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Oral history interview with Jack Waters, 2018  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jack Waters on 2018 February 21-22. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

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

## Interview

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Jack Waters at the Visual AIDS office in Chelsea, New York City on February 21, 2018 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Card number one. So, Jack, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born, and can you tell me a little bit about your early childhood?

JACK WATERS: I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 14, 1954. I'm the fourth of seven children, and I was born during Hurricane Hazel, which apparently was the worst hurricane of the year at that point. My early childhood was—I don't know. My parents were both working parents. My mom at that point was doing housekeeping and domestic work, and my dad was working for the United States government. His job at that time was called Signal Corps, and then a few years later, his job was changed to the Army-Navy Electronic Supply Agency. Basically, he was doing visual information: early imaging, photocopies, microfilm, stuff like that.

ALEX FIALHO: And how about your family? Tell me a little about brothers or sisters, and your home growing up, please.

JACK WATERS: Well, I have five sisters and one brother, so my family was pretty female-dominated, just in terms of numbers and also in terms of the general energy. My parents were very cultured. They were really interested in art and music, though neither of them were artists. They made sure that we were surrounded by art classes, music of all kinds, and dance, dance training. My oldest sister was the first to do dance training, with modern dance, and then my two next-older sisters were also dancers. [00:02:29]

But we were like a party house, and we had a lot of music. My parents were particularly interested in blues and jazz. So, you know, that was really the favorite music. Both their parents were deeply religious, and both of my parents rejected religion vehemently, my father more vehemently than my mother. My father I often describe as a devout atheist. He was so adamant about there being no God and no afterlife. It was basically like a point of religious fervor. Like his atheism verged on religious fervor. My mother, on the other hand, was like an avowed atheist.

So, yeah, we had a lot of music in our house. Early in my life, my mother befriended someone named Chris Albertson, and he was very young, of Danish descent, and was also really interested in blues. I think she met him as a housekeeper. She basically was his housekeeper, and when he realized how interested she was and how knowledgeable about blues, and particularly Bessie Smith, he asked her to assist him with his research. And so, she's credited as a research writer for Chris's book called *Bessie*, which is the book that this recent HBO movie that Queen Latifah stars in, is the subject of. He interviewed people who were still alive that knew Bessie Smith. So, growing up, we kind of referred to Bessie Smith by her first name. [00:04:37]

Yeah, so, he also—Chris was really into bringing old blues singers back into performing, because a lot of people who had reached a certain age weren't making any money and would go into labor, you know, just working. So, another person was Elmer Snowden, who is credited among jazz circles as the inventor of the Harlem banjo. He kind of took this music style that was basically Kentucky banjo, but made it relevant and pertinent to music that was on the East Coast, Harlem. He was also—

ALEX FIALHO: And he would come to your home, or he would be performing?

JACK WATERS: Well, he lived with us. He was like a de facto—my house was like an open house, and so people came into our house. We would adopt. So, Chris, we grew up calling Uncle Chris, and Elmer was like our grandpa. Both of my parents' parents had died before any of my siblings were born, so we didn't have, like, elders, you know, in our family circle. I mean, my mother's grandmother—my mother was raised by her grandmother. Her mother died at a very early age, so I have very peripheral memory of her. [00:06:03]

But at the same time, she also kept this, like—my mother was the family historian on her side of the family, and so she told us stories about her mother, her father, her great-grandmother. But, I mean, generally leaning towards the women. So, we knew more about three and four generations of grandmothers than we did about my immediate grandparents.

So, Elmer was like a de facto grandpa for us. I mean, in jazz circles, he's known as the father of the Harlem banjo, and he was also the lead of a band that would later become Duke Ellington's band. There was some misunderstanding around the band's funds that caused Elmer to go into exile, [laughs] so he had to disappear. I think he went to California for a year.

ALEX FIALHO: That's diplomatic: "misunderstanding of the band's funds."

JACK WATERS: Yeah, [laughs] yeah, yeah. It's kind of a gray—there's, like, this foggy issue, which is documented. It's traceable, but it's not really clear. Like, no one actually says anything, but there was a question and Elmer left town. And then he came back, and I think that was when Chris kind of discovered him, and then he was broke. And we had a big house, which was why we were such an open house, and Elmer ended up living with us.

ALEX FIALHO: Where in Philadelphia?

JACK WATERS: West Philly. West Philadelphia, near what's now called University City. We're bordered by Fairmount Park on the north and Lancaster Avenue on the south. Today, people call—they talk about West Philly and—you know, I grew up with what people are now—which is now kind of a young sort of activist—is southwest Philly. But we're 41st and Ogden Street, which is kind of right in the heart of the urban city in West Philadelphia. [00:08:18]

ALEX FIALHO: So just tell me a little about how that culture of music in particular, but also dance classes, came to you as a young person, and the young person who eventually became an artist.

JACK WATERS: Well, I grew up around music, so Elmer became—my sister Sheila is the next oldest to me, and she's also the sister that's a lesbian, and she—well, Elmer was her guitar teacher, and I think he also tutored her in the recorder. I mean, as she was the next oldest to me, I imitated everything she did, so I kind of learned guitar chords. Anything she did, I did. She was also into crafts and art.

But my dad was also really into arts and crafts. We would paint tables and do collage work with him. And then because of the people that Chris would bring into the house—he would bring in people from New York that were—Chris was gay, is gay, and so we had this very queer extended family life from a very early age. My dad tended to gravitate towards friendships with lesbians, which was very interesting. I didn't know as a child, but my mother kind of filled me in. So they had this very interesting queer orientation from the time that I was a kid. And then also, they were all in various areas of the arts, like friends of Chris's and then other people that would come in and out of my family life as a child. [00:10:16]

So, we learned just at home and then we had classes. You know, there was something called Fleisher Art institute, where we did drawing and painting. There is a woman named Noreen Beckwith who was my sister's dance teacher and then later would become my dance teacher. So, music, and art, and performance.

There was a period, I guess, where I must have been around nine or 10, where—our family entertainment was play-reading, singing spirituals and folk songs and any other music book that we would have. And we had a really extended library. The family library was the largest. It was in our living room, and it was kind of everyone's library. And then my mother had her library, and my father had his library, and then we would all get books. And once we were kind of done with the books, they would more often than not gravitate towards the main library.

So reading—and then also discussion, because there would be a lot of politics, really passionate politics. It was around the time of the civil rights. And so, one of my early memories was looking at that *Life* magazine—I think it was—where the people in Mississippi are being fire-hosed and dogs and German shepherds. And I asked my mom why they were hurting those people, and she said, "Because they're colored." And then I said, "Aren't we colored?" [Laughs.] And she was like, "Yes." So, it's sort of this dawning on race and where I fit into it, because our house was also very interracial. It was very interracial, even though we were in the middle of the urban—I mean, I call it the ghetto. My brothers and sisters would probably not be happy with that contextualization, but it was like, pretty deep, deep in the urban area. Although our house was very large, Victorian, roomy, and comfortable. [00:12:35]

Yeah, so art and music were essentials. They were as essential as food and clothing to my parents and to their kids. And then discourse was also essential. Like, you really wouldn't feel you were present unless you could discuss what adults were discussing. So, my parents didn't really differentiate between intellectual—I think they

were very, very sensitive about emotional development, but intellectual development was—you know, they just assumed. Like, no one ever did baby talk. And in fact, my mother discouraged baby talk because she felt that it inhibited people's development. At one time, I was taking James Baldwin's *Another Country*. I must have been in the fourth or fifth grade, and the teacher was horrified, and she said, "Does your mother know you're reading this?" And I said, "She gave it to me." So that's what my early childhood was like.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have any specific memories of seeing any art from an early time, maybe in museums? Or experiences that stick out for you as developmental, or formative, or otherwise? [00:14:07]

JACK WATERS: My earliest memory of seeing art—outside of the art that my father made, which was really leaning towards crafts but, like, collage-based—like, our dining-room table, he made into a kind of mosaic, and then each member of the family got a square in the mosaic. So it was pretty abstract. I mean, it wasn't figurative. It was all about color and shape. And then he would do sculptural things. I remember he had a saw—he had a workshop in the basement, and he made ducks, like these wall-hangings of ducks, which interested me early on in sculpture. I always gravitated towards three-dimensional mediums, and I kind of chart these ducks. And then I remember modeling clay and making ducks.

But the first time I remember art as product, you know, as presentational product, was at the dentist's office. I was probably around six or seven, probably. And my mother showed me this picture, and she said, "Do you know what this is?" And to me, it was just this kind of, like, blur of—I mean, I didn't even have the language for abstraction. She pointed out the flute player, the guitar player, and she said, "This is Picasso. It's *Three Musicians*, and this style is called abstraction." So that was kind of my introduction to art-making as a practice, where it's like, "Okay, like, you don't—like, you can—figures don't have to be literal. You can actually have figures out of shape and form that represent things." So, it's kind of my early—[00:16:11]

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have a sense of where your parents' investment in art and culture came from?

JACK WATERS: Well, my dad for sure. His brother—my father came from a very strict evangelistic background. His father is what is called a circuit minister in the Methodist church. Circuit ministers travel and proselytize. My dad's mother had a mother who was evangelistic, so she didn't—my father's—and this is where it gets confusing, because my father was married twice, and his first wife and his mother have these very strong resemblances. They were both evangelistic, and I kind of—my mother actually helped to track this relationship that he has had towards women, and particularly lesbians, because his grandmother was a closeted, evangelistic, hypocritical lesbian.

In their religion, dancing was forbidden, music was forbidden, art was forbidden. Anything enjoyable was strictly forbidden. And I think he always wanted to be a musician. And he had a younger brother who wanted to be a painter. I think because of their restrictive upbringing, they were very rebellious, hence his rejection of religion, and hence his gravitation towards art and art-making, which I also never knew until I was grown that my father was actually the one who was responsible, in a large way, for my art-making. Because on one hand, he was like a tactophobe [ph]. Like, he really was not touchy-feely, like emotional, but my mother was his channel for things. [00:18:16]

So, with my dance classes, with my private school—by the time I was in high school I was very art-driven—I learned that he was the one that encouraged this to happen. And her inclination was that it was too expensive. So even though she was also very, very nourishing as far as art and creativity, financially, she was the one who was like—and he was like, "No, no, no, no, he has to have music lessons." You know? So, I played the trumpet in junior high—like, all of these things he encouraged through her agency.

ALEX FIALHO: That's amazing. It's amazing to hear this distinction that he made from his father to pass it along to you.

JACK WATERS: Yeah. Well, he didn't know his father really. And his mother was very emotionally immature, so he was raised by his grandmother with his mother like a sibling. His relationship to his mother was like siblings. And so, yeah, that's—

ALEX FIALHO: How were you politicized growing up in that environment?

JACK WATERS: Well, politics was just always, like, key. It was key in my upbringing, from that time that I was looking at civil rights, these *Life* magazine posters. My mother and her sister were both early civil rights activists, and so her gravitation towards—my mother discovering James Baldwin, which I could not have been more than—what—like six, eight years old when Baldwin became popular. When is that? Like 1961, 1962-ish. But then, because conversation was so crucial, I remember listening to my mother's conversations with my aunt Lois about civil rights and race and, "This is what James Baldwin says about it." [00:20:28]

And so, it was just kind of natural. It was automatic. Because also, the conversation was so engaged, so

passionate that to just get attention, I had to be able to say something that was relevant to the discussion. You know what I mean? So it was just sort of part of my upbringing. You know, I remember one of my older sisters coming home from school and talking about the Holocaust, and it was incredible to me. You know, she was like, "Oh, they made lampshades out of people during the war." And just like, the idea that there is a possibility of that level of human cruelty—and then the idea that there is, like, distinction again.

Because my mother's conversations with her sister and other people, they would talk about white people, and they would talk about Jewish people. And at a certain point, I started to understand that Jewishness was somehow other than, or not as, white. Like, you started to recognize degrees—what people would now call critical whiteness study. So how, in one conversation, the person who's Jewish would be white, then in another conversation, they would definitely be Jewish. And then, of course, we had this history of the Holocaust. [00:22:06]

And then, my dad who served in the army during the end of World War II, while the army was still segregated. And my father was light-skinned, so white people's responses to him were by and large assuming he would be an ally for them, which he was totally not. But would use that position as a way to help and support people that were darker-skinned and other black military, because he was favored by white authority. So during the '60s, I remember buttons were really big, and he had a button that said, "Question Authority." And there was a turning point—I guess I'm more a teenager at this point—where I kind of realized the irony that questioning—like, his position of questioning authority meant that I would also be questioning his authority. And that it would probably be okay if I could back it up or somehow support my argument. You know, we were also brought up to reason—like, use reason, and logic, and explanations—because they didn't believe in an afterlife. Everything was very rational. It was a very rational upbringing, so any kind of belief, or faith, or opinion, had to be backed up.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you describe your own development around identity, particularly maybe sexuality or race, in that moment in early childhood, or childhood, or teen years? [00:23:55]

JACK WATERS: Well, remember, I was the first boy of three girls. There were three girls and a boy, and so their life was all around girly-girly stuff. So, when I was like—as early as my early childhood memories, I was like a doll baby to them, and they would play games. I was, like, the little princess, and they put pajama tops on my head and that would be my braids. And I don't remember this from my actual memory, but there was a picture before I was born of my three older sisters and my father, and they're braiding his hair, so he also was going through this kind of girly—like, at-home girly-ness. So, I was actually—it was a shock to me, at like four or five, to realize that I wasn't really a girl. I mean, I knew I was a boy because being the first boy of three girls, I had a favored position. But at the same time, I didn't really have a visceral, deep understanding of the difference. And then it became embarrassing to them for me to be playing girls' games: jump rope, jacks. You know, the princess thing was definitely out.

ALEX FIALHO: Once you were a little older?

JACK WATERS: Once I was a little older, like adolescent pre-teen. And my sister Sheila who hadn't come out at that point—I remember I must have been probably eight or nine and saying, "Oh, I wish I was a girl. I wish I was a girl, girls do so much fun. They can play with Barbie dolls, they can play"—and Sheila was like, "No, you should be grateful because boys have"—she basically explained male privilege to me. And so, this was kind of my early orientation to gender. But it was still problematic, because even though we had queer friends—gay friends; queer was not a word—but gay and lesbian friends in our household, my identity did not evolve until much, much later as far as my own gender identity. [00:26:27]

ALEX FIALHO: When did you start to identify as an artist? And did you intend to study art and make a turn to thinking about that as a life path?

JACK WATERS: I think I started to identify as an artist probably around the age of 16. Like 15, 16 years old. You know, I played—I was always making art. Art was one of my favorite subjects in school. Art and English. I played trumpet in junior high school, but I was not serious. Like, I didn't—I was not as serious about it as a musician. But then I discovered dance. I started going to my sister's dance teacher, which I think I had probably one class and then she also lived with us. She was another boarder, like Elmer. A lot of the people who were our art mentors were also family members who were boarders, you know, people that lived in our house. And so, I think probably by the time I was 16, I really fell in love with dance. And that was that. My relationship to dance was an automatic connection to art and poetry and had already been saturated with music. So, as far as dedicating my life, I think, yeah, around 16. 16 years old. [00:28:20]

ALEX FIALHO: And what was the turn for you with dance? What was the particular interest and enthusiasm?

JACK WATERS: Well, I went to—when I was 16—and this goes back to your previous question, because I was always queer even if I didn't know it, or accepted or recognized it. Like, I was the one who got his ass kicked at school, and teased, and you know, just kind of bullied. And it was always "sissy," "faggot" stuff. And so, by the

time I—like in the seventh grade, when I was 16, I realized that I couldn't go to school. Like, I could not go to public school, and I started looking for alternative schools. And there was something that was sponsored by the Board of Education called the Parkway Project, that was like wall-less classes. It was open—what did they call it? Progressive education. But it was by lottery, and I didn't get into the lottery for the Parkway school.

But then I think through my association with summer camps that my parents would send me to, I found out about a progressive school that was a private school called Community Camp School. And it was a school that had been out in the country, like Bucks County, like on a farm. And it was progressive education where you could basically choose whatever subjects you wanted to focus on. And I was doing art and reading, art and literature. It was an experimental school. We called them experimental schools at that time. And that experiment didn't work. The people who ran it were—the students had a lot of autonomy. [00:30:43]

And it was during the period where—you know, like, the SDS, Labor Party was very influential, and so they were like cliques. There was a clique at Community Camp School that fashioned itself as the Red Guard. I mean, we were like 16, 17 years old, but they were really into *The Red Book*, and the beret, and, you know, like, radical chanting. And so, we kind of revolted against the leaders of the school, of this Community Camp School. We thought that the head mistress was too authoritarian. One of the cutting points—one of the key points was there were horses, and she had stallions castrated, and that was just too much. And so, we barricaded the school bus and sat in front of the bus. Like, we did this whole thing. And then I think—it's very vague. You know, it's kind of a very vague memory. It's also a really druggy time in my life. A lot of pot smoking, like at a really young age. [00:32:15]

But I do remember Community Camp School fell apart, but then there was another school that was being organized right behind it. So, most of the people that went to Community Camp School went to—it was called Miquon, and Miquon was modeled after Summerhill in England. It was also progressive education. It lasted a little longer than Community Camp School, had its similar, like, '70s problems.

But because students had autonomy, and I wanted to focus on dance, I and other students got a dance teacher. We had them hire a dance teacher who had happened to be someone that I knew in relationship to my oldest sister, Linda, who at the time was a dancer and an actor. And so, we hired Sue Olds as the dancer teacher at Miquon. So, it was very concentrated. I was able, from that point on, to really focus and concentrate pretty much exclusively on art and dance. So, painting—you know, there's a teacher named Eileen Neff, who is very well known now, was painting. Beatrice McLaughlin was sculpture, ceramics, and crafts. And Beatrice was interesting. Beatrice was like, stone, bull dyke. And there was a point—so, Beatrice transferred from Community Camp School. Sue also was at Miquon. [00:33:59]

Miquon started—there was a Lower School, like K through six, we called the Lower School. And that had been around, I think, for a good 25, maybe 30 years. The Upper School was something new. But Sue had taught at the Lower School, and she had also taught at the camp, and then I was a counselor at the camp. So again, there was this kind of integration of faculty. Like, most of the teachers at Miquon were recent college graduates, so they were very close in age to students. And so, yeah, it was very permissive, like extremely permissive, which had a lot of great aspects to it, but then also a lot of really problematic ones. Especially like, sexual relationships between students and teachers, a lot. Drugs happening, scoring from teachers a lot.

ALEX FIALHO: And this is, like, the late '60s, early '70s?

JACK WATERS: It was [laughs] early '70s. It was crazy for a lot of people. I mean, I didn't think the culture at large was as much influenced by counterculture. I think the counterculture, for most of the country, was through the reverberations of what you see in commercial mainstream. But people were actually living—like, people were actually doing hardcore politics. I mean, we had Black Panthers living in our house during the crackdown. And I'm skipping backwards, but—

ALEX FIALHO: Let's hear about that. [00:35:53]

JACK WATERS: You know, we knew what was going on. It's like, Black Power. My parents gravitated from civil rights to armed defense, their ideology. Both my parents—my father was more aggressive than my mother in terms of actual—but as they were involved in things like civilian review boards for the police, and having police lieutenants in the house at the same time as Black Panthers, even while the crackdown was going on, because of everyone's affinity and association through the music that they were listening to—I mean, this is how I grew up, with living dichotomies happening along the political and idealistic spectrum, where there would be a kind of—like, our house was kind of a safe house for a lot of people in a way.

So, there were people whose jobs and livelihoods were high in government. I mean, I don't know how my father worked through the government. My sister was receiving—my oldest sister Linda was receiving, at some point, literature from what was then called Communist China, and my father was asked to report on her, and he was basically like, "Fuck you." So, his position in middle-level government management, I think, was somehow

protective for him. Plus, we were under surveillance anyway. Like, I grew up knowing we were under surveillance. Like you go to a demo and there are white people in suits taking pictures, and my parents were like, "Oh, that's going right into the police files." Or you would hear clicks—

ALEX FIALHO: Because? How did you know you were under surveillance, you and your family specifically?

JACK WATERS: Well, because of infiltration. Because police and secret service infiltration is so obvious. You go to a number of rallies and meetings, and you start recognizing faces that are not really part of an integral community. [00:38:11]

And also, like, people were taking pictures of you in your face. I mean, it's clearly not tourist. I mean like suit, like plainclothes—I mean, it's pretty obvious and clear what plainclothes cops look like. And at the same time, because of my parent's involvement with having civilian control over the policing of black neighborhoods. The head of the police academy was a friend. So that kind of cross-information was also something that I grew up with.

In other words, you have these boundaries of information, but they're always working through personal relationships. And so, we just knew. I mean, you hear clicks on the phones. There were times where we would hear the tail end of our conversation before hanging up. We would joke in the '60s. Like, in our last conversation, just saying goodnight to J. Edgar Hoover, because we knew, because surveillance is so easy and obvious and possible. And in that time, technology was not that advanced, so you could hear the interruptions. And it's probably safer to assume that anything that you're saying or doing is more easily surveyed than not.

And of course, when my father's superiors asked him to report on my sister—which is, again, control. Like, it's really not about information. It's about control. Because they knew what was happening anyway. So, what it was really asking was for him to cooperate with them in a large way of how McCarthy trials were conducted. Like, people were not getting information. The McCarthy administration was not as interested in information as it was in cooperation as a means of control. And so, this is all part of the dialogue and the conversation that was happening as I was growing up, and the art and the music was part of it. [00:40:23]

ALEX FIALHO: How about transitioning from that, it sounds like, incredibly politically conscious, artistically centered family life into—

JACK WATERS: Well, you asked me on sex and sexuality. So, at that time, sex, as it is in many ways today, was considered subversive and transgressive. And so, pornography also was part of the political culture. You know, things like the *I Am Curious* films. And then my dad would come home. He was using the technology. He was doing early photocopying. So, before Xerox was even an operative term, he would bring home photocopies that we would play with, you know? Among the things that he would bring home was porn. Like *Playboy*. I don't think *Hustler* existed at that point yet, but the political—what was it called? This magazine published in New York? The relationship between politics and sexuality were very parallel because they were considered—like subversive politics and subversive sexuality was part and parcel. [00:41:57]

And so, this is how I also grew up. We talked about sex at home. We knew what sex was. We knew what pornography was. It wasn't hidden, and in fact, it was talked about as something that was subversive and anti-establishment. So, homosex—I had a relationship to, as I said, my parents' friends, but as far as my actual identity, it was very contradictory. It was very oppressive still at that time.

As I started to dance, like get more involved in dance, and going to this progressive, liberal private school, I became the poster child for the idea that just because you were a dancer, you didn't have to be gay. And I was meanwhile, basically, having homosex from the time I was 12. So having a sexual identity and having sex for me were not necessarily on the same plane.

ALEX FIALHO: Is there anything about this moment of Philadelphia life that you want to make sure we bring into the conversation? Because I'm also interested about how you get from here to Juilliard and then make that thought process transition.

JACK WATERS: Yeah, I think we can go on.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. So how did you—I know that New York is the next step on your life. How did Juilliard develop?

JACK WATERS: Well, Juilliard developed—as I said, my oldest sister Linda was a dancer and my inspiration for being a dancer. I remember an argument she had had with my mother about moving to New York, and she said, "Oh, Linda, in New York, dancers are a dime a dozen. It's a mistake." And she did it. You know, she did not move. [00:44:04]

But by the time I came of age, I basically—I wanted to get out of the house as soon as possible. From 16, 17, I just wanted to be independent. I mean, my home life was amazing, but I felt it was really oppressive. Like, if I had had the insight that I do now—I just don't know why, but I just wanted to be independent. But once I was 18, I moved to California to dance. I was going to be a dancer. It didn't work out for a number of reasons, mostly the weather.

ALEX FIALHO: Where did you move in California? Tell me a little bit about that.

JACK WATERS: I went to Northern California. I thought I was going to Haight-Ashbury. Haight-Ashbury was over by a good two years. And San Francisco was way expensive at the time, for me. So, I was mainly in the Bay Area, Oakland, Richmond. I did a few apprenticeships. I enrolled in a couple of colleges. I had enrolled in a dance academy while I was still in Philadelphia, The Philadelphia Dance Academy, but I just wanted to get out, so I left. This is 18, like shortly after my 18th birthday.

I stayed in California for, I think, six, seven months, largely because it was really difficult, like financially difficult, but it also rained every day. It was super depressing. And I thought—and also, I was sort of gravitating towards the Haight-Ashbury scene, which was over, and I had no distinction between Southern and Northern California. Like, I thought I was going to sunny LA, and it was rainy, cold Northern California, like Bay Area. So I came back—[00:46:10]

ALEX FIALHO: Why was the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco the next move for you?

JACK WATERS: Because it was hippie and free love. I was starting to get a grasp of my sexuality. At that point, I identified as bisexual to some people. And so that drove me, just this kind of free love, hippie deal. Like, communal, blah, blah, blah. Like, the California dreaming. But it didn't work out.

ALEX FIALHO: And you moved back.

JACK WATERS: I moved back.

ALEX FIALHO: You were there two months?

JACK WATERS: Six.

ALEX FIALHO: Six, okay.

JACK WATERS: Six months, seven months, I think. I went in October. I literally went on my 18th birthday. My parents were very protective, and so they would not give me permission to leave, to move the house, until I was of legal age, at which point they had no choice. So I left. I went to California, seven months, didn't work.

I came back to Philadelphia and then I started teaching at Miquon, at the high school that I had gone to, as Sue's assistant. Sue is very brilliant. She was extremely brilliant, but she was emotionally arrested. Her teaching method was very pedagogical, so you learned to teach. Like, I was teaching at 17. I had good teaching jobs at 17, but a lot of that was sort of taking the weight off of her. She didn't have to teach because she was teaching her students how to teach, which has become a very handy method for me in later years. [00:48:00]

So I came back to Philadelphia, taught at Miquon. Sue, ultimately, broke down. And in the process of her breakdown, she encouraged me to move to New York, to in fact go to Juilliard. Her training also was—it's not anti-technique, but technique was not emphasized in the way. Like, her methodology was improvisation and composition. Improvisation and composition were really strong aspects of my dance training through Sue. Technique was not. But she recognized that she did not have the background to give me the technical chops that I would need to have a career as a dancer. And so, she said, "I hate to do this, I hate to lose you, but if you're really going to do this, you should go to Juilliard."

So Juilliard, for me, was just a strategy to get to New York. I had no intention of focusing and concentrating in this conservatory atmosphere. I was going to get a job and then drop out of school. But instead, I got really ingrained and integrated into, basically, conservatory world, as much because it gave me the resources for choreographing. There were studios. I had dancers. Because composition is not encouraged or reinforced, dancers tend to really, really long for a choreographer, and I was the choreographer. So, as much as I wanted to imbue this idea of improvisation and composition as part of the creative process and the collaborative process, which was Sue's method, it was also very beneficial to me to just have access to studios, theater, everything that Juilliard offered. [00:50:23]

And so that's really how I got there. I auditioned twice. The first audition, I didn't get in. I attribute it to the fact that I probably didn't have the kind of technical training that they hoped for, and so I spent the next year studying ballet. You know what I mean? When we say—in dance when you say "technique," you mean "ballet,"

basically—that technique equals ballet. So, I studied ballet at Sue's encouragement. I kind of boned up.

The first audition was not balletic, and it was also performed to silence. And Sue also wanted to observe the audition, which was completely forbidden. So I got her into the audition as my accompanist, and she came and she sat down at the piano. And though my piece was choreographed to silence, she sat the piano and played nothing so that she could watch my audition. I remember Martha Hill, the dean of the dance division asking, "Where is the music?" And I said, "Well, it's performed in silence," and she said, "Oh, you and John Cage." It was the first time I had ever heard the name John Cage.

And as I said, I did not get in. During the course of that year as I was studying ballet, I had also taken a master class with the choreographer Anna Sokolow, and Anna bonded. You know, we got along really well. She liked me, and I told her that I was planning on auditioning again. I also learned that it's to your benefit to audition twice. They like to see you improve. If you audition and then come back and have improved, then it's a bonus to show that you are trainable and recognize what their priorities are. [00:52:31]

But then on top of that, my master class with Anna was in composition, and Anna was a senior faculty member at that point. And she literally said, "Tell them I said to let you in." And I did, and they did. So, that was the jackpot for my second audition. You know, I had more of a technical grounding, and Anna said to let me in, I guess. I mean, I don't know. I mean, you don't what the jury's actual considerations are, and I'm sure there are many. But it worked, and so there I was.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you tell me about those years in New York, in your Juilliard moment?

JACK WATERS: In my early years in New York, I was really broke all the time. I think I must have moved at least, literally, like, 20 times, 30 maybe. The first couple of weeks I stayed with Chris. Chris Albertson who was the only person that I knew. And then at a certain point—he had a small apartment on Central Park West, 103rd Street, and he was like, "You can't stay here anymore. I need my space." And I stayed with a friend of his for a short period, and it was the same thing. Like, "Okay, your time is up, got to go." And I just started moving from apartment to apartment. [00:54:08]

But my actual life was at Lincoln Center all day, every day. You know, any place that I lived was, basically, for four years, just a place to sleep. At a certain point, I moved in with my friend Susan, Susan Salinger, who was also from Philadelphia. I knew her from the Philadelphia dance scene. She was, like, a legend. She was beautiful. She was talented. She was rich. You know, she was considered—she actually had this huge house that was across the street from Miquon, in a neighborhood called Chestnut Hill, which is a very affluent area of Philadelphia. It's where the John B. Kelly family, of Grace fame, lived. The mayor of the city, Frank Rizzo, lived in Chestnut Hill. And Susan lived across the street from Miquon. We didn't know each other at all. We were kind of like different sides of the track, but she was known as the beautiful, talented, rich girl.

So she also came to Juilliard the same year that I did. And then we became friends. We bonded and had this life-lasting friendship, so Susan was a great supporter of mine. She came to New York with a trust fund, and so one of the first things she did was rented a loft in Tribeca on Duane Street, raw, you know, empty, and then built it from scratch. I think this must have been my second year at Juilliard, where loft living, and building, became part of my life, as we were also training. [00:56:22]

Susan was also a choreographer. You know, she also had—she had a much stronger base, like technical base, than I did. I started training seriously later, which most boys do in dance. It was really tolerated, because there weren't enough boys. So, in the dance world, especially at that time, it was just much easier for boys to get scholarships and to be accepted into ballet companies and conservatories. So, yeah, I lived with Susan on Duane Street.

And then she left the loft on Duane Street, moved to Franklin Street, and she called me one day, and she said, "Living in a loft with a French guy and an artist." The French guy ended up being Michel Auder, and the artist was Bob Smith. And they were, like, the odd couple. So I did not live on Franklin Street, but I hung out there, crashed there basically. So, I didn't really have—there were times where I really didn't have an apartment, or was on the cusp of being evicted constantly. So, between Susan and Bob and Michel, you know, would be my refuge—like where I would sleep when I wasn't at Juilliard all day, every day. [00:58:00]

Susan moved to Brooklyn after Franklin Street, and then I moved to Brooklyn with her. This is now my third year at Juilliard. At the end of my third year, Juilliard dropped my scholarship. They took away my scholarship. They felt that I was spending too much time on my own choreography, and not enough time developing my technique and learning repertoire. At this point, American modern dance, and Juilliard in particular, is being the bastion of the—you know, basically the house of the American modern dance. Their project was to codify the works of Limón. Graham, they couldn't perform. Graham, they were not allowed to perform, I learned, because Martha Graham and Anna Sokolow had a rivalry with their composition teacher and accompanist Louis Horst. And so, Martha said, "You know that Juilliard cannot perform my works as long as Anna is there." [Laughs.]

But at the same time, there was Hector Zaraspe in ballet, Genia Melikova in ballet, and particularly Alfredo Corvino, who was Cecchetti method. And so the foundation—you know, it was a time technique was king of dance. Where modern dance previously had this history of being more or less, not so much freeform, but Limón, and Graham, Cunningham—who was, like, third generation—were all developing their styles with this fine line between what constitutes a style and what is actually technique or technical. But then Juilliard became the house where it became ingrained in the repertoire. [01:00:25]

And I was there just at the tail end of when Juilliard was taken seriously. The Juilliard Dance Ensemble was taken as seriously as any dance company, because the dancers of the Juilliard Dance Ensemble were the progeny of the choreographers who were developing their style, and their craft, and their repertoire. But by the time I got there, Martha was gone, José was dead, and so it was just this weird—it was very weird and problematic. Because on one hand, I was understood and appreciated, particularly by Martha Hill, who built Juilliard. You know she—Martha Hill brought modern dance out of the phys-ed programs and into the art department. Particularly Bennington first, North Carolina. But then when Juilliard moved from the original location to Lincoln Center, the American modern dance was selected as the representative of American dance.

There was a little tension that was happening with Balanchine and City Ballet that I learned later, because the dance division was split. The floor where our studies were, were split. So, SAB, the School of American Ballet, was on half of the floor, and the other half of the studios was Juilliard, which I learned later that Balanchine almost became the dance department of Juilliard, but the American Moderns won. But at the same time, there was this acquiescence to ballet, and I think because of its technical—you know, because it was recognized as being technical. I mean, it's physical, and I suppose the epitome of what's considered virtuosic, but it's also rooted in European tradition. [01:02:31]

And the money was really coming, like any institution, in places where people with money understand and appreciate. And at that point it was ballet. You know, the dance tradition in America became extremely balleticized [ph], and so did I. And my feeling, because of the racial dynamics around ballet, and around dance in general and everything else, it sort of became like a task that I set for myself to prove. Like a proving ground that I could dance. I would be as technically proficient, ergo balletic, as any white boy.

At the same time, I was sort of really more interested in this aspect of ballet that's called petit allegro. Petit allegro are the really fast steps that women do. Like, male domain of dance and classical music in general—you know, conceptually there's sonata-allegro form, ABA form. It's kind of sonata. It's sort of parallel to the idea of what you call in science and philosophy a theme opposition and antithesis. It's like ABA. This is what Louis calls —[01:04:17]

ALEX FIALHO: Hypothesis?

JACK WATERS: Right. So, hypothesis. Dialectics! So, sonata-allegro is like the musical variation of the concept of dialectics, where you have theme, you have opposite theme, and then you have the synthesis of the theme. The theme A is generally male, theme B is legato or allegro, and then the resolution, the synthesis, is a combination of them. But it's more driven towards the male end, the bold end of it, in dynamics. It's a really interesting aspect of philosophy and art that's driven my work for my life. You know, this kind of relationship of sonata-allegro synthesis, like dialectical—just the whole notion of dialectical analysis and dialectical consciousness, particularly as I would learn was one of the leading arguments within the Frankfurt School. But at Juilliard, I was doing it physically, like in my training. And so, as I was pushing myself to become adept at ballet, I was kind of [laughs] focusing on the female end of it through petit allegro. But at the same time, I was still training really intensively.

So they had taken away my scholarship because I wasn't really putting enough dynamics into my technique, and during that period, I went to the Ailey School. I kept training at the Ailey School, which was my training ground during the summers of all my years at Juilliard, because you can't stop training. Like, when you're dedicated towards that end of dance, you just don't stop training ever. So I summered at Ailey, and then at the same time, I was kind of pushing my ballet technique towards this, like, feminine, feminized, petit allegro format. [01:06:18]

Susan, at one point—Juilliard was mounting a piece called *Waves* by the choreographer Katherine Posen, who I think at that point had already set it on ABT, on American Ballet Theater. And so, Juilliard was—the thing about Juilliard was like, at the end of the year was the spring concert, where basically the school had to prove itself. Because it was used to being in the eye of the critical—you know, just being critiqued the same as any dance company. And so, they were really trying and pushing, and they were doing it through technicality. You know, it was like—it's no longer, like, philosophy or other realms of aesthetics. Anna was driven towards the dramatic. She's known for her drama, so I got a lot of acting chops through Anna. But that was not, you know, turning the trick in the '70s, in the era of balletomania then.

So modern dance is becoming increasingly balleticized, and so I had sort of lapsed in that aspect of training

because I was interested in my own work, and in choreography and improvisation. Susan told me that they were mounting Kathy Posen's *Waves*, and so she tutored me. They had already started learning it, and she tutored me, trained me in the steps. And I guess, somehow, the message got back to the administration that I had improved, and they needed me. They needed a male dancer, so they restored my scholarship, and I finished Juilliard. [01:08:24]

So I missed a semester. But as I said, I never had any intention of finishing in the first place. A lot of it was also addictive. It's like, when you're at that level of physical exertion, you just get drunk. You just get drunk with it. You just want to do it all the time. So it's like a mixture and a combination of things that drove me to stay there, because it was not easy.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that intensive training influence your—I mean, you sort of spoke to it in relationship to the *petit allegro*, but also how did it influence your development of your artistry? You noted this relationship to dialectics. But also just at large in being in a place like New York City?

JACK WATERS: How did it influence me as an artist?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

JACK WATERS: So, I am in between technique, technology, technicality, and inspiration, intuition, imagination—are things that have always been interesting to me. Even while I was a teenager, I was fascinated with the idea that Bach composed while he was completely deaf. So that he was able to conceptualize these very intricate patterns of music that were happening harmonically and melodically. [01:10:11]

Sue's training, like musical form, which is this ABA, sonata-allegro-based form, which is what Graham—you know, Louis Horst basically trained Graham in composition by comparing musical form to dance form. So, he would show, "This is how—this is theme A, this is theme B, these are the various variations in tone," et cetera, et cetera. Through dance, you do that through physicality, like actual level—we call level, direction, and then different forms of dynamic. So, you take a motif.

So, I was doing that since studying with Sue. So it's not technique in the physical sense, but it's technical—you know, there's a certain mathematics involved where you can approach it either through pure, intuitive facilities, which people do. Hence, these dancers are born-not-taught type thing, because people do learn through practice, and they learn by working with math. It's like in the old Renaissance old model. You know, painters would train that way too. There's not necessarily a breakdown of the elements of form and style until much later in human culture—Western culture, which is pretty much all I know.

So, this relationship between technique and not technique—also an interest in dreams, mythology, the subconscious. You know, it's very influenced by Dada at a very young age, very influenced by Surrealism. You know, the life of the unconscious and the life of the subconscious mind, and then how the conscious mind and the unconscious mind work in harmony as a unit through like—so, this idea of technique also becomes a form of mental exercise. [01:12:27]

This is one of the other things with my experience. And it calls to my relationship to race. Because going to private schools, like high school, and throughout my teen age, most of my friends were white. Like, almost all of my friends were white. I had never been in an environment where I felt on par intellectually with other black kids. They didn't have the same exposure that I had growing up. They didn't have the same interests. It was just—the white kids were brought up in families where they had more access to art and literature and education. When I got to Juilliard was the first time—like, I met kids from High School of Performing Arts, kids that were training. There was a woman, Thelma [. . . Hill -JW] who was a trainer for people that would later go to AOA. My trainings were—

[. . . -JW] But in any case, I met people who were people of color, black people, who had the same interests and the same experience in aesthetics, like in creative life, as I did. And so, like this world opened up to me, oddly enough, at probably the whitest of bastions. [01:14:09]

Also that year—those years of Juilliard, there was a lot of recruiting, for some reason, of particularly black men. It was kind of crazy, but there were so many black men in the dance division during the years that I was there. But then also in the opera division, like gospels—like opera singers who are coming from gospel. But then because these kids that had gone to Performing Arts were coming from uptown, like Harlem, there was a whole lingo that practically the whole dance division picked up, which we later realized was—it was like house talk. It was everything that was coming out of balls, like, "Go girl," "She's perched," and "Miss Thing," all this stuff. It kind of saturated the entire dance division. And we didn't necessarily know immediately that it was all coming from ball culture, but it was kind of an interesting assimilation, at Juilliard of all places.

ALEX FIALHO: That was going to be my follow-up question, and this is a good segue. Can you tell me a little bit

about those summers at Ailey and what kind of dialogue you were having across Ailey to Juilliard?

JACK WATERS: Yeah. So, Ailey, I would go to in the summer, and then for that semester that I was exiled from Juilliard. And one of the things that for me, now, are most salient, there's like—I remember reading in ballet class, and people—it was when I started to become aware that people—like, you could take any name you wanted. There was a dancer, Trinket. I think she's Trinket Monsod. [01:16:16]

And then, there was this person who was getting corrections all the time, that I was so annoyed that this person had taken this name. And also, I was so into myself that I wouldn't even turn around to look at who would have the audacity to name themselves Madonna. And so, years later, I realized that this was [laughs] Madonna. Like, she was in the same—she was going to Ailey at the same time I was, and I was not even looking. Like, I would not even look at her, and if I did, I probably wouldn't remember anyway. I only remember this in retrospect because, I mean, she talks about going to Ailey, studying with Pearl Lang, the same teacher, modern teacher, that I studied with. I remember this very visceral experience of someone who just seemed so annoying. I don't know why it was so annoying. But, I guess, the audacity of someone giving themselves this religious title in a ballet class.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

JACK WATERS: So that was one thing. I mean, this is one thing that sticks out for me.

ALEX FIALHO: What were the demographics of Ailey?

JACK WATERS: Black and some people of color. I mean, black and some white people. It was mostly black. I mean the whole point of Ailey was like a repository and a respite for people who weren't getting jobs in other companies. And then the also the celebration of the African American culture, which I did not really take as much. You know, I was not as into Afro-Haitian. I was doing mostly modern—[01:18:14]

ALEX FIALHO: There?

JACK WATERS: There, even. Particularly like Graham-based modern, which was Pearl Lang ballet. You know there's another style of modern, which was Horton, Lester Horton, which is like the West Coast-driven style of modern dance.

But, yeah, the demographics: it was a black company and a black school. Not exclusively, but it's Ailey, you know, that's what it was. And then one of the other things towards that period, like towards my final year at Juilliard, Ailey also became available to me as a grounds for choreographing. And so, one of the final pieces I had choreographed at Juilliard, to Stravinsky *Concerto in E-flat*, the *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto, I staged it on Ailey's Repertory Dance Ensemble, like their third company. And at that time, Alvin was having a breakdown, so I remember giving him a videotape. I had performed it at DTW, and so they had taped it—

ALEX FIALHO: Dance Theater Workshop?

JACK WATERS: Dance Theater Workshop, which is now New York Live Arts. And, yeah, I said, "Okay, I want to choreograph on the company, on the first company." So, I guess I was staging—I did the first movement at Juilliard. We took it to Cologne, Germany, on graduation. And then, I guess, this must have been after I graduated, I staged it. You know, I staged the second and third movement at Ailey. [01:20:32]

And it was also during this problematic period where Alvin was basically falling apart. I kind of also get the timing and the years confused, because I later wondered whether this was early phases of dementia. But I think we had talked about this at some point, that he died so much later that it probably was not. I think he was probably exhausted, you know, and just like [inaudible] problem. But the tape that I gave them to represent this piece that I wanted to stage, they told me that he lost it. I remember they had to replace it. It was a really big thing for me, just this idea that my work was lost. It was just kind of lost because of this personal tragedy. But I was not as sensitive to his problem as I was mine, at that point. And, you know, like, "Either stage the piece or give me my tape back, but actually probably do both. And by the way, I'm out of here. Goodbye." [01:21:58]

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] Maybe my last question for this particularly dance training moment is around what pieces you were choreographing on your own? You noted that Juilliard thought you were not doing enough of their repertoire, and you were choreographing your own work, and you just spoke to the piece you wanted to stage. What was the direction of your own work in that sense?

JACK WATERS: What was the direction of my own work? It was largely driven by experimentation. I was looking for a language of my own. At the same time, I was sensitive and aware of the priorities of so-called technicality. I was applying things—probably, by and large, things that were Limón-influenced. I was very conscious of not emulating or imitating Graham because I had seen so much of that happening with her own progeny. You know,

aside from people like Merce Cunningham and Paul Taylor. I mean, Paul Taylor really, more or less, emulates balleticism.

But multimedia, particularly—like in the actual movement, I don't think I was necessarily that far advanced in terms of originality. But I feel like I offset it with multimedia, like doing things. And this, again, came from working with Sue from high school of using film and projection, lighting elements as an integral part. Not light that would illuminate that so much as light as it reflected in terms of rhythmic element. But film, using jazz scores and spoken word, like collaborating with people coming from the drama division. So I think, like, inter-media—[01:24:27]

ALEX FIALHO: Which your work continues to be in. That's why I'm very interested in that—

JACK WATERS: Which it continues to be.

ALEX FIALHO: —early thread.

JACK WATERS: And it also comes from those early influences. So working with the conservatory atmosphere of Juilliard that's very focused on particular styles of modern emulation of balletic forms. Bringing other media into my work then was really important to me. At the same time, I was also working in classical forms, because I was also starting to understand the classical musical form. So, Bach, organ—you know, I did a male trio to a Bach organ *Prelude*. So, doing story ballets.

I actually started doing pointe work, which I knew nothing about. I was looking at Twyla Tharp and looking at her success with using pop music, incorporating pop music, but then also her very original form. And just looking for different ways of moving, but at the same time, looking at different things that I could do musically. While at the same time also doing things that were by and large pretty traditional, pretty traditionally based. Yeah.  
[01:26:14]

[END OF WATERS18\_TRACK1.]

ALEX FIALHO: So, you graduated Juilliard in '79?

JACK WATERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALEX FIALHO: So, that's a way into the '80s potentially. So, I'm curious—I knew you graduated from Juilliard, but my sense of your work, personally, is in and around POOL, Performance On One Leg. And I'm interested how—those are two quite separate spheres, and I have a consciousness of you as sort of an East Village denizen—

JACK WATERS: Wait. What are the separate spheres?

ALEX FIALHO: Juilliard and then POOL.

JACK WATERS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: And I have a sense of you as sort of the East Village stalwart and denizen, and that is also a different sphere from Juilliard, in my estimation. And I'm hoping you can bridge that for me and maybe people listening. How did we get from one to another?

JACK WATERS: Well, when we're talking about the East Village in terms of how it affected my life, in general—which as you said, I was trained in modern dance—the Lower East Side was the—and I'm going to clarify also. Because we're talking about the Lower East Side, and not the East Village, because we—you know what I mean? Because of the East Village's designation as a real estate designation, which basically didn't exist until, like, the '80s.

ALEX FIALHO: Thank you.

JACK WATERS: Thank you, because I'm actually going back. So, the modern dance, you know, there was like an adage that I had learned that—

[Audio break.]

JACK WATERS: My one relationship to the Lower East Side, in my formative years as a dancer and an artist, is that Sue Olds, my mentor, lived here, and she would talk about it. And in fact, we visited New York—it may have been on that Juilliard audition trip—and she took me to what I think was probably Seventh Street and Avenue A, which is where she lived, and it was hard. It was the most hellish place that I had ever been. And I grew up in the center of a pretty solid, urban area, and I was literally so scared. It's like, "Just get me out of here immediately." [00:02:20]

So, Sue was my relationship—because, you know, we're talking about her creative formative years. But then once I got to Juilliard, I learned that 30 years prior to Sue living there in the '60s, it was also, like, the bastion. I think Martha Graham was quoted as saying once that a well-placed bomb on the Lower East Side would wipe out the American modern dance. As I started to recognize that, like, Vaudeville, the American film industry—there are so many places that would have its root there. None of which I had this lived experience of, going to Juilliard.

But, lo and behold, I started—I had always been interested in a collective model for work. I was never interested in a dance company that bore my name in its title. And I was definitely not interested in creating a model where my work was the center. It was really always about collectivism and collaboration, which is not to say that I was not interested in developing individually as an artist. But it was always a very strong value to me of a cooperative or a collective group that would operate. [00:04:01]

So, at Juilliard, one of my closest collaborators and dearest friends was Brian Taylor. Brian also shared an interest in choreographing and developing himself as a choreographer, and so we would dance each other's work. We would create work collaboratively. And shortly after my graduation, we decided that we would start a group. And we decided we would pool resources, and that it would be like a pool of talent. That's what we named it.

We called our group POOL. It was myself, Brian Taylor, and a woman that went to Juilliard, Joan Karlen. And we encouraged Joan to choreograph as well, but she was not super comfortable choreographing. I mean, I think she would do some things, but it was really basically me and Brian. We were like the Balanchine and—not Lincoln Kirstein. Who was the other choreographer at City Ballet that did *West Side Story*? Sorry. [Jerome Robbins] Anyway, there was a duality of me and Brian as choreographers. And so, that was how POOL started. And then pretty shortly afterwards, we met Peter. [00:06:00]

I was still doing concert-based work. It was the Stravinsky piece, *Personifications*, and then I did another piece, *Echo and Narcissus*. It was a quartet. Both of which I had done in my senior year at Juilliard and that transferred to this collective POOL, I think. Well, *Personifications* was a quartet. It was myself, Morris Perry, Mary Duncan, and Barbara Hoon. *Echo and Narcissus*'s first cast, you know, that was movement one. Movement one was a quartet and then the second and third movement, it was what I talked about doing with the Ailey Ensemble. *Echo and Narcissus*'s first cast was me, Brian, Joan Karlen, and Martin Williams, who was a dancer at City Ballet—it was SAB, School of the American Ballet was the school of City Ballet.

So, those two pieces were transferred into what was now POOL, and so this is like '79, '80. And just through sheer economics. I mean, you know, it was difficult to rent studios, difficult to find bookings. Both *Personifications* and *Echo and Narcissus* were premiered at DTW, but then that was kind of it. We were not getting booked in either the white-box alternative spaces or traditional theaters. But we decided really quickly that street theater and street performance was something that we could do. And I think by that time, we met Peter at—[00:08:16]

ALEX FIALHO: Cramer.

JACK WATERS: Yes. Peter Cramer, who replaced Martin in *Echo and Narcissus*. And I think our first performance of *Echo and Narcissus*—the first performance with that cast was something called White Dog Studio, and Peter was in that cast. So, I think we may have actually done both, because Peter also—Peter only did the cast of—Peter did not dance in the cast of *Personifications*. He was definitely second cast of *Echo and Narcissus*. And so, at that time, we started to realize—yeah, I mean, we didn't have venues. We did not have venues, and so we, through Peter—like, through the agency of Peter, who knew club life and club world—because remember, Juilliard is a cloister. We were pretty cloistered. There's not really a lot of opportunity to see what else is going on in the world, unless that world encompasses part of the classical or the concert canon.

But at the same time, the Lower East Side was, like—Anna also, particularly—like, Anna Sokolow, in my first year at Juilliard, did a piece called *Ellis Island* about immigrants. And so she also brought us downtown, and she grew up and was particularly educated to the role of the settlement houses, Henry Street Settlement, [. . . Third Street Settlement -JW], which were the training grounds of the American Moderns. So, the Lower East Side was not unfamiliar to me, but it was really more like a history book or something that I had access through mentorship. [00:10:35]

But then when we met Peter, and Peter started performing with us, we started going out. Like going to clubs, dancing, just dancing. And because we were trained, we would do our concert turns and tricks and just cut up the floor. And then we kind of—you know, what was happening in the '80s, at that point, was this introduction of art in the nightclubs. You know, because it was pre-house music, and so art audiences were attractive to people who were producing club entertainment.

And so, we—you know, we just thought, "Oh, well, like we should be performing in clubs." And we basically did. It was first, like, Peppermint Lounge, Bonds, which we didn't perform. And they were kind of uptown—not

mainstream, but the culture was really around rock and roll. Music video was also starting to come into the fore as a medium. And so, we kind of, I guess, started going [laughs] lower and lower, really, on the island of Manhattan, so that downtown became the place for us. Danceteria was one of the early places. [00:12:23]

I think what really did it—well, Peter was working with this operation called the No Name Club. They would do these unbelievable sets of things that they had scavenged on the street, and create these environments in abandoned places, like abandoned factories or warehouses and whatnot. And eventually, the people who were running the No Name Club were Eric Goode and Shawn Hausman. And later, they would start this club called Area. And in my memory now, I see that the No Name Club was by and large a rehearsal for Area, because in Area, instead of scavenging things from the street, they would get sets and props from things that came from Shawn Hausman's father's production. Shawn's father was the producer—I think it's [. . . Michael -JW] Hausman—who did *Silkwood*, like a bunch of major Hollywood productions.

And so, oftentimes, those sets would gravitate into Area, which is like this big installation on the West Side. But it's still West Side. You know, we're still living in this atmosphere where Manhattan and cultural life is really stratified. So that SoHo, forget it. It's over, like no access. Tribeca is just beginning to be a lost cause. These outer bounds where Area would be, like far, far, far on the West Side, like past Canal, Greenwich, and so forth. And then, of course, like, this area, Chelsea, which was literally nowhere. [00:14:29]

But the Lower East Side was where things were happening, and starts to become a time and a milieu and a period that I could now call the East Village, because it was a thing. You know, it was now starting to be a thing. So the work started shifting. And again, one of the first venues that was home to us was not on the Lower East Side, East Village. It was in the West Village, the Jane West Hotel, and it was an operation called Club Armageddon. And that was run by the video artist Arleen Schloss, Michael Keane, and George Moore. They would do these weekly events, club events, that was like a three-ring circus.

It would be like—people who we considered performance artists would later emerge as actors. Like Eric Bogosian particularly, Steve Buscemi, you know, were all people that lived in neighborhood. And so, Peter and I, at this point, are still living—you know, I'm still gypsying around. Brian had an apartment on 47th and Ninth Avenue—47th between Eighth and Ninth. And that was also like Susan's places that I would live in for large stretches of time. Forty-Seventh Street then became my crash pad, like my home. Meanwhile, Peter was living on 55th Street and 10th Avenue. [00:16:30]

So, I met Peter. Peter and I met at a dance company called Battery Dance Company. It billed itself as the resident dance company of Wall Street. And there, we were basically doing terrible choreography—I hate to say it, because I feel like as years go by, it's not really necessarily constructive. But it was excruciating. I mean, it was just excruciating. But the director of Battery Dance Company had amazing taste. He was an incredible entrepreneur in contemporary music. So, the music was really, really amazing, but his choreography was excruciatingly bad. And Peter and I were dancing at the Battery Dance Company as Brian and I were formulating POOL, and Peter was very quickly brought into it.

I think Peter had come to DTW. We were at Battery, and I mentioned that I was showing the work at DTW, and Peter says that he was fascinated with this idea that a dancer, at my age, was also choreographing and showing it. So, that's how I integrated him into my work, through *Echo and Narcissus*. Because he came to see *Echo and Narcissus* at DTW, and then we later staged it as POOL at White Dog. [00:18:16]

ALEX FIALHO: What year did you first meet Peter? Can you zoom out a little bit for those, and just give broad strokes over the fact that that's a long-term collaboration? And then what was the specific instance, actually? I'm just curious the first time you saw each other and talked to each other.

JACK WATERS: Well, I would have met Peter in 1980 at Battery Dance Company. He was a dancer. He had already been in the company, and I was the new member. And I remember our first meeting was not happy when he was appalled at the idea that I didn't know where I was in Manhattan. Because again, I knew Upper West Side. I knew Lincoln Center. It was like my orientation, my home. And so, the choreographer asked Peter to show me where the subway was. And Peter just thought it was horrendous that someone who lived in New York didn't know how to get around, didn't know the subway system.

You know, so that was our meeting. We danced together in this small dance company. And his attraction to me was the fact that I was choreographing my own work, and that I was in this group that emphasized and encouraged individual work from all of its members. So bringing him into POOL was a no-brainer. [00:20:00]

Joan, [laughs] on the other hand, like, couldn't deal. So, Peter, once he was in POOL, started to introduce us to club life, and the idea that this could actually be a venue for us. Also, galleries, you know. Peter was just really adept. He was kind of the opposite of me and Brian in the way that we—Juilliard becomes this womb in a lot of ways. And Peter had already been at large, like in the city at large, and particularly where it was happening. And it was happening downtown. So even though we all lived on the Upper West Side—Brian, me, and 13 other

people in his two-bedroom apartment on 47th Street, and then Peter in this really rundown, dripping-cold flat hole on 55th Street. And Peter was evicted from—you know, he couldn't pay rent, didn't have jobs. All we wanted to do was dance. All we wanted to do was make art. You know, Peter was actually working. Peter was probably the only one of us who had had a regular job. He was working at this bakery, and was nevertheless evicted.

We started a relationship while we were at Battery. It was very on-and-off-again romantically, but we jelled around POOL, this creative process. And also, I was broke. I was the brokest of us all. You know, I never had a place to live, so I was very much living at Peter's place on 55th Street. We were [laughs] evicted, and so we moved into Brian's. You know, it was like refuge. And so while we were at Brian's—you know, we were still kind of discovering downtown, and I guess one of the places that we were discovering—I guess Armageddon was one of the earliest. But at around the same time—and now, we're talking like '81, '82—and it starts to be the Pyramid. [00:22:33]

And so, we're evicted from our apartment, we're living on 47th Street, we started doing performances at the Pyramid to the extent that we are billing ourselves as the resident dance company of the Pyramid Club. Joan Karlen is out of it. Like, she cannot deal with performing at three in the morning—

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

JACK WATERS: —anywhere. And so, she's like, you know, out of POOL.

On the dance floor at Armageddon, we start dancing with this wild woman. Obviously has technique. You know, and then there's always like this thing of technicality, because you can do things. You can wrap your leg around your neck, you can jump, you can stretch. But at the same time, if you are wildly expressing yourself in this extremist way that nobody else is doing—and by the way, like, "Get off the dance floor because we own this"—and that was Christa Gamper. Christa replaced Joan, and particularly Joan's role in *Echo and Narcissus*, like totally changed the role. And in Brian's choreography, he had a piece that he did to Nina Hagen's music called "Love Song," that was originally choreographed on Joan, but then Christa took that role and completely changed it. [00:24:20]

We're also, with POOL, experimenting with things of switching role. You know, we're kind of doing the repertoire thing and saying, "Well, what would happen if this person? What happens if Brian does it?" But then there were certain roles that were favorite, like "Love Song." Brian would dance—it was choreographed on Joan. Brian would perform it, but then it became Christa's solo.

So we were doing concert-influenced work but gravitating more into other things that would become cabaret and performance. And particularly at Armageddon because we would recreate stuff that were choreographed through Stravinsky, you know, do studies that were very Merce Cunningham-oriented. But then we would do, like, solo, whatever. Peter was very fond of fluids and masks, just like crazy shit. And we could do anything. It was made very clear that we could do anything.

The club—George more particularly, would comment from time to time that he did not like the concert-based work. He did not like it. He would like more the cabaret or performancy-type stuff that you couldn't categorize, the kind of uncategorizable, interruptive type stuff. Or even static things where also Peter excelled, like sets, objects, and so forth and so on. [00:26:03]

So, while we're living—47th Street was like a halfway house for almost anybody, particularly from Texas, because Brian Taylor was from Midland, Texas. And so, people moved from Midland, that was a place to live. And there was one night I counted 13 people living in this two-bedroom apartment. And we kind of figured out, in retrospect, that what we were doing was rotating. Because some people had a day schedule, some people had a night schedule, and so people were not necessarily all sleeping there at the same time. But there was a rotation going on where you could say, "Yeah, there are a lot of people that live here," which at a certain point becomes unfeasible.

And so, simultaneously—and now, we're going into '83, like '82, '83—and we meet Carl George. Carl, I think, Brian met at the Pyramid. I remember one night sitting around the kitchen table at 47th Street, and there's this person who I've never seen before dictating where we should go, like what club we should go to next and what we should do. And I'm thinking like, "Who the fuck is this person who's literally telling—like taking over this group?" You know, he became, like, the great Carl George and the fomenter of everything we did in this hugely dynamic way. So, he wasn't a performer. Carl was vehemently opposed to performing, but he would do costumes for us. He would come up with ideas. He was like our Lincoln Kirstein in a big way. [00:28:08]

So, Carl, I believe—and Brad Taylor was Brian's brother. At this point, Brad moves from Hawaii. Brad had been living in Hawaii with Aline Mare and Reina—I can't remember Reina's last name, but they were a couple. They were doing this witchy, mystical, spiritual stuff. And so, Brad moves into 47th Street, and we kind of induct him

into POOL, because we're now fascinated with the idea of an untrained person. We're now starting to consciously escape the preoccupation with technicality, and so bringing people with no training into the ensemble is a really good way of exploring that. So Brad's one of the first people that we started to work with. And Brad, of course, as Brian's brother, shared these mystical and spiritual and occult interests, which is also a very primary relationship that I have with Brian in a big way, like mythology, unconscious dream work, so forth and so on.

So now, Brad, Carl, me, Peter, Christa are the core of POOL, and there's always this tension about the core of POOL being people who are dance-trained. Christa had a big thing about being on the same stage or being put on par with someone who had no training. But then Peter and Brian and I were like, "This is what we do. You have to accept that everyone is potentially creative and as much of an artist as anyone else, except they don't have training. And training is, yes, an important aspect of the practice, but it can often get in the way and that's why we're doing this type of thing." So it became a discussion. [00:30:04]

So, Carl and Brad—Brad, through his relationship with Aline, who is also beginning a relationship with Bradley Eros—were part of Colab. And they knew about ABC No Rio, which had just been founded. It had been founded the year prior, but time went really, really quickly at that point, and a lot of things happened in a really small period of time. So, at that point, the founders of ABC No Rio were starting to lose interest in running it because they wanted to go on to other things. So, Carl and Brad had an idea of doing a show at ABC No Rio, which would last for one week, and each day, a different artist or a group of artists would be invited to completely change the installation. And they would have free run of the gallery and were encouraging performance and music, like in inter-media, but not necessarily demanding anything. Just letting people have their free run. And we called it *Seven Days of Creation*. And, you know, it's pretty much, as I remember, Carl and Brad's brainchild. [00:31:57]

And so, whereas POOL wasn't like—we didn't really have formal infrastructure, but POOL was already operative as a structure. And even though we had this core group of dance-trained artists, there were other people like Brad and Carl, Susan Brown—who became a major facilitator, especially in practical matters. And so, we had like a thing. We had a group that was basically several groups there were enclosed. So that was like the core group of *Seven Days of Creation* at ABC No Rio.

So it was a huge success, and at the same time, we had already had these things going, like this thing going at the Pyramid. Armageddon was happening. There was Ward-Nasse Gallery, which actually was Tribeca [SoHo - JW]. You know, and a lot of things that were springing up because of our relationship with Arleen and George and Michael. And so, POOL was a thing. And then we got to ABC No Rio, which was already a thing. And we did *Seven Days of Creation*, and they really loved the idea that there is a group of people who are politicized, who were collectivists, and [laughs] knew how to organize. [00:33:28]

So they invited Carl to be the director. It was Becky Howland, Alan Moore, and Robert Goldman, who was known as Bobby G, a painter. After the *Seven Days of Creation*, which kind of amalgamated all of our relationships at the Pyramid, Carl was invited to run ABC No Rio. And Carl, of course, would have nothing to do with it, but said, "Jack and Peter needed a place to live." ABC No Rio was offering a living area in their rat-infested basement, and so Carl was like, "No, Jack and Peter will be perfect. Name them as the directors." So, even though we ran ABC No Rio collectively, where Carl and Brad—Kembra was also coming into our purview through Gordon Kurtti, which I believe was a Carl recruit.

So it's like, our sphere is growing. It's growing in this really short period of time. So, there's Armageddon, there's the Pyramid Club, there's ABC No Rio. And shortly after that, we were invited to a group show at Danceteria. Danceteria was like the golden triangle for us, because it was like—I remember calling and trying to book at Danceteria and being asked if we had a following. And I didn't even what a following—like they actually had to explain to me what a following was. And in my stupidity, instead of lying and saying yes, I said no. I had no idea. It was like, "Well, if you don't have a following, why should we book you?" It was like, "Oh, that's how you get gigs." [00:35:39]

So, by this point, we had ABC No Rio under our belt, we had Armageddon under our belt, and Pyramid, which was a really super, super, super great exposure in this echelon, in this realm of the East Village. And at this point, we're actually distinguishing East Village from Lower East Side, because it's actually becoming a cultural reality of, like, anyone who lives above Houston Street is definitely East Village. And for all intents and purposes, you're getting publicity, you're getting recognition, you're drawing audiences, you're definitely East Village. You're doing political art, you're doing work with people of color, you're anti-gentrification, [laughs] you're Lower East Side, you know? You hang out with Latino people, like as a matter of fact, it's like, you're Lower East Side. So, the designation started to become very real, culturally and geographically.

So, yeah, so that's our introduction to downtown that—

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

JACK WATERS: Yeah, it was like pre—I mean, it's had a history for centuries, and so the gravitation towards that area, I think, is almost like a natural force. It's literally, like, magnetism and gravity that brought us there.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm sitting here just gravitating towards that story. I'm really interested and invested in it. One relatively quick aside is just the name Performance On One Leg. I'm really interested in that. How does that speak to the ethos of the collective?

JACK WATERS: Peter will argue—and we're talking about this a lot lately because that's how memory works. But as I said, POOL was originally something that was conceptual. As I remember, there was a gesture to my last name, so Waters and POOL also. And that would definitely be a Peter thing, like the free, associative relationship. But then there also starts to become this attraction to acronyms, because it's cool, and that's what people are doing. So, P-O-O-L started to happen at the same time that I started to reflect on my dance history and criticism that configures the idea of dance, especially in its Western sense of dealing with balance. [00:38:29]

In your final year at Juilliard, you do a dissertation on dance history and criticism, and that's just one of the things I found, is this idea of performing on one leg. So it coincided very nicely with the constructs that had already been building around POOL. So, this is kind of an ongoing discussion that I had with Peter, where, in his memory, it always existed, the idea. But I think when we're looking at our material, like our archive and stuff, it definitely appears later, the P-O-O-L. Because I do not believe it happens early. There were also—like, Carl, me, Peter, Brad—we were really into words and definitions, and so, a lot of times, when we present something, we would use the dictionary, like have a dictionary definition as the explanation for that name. And that's made up. There are programs that we used where we have "performing on one leg" as part of the definition of POOL, which is completely something that we created.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. One reference I want to point folks to is you've also done an oral history with Peter in 2007, around ABC No Rio in particular. So we broached that topic, and I want to point people to that as a major reference and resource for more information about ABC No Rio, its founding, your relationship to it. [00:40:15]

I want to also spend a significant amount of time today, in our two-part conversation, bringing in the conversation around HIV/AIDS. We're talking about an early '80s moment, and I'm wondering, just to start that conversation—'81 is attributed widely as a moment where what became known as HIV/AIDS was widely publicized in context and then reports. And I'm wondering if you can just describe your first memory of the AIDS crisis, or what would become the AIDS crisis, what would become HIV and AIDS? When did that first come on to your radar?

JACK WATERS: Well, at this time when I met Peter—when we're performing as POOL, our early years at ABC No Rio, and so forth and so on—is in the aftermath of this, like—well, I guess it's called sexual revolution. And I talked about the problematics in my high school era. But by this point, it's just like, having sex is no bound. You know, there's just no bounds. I'm now starting to come to terms with my sexual identity especially because of my—well, undeniably, because of my relationship with Peter, which is still developing—[00:42:00]

ALEX FIALHO: Then?

JACK WATERS: —because we don't—

ALEX FIALHO: We're talking about then?

JACK WATERS: —name it. Huh?

ALEX FIALHO: We're talking about then, right?

JACK WATERS: Yeah. But my relationship and experience of AIDS is obviously coming from this era of pre-free-and-unbridled sex and sexuality. And it's kind of happening almost simultaneously. In my memory and in my mind, I'm looking at this East Village—the dynamics that were happening were very nihilistic. It's also happening during the aftermath and prevalence of punk and nihilist aesthetics. So there's a lot of skulls, a lot of skeletons, a lot of darkness, a lot of death that's happening before we even notice that people are dying. You know, people are getting sick and dying.

And so for me, it's really important, these memories and reflections that don't necessarily have that kind of chronological reference, because I feel very strongly that premonition and zeitgeist are very important, regardless of whether things are recognized in the culture or not. So that maybe people were getting sick and we kind of have a peripheral experience of it, and that has to do with this kind of darkness that we're projecting into the artistic output, into the art that we're doing. [00:43:35]

But disease, like something going on in our community, starts to happen on one of my many visits to the VD

clinic. You know, there's the clinic—I guess it was on 23rd Street—in the 20s. It's where you went when you got STD. And, you know, I got STDs a lot. I mean, [laughs] more than I would have liked. A visit to the VD clinic was just part of our life. And there is one time I went, and the doctor asked if I was in a relationship, like if I was in a singular relationship. And I said, "Yes," which is kind of interesting that I would have thought—you know? Because we were so adverse to naming our relationships, or naming anything, but I said, "Yes." And then he said, "Well, you should really stick with that person because there's something nasty going around, and we don't know what it is."

And so, it wasn't—AIDS didn't have a name. He didn't even call it GRID. He didn't call it anything, but they knew. They were saying—he's like, "Something is going around among gay men, and we don't know what it is." So, they already had the instinct to know that it was sexually transmitted. I don't think there had been any studies, as far as I know. But in the aftermath, I know that the community clinics are the early places of study and observation. Certain sex clubs and sex groups, I'm learning in retrospect, but this is my early awareness of what would become AIDS.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that awareness develop over time in this early to mid-'80s time? [00:46:01]

JACK WATERS: Gordon was the first to go. Gordon Kurtti. Gordon was always kind of sickly. He had had many bouts. I think he had contracted hepatitis. He wasn't robust or physical at all, and Gordon and Carl were kind of a partnership in their relationship to each other and to POOL. They were our designer, artists, and so forth.

So we—AIDS was known because, I think, one of the first people that we knew—that was not necessarily in our immediate circle, but who was part of the art—was Arnie Zane. And I don't know how Gordon—oh, [laughs] I think—and I would have to look at the chronology because there was HEAL. ACT UP was already beginning to form, and there's the group Health Education AIDS Liaison.

[Audio break.]

There was a group Health Education AIDS Liaison, HEAL. And their emphasis was on nutrition as an approach to healing and curing AIDS. There was controversy because people who were more—who thought that pharmaceuticals was the best route to go. So, people were already dying, and we were already at ABC No Rio because we did a benefit for HEAL. [00:48:00]

And Gordon was still alive, and I think Gordon must have met Arnie Zane through the benefit that we did for HEAL, because Gordon was now getting sick. And so, yeah, I guess he was diagnosed at that point, and just died very quickly. He went into this nutritional approach, where he was eating mackerel, which for Gordon was unheard of, like doing anything healthy. And Arnie Zane kind of facilitated. He went through a retreat with Arnie, and Arnie gave him tips on how to cook. Like, Gordon cooking, you know, [laughs] it was just phenomenal, like just phenomenal. And we knew he had AIDS. It was not a secret, but at the same time, there's still this high level of denial. Like, how can someone so young—how can someone that we know be this sick and be dying like the people who we don't know?

So Gordon really was the first in our immediate family, and then not much longer was Brian.

ALEX FIALHO: Taylor.

JACK WATERS: Brian Taylor. You know, and then Richard Hoffman, who was also part of our circle. Richard, I had known for years. Richard had gone to Pratt with Susan, Susan Salinger, and had taken my living quarters when we lived in Red Hook. Red Hook was another loft that Susan had lived in, that I was like at a place in. I went to Europe, and then my loft area was rented to Richard and Doug Wright. So, Richard gravitated toward us during the Pyramid years. And as I said, these things come very quickly. You know, we're talking about, like, the time between '81 and '83. So—[00:50:32]

ALEX FIALHO: It's powerful to hear about Richard living in Red Hook because I know Richard's art in the context of an exhibition maybe one or two years ago in Red Hook.

JACK WATERS: Right, yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: That was a large-scale space, and that was a revelation for me. I had worked at Visual AIDS for, at that point, two or nearly three years and hadn't had much of a sense of his work. And then there was an incredible—I don't know if you could say retrospective, but just like a warehouse-sized gallery filled with incredible art by Richard Hoffman. And that was a revelation for me—

JACK WATERS: Yeah, we thought that was lost—

ALEX FIALHO: —but not, obviously, for you, so—

JACK WATERS: Well, we thought that was lost because I had started thinking of doing a retrospective of Richard. And I guess talking to Nelson maybe, or maybe even Amy.

ALEX FIALHO: Nelson Santos and Amy Sadao from Visual AIDS.

JACK WATERS: Yes. And Sur. And we were wondering—

ALEX FIALHO: Sur Rodney (Sur).

JACK WATERS: —if Richard's work survived. And we had heard that Richard's lover, who was Harry, who was the last lover that we knew—and for us, was this really big, happy moment in Richard's life because he's very [laughs] unlucky in love, although hugely, immensely prolific. And he met this sweet guy, that was Harry. [00:52:02]

And this is still—now, we're talking like '85, '86 maybe. And I have to also check on the timeline, but we had lost track. You know, Richard died. Hugh. But I'm kind of advancing like—

ALEX FIALHO: Hugh Steers.

JACK WATERS: Yeah, Hugh Steers.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's stick for a minute with two folks you know. We would talk about Brian Taylor, and we talk about Gordon Kurtti. And I know there was *The Gordon Kurtti Project* a few years ago in New York City, at Participant Inc., reanimating a lot of his work and thinking about the community that he was involved in. But they both passed at such a young age. Let's just stick with Gordon's work—and what was your sense of it at that point? And then I'll ask you about Brian as well.

JACK WATERS: Okay. Well, Gordon was brought to us by Kembra. Gordon had gone to SVA with Kembra, and we knew Kembra from within the ABC No Rio, POOL years.

ALEX FIALHO: Kembra Pfahler.

JACK WATERS: Kembra Pfahler. So, Gordon was a performer. One of the other central pieces for us was a piece that we did shortly after we had come to ABC No Rio—so this would be '83, '84—called *Foho Tell Dreams* that we initially mounted in Europe, in Ibiza. And that's something I want to come back to, is the *Foho Tell Dreams*, because there's the Ibiza iteration and then the Danspace iteration. [00:54:13]

But Gordon was instrumental at around—like, in the New York—Gordon wasn't in Europe with us, but he was very much a part of the core group that did *Foho Tell Dreams* at Danspace. So, in the same way that we were like a nucleus at this POOL-fomented, ABC No Rio-developed core group—then mounted this performance Danspace at St. Mark's Church.

And Gordon did a piece called *The Bearded Bride*. *Foho Tell Dreams* at Danspace was sectional, similarly to what we did at *Seven Days of Creation*, where we kind of take time and space, and divide it into portions, open it up into collaborative process, but at the same time have this awareness of the apportioned time and space for whatever might develop within it. So, Gordon did a section of *Foho Tell Dreams* titled *The Bearded Bride*, and it was largely about his relationship to his father. [00:55:40]

Gordon also designed the card for *Foho Tell Dreams* at Danspace, which was a picture of Brian Taylor in a lounging position, but sectioned off into, I think, like four or five different—it was kind of this framed portions with Brian's figure along. It's opaque, using white. It's, like, in ink and, I think, gouache. Ink and white gouache. And so that was Gordon's contribution, Gordon's position with the *Foho Tell Dreams*, which, in a lot of ways, was an apotheosis for POOL. Because we're at Danspace, which was like, "Okay, now we're in this concert, downtown-recognized venue." Oh, and we got reviewed in *Dance* magazine. Not favorably, [laughs] but a review. And it was actually okay. The review of *Dance* magazine was "too many cooks" type of thing, [laughs] which is kind of nasty but at the same time true.

ALEX FIALHO: I was going to say, [laughs] "Where is the lie?"

JACK WATERS: Yeah, yeah. So, Gordon was like a chief visual through his design of the card, and through his staging of *The Bearded Bride*. Within *The Bearded Bride*, there's a sequence of Super 8. There's a Super 8 sequence of Gordon struggling to climb the subway stairs. I think it's the Delancey Street Station. It's a really beautiful black-and-white sequence. And at the time, he described it as just his difficulty of getting to work in the morning, type of thing. But then later, like as he got sicker, I remember my shock and terror of seeing him climb his stairs to the apartment, like someone at 25 not able to make it up the stairs. [00:58:04]

So, Gordon's artistic output, he would do also—like a large part of his output was illustration. And we pushed

him. We pushed him, because he was doing waiting jobs. A little later, he started doing copying jobs for the fashion industry, like knockoff. It's like—you know what I mean—send people to photograph, like, a line, and then his job—it's pre-Internet. So, he would literally draw knockoffs of—just really low-pay grunt work. And so, we encouraged Gordon to do at least commercial art, like illustration. And so, he was really—he would just do these hilarious caricatures.

And at the same time, he also—we're starting—and, again, a Carl George discovery was that La MaMa had a space that it hadn't used for a long time, and it was what would become their cabaret space. La MaMa was also disconnected from what was going on in the club scene, so through Carl's agency, we brought them Tabboo!. We brought them John Kelly. We brought them Watchface. All of these people that we knew through the Pyramid and ABC No Rio injecting something that was current going on, into La MaMa. Because I think they had been by and large international, which has always been their focus. [00:59:48]

And so, we installed Gordon as a character we called Sketch Louis. Gordon would sketch the talent that would be performing. You know, we created a series called *One Night Stands*. And again, this is Carl's invention, with the assistance of Peter and I. So it's kind of a group effort but definitely a Carl brainchild. And then Gordon becomes a fixture as Sketch Louis. So, he'll sketch the talent one week, and then the following week, he'll exhibit it at the next *One Night Stand*. And so that was a way of getting Gordon to produce. To get Gordon to produce was like pulling teeth.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

JACK WATERS: We would joke about it. To get him to do an illustration, to get him to do a design, you would have to sit with him, and laugh, and chat. Like, you would have to literally pull it. Carl would call it pulling, like pulling artwork out of Gordon. Because otherwise he wouldn't do it. He was extremely talented, but I think very self-deprecating. Like he just didn't think his work good enough. And so, that was kind of our relationship and our experience with Gordon, is like, making him make art. And I think Carl had a large role in that. And then POOL, like the performance stuff that we did, also had a lot of influence in instigating Gordon to do the output that he did. Because he didn't exhibit. Like, he never did a show. He never had a show at ABC No Rio. He was not part of *Seven Days of Creation*. Although, you know, I think we knew him by that time. [01:02:02]

But he did the *Foho Tell Dreams*, the performance, and he also performed with Kembra. A lot of our awareness and early relationship were performance collaborations that—so, there was this kind of—there was, like, a dichotomy going on where he was doing this illustration, commercial-ish art. You know, we kind of saw him as the next like—what's his name?—the illustrator in the *New York Times*.

ALEX FIALHO: It's powerful for me to hear a few elements there, because my notion on—I know Gordon through *The Gordon Kurtti Project* at Participant maybe five years ago or so, and the concept that it was called *One Night Stands* around performances. I didn't know the reference, so that resonated with me.

And then also to know that Gordon didn't have a show in his lifetime, as you were saying. So, to realize that there was the show at Participant Inc., which is such a respected space in New York City. And then also the concept of *One Night Stands* was actually a rehearsal of an idea that you all were working on then—is really powerful to hear about, so I appreciate learning about that.

JACK WATERS: Yeah. And that was deliberate. It was also Carl's invention, like, "We're going to replicate *One Night Stands*, and we'll do"—and this also becomes a modus for us where we do things that are archival or have a history for us, and then we pair them with things that are going on now.

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

JACK WATERS: So, the Participant *One Night Stand*, we had Lypsinka, we had Karen Finley, we had people that we were performing with and that we presented back in the day. But then we brought people in like Justin Sayre, you know, and people who are more current. And it was a deliberate reiteration of the La MaMa *One Night Stands*. [01:04:06]

ALEX FIALHO: Great. Can you tell me a little bit about Brian Taylor? You've spoken to the Juilliard history that you have there, but also your dance histories. I know Brian most through the incredible Carl George film yourself —

JACK WATERS: *6 Feet*—yes.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, *6 Feet*—is it *6 Feet*? What's the full title?

JACK WATERS: *6 Feet - Dancers that I Know and Love*.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly, *6 Feet - Dancers that I Know and Love*. And it's yourself, Peter, and Brian. And I had first seen that just last year or two years ago at Danspace in your event with the *Lost and Found* Platform. And to see a young you dancing and to see a young Peter frolicking through, I believe, Central Park—but then Brian Taylor on the basketball court with—I think it's maybe the Nina Hagen song.

JACK WATERS: Yeah. That's "Love Song."

ALEX FIALHO: That's "Love Song."

JACK WATERS: That's was "Love Song."

ALEX FIALHO: And the crescendo, and the basketball court, and to know that he's no longer with us, and then to learn that he performed that really closely before his passing, was cathartic and overwhelming. And, frankly, one of the most beautiful performances I've seen in a video context around HIV/AIDS, and the larger context, that I can think of. So I'm just keen to hear more from you about Brian too.

JACK WATERS: Well, the performance of "Love Song" in Carl's *6 Feet*?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

JACK WATERS: Brian literally told Carl, "You had better get this now because I'm not going to be able to do it later." And he meant—by "now," he meant get it today, like, get it this week. Because he knew that he was going. So that that's archived in Carl's film is really a miracle. And it's very gratifying to hear that it has that effect, because, yeah, we were in our prime, you know? But Brian is dying. [01:06:07]

So, yeah, Brian was an original member of POOL, like originated it, but at a certain point he left New York. He went to Denton, Texas. I think he was there for a year or two, doing work at the college. I think it was University of Texas at Denton, I believe. And so, we detached. It was really disappointing to us in a lot of ways because he was such an essential part of our group, of our dynamic, but—and he wasn't sick at the time. He just felt like he needed to grow and develop outside of New York, and particularly in Denton. I think Denton was offering him a studio space. He was being offered, like, an artist-in-residency. And I think he was teaching there, but he may—I don't believe he was in the faculty. I believe he had a residency position.

And so that was when we—like, while he was in Denton, we got the news that he was sick. And there's a piece that Peter and I do, we called *Remnants*, and *Remnants* is basically an archive of both film footage—visual stills—but then the sound track are excerpts, selections from our answering machine. So you hear people calling in. You know, I think there's reporters that were calling as we're dealing with ABC No Rio's battle with the City of New York. [01:08:07]

But there's a moment where Brad has gone to Texas because Brian has had his first catastrophic illness. And it's a hopeful message where Brad is like, "We're out of the woods. Everything is good." I think he had gotten PCP pneumonia. So it's this very optimistic message from Brad, because I think the PCP—I think they, by that point, had a treatment. Probably they were giving him that inhale—you know, that stuff. I can't remember what it's called, but it was very common, that treated the pneumonia for a while, like for a minute. So, Brian then came back to New York, largely because there was treatment here. Ionized pentamidine was the treatment for PCP at that point.

And so Brian came back, and we got a couple of things. The *6 Feet* shoot was a major clue, and then there's also something that Stefani Mar—who also became a core contributor to POOL, and then we also became contributors to her. She did earthworks. She was doing site-specific things, and she was getting grants. You know, she was actually doing really, really well at the time as an artist, so she was able to hire us to work to build her installations, like her site-specific installations. [01:10:13]

So, at this point, Stefani did a collaboration at the East River Park with Shirin Neshat. And I think Shirin—we knew Shirin as the wife—like, the really beautiful, really nice wife—of Kyong Park, who was part of this Hotel Armageddon, Arleen Schloss, *99 Nights of Performance* circle. And so, Stefani did this, like, mural on the ground. It's one of the circles in the East River Park, and there were these, like, Asian astrological figures.

And so, this is the late days of POOL, and Brian had come back at this point, and we did this performance, which was highly ritualistic, around this mural. They had also built a wooden structure, like a raised, wooden structure, around the periphery of the circle. I guess it was an abandoned fountain. It must have been a fountain at some point. So they used the architecture to create this structure, and then they painted on the concrete. Or I think they probably mixed the concrete, dyed the concrete, and then laid these murals down. And so, this is probably our last performance with Brian Taylor. It was almost like a revival of POOL, because we had kind of stopped performing. [01:12:08]

ALEX FIALHO: What year was this?

JACK WATERS: This is now '89 probably, something like '89. And, you know, it was like a reunion in a big way. But we also knew that he was back primarily for treatment. Because, at this point, it's all about AIDS. At this point, it's all about AIDS. Like, club stuff is over, for the most part. We're still performing. You know, we're—actually, most of our output at this point is cinematic. We're now making films. We started Naked Eye Cinema at ABC No Rio as a way to show people's work, but particularly to have a showcase for our work and a way to study work by presenting them publicly.

And so, a large part of our output has now started to segue into film, and a lot of the performance we're doing are things that are film-related. So, the inter-media element starts to become more like live performance, like expanded cinema type things, where the film itself is more of a primary aspect and the live work is [inaudible] in how we project it. So, this *Remnants* is this piece that we start building, not necessarily as an intentional archive, but it's basically what it becomes, in effect. Because we're archiving these calls that are coming in on the answering machine. But it's also a multilayered soundtrack. [01:14:01]

Carl put together a disco mix that's one of the sound levels. And we're operating it live, so we can bring up—I think there's like—the original iteration are two tracks. One is the answering machine, which is basically like the dialogue track. Like in a film work, it would be the dialogue track. And then Carl's music track would be like a music track if you were laying a film. With 16-mm film, it's like you have your image track, your picture, and then you have various soundtracks, which are primarily dialogue or music. You know, there's tone and effect, but we're doing this live.

So, it's a three-screen projection with slides projected on top of it, and then additional Super 8 projectors. Basically as many projects as we can get our hands on, and then mixing everything live by moving the projectors, by jelling them and then adjusting the volume. Maybe sometimes masking things out, because many of the times you have multiple projections, and so you want one thing—so, it's kind of like live effects.

And it also becomes this repository and an archive for work, because *Remnants* itself is comprised of, in some cases, outtakes of films that we produced as standalone works, and in other instances are like full films. And I think I had mentioned this to you. So, this is like—I mean, this is kind of like this thing of moving backwards and forwards, and remembering—you know, the timeframe, because I think you asked me about Brian and that was leading me to *Remnants*. [01:16:11]

ALEX FIALHO: I guess the follow-up is something that you said when we're talking about Carl's *6 Feet*, is that you were in your primes and he's dying. And I want to just prompt you if you're open to reflecting on that reality, that you were in your prime and your close friend and collaborators are also dying. And what was that effect on you in that moment?

JACK WATERS: You know, there's a lot of denial. I mean, even as Gordon is on his deathbed, and I remember Gordon's last phone call and saying, "I'm dying. I want to say goodbye." And I'm responding, "No, you're not. Everything is going to be fine. You're going to get better." And this goes on and on and on, because you just can't believe—you can't believe this is happening. I just have no words to express, and I think the denial itself becomes a defense. And so even though we know, because we're actually archiving and documenting and nursing—it's like, you're seeing your friends die. You're seeing them waste in front of you, and it's just so much that this kind of ridiculous, impossible optimism happens. So that even once they're gone—like when they're gone, the level of shock is so profound that, like, the memorial celebrations that we had are imbued with this idea—and this happens with death—you know, "They're still with us." And I believe that in this spiritual, religious, aesthetic sense, that people who are no longer with us have made contributions that are so strong. [01:18:29]

Like Richard, we thought his work was gone. And it just appeared almost out of nowhere. Harry saved it, and we thought we were going to be the ones—like, with the support and partnership of Visual AIDS. But Sur did some research and had gotten word that it was all lost in a flood, that his partner was dead. It was transferred. It was given to someone else who had no idea what it was and left in some basement and was all destroyed in Sandy, the storm Sandy. So, this kind of miracle—you know, there's something about—like even as you're watching people die in front of you, this belief in the miraculous. And I think it's the miracle of creativity. [01:19:34]

I don't know whether I believe in an afterlife or the spirit world. It's certainly been a large part of my creative practice. But art, and art-making, and memory, and art practice, is the closest thing that I have to proof. You know, to be able to say, "This is actual proof." I think that may be a combination of my mother and my father's philosophy of agnosticism, and atheism, and that whole orientation around the practical and the pragmatic. It's like, I was raised in this way in this way that's like, "If you can't see it, feel it, touch it—if there's not some kind of rational way of perceiving something, then you have no proof that it exists." And they would never—she would never say, "It doesn't exist." My mother's philosophy would be, "I have no proof that it exists. If I have no practical or pragmatic proof of something, in some form or another, normally through the senses—but you can

convince me otherwise—then I can't prove that it exists." As opposed to my father saying, "It's gone." Like, "Done."

And again, I'm aware that I'm kind of flipping between my friends who are dying of AIDS and my father who died of natural causes. My dad died maybe 15 years ago, and my brother asked if he had any wishes for his remains. And my father was like, "I don't care. As far as I'm concerned, it's garbage. Your remains are garbage." Whereas [laughs] with Brian—I was not at his deathbed, but Brad told me—like, he died in Texas. No—he died, Brian died, in New York, on 47th Street, and Brad and Susan were with him.

ALEX FIALHO: In that apartment? [01:21:48]

JACK WATERS: In that apartment. But he was somehow cremated in Texas. Somehow his cremation—or maybe I'm just conflating the fact that I wasn't there. But the point is that [laughs] Brad implored the crematorium to give them a knuckle, you know, or a finger, like, before the cremation, he was like, "Can I have just a bone?" Because it's kind of like the ashes, like he knew that Brian would have been into this idea. And, of course, the crematorium was like, "You are out of your mind. You've got—like, no, that's not going to happen." So, this idea of the bodily remains also as a representation of the continuation of the person becomes salient in this very ongoing way for me. Would I wear a Brian necklace? I don't know. Probably, [laughs] probably. And so, you know, then you're left with humor, you know, like with this dark humor. So it's all kinds of odd, contrasting responses and emotions. And each time, you know? Richard, Hugh—

ALEX FIALHO: Steers?

JACK WATERS: Hugh Steers—in the prime of their lives. And people that you know that are with you one minute, [snaps fingers] and they're gone, and then they're gone. But you actually are watching them deteriorate in the most horrible way you could imagine. [01:24:06]

ALEX FIALHO: I think that feels like a point to stop for today, in that it sort of brings us full circle back to how we started in your family, childhood. And also I think it gives us a lot of space to move forward tomorrow in thinking about maybe how your art practice sustained creativity in response, in this moment, you know—was something that you continued to develop.

JACK WATERS: Good.

ALEX FIALHO: So, thank you for day one.

JACK WATERS: Yeah.

[END OF WATERS18\_TRACK2.]

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Jack Waters at the Visual AIDS office in New York City on February 22, 2018 for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution. Day two.

Jack, thank you very much for your candor and your thoughtfulness yesterday. I was very moved to bear witness to your first half of the oral history. I just want to say that on the record to start the day. I wanted to continue on some friends that we left off on yesterday. And in particular, I am interested in—I know your long-term and sustained practice of art-making and creativity. And I'm wondering: in response to a moment like the height, or the mid-'80s, in HIV/AIDS, in what ways was an art-making practice imperative, an important response for you?

JACK WATERS: In a big way, the art practice was important, well, because people were dying, and it became immediately apparent to make sure that we were recording. We didn't have the word "archive" necessarily as a conscious or deliberate framework as such, but essentially, that's what we started to do. Carl's *6 Feet* was a very deliberate thing. And in fact, the original title—well, the title of the piece is *6 Feet - Dancers that I Know and Love*. And Carl's original title was *6 Feet - Dancers that I Have Known and Loved*. When we heard it, Peter and I immediately said, "Well, you can't do that because some of us are still alive." You know, it just seemed like it was—I mean, it was unconscious because it's a kind of generic, like, "people that I have known" type thing. But putting it in the past tense had this immediate, morbid connotation. And Carl realized that at once and changed the title to the present tense. So that was one aspect. [00:02:32]

Another aspect was being directors, with Peter, of ABC No Rio, using ABC No Rio as a venue for helping with the epidemic. I talked about the HEAL benefit that we did, Health Education AIDS Liaison. I think it was Carl and Brad, again, who went out into the field and contacted this burgeoning group. We had put together a poster, and we wanted—it was a play on words using verbs, but the verbs that were used were things that existed, so, "You don't have to ACT UP to be aware," or something like that. And they went to an ACT UP meeting and asked for permission to use their name in our poster. I was not in the meeting, but Brad and Carl reported that there was a lot of pushback from it. ACT UP was in its early days of forming. So, we did—I mean, we ended up using it. But

we realized early on how tense things were, as far as representation. [00:03:57]

But we did do the benefit, and it was a real all-star cast. You know, we had representatives from the Bill T. Jones Company. We had—I think it was Seán Curran—who is it?—oh, Arturo from BAAD!, and then someone named Damien—and I can't remember his last name. We always have a hard time remembering. He was an early member of the Bill T. Jones Company. And Reno performed. Cookie Mueller was still alive and performed. So, it was kind of like, this really—it was a three-day event, with back-to-back performance, and also art auction that we did to raise funds for HEAL. So, that was among our initial—

ALEX FIALHO: At ABC.

JACK WATERS: At ABC No Rio. Other things were kind of—I mean, they were not so much our active art process, as a way of withdrawal from the club scene. We really stopped doing Pyramid, Danceteria, like all of the club circuit, and we were more focused, I think, on ABC No Rio. I don't know that AIDS had to do with it consciously at the time, but in retrospect, I think there's only so much energy. And then in the meantime, we're being gradually drawn into the movement, into ACT UP particularly. Again, it was Brad and Carl's instrumentation. Brad and Carl were really the hardcore activists in the beginning and pretty much throughout. And Peter, and I, and other people were, kind of, holding the fort at ABC No Rio as well as continuing to do our artwork. We were making film more intensively, as *6 Feet* attests to. [00:06:15]

And then, you know, it was the introduction of a new generation of artists. It was our first new wave of young people. So, there were people like Glenn Belverio, his partner Duncan Elliott—and they were involved as a splinter, really, of ACT UP, which was Queer Nation. So, the notion of queer rights and queer visibility was something that we actually had more of a dynamic around.

Glenn and Duncan performed as Glenda and Brenda, and they had a cable TV show called *The Glenda and Brenda Show*. And the agenda for Glenda and Brenda was to bring drag visibility to the public. So we would do things like the Trump Taj Mahal. You know, people would dress up in drag and then go into public spaces like the Trump Taj Mahal, Empire State Building, and just attract attention, getting public response. You know, "Does this offend you?," like, "Why? Why not?" And then it was all done as an audience. I think we did the Circle line. And what was happening also, we were starting to see and develop this dynamic that was an argument, I guess, maybe Second or Third World feminism, that queer men were responding to. So, within this *Glenda and Brenda Show* dynamic, there were arguments about whether wearing falsies was insulting to women, or being in drag and having a beard was legitimate drag, and stuff like that. So, they were the kind of things that seems parsing on one level, but in another level was just starting to dig into the consciousness and notions of gender representation. [00:08:28]

And so, *The Glenda and Brenda Show* was sponsored by our nonprofit organization, which ABC No Rio was under the auspices—is Allied Productions, Inc. And we had started Allied Productions, Inc. originally as a foundation for POOL, but with the understanding that we also wanted to support other forms of art and multi-disciplines. So Allied was the 501(c)(3) for ABC No Rio and a number of other groups, and then we were also doing—we sponsored *The Glenda and Brenda Show*, and then people that we knew in association with the Pyramid, like Linda Simpson, who had started my publication *My Comrade*. *My Comrade*—there was like three issues that are *My Comrade*, and then I think by the fourth issue, there was a flipside, which was the lesbian version called *Sister*. And so, Allied was a sponsor and a support for their fundraising and just giving general help with organizing and stuff.

And so, you know, there was this close relationship between Queer Nation and ACT UP. I mean, most people who were involved with Queer Nation were also deeply involved with ACT UP, but people who decided that they would focus more on gender rights and gender representation and identity. And so that started to play into our output in regards to the videotapes, to our performance, especially drag performance. So, yeah. That's a few. [00:10:19]

ALEX FIALHO: How about—I noted in you describing your work, you talk about the importance of collaborative working, collective process, and cross-media. And that feels really indicative of how I think about the way that you work. I'm curious to talk about the range of mediums. We've already talked about performance. We've talked about your dance history. Tell me about the transition to making more film work. And then I'm also curious about mediums and specificity, and how a particular medium might be useful to you in different kinds of responses. But let's talk first about the transition to film.

JACK WATERS: It's layered, because film and dance have a lot in common. I think Yvonne Rainer said that they're both mediums of time and movement. And there are lot of people throughout dance who—both commercially, and within experimental and alternative art—that have backgrounds as dancers. Also, dance is kind of the poor stepchild of the arts, as well as entertainment. So it's kind of perceived in a lot of ways within culture and the industry as the bottom or bait, depending on how you look at it. You know, either—like in film

when you get paid, you're paid on the rate of five lines or under. So, if you're five lines or under, it's like the next step after being an extra. So dance, of course, is by and large a medium that doesn't use words or dialogue. [00:12:03]

So, there's economic aspect to it. But then at the same time, as a choreographer and a dancer, film is one way of documenting your work. And so, there's almost a natural transition, because in the beginning, most of our use of film, or a large part of our use of film, was documenting our dances. And then, of course, in my early creative development, video kind of became the operating medium for moving image. And so, of course, you have that terminology where you're making videos, but we still call it film, so it's that kind of like—an anachronism. You know, there's certain anachronism that we're also aware of as we're making video, but more importantly, is this line between what is documentation and what is video.

You know, and I think it was very roughly around 1985, '86, we just all became interested in film and filmmaking. We started Naked Eye Cinema at ABC No Rio. And one of the purposes—we weren't going to film school, very few of us went to art school. The ones that did, like Kembra Pfahler and Gordon Kurtti, didn't graduate. And so, we used our work and Allied Productions and ABC No Rio as our training, as training grounds. So we would rent films from The Film-Makers' Coop, Canyon Cinema, Women Make Movies, wherever—of things that we're interested in. And we would program them publicly, but it was also a way for us to study. [00:14:05]

And then also looking at filmmaking and montage as being a parallel way of structuring and composing. So gravitating away from that theme and variation, musical forms, which was a baseline for composition and dance, and going into a more visual way of composing and constructing. So film was a perfect medium for doing that, because you're basically gluing pictures together.

And then, of course, there's an awareness and an interest in entertainment, like the entertainment aspects of making references to film and video. I think some of Kembra's—Kembra has a way of making jokes about movements in art. And one of the ways that she classified her movements—her film output was *Movin' Pics* and there is a franchise called Mövenpick. And so, she was making a joke about that, and also this idea of production. And this is the other thing about dance and film, is that film is more conducive to larger audiences because they are able to be broadcast through things like television or theatrical release, more than in the way that dance is. So, even aside from video with just celluloid, you can make copies of a film, and you can show them in multiple cities at the same time, as opposed to dancing where every performance is live and you're just doing it. So that was definitely an interest. And then the other thing was energy conservation [laughs] in the physical sense, where it's like, "It's a lot of energy to dance, but if you record that dance on film then you have your work preserved." [00:16:15]

So, it's by and large part and parcel to the documentation aspect, but we're also starting to gravitate more towards film and cinema as a medium. There was one point—I don't remember who it was, but as we start moving through the '80s and into the '90s and wanting to—it was Artists Space, had started a film series. And we said, "Oh, well, we have films. We would like to show in your series." And the director said, "Well, what kind of film do you make?" And I described them, and in my description, I think, it was clear to her that they were largely documentary of our dance works. And she said, "Well no, we're not doing documents of performance." And I said, "Well, what kind of films are you interested in?" And she said, "Film films." And so, you know, it was kind of—she didn't really have the vocabulary, at the time, to describe what she was talking about in terms of film as cinema. You know, the idea of moving images having its own rules and practice. But at the same time, she was very much locked into this idea that there was, like, this hard line between documentation and cinematic practice.

And so, these were things that we were never really—I mean, we were aware of and of course learned as we were doing them. And so, looking at things that we were showing at Naked Eye Cinema, and then looking at other things that were happening simultaneously, like the series at Artists Space. There were things coming out of Charas, Films Charas. Everyone had their own style, their own flavor. [00:18:19]

And Naked Eye Cinema, we never really wanted to package. And even though our core group of makers was coming out of ABC No Rio, which of course was linked to our POOL collective and so forth, we didn't really want to describe it as having a particular style or theme. But, in fact, we were making films that had a large queer dynamic, women's dynamic, and then as time went on, AIDS became a primary and major theme with a lot of the work that we produced.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you tell me a little bit about one that's on my radar—because I think you presented it with the Visual AIDS Fire Island Artist Residency talk—*Black and White Study*, thinking about nudes, and chiaroscuro, and gay relationships.

JACK WATERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, *Black and White Study* originated as a film by Peter. Most of us were working in Super 8: Kembra, Carl, Peter, Brad, Bradley Eros, who was a mentor to us. And we were doing

this cross between video and Super 8. Like shooting Super 8, reshooting it in video, projecting the video, shooting that again on to Super 8 so that we got this degrading aspect that was very painterly in a lot of ways. So this kind of blurred, fuzzy image, and then of course there was, like, scan lines that you get from the video playback. You know, we were very much learning and watching, because Bradley had been making film with his partner Aline, so we were learning a lot through that process. [00:20:15]

But 16-mm somehow—somehow, I was really more driven towards making films in 16, and I think maybe a lot of that had to do with my influence by Susan Salinger. After she had stopped dancing, she—after her Juilliard years, she had a career as a choreographer, but her choreography was very performance-driven and in many ways influenced by Judson and largely—and she may not say this herself, but there was a little mentorship going between Susan and Yvonne Rainer. And so, Yvonne being one of the examples of people who came from a dance base and then went into film as their primary practice.

So, Susan went to NYU film school, and because we were so close—and our relationship was like other-side-of-the-street-y kind of thing. Because Susan was, at that point, living in Tribeca again and was close to SoHo-Tribeca Postmodernism. You know, Susan was much more related to Postmodernism, which I think largely had to do with her background in visual art, because she had gone to SVA before she went to Juilliard. And so, some of the dances—like, we danced in Susan's pieces which were starting to be cinema-driven. She did a piece called *Frames and Sequences*, where she basically got film stills. And then we looked at the film stills and put together a sequence of movement from still to still to still to still, but then she was doing other pieces that were using the frame itself, so that it was looking at the relationship to what's on-screen or in-frame and what's off-screen or out-of-frame, and what those dynamics of perspective and vantage point were. [00:22:28]

So, I guess I was influenced by Susan in a large way, because the 16-mm was interesting to me because of its complexity. Because to do sound involved a different track, involved recording, and so sound-recording itself was another element of the cinematic process. And also because there was a group dynamic. Even with most single filmmakers, there's levels of technicality that are fields within themselves, like sound, like editing, so that if you don't have people who are part of your production, you're at least referring to people. And so, to me, it was really interesting, and I started getting involved at Millennium Film Workshop, and Anthology Film Archives.

So we were doing Naked Eye Cinema, and we were kind of on the margins in a big way because of what was going on in the Postmodern. Similarly to what was happening with our dance, which was not really conforming to what was happening in Postmodernism, white box—you know, that of course was coming from discussions of the '70s and '80s, like the philosophical discussions, which were all the things that I was aware of. You know, we talked about this relationship of dialectics and Frankfurt, like arguments happening within the Frankfurt School, and so I'm putting them into practice through my filmmaking, looking at the history of the *Cahiers du Cinema* and all of the discussions that are happening through the development of New Wave and so forth. So, we're aware of all of this, but we're not really all that interested in putting it into practice on that level of theory—like on that level of direct theory. And so, a lot of the things we started doing were jokes, like a joke on theory. [00:24:48]

But to get to your question, [laughs] Peter was shooting primarily in Super 8, and I was working in 16. And in working with 16, I started to work with masking, where you do your effects in-camera. As opposed to doing effects that we're doing through Bradley, with reshooting, and video playback, and film projection, and reshooting—this idea of doing things in-camera, and one of the effects is masking. Peter was immediately interested in this idea of masking, because of course when you mask and roll the film, all you get is the black image. And then depending on what you're doing, you can control the aperture and you can control the light so that you can do various levels of superimposition. [00:25:57]

But Peter's interest with *Black and White Study* was split screen. You know, he realized that if you masked half of the bellows on the camera, one side would be black and the other would be white. Peter was also working at Danspace as a tech director, and so he became more and more involved and interested in light and lighting. And he was working with Carol Mullins, who was the principal lighting director and lighting designer, and Peter's role at Danspace was tech director. So he started to apply that to his filmmaking, and he needed to do it in 16. So he composed *Black and White Study* as a film, and then of course he went to the immediate parallel of our identity, me being black and him being white. And starts to juxtapose his white image on one end of the frame, my black image on another end of the frame. And in some, I'm on the light side and he's on the masked side, and vice versa. And then eventually, they come into this integration, which I relate to also in this form of dialectic, of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

And in Peter's *Black and White Study*, the synthesis happens when our hands reach out from either side of the frame, and we connect. We're not physically connecting, but he's just masking it in such a way that the superimposition you see on the film playing as being our hands. So, if you look at it, you can see—it's pretty apparent that one hand is a ghost because it's superimposed, and the other hand is more of the full exposure. And he plays with that. [00:27:56]

So, like a lot of the things that we do with integrating live and recorded moving image, we took *Black and White Study* and made it a performance. And this is when it actually became collaborative. My role with *Black and White Study*, the film, is I'm basically his tech director. Like, showing him how to mask, and how double exposure and in-camera effects work. But then when we decided to do *Black and White Study*, the dance, we actually collaborated and then it starts to become autobiographical narrative. So, the film, his *Black and White Study* film, is autobiographical in an emotional sense, because you see the tension and the conflict and the union of us, both in our physical presence on-film, but then you also see those in the ghost effects and the split-screen effect that he's doing in-camera. But then when we do *Black and White Study*, the dance, we actually are telling a story. Like, we're telling a story of our life and of our relationship.

And at that time, that's where AIDS—it's just a part of our life. It's just who we are and what we're living with, and so an AIDS narrative is just a natural and immediate part of it. And we're still resisting. Like, we resist what we think is obvious, we resist the obvious, unless we want to make a joke about it. So, even the kind of theoretical interest that I had in my work, I would always kind of make a joke about it. You know, I had the series of performances I called *Form and Meaning*, and of course I'm looking at all of these Foucauldian essays and all of these things about Postmodern theory. And I'm applying them, but they're—it's somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but the tongue-in-cheek aspect of it is more about, like, "Let's apply this and not take it seriously. Let's apply this in our action. We know what a response and a reaction are, but let's not define it in the work, let's just let it happen," type of thing. [00:30:35]

So that's what *Black and White Study* was in a lot of ways. We kind of pare things down. We reduce them to—you know, parallel to what Peter is doing with a pure black frame and a pure white frame that become integrated by our bodies and also by his lighting approach, in *Black and White Study*, the performance, we are paring things down by just making really simple—like, no set. We have a sheet and that's our bedroom. And then we're talking. We're doing kind of—we're not really dancing. We call it *Black and White Study*, the dance, and there are dance sequences in it, but we're also using the dancing as an element of our personal narrative and not so much as the only medium of the performance.

So, it again starts to amalgamate our approach to genre. You know, applying different forms in genre, so that they stop being containable and locked in as "this is dance," "this is cinema," but we're just putting it altogether. And so, in *Black and White Study*, the dance, which is a performance, *Black and White Study*, the film, becomes a background to it. [00:32:08]

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing. You noted about its relationship to HIV/AIDS, and in particular it's something that you're living with by that point. Are you open to talking more about being diagnosed HIV-positive, and that process with Peter as well?

JACK WATERS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think *Black and White Study* is when we start talking about—you know, there's gags about our medication regimen. Because we're basically in bed, we wake up, and we go through our day—type of thing, you know, is the conceit. But then, our pos-status starts to impact because this becomes part of our regular day. And so, there's this play around taking pills, for example. And jokes. You know, there are little one-liners that are happening in there that, again, are serious because it's life. I mean, it's our health and a life-or-death condition, but we have to go through it in this jocular manner. And so, at this point, I'm diagnosed—I was diagnosed with AIDS. And I think Peter—

ALEX FIALHO: What years are we in right now, for *Black and White Study*?

JACK WATERS: We're in 1990 now. Now we're in 1990. *Black and White Study*, the dance and the film, I think, they were very close [inaudible], and I believe it's '90, '95. I would have to look at the record. But I'm pretty confident with using 1990. Yeah, because this is going on with activism and ACT UP. So while all this is going on, we're making art and incorporating it into the subject and into the strategies of our artwork. [00:34:03]

So, yeah. You know, that's kind of—*Black and White Study* encapsulates that in a big way because if you stay with it, you can see this is who we are. It's basically a recording and a document for me that I was seropositive at that point. I had a diagnosis. I don't believe Peter had at that point. He maybe took a year or two to be tested. But at the same time, we knew that the likelihood and the possibility was huge. I, in fact, didn't—I resisted being diagnosed for a long time—like many people, I think—until I got sick. And I was not sick with an AIDS-defining illness. I believe this was also in 1990, and it was a period when I started writing and becoming interested in journalism. So I kind of knew that I was probably seropositive and sort of investing in this idea that I would want to do something where if I was not physically active, I could still produce creatively.

And so, writing started to become like an equal focus of what I was doing. So I started attending conferences that were also in concert with our developing interest in queer identity and AIDS activism. And so, there was a conference called OutRight, that happened in Boston. But then there was something else that was happening at Rutgers, which is roughly '90, '91. I was talking to Geoff Hendricks about this the other day. We were trying to

remember what the name of it was. But I think there were, like, three of them that, in my knowledge, were the first forums and symposiums on queer identity. Queer identity was now, thanks to actions like Queer Nation, starting to enter into the academic realm. [00:36:23]

And so, you know, there are very intensive panels and conferences. It was happening at Rutgers, and I went to this falafel stand and ate a falafel, and got sicker than I've ever been in my life. You know, it was basically food poisoning. And I was incapacitated, and I went into emergency. I think it was Beth Israel. And while I was there, the doctor that was treating me tested me. She actually asked, she said, "You know you're high risk?" And I said, "Yes. Yes, I know." And she was like, "Do you want to be tested?" And at that point, I caved. I said, "Yeah, I guess I might as well." So she did, and she came back. And to this day, like it always—you know, it was such a blow when she said, "I'm not going to beat around the bush. You're positive. You have to do something," and that was that. So that was my diagnosis and the beginning of actual treatment.

ALEX FIALHO: You had mentioned you, like a lot of others, resisted diagnosis. Can you talk a bit about that process?

JACK WATERS: I think it's honestly denial, because you're just hoping against hope. I mean, I was telling you about how when we were watching our friends die and there was still this, "Oh, you'll get better. Oh, someone I know can't die." And so, it starts to embody myself, where I'm feeling like, [laughs] "Maybe I won't get AIDS. Maybe I'm not positive." And so you wait and wait and wait until something happens. [00:38:29]

And interestingly, my diagnosis was not because of an AIDS-defining illness. My immune system was still pretty much intact, but I just had food poisoning. And there was the doctor, and even though I resented it at the time, and I still bear resentment over her manner and her delivery, the timing, I think, was really lucky for me because then it put me into a position. I mean, she said, "We have to do something about this." And I don't remember if she gave me any direct recommendations or if she just left it at that. But I had already been involved with the STD hospital, which I think developed later on into GMHC.

And I believe that the person that would become my physician, who was Joe Sonnabend, also became part of that momentum. He started several study groups. You know, he was an immunologist and an epidemiologist, and he was very sex-positive. He was gay. Joe was very much into leather-and-sex scene, and so he was very sex-positive, but he was also a doctor, a scientist. [00:39:55]

So, because Carl and Brad and Susan were the people in our group that were the most directly integrated in the movement—and it wasn't like it was decided or declared. It didn't really have to be. So that Peter and me and Brian still, at the time, had roots in the arts and creative community as well as the other outlying communities of community politics. Because again, even within the communities of the Lower East Side, there's still this boundary around recognizing and accepting AIDS because of homophobia, because of ignorance and AIDS-phobia. At the time, there was still a lot that we didn't know. So, Peter and I were kind of able to navigate through the downtown art scene and keep producing art.

And then Carl and Brad and Susan were doing hardcore stuff, and particularly treatment study—studies of various types. And so, Carl was very much involved in many. Some of them were ridiculous, like egg whites. You know, I think there was something around egg whites and whatever—like anything that gave hope. And Susan somehow gravitated more towards what Dr. Sonnabend was doing because he was doing his own in-house studies. They were not broad studies, but they were things that he was able to detect just within his caseload, which was largely gay men. And Susan—Susan Brown I'm talking about—became his assistant. So I was very easily introduced into trials, into HIV trials. [00:42:02]

And lucky enough that I had resisted treatment, so I was not one of the people that succumbed to overdosing of AZT. And then I didn't develop PCP pneumonia as Brian did, as Gordon did. And that became part of Joe's treatment methodology. He was very suspicious of overmedication, and at one point, he was criticized for being anti-AZT. I mean, people were dying from AZT treatment because enough wasn't known. So people were being these gross dosages of AZT, and Joe recognized it. He said, "These people are dying from overdoses. They're not dying from AIDS-related illnesses."

And for a while, he was speaking out about AZT as poison, but then he through his treatment and diagnosis quickly became aware that, "Oh, well, it's not AZT itself. It's the quantity. It's the level that you're giving." So part of my treatment with Joe—Joe's methodology was holding off for as long as possible. So he was really big on HIV prophylaxis and things that will prevent AIDS-defining illnesses like PCP. So I think he did have me on prophylaxis early on. And by that point, the pentamidine—you know, I talked about—I think it was ionized pentamidine, which was only given once you were sick. But they were starting to use pentamidine as a prophylaxis. And at that point, it was in pill form. So he was just watching me and other people. You know, I mean, he had many, many, many patients. [00:44:07]

And because he didn't overmedicate—and the other aspect besides toxicity he was very conscious of was

resistance. You know, like, putting someone on a medication and then having the immune system become resistant to it, and having the virus itself become resistant to it, so that medication was no longer any good. So he kept me off meds until the cocktail methodology became a factor. And it wasn't like he deliberately waited because he knew something was coming. Because we didn't. But at the same time, he was very participatory. I think Joe was one of the early founders of GMHC.

And then for a long time—I think when I was—when Susan was his assistant, she wasn't his medical assistant, she was an assistant for his trials because he was doing early trials, and that was—what was it? Well, I'll think of it. But they're still active today. So we knew enough that, like, it was probably safer—unless you were really, really sick—not to participate in a first- or second-phase trial, but a third-phase trial. You know, the first phase is toxicity. It's like, "Is this medication going to kill you?" The second phase is efficacy, like, "How effective is this in combatting the virus?" And then the third phase is dosage, like, "What is the least amount of dosage that we can give you to combat the virus but also to assuage any other problems that will happen?" [00:46:09]

And so, by the time this triple-phase treatment, which we know as the cocktail, came into effect—and particularly protease inhibitors. He's kind of waiting until my T-cells dropped to zero, which they basically did. And then Joe also knew the immune system and knew what a lot of people didn't know at that time, because people were kind of counting viral load. I think viral load was just beginning to become something that was a factor, but T-cell count was really the big indicator. And Joe knew that even if you had very few T-cells, the way that T-cells operate is that they could be effective in keeping off various types of infection. And that you didn't necessarily need to be treated. Joe was also very keen to the fact that the human body, in very rare but in actual cases, has the capacity to develop resistance even to HIV. So all of these things that we now know that are not necessarily being major focuses of treatment with PrEP and so forth and so on, Joe knew. He intuited.

He wouldn't say that he knew it, because he's a scientist and he was making assessments through his practice and through his patients, as well as participating in these broad-scale studies, and would make diagnoses based on his practice and on what he was observing. Unlike many physicians who are waiting for permission basically from these broad-scales. But that's where ACT UP and TAG and all that stuff starts to come in, with all of these conflicts and arguments and progress around the pharmaceutical industry, as well as general health practice. [00:48:31]

ALEX FIALHO: And Joe is also—at that point, had been at it for quite a while. He, with Richard Berkowitz, wrote *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*. And so, yeah, that's incredible that he was—you know?

JACK WATERS: Well, Joe is South African, so a lot of his early experience as physician was around epidemiology and immunology with the populations that he was treating before he came to New York. So once he was in New York and the epidemic happened, he had already had that background in epidemiology and immunology. And then of course he was part of the sex scene. He was gay, you know? So he was just basically using both, I believe, his scientific acumen—and he might argue about this, but I think intuition played a large role in his treatment decisions. Because he was watching. He was seeing who was living and who was dying. And even though there was so much that is unknown and unknowable, you know, he's kind of like, "Stay off meds. Do this prophylaxis." [00:49:56]

Even people, you know—and I think what's most interesting: I think Joe is an unsung hero of the epidemic because he was very vocal against industry. You know, he was also a socialist, and so the money that happened—like, he would start these community treatments, like CHP, all these things. And then as soon as they started to become big fundraisers, as soon as there was money involved—like big money involved in AIDS treatment and awareness—he would criticize and then he would be out. He would either leave or get forced out.

And so, what I think is interesting and attests to Joe's expertise is that Sean Strub, who I worked for—you know, Sean was the founder and publisher of *POZ* magazine. And then *POZ* had what we called a sister organization called CPS, Community Prescription Service. And my job as much as I would have liked to have been—I was already writing. I was now starting to publish and most of the stuff that I was publishing—you know, I kind of started doing, like, gay-community-news type journalism, which didn't really interest me that much because it was basically reporting, which I found boring. And I didn't really have the kind of interest in journalism where I looked at journalism as, like, a literary practice. And there was not really interest or the use for that kind of—because people just wanted information. So I started to gravitate more towards reviews and critique, you know, because I'm an artist. And so I was writing largely—I kind of segued way from raw journalism, and particularly LGBT journalism, and into criticism and essays, and particularly cinematic, like in film publications and art publications. [00:52:27]

ALEX FIALHO: I know and I'm interested in your writing for *Color Life*, but I'm also wanting to know a bit about the range of your journalist practice and writing practice. What publications did you write for primarily, and then what specifics—articles or themes—might you want to bring in?

JACK WATERS: Well, the early interest started, again, to come from the ACT UP, Queer Nation. There's *LGY*, there was *OutWeek*. There were all of these publications that were like wings, in my opinion, in my experience of ACT UP. You know, they're kind of mouthpieces. And I referred to this in this section that I wrote in *Short Memory/No History* called "Mouthpieces." They were publications that changed their names. I think it went through four name changes, but they were all published by the same people. Editorial would shift from time to time, but editorial was also more or less stable. And as we looked at—you know, it's like, I looked at it, and it was very much a bastion of white gay men. [00:53:48]

So one of the people that I had become friendly with at this period was Esther Kaplan, and Esther was writing for the *Village Voice* at the time. I think she was part of the *Village Voice* family. And she was doing a lot of writing about AIDS and women, and was also an ardent and very active member of ACT UP. But she was also linked to us, you know, as I was talking about this way that Peter and I were kind of the roots within art and aesthetics. So Esther was a serious journalist and activist, but then she was performing [laughs] with us. And one of her areas of performance she was really interested in was gender play.

You know, Esther and I had this partnership. Like we did a couple of performances we called *Lester and Esther*, and she would perform Lester. Lester is my birth name, and she was Esther. And we would do these, like, gender switch, where she would be this ACT UP boy, like this new clone. You know, because ACT UP, of course, produced this whole new generation of activists who were like boys. And so, she was kind of making a play on this role, on this hyper-masculinized role-play that ACT UP boys were into, and then I would be this femme, basically. And we would play with that. [00:55:35]

But then Esther was also very much a guide for me in my own writing, and so had this exchange happening. We started to be really critical of what was going on with these gay publications. ACT UP and Queer Nation kind of reignited this whole momentum in gay journalism. Because prior to that, there would be *After Dark*, you know, these other things that were by and large entertainment-focused, probably sex-clubby and whatever but not political. And then with the advent of the epidemic, we started having *LGNY*. What was it? You know, I have to think about it for a minute to just recall the names, but I refer to those in my *Short Memory* piece.

But there were no people of color writing, and so I wrote a letter—I had a couple of letters to the editor. And we knew people. And also, people who were instrumental were involved at ABC No Rio, because we were presenting people. So the movement and what was going on creatively was also this integration. But what was happening along the lines of social networks was, like a lot of New York and a lot of the art world is, very stratified. So, even though everyone knows each other—like, whether you can "get in" to this or not. And so, for me, the sticking point was like, "Why am I not being published in these magazines?"

So, simultaneously is where *Color Life* also evolved, as a direct response to this barrier of having people of color. People in this echelon would actually defend themselves by saying, "Well, if we put a woman or a person of color on the cover, people won't buy our magazine." So they were very deliberately targeting. As they were being critical of target marketing that was coming from the mainstream, they were also target marketing within the community itself. And, you know, they may have been right, but they also weren't putting effort into the kind of education and promotion. So there was this barrier between people of color and women being published in these magazines, which were basically the voices of the movement and of the community. [00:58:29]

So, *Color Life* was something that I published. You know, I was one of the founding contributing writers for *Color Life*. But in the same time, I was doing—I think there was a magazine that was coming out of Toronto, and again I have to look in it. But it coincided with what was going on with our Naked Eye Cinema. There was an editor at this magazine, Brian Bruce. And Carl had done a tour. He wanted to take the films that we were showing and producing through ABC No Rio, Naked Eye Cinema, so he did [laughs] a cross-country tour from coast to coast in Canada.

And in Toronto, he did a screening and then he was reviewed by this Brian Bruce who looked at our work. And, again, he was responding to this kind of, I guess, post-Susan Sontag and pre-queer radicalism and thought that the films that we were making were too camp. Like, he really tore us a new one in his review about, a) our films having all of these camp images, and that was, like, old-hat, gay school. And then, "Who was this woman Kembra Pfahler, and how dare she make this film *Cowboy Stories* with the soundtrack to an anthem to fisting?" And we responded with a series of letters, and it became this dialogue. I think there were, like, three issues. And as time went by, this editor who was so critical of us, started to make his own films that got more involved in, like, queer, punk, skinhead, porn, sex radicalism, and would evolve to who we now know as Bruce LaBruce. [01:00:52]

So, this was kind of things that were all fomenting in happening that happened through the course of time. And of course, Bruce LaBruce and Kembra became really good friends. Kembra was like, "Fuck you. You don't know who I fuck. How dare you label me as a heterosexual woman? You don't know if I eat pussy or suck dick or both." This was kind of the dialogue that was going on through these letters with this person that we knew as Brian

Bruce. And then as time went by, he becomes, I think, one of the most radical and outspoken voices in queer cinema. And I spoke to him after that. He was kind of like, "I'm not that person anymore. That was a different person." And, you know, it's not like I want to out him, and I don't think at this point it would be such a big deal. But it's also interesting how people change and re-present themselves in ways where their ideology starts to shift and become different. [01:02:10]

But those are the publications. You know, I was doing *Color Life* and then there was a magazine that was coming out of Vienna called *Springer*. And as this is happening—and we're now in the mid-'90s—cable TV is a big factor. So, you know, I talked about ways of disseminating our film work, so we had a series called *Naked Eye Cinema TV*, where we were taking things that we had shown like at ABC No Rio and various locations, and then doing interviews with the filmmakers. And that was our TV program, but then there were many things going on. There was this burgeoning of gay cable news and gay networks. There was basically, essentially, what was a national cable network, where it was not formally a network in terms of its corporate structure, but that programming would play from city to city, just by exchanging tapes. And cable TV was far less restrictive, so there were things that you could do graphically. There were things that you could do on cable television, so that also became like a format and a form for us. [01:03:40]

And so, through that, and also through our touring with the ABC No Rio archives and visual art collectives, we continued to develop relationships in Europe, particularly Germany. You know, because travel has always been a really big and important part of our work. And our work was by and large supported more and accepted more in Europe, and particularly in Germany. So we kind of established liaisons with people. So, *Springer* was—I did several pieces for them. They would translate my writing into German. *Village Voice*, you know, I have one article—an article in *Village Voice* was around the Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin, who I was at Juilliard with and just recently retired as the artistic director of the Batsheva Dance Company. You know, to name a few.

ALEX FIALHO: Great. We've been talking about activism, maybe in a peripheral way, but I want to ask you directly, how did your—were you involved in ACT UP in ways? And how were you thinking about your relationship to these activist organizations, and your art as an activist practice?

JACK WATERS: Well, ACT UP had very similar philosophy to what we were doing, because there was no membership. You know, you didn't have a membership card. You basically showed up. And anyone could say they were a member of ACT UP. And in my relationship to ACT UP, I went to meetings, but I was not involved in any committees. I was not part of any committee, and again, I've kind of—my relationship to ACT UP was, in a lot of ways, by association and direct relationship to stuff that Carl and Brad—like, Carl was particularly active in experimental and alternative treatment. You know, like, smuggling treatments from Europe and so forth, and distributing them. [01:06:05]

And then Brad was highly, highly, highly involved and engaged in needle exchange. And then Esther, as I said, was all around women, AIDS and women, which was a huge sticking point, especially as far as treatment went, because in those early days treatments were not made available to women. In fact, women were not even acknowledged as having AIDS because the types of infections that women get—because women have different bodies—were not AIDS-defined. And so, therefore, they were not eligible for participating in trials, which was the only available treatment at that time. So, Esther and her participation—Esther was also deeply engaged in Haiti, like the AIDS in Haitian—and so we were performing together.

A lot of our activism was happening in our performance, as a performance and also as a relationship. There was also no boundaries, a lot of times, between, like, what we were presenting as performance and how we were performing. Like *The Glenda and Brenda Show*, which were a video shoot, but at the same time, we're out in public in drag. And so, I was kept abreast of what was going on at ACT UP meetings by going to meetings, but I did not participate in that integral way until an action was established. And then knowing that the whole—like, the large part of the effectiveness of an action was bodies, so you would go. Like you would go to the Holland Tunnel, go to Stop the Church. It's like, I was there with thousands of other people, and I was aware from my attendance of meetings. And then I was kept abreast of what the integral dynamics were, as far as what plans and strategies would happen, by the people that I just named who were active members of the various committees within ACT UP. [01:08:21]

ALEX FIALHO: Did you have a particular stake or direction of activism that you were particularly invested in? And if not ACT UP, was there a related organization or ethos that informed your work, or that you were taking part in?

JACK WATERS: Only after ACT UP started to develop organizational responses, which were, in the beginning, community organizations. Like what I talked about—I was struggling to remember the name that Joe was the founder of—is CRIA, Community Research Initiative on AIDS. I think now it's CRI—which, at the time, was a small, community-based action that came out of ACT UP that was around the response to AIDS. Then there was ATDN: AIDS Treatment Data Network. Again, both CRIA and ATDN came out of my relationships with Susan Brown,

because at that point, they needed someone that had the organizational and administrative acumen to run the organization, so I worked. And then Community Prescription Service, which was the commercial branch of *POZ* magazine, for which I was the marketing manager. So, I had jobs basically with these. [01:10:01]

But at this point, ACT UP had developed to the point where there were actual organizational responses to it. And then there was one of the video offshoots of ACT UP, which was *Testing the Limits*. And again, my introduction to *Testing the Limits* came through Carl, who was an associate producer of their first broadly released video titled *Testing the Limits*. And then I, ultimately, was on the staff of their broadcast that was funded and produced by PBS, called—we went through so many titles. I think the final title was—I know *Rites & Reactions* [*The Question of Equality* -JW] sticks in my name because that was a title that had lasted.

But the ultimate broadcast—you know, this was something that there was a recent controversy over, around the Sylvia Rivera footage. We showed that Rivera footage in one of—it was a four-part series that was produced by *Testing the Limits*. And my role was, like, tech director—operations manager. My actual title was operations manager, because again, it was the beginning of internet and of computers, so that the—it was just the beginning where editing systems, where interoffice communication like email—this was all now just beginning. And this is happening at the 25th anniversary of Stonewall. So, yeah. So that job with *Testing the Limits*, my work at CRIA, and then my work at Community Prescription Service and ATDM, were all ACT-UP products. And in addition—[01:12:21]

ALEX FIALHO: ATDN?

JACK WATERS: AIDS Treatment Data Network.

ALEX FIALHO: Right.

JACK WATERS: Ken Fornataro was the director. And so, it was just kind of how the movement operated, where some people are on the street, some people are in the—you know, you had TAG, which was a pharmaceutical element. They're in conflict, you know, like the women, and so forth and so on. And so, my role started to be, like, helping to organize—being a component of the organization through my various roles. And so, having had this journalistic background and having administrative chops with Allied Productions and ABC No Rio, I became very useful for helping those developing actions and operations, which are now starting to come off of the streets and actually into mainstream interconnection.

My other role was—and largely due to my journalistic experience. And because these structures—there was a lot of conflict and a lot of contention, so the board meetings were crazy. Also, structure itself, because ACT UP was by and large anarchistic. And even though its structure was very complex, it was not structured as a corporation. A lot of its dynamic had a lot more to do with social hierarchies, and so gender and race of course played these big roles. Because of course white men—it's not that they don't give a fuck about Haitian women, but it's not in their experience. So it's a struggle to have actions developed and responding to the epidemic if you are a woman of color. [01:14:12]

But things like *POZ* magazine, which is a commercial publication, and Community Prescription Service, which was its pharmaceutical distribution wing. And my role as a marketing manager for them—my job was to organize forums of leading researchers and physicians, so that I would first select—you know, I was given a list of people, and of course I knew Joe, and Susan, people involved in Treatment Action.

But then also, Sean Strub was very adept and very experienced. And even though Sean was the editor of *POZ*—well, Walter Armstrong at that time was the editor. Sean was the publisher. But then Stephen—and again, it's like my mind is going blank, because I'm so excited—not Stephen Englander. Stephen [Gendin] was the head of the Community Prescription Service, and what we did, basically, was sell drugs. We sold drugs to people that lived outside of major cities—or I'm sorry, people that lived in small towns—because of the stigma. So you couldn't go to the pharmacy, you wouldn't want to go to your local pharmacy, because everybody would know you have AIDS. So we would do it by mail order. And so in order to develop an audience—and it was a double-edged sword, because on one hand, my job was educational, but on the other hand, it was deliberately marketing. [01:16:13]

My boss was Ajax Greene, and I forget what his title was, but he was basically brought in. He was a straight white guy who was into what he called corporate responsibility or something like that. So that the people who were—like, there was an office that was largely Latino and African American, including myself, who were in the basement of our office on West 12th Street, and then there was *POZ* magazine that was on the upper floors. So the magazine was visible and public, and primarily white, and then the Prescription Service, which was the moneymaker—and so, *POZ* would advertise things that were coming out of the results of TAG that were now approved. You know, TAG being instrumental in accelerated access. And then we were selling them through mail order at CPS.

And then I would set up these forums—we called them community forums—where really valuable information was being disseminated to the community, and by and large published in *POZ* magazine. But then we were—*POZ* had pharmaceutical ads, and then CPS would get grants. Our primary funder was Agouron, the pharmaceutical company Agouron. And we weren't obligated—we weren't pitching or pushing. My other responsibility was making sure that the literature from the pharmaceutical company was present and available at these community forums. And we were known internationally, like coast to coast to coast. And it was a good-paying job. [01:18:11]

And then one of my other activities in the movement was—because there was a lot of contention happening around the boards of all these activities, and because I was black and not really in the center of the movement—I was writing the minutes, board minutes, for all of these organizations. Not CPS, *POZ*, who I never published in. I've been in several times as a subject, but for—well, *Testing the Limits* I was kind of like the heart and soul. So, I'm kind of the information—basically, all information is coming through me. I'm writing the minutes. Like CRIA, there was this horrible breakout between Joe and an executive director, a new executive director, who felt that because she was raising all of this money for them, she could dictate policy. And Joe, of course, was having none of it.

And on and on and on, like things that were happening in the closed doors, basically. Because I was a journalist. In the early phases, I was just writing and taping everything, which I have, which are part of my archives. I mean, I kind of learned later, and it was a little more easy for me to just sort of summarize. But at the time while things were happening, there were really super intense things happening that was not necessarily in the public interest to expose, at least not at that point. But at the same time, like, I just thought it was really important to document. So, sometimes, I was just taking dictation, and then my board notes would be in summary. But I was getting detail on all of this stuff, and it's a really interesting backstory. [01:20:23]

So that was my involvement in the movement. It was kind of undercover in a lot of ways. And I was not paid a lot of attention. I mean, people knew who I was, but I was able to be in that position of being the repository of all of this information because I was kind of like nobody to them.

ALEX FIALHO: You had mentioned that also involved travel, that job, one of the jobs you were describing. And also, the importance of travel to your art practice. Can you just talk a bit about that? Places you went, what perspectives you were gaining? I know yesterday, we also wanted to return to the Ibiza experience, and maybe that's an opportunity for you to do that.

JACK WATERS: Good, yeah. I wanted to talk about that because it also—Ibiza also drives home the nature of my relationship with my core group.

ALEX FIALHO: And this takes us back a little bit in time.

JACK WATERS: We're going back now to the fall of '83. Summer of '83, Carl was out of New York. And Carl is like—Carl never stays in New York for very long. He always has to get out. So this year was the British Isles. You know, he was going to the British Isles. [01:21:57]

We have this patron. This person that we're recording is a patron who was based in Philadelphia, who I knew just through being Philadelphian. Henry McIlhenny. And McIlhenny and his family—his cousin is the designer Mary McFadden, and then there—the other associate family are the Annenbergs. They basically built the Philadelphia Museum of Art. And Henry McIlhenny was the host to Warhol when Warhol kind of broke through at—what is it—ICP, Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, I think, an offshoot of U of P, where I think we have—a Visual AIDS former director is now in position there.

So McIlhenny is Irish American, had a castle—Castle Glenveagh—in Ireland. So [laughs] one of Carl's—we were just trying to get money. You know, we were looking for patron and we're like, "God, this guy is filthy rich. He's into art." We had done some performances for him, because he was also—his house was next door to the Philadelphia Ethical Society, which is where I grew up. It was, like, my religious background. So Henry McIlhenny was in Ireland. He was selling his castle. He called himself one of the *nouveau*—what did he call himself?—*nouveau* poor. Because there was a castle, like an ancient family—I guess it was a family castle or his family somehow acquired it, and he had to give it to the government. It became a landmark.

So this was happening at the summer of Carl's travel in the British Isles. So, you know, Carl will tell you his own story about this. I was not there, but Carl was the first of us to go to Europe. At that time, there was something—I think they still exist, but they were courier services, where if you wanted to travel for free, and you knew someone who was an assigner for a courier service, you just told them where you wanted to go and then you would be responsible. It could be a document. It could be jewelry. Most times, you never even saw it. You just had to sign for it at customs. [01:24:24]

So, our friend Philly [Philly Abe, née Phillisima -JW], who just died last month knew someone who worked at SECUREcorp. Her name was—we called her SECUREcorp Sue.

[They laugh.]

JACK WATERS: And so we could basically travel anywhere we wanted to for free. And so, we decided—like I had already had this relationship with Germany from my graduate—I think I talked about traveling and doing this choreographer's competition of *Personifications*, the Stravinsky piece. I had done it my graduating year at Juilliard. I don't think I did talk about that here, but it was also like an establishing moment in my art career and my introduction to Germany.

I did talk to you about my relationship with Bob Smith and Michel Auder through Susan Salinger. Bob was the gay part of this odd couple, like super adept at how to live well on zero dollars a year in Tribeca. They had this loft on Franklin Street, which they also basically lived in for years for absolutely nothing. But that's Michel's story. But Bob knew an artist named Michael Buthe who was a very—like, had begun as an abstractionist but then started to develop these collage techniques. He was very important at the time, and selling lots of work. So Bob said, "If you're going to Germany, you have to know Buthe." [01:26:12]

So I met Buthe on my first trip to Germany, and he was the first flamboyant—like a raging, flamboyant homosexual. A big guy, major drinker, just basically stormed into the place where I was living with swirling scarves, et cetera, and had this whole coterie of Senegalese and Arabs that was just, like, crazy, from another century. And so, the following year, when Carl was on this tour, we decided that we're going to perform in Europe. We actually decided we're going to move to Europe. Like, "We're leaving New York, we're going to live in Europe and be expatriates."

So Carl was first, was already there, and Bob Smith said, "If you're going to Europe, you have to know Buthe, or "You have to hook up with Buthe." No, Bob told Buthe's agent, who was Dietmar Werle, that we were coming. And Buthe was working on a project that was associated with a friend of his that he had known from the '70s, who we knew at the time as Jenny Stöker. Jenny was really rich, had a gallery in Munich, and was really close friends with Buthe. Buthe was designing this meditation chamber that she had constructed by the elders of this community on the outskirts of Ibiza. She was very much into meditation and spirituality. [01:28:11]

So Buthe was going apeshit crazy being basically in the middle of paradise, but nowhere, like nowhere. And so, when Dietmar found out that we were all planning on traveling to Europe, he said, "You have to go to Ibiza. They will treat you royally, and Michael will love to have your company." It was me, Carl, Brad, Brian, and Christa. You know, I'm talking about POOL. One of the mechanisms of POOL, there was always three boys and one girl. So Christa was the girl.

So because we have this free travel, we were able to assimilate. Carl was basically moving in this southward direction. I got word to Carl like, "We're all going to Ibiza." So Carl was like, "Great." So he starts traveling southwardly, and then Brian meets him. I think they meet in France, somewhere in northern France. They start traveling, continuing on their southward trajectory. And of course London—in those days, the cheap hubs were always London or Amsterdam. So Brad followed next. And by the time Brad met them there Perpignan, in the Pyrenees.

And so then I traveled. My landing port was London. I took the boat over, met them all in the Pyrenees, like in Perpignan. And then we eventually traveled southward into Ibiza. And she was not in the town of Ibiza. She was in this countryside called Santa Eulalia, and our directions for getting to her place was, "Follow the blue stones and then ask for the blonde German lady with horses." Those were our directions to get to Jen. She had an estate basically, simple but well-equipped. She had the house, guesthouse, pool, tennis court, orange groves, pomegranate, horses, German shepherds, the whole nine yards. [01:30:36]

And so, the last person to get there is Peter, and Peter comes straight to Ibiza. And Christa was already in Zurich. So Christa came down from Zurich, so then it's me, Carl, Brad, Brian, Peter, and Christa. And because Brad and Brian were deeply involved in this occult spiritualism, they connect immediately with Jenny. And because we're all friends of Michael, part of our role starts to be, like, "Keep Michael from drinking too much and keep him company."

So we stayed in the guesthouse. The guesthouse was split in two. There were, like, two bedrooms in the guesthouse, and a common area, and then Jenny was in the main house. And then we would have these kind of little kikis with Jenny—basically reading her tarot cards, talking about astrology—that Brad and Brian basically led. And I had already known Michael from my previous travel to Europe, when we did this choreographer's competition in Cologne. So that's really the basis. I mean, there was a lot of things that happened, but the basis of the story was just, like, this bonding. [01:32:10]

We created this ritual around the consecration of her temple. And later, I think in 2016, she published a catalogue with Michael. Michael kind of fell out of popularity, but he did have a final retrospective in Brussels, and she has a large portion of his collection, of his archives. So she published a really beautiful catalogue of the performance we did, in the woods in Ibiza, but it was just this, like, witchy, magical—Ibiza is known as the

Scorpio Island, it's an ancient Roman necropolis, and so we're, like, all immersed in this atmosphere. And I think—you know, like the Bruce LaBruce story, people kind of later emerged in the public eye.

Jenny, at the time, wasn't married, but she was about to be married to her husband whose name was Stefan Goetz. And then she stopped being called by her nickname, Jenny, and for a long time was just being addressed very formally, as Frau. Frau Goetz. So she's become now known as this major international collector, which—you know, the thrust of my story is about our relationship to art, and art production, and art history, through this kind of a backdoor. Because she looked at us, not even as dancers or performers, but as these, like, spiritual guides to her, and in her spiritual life. [01:34:04]

And basically, like we had—Christa had organized a performance in Switzerland. But he wanted to take us to Africa. You know, he was like, "I'm going to take you to Africa on a bus." And we were like, "No, no, no, no, no, we have a gig in Switzerland. We can't do it. We're leaving. We're out of here." We did this ritual performance at her temple, and then we did a public performance in a—it's called *Las Dahlias Salla de Fiestas*, like a social—like a hotel and restaurant. And that was the first iteration of this *Foho Tell Dreams* I talked about that we did at Danspace. It was a completely different version.

And Frau Goetz has now become—is Ingvild Goetz, who recently brought her Arte Povera collection to New York. And, you know, weirdly has all of these kinds of connections and interactions between art, and commerce, and criticism, and collection, that you're going through on another end. So, to me, it's interesting to look at these things through personal relationships, and especially because what we're doing was not—we were not necessarily construing it as art. Because we were. Like, we're totally into this aspect of ritual, but it was largely driven by Brad and Brian who were also invested in this kind of anti-art aesthetic that we're also part and parcel to and continue to be. [01:36:10]

So that's the Ibiza story. You know, Brian's no longer with us, Buthe is no longer with us, but our relationships continue to be very much ensconced. And that trip was a real kind of—I mean, we had already been pretty much bonded from New York. But the travel experience was also something that kind of made us a family for life.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice. I'm glad we returned to it as you hoped.

JACK WATERS: Yeah. I'm sorry to segue, but I kind of felt—

ALEX FIALHO: No, we're good.

JACK WATERS: —it was—yeah.

[END OF WATERS18\_TRACK3.]

ALEX FIALHO: So we just took a pause, and now we're back for the homestretch. We're going to think about your work moving more towards the present and where we are now. And I think a strong way into that is the conversation around *Short Memory/No History*. But there's one work I wanted specifically, or definitely, to ask you about before we even get to that 2000s moment. And that is *The Male GaYze*, which I know, in particular, was screened in *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity In American Art*, curated by Thelma Golden at the Whitney. I'm interested to hear about that piece, and then also that context for the work.

JACK WATERS: *The Male GaYze* is also something that interestingly connects my work as a dancer-choreographer and my interest in film and cinema. On a formal level, it also calls to this notion of dichotomy, maybe dialectics, but it's definitely a study in opposition, really similar to the way Peter and I approached the *Black and White Study*. But in this case, the primary fields of opposition—well there are two. One is the notion, formally, of text versus image, which I look on—again, through film studies—as, one having a male domain and the other as being more of what would be feminized. You know, text and words and talking as being this realm about masculinity. And pictures, images and intuition as being something that would be more feminine in traditional notions. And then the other dichotomy would be city versus country. [00:02:23]

So, what I'm doing is juxtaposing a narrative, which is the story of this European experience that I just talked about—was this preliminary trip to Cologne, which was 1979. And the responses that happened in doing this competition where we showed the first movement of *Personifications* as a quartet, two black men and two white women. And how the racial—how the casting really had nothing to do with intentionality as much as these other people presenting. But then, the audience's focus and recognition, especially European audiences, is seeing that as a dynamic.

And there's also the narrative that happens in terms of body and control, and my developing understanding of feminist politics. And in terms of how gay men play out these dichotomous roles of dominant-passive, masculine-feminine, by the way that they are represented. And then the aspect of the photo image, photography and representation, in terms of whose camera—like who's controlling the camera, and who's controlling the

image, and what's representing it. So, above all, how race and sexuality operate within it. [00:04:12]

So there's this narrative, and the narrative is in many ways coincidental by virtue of just being the means for making this parody between linearity of storyline and narrative. And then there's the image, which is more of this chopped, cut, fragmented approach. And, you know, again, I didn't really—I was not as fully aware of these arguments as I am now, but I had enough awareness that I knew that these issues of fragmentation versus unity had been these ongoing discussions around Postmodernism.

The main image is my picture. It's the image of myself that's a photographic image taken by someone else in a way that is objectified. Its objectification is emphasized because it's my body that's represented in the image, and my head is cut off. At the same time, I'm doing this film, so I'm in control of this frame. So it also goes back to that interest in framing and perspective that we talked about, in terms of, like, who controls the image, who controls the perspective by defining what's in and what's outside of the frame. But then allowing a certain level of freedom by the viewer, thus erasing the line between maker and observer by giving the viewer an imaginative option of—as to what may be outside of the frame of reference that they're being presented in the work. [00:06:13]

So yeah, I mean, it's my black body in the frame of a white photographer, but then I'm taking a frame outside of that by showing that story. But then contained in that story is also my experience that shows the frame of my window, of my kitchen looking out on the view of the street that I observe. So, it's this whole idea of frame-within-frame-within-frame, type of thing. And then within that frame there are cuts to the country. So, my view is urban, it's city, it's colored. You know, there are, basically, black people in the frame, and then I walk into that frame, and basically, the viewer sees my black ass. And so it's me showing my black body and my black ass in reference to what this other dominating factor has shown within the framing of the photographic still that is seemingly the main subject. But then the main subject is broader, I hope, by showing those theoretical contexts and those theoretical references that are juxtaposed, and, in many ways, I hope, conflicting and at the same time potentially harmonious to the visual montage. [00:07:48]

So yeah, it's me looking out the window. And then there's a cut to Camp Linden, which is West Chester, Pennsylvania, which is a property that was owned by the Philadelphia Ethical Society that I referred to in relationship to this Henry McIlhenny. You know, the Ethical Society is on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, which is a very lovely area of the city. And at the same time, it's not the Ethical Society I'm showing. It's Camp Linden, which is a property that the Ethical Society owns, that they mostly are using for retreats for urban youth. But at the time the film was shot, it had fallen into—the programming, the summer youth programming had lapsed, and so we were able to go there, and relax, and enjoy ourselves. At the same time, we used it as a set. It's the same location where sequences from my films, from the *Ring Cycle*—the Brunnhilde and Wotan sections—are shot.

But *The Male GaYze* is not really so much concerned with that as the fact that it's, like, country. So it's a city-country dichotomy. And then the framing element, and then my interest in the idea of who's paying attention to what. What happens with the conscious mind, and what happens with the subconscious mind. And my understanding that the conscious mind is going to be more driven to the storyline. And even though the storyline is very directly engaged in this idea of control—you know, of control over the image—it's also the story itself that becomes a distraction, where my hope is that the images themselves will seep in through the unconscious. And it's not really directly stated, even though I'm talking about this experience and this image. I don't relate that image in the narrative, although the image is contained within the framework of the montage. So I'm hoping that the viewer will subconsciously make that connection, and be able to see it as a continuous whole—not in a literal way, but in the way they sense, in the way that it's ultimately sensed. [00:10:30]

So, yeah, I mean, that's the summary of *The Male GaYze*. I mean, there's also personal things. It's Brad Taylor and Susan Brown—you know, who are part of my family, creative collective—who are not outward identified as artists in their daily life, but have been very foundational in my art, and particularly, as I said, in my activism. And they have their new—I think she's one year old—their daughter Iris. And my interest in having them in the frame was kind of reaching this point of—trans would be too soon because trans is not really in my consciousness as such, but this idea of like unisex. They both have very close-cropped hair, and so my hope is that people will look at them as un-gendered. And then the baby, of course, which is also—because she's really young, and whether it's a male or a female child. So you just have these three people, and what their relationship may or may not be, I think, can be largely assumed that it's a couple and their offspring. But then at the same time, to me, they're so neuter. [00:12:03]

In the middle of that, a sequence of Peter diving into a pool and then making a cinematic reference, sort of like a dry joke, where I do a pan of the swimming pool and you see the depth levels, which is a countdown, and making a reference to that cinematic countdown at the beginning of the film. And then Peter's diving into the pool. I'm also looking at a form of objectification because he becomes my object, my cinematic model, and it's his white body. And so, this sort of happens as a dynamic.

There's other sections that are found footage, particularly the footage that was made by Susan Salinger, and she's got an image of Doug Wright. And again, Doug—it's really just his head, and his head dips into the frame. So my intention is looking at feminist discourse and this idea of cutting and dissecting the body—women's bodies—that happen within advertising and art, as this form of mutilation. And then also, the cinematic form of cutting both in the montage and in the way things are cut off within the frame, as well as the film itself being edited, which is a cut. And so, all of these—since they're operating, I'm not necessarily concerned about whether they're immediately perceived, because I think there's an automatic response to these conditions that happen. Because I think they're bodily and physical responses that I hope to bring about. And then using my telling of the story as a distraction, because it's comfortable, I think, to hear a person's voice, and it's deceptively simple. [00:14:10]

My goal with that is to appeal to that level of the simplicity of perception, but then having the complexity be a dynamic that happens, as I said, through the subconscious or the unconscious mind. Because all of this is happening. You know, there are all of these cuts. There are all of these juxtapositions. There are all these references. There are all of these relationships of what's going on in the text and what's going on in the montage. But I don't think one necessarily puts it together, nor do they have to put it together. Because it then calls back to my interest in the film as being an experience as well as being something that could be also an intellectual challenge.

So that's *The Male GaYze*. I made it, like many of early films, for the MIX Festival, which was then the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Festival. And the storyline, I would connect to this travel that I was talking about, because this was the preliminary trip to Europe before this Ibiza experience. But because of that trip, I was able to have that experience, because that was the trip that I met Michael Buthe and started formulating relationships with Germany, and particularly Cologne in this situation. [00:15:57]

I don't really have a lot to say about the racial dynamics, because, again, one of my goals is to look at the parody between race and gender, control and passivity—you know, these forms of social relationship and social being, which I think people accept as natural or obvious because this is how we're conditioned. But at the same time, I talk about it in the piece, and the images are there in the piece. Like, again, you see my black body in the representation by the choreographer that I talk about. And then you see the representation of myself, in my own framing, as I look through this frame of the window. So, hopefully, those dynamics speak for themselves, but at the same time, I think they're very clearly pronounced within the context of the text in *The Male GaYze*.

ALEX FIALHO: Great.

JACK WATERS: And so, yeah, should I talk—the film, it was kind of my greatest hit, *The Male GaYze*. It was surprising—I mean, it was really easy to write. And again, because I'm kind of working with this strategy of fragmentation, I wrote the text. Like, I wrote the narrative separately from the picture, and they're two completely different structures. I'm not really—I mean, I know that the leading image of my photograph is what I talk about and that's the story, but they're not really sequenced in such a way. The sequencing of it is kind of a chance operation, very much like a Fluxus strategy of saying, "What happens if I put this and this together? How will they fall?" [00:18:05]

And it's extremely well received, and it's the one film that, I think, is in the widest distribution, and then—

ALEX FIALHO: Frameline distributed it?

JACK WATERS: Frameline distributed it. And then, you know, it was shown at Outfest, shown at New York, of course, at the MIX Festival. And then what is our own home queer, gay and lesbian film festival in New York? [New Fest] I can't remember even the name of it because it's not really a festival that I normally screen or show in, I think. But that was one film that was of interest to this—pretty mainstream of the experimental end. People understand it, or people feel that they understand it. And then that was, in turn, selected for screening with the *Black Male* exhibition that Thelma Golden curated—and who I erroneously referred to when I meant Thelma Hill, the choreographer. So, glad we got that in.

ALEX FIALHO: And the reason I brought in that specific context, too, is that I'm interested in thinking around *Black Male* as an exhibition that was such a lightning rod context in an American art context in that moment in '94. But for me, I've [. . . recently- AF] been struck by the reality that it's an exhibition in 1994, which is a moment in which HIV/AIDS is still as it is now, but it's before antiretroviral treatment. AIDS is still ravaging arts and larger communities. And there's a way that I actually haven't heard *Black Male* considered in a context around HIV/AIDS in some ways. It almost falls out of the frame or isn't really in the frame. There's a lot in the frame, and that's why it became such a landmark and discussed show. But that's also part of the conversation I haven't heard as much about. So, I'm prompted to think through it. [00:20:28]

JACK WATERS: Yeah. I mean, I feel that because having an exhibition around the black body was such a watershed, maybe a conversation about AIDS is almost too much for people.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

JACK WATERS: And I don't know that it's necessarily something that's considered, but at the same time, it would be a lot. I also think of the resistance of black communities to discussing AIDS and HIV, and possibly that filtering into the curatorial decisions where things may have been actually conscious. You know, maybe people didn't.

*The Male GayZe* is not a direct reference. There are no references to AIDS or HIV, and that's 1990. So, you know, I would certainly have been aware, but I would not have been as—no, well, I would have been as involved in activism at that point, and it's interesting that AIDS does not become a central subject. Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: It's a great segue. Let's talk about *Short Memory/No History*, where AIDS is a central subject, and a longstanding project of yours with Peter since 2000. Just walk me through some of the iterations of that project—installation, essay, video—how it started, and where it grew into, please. [00:22:18]

JACK WATERS: *Short Memory/No History* is the most direct address of AIDS, HIV—and also, the most intensive in its concentration, its focus, and its continuation—between me and Peter. That started—as far as an iteration, we were invited in short order to do two exhibitions. One was the Donnell Library, the windows. There was a year where it was Pride month, and one of film curators at the Donnell Library was really, really, really, really interested in Peter's *Black and White Study* film. And so, he basically—that was our introduction to Donnell, I think, because of his exposure and his invitation to acquire *Black and White*, the film, into the Donnell Collection. We were also invited to do the windows. And the windows also were largely—or, no, totally—a compilation of photographs that Peter had taken of various demonstrations. Photographs and video. [00:24:06]

And so, it's something that I also, I think, did not emphasize as far as our engagement and involvement. But it's largely because that was Peter's focus and input, is just doing lots and lots and lots of documentation of demos through still photography and through video. And then at the same time, collecting images that were our personal history. So it's a continuation of the *Black and White Study* motif as we continued into *Black and White Study*, the dance, as also being a narrative of our personal lives. And then the emphasis being on showing the AIDS epidemic through our personal life.

So, it was conceived—you know, it was one of the first iterations. We don't really call—the Donnell windows are titled *We Remember*, but we used the material from that in the installation that we did, that we were invited to do, at a place called Shedhalle in Zurich, Switzerland. And one of the strategies that we've used—and it was kind of—the Shedhalle was, I think, the first time that Peter said, "Hey, I don't have a studio, and I've never had a place where I can look at all of this. Let's just use the gallery as our studio." So we basically used the area that we were designated as a way for Peter to lay his photographs out. And so, the things that he put on the wall were ways for him to actually see his images and how they juxtapose. And then, at the same time, we had a very deliberate idea to make our installation a facsimile of what could have been our life at the peak of the epidemic. [00:26:13]

So this is now 2000. I believe Shedhalle is 2000. And there had a been a period where there was really no interest. It was almost like AIDS had disappeared. Queer activism had disappeared. And my personal feeling was that, like, the marketing of AIDS and the marketing of queer demographics was something that was very deliberate. So instead of demos, you started having festivals. We had had already had these marketing incentives, towards the end of the '80s, where you look at the *Village Voice* and other publications that were asking to buy your lists. Sean Strub, who I worked for at CPS, was a provider of lists.

So, I think very, very instrumental in the development of this kind of niche marketing that by 2000 had stopped being political. You know, there were medications, there was now treatment that was by and large effective, at least in keeping people from dying immediately. And the toxicity issues relatively diminished. So AIDS was now, literally, being constructed as a treatable chronic illness. I think that's the official phrase, it's a treatable chronic illness. So you now have the development of big-time LGTBQ marketing. And so, this was happening at the time of *Short Memory/No History*, and at the same time, we're looking back. [00:28:09]

So we're looking at Peter's photographs. We're looking at the demo footage. And in addition to AIDS activism, there's also been very recently Matthew Shepard. Matthew Shepard was kind of a shot in the arm in a lot of ways around—if not AIDS activism, queer activism. Because it was the first time that people were out on the streets since the peak points of ACT UP. So we just thought we would show that in a live situation.

And because I was following the trajectory of queer representation through journalism, I also started to write essays about what was happening within queer publication and the queer public. So I followed the trajectory of these magazines that I talked about and especially how they were correlated. And in one way, I'm just looking at the logo, the imagery. There's a pink triangle, and it kind of changes shape. It changes position. Its prominence shifts. And then there's a couple of issues where it disappears completely. And then it comes back. I have no idea what that means, but I thought it was an interesting juxtaposition. There's Michael Musto writing for the *Village Voice*. There's James Revson writing for *New York Newsday*, which at the time was still a prominent New

York mainstream daily. And then you have Michelangelo Signorile, who's writing for *OutWeek*. [00:30:05]

And, of course, Signorile is coming out of the Queer Nation dynamic, which is outing people and writing things in bold caps. And one of the things that he's expository—is outing. I mean, Signorile, as far as I'm concerned, invented outing. So one that he's outing is Liz Smith, who both Revson and, I believe, Musto were assistants for. Liz Smith was lesbian, closeted lesbian, writing syndicated columns, society columns. So also, this interest in society columns, which are also construed as the gossips. And how *OutWeek*, and *QW*, and *LGNY*—these are all the iterations of these publications coming out of ACT UP—were also really focused on gossip and society, as a means of truth-telling. And Liz Smith—you know, one of Signorile's primary targets was Liz Smith. Meanwhile, you have James Revson, who's also writing social gossip for *New York Newsday*. And they all know each other. They know each other from the publication industry and especially as being assistants of Liz Smith, as well as being active participants within ACT UP. Probably Revson less visibly. [00:31:41]

But I saw a kind of—and I don't know how concerted it was, but there was definitely a concerted strategy that was happening within the outposts of their publications, with *QW* being the most radical and the most marginal and the loudest. The *Village Voice* kind of being in the middle, having a history of the underground alternative, but also still legitimately mainstream-ish. And then *New York Newsday*, which is a completely mainstream publication. And so, clearly, whether consciously or not, when you follow their output—and I think Musto actually published something in, I believe it was *Esquire*, which is also included in the essays that I have—where he talks about the challenges of what happens when ACT UP becomes mainstream with money.

Because now, ACT UP is being put in this position where they're accepting big money. You know, there's the *Red Hot + Blue* debacle. There's the fundraising, where they're actually getting money, and so the question becomes like, "Are we now part of the system?" type of thing. In addition to what's happening within the Treatment Action Group, where they're first protesting and challenging the pharmaceutical industry, to the point where they actually become members of the pharmaceutical industry. So, like, these questions of assimilation.

So in *Short Memory/No History*, we're just doing this kind of fly-on-the-wall-ish approach, but we're building our wall. We're building our own walls. And so, the essays are encapsulated in a CD-ROM, which simultaneously samples elements of a video documentary that we made at the same time, also called *Short Memory/No History*. [00:34:00]

So, *Short Memory/No History*—the video, subtitle *AIDS, Art, Activism*—are interviews with Esther Kaplan, with Sarah Schulman, [Sandra Elgear -JW] and with Robert Vásquez. And Robert Vásquez was a member of one of the agitprop, one of the art groups of ACT UP, and dropped out. And he tells his story about how, as the only person of color in this collective—where their strategy about how AIDS is being represented through white beauty queens, and how having a black face within this poster strategy was not important to them. And so, he subsequently dropped off. Was it ART+?

ALEX FIALHO: Gran Fury.

JACK WATERS: Gran Fury. Gran Fury.

So, *Short Memory/No History*, we're documenting the movement. You know, there are posters from ART+, posters from Gran Fury, posters from Cheap Art, which was the collective that Esther Kaplan was a member of. And Esther and one of her collaborators—who was Max Schumann, now the director of Printed Matter—were working with this group called Cheap Art. And their agenda was to critique and pull apart the art market by selling really great artwork for next to nothing. There was a Cheap Art New York contingent, there was a Cheap Art San Francisco contingent. And then ABC No Rio was one of the centers of focus with Cheap Art. [00:36:09]

So again, we're doing—in *Short Memory/No History*, showing how the amalgamation of many groups and many strategies are happening simultaneously. Sometimes in opposition and great tension with each other, but still there being this kind of a continuity by virtue of the fact that they all exist, and their commonality around being subject to homophobia and AIDS.

So, yeah, in the installation, one of the prominent features is a clock, a gold clock. Another feature is a bed. We wanted to make it very sterile. We made the environment very sterile, so everything is white and most of it is plastic, like white plastic walls. There's a video—we have this miniature TV set, which we sat on the bed, where we played the video documentary. Because one of the other strategies was to bring people into the environment. So, we have the publications. We had the *QW*, the *OutWeek*, the *LGNY*. We have *POZ*. We have all these other publications that are coming out of AIDS treatment. We have *Pussy Grazer*, which is a magazine that Glenn Belverio and Emily Nahmanson, who are two of the people that have been introduced to our community that we associate as being the New Queer. So, all of these publications and magazines, we had present, so that there is basically a reading room. [00:37:51]

And we had it set up as if this was a place where people lived, ostensibly me and Peter. And it was very sterile,

so it feels like a hospital. And when we're there—and it also feels like a studio, because it functionally is a studio. So when people come in, we're able to walk them through the CD-ROM. We can show them these publications and ephemera that we have. So it's also a living archive. We're using the installation as a living archive, both through hard copy as well as electronic media. I mean, in a nutshell, that's what we're doing.

Oh, and then one of the primary arcs, in the way that Peter lays out the photographs in the Zurich iteration, is how—is basically Gordon and Brian as being our first deaths. So Peter's installation—and he's got some kind of a diagonal stripe that basically is linear. And it basically—the peak point is Gordon, but it's not Gordon himself. There was an art store or something called Gordon's, and so there are all of these references within the installation.

So this is just all very specific to Shedhalle, and it was one installation that was part of a larger exhibition called *The Color of Friendship*. And *The Color of Friendship* was something curated by a curator named Elke aus dem Moore. And her agenda was looking at what we were calling queer culture, but she didn't want to have it—she really didn't want to isolate or—so, she was looking at what she was calling special friendships. So, she's looking at, like, the Romantics. She was looking at people within the art world who had preceded us. But at the same time looking at things that existed and things that were not necessarily limited to, or isolated to, homosexuality. But with this idea of queerness being a driving focus and a driving element within this exhibition at large. So that was the first iteration, which, as I said, was preceded by the Donnell Library windows. [This chronology is incorrect, and actually happened in reverse order to this recollection. -JW] [00:40:35]

ALEX FIALHO: How about the title? I'm really compelled by the title.

JACK WATERS: You know, we realized, at a certain point, that "short memory, no history" was a phrase that Penny Arcade was using, and I don't know what preceded. ["Cultural amnesia" may be Penny's term. "Short memory, no history" is not. -JW] There's a certain point where—I think I've said before that zeitgeist is very real and very fundamental, so that one can come up with an idea or a concept. But, again, it's like, you hear something and it sticks. So, whether this was something that Penny originated—you know, I'm very wary of origin stories, and that calls back to my reading of Walter Benjamin and his chastisement, I guess, by one of his colleagues, where they were thinking, "What is the point—like, you don't really know. Why is it important to make a decision about where something started when we're looking at continuity and the nature of things being cyclical?" [00:42:04]

And so I don't know, in short, whether that's something that we originated, that Penny originated, or something that came up at the same time. But at the same time, we are very much in concert. And so, you know, it's just what happens with our collaborations and community. You know—

ALEX FIALHO: Conceptually, what does it speak to?

JACK WATERS: Oh, it's absolutely this idea of American consciousness, of the way Americans are conditioned to have no memory and no history. And we're looking at this idea of ACT UP in this—almost, like, in no time, just disappeared. There was no remembrance of the fact that there was a movement. If you were around in, like, 1998, 1999, you could easily experience this as if it never happened. And in fact, in that period, one of the little ephemera elements we have was that MTV was still—music video and MTV was still operative. And there was a promotion that they were doing, which was a direct grab from *Gran Fury*. It was the *Can I Get AIDS From Kissing?* campaign. And MTV was distributing these cards, and posters, and billboards, that were "Can I get MTV from Kissing?" It was just insidious, and it was almost halted immediately. Like, we did our own campaigns by altering it, by changing MTV back to HIV. Because it was a deliberate—it was very clearly a deliberate opportunity that people had forgotten. [00:44:13]

Because the *Gran Fury* campaign was already—what—only two or three years, but erased, like completely forgotten. And so MTV thought that they could harness that kind of agitprop energy by doing that. So that's what *Short Memory/No History* is all about. And then in the video, the video culminates with 2000, millennium—the Millennium March where we're interviewing people, and people are not there for politics. They're saying, "We're just here for the party. We're here for the fun in the sun." You know, we're asking younger people if they know anyone with AIDS, if they know anyone who's died. "No, no," like, "I know what it is." You know, "How does this affect your life?" It's like, "Not at all."

And then meanwhile, there were, like, gay credit cards. There's, like, rainbow flag ephemera. And I'm relating this directly to my experience with CPS and *POZ* where *POZ* started something called the *POZ Life Expo*. And it's hard to know whether this is even within your memory or awareness, but it quickly, in short order, became the Gay Expo. You know, from something that was very specifically geared towards HIV treatment and awareness—was leveraged—and in a larger way, with my participation; I had a marketing role with this company—where it became part and parcel to the niche marketing of LGBT dollars. [00:46:06]

So, by the Millennium March—which is the culmination of *Short Memory/No History: AIDS, Art, Activism*—we're

looking at Esther and Cheap Art's street postering policy, Gran Fury's street postering activity. And then looking at this Millennium March, which is this massive party. So it's kind of harnessing all of those things, but no reference to politics at all, even though it's happening in DC. So the fact that it's happening in DC is also harnessing this idea that in order to mobilize people, you do it almost like lemmings in a way, because people will go to DC. You want to gather millions of people, as had happened from time immemorial, like, into the seat of American politics. But now, it's this gathering, which is by and large a marketing endeavor. It was very controversial.

And then at the same time, you have things happening within the publication industry. I think there was—you know, and I talk about this in the compilation, in the "Mouthpieces" section, where magazines are now starting to either hire or the editors are being more comfortable with being out. So there's this burgeoning of this post-out dialogue, which, again, was very quickly contained, I think, because of people who were still around in the movement. But there was a forum that happened at the New School, and there was an editor of [. . . *Vibe* Magazine. -JW] But he was a gay white editor, and there was a lot of pushback within the black community—it was like, "Why is this white guy"—and submerged homophobia. Because people—I mean, there were comments, of course, in letters to the editor and so forth, like, "Why is this gay white guy the editor of this rap magazine?" [00:48:26]

And then other people in publication who are talking about, "Well, we've now achieved this status where we don't have to be gay. Like, it doesn't matter, it's just our sexuality. It's not political, like, there's nothing politicized." And literally saying, like, "I can get in and out of a limousine, so I'm not worried about being bashed, so I'm post-gay"—type of thing. So, this is all happening around when we're doing *Short Memory/No History*, and so this is why we titled it.

ALEX FIALHO: I think that's an interesting way to segue into something that I feel is important to your practice, just from seeing you in community, and that is your relationship to intergenerational conversation. And I'm curious, what impact do you think that the AIDS crisis has on a younger generation? Those who maybe didn't live through the '80s and early '90s as adults. And sort of set in tandem, is to think about how nostalgia plays into retellings of this history, either for you or more generally.

JACK WATERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I mean, it's an interesting framing because, again, it's really important to remember there is no younger generation, because people are maturing all the time. But in our experience—you know, I talked about, like, Glenn and Shari Frilot.

ALEX FIALHO: Glenn? [00:49:56]

JACK WATERS: Glenn Berverio; Shari Frilot; Alex Heimberg, who performs as Miss Understood; Steven Polito, who performs as Hedda Lettuce; Esther Kaplan. You know, this was our first wave of a younger generation, and also our first awareness that we're not young. We, now, definitely cannot describe ourselves as young. We're definitely older, and these are people that we are responsible for, and people that we need to learn from. And so, in the best of situations, and I think at that point in time, these are sharp, on fire people. Raj Roy, Stephen Kent Jusick.

So that was kind of our first wave, which was happening through ABC No Rio. And one of the expressions of that was the show we called *Out & Exposed*. We didn't call it; they did a show. It was George Towne, Shari Frilot, did a show at ABC No Rio. I believe it was probably 1990. It was around the time of the HEAL benefit. Because in concert, we tried to constitute an all-queer directorship of ABC No Rio. I think George Towne was delegated as visual art. There was Dirk Hauska from Hamburg, who had come from the Hamburg Queer Film Festival as the general director. Shari, I think, was performance. Jocelyn Taylor, who was partners early on with Julie Tolentino in the Clit Club, as also performance. I think they were performance co-curators. [00:52:11]

And we tried to institute this all-queer administration at ABC No Rio. It didn't work because the litigation with the City of New York and the building structure, it was just impossible. I mean, it was too much. But they branched into other places very quickly and have come into their own. So that was kind of our first iteration of a younger generation.

And then, you know, as a demonstrable community, I would say the next was our development of a deep friendship with Stephen Kent Jusick. He came to the MIX Festival as an intern. And I think Raj had left MIX, I think Raj had probably gone on. Raj was an assistant at the Guggenheim simultaneously to being intern and the director at MIX. But shortly after Raj's directorship, Stephen started to come into prominence in a directorial role. But Stephen was also doing these events at this club called I.C. Guys, and was doing these really, super charged, high-sexy actions in clubs. It was kind of like our re-initiation to a club scene. And then in this version, it was very specifically gay clubs, queer clubs, sex clubs. So, this is kind of post-ACT UP, like post-prime ACT UP. Because we were not really super involved in the queer scene that was happening around mother—you know, the whole development, for lack of a better word, of the meat market. We what do we call it? [00:54:11]

ALEX FIALHO: Packing.

JACK WATERS: Meatpacking District. When we were in that scene, there was actually meat packing. It was like, the Anvil or whatever. There were clubs that were actually—but by this time, the club circuit had started to develop in such a way that also had been informed by ACT UP, Queer Nation, queer activism, AIDS activism, and were doing their own responses. Our closest connection to that was around, like, Clit Club, you know, Julie and Jocelyn. And so we attended, but we were exposed to it again through osmosis, through George and Hedda, like all of these younger people.

But then as we started to approach the 2000s, then there's another generation. And that comes through this circle largely fomented by Stephen Kent but then also things that are happening, I guess, post-9/11. So, we're already segueing into 2001, and we start meeting people who are even younger. [Laughs.] You know, it was very satisfying in a lot of ways because you get to kind of relive your youth over and over and over again. And this time it's through a group of people who are by and large centered around MIX, but then also what's happening around post-9/11, post-Iraq invasion, people who were coming out of NYU Gallatin and then Le Petit Versailles. You know, because Le Petit Versailles now is starting to come into its own, having started as our outdoor party center and into actual formal programming. So it becomes a hub in this new system, if you will, of new generations of youth. [00:56:20]

So it's completely different. It's like, as people develop and change and grow, people establish positions, either as pure survival in economy. You know, I mean, the capital economy is real, so if you're not getting jobs in as an artist—which is like, duh, like, never—or in commercial industry, which would by and large be, like, club. You know, club scene, which is alternative and marginal, but at the same time part and parcel to commerce. Then you're looking at what's now becoming design industry and the financial industry. So people who are queer—people of the same age as this new group of people that we're now being introduced to are of the same generation as this new body of fodder for commercial industry, which is what we had been responding to or responding against with *Short Memory/No History*. And so, we're just—we're partying, and then partying again starts to become really vital for us. [00:57:44]

So using the garden, MIX—one of the things that I feel like I was instrumental in with MIX was saying, "Okay, this is a festival; we should be having a party." You know, it was a very dry film, experimental film milieu, but the social engagement was limited. And so, I had a loft that I shared with Susan Salinger, and this is at the time that Raj was directing, so it steered into this more party atmosphere. So as time is starting to progress, new generations of people are coming in. And in addition to club life, and party scene, and introducing our artwork and then doing street art on the street again, like through demo, costume, performance, agitprop, Bread-and-Puppetry type actions that we're now able to produce at our house because we have access to our building and to the garden.

And so, we're using our building as a production studio basically. Because for the entire time that we lived there, it's just me, Carl, Kembra, David Orama. Only five units were occupied, and then the five units and the ground floor were completely unoccupied, and then we have the garden. So we transformed this into this center. It was like very guerilla, but nonetheless space. So we were doing things in clubs, but then also doing things that are sponsored and produced by people like Franklin Furnace. And this new generation now are people that are coming from NYU Gallatin, coming from anti-war activism, and a renewed interest in queer visibility. [01:00:09]

So then Peter and I become like the living history for that. So in a lot of ways, *Short Memory/No History* becomes a resource for them. If not the actual installations and iterations of it, the material itself because we're also—as we're using our building as production, Carl has pretty much moved to Los Angeles so we have his apartment. So Carl's apartment becomes our guest accommodation, so we're able to host people who don't have homes, and who by and large we're also able to engage as assistants with these ongoing archival projects with both our ephemera and our moving image.

So the living dynamic with this new generation is dance. We have a reiteration of what would have been POOL into Dancetube. Brian McPhee, who was one of the people in this group of new people that were introduced and was interested—he knew that we were trained in dance, and he was like, "Teach us to dance." And we're like, "Really? I mean, like, sure, why not?" And it kind of became a social activity and we kind of had a deliberate intention of not performing. We're like, "We're going to do this dance focus and this dance concentration, but we're going to funnel it into activism and funnel it into just our interaction. And we're definitely going to be naked, and we're definitely going to have a lot of sex around us. But we're not going to do theater. We're not going to perform it." [01:02:07]

But, of course, in short order, we just started booking all over the place. It was happening at the same time of the burgeoning of this momentum that's known as New Burlesque. And so, we first called ourselves Dance Box and then we thought, "Well, [laughs] we can't be a box. We can't be so contained." So we called our collective Dancetube. And a lot of it revolved around this physical idea, this action of using stretched fabric that kind of

called to Martha Graham's *Lamentations*. But instead of having a single figure in this stretchy material, we would just all be in this tube, and it [laughs] would be all about, "What can we do in this tube as being like a single organism? Like, how can you have—how does a group of people operate as a single organism as a metaphor for our social and political agenda?"

So that when we're not literally in the tube, we're also doing contact improv. We're doing ballet. We're renting studios so that we're actually doing ballet classes, showing them Limón technique, fall-recovery strategies, contraction-release strategies from Graham. And kind of giving them a crash course in dance, like forms of modern dance that we know, as well as classical ballet. As well as these other inter-media formats that we know just through Fluxus, through Oskar Schlemmer, these movements that precede us, which also give us the opportunity to relate them to things that are going on in visual art, in performance. [01:04:04]

And so, our politics, it's like a shot in the arm, like—

ALEX FIALHO: As well as queer politics and AIDS history and—

JACK WATERS: Yeah, queer politics. Yeah, AIDS history. So now, we have a generation that is the most vulnerable and the most subject to AIDS and HIV because it's been forgotten. The whole strategy around condoms and protection and barrier is now forgotten. So now, you're having a massive reiteration of infection, and it's kind of—you know, it's mitigated by this idea that there's medication. Because it's no longer a death sentence, so it's no longer in people's consciousness, and this is what we mean by "short memory, no history." And so, these are people, young people, who don't know. It's not that they don't know—well, they don't know, because there's no ACT UP. You know, there's no community at this point.

So, in a lot of ways, *Short Memory/No History* also becomes this locus—among other things, you know—that we're doing at this point: installations, performances, you know, we—Dancetube was also the nucleus of a theater piece I did at Theater for the New City called *Spettacolo Provolone*. And the conceit of *Spettacolo* was around these ancient constructs of gender where abductions—you know, there's Zeus, Europa. There are these metaphors that happen within classical mythology where there's always this bovine element that's seduced and abducted by either a god or another bull. And they kind of configure throughout the classical canon, as well as through India, certain parts of Asia, and Africa. [01:06:17]

So this is happening at the same time that mad cow disease is happening. And at the same time, the euro is becoming an international factor in finance. And so, the conceit behind *Spettacolo* was: What happens when the European Union becomes standardized to the point where their food product becomes as generic as American food product, like white bread, American cheese type thing? Because I'm looking at the currency, and no longer do you have these vastly differentiated color and size, but it all becomes this current, this standard. So, it's like, "Well, what's going to happen when it becomes food?"

And then I'm starting to equate it to these abduction myths. And then through the research, I'm looking at this myth of Io, goddess Io, and discover that it's basically ensconced in the trade routes along the Mediterranean, where these people that were formerly known as Philistines that we now know as Palestinians. So there are these integrations of cultures, where women become representative of colonization and control. Helen of Troy—you know, on and on, and they're ultimately, through the mythology, converted into cows. Io who's turned into a cow in order to disguise her from Hera's jealousy, but then through her wanderings ends up in Egypt, and in some readings joins the cult of Isis, and in other readings becomes Isis herself. Metis, who in Greco-Roman mythology we know as Medusa, but actually was a cult of Libyan goddess who's this black, snake-haired figure whose main attributes are snakes, which have both healing, medicinal and poisonous properties. [01:08:41]

So we configured it all in *Il Spettacolo Provolone* whose literal narrative is a talk show.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice. That evokes to me, in a tangential—but related in my brain at least—way, *Sunscreen Test Boulevard In The Sand*. And that's the way that we've work most closely together through Visual AIDS, and the talk on Fire Island, and the way that it was just an expansive, involved, performative tour, talk, extravaganza in some ways. And then also, I'm thinking in relationship to Dancetube, your work around *Lost & Found*, and the Danspace platform, and the way that *AIDS OS* as a title referencing medium OS and tube in a computer-literate generation, how that sort of dovetailed or—I'm seeing through-lines across the work.

JACK WATERS: Yeah, yeah. Well, like—

ALEX FIALHO: So, I guess, let's talk a little bit about recent projects in and around AIDS, particularly in relationship to Visual AIDS or how this organization where we're sitting in the office might have informed your work, or you've been in close contact with us. I'm keen to know more. [01:10:04]

JACK WATERS: Well, my involvement with Visual AIDS happens almost from the very beginning. I guess there was this point where my three films—*The Male GaZe*, *Berlin/New York*—I can't remember. There were three

titles that were chosen by the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, and I believe the Estate Project had a correlation to the beginnings of Visual AIDS. Because I think there was the Estate Project, which wanted to preserve the works of people first who were dying or had died, and then there was the Archive Project. And then I think they were both kind of amalgamated here at Visual AIDS. So our participation in those were happening from the very beginning of their formulation and, you know, has been a resource and support for us from early on, like even before Visual AIDS was Visual AIDS.

I think at a point when, I guess, it was not—it was before Amy. You know, we were invited to do one of the online exhibitions, and I think we kind of integrated the *Short Memory/No History* thematic in that, to some extent. But then we started—you know, we were—you know, a lot of our identity as artists is also problematic in a lot of ways, because Visual AIDS, at least traditionally, has been by and large driven as visual art. And we're not painters, you know, we're not sculptors. So even though that's always been a part of our output, we, from very early on, started to contribute to the Registry. [01:12:22]

A lot of times, the Registry may have been artifacts or documentations of performative things or stills from film. Peter has always been super engaged in photography, you know, would have his photographs as being represented. But then also because we operate curatorially, and as presenters, and as community builders, those echelons of performative behavior start to factor into our participation in things and projects that Visual AIDS does. And I feel Visual AIDS, like many institutions, are also starting to be able to grasp the inter-disciplinarianism of art production, of art product, so that's no longer such an issue. And so, it means that our participation is also a lot more fluid and easier to do. Hence, you know, bringing the iteration of *Short Memory/No History*, I think, we did *Not Over*.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. The 25-year anniversary exhibition for Visual AIDS.

JACK WATERS: Yeah. And in a lot of ways, *Not Over*, we thought was a natural part of the art of the *Short Memory/No History*, because we're emphasizing this lapse of memory and recognition of AIDS, then *Not Over* reifies that in a big way because—yeah, because it's not over. So our contribution was doing an iteration of *Short Memory/No History* is part of that exhibition. [01:14:27]

You know, they are, like, offshoots, which have to do with our representation in other archives like Fales, where we had Valerie Caris, who was a proponent of ABC No Rio. And that we participated as artists, but as artists, as archivists, type of thing, which is also a very nice juxtaposition. Because so much of work has been archivally oriented with this idea of remembrance, and iteration, and implantation of AIDS and HIV as a cultural fact. And so, *Not Over*—we did *Short Memory/No History*, which again became largely functional in the same way that it was functional in Zurich as a de facto studio.

At *Not Over*, it became functional as a locus for video. It basically functioned as a lounge, and as a receptacle and a repository for other works to happen within it. But at the same time, it contains the CD-ROM that archives and documents and critiques this queer AIDS activism in publication. And then it's also—we excerpt the *Short Memory/No History* video, but in addition to that, we're using the projector that's in our installation as being the projection of other works within that. So, it's like, a piece and not a piece. [01:16:23]

And it's kind of interesting how people respond to that, because Ariel Goldberg was very keen to it as being a work. And in fact, her written response to it is almost exclusively to it as a work. But then there was someone else who we were recently introduced to, Phillip Aarons, and we know him by sharing the archives of *My Comrade Sister*, which came as a result of our participating in last year's Printed Matter Expo. So, Phil [laughs]—like, we were explaining *Short Memory/No History*. Somehow from *My Comrade* that conversation developed into *Short Memory/No History*—or maybe it was about *Not Over*. But they are all of these things that correlated. And he knew the installation, but he wasn't responding to it as a piece. And so, as we talk to him, you could see it jelling as I'm going, "Oh."

His interest, I think, was as a repository of archives, and I think that was his experience of it because he was probably looking through the collection of materials that we had there. And I think that's great because these things can be multi-functional. But I think for Visual AIDS, the primary function of it was to be basically a video lounge. And so, it worked across the board, as an archive, as a video lounge, and as an installation for us. So, yeah. It's like, these iterations are very site-specific and—[01:18:27]

ALEX FIALHO: I think about the similar sort of stage setup that was in *Ephemera As Evidence*, the Visual AIDS exhibition at La MaMa as well, in relationship to José Esteban Muñoz's legacy, and your piece sort of functioned as a stage set in some ways, and also installation for other performances.

JACK WATERS: Right. It's kind of a trick. Like, it's sort of a—it's similar to what I was telling you about with *The Male GaYze* where you kind of trick people into thinking.

ALEX FIALHO: So, as a way to wind us down, you know, I want to acknowledge that we've been talking for quite

a long time. And I'm also really remiss to think about things that have almost even fallen out, like Film-Makers' Coop. I was curious about Barbara Hammer and *Nitrate Kisses*, talking more about Stephen Winter and your star role in *Jason and Shirley*. And I think that just points to the polymath that you are in the ways that your work, and your performance histories, and your involvement in so many creative communities, stretches really widely. And that's immensely impressive, and that's what happens when you have a decades-and-decades-and-decades-long career. So, I'm both impressed and excited about how much we've covered, and also realizing how many other directions one can go when talking to you about the range of your work. So, that felt like just something that I'm experiencing as part of this process with you. [01:20:00]

But I think to wind us down, I'm curious—and this is a big question—but to think about questions of legacy or future and history. Maybe, how would you like your art to be viewed in the future? Or what do you think your contributions as an American artist have been? But in particular, for a future audience, what might you like for them to have as a frame around your practice?

JACK WATERS: That's a really good question, because I look at my art as a conversation. I think that the people who receive and perceive it in its ideal modes get integrated into it. I'm very big on the notion that art as a profession is very new in Western culture, and very specific to Western culture. Like, the idea of art and art-making as being something that's separate from other aspects of life, it's really strange and very unusual and very new. Because aesthetic practice, spiritual practice, social engagement, social involvement—these things that are of a life that extend beyond the physical realm, but where the physical realm is obviously a very integral part of—is part and parcel to what my goals and agendas are.

So, when I think about how I want things to be remembered, I feel like I shouldn't be the one to dictate that. Because the conversation—because even posthumous recognition and realization become part of an extended conversation. It's this idea—you know, I mean, I'm going to die. You know, we all die. What do we leave on Earth? [01:22:12]

I talked about being raised in Ethical Culture. It's religion. It's legally a religion, but it's not—and it's theological at its base, but it's not really concerned with afterlife or deity. You learn about that. It doesn't necessarily profess against it, but it's about what we do here on Earth, like, what we do. We know that we live on this existence. I talked about my parents, and my mother's relationship to agnosticism, and my father's atheism. And the Ethical Society teaches you that the only afterlife that we can really know about, for sure, is how we're remembered after we're gone. So that's how I look at my work.

Whether I want my work to dictate or imprint anything, I would say, "Yeah." You know, I mean, I won't deny that I have an ego. I question this idea, and I think about it a lot, about how I'm remembered. Legacy is really weird. Legacy is really problematic for me, because I feel that legacy is one of the dynamics that focus around possession, acquisition, property, and then into the very dynamics of heteronormality that we—in other words, this idea of ownership. That like, after you die, what you leave behind you becomes yours. [01:24:02]

You know, there's an element of ownership that happens. And you look at it in dynastic terms, where kingdoms, inheritance, all of these things, like, names, especially surnames. This whole idea of a surname, which is basically the indefinite, intergenerational, infinite possession of a male. You know, his name become his wife's name, and that name become the children's names, and those children become their children's names. And then there's property involved, and there's money involved. And I think as far as aesthetic legacy, I don't think it can or should be separated from these materialistic constructs.

And so, when I think of what my legacy is, you know, I'm compelled to leave traces. My values and my ideals, I believe in very strongly. I do, I think, have an embedded faith that there are things that exist beyond ourselves. But when I speak of ourselves in the plural, it kind of hints—more than hints, but deliberately references these ideas of Asian philosophy, indigenous philosophies, where we are all part of this single spirit.

And so, my work—and I have a lot of problems with this as well, because I often speak in the plural. And this has to do with collectivism, and this idea that I don't own my work, and anything that may have been generated or that I think I may have generated—you know, we talked about the [sub -JW] title of *Short Memory/No History*, [*Cultural Amnesia* -JW] and I was like, "I don't know if we came up with it or we got it from Penny Arcade." But it doesn't matter. [01:26:13]

So the relics and the artifacts that I leave behind both physically and idealistically, ideologically, are things that I do. This is my work. This is what I feel like I'm here for. And so, how much I engrave those values and those aesthetics and those ideals into those material repositories, or into the repositories of my interactions with people—you know, as we were talking about with our relationships with younger generations, that's legacy. I mean, this is how I see legacy, but it's not up to me, and I have no control.

I have control over certain things. I like to think of things—you know, I'm very systemic in a lot of ways. And a lot of that relationship to system has to do with natural phenomenon. I think often that, like, you can't control the

waves, and you can't control the wind, but we've learned to surf, and we've learned to navigate. So, once you understand what they are, you can move in a direction that you want to go through, by tacking or other forms of navigation. And this has been done for thousands and thousands of years. And I think aesthetics and life of the spirit happens in the same way that there are waves, that there are resonances, and that there are energies that are just there. [01:28:09]

And I think science talks about this. Like metaphysics, you know, just the whole focus and concentration on metaphysics. This idea that art and science and spirituality are separate practices, again, is very new, this idea of shamanism, et cetera. We know that people are adept at different things, so I feel that these are gifts. And I feel very privileged, and I feel very lucky, but I also feel very responsible. Because if I'm imbued with things that people find valuable or things that I myself feel are valuable through the agency of communication and congress with other people, then it becomes a responsibility for me to be as true to it as possible by whatever means necessary.

So I often wish that I could be more direct and more specific. And I kind of learned things through my involvement with, like, archival strategies, with library arts, through finance, economics, through public relations. Like, all of these tools that we have, basically, to navigate and relate and to exist as a culture. Because it's probably not a good idea—like, rapid destruction is probably not a great idea without some kind of modification. But destroying things and eliminating things also starts to become part of the cycle of re-initiation and reengagement. [01:30:06]

So I look, again, to the world of nature, the natural phenomena. Things die, people die, but in a lot of those endings become the beginning, hopefully. Like, ideally become beginnings. And then if they don't, they are periods of rest. Where you have, okay, erasure. Where you have void. But I believe there's always the possibility for these things to regenerate somehow. As long there's consciousness, there's creativity. And so, I think my responsibility—I don't know how long my consciousness exists, what happens beyond my physical existence. But in my transference of what I know, and what I love, and what I believe in—as long as it's something that I feel in mutual agreement, as something that's being by and large, and by consensus, to be determined from time to time or whenever, then this is what I'll continue to do.

So, legacy gets to be really tricky. It becomes—it gets really tricky for me, because it's all around possession. You know, there's something—it begs notions of containment and possession, that on one hand while I'm compelled towards it, I also resist it. And so, I have to have a continuing dialogue and negotiation with myself and with other people about what that means.

I wish I could be more concrete.

ALEX FIALHO: It makes complete sense. And I like that it looped back to where we even started. So it sounds like an oral history to me. Thank you very much. [01:32:07]

JACK WATERS: Done.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]