doesn't look right." So—anyway, so we did something. But I had to kind of really work on the color angle.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. You had to like, really adjust.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I had to kind of pretend it was much darker than it was, kind of thing, something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And in that moment, it's like a flash of knowledge comes to you, "Oh, penises can be different colors."

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that, yeah. That my sense of the norm was kind of shaken, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Also, I think because I hadn't expected it, because the rest of him seemed so brown.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And did you—then did this start a new pattern for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, over the—eventually it became another norm, because from then on, I never met another Indian to have sex with. There were so few, and the ones that were there were really messed up, as I discovered later on. Because then I went very quickly—I had this very quick transition. I think because of all the sex in India, I transitioned. Because this was '69, and so in '70 I went to junior college. I went to Dawson.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Where from the first day of my life was transformed into gay liberation, because I was very lucky. I was 17 or something, and as I walked up, came to the steps leading to the school, there was this lovely Hungarian boy who had an afro, and he was sitting there out, gay and proud. I didn't recognize that that's what he was doing, swinging his legs and he was saying, "Oh, hello," and like, "Come with me," kind of thing. And so, he became my best buddy, and he was like out as anything.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. That was your first day of Dawson College?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And I never looked back. And then the teachers were like that, and it was very—it was like the end of the '60s, and so I could design—I could choose my own courses, and then I had whole term of it, of Greek stuff, philosophy, and anthropology. My teachers, many of whom were gay, were pushing gay research that was not even published yet. They would hide it as papers. And my term papers were on why men have sex in cottages and stuff, so.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: So within a year of this, I was suddenly, like, super-educated on gay liberation. We were, like, marching in the streets. So, I had done everything except the sex, you see.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I wasn't used to mixing it. So my best friend was happily bedding everybody. And so—

THEODORE KERR: But you two didn't, at this point?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because I still had this, still had this, like—

THEODORE KERR: —separation.

SUNIL GUPTA: He was my friend, he wasn't a sex object. And anyway, they were all white, so I still was like, having this color thing. And the class thing, because they were my classmates, it couldn't happen there.

THEODORE KERR: Right, because they were part of your circle.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, part of my social—

THEODORE KERR: So sex was still something to be—was public, but separate from your intimate reality.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. Something like that, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Charles would sleep with the gym teacher and his wife, and everybody. He didn't care who he slept with. He was properly, like, a product of his time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think I just had too many hang-ups, or very particular ways in which it needed to come. You know, I just couldn't conceive of going up to the gym teacher and offering myself.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So yeah, no, it all happened outside of the school. Because I found the cinema, and that became —

THEODORE KERR: —an outlet.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so you went back.

SUNIL GUPTA: And through that there were then people who would take me home. And then sometimes I tried to—then once I found somebody, then you know, I'm also quite lazy, so then I would, like, stick with a person.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Through sheer, like, you know—THEODORE KERR: —lack of imagination,

SUNIL GUPTA: It's easy. Yes. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes. And I would ruthlessly move on, also. I was—you know, I was not paying any attention to any effect it might be having on anyone.

THEODORE KERR: Because they weren't relationships to you. They were, like, sexual experiences.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. So, there would sometimes be somebody who I think I would upset by doing this, and I just wouldn't—I wasn't worried at all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what about, like, First Nations people or aboriginal people. Were you encountering First Nations people?

SUNIL GUPTA: There weren't any—

THEODORE KERR: No?

SUNIL GUPTA: —at the time. Because the big problem then was French and English, it was all this—but to me they all looked the same.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was only when—but I got politicized very quickly.

THEODORE KERR: Once at Dawson College?

SUNIL GUPTA: At Dawson, and then when I went to what became Concordia. But then at McGill, they started a Gay Society, a student one, which we could join. So, we all joined, the students, undergraduates, joined this. And through that we did stuff like helplines.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I lived very centrally, so, with my sister, who had arrived by then, didn't get on with my parents, we both moved out.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. So that made being politically gay possible?

SUNIL GUPTA: So we had—I had the kind of gilded youth, like that—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in Canada, I must say. For which I'm very grateful, because between 16 and 22—so we lived—we could afford to live downtown as students.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was very safe, in retrospect. And we could be up all night, and there were bars you could go to. And we could be very political, which we were.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And your sister was excited about you being gay, or didn't care?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so—no, so when she came—so at Dawson, when I experienced this sort of transformation at Dawson, right, I took literally to gay liberation very easily. Because suddenly what I had done had a name, you see. It never had a name until then.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And also, I found that becoming gay, or, like, adopting it as a public identity, much more useful than being Indian. So, I dropped the Indian thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I just—I picked up the gay one, and it served me very well. I suddenly had a crowd of people —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and meetings to go to, and things to do, and all of that.

THEODORE KERR: And did being Indian ever—was racism or xenophobia ever an issue within these meetings, or within these kind of gay liberation spaces?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not really, because—I think because of my age, maybe, or where I was. But I think we were just—and even the politics of the time, it was—you just got as laid as often as possible, that was the plan.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we all did it, and I did it. And I didn't feel I wasn't getting enough of it because of who I was.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But what about even outside of sex? Like if you were at a meeting, and you said something, did anyone ever, like, comment on your skin color, or if you—or your English?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, no. Oh, okay, oh right. See, what happened—yeah, the thing is that—so aside from the sex stuff—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —remember I was with a military dad, I was right of center.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the larger politics were not like—they were different. And I was—and he thought—one of his ambitions was that I would follow in his military footsteps, so I was enrolled in the Canadian Forces in the reserves.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I spent my summer and winter holidays in Army camps, and I trained to be a sharpshooter, so—because they had this FLQ problem. And at one point the Army was out in Montreal, they would take over the streets.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I had a rifle, I was supposed to pick off the ringleaders if there had ever been this riot in the streets.

THEODORE KERR: You were trained to do that?

SUNIL GUPTA: I was trained to be a sniper, how to pick you off at a thousand yards.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: So—

THEODORE KERR: And were you ever deployed onto the streets?

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

THEODORE KERR: Were you ever deployed onto the streets?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, but I was ready to, and I had been trained. And it didn't—so I thought that was the right thing to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Interesting.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. To keep order.

[Cross talk.]

THEODORE KERR: This is a real mix, you're attending—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because remember, I came from a feudal background, basically.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but you're attending gay liberation meetings. Meanwhile, you're also trained to—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, but gay liberation and this didn't seem to clash, because that was the gay part. Because gay liberation then wasn't the liberation of the world, it was just sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Ah, okay, that's super-important.

SUNIL GUPTA: Isn't it? Yeah

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So what I'm maybe—

SUNIL GUPTA: So in fact, actually, I had to hitchhike in my uniform. And everybody—actually, so some people would stop and want to have sex with you.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And some people would want to run you over, if they were hippies.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But sometimes, if I had come back late from a camp or something, or for the weekend, and I was feeling lazy, I would just walk into the bar in my uniform, and it was like, yeah, I realize it had a lot of—

THEODORE KERR: —pull?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, absolutely. I was 18 in a uniform.



THEODORE KERR: Right, right. So, fantasies abound.

SUNIL GUPTA: Even though it was Canadian, and they never went to war with anybody, but still it was a—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, of course. That's how fantasies work.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: I think what I'm starting to understand really deeply is the kind of, like, little alcoves in which sex lives and doesn't live in your youth and childhood.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And then I began to get—my student life, my odd jobs were working in the local bathhouse.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: All night from one in the morning to six in the morning, changing the sheets and the little KY things and all that. I was like the keeper of the rooms.

THEODORE KERR: Like refilling the—okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, doing that. And I don't know if you remember, but the law in Canada at the time was it was legal for gay sex to happen, but only between two people in private.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I had to make sure the doors were closed, so they were in private. You couldn't do it with your door open.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, so your job was to close doors. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Close the doors. And then if there were three people, I had to persuade one of them to leave.

THEODORE KERR: Or turn a blind eye?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because three was illegal, they could be shut down, you know, so, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. So, you had to enforce it.

SUNIL GUPTA: I had to make sure. Yeah. I was a little enforcer. And then I was dressed up, because I was working.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And everybody was in towels, and in a way it put me off sex for a while, because all I saw was naked men every day.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Not in shape, mostly, in those days.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I saw a lot of knobbly knees, and it just put me off it altogether.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think wherever we work on the sex work spectrum—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —it becomes—we become immune to it, and we forget to engage it, and, like, we forget to charge it with our passion or something, yeah, yeah. It became so functional.

SUNIL GUPTA: And the same people ran a bar, so before I went there I went to their bar. And they employed me as some kind of decoy doorman. So, I would stand at the street level in some sailor outfit—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: —and try and attract customers.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: While you're also in the reserves.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Yeah, yeah, because I was much fitter. I used to work out, and all that, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But I'm also thinking about, like, you have a reserves uniform.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That you would wear, and then you also had the sailor uniform.

SUNIL GUPTA: Sailor outfit, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so—

SUNIL GUPTA: And then they would go up a flight of stairs, and if they were real troublemakers, then there was a proper bouncer up there—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —who would, like, beat the hell out of them. So—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you were the lure.

SUNIL GUPTA: I was the lure.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And did you know that at the time?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and I got loads of—I used to make a lot of money.

THEODORE KERR: How?

SUNIL GUPTA: People just put money in my hand.

THEODORE KERR: Just for existing?

SUNIL GUPTA: Just for standing there looking pretty in this Navy outfit.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And what did you spend money on?

SUNIL GUPTA: My parents thought it was very weird that my jobs were all at night.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It's true. What did you do during the day?

SUNIL GUPTA: I had another job in a dog parlor, washing poodles and things.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And have you picked up a camera yet, at this point in your life? Like, is photography—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I started to, because through the university, after '72—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so when we were starting services, helpline and all—so, we decided we would have a newsletter. And the newsletter, we thought, should have pictures in it. And then I got interested in making—in wanting to make the pictures.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And by then I had another gay best buddy, a proper gay best buddy, along with the one I had met at first. But in the undergraduate years, who was American also. And he was sort of intellectual. He was studying Russian, and he was from Florida, and he was very interested in text, so he would—and we both liked the movies, but we knew we couldn't make movies where we were, so we bought a camera—I bought a camera and an enlarger, and then we used to make pictures in my loo at night, and then he would write poems, and then we would put it together. And it was all about all the guys we fancied. It was about being single and gay in

Montreal at the time. So that was quite good fun. So I used to make these documentary pictures, very rudimentary, untrained ones—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —of gay events in Montreal, which would be like pictures of the bars and things, or—and the news would be like when the sauna burnt down. Because it was all owned by the mafia, so things would happen, some manager would get murdered, have his throat cut or something, and I would go take a picture of it. Or when the bathhouse burnt down, I had to go and take pictures of it, and—especially of the owners, who were like very shady characters.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I used to work for them. So anyway, stuff like that. And then I did these arty things with my friend, writing poems, and—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Do those still exist?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. And they've been shown, yeah, they're in a book. I did a book and they're in it, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: *The Queer Book*?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, the first thing in *The Queer Book* is them, there's a sample of that.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because Montreal's very small, so it only had a handful of gay bars—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so very quickly, everybody—you had seen everybody. So, this friend and I, we had—we renamed everybody.

THEODORE KERR: Like nicknames?

SUNIL GUPTA: We gave them all names, and then we gave them all characters. So, we sort of had a soap running about all the guys in our bar.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—[Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And this is in the early '70s?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And then we made that into these pictures, with the writing underneath.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: We would catch one and make him model for it.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Do you have influences at this time? Like, are there artists or musicians or movie stars that are exciting to you and influencing?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, we had European—we had art cinema, because we had—we saw everything. Our university had—for just a dollar you could see, like, so every night there was French, Japanese, everything, from Kurosawa to Godard, it was all in Rene and [inaudible]. It was all there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we saw it all, and discussed it all, and then made these little things. And then we never saw art, really, except—because I was—became interested in still photography, I tried to find gay photography. That was very hard.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I did find Duane Michaels, who I liked.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Wait, you met Duane Michaels when you were in—

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: And not too much else, I think. But I liked that Duane Michaels style, so that's the style we made it in, the little prints with the writing underneath, because that's what he wanted to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Oh, this is interesting.

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was just for ourselves, it wasn't for anything else.

THEODORE KERR: Right, right. And then you were taking pictures for the school paper?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And of the—we went on many demonstrations.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. It was kind of a magic time to be in Montreal, lots going on.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was. And you know, so then I had these inherent contradictions, because aside from the reserves—so other people were studying Russian and all this, I was in the business school.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: I was studying accounting.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's right, that's what you graduated in, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, my first degree was in accounting. I can do four-column figures for you.

THEODORE KERR: Do you keep it up?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because later on, when I got the art degree, I got involved with curating, which is basically arts management.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I used to run a little company with, yeah, a £100,000 budget kind of thing. Public money, I had to account for it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Also book editing is also a lot of accounting.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Yeah, basically it was cost-accounting, I could do that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Ah. Tip to artists, become accountants first.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so this is a contradiction that you're living in, so you're making queer—we would say you're making queer zines at night, right?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And you're learning accounting during the day.

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm going to management classes in the day.

THEODORE KERR: And you're having—

SUNIL GUPTA: And going to the Army camps for the summer holidays.

THEODORE KERR: And then movie theaters, either to watch—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. The movie theaters stopped after that. Then I found gay liberation.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And then—but then did sex start to enter your—?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because then we had the bars.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then we were relatively successful, because we were young and very horny all the time, I suppose. And Montreal was a very cruise-y singles town—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —compared to say, Toronto, which was like, bourgeois settled coupledness, get a mortgage town.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So yeah, we were in a kind of—everyone was cruising all the time in Montreal. And anyway, we had this great sociology professor who would come to our bar at about two in the morning, just before it closed, and gather up the last remaining 20 people, and say, "Come with me," and then we would all go to his apartment. And there would just be like group sex, and takeaway pizza.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: I love that detail, the takeaway pizza.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And it was that moment when it was winter, and he lived in one of those glass high-rises, which had floor-to-ceiling glass, and then—and carpets where we would be just have this mass sex on the carpets, and gazing out at the snow on the streets down there. At three in the morning.

THEODORE KERR: Can you see it in your mind's eye?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was very—yeah, and somebody would be giving you a blowjob for hours, it was wonderful.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. While eating pizza?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, or the pizza guy. [Laughs.] And it was never dangerous, or not consensual. I remember this as being a very pleasant, fortunate time. When I hear of other people's stories about such terrible times, in places like England where this wasn't really possible. I think I was very lucky going from a very easy life in India to a very equally easy life here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And it seem like—

SUNIL GUPTA: It was all within a few blocks. Do you know Montreal's streets at all? You know McGill—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and Peel, and Stanley, those parallel, coming down the mountain?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I lived on Stanley.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: My classes were on Stanley, the Y was on Stanley, the bars were on Stanley, you know. My world was like three blocks big.

THEODORE KERR: And are you still friends with some of those people?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah?

SUNIL GUPTA: I am. Of course, we've lost many of them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: My friend Jerry who wrote the poems, he died.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And some of the other key people in the group have passed away. But Charles, the boy I first met on the first day.

THEODORE KERR: The Hungarian?

SUNIL GUPTA: I met him in Toronto. He's around in Toronto.

THEODORE KERR: What's his name?

SUNIL GUPTA: Charles Fish.

THEODORE KERR: Charles Fish, that's nice, that's good. And the sociology teacher?

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm not sure if he survived. He was really rampant.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He would be very fortunate if he got away.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Unscathed.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] And then—and was it all men? Like, were there women in the sex parties as well?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it was all men.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I've been very—I mean, I did—when I was in—I took a girl to my high school prom, I had a prom in Canada.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I took Irene, who was Polish and tall and not pretty. And I knew nobody would take Irene, so I took Irene.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And having taken her, I thought I should show some physical interest.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Otherwise be fair, so do all this close dancing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I thought I should at least get a hard-on or something, you know? So, I did all that. But I did end up with another woman friend, who was—because my women friends, I think, kind of couldn't believe that I was, like, so gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So with one I did try something, but I think I just was gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I've never been—I'm not somebody who was kind of unsure or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know why. It's just never occurred to me. Maybe if things happened differently. Because in India, what would have happened is that they would have married me off. So, gay or not, I would have had a

wife and a kid.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, which—yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So Montreal and gay liberation gave me an opportunity to just be gay.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I just took it. My parents were, like, scandalized. But I did it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And at what point did you let them in your gay life?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, immediately. Because at 17, when I went to Dawson, I came home after I met Charles, and then he said, "You have to come out." So I came home—went home and came out, to my rather shocked parents. They had never even heard of this thing. So, then I had to educate them, because they didn't know what I was talking about.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I think at first that they thought, I'm just talking about my sex life. So, they were a bit puzzled, like "Why is he telling us, because we don't normally discuss it?"

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then my father thought, "Well, maybe he's telling us because it's worrying him." So, he said, "Is it a problem? Do you want to see somebody?" I said, "No, I'm just telling you." And so that did happen, you know, that the problem transitioned from being mine to becoming theirs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But then I felt guilty that I had created a problem for them, for which they had no understanding. Because I was in higher education and surrounded by literature about it, I decided I would educate them. So, I used to buy them books, you know those kind of *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, for your parents, kind of things. Of course, my parents don't read, and they wouldn't read those kind of books.

So then they decided, "Well, if they hadn't come to Canada, I wouldn't be like this." So that went on for a while. Then there was a truce, that, "We'll never mention it again, then it'll be fine." [Laughs.] So that's what we did for a while, for everyone's—but then, so then they just turned a bit of blind eye, because I became very out homosexual very quickly. Because we held the training meetings of this gay switchboard thing in our flat.

THEODORE KERR: With your sister?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, around, when we had the training meetings. And the parents would be around. And all of my friends became gay, were only gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they would talk about it, so they weren't, like, gay and not saying anything. But the chat was about that, who you slept with last night, and who was hot and who wasn't, and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And my parents were always around, and they were those kind of Indian parents who come every day with food and all this, and try and bribe you back and pay your rent for you. They paid our rent—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and basically bribed us a lot, which we took everything and we didn't move back.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: But they did come every day.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: My father would make surprise visits at 6 a.m., to see if we had overnight visitors, and who was sleeping with whom. So, they were very exposed to it, but they kind of—we didn't really have a discussion or an argument or anything about it. They slowly—I think it really only changed when I met somebody.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So then we had a—because there was a period before I moved out, when I lived with them. So it began with this—my nights got later and later. And it got to the point that we had an unwritten rule that if I came before they woke up, then nobody had to deal with it, then that would be fine. But I had to get in before they woke up, because then they would have to say something. So, it went from something like that to—which meant that it was alright if I was just having sex—I got into this funny situation—but not alright if you were dating somebody, because then that one person would be around. And I think even they could tell this is not just a college friend.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And through my bathhouse work, I met somebody. Although it turned me off, I did meet somebody.

THEODORE KERR: And he was a customer?

SUNIL GUPTA: He was a customer, he was wearing a towel, yeah. So [laughs] surprisingly I did meet somebody. And he fitted my bill, he was Canadian working-class, in a way.

THEODORE KERR: So the best of both worlds.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he was like a French lumberjack. Not a lumberjack, but he was a factory worker.

THEODORE KERR: A type.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Only spoke French.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He built his own house, manually, out in the woods outside Montreal. So that's where we went, like, 40-mile drive out.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Literally in the middle of some woods, with a little pond. And he had these geese that came every year. It was like a Christmas card. [Laughs.] And I thought, "This is marvelous," that I would learn French because they only spoke French. And he had this huge extended French family. His social life was to visit all his aunties.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And everyone only spoke French.

THEODORE KERR: What was his name?

SUNIL GUPTA: It'll come to me.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: I can remember his picture. I took a lot of pictures of him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. How old was he? Or was he older than you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I thought he was older. He was maybe 24 or something.

THEODORE KERR: And how old were you then?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think I was 18 or 19.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And he had already built his own house, that's amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. But I think when you're working-class, like, you don't—you know, straight after school, you start working in the trades.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And so once you met him, that changed your relationship with your parents around homosexuality?



SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because I had to spent nights out there. I couldn't come running back.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I needed him to come into my house, because we were dating.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you think he was the first person you dated?

SUNIL GUPTA: Kind of, in the sense that I brought home to them, and they kind of had to deal, in this unspoken way, that this is somebody—I mean, I think it was swept under the carpet of "Oh, Sunil is trying to assimilate, and learn about Canada, and hang out with French-Canadians and learn the language." You know, like, everything but that we're having some sort of relationship.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Was it also a moment of reconciliation for you, too? You were reconciling your sex, your love life, like, a bunch of different identities were—?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think so, because somehow it sort of—I thought he was very sexually exciting.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So that was relatively like a big shift, because now he was partly French and German, like a mixture of European stuff. Yeah, and I think that the warmth of the relationship and the surroundings, and being inside and the continuity, somehow. Like, we would go there, and then first thing we had to do is cook our supper. It was very domestic. It was semi-rural and very domestic.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I guess it's like *Brokeback*, but it wasn't a *Brokeback*, but this was the equivalent, I guess. So, you were like, literally by yourselves in this wood. It never occurred to me that it might be scary or something. Anything could have happened, but it just felt very warm in that Canadian kind of very pleasant way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was—yeah. And we were kind of in love, and just had lots of sex. Until the sex became a bit problematic. In the end, the sex became problematic and my interest in gay politics became problematic, because he didn't share that interest. And my gay politics was another contradiction. It all happened in English, because it was at McGill.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he didn't speak English. And it never occurred to me that my politics was in spite of his human rights, because we couldn't be arsed to speak French.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know? So, the combination of us—what became our slight sexual—our sexual—we had a weird—no, actually—yeah, he had a—I don't know how to describe it. Basically, he never came.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it began to get to me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know how common that is as an issue, but initially I thought, "That's okay." But as the months went on, I thought, "I just wish that he would come." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. It's important you—

SUNIL GUPTA: I couldn't figure out what was going wrong.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It felt like something was going wrong, and we couldn't put our finger on it, or I couldn't.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was putting pressure on the whole thing.

THEODORE KERR: Right, so it gets distracted, so it just becomes about this one moment, or this lack of moment.

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he just was always the passive partner, and that didn't feel right to me in my politics. Not that I had had much experience of this or anything. I just felt like—I hadn't really thought about it before, but this was so extreme that I hadn't thought that one of us would always be passive, sexually.

THEODORE KERR: Right, right.

SUNIL GUPTA: To the point of never even coming.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It just was feeling—and I couldn't talk about it. But so, then that—but then really the English language thing, and the politics, got in the way. Because my meetings were always at night, and they were clashing with his time. And I couldn't take him because he wouldn't come, and he didn't feel like they, you know, all of this. And I didn't appreciate fully what his relationship to that institution might be—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or to the larger politics of the place. And maybe that's why the French want to separate, because—and all that. You know, how the English—and all of that came much later. I just thought that this gay liberation lot was the way forward, and this guy was, like, not wanting to go forward with something, you know. So, I just—So much later I came to realize that I had misread something, and I used to go back and see him in some kind of atonement way.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow. How long do you think you were together?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, not very. Just very briefly, like—but then again, when you're young, it feels like—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it was like six months.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I met the guy that I really was with when I was 20, so it must have been just—probably been more than a year.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I had all my adventures between—they were over by the time I was 20, because I met somebody and we became monogamous at 20.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: For about 10 years.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But in my head, there's all this adventure. It must have all happened between 17 and 20. So it was all—must have been pretty packed, because I had had a lot of goings-on in that period, including this affair with this guy.

THEODORE KERR: The lumberjack.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, the working-class guy.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And so, in '73-ish, when you were 20, you met someone.

SUNIL GUPTA: I met somebody at one of our university gay dances. We began to have these fundraising gay dances.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he was a fellow student. So, it was all how it hadn't been before, you know? So, we had created this scenario of safe space for gay kids in the school to have a dance. And then I met another gay kid from the school. Which is not what my background experience was.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I hadn't planned to, and I didn't really fancy him, but I was with my, by then, a fellow Indian best friend.

THEODORE KERR: You found—

SUNIL GUPTA: I found a fellow soul mate, but who was—we never had sex, he became a friend.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But he was Indian?

SUNIL GUPTA: He was of Indian origin, but he was from Kenya.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so we used to hang out—another one I used to hang out together with a lot, who was very camp, also. And he was studying English, and then became a hairdresser. He was the most literate hairdresser in town.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing. Do you remember his name?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he's a good friend still. He lives in Vancouver, Fakvoon.

THEODORE KERR: Nice.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, we used to just walk arm in arm down the street, sort of our own little demonstrations.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we met another India later who wouldn't walk with us, because he thought we would out him simply by being around him, in public. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so this guy was with me, and so it was two in the morning, and one of those gay outing night scenarios. So, I was saying to him, "I don't really fancy the guy, and I would much rather just go home to bed." And he was like, "No, no, you should just go and do him," kind of thing.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And he looks very, you know, desperate or something. So, I did—I think that maybe because of my Indian childhood days, I'm—there are people I like, and then there's people I kind of don't like as much, but like, "What the hell, they're there, and they're another warm body and they might like you, that might overcompensate for the gap."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I've never been too hung up on like, I must have—you know, some people get super hung up on, like, this one kind of thing. Anyway, so I did, and that person became my lover for 10 years after that night.

THEODORE KERR: And did you know by the end of that night that you had feelings for him?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it kind of happened gradually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. What was his name?

SUNIL GUPTA: Rudy. He was Swiss.

THEODORE KERR: Swiss. Swiss Rudy.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he was also in business school.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. In accounting?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, he was doing his MBA by then. He was a bit older.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. But of your class, in your school?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: So those are complications for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that's true. And then he was a foreign student, and he was living on money from home, and he was trying to be frugal. And so, I lived in a two-bedroom flat with my sister, so at one point for a while he moved in with us. And the three of us became a kind of trio, because at first he was a bit resistant. But then—he's her age, they're both four years older than me. And they had a lot of things in common. Then my parents were trying to—were hoping that it was her rather than me, who was [laughs]—because they quite liked him, because he was Swiss and quite proper and everything. And behaved very nicely towards them.

Anyway, so yeah. So meeting him then started a whole lot of things, because he—so at first he migrated to Canada. So when he graduated, we had a cliffhanger. Suddenly they were going to send him back to Switzerland. And I had no interest in leaving Canada. And so, he migrated. He got himself a job in the business world in Canada, and he got himself—what's it called? Landed immigrant status. And then he lived there for a while. I think he was a bit unhappy. Not unhappy, but he used to always moan about—one of his characteristics was to moan constantly about North America. He had come to Montreal because he had actually come to Chicago, and then he found it too overwhelming and North American, so Montreal was a little bit European, or something, and French-speaking. Anyway, he would go on and on about this, so then people said—everyone used to say to him, "Well, why don't you just piss off back to Europe?" [Laughs.]

So he did. So he went home for a holiday once, and he found himself a job, and he said, "I've got a job, and it's going to mean living in England." And he said, "I picked England because maybe then you could come, because it's the only place I could have thought of living in." And so, before that, the training—it was an American company. It was J.P. Morgan, actually, and they would train him here, in New York.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so something funny happened then. So, then it was all kind of long-distance. I think he called me from the interview. He had gone home to Zurich, and then he had the interview in London. When they made the offer, that's when he told me over a phone call from London, which in those days was kind of unusual, right? And then this guy is calling and saying, "Should I take this job? It means, "I'm going to New York soon," what did I think? And I've always thought that people shouldn't stay with you if you have to stop them from something, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That would somehow bounce back badly.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I had this gut sort of intuition about it. So, I said, "Please take the job, and I'll try and come along." So the first thing was very easy. He came to New York. I stayed back and finished my BA, my undergrad, and I applied for a grad school here, to do an MBA.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I got a place at Columbia. So everything was like, very hunky-dory. And then—but he moved here a bit earlier, and I kept going up—I went up and down a lot for a while. Driving—I've been on that 87 enough times over my life, and in the winter. Anyway [laughs] so—but I dropped a course. I failed my tax course, because it was so boring. On Canadian accounting tax laws, can you imagine? [Laughs.] I think it was on a Monday morning, I just never made it back on time.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Or stayed awake long enough, or something. So, then I lost Columbia, but then I found a substitute downtown here at Pace. So, my parents were happy, they were persuaded that I, the son, was going off to study an MBA in New York City, and they would help me. So, I came here. So in '76 I was here for a year with him. And then—that's when I dropped out of the—then I dropped out of the MBA, and got involved with photography.

THEODORE KERR: What was that process like?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was a bit nerve-wracking, because it was gambling on many things. But I think we were young and kind of idealistic then, also.

THEODORE KERR: But what had happened in your life that made photography something that you could switch to?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think my interest in Montreal had sort of—I had become the photographer for my local gay thing and I think I arrived here at a very good time for photography. It was '76 and coming from a place where culture

was not really created there, it arrived there already formed.

THEODORE KERR: You're talking about Montreal?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then to be here where it felt like it was being made here. But also, in terms for photography, there was that big boom and there were 50 galleries. I didn't realize until I—suddenly I was in this place where there were 50 photography galleries.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I hadn't even thought of photography on the walls, let alone so many of it and so much of it. So I began to go to things and meet a few art people. And some of the gay people I met were involved with it. And I met a gay guy who was involved with auctions. So he would take me and then, you know, I began to see people buy and sell this. And I just had this huge interest. So I had this amateur interest, so I self-taught myself. But suddenly here there were all the pictures that you had thought about or seen in repro over here. And so, I enrolled in some—it started with enrolling in some classes at the New School, where you're teaching.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] So, on the photography course in that final year they would allow non-full-time students into these sort of master classes that were run by very well-known people. So I enrolled with Lisette Model and Philippe Halsman, and George Tice. And just stopped going to the MBA.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: I was kind of aided in this by Rudy, who said, "Well I've got this big job at J.P. Morgan, you don't have to worry so much," kind of thing. "Just do the photography."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I did.

THEODORE KERR: Was that comfortable to accept?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, yeah, at the time I was—I thought, "Why not?" You know I just—because I had practically gone for the same deal. Because he was going to be here and then—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I wasn't thinking about what would happen when I'm 50. I was just thinking, what am I going to do now?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Although, I did think—so then when I did the—and also, I thought it was going to be, like, temporary. That I would do this and then we would go back to normal life. And then after this I would—like when we went to London or wherever else we would go to—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In fact, when we went to London I spent the first year trying to get an accounting job.

THEODORE KERR: Like New York was this experiment at the time for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was like a time—yeah like a year off or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's just there was this awkward thing that my parents were involved.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they were tied to the school and the fee-paying part.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And I hadn't told them. So, I hadn't built up the courage to tell them, "I'm no longer going to these classes."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's hard. Maybe harder than "I'm gay."

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I think so. So, they didn't know. They found out the worst possible way. They heard from the school at the end of the year. With a bill saying you know—transcript saying "incomplete" across everything. But they still wanted the money.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So then I had to go home after that. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. With your legs like crestfallen?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, but by then it was over. He's over his year here anyway, so—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —a whole new ballgame was going to start. But yeah, it's—

THEODORE KERR: Let's slow down and talk about photography, just a little bit. Like do you remember the cameras you were using or?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, but I'm going to use the loo.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Let me unplug you. Or you can unplug yourself. There you go. I'm going to pause it.

[Audio break.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Camera size—I started with a basic manual Nikon and a basic enlarger. Both of which I had learned from the *Time Life* series of self-help books. And I had a normal lens for it. And that's all I had. And it served me well. And then when I lived here I became more interested in larger formats because of what I was seeing, you know, the photography. And so, then I got like a Rolleiflex that you look down, a box camera.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I even got a Speed Graphic, like a 5x4, but a portable one that has a wire frame.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: A, like, Weegee kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I could walk around the streets and take 5x4 snapshots. That was more hit-and-miss because you were just in the wire frame.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] It was trickier to process them in the bathroom, the 5x4s.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I was still DIY-ing it.

THEODORE KERR: So, your darkroom was your bathroom?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, always had been. And so, I tried to fit it all—yeah, I couldn't get bigger than what that would allow.

THEODORE KERR: Right. So, the sink was your—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And I was living with a guy who went to work from morning till night again.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he found himself in a very competitive environment here. And he was—so in his office, people competed to arrive before everybody else.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, like that. Anyway, so—but basically, I ended up being, like, Leica and Tri-x on the streets, which was the kind of atmosphere of the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the streets were here, so it was New York and I lived—we lived in London Terrace on 24th Street.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he worked on 57th.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I used to go to the New School.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then we just spent our weekends going to SoHo to see art galleries and hanging around the West Village. And then, of course, I realized we were living in a new experience of a very publicly gay space. Between where we lived on 10th and 24th—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and the school and down there, in the Village. So I just shot it all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Plus, I shot different street corners, particularly that sort of whole gay thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then it sort of—it was a cliché almost. So, then we were in this building which was full of little old Irish ladies who wouldn't come out after six.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was scary, and there were Puerto Rican boys who might mug you. And so people thought I was Puerto Rican, so they would cross the street like that. But it was like a fun time. But I was with somebody.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And you guys were monogamous.

SUNIL GUPTA: And we were monogamous in—well, that was the idea. Not entirely, but we didn't talk about it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, we both—I went to see my parents and he traveled. So, like, things happened here and there.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, normally what would happen is that when the person came back we would have a new friend.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Because that was one of the only mechanisms to meet people. Because he wasn't meeting anybody at his bank.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because if there were gay people, they certainly weren't out.

THEODORE KERR: And he wasn't out at work?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not entirely, I don't think.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I didn't really have a way of—I mean, in my little photo workshops there weren't really people to meet very much.

THEODORE KERR: There wasn't?

SUNIL GUPTA: There was a few, but they were pretty straight, mostly.

THEODORE KERR: And do you remember any of the exhibitions you saw at that time? Or were there photographers besides your teachers that were inspiring to you or exciting to you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah. There was galleries that [inaudible]. There was the Witkin Gallery on 57th, where you could just hang out, that had sofas and a library.

THEODORE KERR: What was it called?

SUNIL GUPTA: Witkin.

THEODORE KERR: Witkin.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was on the East Side and it was a kind of informal center. No, I was enthralled to a certain—to that whole semi-street legacy of the new document you know Arbus and Winogrand and so on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there was this enthusiasm that we could photograph everything we saw. But it was all very straight photography, I mean.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: On Tri-x, un-manipulated and the full frame, very classic photography in that sense.

THEODORE KERR: When you say full frame what do you mean?

SUNIL GUPTA: You print the whole negative.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it's not cropped and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, you're shooting in camera? You're imaging in camera?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then the skill was to kind of get that image very quickly without thinking. So, I developed that and I could do that. And—yeah. So it was fun to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I did a lot of it. But it was kind of still—as I said, it wasn't serious. Like I didn't think this was going to become what I do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, it was like a glamorous amateur.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Like a very invested hobby or something?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because by then I was kind of being kept.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I didn't have to work for that here, anyway. So, yeah, it was kind of a luxury. So I just went to see shows and auctions.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And were you excited by the photos you were taking?



SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And the ones that I was seeing. Because I did this print workshop with George Tice.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was all about—the whole thing was to come with 10 negatives and print them 10 different ways all semester.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I was very interested in making the prints. Handmaking the prints. So I got all very invested in all—all of the stuff that has now all become redundant.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But that's what I thought I was going to do. And also, I thought I would do it in a non-commercial way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I wasn't really planning to work commercially. I kind of never looked at the magazine world or anything.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I had no idea that how all that functioned. And no interest in it. I just became very gallery focused. But I didn't understand how I could penetrate that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. And did it—

SUNIL GUPTA: Except in the classes.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—because one was with Lisette, which was the most exciting in a way. And she had this way of talking about the gallery world. Because she knew them all and been around them for so long. And then she would respond to work that she saw like that, very extreme, positive or negative thing, in a way that you can't do now when you teach. You know, she would say, "Darling, this is shit. Go try again." You can't say that now to your students.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And was that helpful? Like did you get feedback like this?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, for me it was fantastic. Because she was very positive.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And she—I think she was at that point in her life she was kind of taken up with an Indian guru kind of philosopher guy, called Krishnamurthy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I think she put the Indian thing together and—and I think a lot of people thought I was stoned all the time. Which I wasn't. I was just like this. But people think I'm slow or high or something. [Laughs.] So, anyway, she took a shine to me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Let's put it that way. And she said to me, "Oh, why are you doing business? You should do photography." So, I said, well, I have a knee jerk thing of, "Well I don't think it's going to—I won't survive on it." [Laughs.] Which was true in retrospect. She said, "Does it matter?" And I thought, "Oh, yeah, well Rudy's working at the bank, it doesn't really matter for now. So, I'll carry on."

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And the other one were Philippe Halsman, so that was just like all about him and all the kind of—it was kind of cute, it was his wife would bring you tea and all this. And it was in that building you know that famous apartment building he lived in, in the Upper West Side.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow. It wasn't even at school?

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

THEODORE KERR: It wasn't even in the New School space?

SUNIL GUPTA: No. He did his at home.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. On Central Park West when the Lennon and all this was happening.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: She came down a staircase with this tray. It was very dramatic. Anyway so,—

THEODORE KERR: And were his portraits everywhere around the house?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Kind of. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And what did—

SUNIL GUPTA: It was all very informal. You sat around his living room, basically.

THEODORE KERR: So, they are very different photographers: Philippe, and Lisette.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. But French. Both of them still had their accents.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Did you find yourself gravitating more towards a school of photography or a type of photography?

SUNIL GUPTA: Finally, towards her the most.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And she used to say—of course she made these sort of huge statements, which were kind of inspiring because they were so melodramatic. And she would say, excuse me [coughs], we would go on trips to the Met and she would say, "Darling, when your work is dead, it will be in a museum." Meaning, like, when it stopped being of any real interest.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Being studied.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like this we're doing. It's because it's like, it's over.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, we can debate that. I mean, I have strong feelings. Yeah, but I see what you're saying.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It seems safe to talk about HIV now.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But, I mean, we could—we know it's not.

SUNIL GUPTA: But in a sense, we're talking about history. It's not going to affect anyone.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, it's not—we're not talking about, like, "Let's go out and, like, disrupt everybody."

THEODORE KERR: Absolutely.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, absolutely.

SUNIL GUPTA: In that way—so, I kind of—she appealed to me like that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: She was the only person in the position of authority who said museums were crap. Because everybody desperately wants to sell to them. You know when you go to AIPAD and everybody wants to sell everything to a museum.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they gave this award to a museum woman, and I thought, "Oh, this is what's happening." [Laughs.] Anyway, I just didn't see any way into it.

THEODORE KERR: And also, you felt—I'm guessing that also because you weren't invested in the same way that students who maybe had to make it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Who were here and who were on a course.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. You had a different ease.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. I was a foreigner. I'm, like, a professional foreigner.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I was just passing through anyway.

THEODORE KERR: And when you look at the work from that time, like the *Christopher Street* photos, like what do you see when you see those photos now?

SUNIL GUPTA: They're very nostalgic. And they were never seen in public till a couple of years ago.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, no they were. They were reproduced for the first time in that magazine called *Butt*.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, of course.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay [laughs], so they were there.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And somebody—one of the guys saw himself there. That was very cute.

THEODORE KERR: Somebody in the photographs recognized themselves in *Butt* magazine?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. In the *Butt* magazine.

THEODORE KERR: And contacted you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, got in touch saying "I'm so-and-so and I'm still alive."

THEODORE KERR: [Gasps.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Because the presumption somehow about that series is that they've all passed away.

THEODORE KERR: Even about that series, the *Christopher Street* one?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because that's from '76.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In the West Village.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was, like, too many men, not enough time.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember which guy it was that—?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I do.

THEODORE KERR: Which guy was it? Because I can remember some of the photographs. There's the one of the boy in the black sweater.

SUNIL GUPTA: He's walking alone and he's quite close to the camera.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and he's like this?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and he's slightly—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and he's slightly camp and he's got these sort of nice short—

THEODORE KERR: Jeans?

SUNIL GUPTA: —shorts.

THEODORE KERR: Oh

SUNIL GUPTA: No, he's the one with the shorts on.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I don't know that one off the top of my head. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Is he in jeans? I thought he was the—

THEODORE KERR: There's one of a nice looking boy with like a mustache and good hair.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But not him?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not him.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he's walking like that way.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But this one is walking the other way and—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —he has these sort of short shorts and yeah, slightly campy kind of feeling about him.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so I sent him a print.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. But now when you look at those photographs they feel—you feel nostalgia? Or they look like they—yeah, say more about that. Do you think they were nostalgic even while they were being taken?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I think when I took them, I didn't think that—I thought I was—I didn't think that world would be over.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I just thought it was just like my picture of something that—you know, like Fifth Avenue would live forever.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I just went for a walk around there, in the West Village yesterday, to take him around, show him. And it was very sad because it's completely—the whole atmosphere and the little shops that used to be in business, there's no sense of it now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's almost all gone.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Did you go around London Terrace as well?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, all the time, because the galleries on 27th. My art world is all there now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That looks pretty much the same. Probably smarter inside. But from the outside the building is pretty much intact.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Does it feel the same or does it feel different?

SUNIL GUPTA: London Terrace feels the same-ish, to look at.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And then let's go back to the timeline a bit, how do you and Rudy go from being in New York to the UK?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, it was a bit fraught. So, I had to go back—I couldn't go straight to London. I had to go and apply to go to London.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, no, first I did go to London straight. And then I had this whole immigration saga because I was just a casual visitor. You know when you just arrive and they give you a tourist stamp?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you used to be able to string it out up to six months.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I stayed for six months and then you go to Paris and come back.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you get another six months. But you can't do it a third time. They get suspicious. So, after doing that a couple of times then I was in this weird limbo. Because I wasn't studying and I wasn't working. I was trying to find this accounting job. That was the only thing I could do, was if I had gotten an accounting job and then some potential for some kind of work visa thing. But then I had a—I couldn't get a job because I was—the context was different. Basically, England back in those days didn't have business degrees. So, they didn't understand what my training was all about.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because basically people in England went to university to read history or something. And then when you worked in a business environment you were an apprentice and you started from scratch.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like an intern. And then you worked your way up.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So, they didn't know what to do with someone who had skills that never

worked?

SUNIL GUPTA: Who had a skill and a degree and who needed a salary.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So right from the word "go."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So they didn't know where to slot me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, I wasn't getting anywhere, or getting a job. And a whole year went by and it was a very strange—it was a difficult year. Meaning—so, again, the worst thing to do was to migrate as a couple somewhere and not know anybody else.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we did this in New York; we arrived together, didn't know anybody. And our main avenue, the equivalent of Grindr, was impossible because we arrived together. And we did the same thing in London, which was worse because there was no scene.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So he went first, because I had to go back home in between. And then he could find—so, he found a place in this neighborhood that he told me was sort of like the Village. But in fact, it was nothing like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was maybe 10 percent gay, the rest of it was Australian. Or something.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: But it was nothing—you know, there was nothing like those gay neighborhoods in America ever happened anywhere else.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: To that degree, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Maybe there were a few more visible gay men; that was it. But I know at first sight everybody in London looked gay.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Coming from here. So, it was very challenging to figure out London after this. All the signals are all different.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyhow, so, there was that. But then the guy went to work all day. So I had all these long days, like, to fill. So it was a bit weird. So finally after a year of doing this and with this uncertain status, we decided to go back to photography. Photography came to the rescue this time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, in order to stay on with him in England, I enrolled in a photography course. So I get a student visa for three years.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I studied photography full time. Partly out of interest, but partly to stay on with the guy. And then I finished, and then we were back at square one. So then I enrolled in another—in an MA, to make it another two years.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, and so then that finished, and we were again back in the—but by then I had become more seriously involved with it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Five years of full time study. I was really in to the whole thing then. And there was no turning around.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. You were committed. And had you spent more time in photography than accounting by then.

SUNIL GUPTA: Much more time.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I had seen what was possible.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I had been at the very fancy school because I went and did the MA at the Royal College of Art.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: At a time when only six people were in the class.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, so, it was very privileged. We could have anybody we want, and we did.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And my external tutor was Bill Brandt and all that. You know, it was very—and we were in South Kensington near London. The Queen lived down the road.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Grand, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Meant to impress, and it was impressive. I was impressed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And when we graduated there were people dressed up in medieval outfits blowing trumpets as the Royal College of the—you know, they really work it. So—and our graduates were David Hockney and people like that. So, anyhow, so—

THEODORE KERR: But it is interesting. How did that—

SUNIL GUPTA: There was no turning around after that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But they teach you that—they actually create an elite.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they tell you that when you arrive: "We've chosen you and we're going to make you the elite."

THEODORE KERR: Well, and I'm wondering, how does that square with your gay liberation political awareness?

SUNIL GUPTA: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So then, what happened was—but then I was kind of off of preserving the status quo with arms, remember?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So—but gay liberation in this part of the world was gay liberation for the gays.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Most of the time. That's what I realize in retrospect. It wasn't liberation for everyone.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, no.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, it's only in England that politics with a big P became more visible.

THEODORE KERR: For you?

SUNIL GUPTA: For me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Because other constituencies started to intersect with your life.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, if I compare myself with my sibling, who came to live here more permanently—so, the point at which I went to live in London, she got a—she came to do her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And met a guy here and stayed on here, and ended up living in places like Atlanta and DC. And I lived in England. And we started at more or less the same point.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I became, well, like, very left wing I suppose from the vantage point of here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And she to me felt like a liberal.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know?

THEODORE KERR: And would she understand herself as a liberal as well?

SUNIL GUPTA: Probably. But we argue all the time because we're like—actually quite poles apart. Because—and then I used to come back sometimes and visit some gay friends who were still in New York, and were not particularly gay-political but they were just regular gay guys who lived just down the road from here. And they lived in a completely gay world. The gay male world, and I couldn't understand how they managed to do this. And that they found it satisfying enough. That it was—the entire thing was—you know, when they had a party, everybody was another gay man, of roughly the same age. It was, like, strange.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: After London where we were kind of—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And was there ever a moment when you questioned your relationship with Rudy? Because it was hard work.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah. All the time. It became very problematic. I used to accuse him of personally representing, you know, the capitalists.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Because [he -SG] was a Swiss banker, you know. He was asking for it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he thought he was a liberal. And I think when we were young and we were starting out we thought we were going to join the business world and change it from the inside.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Right, that's how it started. But actually, the opposite happened.



THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It changed him?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. He didn't want to come to demos anymore.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He didn't want to be filmed in on pride marches.

THEODORE KERR: By you?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: Or just generally?

SUNIL GUPTA: By the media.

THEODORE KERR: The media.

SUNIL GUPTA: There was anxiety that he had to have a certain—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He became their poster boy for a while.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, they used to make ads out of him.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: Take him to Japan and he would be stepping off the curb in front of some bank in Tokyo and it would be full-paged pictures in the financial press.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, like, the literal poster boy?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, for J.P. Morgan, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Uh-huh [affirmative]. So, he—

SUNIL GUPTA: You couldn't be gay [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, you had to be J.P. Morgan [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, straight. And then, like, there were all these perks.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Boxes at the Royal Opera House and stuff. But he could never take me anywhere. He had to take a woman every time. And so, we began to have quite a lot of political differences that way.

THEODORE KERR: This is in London?

SUNIL GUPTA: This is in London, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, that's—I mean, I'm projecting, but I would—my heart would break a little bit every time. But I don't know. What was it like for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I just became more and more extreme and involved in racial politics. And gay politics, and a mixture of it, and went to a lot of meetings and began to understand real politics, like the town hall. And I would join groups in the town hall. Our town hall was very Left. It was Labour, and it became a coalition of queers and old people and all the marginal groups together. Like this big—the bigger rainbow, and then we were more than anybody. And Ken Livingstone with the London town hall understood that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And out of that, cultural policies were formed. And I used to help write cultural policies about inclusivity and why public space was important, and why public institutions were important, and why we didn't want to have more private trust and foundations in the arts. Everything the American side was pushing, you know. And now you can't have a solo show in a British institution without a private gallery involved.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Just like here. So the same 10 galleries run the public side now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: With their artists everywhere.

THEODORE KERR: I realize there was a question from before I never asked. And you were in Montreal during the late 60s, early 70s, which was like—you know, if we think about the timeline of "gay history," and I use that in quotation marks because there's lots of gay histories. But one of the through-lines of gay history is the late '60s, early '70s was very important to gay history in New York City. And I'm wondering, how did that information come to you in Montreal? Or did it come to you guys at all?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, no, it did.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Absolutely, the whole thing. So, because it will be written about. And so, this was circulating. So, through Dawson, through going to college and with gay staff, they had this information.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, all those early writings and reports and everything. And just the idea of the—I forget what this was called here, but some kind of gay liberation front in London became GLF.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: For us it started at university. But the university group soon realized that it had to address the city.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's what your university groups did?

SUNIL GUPTA: The Gay McGill thing. It began as a something—yeah, it was called Gay McGill, inside the university.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But it was done politically in the sense of using the reach and the money and resources of the university to create some kind of services for the city, for the outside, for the larger community.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like the helplines.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which were physically situated off campus.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And served the city, like that. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I'm making a kind of face because that's a very enlightened understanding of gay politics.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, but in Montreal—and I've got pictures of this—the earliest gay marches I went to were inside May Day marches.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: For laborers rights.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, the worker rights and gay right are in the same frame.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, it was very much tied to the trade union movement. That's what I found later on was missing here. Here it's like this—it's less like a lobby group but it's just about this group.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. I hope when we keep talking, we can talk about how that impacted the response to HIV.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Because I think that will be an important topic. But first I just want to—

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I just got very like—I feel, like, radicalized—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in London. As opposed to living here. Just by I think being in the arts and being there at the time that I was. Which was early '80s. So, I came out of school into a kind of postcolonial world. Theoretically. And that was what the talk was about. And kind of Postmodernism. So, it was—and also, I think around that time Thatcher was coming into power. So, things got—it's like now. Things got very polarized.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there was a kind of clearly defined enemy character. This evil nasty woman who was running the thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, that galvanized everybody. But there were huge demonstrations. They were about anti-nuclear, the American bases in England, from which they were bombing everybody. The planes were flying off from England. And the French were saying, "Not over our air space." But the Brits were saying, "Oh, yes, take off from here."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: The nukes were stored in England, and there was a lot of commotion about that. And women's groups and gay groups were part of those. So there were like this coalition-building going on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And a shared sense of vested interest, like, "Our well beings are tied to each other."

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. That's right, and through our local borough councils and town halls. So, that's were the lobbying—so, my local mayor in my neighborhood—so I lived in Brixton. I moved to Brixton after the riots.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And we had a mayor in Brixton, a local mayor, who was Jewish, lesbian, single mother, you know, who was hated by the tabloids. Every day there were these things about her. And she had this Indian girlfriend, so I took a picture of them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, my work became again a response to all that was happening around like that.

THEODORE KERR: So, work—your work and your politics are not separate.

SUNIL GUPTA: But then—no.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Actually, I gave a talk at the Royal College recently, because I work there again—well, I work there now. And so I went from this time to now. And basically, I started with this question of, "What's it like to be gay and Indian?" then.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's the same question now.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I told the kids that it's not about moving forward to work, to some kind of thing you're perfection in your artwork. It's—the larger questions are always there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So what happened was, in the process, by the time I finished all this studying, '83—and resolved yet again the visa issue.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because by then I really had to leave and come back in some other way, which I did. You could—I found a way. You could come back to England as an artist.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And be self-employed and then get it stamped, allows you to be there.

THEODORE KERR: Right and by then you had had solo shows and some group shows. Right?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: No?

SUNIL GUPTA: No I had—yeah, I had been trying to kind of get shows. Yeah, I had been in a few things.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, I guess, just like as a proof that you were an artist?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that's true. No, I had been in a show in 1980, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: By lying about not being a student.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Okay. And was that still something that you were having mixed feelings about? Were you still curious—were you still wondering within yourself, "What would it mean to be a photographer?" or, "What would it mean to be an artist?"

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because by then I had decided this was what I wanted to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I could see how I could do it. It's just that when I graduated the MA, and I was confronted with the visa thing, and the work thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then finally I got this visa that allowed me to come back to live in England. But only to be self-employed—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —as an artist. [Coughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Do you want sparkling or still?

SUNIL GUPTA: Still.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. I'm going to see if I have a cough drop.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I came back to live in England with this legal right to remain there. But only as a self-employed person. So it meant I had to live through the photography.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I couldn't teach.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which was the natural home for arts graduates who weren't living off their art sales, right? So, it kind of inadvertently saved me from the teaching pathway. But of course, I wasn't going to sell enough prints to live on. So, I decided to do commercial photography work. Because I think read somewhere that one of my heroes, like Duane Michaels, did this. That they kind of made shitloads of money in advertising while they were doing this art thing. Nobody was making a lot of money on it back then.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I did editorial work. So my peers who left college with me—between us we figured out, and they were telling me also, that there's this magazine world, which I hadn't really looked at it very much as a potential source of income. And also, when I had been in college I had been drawn to the human rights stuff, and so in a nutshell I kind of left in '83 with my MA thinking—I think I want to be W. Eugene Smith.

THEODORE KERR: Who's this?

SUNIL GUPTA: Hm?

THEODORE KERR: Who is—

SUNIL GUPTA: Eugene Smith? The photographer from the '50s.

THEODORE KERR: I'm sorry I don't know who this is.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay, he did very famous—he worked for *Life* magazine, and he did a lot of famous essays.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But he's very famous for having left *Life* magazine to work on a Japanese pollution story called, *Minamata*.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: About lead poisoning in a river. And he spent two years there, having left his job.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because the *Life* magazine assignments were only for a week.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So you really couldn't do investigative stuff of your own. They would give you the story—that's what happened to me later. You get the written text and then you just illustrated with something.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Whereas he got completely immersed in this pollution story, which they were trying to hide because it was to do with corporate interests. So anyway, so that's what I thought I wanted to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then when I went to see all the magazines, they all laughed at me because that had all gone. Because I hadn't looked at the market properly. So that was all done by TV. And the print magazines basically wanted portraits of minor celebrities.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Or glamorous restaurants and that kind of—like lifestyle or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So my first job when I left school was take a mug shot of Miss UK. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: What does a mug shot mean? Like a tabloid?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I mean like a head and shoulders.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, like what are those called?

SUNIL GUPTA: Passport pictures.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But a more glamorous version of it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Head shots. Yeah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because my girlfriends who had left the college with me primed me—like, informed me about this huge market of women's magazines. I had never looked at them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's hundreds of them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they were all being serviced by these towers in different parts of London. They said, "Look over there at that building. It's got 15 floors of women's magazines and every one is a potential job."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But was it around this time that you were taking the portraits of the couples?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Just then, because that's when we broke up.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And so that's what sparked the—

SUNIL GUPTA: —the couples, yeah. Because I didn't think I would break up. I don't know. I just didn't think we would break up. I mean obviously it wasn't news that people break up, but I didn't think we were going to break up. Because we had been through so much—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —hassle to get there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we just finished removing all the problems.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I could stay there and there was no more impediments. And then we broke up. I forgot why we broke up. I think finally a break over petty things that much later don't seem really relevant. But—

THEODORE KERR: But there was maybe a lack of communication all along? And some of the bigger things didn't get discussed, or—

SUNIL GUPTA: I think we just became different people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In a way that we didn't expect.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Politically for sure. So, he was changing J.P. Morgan. They were changing him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I didn't realize that I would get so personally invested in the kind of race and sexual politics that I got involved with. And he couldn't share that. And he didn't mind, but it became a little tricky to negotiate living like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, because it was, like, your passion.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and I couldn't really—and when I brought it home it would clash sometimes.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Everything about it—you know the hours would clash.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You have to go bed at 10:00, because you start at 6:00. And if I had my lot over, they would come at 10:00—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and then smoke dope till 5:00 a.m. and all this. And then he would have to ask—he would actually have to ask them to leave. I mean, it like, became very awkward.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And were you financially dependent on him at the break up?

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I was still financially dependent.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because by then he had bought a whole house. There's no way I could have even shared it with him. It was—he bought a—we were living in like a brownstone in London.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So one day, I just packed up a bag and I moved in with a bunch of lesbians in a house that had nothing in it, in a flat in North London.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Because they were feeling threatened and they wanted a guy in their front room.

THEODORE KERR: So, the invitation—

SUNIL GUPTA: There was hardly any heat and I went to, like, the complete other extreme.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So yeah, that kind of—but I didn't last long on my own. I've been a bit of a serial monogamist for a while, or for the first few years. And between these two, I think it was three weeks in-between the first and the second one.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the second one lasted a bit longer, 11 years.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow. But was there any fallout from the break up with Rudy? Like, was there like—?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because we just went back to being friends.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I went back to living there and—very briefly. But then because I met the second one—by the time I met the second one, I was back to living with Rudy. And I think Rudy was actually quite irritated because I think if I hadn't met somebody, we could have lived—we could have just lived on, like, as ex-lovers but—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —sharing the house like—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —in an ongoing kind of—but it didn't work if I had met somebody.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I wasn't the owner of the house, so—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's kind of what my friend is experiencing now with his roommate, who's got the boyfriend.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right. Totally. And it wouldn't be fun for Rudy to see you—

SUNIL GUPTA: Me romancing somebody in his house.

THEODORE KERR: Exactly.

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that. So, then I moved out. And then—

THEODORE KERR: With the second boyfriend?

SUNIL GUPTA: With the second one, who was much more appropriate.

THEODORE KERR: Was he radical?

SUNIL GUPTA: He was working-class Brit.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: He had been to a grammar school, though. And he had been to Oxford twice because he was academic.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But working-class?

SUNIL GUPTA: But working-class. And he was clever, and he studied Chinese first.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he was too young for the '60s, so he was sort of like, involved with—he wanted to be like the Beat Generation. He trekked across America to that bookshop in San Francisco.

THEODORE KERR: City Lights?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, something like that. And then he went to Japan and then became a Buddhist, and taught English for a couple of years. Didn't have any sex, and kind of got all spiritual. And then—anyway, switched his interest from Chinese to Japanese and then back to Oxford to learn Japanese. And then I think when we met, he thought I was Japanese.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I fear seeing some writing on the wall in that case, at that point, because—but anyway, we kind of—but we're both Virgos, so in a way, we kind of clicked quite well together.

THEODORE KERR: He was a white guy?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he was a bit littler. So, that was good. They've always been a bit littler.

THEODORE KERR: Do you mean shorter?

SUNIL GUPTA: Shorter.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But we really gelled very well. And also, I thought I was trying to learn from the first one.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, we were just open. There was none of this—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].



SUNIL GUPTA: "Oh, we're being monogamous, but not really, but we just don't bring it up," kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: He was interested in a lot of sex. Not in some weird kind of—but I mean, just like on a Sunday—a rainy Sunday afternoon like this, he would just go to the bathhouse. He would just tell you, "I'm going to the bathhouse."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And that seemed to be fine. And then he would come back for tea. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was it fine with you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was actually, because I had a lot of things I wanted to do.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And by then we were living together, and these flats are always very small.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we both had very obsessive interests that we wanted to do. And I was still filling a lot of grant application forms and things. I was used to like having the place to myself. And it was completely non-threatening, these outings. I mean he would come back and tell you about it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And did you want to hear them? Hear about it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, they became part of our sex life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: The hearing about it. The telling and the hearing about it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Until he began to embellish it too much, and then I thought, "He's making this up for me. It's not true." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It lost some of its—

SUNIL GUPTA: The stories became too outlandish and impossible. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right, you're like, "You can't put a dick in your own ear!"

SUNIL GUPTA: The fact that that wouldn't happen.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Right. Yeah. I guess to go back to the series of the couples, like I wonder, like, what a photography session with a couple be like?

SUNIL GUPTA: So I was—yeah, I was trying to be very direct and simple. And—so I went back to my roots with the Tri-x and the normal lens and the Leica. And I was looking for just a kind of—I felt they needed to look back at us with a certain feeling of power or authority. So that they shouldn't be shying away or something. I think it was still—I was coming out of the days of—where there wasn't much around, image-wise. And I've always had this problem actually, that I grew up—well, I mean, my kind of education in art, in photography, in visual culture, and the gay movement and the gay side of it, is that the gay subculture is, like, stuck in some [laughs] ridiculously repetitive, endless trope of the same kind of naked body year after year. And nothing seems to change that. So a bunch of us have tried, in different places, in Chicago, and here, and in London. But it cannot be changed. Those centerfolds are there permanently.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I just wanted to give these people a center for a character that wasn't just their dicks basically. That there was more to it, somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I was interested in the relationship side more than the sex side.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I felt that all the gay work is, like, overdetermined by sex a little bit. Not a little bit, a lot of it. And the body and so on. So, they're clothed and they're in their domestic environment. They're just gazing back. Not just being kind of out-and-proud-y, but just sort of, I thought, just being themselves without too much embellishment.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—and then I would just chitchat with them about—I think I thought there was something to find out.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Something I had missed about why I broke up and they didn't.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like their secret, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But I didn't find anything.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: But I thought there was something to find.

THEODORE KERR: Did you arrange them? Or, like, did you—?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I did.

THEODORE KERR: And like, would you have dinner? Like how involved—like were you there for 45 minutes?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. So I modeled it on my editorial life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which was half an hour to 30 minutes—30 minutes to 40 minutes. Unless I knew them more, because I had found them through a social network.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So some I might know a little bit more. We started with some friends, so them I used to meet anyway. And then as I got to the outer bits, then I wouldn't know them at all. But somehow the gay thing kind of clicked in because it was '83. It was before I got really heavily involved in the race politics. Because I think after that, I became very self-conscious. I would have seen that they're all white and I'm not. So I never stopped to think that, you know, I see them as normal gay couples but they see me as not-normal gay person because I'm Indian.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there are not many Indians that they see.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And not with a camera. So that they must think I'm a bit weird. I never stopped—so I think if I stopped to think about that, it would have made some kind of difference. But I just sort of identified with them. You know, they're very—they're just there as them.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: I wasn't making any statement about them but I could never get them shown, because most of the curators I showed it to, mostly women, all took a step backwards. I think because they were all men. There was something about—and they were all looking at you. And she was saying, "You put it up and they're all staring at you." They found it oppressive.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow. It wasn't about the homosexuality per se, maybe? It was also about the male gaze.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was a little bit about they were all men and they were all maybe white men. I think if there were men of color, that might have been a little more exotic or showable.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And so, obviously by then you had been thinking about your race?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it came straight after.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, it came straight after? But what was it like before then? So, let's try to capture on tape, like, what was your relationship to race before?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay. Well, I buried it because having as a teenager discovered in the West that being Indian was useless baggage.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And being gay was vastly more interesting. So, I had adopted gay as my—so I operated as gay. And so, I didn't want to complicate that further.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not until the mid-'80s.

THEODORE KERR: And it must have come up at times. Like would anybody ask you that, like, very intense question, "Where are you from?" Or like, did it rear its head in unexpected ways? Before you were ready to talk—before the mid-'80s?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, it did, but it depended on where I was. So, it changed—the nature of it changed. And some of it mostly—I think because I didn't obviously belong to some very problematic subculture.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the places that I was in. It kind of—what's the word? It kind of meant that I didn't really encounter that—

THEODORE KERR: You didn't set off alarms.

SUNIL GUPTA: —every day. Huh?

THEODORE KERR: You didn't set off alarms.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, so I didn't experience that everyday kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think it's partly also what people—I think it's partly because I didn't grow up with it.

THEODORE KERR: What's the "it"?

SUNIL GUPTA: With racism.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I grew up with privilege in the place that I grew up in. I'm used to having my way, you know. So—and I'm kind of predatory that way, also. So, I suppose in a gay setting, if I would go into a bar then I'm used to being the person who's doing the active seeking out.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: What I want, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I'm not waiting for someone to find me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So if there was racism it didn't affect me that way, because I was the one who was doing that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But I have some friends now who, say, grew up in England, who are South Asian who grew up in a very difficult way, you know. When I saw *Moonlight*, it reminded me of them. You know, who had daily school ground problems with color and sexuality—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and being beaten up all the time. None of that happened to me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I was the one who was chucking those little ones down the stairs.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So—

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And then you said it changes in '95.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I mean '85, I'm sorry.

SUNIL GUPTA: '85, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: What changes?

SUNIL GUPTA: I got involved with the town hall and racial politics and joined antiracist committees. And it connected politics and theory, and postcolonialism, and visual art. And then—so then I began to feel like, you know, in a much more active way, this idea that I had learned in my art training that yes, it's all very Eurocentric and yes, there is no Indian representation. There's very little or hardly any gay representation, and there's zero Indian gay representation. Anywhere, not in India, not here, not in London, not in anywhere, in Japan. It's completely—and so, it became my mission to make images of gay Indian men and put them somewhere that—where they become part of our cultural history or whatever, our visual culture, accessible. So that next time around somebody else would find them. And it happened. So, I'm very pleased about that. You know, it really literally just happened now. So I made in '86 a body of work, *Exiles*, about—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —gay men in India.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's only just been acquired by your museum here, by MoMA.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so it's done. I can, like—that's it. I can go home now.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. I mean, that's a really heavy statement. I mean, the fact that it's been acquired by MoMA is a very heavy statement, I think.

SUNIL GUPTA: 30 years. Yeah, but it was an objective. It was done for that purpose.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And also, your goal is quite specific. What you're saying—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's very specific. I set out to place them in—I have a different goal now, which is to—which came up yesterday because we had this show of *Gays in India* up at the gallery in which I had *Christopher Street* up two years ago.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, people who have seen both said that they're very interesting together—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —to think of. Because that's unusual. That—how it is in different geographies. Actually, there's a third one with England. There's three places that have gay cultures—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: One is—I'm trying to visualize—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I think ideally once—I should try to show them all at once.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Can we talk about *Exiles* a bit? Because it's a—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —it's a departure in both like medium, but also in terms of subject matter, right? So, you're putting Indian—like, Indian is very important in these, but it's also, like, you're experimenting with collage and—it's digital, correct?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it was—

THEODORE KERR: No.

SUNIL GUPTA: —color stills and some writing underneath.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, I'm thinking of other *Exiles*. I'm thinking of—sorry.

SUNIL GUPTA: You're thinking of—

THEODORE KERR: Is it *Exiles 2* or *3*? I feel like—

SUNIL GUPTA: *Trespass*.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, I'm thinking of *Trespass*.

SUNIL GUPTA: But that was all collage, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, *Exiles*, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so, this is not—this is done—

SUNIL GUPTA: *Exiles* is in the color square pictures with the writing underneath.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay, so let's—yeah, that is it. That's still a departure, though.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And it's still—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was for me, because I had—one of the things that had happened through the educational system that I had, was that although I wanted to be like this guy Eugene Smith, who was a kind of Magnum-y documentary lifestyle person—that had all been called into question at the university and the idea of you reconstructed had come to play. And so, when I went to India, and I could see you could do it both ways, and I thought that to do it the documentary would be very unfair to the people who were trying—because people were basically not wanting to be seen. But because I knew where they were, and I could pass for them, I could do it. And I did do some like that. You know, you just go to the cruising sites and take a snap. They really can't stop you.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But it seemed very unfair. So I did it in this constructed way. So *Exiles* is a made up—everything is made up, except the places are real cruising sites and the people are all really gay men. That was all that was important to me, and that we see what really gay men look like. Which seems a bit minor now, but back then, it seemed like a big deal. We just hadn't seen any.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, also because of the circular nature of life. It actually again is a big deal. Like, I'm sure

you meet students, or you meet people who like your work, who feel that your work is as fresh today as it felt back then because they're still not seeing it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Ah, okay.

THEODORE KERR: Because it's not like there is a whole, like—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, there's lots of them, yeah—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Like you've done a lot of work, and a lot of people have done a lot of work, to represent what gay can be in a variety of ways, but it's still easier to see a picture of a young blonde naked boy than it is to see—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —anybody else.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's true.

THEODORE KERR: And so, there's still a way in which, like, the work is urgent, which speaks a little bit to why it's good that MoMA's bought it. Because I think one of your goals, whether it was stated or not, is you wanted enshrined in the system.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It's not enough that your friends see it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: You want to know that—it's almost going back to Lisette, you want to know that when you die, it is in a museum. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Which is kind of a sweet—that is a sweet, intense thing to consider.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And how long it takes our work to get out of our hands into the culture and then circulate to the gatekeepers.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: So, we're at the three-hour mark for today.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: And do you—is there anything you want to end on today?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, do you want to—I'm trying to think, what, '86, quite a lot happened right around then. So —'86 was also the year when we had the first LGBT exhibition in London that I'm aware of. At a place called Camera Work, which was organized by a woman and I. It was called *Same Difference*, and it was a response to difference theory, which we thought was all about gender difference—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —at the time. But it was being espoused by the—all those photo-theorists, and *Screen*, and all those kind of filmy magazines of the early '80s. Yeah, and that was a really racially diverse show, because by then race had become an issue. So that also happened in '86.

THEODORE KERR: How did that show come to be? Like, was it that you guys approached the gallery, or they approached you?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, that came through the photography fraternity, and we had in London a number of government funded spaces, like Camera Work, which would be like Artists Space here or something, I guess. It's a gallery and it's a magazine, and it's a darkroom, so it's a functioning production place, plus showing place.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Plus grant giving and it will have little boards and advisors and then you could be on the board or you could be an advisor or you could be a worker there, or you could be a user, or you could apply for a grant from them. That kind of thing, so people had different roles in this. And London has a slower start in the '70s, but then it kind of caught up to speed in the '80s, in terms of the LGBT stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because when I first went to live in London, you couldn't hold hands in a gay bar. They would throw you out.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: So the idea of this show took a while to happen, but the woman, Jean Fraser had come out of university the same time as me, and more people were out then. And we kind of found each other at these places, and then—so we would then announce to them that, "We want to do this." And then usually they said, "Sure," because—in that spirit of the time. And that led—that was '86, so that gave it kind of—so these spaces gave us the impetus to produce more and more stuff that we wanted to see, because basically by then it was—I left school at '83, so by three years, four years, '86, '87, it was becoming quite evident that the existing infrastructure of galleries and museums and curators was not going to address any of this.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we could just wait and expire and there would never come. Or we could just do it ourselves. And I think I come from a DIY British background. They're quite good at DIY, and it's a culture like that. And the government funding system, it allows you to do that, so I invested in that. I turned my back on the commercial art world—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —at the point of leaving the College, because that was—they prime you to be this elite, and they bring all the dealers in, and so I had a couple of serious conversations with some very wealthy people then I just walked away from it all to the other side of the river, and we got involved with a different thing. And yeah, I mean, it became politicized in the sense that you didn't want to have a dealer.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, it's hard to imagine now, because my students now all want to be successful. [Laughs.] From the minute they walk in. So anyway—so, yeah, we just did it then because of my account—we just kind of did it ourselves.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I met people in these—I went to these meetings all the time, remember? And then the next lot of people I went to were an AIDS activist meeting. We used to have a London Lesbian and Gay Center, and now it's in the gay press, having a meeting about AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: And this was early in—

SUNIL GUPTA: This was around that time, '86, '87.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I went in that and there were, what, 50 people there, and, "What shall we do?" and blah-dy, blah, and so—

THEODORE KERR: And what did it feel like? Did it feel like this drum beat from America was coming over, or did it feel like this virus was going to touch down, or did people already understand that it was circulating in the UK? Like, how did people conceive of it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, it changed slowly. No, I don't know how slowly, but it began by being an American thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: As you might know. So, the first word on the street was, "Do not sleep with an American." And the way you spot them was that they tip the barman and then everybody walks away from them.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So, just stop sleeping with them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That was precaution number one.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then, when the sort of stuff started to filter in, and then when the stuff was happening here and the organizational things, and there was ACT UP here—and then I think there was a kind of ACT UP in London, but then—you see, our issue was totally different because we had the NHS. It wasn't about getting the drugs, it was trying to maintain the system that we had.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But also, we were trying to influence government policy because they were advertising a very heavy anti-sex message of, what was it called? It was—I forget, there was some catchphrase for it. It was monogamy and all of this. And there was this notorious iceberg ad on TV.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they also pulled back from any—they did start to make directed advertising towards gay men, then they pulled back, so it never actually appeared anywhere. So, anyway, I met a woman at this meeting and we decided we wanted to make an art show that would be very British, and very sex-positive, about AIDS. And a lot of the other people there were very skeptical and not very supportive, because I think people that come to take direct action.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think a lot of the people were just skeptical about art anyway. They thought it was a very bougie kind of activity—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and like, "Who goes to art shows anyway?" And so on.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyways, this woman and I, we persisted and we did it. So, it took a couple of years, but it came out. It was called *Ecstatic Antibodies*.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's the book, too?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's a book. And the book sold out and the show did very well. Yeah. And we—and the book was good because we could have writing beyond the exhibition.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and the book—

SUNIL GUPTA: Of different kinds of writing.

THEODORE KERR: The book is also good because it's an artifact—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it carried—

THEODORE KERR: —of topics that are just—how do I say this? In 2017, let's say an MFA student can think and be supported by selected media that HIV was a white gay thing that happened in New York. But if—when they find the book, they will see that actually from the very beginning in other countries, there was a racial analysis—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —of HIV/AIDS. And there was like a critique of government bodies of ignoring black bodies for example.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so, the book is for, you know, someone like me, is super-important and for someone—and definitely people much younger than I am, it's super-important. And so, it's interesting to think about the ways about the way in which art gets critiqued as not helpful in the moment—



SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —and I just—I guess, I'm wondering how your radical—the way you radicalized yourself, understood the role of art early in an epidemic?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, through this experience, anyway, certainly discovered that—I discovered from a comparison of my own experience with the media who I worked for—for a living in this parallel way, at this day job with the newspapers and magazine, including the *Times* group, and—that was all editorialized that you weren't at all free.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That art was much more free that way to express what you want to say, and that message—if you can press the right buttons, can get carried by the media once it's made.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So that's what we kind of tried to do. And—so it got a reasonable amount of PR at the time. And then one of the galleries wouldn't show one of the things, and that became a big controversy and so on, because it was sort of too directly about sex. But it didn't—yeah, it didn't manage to—yeah, it would have been impossible to do it in the normal media kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And once the show was up, how did people in the group react?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, I'm not sure if they even saw it. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I think what's changed now is that these groups don't exist.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And not the groups, I'm sorry, but the venues. England is losing its infrastructure for these things.

THEODORE KERR: And you're talking about, like, these kind of artists' friend centers—

SUNIL GUPTA: The photography spaces, the Gay Center is no more.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's gotten to the point where the bars are no more.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Everything is virtual.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And—so I'm not sure where these discussions happen nowadays.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean like, what would be the venue for it? Or even, where would you hold it? So I feel sorry for my students because I was able to do what I did because there was this—

THEODORE KERR: Infrastructure?

SUNIL GUPTA: —infrastructure of government funded spaces to show and talk and discuss. Now it's all pretty much privatized.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, once they leave, the schools, you know, are—yeah, it's—and I can see what's happening. You know, this is not uncommon, this guy that I'm telling you about, as you know yourself probably—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and this is happening everywhere.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I've just been researching for another job I've got for—used to—in India again—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Sorry, I keep running back to Delhi and Bombay—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which is why we could never meet. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so exact same thing. You can't have—in Bombay and Delhi, it's all on the internet.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not only that, it's almost impossible to have one-to-one sex. It's always involving more than two people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So everything's become a party.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. In private spaces, though.

SUNIL GUPTA: In private spaces, yeah. And it's all becoming chemsex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And people are injecting.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And God knows about education and safety and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Not only that, but people are becoming positive, and people are—and the stigma's not gone in India at all, so nobody will talk about it. A number of young middle-class gay men I know are becoming lately—all of whom talk to me, but not to each other. And I'm saying, "You should just like talk [laughs] get together."

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because everybody is afraid to be outed. Because—the thing about the internet is that you're all—you're a stranger, but also everybody knows, so like, should it appear that Ted's positive, you're not going to have any more sex.

THEODORE KERR: Right, because there's still this stigma.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, there's still this stigma. It's just insane, and—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It's—I mean, that's a good word for it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It's interesting, maybe one place we can pick up next time is, like, I'm still drawn to this idea of like the role of the public in your life, and how the public and the networked public is such a huge part of your work. It's definitely in your work. Like it's the subject of your work, but it's also kind of a through of your life. Like from the public sex as a child—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —to even your response to LGBT issues and queer issues and HIV/AIDS in England, it also seems like you were using the public sphere, like—yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Sorry. I mean, do you have any—is that interesting for you to follow through? Is that an interesting—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it is because—I'm going to borrow from my partner you met—

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who is doing his Ph.D. right now—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —on similar things. From his point of view, because he's working-class Indian—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —who has never had a private space. And so, you see the whole rationale for the law and the changing of the law like that in India—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which is a copy of the changing of the law in England and Canada, and also South Africa, et cetera. It's all about consensual sex between adults in private.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Now, half of India doesn't have a private.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, you change the law and you make it private, but what about all the—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Everybody on the road who's—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Or the people—

SUNIL GUPTA: —no access to the private, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Right, private is a luxury, or private is privilege.

SUNIL GUPTA: Private is a luxury, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, also, you can tell the history of HIV/AIDS through this dynamic of public and private. So the early response was private. It was community, it was like you were using your body as community, and HIV was understood as a networked, public epidemic. And then with the rise—with the introduction of lifesaving medication and the rise of the AIDS service industry, it became privatized. Both, if you had the money, your response to HIV/AIDS was privatized, or, there were small companies vying for state money to take care of HIV/AIDS.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: And now, I actually—maybe I'm an optimist, but I do think that we're in a third phase where we're trying to figure out, how do we bring the community back into the kind of professionalized response? Because I don't think we want to lose the professional—like I want there to be medicine available, and I want there to be access, but I don't want it to be an AIDS service organization.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, I see, okay.

THEODORE KERR: You know what I mean? So, I do think that—and so you're—

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, they've got a very bad name in India.

THEODORE KERR: What's the bad name? Oh, AIDS service organizations?

SUNIL GUPTA: AIDS—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Of course—

SUNIL GUPTA: And that's what his Ph.D. is about—yeah. Maybe you should talk to him one day.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But it's—basically what he's arguing is that—well, it's true, with the case of India, it happened the other way around.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: AIDS funding brought gay activism, or gave it a physical space.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But AIDS funding also brought definitions to India because UN bloody AIDS decided there was something called MSM.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, all these non-English speaking people say I'm MSM because money was coming in the name of it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a real corrupting thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and the ways in which HIV/AIDS was overdetermined by the homosexual narrative and by the gay narrative, and we know that it's more complicated than that. Like the ways in which race plays into HIV/AIDS, or the ways in which, like, not every—you know, HIV/AIDS not only affected white gay men in the early days, but that impacted the way in which education was rolled out. The way UNAIDS decided to focus on MSM, right?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Like, we know that lots of people who are tagged as MSM are trans women or they're intravenous drug users before they're gay men. You know what I mean? So, it—

[END OF SD + 1.]

THEODORE KERR: —and so I am interested in the way that it seems like your work is always kind of disrupting easy narratives of what it is to be someone with same-sex desires. And your work is disrupting visibility and invisibility. So, *Exiles* is a perfect example of that. Like, from the very beginning you decided, "I'm going to respect that some people want to not be visible"—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —"but we need visibility."

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Sorry.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it's true. I've had people become hostile because they thought *Exiles* was real, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like, it was like documentary. And when they learned that it's not, they thought, I'm cheating somehow, and they were not happy about it. But I say, "The men are still gay, that's real."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And we have to think about who has access to visibility, and what does visibility—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —and I read on Facebook today, someone posted "Visibility is surveillance."

SUNIL GUPTA: Ah.

THEODORE KERR: It's interesting, no?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well this book came out, *The Opacity of the Closet*.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: My partner's very good on the reading list side—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he's very interested in all of this because, you see, I'm like super-out in India.

THEODORE KERR: Sure.

SUNIL GUPTA: Meaning I'm on—I've been on TV and I'm debating the nutters about the law and blah-dy, blah, and being positive and everything. In fact, that's how I met him, because there was some [laughs] big gay thing in Delhi.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they just plunked me on the stage as a kind of living example of somebody who is—

THEODORE KERR: —a real life gay man.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who is positive.

THEODORE KERR: Who is positive.

SUNIL GUPTA: And not afraid, kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I didn't have to say anything so there was this all day talking show, and I was just like the—sat there. And there were 300 social workers I was looking at in the audience so I thought, "I may as well get laid. Why waste the day?" [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And so you started winking?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so I met this guy. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That's beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was good, because I didn't have to explain I'm positive and all that. He already knew, so yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Now he's negative and not out. He's the opposite of me.

THEODORE KERR: Not out in terms of being gay?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah—

THEODORE KERR: Or not out with being negative?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, being gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: I think everybody assumes he's positive because of me, but he's not.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But no, it's more the gay thing.

THEODORE KERR: That is very interesting dynamic.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because we did this show together and this Indian journalist wanted to immediately

interview us for the Indian media.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he's not out, so he has to tell a different version.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. It's very complicated to navigate.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's complicated, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And the world is big, and there's lots of difference, but the internet makes things—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. No, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —very different. I'm sure he's more aware of that than I am.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, well I got outed in India by this same kind of thing. I had a show here, years back, and it got reported back there—because, you know, they just like—everybody has this love-hate thing about the United States.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—but whenever one of their people does anything—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —here, it gets reported in this kind of very out of proportion kind of way.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Good or bad, it gets, you know—or one of them gets shot at or something. It's like big news. Somebody shot an Indian [laughs] in this—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And similarly like this so, we're having a show that would become like, a much bigger deal over there, because it's in New York.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, the cultural capital of New York.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so. So they had—but then they had these tabloid headlines, so they had pictures from my work, which had me in them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it said "Gay HIV-Positive" in big black letters. So my 500 cousins saw it [laughs] in India.

THEODORE KERR: Which work was this, which show? Which exhibition?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was—it think it was—well, it was *From Here to Eternity*—

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. Okay. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was—

THEODORE KERR: That's like 1999, 2000?

SUNIL GUPTA: 1999—yeah, early 2000s.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Okay, we really should stop.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay, yeah. What's the time? I'm going to be—oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Good.

[END OF SD + 2.]

THEODORE KERR: This is Theodore Kerr interviewing Sunil Gupta and visually his office on April 1, 2017 for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution. Good morning, Sunil.

SUNIL GUPTA: Good morning.

THEODORE KERR: How are you feeling today?

SUNIL GUPTA: A bit sore from yesterday.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: From the interview?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, what happened after. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: I didn't get home until one o'clock and I was very wet by then.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And it's early; it's 9:00 a.m.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, but I just get up early, that's the problem. I don't—I can't get to seem to compensate by lying in or something.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Well, I'm glad you're here.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And in front of us is the book *Queer*, which has—it's like an overview of your work, and we're looking at a page within the *Exiles* work from '86 to '87, and I wonder if you want to talk a little bit about the images.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, well, *Exiles* came about as a commission from the Photographer's Gallery. It was for an exhibition about the body. It was called *Body Politics*, and I used it to go back and focus on making a body of work about gay men in Delhi, which I had been doing, exploring kind of casually on my own, and finding it quite difficult in a way, because nobody wanted to be in a picture and nobody who wasn't gay wanted to mention the word "gay." So, it felt very invisible altogether. So my kind of photography project subjects didn't want to be in photographs, and I had a kind of crisis with how to proceed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the options were either to be documentary—so I had to go with that, meaning go to cruising sites and take real documentary pictures of events as they happened, because in India there's this public-private space problem. The—most people can't bring you home because they live with extended families, so they meet outside, and the business happens outside.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Much more than in other countries, maybe. So then, when I came to this commission, I arrived at this method of working which was through "use actual gay men" because I really wanted to visualize them and see what they looked like—as evidence that they exist—and then use the actual places, which in the case of Delhi, is fantastic because it's these monuments. And then we just sort of—I cast it with a few people, so the same few people, and we just enacted these scenarios. And I tried to—and I had been interviewing people much like you are, just with a tape recorder.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I would go to the cruising sites and just talk—try and talk to the people, which was a little bit of a novelty for them because they couldn't figure out what I was trying to do. You know, like, they didn't come to talk with me; they were just trying to get it up, so [laughs]—anyway, so that's where the writing comes from. So it's in their voice.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not necessarily the voice of the people in the picture, but I tried to keep the language of their spoken voice, because Indians—a lot of—English is widely spoken in India, but it's become an Indian language. Kind of like American, with its own kind of way of—almost its own grammar now. So I kept that—tried to keep that feeling of Indian person speaking. And then I developed a kind of—at the end, I edited it into a kind of

narrative between the pictures so each one is—it kind of works on its own. So, there's an image and there's something being said about it, and there's a little title in bold, which is the name of the site or the scene we're at.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And—but then it's kind of in a sequential order of—and we touched on things and in this double spread—*India Gate* is about people saying that despite everything, there are still lovers, there are still people who have long-term relationships.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Should we read the text?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes, it says: "Even if you have a lover, you should get married and have children who would look after you in old age."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So that was a reference to—that basically everybody is married, with very few exceptions, to women and that the social infrastructure needs that for many reasons, just like social security or that's your pension, and if you fall sick and you need a blood transfusion, your relative, your family has to give it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]

SUNIL GUPTA: You really can't survive as, like, one single person. So it was like that, but I wanted to suggest that despite that, people are obviously managing to have relationships.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It wasn't just having sex—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in that MSM way. That's so irritating, and that's another story. So this Humayun's Tomb—I thought it was very important for this story to have some Western image in it, some—because otherwise it might have looked too enclosed, like a closed world.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I thought—so I made it like a double thing where it's the image where there's an American character, but he's bringing news about AIDS. So it was like—could have the two things, and the one is a foreigner and the AIDS, so there was information flow.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They had heard about it. This is '86, remember?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was like nobody was talking about that at all for the next 20 years.

THEODORE KERR: You mean on the government level.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But obviously people were, you know—.

THEODORE KERR: —talking about it. Should we read the text?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it said: "Americans talking about AIDS and distributing condoms. Nobody believes them, they're always telling us what to do." So that's also the ugly American syndrome.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So any message coming from here is, like, highly suspect in the outside world, even if it's like a do-gooding one.



THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Or maybe especially?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because once a gay activist from San Francisco, early ones, contacted me for they were desperately looking for somebody Indian, anywhere in the world, because they wanted to go to India and give, you know, information and help and money and whatever, about HIV and AIDS. And I said, "Well, first of all, everyone's going to look at—perceive you as white American, and will go like, 'Okay, you know, this is the CIA, what do they want?'" You know, so.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's a bit like that.

THEODORE KERR: And when you took these photos, you were living in England?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. This is '86, so I was very much living in England, and I was on a high because I found a very good lifestyle of sharing a home with a partner who was a text-oriented academic.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But was interested in Asia, but a different part of Asia, East Asia, and very obsessive about it. So, I had intellectual space as well as someone to talk to. And, plus, he was cute actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I shouldn't forget that, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, that's very important.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And then we were kind of a multi-racial couple.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: At a time when race was very much on the agenda. And so one of the—see there was so—my agenda was to promote non-white artists' work, and we started this movement called Black Arts, but within that we didn't want to be kind of essentialists in that way, so there was peer pressure to have a lover of another race —

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I went on a big racial exploration, and it couldn't be another Indian in my case, you see.

THEODORE KERR: It couldn't be.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it would be like too essentialist.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There were people like that, "Oh, I'm black, I'm only going to fuck black people," like "I'm very politically, you know—"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so we used to look down on that kind of reductive way of thinking.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Just a mirror of the white thing, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —who say "no blacks," et cetera.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Just by reversing it doesn't help anything.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And anyway, so we were very cool. We were multi, and all our friends were. We had this huge

party and everybody was all kinds of races and like that—so it was '86? Yeah. And it felt like—and we had a definitely clear enemy in Margaret Thatcher—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in our larger politics. And people were part of the Labour Party and like—there was other talk about the big politics, and the little politics, and the art politics, and the gender politics. It was all—and so we felt, like, in the heart of it in London and in Brixton, and there were real riots and everything. So—and I think London is very unique that way because it's a mixture of the media, the arts, Westminster, government.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's the heart of an empire and it's also the soul of a country and, like, it's like a global thing, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And finance—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's kind of like New York and Washington put together or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I guess LA, because all the media industry, the film, everything is there. It's a very hard place to kind of get into, but then once you're in, it's hard to exit. That's why I'm still there, actually. So anyway we felt we were at the forefront of some real revolutionary moment in history, and then there would be, like, a whole army of people coming along behind us. So we had to forge a way forward. I was very pro-sex and everything.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it's also—we can't take for granted, it was also pro-culture.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And I think you would be remiss if we didn't talk about, like—what were the discussions you all were having around the role of culture?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well there was a bit of a struggle because we thought—well, the thing is, well, culture—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —was permissible in some—in the more popular forms. So if you did music, for example—you know, London's very big on music, all different kinds, many performative things.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Or drama, or as long as you were doing something live—so that really worked well for the Left and any kind of critical position.

THEODORE KERR: Or in entertainment?

SUNIL GUPTA: But what everybody had a problem with was visual art in a frame in a gallery.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like Chelsea here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It clearly, like, needs money and needs patronage. It immediately becomes tied up with, you know—yeah, it's compromised, its infrastructure—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —with capital, in a very obvious way.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So then we responded by having a lot of community, low-level, low-budget stuff, and so basically some of us—and I certainly felt that photography led the way, with film coming along, and that somehow the lens-based media were the most accessible, the best understood, and were useful to document, and to make,

and to—could be shown in a variety of ways. There were a lot of, like, temporary posted-up, stuck-up shows that—for which there's no record actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean, nobody documented, no catalogue, nothing. So this all came much later.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: A lot of the stuff's gone, so—so like what I was saying yesterday about *Ecstatic Antibodies*, there was—the AIDS activist group wasn't sympathetic to the idea of an art exhibition. It didn't sound like activism to them. But they had visions of ACT UP, like, lying in the street, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And also of maybe like propaganda type art, like a Gran Fury type of practice.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But it sounds like you guys were a little bit doing that as well, if you're having like one-night shows or—

SUNIL GUPTA: In a way, but I think in our art system, which was state funded, it's a bit like our health system. So we had a vested interest in both.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So for example, like, our museums once tried to charge money, like the V&A to go in—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and people just said, "No, we already paid you, the state, to help them. You can't charge us a fee to go in."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the whole idea of not charging a fee and that you pay extra taxes is that—so that everybody can go in.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, so it's accessible.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because when they instituted a fee, I once took two kids on an outing—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and it cost me a hundred—you know, like, it was a fortune.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Buying all of us tickets and then buying them lollies, and then they wanted to buy a little dinosaur each, and all of this—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —by the time I left I was [laughs]—thank God I don't have children with me, it cost a fortune.

THEODORE KERR: Right, the treasury was empty.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. [Laughs.] Anyway, so—yeah, so I think—so then—that those discussions you could have inside the Party—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or with the town hall.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And if that didn't work then you could take it out on the streets.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we certainly—we took it to all the colleges. We are all involved in some way with education and—yeah, and then there was some kind of low-budget but quite influential little publications. In our case it was some magazines like *Ten.8*, and—well, like you had here from, you know, those folded up tabloid things that —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That would fold out, that would be like—it would be like, is it an A-11? But it would fold out and be a poster?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. It's—yeah, or like just—no, it's just like magazines to read, like a book. I forget—what was it called? The thing from Rochester? That was about film theory, full of lesbians. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But you're not talking about like the *New York Native* or something like that—

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

THEODORE KERR: You're not talking about like the *New York Native*?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, no, I'm talking about art things.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Art and film and photography.

THEODORE KERR: Like films—

SUNIL GUPTA: Like medium-specific kind of—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay—

SUNIL GUPTA: Like *Screen*—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Little journal, but not, like, a big packet—

THEODORE KERR: No, but like an accessible journal.

SUNIL GUPTA: —but more college kind of—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Okay, so there were those. And also were you there—it seems like there were debates or conversations and maybe it wasn't this term, but the idea of, like—

SUNIL GUPTA: And there were books like that came out, *Queer Looks*—

THEODORE KERR: *Queer Looks*, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —which was a bunch of the kind of people who were involved—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I wrote something in there, and I wasn't coming from—it wasn't academic writing, you know, it was just coming from what people were doing at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want me to get it? Do you want to see it?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, you don't have to. But well, you can—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah?

SUNIL GUPTA: So you can just tell from the—who is doing it, I mean, Pratibha [Parmar] came from, really from being a bit of a critic, and became a kind of TV filmmaker.

THEODORE KERR: Okay

SUNIL GUPTA: And John Greyson we know, so I mean they're not academics as such.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, publication was different then, too.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so stuff like this came out. This is great.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I mean—so basically it was like a group of—so we all kind of knew each other.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's Tom Waugh. You know, he was always like our dirty old man, even when he was young.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And couldn't have been more so when he was young. And of course Kaucyila Brooke in LA, and so on, and Matias [Viegener]. John di Stefano is now in New Zealand, who was from Montreal actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I wrote something—

THEODORE KERR: Do you want to read your title?

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] *India Post-Card: Why I make work in a racist homophobic society*. So you know, people—I should speak, I don't speak like that now, as you can see. So.

THEODORE KERR: Why? How would you describe that way of speaking?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, because we were—everyone was very separatist and extreme back then in the '80s.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So women made work about women and blacks made work about blacks, and a lot of essentialists only spoke to each other.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I never spoke to any straight people at all. And I think the big connecting thing—in fact they make a claim, in retrospect—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —completely untested, is that had it not been for the queer thing, the racial thing would have been completely segregated, separate. And so queers have kind of brought it together, because we crossed the racial divide.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But that doesn't always happen.

SUNIL GUPTA: It happened in our case.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's what's happening here.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. But—and I guess I'm just wondering, how did it happen? Like, did it happen because of the queerness? Did it happen because of—

SUNIL GUPTA: I think because as people emerged from—because this is the generation that came out with MAS—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative], yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: The first one, that could have—to talk the talk.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, we kind of looked over the parapet to see who else is like you, kind of, be it man, woman, straight, black, or whatever, white, but if they're speaking that kind of language.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And what happened was that, I think especially in England—so before—so up to the '70s, there was this big gender divide. So the women were out marching for their stuff—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —feminism, and "off our backs," and all that business. And the men were really not doing anything about anything. They weren't really—I mean, so there were some gay rights—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but it was kind of trying to be umbrella but it was really just the guys.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because the women kept separating off.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Or it would just be the white guys, eventually. And then we had this—Margaret Thatcher brought in this Clause 28—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which is a local government discrimination bill. And it said funding couldn't go to LGBT organizations to produce any cultural events, book, play, exhibition, that promoted homosexuality as a pretended family relationship—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or a normal kind of thing. Which was terrible because it meant that all the ways in which we worked with town halls—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —would all become kind of illegal overnight. They couldn't give us the money.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And—

SUNIL GUPTA: Or they could be challenged by other people saying, "You gave, you know, a bunch of queers and [inaudible] money and that's against the law now."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's one of your biggest—

SUNIL GUPTA: That kind of thing. It was very, very bad.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So there was a backlash to fight it. And one of the positive outcomes was that it brought the men and the women together, because it affected both.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because the problem with the anti-sodomy laws is that they were always about anal penetration, to put it bluntly. I mean it's technically—I've had this discussion with many people for many years [laughs] but the British laws were supposedly: "You can't do anything except have missionary-position, heterosexual penetrative-sex," as appropriate, basically.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But anybody, in theory—I mean, all sex, even if they're a straight married couple, were illegal. But as we all know, the only thing it applied to was men getting penetrated, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was all about sodomy, and people used to call it the anti-sodomy thing. So a lot of women felt, "Well, this is, you know, your legal situation, that's not our problem." That—I mean, like, this happened in India, by the way, you know this whole 20 years of "change the law," is a sort of—completely focused on the sexual act.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's what was being used to—anyway, so basically in the '80s, suddenly in the mid-'80s, we had this law that then brought the gay men and lesbians together—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Of different cultures and races?

SUNIL GUPTA: —over this issue. So there were suddenly—I think it made this book possible—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and it brought us all together. So I know—that's why I know a lot of these people, regardless of their gender.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I've worked with them, you know, like in *Ecstatic Antibodies*, which followed it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In fact, in *Ecstatic Antibodies*—so we met at this, at the LGBT Center—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and she was a white woman, and then we started to meet to make our exhibition, and three meetings into it, she said one day "I have a confession to make; I'm heterosexual." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: She came out to you.

SUNIL GUPTA: She did. And she thought I wouldn't want to work with her—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —because such was the time—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and the way I had obviously spoken about things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And how did you feel when she said it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I was too far gone with her by then—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —you know, it was, and also she'd become like a—it's like us, we just kind of—you know, I just get very involved like this—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and then—so it seems silly to kind of—you know, so then I felt those barriers were kind of coming down a bit.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And, to be clear, this is before HIV activism? Or is it happening alongside HIV activism?

SUNIL GUPTA: It's happening alongside. Because it did come to England later—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —as you know, and—but we were aware of the work that was done here, there was somebody called Jan Zita Grover—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and there was a show here—there had been art things happening—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and—when did *October* do the AIDS issue?

THEODORE KERR: That's a good question. I don't know it off the top of my head.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was around nine—

THEODORE KERR: Do you think '89?

SUNIL GUPTA: Around that time.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because in '88 I went to my first American conference, but I had no physical contact. I never come back here—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —since '76. So in '88 I came to, for the first time in a kind of work capacity—no, I had come to visit my sister living in Baltimore, so [laughs]—so it was like very family and I didn't do anything as such.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I still have this other half-sister who was living in Huntsville, Alabama—

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: —because her husband and she were working as academics there. So that was very weird. This is a completely irrelevant aside: I find myself for a week in Huntsville with this long lost—I haven't seen this woman for years, because she was adopted by the other mother.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But because I think we were on this side of the world, and so there's—somehow find each other—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —I thought, "Well, I'll just go down and see her." And so they were perfectly, like, straight normal Indian Americans, and they had this son who was completely American.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there's like a space town I didn't realize—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —yeah, until they built Columbia there.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's also a little town that didn't have any public transport at all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they had to drive me places and leave me in the morning, and then at lunch time they could move me to another place, because couldn't go anywhere. [Laughs.] If you didn't drive, you were sunk.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—

THEODORE KERR: A small interesting thing about Huntsville.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh yeah, and why did I mention—because so this woman, she—and of course I was being very out, aggressively so, but there was no outlet at the time in Huntsville. But she said there's a Hilton Hotel, and there's a bar. She said, "If there's any gay people around they'll be there." [Laughs.] So they took me there, in case I spotted somebody. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Did you?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I didn't—[laughs]—and anyway I was with them, I had these two chaperones.



THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I couldn't tell—it was all—yeah, it just felt like this airport hotel or something.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Huntsville is also where the first anti-HIV Criminalization Conference happened a few years ago.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: So that's interesting to note, and there's still no gay bar there.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: There's like gay nights, or gay-friendly bars, but no gay bar.

SUNIL GUPTA: Alright. But they have all these people there, and they have all these colleges, a big college.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. So should we go back to—

SUNIL GUPTA: Get back to her, yeah. By the end of this project, she was very gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So she kind of transcended me and became this leather dyke—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —like extremely gay—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and began to, in fact, live her life as a kind of performance, as a queer performance. So she acquired this girlfriend, and they lived as the sailor and the whore, so Tessa was the whore, so she used to dress up as a gay man in drag—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —with a boa, you know, feather boa. This is, like, daily life, nine to five, going to the shop, and the girlfriend was the sailor.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, these two lived like that. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And then you were saying—

SUNIL GUPTA: So that was part of the thing about cultures, that it gave people, like, a means of expression—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —that you could live like that. You know, it wasn't an academic thing. It wasn't like you had your nine-to-five job and you went down to the splash. You know, it was people who would live—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —or certain groups of people in this center would try to live differently.

THEODORE KERR: And was it an animation of the academics? Like you said that they—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because she was quite academic, Tessa—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —at the same time.

THEODORE KERR: And you started talking about Huntsville because you were wondering about *October* magazine, you went to the United States for a conference—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh yeah, yeah, '88, that's right. So yeah, I was on this panel that was organized by—it was a queer panel, so there were two men and two women. It was call Partners in Crime and it was Kaucyila Brooke and Hinda Schuman, and of course Kaucyila Brooks was on the West Coast and Hinda was on the East Coast here, in Philadelphia, and Doug Ischar, who was from Chicago, and they found me somehow. But Doug was a student of—just finishing at CalArts then. So CalArts was kind of involved, and of course Kaucyila was on the West. Maybe she was in San Diego, or she had—something, or—so, yeah, and it took place in Houston.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So then what happened was that to get to Houston—and of course we had no money, because they wanted me to come from England and they had no money, I had no money—what to do? So—but because of our teaching ability, our teaching connections, they said, "Come and give a lecture at CalArts. They'll give you \$500 and fly you over, and then for the 500 bucks you can fly to Houston."

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: And then everywhere you go, you sleep on somebody's floor.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's kind of what happened. So I went—to go to Houston, I went first to LA to give a talk in Valencia—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative.]

SUNIL GUPTA: —which was horrible because some—they had already gone to Houston, and they left some graduate kid student in charge of me, who was one of those art students who was completely interiorized. He was unable to make any social gestures. [Laughs.] So he met me and he was like a sphinx. He wouldn't say anything. [Laughs.] And then he drove me to a motel in Valencia. And I've never been to LA, right? So—and he said, "This is where you're going to stay. Bye." And then he left, and I was standing at this motel with no transport on a highway thinking, "Where am I? Where is the food?" You know, like, this—and the motel guy said, "Where's your car?" I said, "I haven't got one."

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So he had to drive me to a car rental joint so I could rent a car.

THEODORE KERR: You knew how to drive?

SUNIL GUPTA: So I could get around. Huh?

THEODORE KERR: You knew how to drive?

SUNIL GUPTA: I did, luckily.

THEODORE KERR: That is lucky.

SUNIL GUPTA: Otherwise I would have been at the mercy of the student whenever he felt like coming to fetch me and do things.

THEODORE KERR: And do you remember what your lecture was on?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think it was on the idea of this—we were just doing it—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The exhibition, or the book, or what?

SUNIL GUPTA: The project, and how we particularly wanted it to be British, and how we wanted it to be pro-sex, and how we came up with this idea of *Ecstatic Antibodies* for it, because they were getting some of—so they were—some of them were like—I think it was a time that was quite—see, coming from across the water, we often—there's a cliché that Americans, despite all this porn and sex industry, are quite Puritan.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, some of these students found the title, like, almost offensive, that we wanted to talk about—people are dying and we're saying "Ecstatic" something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative.]

SUNIL GUPTA: They didn't understand what we meant.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs]. So, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Do you think that people understand it now?

SUNIL GUPTA: I hope so.

THEODORE KERR: It's interesting. I don't know. I think it—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's quite obvious to us, but I guess, yeah, if you don't know the history, maybe not.

THEODORE KERR: It's still a bold title.

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

THEODORE KERR: It's still a bold title.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh.

THEODORE KERR: Because there's still that—

SUNIL GUPTA: You think it's too obscure?

THEODORE KERR: Not obscure. I think, rather, there's still an idea that HIV—

SUNIL GUPTA: —is sanctified somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and it's the worst thing in the world and no one should talk about it except for in terms of prevention—

SUNIL GUPTA: —"let it go," yeah, and safer sex.

[Cross talk.]

THEODORE KERR: And safer sex.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's what my doctor asks me, every time I see him: "Are you having safe sex?" [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Is it an offer?

SUNIL GUPTA: I say, "I wouldn't even tell you if I wasn't."

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Stop giving me the pills.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And then the panel in Houston. Was it a similar topic?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, so the panel was literally just four of us talking about—each of spoke about an art project that was to do with being gay or lesbian.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And rather than—this was not literally my work in that sense—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I think I just spoke about some other art project. But it—so it basically, but many things happened actually. It was a fortuitous trip because I got to know this guy Doug Ischar really well and of course Kaucyila Brooke. I've known all of them ever since, and Hinda Schuman, who was the only nonacademic photo person. She was a—like a straight photographer. She was on the staff of the *Inquirer* in Philadelphia.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So every time there was a fire or a boxing match, they sent Hinda.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So she was one of those, so not like us at all.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: But I took a great shine to her as well, and I still know all of them. And out of all of them I see Hinda the most because she's right outside—she's in Philadelphia.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So she came to the opening just now, and I'm going to her tomorrow for a couple of days.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: So there's a real sweetness there.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it brought us together. And it gave us a peer group in photography, an LGBT peer group which we didn't have before. And it was across genders and across borders, and that's where we started these discussions, "Why are our magazines the way they are? And how can we change that?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And were you still working in—were you still interested in commercial work, and were you still dependent on commercial work?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was—I was—yeah, but it was on the cusp of changing. Because this kind of—this curating work began to come in. I found I could create—I discovered how to write grant applications—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —basically. And I got real good at it, and I didn't have to work anymore. I just wrote grant applications.

THEODORE KERR: Which is work. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is work. Yeah, that's true.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because my poor guy, he used to—because we had a very small flat—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so when we did this, and Tessa had no space at all, so she would come to me. And then, the computer was in the bedroom, so Steve would be trying to sleep in bed and me and Tessa would be sitting on this and trying to write our applications to do this.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Also like, I'm trying to imagine what kind of computer you had in 1986.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, some kind of monstrous PC.

THEODORE KERR: Monstrous, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Big.

THEODORE KERR: Very loud keys.

SUNIL GUPTA: Bulky.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Probably heavy.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, with the big floppy disc things. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Amazing. And also I think it's kind of interesting, especially since this is for the—

SUNIL GUPTA: And no Wi-Fi I think—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, no Wi-Fi, of course not.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah, it was just like a fancy typewriter.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Like you had to print it.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I am thinking about the cultural differences of how both—we can talk about how both India reacted to HIV/AIDS, and how UK reacted to HIV/AIDS. And we can talk about that. We can also talk about it in relationship to the US, but I think it's more interesting to just talk about the UK's response—

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: —and India's response as their own thing. We don't need to compare. Unless you want to compare.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, except that there was this—so all I wanted to say was that there was this significant exchange that happened.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: For me and for other people, many other people, from that side more, maybe. You know, maybe this side didn't care as much. But that side certainly—like for Simon Watney, who used to write and came here a lot, and then Jan Zita Grover would come sometimes, and—what was—Cindy?

THEODORE KERR: Patton.

SUNIL GUPTA: Patton. So like, there was some—at different levels, but for me these people became the practicing photo art people who were also gay and lesbian kind of, who were making work about it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That was a key thing. There weren't that many where I was.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Or where they were, but when we combined, it—we became more. And for them also, because they were also scattered then in this country.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So the good thing about England is it's so small, so the other English ones you can meet, because they were not too far. And actually everybody lives in London and the rest of it doesn't—you know, it's like—I mean, it's kind of [laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —the hinterland. But yeah, so although this is about England, it was formed by stuff that I would have talked about here with people.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, you said it was a meaningful exchange.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was. So aside from our panel, which was relatively—predictably kind of—we showed slides and there were—aside from being LGBT it wasn't, like, very controversial or anything. But it was—what happened before that, was that the first thing in the morning, at eight or something, we rolled up for some talk by Douglas Crimp.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I was all about sex, like really hardcore, so there were erect penises suddenly on the [laughs]—so

anyway, I walk up—and yeah. Yeah, so that was like an eye-opener for me, also, to see that you could do that—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and they didn't shut it down or anything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: We were in some kind of weird, big Hilton Hotel type thing, so yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That was important.

SUNIL GUPTA: And it became suddenly this very, you know, intense talk about actual sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And the way the narrative goes in the U.S., it says that there was a divide between the kind of—the "angry in the streets" activists who wanted to create this kind of activist art, and then those who were painting, or wanted to take, like, a longer burn to do activist art. And it seems like in the UK that debate—you had different debates, and that wasn't a debate.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Which I think is really interesting, and maybe in part it's because of urgency in funding, and—

SUNIL GUPTA: And the way the health service functions.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and also—and correct me if I'm wrong here, but you could see HIV coming.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Yeah, we could see it coming, but we also felt implicated. So there was a lot of denial about that already implicated part.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because when I first heard about it—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —I was—it was all about New York initially, I think, or San Francisco or a bit of both or something. But certainly my ears would perk up if it was about New York, because I had lived here in London Terrace for a whole year. And there was a list of things you might have done that led to it—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and there were all the things that I had done.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I would keep quiet about it, you know, because—unless I was feeling joking and intimate with you—but people would ask you, "How do you respond?" And I did think that I was very high up on the list.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And because there was also this idea that it may not show up yet, and it might take time, and all of that, so I—so I thought I was very high-risk, but I never took a test.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And when—so here, the test is like, '85 to '87 there's rollouts, and I don't know the testing history in the UK. Another way to think about this is: When you were working on these projects—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —were you thinking about your own possible status?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes, because of my history here from the '70s.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Less so from my history at the time there, because [inaudible] was [not -SG] very promiscuous—I was too busy writing grant applications. [Laughs.] And I have a different—I can't be promiscuous in that way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. While you're writing?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, he had an appetite for just sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, like, bathhouses and stuff really just worked for him—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but I found if it's very anonymous, then it doesn't excite me or something. I mean, I did try—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: —and [laughs] subsequently have tried again. [Laughs.] But to go around the cubicle when someone is just offering themselves—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —sometimes facing the other way or something—

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —it just—[laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I have gone in thinking, "Well, if I really focus I can get it up," you know. But no, it doesn't happen. I have to—there has to be something.

THEODORE KERR: Like a connection.

SUNIL GUPTA: I just have to see a face or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Or have eye contact, or something has to happen—

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: So the bar is not so high.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So in my case, often it leads to names and phone numbers, which often becomes a start of some slippery slope, because then I'm also lazy, so then if I've met you—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and I've got Ted's number and then the next rainy afternoon, I can't be asked to go back—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and start again from scratch. I'll just see if you're free, you know. So then we had these different ways of being promiscuous.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But my way had brought baggage, so that was—and I think we misjudged that, because I basically ended up with the same guy, like all the time—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —over a few years.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So monogamy within monogamy. [Laughs.] Or like a steady partner within a relationship.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he was, like, providing the outside—you know—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And also, I think because I was so focused on all this, it was a very productive—I did a lot of shows at this point.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I think between '88 and early-'90s—there were like half a dozen of these things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so Steve went to the sauna—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and it's not like we weren't having our—we were having our—and we slept together and all that, which was very nice. But I knew that I had this other guy, you know—what was he called? Anyway, so if I needed a quick fix I could rely on this. I had this reliable source who was always ready and somehow always able to and willing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And, yeah and in a few years—a couple of years into this he decided to get involved.

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean, like, in a relationship?

SUNIL GUPTA: He said he was in love, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And, in a kind of Virgo(an) way, I said, "That's not what we started with, that's not what I thought at all."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I had a big upset on my hands. But I hadn't even thought—you know, I didn't think this was—so another aside—but basically, once you figure it all out, something else always happens that upsets everything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I hadn't thought of this, you see. I thought I was very clever, but I hadn't bargained for that the guy would become attached.

THEODORE KERR: And have feelings, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I thought he just wanted the sex as well.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's what you get for needing eye contact.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And during this time of—oh, sorry.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, so—how did we get there? Yeah, so I was—I've lost track of how we got here.

THEODORE KERR: I guess I'm just wondering—you said you were thinking about possible, your possible HIV status during this time.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's right, yeah. So basically—so I didn't think I was—so when I met this guy, I was—also I was studying it, so I had like—

THEODORE KERR: —reads.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and I had done a thing with Simon in the media. Simon had stacks of the media stuff, which



was all pretty horrific and scary at the same time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So you know, I was, like, really super informed.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And, you know—and I would arbitrate so I would have opposing friends, you know. So there was this great debate about the drugs, I don't know if you remember, especially the—what was that early one called?

THEODORE KERR: Not AZT?

SUNIL GUPTA: AZT.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So somebody wouldn't touch it, and somebody was taking it, and all this. And there was this big—but people thought that I knew everything—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I was sick. Yeah, so anyways, so when I met, so when I had this bit on the side, shagging—so I remember the first time—well, I met him in a bar, a typical kind of two in the morning, last ditch stand, kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then—but I went back with him, and then—but I wouldn't—I didn't want to, like—I wanted to make sure there was no possibility of any exchange of body fluids in that sense. So, I tried to maintain—I maintained a physical gap between us.

THEODORE KERR: Are we talking about condoms here, or no?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, we're just talking about—no condoms at the time—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and so just trying to keep it like a little bit away.

THEODORE KERR: Like, activities.

SUNIL GUPTA: The activities, yeah, from the—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I was trying to keep, like, a little distance, six inches or something.

THEODORE KERR: So, like, if he came—

SUNIL GUPTA: —nothing get over, on this side. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right, you were keeping a moat. [Laughs.] Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so having started like that, I tried to keep it like that.

THEODORE KERR: Because you were thinking that either you were living with HIV, or he could be living with HIV? Or it just wasn't even that conscious? You just—

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I thought that I might be—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and I also thought that he might be, and then I was actually sleeping—then I would go home and sleep with Steve, so.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I was more—well, actually I was mostly thinking about, "I shouldn't give it to Steve."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Or carry it home somehow. That would have been—made me feel extra-guilty.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then—so that the British—there was this—remember—okay, also the whole British attitude towards disclosure, as you probably know, the onus in England is on the other side, the opposite of here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it's—in England, it's all about: It's your body, and you look after it.

THEODORE KERR: Wait. How is it the opposite of here?

SUNIL GUPTA: Over here you can charge somebody for murder.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay, right. And you're saying that's not the case in England.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because you're responsible as an adult to look after yourself.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You cannot get it if you don't willingly say—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —"Fuck me without a condom" or something.

THEODORE KERR: Right, like it's an understanding—

SUNIL GUPTA: You have to give the—yeah, you've already given the consent, as it were.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. And that was something that—were you thinking about that? Because when you read your essay in *Ecstatic Antibodies*, you're talking about testing in a pretty, like—I love it, what you say, but I can understand that people might be upset by it.

SUNIL GUPTA: I've forgotten, which part?

THEODORE KERR: Well you're basically saying, "Testing is a form of surveillance," or testing is—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: —and that's something that people are wrapping their heads around now.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, you know, there were no drugs then—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I didn't see the point of it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I saw what happened to people, you know. The people who were tested positive in the early years—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —just from then on, their life was absolute hell.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. It's called "no solutions."

SUNIL GUPTA: There was no—yeah. There was no cure.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And you're also talking about like the xenophobic undercutting of testing. Like, I think you're alluding to the travel ban in the US that started in '87. Like, people coming over to get tested.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah, yeah, the—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is funny, because everyone thought it was coming out of here. So anyway—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I mean, there's many ways in which because of—as someone who's studied HIV from the U.S. point of view, there's ways in which this book seems ahead of its time. But in talking to you now, over these two days, what I'm hearing is that it wasn't ahead of its time; it was of its time, rooted in conversations that had begun before HIV/AIDS, that were already integrated, that were already networked, that were already intersectional, and that culture was an animation of these things—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —that had already been headily thought about, but now being activated with art and bodies and community. And that's—I mean, I think that's worthy of further discussion.

SUNIL GUPTA: This guy's pictures are up right now at AIPAD.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: This show. The guy on the cover wrote to me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And if you think about it—so we've had 20, 30 years of Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowicz—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —and Keith Haring, and these are all fine artists. But only now, in certain circles, is someone like Rotimi [Fani-Kayode]—Rotimi's art kind of coming to the surface.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: In the U.S. Whereas, you know, like, artists like Amaju—am I saying Amaju's name right?

SUNIL GUPTA: Whose?

THEODORE KERR: Amaju, black photographer in the UK.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, Ajamu. Ajamu, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ajamu—you know, it's taken a few generations for those—

SUNIL GUPTA: And he's enrolled to be my Ph.D. student now—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —which is very weird. I told him that I feel like I've known him—it's hard to be somebody's supervisor if you—I wanted to show you a picture.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But we can keep talking while I look for it.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because my old—there's a—some works going up in the Tate, a small display on a background of General Idea's AIDS thing, wallpaper.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they have put my pictures on it and Rotimi's.

THEODORE KERR: I just interviewed A.A. [Bronson]—

SUNIL GUPTA: Did you?

THEODORE KERR: —and he was trying to remember what was on the AIDS wallpaper and he couldn't remember. So you're answering the question.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. There it is; that's the tape. It was on all year, in case you ever go, until January.

THEODORE KERR: Until January.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so that's *Ten Years On*—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and that's from the *Black Experience*. That's me and Steve!

THEODORE KERR: Oh, really?

SUNIL GUPTA: In the '80s, together, that's literally us.

THEODORE KERR: And who took that photo?

SUNIL GUPTA: I did.

THEODORE KERR: You did.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a selfie.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: A pre-selfie!

SUNIL GUPTA: We are standing in front of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which was a great British movie about multi-racial gay romance.

THEODORE KERR: And you knew what you were doing when you took that photo.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. It was for a show.

THEODORE KERR: This is a really—oh, that's very interesting. It's a little bit of—someone could write a whole essay about this photograph, of those photographs on that wallpaper.

SUNIL GUPTA: And what I thought I had a picture of—why do I not have a picture of it? So, there's more wall—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and there's a picture, a small picture like this, by Rotimi—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and he's squatting naked and you see his bum—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and he's sitting on an African mask.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Isn't this show—so the question that A.A. had—he was confused; he thought this show was about British artists—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —but he's wondering why General Idea was included, because obviously they are not British.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's true.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Maybe they, did they acquire it in some way?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, they recently acquired it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, so maybe that's what it is, it's from their collection.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay. It's also an interesting—there's like a subtext there that's not so hard to see, that the backdrop to your work in those images is HIV/AIDS.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. There's that. Yeah, they've done that as well. And then on the other side, this big painting by Derek Jarman, which has writing on it. I forget which one it was. It was one of those kind of messaging things.

THEODORE KERR: What was your feeling on art happening at the time? When you first saw General Idea's *Imagevirus*, did you have any thoughts or feelings about it? Or when you saw Gran Fury posters did you have feelings? What were some of your thoughts and feelings about AIDS art?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, well it was very exciting to see that over here—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —starting with the—what was it? The New Museum thing that became—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —very globalized. And yeah, those kissing things on the buses and stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they were multiracial as well.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it felt like something had started. And it felt like we couldn't do that there at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we were really struggling to get it culturally acceptable.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because, you see, at the same time there's a great resistance in the art world to be—for any kind of polemic stuff to come in. And, yeah—and also what we did took a lot longer, because we had to raise some—this took two years to get off the ground.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Whenever we looked this side—we were slightly envious about the way in which you can raise money and do things, like, virtually overnight here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you have this pool of people who will just subsidize it.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's interesting. But some of it—

SUNIL GUPTA: But you're better off. I mean, you can do more things, and you can—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, right.

SUNIL GUPTA: We have to—getting—it's all state funded, which makes it politically more correct, but it takes a hell of a lot longer.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the scale can't be so big.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And the urgency is different, because of the time and the—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and there's a lot more backroom kind of discussion about it.

THEODORE KERR: And are the artists part of the backroom discussions?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. A lot of us have sat on committees.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: I sat on an anti-racist committee at the town hall.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. And a town hall is kind of—just for listeners at home, a town hall is kind of like a community—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it's a city government.

THEODORE KERR: It's a city government.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. That's what I mean, city hall.

THEODORE KERR: And it's like a borough community hall, or—?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, so, London has boroughs. They each have a town hall, which will collect the local taxes and do usual local things like parking and collect garbage.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And local arts, very local arts. And then London also has an overarching thing called Greater London Council.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which Margaret Thatcher shut down because it was virulently against her—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and they used to—they were right opposite to the Houses of Parliament down the river—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and across the river was this GLC, Greater London Council. And every time she did something, they would have a big message, like a huge—across their building, saying something nasty about her.

THEODORE KERR: Like a banner.

SUNIL GUPTA: A banner, everyday there would be a new banner about how she messed up.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's really amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: She shut them down, basically. So it was interesting because they were brought into existence, I think in the '30s—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —by the Tories, because they had gotten control of the inner city—of the local borough councils. But the Tories figured if they made a larger one and brought the suburbs in, they would get political control of the whole thing, so that's what they did. They made a big council with all the suburbs in.

THEODORE KERR: And then that's what—she shut that down for a while.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then—but then what happened—yeah, then it became Labour, so then she shut it down.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: That's a big deal. I'm going to fast-forward the photos—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —a bit to—well any—we can stop at any of these photos that you want to talk about, like if you want to talk about *Trespass*.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, this was about the whole business about me and Steve.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And, yeah. That's the guy who I was sleeping with and decided to get involved.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It actually led to us breaking up in a complicated way.

THEODORE KERR: You guys were together for 11 years, you and Steve.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So that's what I meant about the terrible past.

THEODORE KERR: And this work is interesting because it's collage work.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: You're using digital, and—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's all digital, yeah. I started with this project and I carried on here. Actually, this is part of it, too. So the whole—that's the guy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And what triggered the breakup was that I involved him in the rebuilding of our kitchen.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because Steve—and that's that picture that's up at the Tate—came to do his Ph.D. at Columbia, so he was here for five or six years.

THEODORE KERR: Steve was.

SUNIL GUPTA: This guy, yeah. My Steve.

THEODORE KERR: Your Steve was here?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And meanwhile?

SUNIL GUPTA: So he—meanwhile, I wanted him to help out in the kitchen.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. A domestic slave?

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And that provoked a breakup for us.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I didn't realize Steve would be affected by it, having this other guy—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —help remodel the kitchen. It was just Ikea, it wasn't anything [laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but—

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so this is all in the kitchen, and domestic.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And about food and so—

THEODORE KERR: And it's about culture.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so this is, like, Western ideal male—an Indian ideal male.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And being some way, like, you know, you get stuck. You know? Because I tried to go to the gym, but it [laughs]—

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: But natural inclination is to end up like that, so.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, I just naturally have slopey shoulders. I'm never going to look like that.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Like that. Yeah, so this is *Dad, 26*—that's our fridge, the Bosch thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And this was a different one, *Trespass*. So in all of this—this is the key picture for our purposes here. That's the day I got diagnosed.

THEODORE KERR: So it's a picture of—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a picture of me.

THEODORE KERR: Let's describe it.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a picture of me collaged into a picture of the structure of a bridge. And a bunch of flowers. And it's a selfie I took on the day I was diagnosed in July '95. And you can see I'm holding the bulb, the shutter thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And, yeah, I think when there are moments of crisis and—I just pick up the camera. It's a kind of knee-jerk reaction.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because my diagnosis was a peculiar moment. Because I was, like, overwhelmingly too well-informed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the person who told me who was a health adviser was, like, 21 or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think he was new, and he probably didn't attend all his training sessions or something. Like, I felt like he didn't know how to—what to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And he was overwhelmed?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he just said, "You're HIV-positive." And then he sat down. We were both standing when he told me. He sat and he said, "If you have any questions, you can ask me."

THEODORE KERR: [Groans.]

SUNIL GUPTA: That was it.

THEODORE KERR: Right. And you were by yourself?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Because—I did the whole thing by myself because the first guy that I—who built the kitchen has now become history.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And Steve had gone off and finished his Ph.D. and then got a job in England and then immediately got a sabbatical and went to Japan.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: For a whole year.



THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So then my business started again.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So again I would go out to the bars. And I met this guy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Outside a toilet. And instead of just having it in the toilet and going home, I went home with him and got a number. And the next thing I knew, I was seeing him all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you want to say his name or give him—

SUNIL GUPTA: Edward.

THEODORE KERR: Edward, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so—and then Edward—but Edward had only been gay for, like, two people before me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we were, like, complete polar opposites. He had been straight. He had a wife. He had a child and everything.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: I think I was the third gay sexual encounter he had. And—except he was kind of perfect, physically. He went to the gym every single day.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not to become all beefy, but he was just very toned.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so I got swept away in this. And then he said—unlike the other one, he made the thing from the outset. He said that, "I'm not going to see you. You have to decide."

THEODORE KERR: He had boundaries.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. [Laughs.] It's going to be me or him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he was in Tokyo.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I wrote to—by then email had come, you see. So, I email Tokyo and I said, "This is what's happening." And I thought, if he really loved me, he would, like, come back or something one day.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he's also a Virgo, so he just said, "Well, I'm doing my research. You know, you have to do what you want to do. I can't tell you what to do," et cetera. And, "Let me know what you decided to do." So, I thought, "Oh, he's not going to fly back and try to save the situation."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: No white horse.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that's what really—actually, he was kind of a closet rice queen.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—and I was not rice enough.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Your rice was too cooked.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so I got involved with this guy, ended Steve after 11 years, on email.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I'm sorry. That's hard.

SUNIL GUPTA: Not for me, for poor Steve. Because, actually, he took it very badly. He just didn't—he's just like very—he's not demonstrative, you know? He didn't have—like, I would have flown back.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know. If you said to me, "I'm going to leave you"—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —I would have just come.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. A romantic gesture.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Isn't it? You know. And what's a week away from the research in a whole year?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so he didn't come. I left him, ended up with this guy, who's first thing was like, "Have you been tested?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he was really terrified of it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I said, in my cavalier way, "I probably have it. I can't be bothered to find out." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So he was really shocked. So, he said, "You have to get tested."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So to pacify him, I went off to have the test. And although I thought I might—most likely did have it, I didn't really think I had it.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So when it turned out I did have it, that was a big shock. That was the first thing. Then my second thought was, "He's going to leave."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which he did, because it was too overwhelming.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then five minutes later, the next big thing was that I thought I was going to die, like, very soon.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which was my first thought. And then—because I think that was everybody else's first thought around me.

THEODORE KERR: That you were going to die, or that they were all going to die?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, that I was going to die.

THEODORE KERR: That you were going to die, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But when I woke up the next day, I didn't think I was going to die, actually. Because then, you know, the information thing clicked in. And I wasn't unwell, you see. I just got the test because of our discussion.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I saw a different—I asked to see a different health adviser with a bit more experience.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And she was very good. I had a nice proper chat with her and then she calmed the whole situation down. And she didn't think I was going to die, and we had a big discussion about the doctors that were available and all that, and I had to—in our system, you have to go to your local hospital.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But mine is—because I live in the center, it's a very prominent hospital.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's opposite the Houses of Parliament.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's where they have to go if they fall ill, so it's very well maintained. [Laughs.] And it had this very good—it's a research hospital for HIV, so it's like ahead of its time, always.

So, they had a bunch of consultants over there. So, she—I was actually—she gave me a kind of summary on each of them and said, "I'm going to match you to one of them." So she matched me to one that would suit me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what do you mean by suit you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I mean—so she took—so you—well, she was very well-trained. So, she had a chat with you, and she thought, "Okay, Theodore. You're this kind of person. I'm going to make you see Dr. X because he's—you'll respond to him better, and he'll respond to you because of the kind of person you are."

THEODORE KERR: Oh, like, "This doctor likes to make jokes; you like to make jokes."

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And she knew what—she figured out my cavalier attitude.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: All of that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And who I was, and so sure enough, I got this guy, and he was, like—adamant that I would never die from it. There was too much money and, you know, the whole rational—that they were investing too much in the cure. And there were so many drugs coming out that by the time things started happening to me there would be, like a steady supply of new—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and that I should just carry on like nothing's happened.

THEODORE KERR: So not go on medication right away?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And nothing was wrong, evidently.

THEODORE KERR: Like, your T-cell was fine?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Your T-cell count was okay? Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And did you believe them?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I did.

THEODORE KERR: Great.

SUNIL GUPTA: Except—because then I started telling people around me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they thought I was going to die, so then the atmosphere around me became very somber.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they would all weep and carry on. So I had to try to calm them down.

THEODORE KERR: Why—what informed them to think that? Like, what led them to think that you were going to die?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think because people are two-faced. So, they have this public face of, like, "I'm very rational and can deal with everything." And then they have this other side where they really can't deal with it if somebody they like is going to die. Or they think—you know, they just, like, went to pieces. The closer they were to me, the more they went to pieces.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I would be saying, "No, no, no. I'm going to be fine." [Laughs.] Which I have been.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And what was the culture saying at that time about people who were newly diagnosed?

SUNIL GUPTA: They weren't putting people on meds straight away. And there were some—but there weren't that—basically in '95, they were just starting to come in.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like, it's pre-cocktail, kind of.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I think they already had at least two—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —on offer. It wasn't just AZT on its own. I knew that was potentially a disaster just on its own like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So there was some—I think they were starting with only two, maybe.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, I didn't take anything.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he went—

THEODORE KERR: To get tested?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, not to get tested.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, he went away?

SUNIL GUPTA: Then I realized that eventually—he should have come. I shouldn't have gone on my own, because it became like, "I'm the one."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But we didn't know what his status was. And that had he tested positive later, it would have looked like it had been via me.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he should have gone in the beginning as well. Anyway, since he left, then it didn't seem to matter either way. But—I mean, I think he did try. But I think he was such a novice at being gay—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and all his straight values were more or less intact. He just sort of became sexually gay, but all the rest of it was—like, he had no history of—no sense of there had been a movement and there had been—you know, like the whole—everything I had done had not happened in his life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He just knew that you went to certain bars and hung around the toilet and you got laid.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And then did you email Tokyo and say, "I'm living with HIV"? Did you—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, this happened subsequently.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. What does that mean? What do you mean?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, but—a year elapsed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Time, there was some time.

THEODORE KERR: But you didn't get into contact with, like, people you were close to in the past and share information?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, about my diagnosis?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like were you looking for support from Steven or—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, no, I was still living with him kind of.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then that's the point at which—because then he came back and I was kind of dating him, this one. Then that became a bit awkward. And then—but I had a work situation—a floor in the building, below where we lived. So I just lived in my office space as a kind of initial thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's very complicated in England, I think. It's not—theory finds that economics can govern what's possible.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And once again, because you're better off here and you live a more market way, you can make up and break up easier, because your housing isn't tied to it necessarily. But in England, because of the lack of money and the—most people have to share a flat anyway, with friends.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And people who become couples would then buy one.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you sink all your resources into buying something.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So me and Steven owned a flat together.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the idea of leaving it—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because in the first one, the Swiss one, he owned it entirely.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I was just, like, the kept person. I just left with my suitcase.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But in this case, it was very complicated. We had to—hard to untangle the—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And neither of us could afford to—

THEODORE KERR: —buy the other one out?

SUNIL GUPTA: Buy the other one out.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But then we came up with a good solution, because I think I had debts of about 10,000.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I have an attitude towards money that it just, like, comes and goes.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I never accumulated any, but really—that's not been my goal as such. So we made a deal that he would just give me 10,000.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I would—that would be it. And I just signed it over. And then he would write—then he wrote—then he would write me a letter saying he had kicked me out. That was the only odd thing he had to do.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which I could take to the town hall.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there was a policy, then, that if you're HIV-positive—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —they give you housing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I took my letter to the town hall. They gave me a flat.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So he had a flat, and he didn't have to pay me a fortune for it. And I had a flat from the council.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which I eventually bought for nothing. Like, 20—no, £33,000 or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which, I'm still paying off in tiny amounts for.

THEODORE KERR: Sure.

SUNIL GUPTA: And everybody was like, "You just gave it, you know, like that?"

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—but then I said, "But it wasn't about the money." It was, you know—because we were good friends.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: We still are.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, good.

SUNIL GUPTA: Last year he went to Japan for a year again.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he didn't want to rent it, so me and the current guy lived in it for a year and rented our flat.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Nice.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, just like that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And now we are in New York, so he's going to go and feed the birds. Because, you know, we have—we feed the—they have a bunch of—they have a little garden, so cats and birds and fox and whatnot come, and so we give food to all of them. That's my entertainment.

THEODORE KERR: That's your entertainment? [Laughs.] That's very nice of you. Who needs a TV—

SUNIL GUPTA: But that's why London is so—you know, I've gotten so used to it. You can't do it here. But we have wildlife in our little gardens. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. You either—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's amazing, birds these—you know, they're migrating. Very colorful little birds.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So you put seed out and they come. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: That's cute.

SUNIL GUPTA: Sorry, I'm diving.

THEODORE KERR: This picture that you described, the selfie in the middle of the bridges—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —seems like an early—a precursor to *From Here to Eternity*.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: In the sense that *From Here to Eternity* is a lot of selfies.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. It's all selfies. Here we go. So then I fell ill.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I was hospitalized briefly.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And before that, this happened—I got a pet.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And then I fell ill. And then in my—one day I glanced at my hospital record, because they were like—they don't show it to you—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but the notes they leave by your bed. And the very first line said, "Lives alone with dog."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That's how it started, my notes. So, I thought, "Oh, that sounds really terrible." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so there was this project—so it was selfies.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Basically about the illness—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and what was happening to me. Not a lot.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So actually, it was—and then these facades of gay sex places, because London had this very strange—I wanted to record this weird social history.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So in the '70s when I went there—I think I mentioned to you yesterday—if we held hands, they would throw you out.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was very formal.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like, handshake. That was it. In a gay bar. It went from that to—and there were no bathhouses for a while. I think they started only happening after I got there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: The bridges to go to Paris and Morocco to have wild, you know—or here—they didn't have it there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so with the rise—with the arrival of AIDS, suddenly, there was sex clubs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they mushroomed. So, in the '90s, as AIDS became more and more—more and more bars converted to sex clubs. Meaning—what I mean is that you would deposit your clothes at the door.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That's fascinating. It's the opposite of what happened here.



SUNIL GUPTA: And nobody remarked, you know? There was no tabloid headlines. There wasn't much discussion that I could see in the gay press, even.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: People just took it for normal.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: As—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And how were those spaces for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: And so then they became a kind of—so I went in the day. Which was interesting because [laughs] they were always locked.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so my gay audience in London didn't recognize many of them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because they had never seen them in the day.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I liked the way this is—the ambivalence of the locked door in relation to me and the virus, whether it's something that's been kept out or in.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because, you know, once this Sean—Sean somebody, who was the editor of *POZ* magazine here—

THEODORE KERR: Sean Strub?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he came for a visit. A research trip or visit or something. And we met and—I did something for him once.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he—anyway, we went to the—one of these places. I think it was The Hoist. Is it here?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, The Hoist is the picture.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah. Oh, this is one of my—I got shingles.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: The most painful thing that ever happened. There is The Hoist. We went here. Which used to be a kind of leather bar.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But like a drinks leather bar, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: People tried to look scary, but they were all dentists, really. You know?

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. [Laughs.] So, this suddenly became a kind of place to have sex, right in the bar. And not even in the toilet or something, but, like, just in the—so it became this, I thought, quite sexy, interesting mixture of—so half the people were just drinking, the other half were having sex in amongst all the other people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But you didn't have to take all your clothes off.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: You know?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And people just acting out all kinds of things. So, there would be somebody—we talked to somebody and their partner was, like, dog on the floor licking your boots or something. Something like that. And then there was a little mezzanine above, which was like a mesh—a metal mesh?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And people would line up to get whipped. So you would hear this sound of people getting—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow. And you took Sean there?

SUNIL GUPTA: —above you. Huh?

THEODORE KERR: You took Sean in there?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, we were researching for *POZ*. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And do you remember his reaction? Like I'm interested in how—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah. No, he did—we did an experiment. So, then there was—so there were different lineups. There was one lineup to get a blowjob, so the guys on their knees giving you—people blow job. People would queue for it. So, Sean went along.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So when he got to the guy, he said, "I'm positive." And the guy, like—he wouldn't give him a blow job.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But he said, "But I've just seen you give all these other people a blow job. And you didn't ask them."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's just that I'm telling you that—and he said, "Yeah." So, it got me—yeah, so, like that. So that's The Hoist.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It's also interesting, you're talking about disclosure. And also it goes back to invisibility and visibility.

SUNIL GUPTA: Exactly, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like unknown—in people's minds, unknown is safer than known.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. I've only had one experience of telling somebody that I'm positive and who still wanted to—generally people don't want to.

THEODORE KERR: Even now?

SUNIL GUPTA: Even now. Well, I mean, I don't know. I haven't—even now, in places that I live in. Not—maybe—I don't know what it's like here. I haven't been out and about here. But in India, it would be, like, complete, "No, no," if I said I'm positive in advance.

But I was—in one of these places—like, that's a bathhouse. That's one of those where you take your clothes off at the door. But this one was multi—it had different nights every night.

THEODORE KERR: Substation?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. So I was in there one night. And so somebody, like, again—at two in the morning, and some guy said—I don't know, something—his opening line was sex. Like, "Do you want to fuck?" or something. Or—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I said, "Yeah, but I'm positive." And he said, "Well, so is everybody else in here."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It was, like, completely unmoved by it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. What year do you think that was?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was in the late '90s. Around this time.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: There had been a night that started, you know, in response to the disclosure and the stigma and all of that. So, one of these places—not one of these sex clubs—one of the more regular places started, like, a Tuesday night for—you would be assumed if you went you were positive. Like, a positive night.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: To remove the need for disclosure. You disclosed by walking in.

THEODORE KERR: And did you go?

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't think I did, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It seemed like a ghetto, somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Like, in the sense of being rounded up, or in the sense of, like, being, like, pushed to the side?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was like, too easy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I think, also, because I—my response to being positive was to acquire a very bad body image, which is partly why I did this.

THEODORE KERR: You acquired a bad body image?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I thought people wouldn't want to sleep with me, and then it began to affect me. Then it began to affect my interest in going out and being rejected.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I stopped going out. Voluntarily.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I became a buddy. The buddy thing arrived in London, so I became a buddy in the hope of meeting other gay buddies. But my group was incredibly straight, it turned out. So I quit.

THEODORE KERR: People living with HIV—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, the people providing the buddies. The buddies.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, you kept on getting straight buddies?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, no. The group of buddies I joined who were—the core group that went out. So, we were organized by local teams.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So my local team—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —was all straight, mostly.

THEODORE KERR: But what would you guys do? What was the—

SUNIL GUPTA: We were the buddies, so we would get assigned people.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I would be assigned somebody.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I would look after this guy. I would go visit two or three times a week.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But your cohort—

SUNIL GUPTA: And then—yeah, like, so once a month we would get together.

THEODORE KERR: And they were straight, primarily.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, and I joined it—

THEODORE KERR: Straight women? Or straight men?

SUNIL GUPTA: Both. There were, like, young 25-year-olds from IT. Like, the dot-com things.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And they were doing it to just, like, do social service?

SUNIL GUPTA: Social service or something.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they weren't making money. They were doing this. But when they got together, it was all about being young and very successful—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and rich. Because they moved into the inner cities, you see, which had—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which by now had gone up.

THEODORE KERR: This is a really important conversation, because it charts the difference in community—

SUNIL GUPTA: The demographics changed. Yeah. When I moved there, to South London, it was basically an underclass of drug addicts and unemployed black people and white people and migrants and that kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then gay men moved. And then it got—they gentrified. And then—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Then the dot-com thing happened, and all these 25-year-olds came.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But it also shows—

SUNIL GUPTA: And they were all very skinny, you know, and go to work with briefcases every morning.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they would jog around all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And now they all ride bicycles to work. They would treat the roadway like a racetrack.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In Lycra.

THEODORE KERR: It also shows, like, that change in the community response to HIV. So early on, it was people affected and living with HIV, and then this slice of history that you're talking about is like—it became like a charity thing to do. Like in the same way somebody might donate to amfAR.

SUNIL GUPTA: I think so, because I—it was coming via the Terrence Higgins Trust.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, they weren't personally affected, necessarily.

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: Like, they weren't living with it, their lovers weren't living with it.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's right.

THEODORE KERR: Maybe they hadn't even lost anybody to it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. That's interesting. And so, you left because—

SUNIL GUPTA: Because my main benefit from joining was to have this cohort of—I thought were going to be knowledgeable gay, AIDS-y people. And they weren't.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They were young, straight, dot-com people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Who wanted to discuss things like that at the meetings.

THEODORE KERR: I joined—I started doing HIV work because I wanted to meet gay—

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: —smart people. And it turned out—it was all women of color who were straight.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Because all the gays had left the AIDS service organizations.

SUNIL GUPTA: Ah.

THEODORE KERR: Because they didn't have to use them anymore.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: The only people that had to use the AIDS service organizations in Edmonton in 2000 and after were people with mental health issues, drug issues, immigration issues—

SUNIL GUPTA: Ah.

THEODORE KERR: —or First Nations. And so, it's interesting to think about kind of the decamping of white gay men from the AIDS narrative at the turn of the century.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, right.

THEODORE KERR: And how that relates to gentrification and access and—

SUNIL GUPTA: So, yeah, my local hospital is like that. My HIV clinic. It's basically straight black women and gay white men.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Still is. Because, you know, they're all involved in this long-term thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. What do you mean?

SUNIL GUPTA: Hmm?

THEODORE KERR: What's the long-term thing?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because we go for the clinic—I mean, it's the hospital rather than a service.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, it's charting you.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I mean the users—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: —are people—are all the people who became positive, right? So that's just—I mean, this is a medical service, not the voluntary sector.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So my hospital clinic—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —where I got diagnosed and where I go to—so the users at my clinic, the patients are all straight—mostly straight black, African women.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: From Africa, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And, yeah, gay white men.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there's—like, a strong sense of black humor prevails everything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And not black as in culture—not black as in race—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —black as in a type of humor.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: A, like, macabre, funny side of the sadness.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I went to a conference in Leicester in England.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Around maybe early 2000s. And the entire conference—you had to be positive to enter. They went to provide services.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I was the photographer.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. There was nobody there who did anything who wasn't—not positive.

THEODORE KERR: What year was this?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think early 2000s sometime.

THEODORE KERR: And what did that mean for you to be in that space?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was quite informative. And very unique. I had never done it before or after. It was like going to a gay summer camp or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So there were, like, all kinds of people. But again, there was this predominantly gay white male and African, straight—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —from Africa kind of a thing. Very few Asians go to these things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It might be a cultural thing, maybe. They would feel very outnumbered. And again, full of black humor.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I discovered that most people do a lot of very hard sex that I don't do. And so I discovered—I had conversations like that.

THEODORE KERR: What are very hard things? What do you mean?

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know. I think I'm just into very vanilla sex, basically.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, they would do very hard things sexually.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. They were all into all kinds of fetish things and playing out. And England's full of that kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Underneath that [laughs] very great reserve.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. I saw this TV program about this mistress woman—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in England, and she used to do mail order. So, she would sell scat through the post.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Yeah. That's—

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: We're not post office people. This—we're looking at *From Here to Eternity*, and I think in 2000 it exhibited here in New York, and Holland Cotter wrote a review.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And he said something that was striking to me. He said something like—I have the direct quote if we need it—but he said something like, "This was like a sensitive exploration of the pains of HIV." Which was in comparison to a lot of the HIV work that was heroic that was coming out at the time. Do you remember that quote? Or do you remember reading that line?

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't remember that line exactly.

THEODORE KERR: And I'm wondering, like, did this series seem out of—different than other work that you were seeing at the time? Or do you remember how it was received?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, mostly I was very concerned that there was a picture of me naked. [Laughs.] That took me a little while to get over. That's what used to—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Because it was the first—

SUNIL GUPTA: The first time I had done that.

THEODORE KERR: And why did you do it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I thought, "It's about the body, and I can't be shy about it."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know? Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so what was it like seeing your naked body on gallery walls?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, after about 20 minutes, I got used to the idea that it's an object. Like, I can see it now and it doesn't—like, it's not me. It's something else. It's an object in its own right.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a picture.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I could disassociate.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it freed me up. Now I can do anything. With the pictures, I mean.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: The quote's better than what I remembered. He writes—this is in January 2000—"The celebratory sense of communal empowerment sometimes associated with art produced in response to AIDS is missing here. Instead, social gathering places are inaccessible, desolate, sometimes half-hidden. Tenderness is a solitary emotion. Liberation takes the comfortlessness form of unromantic self-awareness."

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh. Good heavens.

THEODORE KERR: It's quite powerful.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it is.

THEODORE KERR: And it seems—it obviously struck him as a much-needed intervention into what work was being created at the time.

SUNIL GUPTA: Ah.

THEODORE KERR: But that wasn't something that was shared with you?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not directly. No, I never met the guy. I wasn't—what I remember from that is more of the stuff he wrote about *Exiles*. Because he wrote about the monuments. Because he knew what was in the pictures. He's the only person who's ever talked about it in that—taken it into Indian art history that way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, the thing about this is it was—I was ill, so it was kind of therapy for me to make this.

THEODORE KERR: And to see your body this way?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, the physical making of it. So—because I went back to film because *Trespass*—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in terms of film—this is all digital.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.



SUNIL GUPTA: So—I mean, scanning.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—and then I made—so like, even these flowers, I used this kind directly—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But I used to shoot with a little camera and then give it to a shop.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And get those little prints.

THEODORE KERR: Yep.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I scanned them on a basic scanner.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so—and then I went really huge prints. It's all about pixelated and funny.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which I didn't mind. But it was all on a computer. And over the years, I have found computers—when you are done for the day, you feel very tired.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Whereas if you do in a darkroom—these are all darkroom—it's more kind of exhilarating. You leave with a—kind of on high.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. And not just from the chemicals.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I mean, let's talk about the architecture a bit. So, with the first one, *Babe*—that's the dog's name?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. You're—it's you without a shirt on standing in front of—I don't know this building or this town.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a victory tower built by a conquering Muslim army in Delhi.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In the 11th century. And it's become an iconic symbol of Delhi. It's like the Empire State Building here. It's like the tall structure—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —that's become symbolic. And it used to be a temple site, so the remains of the mosque that they built are made of the same material as the temple. So when you're up close to it, it's all—unlike normal mosques, it's covered in figurative art.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Indian style. So, I quite like the way the—it's kind of—what's in the picture, the content is an adaptation of one thing over another.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Another complete denial of it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so it's also, like, it's—for me, it's also, like—it's a homeland.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. In the photo it's behind you.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But it's also like, ever-present.

SUNIL GUPTA: Kind of, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And that comment about the not-denial, is that also in relationship to your own changing relationship to your body? Like, you have this virus. It's undeniable.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: What are your thoughts when you're looking at it now?

SUNIL GUPTA: That I meant them to be together.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And this is what I like about photography. I could have done this in Photoshop, but I didn't have to. It was—I find if you go around the streets, you see things that are quite surreal like this.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you're talking about the—

SUNIL GUPTA: This is a very well-known fetish club.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Fist.

SUNIL GUPTA: And nobody's—I don't think people realize what's next to it.

THEODORE KERR: Right. It's a poster that reads—or it's a billboard that reads—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's a billboard. Yeah. Accidental.

THEODORE KERR: "If God exists, why doesn't he help you?"

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. It's just—so it gives me great pleasure to walk around New York or London and see things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: My way, kind of. Things that I find interesting. There's always tons of stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And this one was, of course, Christmas. Literally was Christmas. And I was very ill. I couldn't wear any clothes, because nothing could touch it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know shingles?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And this, of course, is this place I used to—my local—which I used to frequent a lot.

THEODORE KERR: Substation was your local sex club?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, in Brixton. I think I've become very drunk and walked home in my underwear.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] I'm surprised nobody stopped me. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Just carrying my clothes. I mean, I couldn't even be bothered to put them back on.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And this is the blood test that I was just, like, recording this thing that happens every few months forever.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And did you end up finding community of other people living with HIV? Was that important to you?

SUNIL GUPTA: I tried to. I thought it was. I wasn't very successful at it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know why. I should have been.

THEODORE KERR: It sounds a little bit—when you say—that you're putting the blame on you. Is that true?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, like I didn't try enough or something. And that's why I joined the buddies.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I didn't find them there.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I found—and then the guy I was trying to help was a nightmare and then he complained about me and then I—they didn't want me anymore.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And he was a very extreme case of what I could see might happen to me that I didn't want. Because he was very good-looking.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I guess he worked out or something. Anyway, so the drugs, I presume, had changed his body shape to the point where he refused to go out. So, my job was to make him go outside his house. He wouldn't leave his apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]

SUNIL GUPTA: He was turning into a hermit.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And becoming decrepit by not going out.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. And becoming the thing he feared to be.

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean, not going out to shop or anything. Like not stepping out.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I had to force him to come out to sit in the diner or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like that—

THEODORE KERR: And you feel—

SUNIL GUPTA: —was an extreme case of that.

THEODORE KERR: You feared that happening to you as well?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, kind of. That level of isolation. And bad body image, you know? That—he was completely obsessed about his looks.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, maybe that's the best thing he had before.

SUNIL GUPTA: Maybe. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I mean, I don't know him.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah, I just hadn't met someone like this. Well, I had with Edward, the guy—because he was obsessed with his body—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but I don't think even he would have, like, just not had any other interests that would make him —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know, maybe go and see the show at MoMA or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And what kept you from being isolated? What keeps you from not being isolated?

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I've got this big extended family of people who are—because in—fortunately, from that Canadian experience—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —of going to Dawson and coming out and being so well-educated—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I was—my worldview was formed at Dawson, which was that—the evils of the world reside in the family. There was a famous book called *The Death of the Family*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And that we were invented to bring this crashing down.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we did this by extreme promiscuity.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: And by having—building a new family that wasn't biologically yours.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I kind of tried to kiss my family goodbye and create a new one. So, I got a big extended network.

THEODORE KERR: And you decided to—

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, I could have all these best friends.

THEODORE KERR: And you decided to keep in contact with them?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, Hinda Schuman—I'm going to see her tomorrow for a couple of days.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: After a point, you know, so California has become a little distance because I don't have too many reasons to go that way. So that's a rare luxury which I can—like Chicago as well.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But just in where I am, there are sort of people from—and there's an Indian word that suggests, like, hangout, I suppose.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: To be colloquial. So, my house—the places I've lived in have been like that. So, all kinds of people have felt able to come and we just eat and drink and they come and go. And this has really irritated some of the people around me, especially my family, who feel like they can't get enough of you or those people are just exploiting you.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, that—

THEODORE KERR: They're using you for a good time or for—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, for food and drink or something. Or somewhere to crash—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or somewhere. I live in a one-bedroom flat. And sometimes I've had eight people sleeping in it, so. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But then I know other people like that, so I'm not alone, I'm saying. So, I've got role models like that around. And anyway, I say to my critics that I like it so why—that's why I do it. I wouldn't do it—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't feel imposed upon, because otherwise I wouldn't do it. So the good thing about these hangouts is that they generate chat. And that's when you can get diversity in chat, is when there's a kind of—you know, like, I go to conferences not to sit in the talks, but I stand by the elevators and meet people on the escalator.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that. So yeah, there's a whole handful of people. My gallery woman here is like that. We can share somewhere and we have pajama parties and she's seen my people come and go. And—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so, this—the latest person—he's relatively young.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He's walked into the city; he's discovered there's, like, a lot of people.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's not just me. Plus all of my exes. They're not gone away. They're very much there, starting with Rudy, the first one. And Steve.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So sometimes he loses his cool about that, because they keep wanting to come around and all that. So.

THEODORE KERR: I have to break to pee.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

[Audio break.]

THEODORE KERR: You turn the page.

SUNIL GUPTA: So all these little pictures in this book are all these people that are in my kind of extended family. So that's the first gay show we did in '86.

THEODORE KERR: *Same Difference?*

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. That's my woman that I was—Jean Fraser, who was my collaborator to organize it. There's —so to me, *Rotimi Fani-Kayode*, who is here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you were like—so he was from Cyprus. There were women—you know, like, so it's like it was diverse then.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you're showing that. It's like—it's a choice to show that.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And it's interesting, there's an exhibition, but there's also a workshop.

SUNIL GUPTA: There was a workshop for school kids, high school kids, through our local government.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the public high schools used to let me run a workshop with gay teenagers.

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: I think.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And then they brought in this Clause 28 business. So the kids made coming-out photo stories on boards.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Where they stuck, like, "what happens in the high school"—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —sort of thing. I was meant to tour the high schools and then they brought out this law and then I couldn't.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So there's Edward.

THEODORE KERR: That's from the flower collage.

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

THEODORE KERR: It's from the collage with the flowers? The two flowers? That's Edward from—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. That Edward. Yeah. That's Fakroon, my first Indian friend from—in Montreal who I said became a hairdresser.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, the most literate hairdresser.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who reads Jane Austen to his clients, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: And this was the guy who was posing in the tomb that MoMA bought.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: How he is now. And these are my people in Delhi that I—collaborators, those two. And so, there he is again—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —while getting the haircut. And here he is with a woman called Ruth Vinita, who I met through him. And these two did the first Indian academic history of literature on same-sex love in India.

THEODORE KERR: Beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: Male and female. And she's an academic in Montana. And she's my very dear old friend who is a big-time activist with the rural poor in India.

THEODORE KERR: What's her name?

SUNIL GUPTA: Aruna Roy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: She's like Marxism in action.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I'm surprised she's still around, they haven't come together yet.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: This—he came to my opening. They live in Boston.

THEODORE KERR: That's David and Jessie?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, they were one of the first gay marriages in Massachusetts.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I came to photograph it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: It's beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. So, like that.

THEODORE KERR: And then *Homelands*?

SUNIL GUPTA: *Homelands* became a post-HIV kind of thing. So, I made this body of work from the point of view of the virus. So, I decided to be literal, and it—everything I see is colored by the virus since it's so kind of all over you.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the idea was that the—you know how photography is often, like—it's full of this endless nonsense about the eye of the photographer? I said in this case, "It's infected eyes, the HIV-positive eye."

THEODORE KERR: Yep.

SUNIL GUPTA: "What does it see?" And this is what it sees.

THEODORE KERR: Yep. Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Why do you laugh?

SUNIL GUPTA: Because a lot of people don't want to get that, somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Of course!

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, they just like,—they listen and they look the other way. There's no response. I think, "Okay, they don't want to deal with that. That's fine."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Nobody wants to think of HIV in a complex, 360 way.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. They only want to think of as a medical way, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Exactly, and I think—yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was simple diptychs of three places that have been home. Which is Northern India and this bit of the East Coast.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And India and Canada. So, it was, like, kind of complicated. So that's England.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So we're looking at a picture of—is this in the—this is in a museum?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, this is in a temple in Queens.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, a temple in Queens.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's not in India. It's here.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Wonderful. And then we're looking—on the paired [side] is a photo from the UK?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And it's, like, a calling for a witness—

[Cross talk.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's a police notice.

THEODORE KERR: —because there's a homosexual assault in Brixton.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because we still have gay-bashing in England.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, here, too.

SUNIL GUPTA: I don't know if you still have it. We still have it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it's interesting. You have a certain idea of the United States that is not—

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Like, I don't know anybody who lives alone. Everybody—all my friends live two, three people in an apartment.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like—

SUNIL GUPTA: This guy—my friend lives alone, so he's—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but he's rich.

SUNIL GUPTA: So he's kept this—he brought this tenant to give him company, but then the guy's decided to find himself a boyfriend.

THEODORE KERR: Of course. Yeah, yeah. I mean, the rich life is different.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: But everyone in America is rich. That's the thing.

THEODORE KERR: No, but—

SUNIL GUPTA: Compared to everybody else.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, that's an interesting conversation. Yeah. I—like most of my friends—it's true.

SUNIL GUPTA: So the amount of food you get here is twice the size of anything.



THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but that kind of also sometimes shows you the poverty, or the ridiculousness of how resources are used here.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Like, the more you have, the more you get. The less you have, the less you get.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, okay.

THEODORE KERR: And so that's—

SUNIL GUPTA: We have to always have one meal between us, otherwise we can't eat the food.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, while you're visiting?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. And if I think about—

SUNIL GUPTA: So if you order some kind of chicken breast, you get both the breasts.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That would be unheard of in England.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. There's a lot of waste here.

SUNIL GUPTA: You would get like this much.

THEODORE KERR: There's a lot of waste here, so that makes—

SUNIL GUPTA: I went to Houston, it was really crazy. There it was like, pies, like this. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. If you even think of what the Visual AIDS artists—there's like—there's the super-rich artists. A lot of them actually are dead and it's their foundations that are rich. And then there's the artists who are applying for emergency grants because their phone is going to be cut off or they don't—they have money to basically survive, but no money to make art. So they get gift cards to make art.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And so—and even in my friend group, there's the secret-rich and there's the barely-getting-by. And then, now that people are starting to teach, there's the bubbling up of a middle class. But—

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it's interesting.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And is this—who—is this Edward?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, this is one of Edward's Brazilian boyfriends.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And—so the title of this is called *The Body Positive*. And is it of people living with HIV?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. So I—this was—I embarked on a—so having done myself, I decided I would do somebody else.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so I kind of—yeah, asked—got this guy to volunteer.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it's not him. He's just standing in.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. You liked—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's not about him in particular. He's an unnamed person here.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you liked this technique of, like, showing a body. But that body's not necessarily—they're representing the thing—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —but they're not maybe the thing.

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, he's not the person, literally.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah. So did Edward become more comfortable with HIV?

SUNIL GUPTA: I guess so, after, yeah. Although he wasn't the directly after—but, yeah, he was like two after. But he—but also Edward had a—Edward—I realized his pattern is to have multiple partners ongoing.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then they kind of leapfrog.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So while it's all happening, he's never without.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But at any given point, there are two.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. He—

SUNIL GUPTA: And this—and they're all secret. So, I mean, it's the straight baggage. It's all like—it's this strange, secretive way of operating. It's really irritating. We would never have got on. So I should never have—that's my only—if I was going to have a regret, it was to have left a very normal gay guy like Steve for a very muddled-up straight one like Edward.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: That's beautiful.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I was, you know, swept away by the body.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And all that gym-going. Just to look at.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Flesh.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So that's what it was, kind of. And then I just went up and down.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You said that—earlier you said that it was hard to make community with people—it was hard to find people living with HIV to make community with.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think that you used art as a way to find community? Because there's the 2006 project where you go to the children's hospital—

SUNIL GUPTA: I did with *Ten Years On*, earlier, to find couples. So yes, I could have. But I was always slightly—I was a little—I've always been wary of becoming an AIDS photographer, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because I feel like I've already got a lot of—I've become the Indian gay AIDS photographer, I'll have a very narrow bunch of people to deal with. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right, but—and this is something you thought about?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, yeah. I tried to stay away from overdoing the AIDS thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. While balancing—I mean, you're an artist who—there's some artists that we know who never do anything about HIV/AIDS, even if they may be living with it or deeply impacted by it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Which is fine. I'm not judging them. But you're an artist who's been able to find balance between never being absent from the conversation.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, sometimes it comes back into the fore.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then I use this one—I have another little book. It's at my gallery. The—have you got the little pink one? For an Indian book?

THEODORE KERR: No.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's called *Pictures From Here*. No, it's like small and bright pink. It was made in India.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, no.

SUNIL GUPTA: No. Okay. It's not available here. You wouldn't have, maybe—

THEODORE KERR: No, I don't know if I've even seen that one.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, this image is on the cover.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because he died. That book became a dedication to this guy. Then he became particular and I give his name and all of that. And it was all very tragic, because he was living in England as a Brazilian.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so he couldn't endlessly stay on. And the only way he could have done it was if Edward had taken him into some kind of partnership. You know, we used to have civil partnerships in England. And he wouldn't. So, the guy had to go back to Brazil. And then he got ill.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then he died. And then his family blames Edward for his death, because they say he died of a broken heart. Or, you know, the going back to Brazil.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the separation accelerated the—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —the HIV, to where it made it very virulent and killed him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Because Brazil does—Brazil has a decent medical system, too, and AIDS drugs are free there—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah?

THEODORE KERR: —for people. Yeah. Because they disobey patent law.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that's right.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But Edward was already on to the other. He had two Brazilians.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: One in Brazil, this one. And one in London. Oh, this is the picture I made for *POZ*, for Sean.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. *Love and—*

SUNIL GUPTA: It's called *Love and Light*. So, I went to India and met—and had a show, and then I met a guy—this guy—and, yeah, without thinking about it. And he presented himself to me as—he was a friend of a friend. I met him very casually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: We went on a date, but he kind of manipulated into being a kind of—basically he seduced me when I wasn't looking—I wasn't—because usually when I went to India, I used to avoid having sex, because my early experiences of sex in India were terrible.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Nobody's taught them how to do it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they're just very bad at the actual sex. It was all that public—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —you know. It's very jerky, and over in a jiffy, and all that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: No foreplay, no wine and hot towels or anything, okay? [Laughs.] Just kind of, yeah, quick and dirty and fast and over with. So, I just didn't bother. Anyway, so I got seduced. And we went—he was shooting—he was involved in the film industry, and he was shooting a movie up here. Ladakh, the top of the world here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I mean, looking down at the valley, and there's a river, and it's completely dry like a desert. It's an amazing landscape. And I was staying at a Buddhist monastery, and he would come to visit. And he was also a guru, so he was—I think he presented himself as a savior.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So—also I hadn't been with anybody, dating-wise, since Edward, which was, like, mid-'90s—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so nearly nine, eight, nine years, which I wasn't—if you remember, I had been a serial monogamy person.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then suddenly there was no one. And yeah, he was very charming, and I fell for it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So, I moved to India. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then he changed his mind, by the time I got there. He said he couldn't be loved—he couldn't have just one person, because he wanted to be a guru to everybody. So, the love had to go to everyone. [Laughs.] So, then I was in India on my own, so I thought, "I can't just come back." So, I carried on the pictures with me on my own. And all the places that work took me to. So that's what this is about.

THEODORE KERR: And it's 2005 to 2009.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Does that mean you stayed for those four—

SUNIL GUPTA: I was then living in India, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But traveling for the show. So this is Mexico.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Where I passed very well. Everyone thought I was Mexican.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Plus I had the hat on, that was it. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: You were incognito. Is this in the U.S., *Boy Bar*?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, that's in Mexico City, and then Rosa. Have you been there? That gay area.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, Zona Rosa, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I went to a very interesting, very working-class bathhouse, near the big central park.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Did you go there?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-mm [negative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's quite interesting. Well, there's this big in the center, which is full of drug dealers and junkies. I mean, it looks quite scary, but I was with some Mexicans. They took me there. But I don't think I would walk in alone actually, it looked a bit daunting.

THEODORE KERR: Was this for the 2008 AIDS conference, or no?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, this was just a show.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So behind the park was this bathhouse, which was full—the Mexican equivalent of truck drivers, or something.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: Like, a bit rough-looking. And the towels were kind of gray.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: With holes in them, yeah. And the bathhouse was very traditional, so there were showers, just like all in a row. And then in the middle of the space, there were slabs of—there were tile slabs, and guys just laid out on them. So you could either be under the shower or hang out on this slab. But it was all, like, in full view. There was one—

THEODORE KERR: That was it. It was like a locker room, the showers.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then there were some other parts, maybe, but I was very impressed with this big open, like, Roman thing, in full view of this—what looked like very straight-acting, working-class guys. Who were also chatting away, but unfortunately in Spanish, so I couldn't. But it was fantastic sightseeing. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you went more than once?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, because the area was a bit daunting.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: This was a completely different thing, Helsinki in the winter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] That was Paris. And so, this is the entrance to a bathhouse in Paris called Sun City, which when you go in, it's completely Indian décor.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like in a fetish way?

SUNIL GUPTA: No. Oh, no, there was fetish, because—yeah, fetish, too, because so the first few floors are like an Indian craft museum.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Little Indian-y things.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then when you got to the upper where there's like, basically, full-on sex places. Because it's huge. It's got a swimming pool, and entertainment, like, TV and whatnot. Meaning that it's not all just for sex, so.

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so, yeah. Yeah, so the top floor, there's this is hybrid—so they've taken Tom of Finland and Indian miniature painting, and hybridized it.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's amazing. And they're, like, these big paintings with the—you know, like, the little Indian miniature I had?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's like that character in Tom of Finland, with a huge cock.

THEODORE KERR: Do you wish you took a photo?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, the thing is I wanted to make this work for India [laughs] living in India. And I didn't want to—I was trying to test the waters, but that would have been too much for the Indians.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And also because there were Indian gods in it, so that's asking for trouble. People come and want to shoot you then.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So [laughs].

THEODORE KERR: And can you talk a little bit about what—the conversations you were having about HIV in India during 2005 to 2009?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes. Well, a lot happened. I went to—I sought out my—

[Phone rings]

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, sorry. Can I just answer him? He wants to know—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, of course.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, he's kind of on the road. Shall I—?

THEODORE KERR: He can come here.

SUNIL GUPTA: He can come here?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, if he's fine being quiet.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, of course he can. And the building is open.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And he can—it's 516. No, 510.

[Texting sounds.]

SUNIL GUPTA: The door number is 510?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: On the fifth floor.

[Texting sounds.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So what happened was that I—so in the process of making *Homelands*—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —which had a video component which was directly about AIDS. So, it was called *A World Without Pity*, and it was a journey—I made, like, a very personal video diary, *Back Into India*—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but looking at HIV as a subject in India. Because I felt at that point, 2000, very strongly that all the stuff that was coming out of Africa, all the news about Africa—and I had much more contact with South Africa, actually, because of the art work. So, I was hearing quite a lot about Africa. And the more I heard, the more I thought, "This is all being replicated in Asia, and nobody's saying anything." And there's a lot more people, there got to be, because it's got one billion people. So, I went to find out in my video.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So between 2000 and 2003—so like, before I met the guy and before I moved there, I used to go on research trips.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I researched—I began with AIDS NGOs—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —then through them I met—I talked to their clinical staff. Because they became sites of testing in drug-giving, and they also had centers for meeting—like, drop-in centers. And there were specialized ones.

THEODORE KERR: Based on what?

SUNIL GUPTA: One was focused just on children—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so I got very involved with that. So, I documented the children.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There were about 30 of them in a home.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And I meant to go back now. I thought I would come back—I've been inspired by a British documentary series called *Seven Up*. Ever seen it?

THEODORE KERR: Of course.

SUNIL GUPTA: So because—you know, when they were little—because they were little, the kids.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They had been abandoned, you know, like were toddlers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they were cute. I thought they were adorable. People were giving it money, and clothes, and

everything. So, I wanted to go back now, like, when they're not cute—and they're now 18, or something, or 20. What's happening?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: What happened to them? Like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so like that, so different kinds of—And then also the AIDS NGOs had created special drop-in centers for basically very poor kind of street queens.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: What they like to call MSM, kind of effeminate. People call them working-class, but they're not, because they don't work, you know what I mean? Like, they—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Anyway, so broadly speaking, effeminate working-class men who cross-dress to do sex working.

THEODORE KERR: But they're not—they're not third-gender, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But they're not trans, no. For the trans, I involved with them—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —as a different category. So—some migrate over, some don't.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's a kind of magnetism. But becoming trans in India is a one-way street.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You can't come out, it's a real—they're cults. Trans in India means you join a house.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because they live in communes, or houses. And you join it, and you're stripped of your personal economic possibility. So, all the money goes to the house, everything you do. It's like a cult, you cannot leave it.

THEODORE KERR: Are we talking about the women who will go to a wedding and say—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, the [foreign language] who dance, and all that, yeah. So, one of its negative factors is that it is a cult, and you can't leave.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So anyway, so all of this—so they—but these other ones, they have very few resources. So, the Indian AIDS NGOs are very focused on this underclass.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: That became their kind of mantra thing, right. So completely ignored the middle class. There's nothing for them at all. It's just for these guys. So, they were provided with a space to meet in, so I used to go there to chat. You can hang out, like a hangout place.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And this is in Delhi?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. In my case, I was focusing on Delhi. And really what happened is that around 4:00pm, they would start coming, and then they get—there's some food and drink, like tea and coffee and all that, and biscuits. And they also—it became a place where they changed over. So, they would come as boys, and leave as girls—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].



SUNIL GUPTA: —and do all their makeup and bitching and carrying on. And dance practice, and watch Bollywood movies, or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was good for any kind of research. You just hung out there. All these people would come and go. It was—you don't have to wander around the streets looking.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And because you were in this space, they also—there was a certain amount of trust, because you had come in through the organizers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, how did they read you?

SUNIL GUPTA: And they also couldn't—hm?

THEODORE KERR: Sorry, finish your thought.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, also they were a little bit like sitting ducks, because they also couldn't say no.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because it's like if you had service users, and then I came through you—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and they would kind of have to respond, like that. So, there were those kind of places. And so, then I made this video, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: How long is the video?

SUNIL GUPTA: It's half an hour.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was it for galleries, or was it—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it was for galleries. But it's kind of—I should put it up somewhere, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's full of facts and figures of its time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I was trying—it was meant for the Indians, actually. I was trying to start with them into something. The figures were quite staggering. Because at one point, India's figures were nearly reaching 5 million, I think.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the Indian government revised them down by nearly half, so there was a lot of interesting discussion about how data gets made—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and unmade, and all that, and how politics plays with that. And very interesting discussion about how very powerful Third World countries like India's cannot be challenged by the U.N.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's that also.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And how does the Indian—oh, sorry.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, so like that, yeah. But it was like a big thing to get involved with. So then when I lived there, I just naturally then now knew all these people, because of this background. So I carried on with the kids—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and I got very friendly with the organizing woman, who was very dedicated. And one of his patrons was—what's his name? Hollywood actor.

THEODORE KERR: Richard Gere.

SUNIL GUPTA: Richard Gere. And through him I met his brother.

THEODORE KERR: David Gere.

SUNIL GUPTA: David. And then he did something at UCLA, where he teaches.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah? "Make Art and AIDS"?

SUNIL GUPTA: Something like that. So, I went to—I participated in the Indian thing they did in Calcutta.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then they brought us here to LA, to UCLA, to talk. Anyway, so stuff like that was kind of happening. But then I also tried to find out—then I needed services.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But this lot couldn't do it, they weren't directed at me. So, the only part of it I could use was the clinical doctor guy. And then I—yeah, so the Indian infrastructure of the state is they have a central body called NACO, which is the National AIDS Control, blah-dy, blah. The Indian government—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

SUNIL GUPTA: —like a public health thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it's a federal agency. India's a republic, like here. Are you a republic? I don't know, but it's a constitutional [laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, Canada's a republic. Right?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, of course it's not. The Queen's the head of Canada.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, what—oh, yeah, yeah, never mind.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. I did a project about that called *The New Republics*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And the Canadian High Commissioner—we had it in Canada House—he said, "I'm not putting the word republic on the building."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: "The Queen's the head of Canada."

THEODORE KERR: Right, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Okay, so you tried to do—

SUNIL GUPTA: So there's NACO, the federal thing, like here. Which is kind of—so Delhi's like D.C.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It doesn't belong to a state—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —but it's got the federal agencies.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But so basically NACO—so when money comes from U.N. AIDS—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or something, it goes to NACO. But NACO doesn't spend it directly.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It gives it to state—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —government-level versions of itself.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And those state things give it to the final.

THEODORE KERR: And those state ones are giving it to—

SUNIL GUPTA: To local—to statewide—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —every state has an HIV public health government-funded—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —user, a kind of center—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —or place where things come together. Where information is shared, something like this.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I went to my local one in Delhi, there's a Delhi one.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it was so inappropriate, I can't tell you. It was a room like this full of very needy people, who were very destitute.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It wasn't for people like me. I mean, I was like—it was like Rockefeller walking in here—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —you know? [Laughs.] And there were these two or three desperate NGO—middle-class NGO people. And it was a classic case of—like a Victorian scene, of these people being explained patent law by these social workers. [Laughs.] Basically, India nearly was going to sign the patent, or something.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they wanted a big demonstration. They wanted these people basically to come out on the streets, to demonstrate against this patent law. But the people were kind of unwilling, because it was hard.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they don't live in the center, they live far out. So, they're not going to come, so they have to be bribed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they need transportation. Buses have to be organized for them, and they were negotiating. So, what I found myself was that there were—I was witnessing a negotiation of HIV-positive people who was saying, "If I don't get two bottles of water and a sandwich, I ain't coming."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And this woman was going nuts. She was saying, "But I'm doing this for you."

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

SUNIL GUPTA: "This is your issue, you'd better fucking come," you know.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] So, it was like this, going on. And the tempers were rising. And the social workers, who were neither positive nor gay—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —were getting really angsty. So, then I got involved, in a bad way. I told the woman, I said, "You can't talk to them like this. You know, they're the ones who are positive and suffering. This is just your profession, you can't lose your shirt like this."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: "And you shouldn't talk that language of 'we're doing it for you,' then don't do it. Like, go home."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] I said, "I'm a user, like, you can fuck off, basically."

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So you know I—but then that's their system. So, I never went back, because what was I going—because then, was I going to do it for them, no? I hadn't got the means, either.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So then what happened was that the few people I met in the next few days turned up at my doorstep with entire families. Children and all, like seven people, were HIV-positive, like, all of them, children and all. They have no money, you know. Can I feed them?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I can't, because first it would be like, how much and for how long?

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then there's lots of them, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's an endless problem.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so I couldn't—I think, very wisely, I—literally, I thought, "I'm not a one-man charity like that." I didn't have the means, anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]

SUNIL GUPTA: It looked like I did, because I looked very grand—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: —in relative terms.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: But it was this quite difficult thing to do—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —to turn them out.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was pretty awful. So, I got really involved with India—and then you really get—and all my chat became like that, and then I became more and more—then I found a role. So, then my role became the media, because nobody would be out and speak to the media.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was only these people. And actually, he [Charan Singh] has a lot to say, because he was from that world.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I'm going to borrow from him, which he's always accusing me of: I'm cheating and borrowing what he's [laughs]—so basically, UN AIDS and MSM and all this, and these NGOs, they have this global system by which they create these service centers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They give these people the language, "you're MSM," then the people parrot it back to you for the media. And that's on the basis of which more money is raised—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and they've just become cogs in a wheel to raise money.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And it's so corrupt. The money's all siphoned off.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And inevitably the final end users very quickly die off, because they don't really get any actual support.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: But they're very expendable, because there's loads of them. You can always find more.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, right.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a very cynical, you know—have you ever read *The Wisdom of Whores*? All that kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, I was just going to talk to you about Elizabeth Pisani!

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that sort of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, it's all this happening right in front of your eyes.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So a friend of mine—who I stopped being friends with, who went to India from England, who was of Indian origin—was one of the main NGOs for this, recently killed himself because they nearly—he was about to be uncovered. There was over a million dollars of missing funds—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —so he put a plastic bag on his head. This was, like, one of the main guys in India.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So stuff like this happens. So, it was the whole thing—so then, you know, they—so then I found this role. So between the later 2000s, you find me on the media.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I became this—and also about changing the law, that anti-sodomy case. And so then I called my mates in Los Angeles about how to deal with the bloody media, you know, because it all happened so quickly,

and it all seemed so important, and I got a few seconds. So they gave me some long-distance training.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I bought a tie [laughs] and, you know, and I looked tidy—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and not colorful. And I looked very straight-acting and proper—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and my age, right. And I said what I needed to say. Whatever they asked me, I had my message to give.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I ignored the question completely. I just said what I needed to say.

THEODORE KERR: And who did you think you were speaking for?

SUNIL GUPTA: Hm?

THEODORE KERR: Who did you think you were speaking for, or who were you speaking for?

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, we were trying to make a case for a.) a change in the law.

THEODORE KERR: The sodomy law?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And b.) we were trying to get—to introduce free anti-retroviral drugs into the public health system.

THEODORE KERR: And did you think you were speaking from the point of view of, like, the people who were—

SUNIL GUPTA: —affected? No, so I was a gay HIV person.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you were middle-class. Like, did you think about the class aspect of it?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, totally, yeah. So, I was—so I spoke from authority.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And because—so the combination of class and age and appearance—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and my name.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Gupta.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, which is Hindu.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's a caste name. People listened.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: They really did.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I can speak the lingo, so I could do this in the local language.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, okay. That's a big deal.

SUNIL GUPTA: It was a big deal. I wasn't somebody—because the thing is that, if you did it—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —you know—

THEODORE KERR: It's a foreigner—

SUNIL GUPTA: You know, a foreign spy, or something, yeah. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But it was important that you were—

SUNIL GUPTA: —that I was living there. It's also important that I was now living there. I had come home.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I was a resident there. I hadn't just flown in from London to do this.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And where does the middle—

[Knocking.]

THEODORE KERR: Come in.

SUNIL GUPTA: Hi. You're just in the right time.

CHARAN SINGH: I don't want to hear anything about me.

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm explaining about the kothis and the NGOs, and the MSMs.

CHARAN SINGH: Well, you go ahead.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, well, feel free to jump in.

CHARAN SINGH: Alright.

THEODORE KERR: Especially if we're being offensive.

[They laugh.]

SUNIL GUPTA: So he used to work—he started a group like this.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, we should say your name.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yes, Charan Singh.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Who is now my husband, also. But he started one of the earliest groups that got the initial funding from this NACO, no? From the National, in Delhi, of these kothis—of these effeminate underclass kind of men. But by which, by men—I keep saying men, but what I mean, that they have their bits—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But they might not necessarily call themselves men?

SUNIL GUPTA: Would they?

THEODORE KERR: I mean, it's a moot point, for this interview, yeah. I have a specific question.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, they have multiple identities, yeah. So sometimes they're women, and they're sex workers,

and sometimes—

CHARAN SINGH: [inaudible].

SUNIL GUPTA: Because they're fathers, also, they have children.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And they're husbands to wives.

THEODORE KERR: Right, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So they're multiple, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And I'm sure it's more complicated than we have time for. Like—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But you wanted to say something?

CHARAN SINGH: No, I think it's—I suppose it's complicated for everybody. Being here also I think there are complexities. But because there is this—what do you call this kind of, like, omnipresence of this gay identity? I think people kind of, like, also, I feel—I feel this kind of this burden of just being this gay umbrella.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: And so as in India, also then, suddenly everybody became MSM in the mid-'90s. And whether they wanted to call themselves MSM or kothi or anything else. And it also shifts from each cruising places, so if I'm feminine kothi here, I would be, in other, like, east-west side, I would be somebody else, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So it's also shift. These are—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, so it's in the book. I brought the book.

CHARAN SINGH: Oh yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: I never showed you the book.

THEODORE KERR: You should show me the book, and we should be clear that the shift to MSM is in direct regards to funding around HIV.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, yeah. It was because of that funding, and because there was this need to have—what do we call these people from—who are not in the States and in the U.K.?

SUNIL GUPTA: We did together.

THEODORE KERR: So we're looking at a book. It's called *Delhi: Communities of Belonging*. And it's an exhibition that's also up right now.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's in this book by the New Press. And so it's 17 characters, from different social backgrounds. So that's Jatin, that's one of the people from the group that Charan was involved with.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we just see him in his different guises.

THEODORE KERR: There's a good bookstore, around here.

SUNIL GUPTA: "Peepul Tree"?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, World People's Bookstore.

[Cross talk.]



THEODORE KERR: And in the back, there's a nice old—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, the old guy, the old gay man. Oh, you've been to India?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And there's a handsome person in the front room when I went.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, we always have handsome personalities.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Oh, I was sucker, okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: So that's—this is that park, opposite that Regal Cinema.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is—the Regal Cinema is now being torn down.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But it's—so here they are, so that's what we mean.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So we're looking at pictures of people from the groups, and it's like, smiling people, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And as you can see, they're kind of semi-trans dressed, semi-not, kind of—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —isn't it?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. People are existing on a spectrum.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I think this is a group's office or something, no?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And these are your photos?

SUNIL GUPTA: It's our collective photos.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's his photos, but I've signed them off. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

CHARAN SINGH: It's domestic violence.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But then, he has children—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —of his own.

THEODORE KERR: The person in the pictures has children of his own, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, that's his father, he's a father as well.

CHARAN SINGH: But it's also—I mean—

SUNIL GUPTA: He's a husband, that's his wife.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: But I think when we see, "Oh, India's complicated, and they're all married," I know, even if I meet somebody in London, and if I say I'm married, suddenly their first response would be, of a gay man in the West, would be, "So do you have children?" And I said, "No." But, "So what happened?" I said, "Nothing." And so they assume that I'm a husband of a woman, not a man.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So it's very unusual for me to explain that I'm so—often they got shocked that, if I'm married to a man.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So this assumption also, that it's—that they're married to a woman. But also, that they are all give up—no, they are all, like, kind of, like, hiding and something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: But it's not very easy, because this boy was beaten up by the family, later, all the men in the family, and being stripped naked in the colony and kind of, like, parade, if you don't get married.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So it's—and also—we are also looking at the age of 19 and 20, when the marriage pressure in certain class are very high.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So you have to get married to—so that you can—it's kind of a mix-mix, because by that time you're children are 19 and 20—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: —the mothers get 40, 45 or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: And after 40, 45, women get—they become this kind of old granny.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So they have this thing. So they need somebody to look after them, in their 40s and 50s. And so it's kind of like vicious cycle, which feeds into itself.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So Jatin to get married, so that he could bring a wife, so she could help in the household, and so on and so forth.

THEODORE KERR: And is this also impacting the ways in which HIV may travel as well?

CHARAN SINGH: Yes, yes, of course. So if people—so other things, like they have to produce—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, this is a place where they go to. So this other guy and him, they're friends.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So he also does sex work. And this is on the outskirts of the city. It's a kind of dumping ground, like a rubbish dump on a public walkway, and it's a cruising site, no?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It's a cruising site for both, like, exchange for sex but also sex workers?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, I think.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, but mostly men.

THEODORE KERR: Men, yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: Women would have slightly more problems in visible spaces.

THEODORE KERR: And the men who are doing sex work, they're doing it with other men? For other men?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And they're doing for other Indians, or for tourists, or—

CHARAN SINGH: No, I mean, tourists wouldn't go there. It's mostly Indians, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And they're from the same social class and the same caste?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, kind of.

SUNIL GUPTA: No, they're different. This one's a Muslim, so the other ones were Hindu.

THEODORE KERR: No, but I mean the sex work—those sites for sex work. I'm trying to understand—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, I see. No, it's a social thing, it's a class thing.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, it's a kind of similar—being kind of, like, linger in the similar kind of—

SUNIL GUPTA: They're on the street.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

CHARAN SINGH: But what happens when they cross this—

SUNIL GUPTA: It's the equivalent of streetwalking, in a way.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, they could change their class.

THEODORE KERR: If they cross-dress?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, if they cross-dress, they would be slightly higher. So, because the demand for almost look like woman is slightly higher than the working-class, or like, shaggy dreads and baggy shirt.

SUNIL GUPTA: So I don't know, do you still have streetwalking here? You don't. So in India—

THEODORE KERR: No, it's all gone online.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's all gone online. It's happening there, also.

THEODORE KERR: You said there weren't—

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, I see. So, it's happening there, also, at a slightly higher economic level.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. That's why I was wondering—

SUNIL GUPTA: But there's still street corners where people gather.

THEODORE KERR: Okay, good.

SUNIL GUPTA: But they have a whole selection of male-female, boy-girl, like, whatever [inaudible].

THEODORE KERR: And historically, with your work, it's often been grant-based or commission-based. And this project?

Do you want to bring up a chair?

CHARAN SINGH: Oh, and some water, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: This project?

SUNIL GUPTA: This project was a commission from the New Press—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —who have done a series of LGBT books from different parts of the world.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And their focus was actually more about the law.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So we felt we couldn't talk about—India's so complicated socially, we would have to first talk about the diversity of the caste and class system, and how this sense of the law affects them. For one thing, a lot of these people didn't even know they were illegal. Like the anti-sodomy laws only seem to happen in English.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Not many people have heard of it. So, when the news came that it was changed for the better, you had to first explain that there had been a law, and now it's been changed.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So yes, a bit like that. So then we also did other kinds of people. So, she's a university post-graduate, who's come from another part of the country, who started women's groups and stuff. And this is the university, it's a queer group. And so, he's a kind of male equivalent. So, this is your upper-middle-class gay male professional, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Who is the spokesperson who's on TV, and the media, no? Who writes books, and edits books, and—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —he's all-around, smart, good-looking, presentable.

THEODORE KERR: The queer intellectual, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. No, but also like, looking good.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, clearly.

SUNIL GUPTA: And you know, for India, he's tall.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: No, it's the whole media image thing. Like me, you know, it's like I became presentable.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And that's what this picture is, that we're looking at, page 50 of the book. It shows—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, he's outside, yeah. So, his presence—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —in the kind of—he's in a metro station.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Like that's the size of a cup.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Also, there's this idea of, like, technology and urbanity as well.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: This idea that—because people want to paint Delhi or India—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —as less advanced. But this picture is suggesting what's more complicated and true.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so they're very kind of contemporary. So, they're globalized.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So they're also queer, and they're also kind of polyamorous and all that business. Actually, they were even hidden. Anyway.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah. I think what we have much more polyamorous than queers. Queer don't get laid.

SUNIL GUPTA: Queer don't get laid at all, you mean.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Really?

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean, queers don't get laid?

SUNIL GUPTA: They don't have sex, they just talk about it. They theorize.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's interesting. That's a good dance party name too, Queers Don't Get Laid. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Is that true over here?

THEODORE KERR: No.

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: But I do take that point very well, the idea that, like, queer is this thing that's—it's theory, it's up here. Where here—and I'm only speaking in my own experience—queer can mean, like, your practice, like, maybe you're a radical fairy, you're queer in that way. And it can also mean theory. And the queer academics do fine for sex.

CHARAN SINGH: Really?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] The queues of students lined up.

CHARAN SINGH: I'm raising my eyebrow with doubts.

SUNIL GUPTA: Why?

CHARAN SINGH: No, I'm just—it's going in an archive.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, exactly. You understand that it's—for the record, eyebrows were raised, yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: Yes. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] Well, that's his partner, who's currently in Minnesota doing his Ph.D.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: He did his from Berkeley. So they're all, like, super-smart, and they're in all—all your Ivy League schools are full of them

THEODORE KERR: Right, and also super-global.

SUNIL GUPTA: And very global, yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: But it also means that they are—

SUNIL GUPTA: And they can outtalk you, totally.

CHARAN SINGH: Upper caste.

THEODORE KERR: Upper caste, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. And Indians are notorious for talking. We can just go on and on.

THEODORE KERR: I never noticed.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: How do you see yourself in this kind of—in this globalized Indian and European and North American world? Like, how do you fit in, and how do people place you?

SUNIL GUPTA: It changes, depends on where I am, and which day we are in, what's happening. So, when I was living here, and appearing on the TV and speaking of behalf of—it was—I was Indian, and we were in India, and it was like a local—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —thing. There was no notion of "I've come from somewhere else, too." When I wasn't living there, then there was.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So for my practice, it was important to make—to live and make it there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So that's why I was making these pictures. Although they were shot in Paris—we were here.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And so these led to these.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

SUNIL GUPTA: So now we're in the bathhouse, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And this is the bathhouse that the Sun City was?

SUNIL GUPTA: Sun City, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, you got to go in and take photos.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Did you rent it for a day?

SUNIL GUPTA: I got a—what's it called? A commission from the Pompidou Center.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

SUNIL GUPTA: For a month, they housed me and fed me, and I made one picture a day. It was quite intense—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —because I could only go into the bathhouse when there weren't any clients, which was only between 6:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., when it was closed.

THEODORE KERR: When they were cleaning?

SUNIL GUPTA: When they were cleaning, yeah. So, we'd arrive at 6:00 a.m., and it smelled like sex, obviously—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —because 500 people had been there all night, having sex.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And you know, there were used condoms everywhere. Because they were cleaning up around us.

THEODORE KERR: What year was this, that there was used condoms? 2010.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah. Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: Ah. So no PrEP?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: No, it's too early. 2012 is when it gets approved here.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: So there's used condoms everywhere, and you have these—

SUNIL GUPTA: So I took these pictures, which was kind of loosely based on *La Jetée*.

THEODORE KERR: And these are—like these are [inaudible]?

SUNIL GUPTA: I had a production company, yeah—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and we cast it, and everything. Oh, the French were really, like, very bureaucratic. I had to get all kinds of permissions. Even to be outside, we had to get signed permission from the Parks Authority.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I had to tell them which way I would be looking.

THEODORE KERR: And this, to me, is not necessarily how you work?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, not at all. This was very scripted and I had to think about it. I had a crew.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I was more like director. I had a camera person.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I had a lighting guy. So, I was just like hovering nervously, trying to make sure [laughs] everything would happen.

THEODORE KERR: And not a camera in your hand?

SUNIL GUPTA: No.

THEODORE KERR: How was that for you?

SUNIL GUPTA: It was great fun.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: But because it was digital, so I could control it by seeing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So this is what I was interested in. To animate, to kind of make a contemporary Postmodern version of the gay history of photography.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was about looking.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So I didn't show what they were looking at exactly, but I wanted that whole looking thing. For India—I meant to show this in India eventually, which I did, and it got shut down, I think, because of this. Because as you can see, this is—it's not in itself very controversial.

THEODORE KERR: It's not?

SUNIL GUPTA: No. I mean, you can't see any genitals.

THEODORE KERR: I know, but—

SUNIL GUPTA: No, but usually that's what defines things. So, in England, like, we had a—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —penis law, couldn't be more than 30 degrees.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: You need a projector.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, in Japan you can't have pubic hair. Everybody has their kind of little rules.

THEODORE KERR: But in India, this got shut down.

SUNIL GUPTA: This got arbitrarily shut down, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Because of the homosexuality?

SUNIL GUPTA: I think so, of the way people were looking.

CHARAN SINGH: But it's interesting, because this much of skin you see all the time, of men. They are having bath outside. And if you see in the book, there's one of the characters having a shower outside—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: —bathing outside in his underwear. So that's kind of really common.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: I think it's to do with the—who understands the context. That's the problem. And then—

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, maybe here, they're touching. Yeah, there's some—it's very funny, because my hero, he was straight—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and he had never done this before, so he hadn't been physically up close with another guy naked before. We had to give him a barrier, like, put some towel arrangements so his intimate body parts weren't in absolute contact with the other person's.

THEODORE KERR: For his own mental—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Like, he requested it? Or you just sensed—?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, no, he requested it, yeah. And he came to this interview with his wife, and she had to give her permission.

THEODORE KERR: That's very important to get. That's really interesting.

SUNIL GUPTA: So, like, this is a composite of all classical gay photography—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —from Baron von Glodin, Platt Lynes, and upwards. The poses.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. And this is six in the morning, or like—

SUNIL GUPTA: Between 6:00 and 11:00, yeah. And I'm on the other side of the pool, because that was my vantage point, so yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think you'll work this way again?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, I discovered—I didn't think I could, but I can, I think, yeah. But it needs a lot more resources than I usually have.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].



SUNIL GUPTA: Finances.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. It also changes the politics of it a bit.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because everything I've done is DIY.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: I could work like this, in a given—you know, I don't have to build this space.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: It's in the Pompidou Center. And just the two actors. Oh. [Laughs.] So when we shot this scene—

THEODORE KERR: We're looking at a picture of the hero in a sling.

SUNIL GUPTA: In a sling, he'd never been in a sling before, obviously. Or so he said, anyway. But he said something very funny in Hindi. He said, "[speaks Hindi]." He said I had made him Radha, who's a goddess—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —a kind of bacchanalian goddess, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That's nice.

SUNIL GUPTA: So you know Krishna—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —the blue god? So the female is Radha Krishna.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: There's this endless love thing that goes on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And there's a temple dedicated to Krishna, which is full of cross-dressed Indian men, who dress up as Radha—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —to be his consort. So they present in the temple, in women's clothes. So there'll be like a thousand of them there.

CHARAN SINGH: But not just Indian—

SUNIL GUPTA: Huh?

CHARAN SINGH: White men, I mean—I mean all the men from around the world goes there.

SUNIL GUPTA: This is my favorite. This is the George Platt Lynes.

CHARAN SINGH: And most of the—all the priests are white guys, actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: A lot of the priests are white guys, and they would be calling something so-and-so Krishna, like George and Krishna, and Michael Krishna.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, so they've changed their name.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, there would be some, like, Indian name.

THEODORE KERR: In the artwork, or in the process?

CHARAN SINGH: No, they live there for several years, and then come back here, become Hare Krishna, type of thing.

THEODORE KERR: The Hare Krishnas?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah. So they go—they all go there.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. You said this was your favorite. We're looking at a—it's called *Sun City Paris, 2010*, page—I don't know the page, but it's three men lying in a blue bathhouse room.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, just on a mattress. But this part of the picture is a George Platt Lynes picture, turned around.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And I just gave it an onlooker.

THEODORE KERR: Because of the idea of the seer, and the—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And then also our hero always has this kind of—he's in a halo, throughout, just like that.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. A golden halo.

SUNIL GUPTA: He's kind of a golden—and I made him very Indian, so see he's super-hairy.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So a lot of people have complained about—Indians have complained that I made him unattractive. Because Indians who are normally—suddenly hairless has become fashionable, I guess through Bollywood. Like, muscle and hair, just like here. So, Western pornography has penetrated Hollywood, so all our heroes have become all muscly and seem to have no hair at all.

THEODORE KERR: But the hair is cyclical. You can tell what kind of—what's going on in the economy and in the culture based on the hair.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, definitely.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, I didn't realize that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it's the same with miniskirts.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Like, skirt length and the economy related to it.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh I see, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. But the muscle things just seems to be a—I mean, maybe you know this from your own work, but the muscling of gay men comes after HIV.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Like, the intense desire to be seen as healthy.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's true. And just go and look in these dance bars. You just look and—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah. And so, this book that we're looking at, *Queer*—and I think the last project is this project, and it goes up to 2010.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: But obviously, that's seven years ago. So, I wonder if you want to talk about work that's happened since 2010.

SUNIL GUPTA: Oh, well, this happened most recently. So, this is the last couple of years, two or three years. Oh, yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: [inaudible].

THEODORE KERR: Like ten minutes?

SUNIL GUPTA: Ten minutes, yeah, 12:30, we have to arrive by one. It's only IN 56, or something, it's in the fifties.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but how do you want to get there?

SUNIL GUPTA: By taxi. We'll never get there otherwise.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Because it's the piers.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's too far from the 8th Avenue subway.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I agree. So, let's think about how we want end the interview, and then we'll get you on the road.

SUNIL GUPTA: Okay.

THEODORE KERR: What's some final thoughts you want to share? No pressure.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] I'm trying to think what happened in between.

CHARAN SINGH: Many things.

SUNIL GUPTA: Many things happened. The law got reversed.

THEODORE KERR: In India?

SUNIL GUPTA: In India. We had met. We got married in 2011. When did we get married? '11? Seems like such a long time ago.

THEODORE KERR: It is.

SUNIL GUPTA: It is, isn't it? Yeah. And—oh yes, I made a body of some work about love, isn't that in here? No, maybe not. *The Loved One* isn't here, no *Love Undetectable*.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, *Love Undetectable*. Oh, we need to talk about that, because I'm curious about the title. I know it comes from an Andrew—

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's from the book, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Andrew, I can't remember.

SUNIL GUPTA: That English right-wing guy's—yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, okay, I'm glad you said that, and not me. But was *Undetectable* a reference to the HIV —

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, so in the same way, yeah. Both.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. A play on words.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, because I got interested in the idea of—I decided we'd have enough of sex, because of the law, and 377 and sodomy and not-sodomy. The whole public discussion was around the legal ability to have sex, the right to have sex, and privacy. So, he would contest the privacy part. But it seemed to be all about sex. And again, I felt like I did, back in the '70s and '80s, that the sex didn't worry me, you know. And even visually. So, it's the love part that's more difficult and complicated. And the relationships. It's like *Ten Years On*. So, I made *Women In Love*, which was about lesbian love and romance, which I shot in a kind of *Elle* magazine style, about bougie women in Delhi. Which was very funny, because they were activist women, they weren't bougie at all.

But they didn't mind acting out. So, we showed that in Delhi—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —except the bedroom scene. But the rest, they showed.

THEODORE KERR: And that has videos as well, or no?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, that just had stills.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And then—oh, the other part had—that's true, there were three women talking. Have you seen them? No.

THEODORE KERR: Just representation, yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: So they're talking to their lovers, okay. So, they're like single-take—

THEODORE KERR: Monologues, almost?

SUNIL GUPTA: They're talking to their girlfriends—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —who are away.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So two of them are talking to each other, actually. And the third one is recounting a brief history of—it's like, "how I met you."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You know like, "Oh, you wrote to me, and I was very casual. I just ignored it for a while, and then I thought, 'Oh, I'll bother to write back.' And then we met in New York, and then I thought, 'Well, he's okay.' But you know, I'm not living in New York." So, she goes on and on like this, and she builds up the whole thing. "And then finally, I fall in love with you—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and now we're very excited." It's like a looking-forward thing, it's the beginning of—so she tells the whole lead-up, how she was taken in by somebody. It's very—in one sitting.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And so there were these three women just talking to you. And then up in the stills, there was us. We took the camera to bed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Didn't we?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Laughs.] And so—

THEODORE KERR: This is for *Women in Love*?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, this is for another part—another section of it.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: There were these large photographic stills.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: Which we shot with a normal lens, wide open, so that it was kind of acceptable in India. Nothing was, like, very sharp.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: You would have to—I mean, you could tell there were bodies in bed, no?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, that was the *Love Undetectable*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So it was always trying to find, like, what you can show and how you can allude to something, and how far you can go. Which always sounds—I don't know if it translates well here, because you can show anything here, it seems. Oh, no, you can't, there's something you can't show, there's one thing I have to show you. America has its limits also.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: It's this one. Oh, no, they're not in the book.

CHARAN SINGH: They're not in the book.

THEODORE KERR: Because you can't show them. [Laughs.]

SUNIL GUPTA: Because you can't show them in America. No, to have the book here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Basically it's a naked child.

THEODORE KERR: Ah, of course.

SUNIL GUPTA: These two women had a baby—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —and I was doing the pre-Raphaelite thing, and so I made the baby a cherub—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: —so of course he's naked. His little penis is staring right at you.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

SUNIL GUPTA: And they won't show it here.

THEODORE KERR: So that covers *Love Undetectable*. Maybe we can think about how—is it fair to say that your work has—especially in the last, like, 10, 15 years—has primarily been occurring either in your domestic sphere, with Indians in the U.K. or in India? And do you think that that's something that you're interested in? Do you think that's—

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, no, it was all in India, so—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, it was all in India.

SUNIL GUPTA: —us coming to live in England, it's created a crisis, because we haven't got a subject matter in England.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: But it's getting better. So, we're using this time to do academic research.

THEODORE KERR: On what?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, he's doing his Ph.D. on—well, he'll tell you what it's on. And I'm doing mine on four of these projects.

THEODORE KERR: What do you mean by that?

SUNIL GUPTA: On *Homelands*, and *Sun City*, and Pre-Raphaelites and another one.

THEODORE KERR: So you want to keep—those are ongoing projects, then?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, I'm going to—I'm doing my Ph.D. on them. I'm theorizing about them from today's vantage point. From queer theory today, looking back.

THEODORE KERR: And you're using the lens of queer theory?

SUNIL GUPTA: Language today, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Ah. Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Amazing. Cool.

SUNIL GUPTA: As a PhD.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: That's possible, nowadays. It's a short one.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And meanwhile, you're also being a Ph.D. advisor for other people?

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: And he's doing his by practice, so he has to make something, and also write about it.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And any final thoughts on HIV, or like—what's the role that HIV plays in your life now?

SUNIL GUPTA: Well, the biggest thing is that I'm positive and he's not.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we're trying to keep it that way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So personally, it's suddenly become more relevant, as opposed to when I was just me, and had shagging on the side.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is PrEP available in the U.K.?

SUNIL GUPTA: No, they're still discussing it, no?

CHARAN SINGH: I think it's coming in.

SUNIL GUPTA: But it's about, "Will the NHS give it for free?" That's the thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, okay. Okay, so that's a big theme.

SUNIL GUPTA: So it is—yeah. But it's—obviously, like here, the AIDS sector has shrunk.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: So the service places are shrinking, there are fewer of them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: In fact, there might be only one left now, or something. The one that's aimed at people of color is still going—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —but many others have closed. The service that—the drop-in kind of centers are closing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah, it's—and the hospital clinic is getting more and more interested in doing everything electronically.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And at the same time, culturally HIV/AIDS, especially, like, memories of the earliest response, are coming back into vogue. We're seeing large traveling AIDS exhibitions, documentaries.

SUNIL GUPTA: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That are looking back, and I'm wondering if you've noticed a kind of—a re-exploration of your work dealing with HIV/AIDS. Are there new generations of people that are interested in the AIDS work, that weren't interested in the AIDS work before?

SUNIL GUPTA: Not in England. Currently there's an interest in the 1980s—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: —and the race work, but not in the AIDS work—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

SUNIL GUPTA: —so far. Aside from the fact that the Tate put up the AIDS wallpaper.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: And we're both involved with the Royal College of Art.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Which is very anti-subject matter—is like—it's very process-driven.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

SUNIL GUPTA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, I—

SUNIL GUPTA: Although a lot of queers have arrived there.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, a lot of queer—they might be able to—

SUNIL GUPTA: Professors and—

CHARAN SINGH: I'm looking at the book I was doing, with HIV and NGOs. So, I'm looking at the same people, and the same stories, and, also, I'm interested in the landscape that people are losing. Does that landscape have a significant history?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: In people's memory and that they mean a lot to them.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: And to me, also. So, and a lot of composition happen in those spaces. Which is not part of the queer discourse and nobody knows about that. And also, kind of discourse focused on certain class of people and also certain locations. Which will come [inaudible]. There were other queer activists group came and meet, and then there were film festivals, and all kinds of activity that had to do with what's happening. And so—and, obviously, [inaudible]—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: —to do—people come to protest there and all the pride marchers end up there. But, I'm trying to look away from those monumental spaces and see—trying to see there are other places of resistance, basically, because resistance is not only happen in front of the White House. It could happen anywhere else. It could happen in Minnesota. It could happen, you know, in far away, in Missouri or something, and unknown places. I'm just trying to think—

THEODORE KERR: But did you mention Missouri specifically?

CHARAN SINGH: No, yeah, like I was reading this—yeah, I did mention—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

CHARAN SINGH: —because I was reading some stuff in *Life*, Missouri and here.

THEODORE KERR: Laura Flynn?

CHARAN SINGH: No, Tara Thaemlitz, the music person.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah. To—they grow up in that—

SUNIL GUPTA: I'm just going to do before I—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, before you have to run.

SUNIL GUPTA: Before we get trapped in here. Down the corridor?

THEODORE KERR: To the left, to the left.

CHARAN SINGH: So that's kind of why I like the idea because it's kind of like a similar kind of story. And also, they say that—talks about the closet-ness and, you know, like this, kind of, this thing that if you are from [a suburb -SG]—if you're not in the city, you don't live in the city, and you live in some small place and village, this assumption that you are out, in the closet.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: You know? So, so many assumptions that we keep making every day.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: And that's what happened with the presentation [inaudible] also. Especially with me, also. I'm trying to, because [inaudible] is also, in a ways, kind of language. The more you write on the blank paper, the more you're creating gaps.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So, I'm trying to think how to a) record—register all this other spaces of resistance, b) how to have a voice where this assumption we don't have a voice, because your voice can only—I mean, only people who have been to abroad and have educated themselves have voice and so, I'm trying to think that, "Okay, we can't—we don't have voice, but we can mumble."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: Maybe we can make a word. We can't say a word, but we can mumble. We can do things.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: We can—but, you just have to hear.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: You know? One needs to find out how hear these resistance. So, I'm trying to think in that way.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah. And the main thing is, kind of, like, entangled with HIV and AIDS because that was kind of my thing and my—kind of, like, my work, and my involvement, and my identity was based on the AIDS—because before that, I could not be called anything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: You know? So, that became very important and—

THEODORE KERR: How old are you? Or, what year were you born? I know you're a lady.

CHARAN SINGH: I'm sorry [laughs].

THEODORE KERR: But—or, just roughly. So, I'm 38.

CHARAN SINGH: No, I'm 39.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And I have just a working theory that there's a way in which, at least in a North



American context, us being a similar age, we, and I'm using air quotes there, we grew up in a time of, like, what I would call the second silence—

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —of HIV/AIDS. And so, we had to make our own content—

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —to make sense of the stuff that we were—the cultural inheritance.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, but with you it's different because you already had the boom of AIDS—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: —and, you know, gay movement.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: But, HIV came, like, kind of, 10 years later in India, in that form.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: So, a lot of the people—my friends, they're just, like, shooting up, like, gone completely. Like, within three months they would get tested and gone.

THEODORE KERR: They would die.

CHARAN SINGH: They were dying. But, that happened, kind of, late '90s and early 2000.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: Because HIV came '89. First detected in '89 there, and then this whole language of MSM came in the mid-'90s, early '90s.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: And then the funding—the project we started in 1998, because suddenly we were all school dropout. A lot of us can't speak English. Obviously I couldn't speak English until I met Sunil.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So, we were figuring out how to do, what to do. And, also, then this rationale that, "Okay, fine, there's something called AIDS which is going to kill us in 10 years, as they say, but our prime concern is, like—daily concern is the daily-ness of our lives." So—and that's, kind of, we often forget that, "Oh, you didn't come for that protest and then, therefore, you're not queer enough, you're not activist enough."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: You know? But—and often those people who claim that, this kind of—it's all personal experience. I'm not saying that—

THEODORE KERR: Sure.

CHARAN SINGH: —I'm not naming—I'm not blaming people.

THEODORE KERR: No.

CHARAN SINGH: And they're all kinds of people. I mean, they are queer, they are activists also, and they are not activists also. But, they tend to say—to blame that, "Oh, you are not there at that moment." So—but what happens when people are resisting every single day and the challenging normativity on every day. Just to getting in the bus—

THEODORE KERR: Absolutely.

CHARAN SINGH: —is a kind of challenge because—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. You're queer every day.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, the everyday-ness of the lives. And so they—that got kind of, like, under the carpet.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: Because, if you see the boys—and some of them, in my pictures.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So, I can show you this. No, I can give you my card and maybe you can—so, that's—so, like this thing. This kind of queerness, every day.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So that's, kind of, everyday thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: And that, kind of, gets under the carpet because they can't speak.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: And the people who can speak in the language and the verbal language and the English language—they're the one who are claiming the queerness.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: So, these things, kind of, like, get—they're still under—so I'm trying to think with that. And, therefore, the ration was, is that, HIV will die with HIV and AIDS in 10 years.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: But, the concern was how to get in the bus and how to buy grocery for our mothers, or sister, or whatever.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: And how to get past the boys who were standing at the street corner.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: So, that was a challenge.

THEODORE KERR: Like, you're looking at life chances. All the orgs want to just focus on HIV/AIDS as reducing your life chances.

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And you're like, "Well, I'm a big fag. How am I not going to get beat up or murdered?"

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. So, yeah—like, people are dying every day, actually—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: —in that sort of—or they were getting abused by their families—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: —and the father would come up, boy like him, that, "Oh, that you are going outside and getting laid. Don't go outside, and we'll do that for you."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHARAN SINGH: You know, that kind of conversation was having in the daily lives. So, how can you, like, feared by HIV, which is, like, somewhere, hypothetically, somewhere sitting here?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and I don't mean to make easy comparisons, but there's a similar conversation that can be had around the African-American community—

CHARAN SINGH: Right. Oh, yes.

THEODORE KERR: —and HIV/AIDS here.

CHARAN SINGH: Yes, exactly.

THEODORE KERR: And, like, the violence of being told, like, "One in every two black men will get HIV if they're gay."

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: You know, this is a horrible—like, what does that mean?

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And if we address the other—I think what you're saying is, if we address the holistic experience—

CHARAN SINGH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —of the life—

CHARAN SINGH: So, I went to get tested in London first time—it's been a few years—and then they—obviously then there's this kind of like a categorization. So suddenly you are—if you are Indian, and then which Indian? Or South Asian, and they go, "Which South Asian?" Pakistani, or Bangladeshi, or something. So, they kind of mark you.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: And they assess you. And this assumption that certain people are on certain risk and, you know —

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

CHARAN SINGH: And I understand the data, and I understand the statistics at the research—this, kind of—these researchers.

SUNIL GUPTA: [Inaudible.]

[They laugh.]

CHARAN SINGH: But it's also—it's not life. Life is not so easy.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Exactly.

CHARAN SINGH: You know? It could not put into any data this—

THEODORE KERR: Exactly. We need more mumbles.

CHARAN SINGH: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Thank you both very much. Any last words?

SUNIL GUPTA: Are we going to see you again?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah! Okay, I'm going to press stop. [Laughs.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]