

# **A C T U P O R A L H I S T O R Y P R O J E C T**

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**Interviewee: Loring McAlpin**

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**Interviewer: Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project  
Interview of Loring McAlpin  
August 18, 2008

**SARAH SCHULMAN: Okay, so you look at me. Hello.**

LORING McALPIN: Hello, Sarah.

**SS: So we start, if you could just say your name, your age, where we are, and today's date.**

LM: I'm Loring McAlpin. It is August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008. We're at my apartment, 39 Great Jones Street, in NoHo.

**SS: And your age.**

LM: And I'm 48.

**SS: Okay, great. So, the tapes are 40 minutes long. And we usually do the first tape about who you were before you came to ACT UP. And then we get into the whole ACT UP history. Okay?**

**So where were you born?**

LM: I was born in New York City. My mother was eight months pregnant, and my parents had come into the city to see some Scottish Highland dancing at the old Madison Square Garden, and were spending the night in the Gotham Hotel, which was on 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. And I was born in the hotel room, delivered by my father, in Manhattan, even though they lived in New Jersey.

**SS: So you're a New Yorker, by accident.**

LM: I'm technically a New Yorker, even though I then grew up in New Jersey and Michigan, and went to part of high school in New Hampshire. But mostly in and around New York City.

**SS: Okay. And what did your parents do for a living?**

LM: My father was a Presbyterian minister. My mother was a homemaker. My father was, his first congregation was a mixed-race church in Princeton, New Jersey, where he grew up; which, in 19-, it must have been about 1960 — maybe actually slightly before 1960 — was an unusual thing for somebody of his class to go into a – actually, until he had been the minister there, was primarily a black church. So he was involved with the civil rights movement, and in a kind of very liberal, Presbyterian expression of his faith. And that was transmitted to me as a child, and I think to my siblings.

**SS: What enabled him to make that transition?**

LM: Well, he was a child of inherited wealth. And on some level, he had the freedom to make choices like that, to devote himself to working for social justice. I also think that he was somebody who experienced difficulties personally; his parents divorced when he was a youngster. And so I think that the church provided a certain kind of solace for him. And he organized his life around the church, and trying to work towards improving not only his own lot, but the lot of people who were quite different from him.

His father was an investment banker, and wanted, his idea of what my father would do with his life – he accepted that my father was going to divinity school, and I think he thought that my father would end up at a Presbyterian church in Riverside; you know, a very prominent church. And my father decided not to do that. He chose his own path.

But that was his background. And as I said, in certain ways, if I had followed the logic of both of my parents' families, I would have been an investment

banker or pursuing some kind of career that was more in the mainstream. But I think because of my father's choices, and the way that he raised us, that was not my path.

**SS: And how did your mother end up stepping out of her milieu in that way?**

LM: Oh, that's a much longer interview, heh heh. My mother was born – lost her hearing at a very young age. And even though she could hear with hearing aids, because of when she grew up, and because of the family environment that she was in, she was extremely sheltered. In certain ways – I think that removed her from her class, as well. And in marrying my father – in certain ways, they were both removed from their class, as a result of various – I think mostly family histories.

So she was fine being a minister's wife, and moving to Michigan, where we grew up. My father had a church in East Detroit, when we were living in Michigan, for seven years.

And – I'm struggling with your question, about how my mother was able to do that. I guess ultimately, she lived through my father and didn't – it was enough for her to follow his choices and his life. So whether or not she – she was fulfilled by having a family, really. She defined herself through her relations with us, and not so much through identification with maybe where she came from.

**SS: So growing up in Princeton, New Jersey in the '60s; right?**

LM: Well actually, mostly I grew up in Detroit. We moved to Detroit when I was three, until 10. So that was kind of my primary school. And then we moved back to New Jersey.

**SS: And you went to high school in New Jersey?**

LM: I went to high school in New Jersey for one year, and then I went to a boarding school in New Hampshire.

**SS: Okay, so you were separated from your family for your education.**

LM: Yes. Yeah.

**SS: Okay. So during the '60s and early '70s, in this period of great social transformation: How did your environment, whether it was with your family or at boarding school – how were they interpreting those events? Did you feel that you were seeing them differently than the people around you? Or did you feel that there was some kind of unity of experience of what was going on?**

LM: With my family?

**SS: Well, because you were living in two different environments. So with your family, and then with your school environment.**

LM: Let me see. In my school environment, being in a boarding school in New Hampshire, it was quite a sheltered environment. Although it was an extremely liberal school, and there were a lot of scholarship kids from the inner cities. So in certain ways, the boarding school I went to was more diverse than day school in Princeton, New Jersey. I'm trying to think. That was 1976 through '78. I don't think I was particularly politically active, although inclined to align myself with whatever underdog there was out there.

I'd say the first time that I really felt myself becoming sensitized as more of a politically active person would have been, I went to art school in San Francisco, in 1980. I went to Princeton. I left for two years, a year and a half, because I wanted to go

to art school, and I wanted to come out, and I knew that I was not going to be able to do that, or I felt that I couldn't do that comfortably in the confines of Princeton. So I left.

I had a hard time coming out, even in San Francisco, which at that time seemed like the gayest place in the entire universe. But I had a teacher there, named Reagan Louie –

**SS: Oh, you went to the Art Institute.**

LM: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah, okay.**

LM: – and he was a photography teacher, but his classes were much broader than photography. And he exposed me to the work of photographers who were working less in a strictly formal way, and thinking more about the social world. And that probably did more than anything, in terms of my education, to get me thinking more about that.

But – in terms of, once again, the unity of my family experience; I'm pretty much a black sheep in my broader family, and even in my family. My brother and I are very different. He's much more identified with my grandfather – this is a much longer story. But – I'd say that there is, my father's a politically very liberal person, and there is some unity there.

The gay – the other thing is just being gay, I think, provided the occasion for me to just look at the world very critically, and try and understand where I fit into it, and what was taken for granted, and what was not taken for granted. So I think that separated me from other people who would have grown up in the same educational sort of framework that I grew up in.

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**SS: Um hm. I want to talk more about your training as an artist. So you're saying that — I'm really familiar with the Art Institute, and Reagan Louie, and I know that he's been influential on many people — would you say that the idea of being a citizen of the world was integrated into how you were trained as an artist? And if that's an overstatement —**

LM: Well, he, I studied with him for I think only one semester. And then there were a variety of other teachers there who taught other things. But I think sometimes it's — one person can have a profound influence on you. He certainly encouraged that. Other teachers were less focused on that. I also studied with Emmet Gowin at Princeton. And even though he had, I think, less of a focus on looking at the world as a social and political ecology, he was also somebody who encouraged — you to express yourself as a full person. And so even though his approach was less explicit and perhaps programmatic, he encouraged that. And I think of him also as somebody who was not very geared towards the mechanisms of art production, meaning the market —

**SS: Right.**

LM: — in the way that I think a lot of art schools now — you're being trained into how to fit into that system. Neither of those teachers were looking at that at all.

And I'm just trying to think of your question about the Art Institute; could you say that that was, as an institution, somehow reflective of the Art Institute? I'm not really sure. I know there was, I think there was a lot of interesting things going on there. There was performance, there was writing; it was much more interdisciplinary, for the time. But — I'm not sure. It could have just been that one teacher who kind of —

**SS: Right.**

LM: – influenced me in that way.

**SS: So as your art practice was developing, and you were coming out, did the two things come together immediately? Or were they at first separate?**

LM: They came together immediately, actually. And one project that I did, which, it was, I think I was actually studying with Reagan. And he asked everyone to do something that we had never done photographically, to work in a mode that was entirely unfamiliar to us. And for me, that was shooting on the street, because I never had done that. I felt uncomfortable with it. I thought it was voyeuristic; and just the politics of that made me uneasy.

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So I started to photograph on the street. And my idea was that I was going to engage in a relationship with people, and then ask them to take their photograph. So try and overcome what I saw were certain shortcomings of just roaming the streets, and kind of grabbing people's image, without any kind of consent.

And I started to do that, and I noticed that the people that I felt comfortable doing that with were women; younger people; people of color. I could, I mean it was, it was hard for me, because in certain ways, I can be a shy person, I'm not an extroverted person. But in doing that, I came up with photographs that were really pretty uninteresting. And I started looking at why I had such a hard time confronting certain kinds of people. And they were white men of privilege. And I started photographing them. And I ended up with a series of photographs of them that were very, were pushing the exact thing that I disliked about street photography, kind of to an extreme. Which was, I started stalking them. So I did not ask them for permission. I

would position myself in places where I would catch them, very close up, with a flash.

And they became my prey.

Now at the same time, that was exactly the time that I was coming out.

And I think there was a way in which that was my confronting heterosexism, and probably all the patriarchy in my family, and kind of saying, like, I'm not you.

So in that way, in that study that I did – and also, kind of rejecting certain range of choices that I think my family would have logically liked to see me go in.

So even though there was nothing explicitly gay about that, it did seem to be very much aligned with what I was going through personally, in terms of my sexuality, that that happened.

**SS: But was that technique similar to your street cruising technique, or was it –**

LM: What do you mean, my street cruising technique?

**SS: Like how you would meet men on the street –**

LM: I, well I, at that point, I was still – I mean, I was 20 years old. I was not a street cruiser.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

LM: So, no; it was very different. And there was very little interaction I actually had with those people that I photographed. For the time, it sort of aligned with a kind of zeitgeist. People really responded to them, because – I think it was, we were just going into the Reagan years, and – I never felt that those, they were quite expressionistic photographs. They were not really about those people; they were about what I was going through; or about “the businessman,” and trying to sort of, in some way, maybe even

latch into a kind of, the ruthlessness of a world of suits. You could do that; you could treat them as if they were prey.

I tried it, for one week, I tried doing the same thing with the wives, I suspect, of these guys, in a parking garage in Union Square, where they would all go. They were, the fancy stores were there. And I remember just feeling really that was such a wrong, such a bad thing to do; quite unfair.

Now, that's probably a little too simplistic. It probably wasn't fair to do it either of them. But to get back to your original question: there was a way in which my art practice then felt very connected to what I was going through, in terms of coming out, and confronting certain kinds of fears and expectations that I felt I had to break through.

**SS: Now when you finished at the Art Institute, did you stay in San Francisco?**

LM: No, I went back to Princeton. I finished my degree –

**SS: Oh my goodness.**

LM: – there.

**SS: That must have been strange.**

LM: It was very strange. Although – I think I needed to do that, for a variety of reasons. I just needed to finish that. I never left Princeton with the idea that I would leave it, and it was a very hard transition going back. Because at that point, when I came back, I had been out for a year and a half. And even though that was very much an evolving process, that took a decade, in some sense, to get through; going back to Princeton – while I didn't closet myself, it meant that I didn't have quite the same support for a gay identity. And my personal friends were supportive, but you know, socially and

– I’m trying to think if I was politically involved in San Francisco. I probably – I was sort of marginally involved in certain things that had to do with the school. But it meant – it felt like I was stepping back, in certain ways.

And then at Princeton, I didn’t have the same kind of support aesthetically that I had at the Art Institute. Even though Emmet Gowin was a wonderful teacher, and I ended up doing work that was much more personal – actually, that businessman series evolved into part of my senior thesis; that was an element of it.

Many of the students at Princeton – you often find students emulating what their teachers are doing. And there was a whole kind of cult at Princeton in the Photography Department then about using a large-format camera, and doing work that was very similar to Emmet’s. And I had really moved in a very different direction. And while he was supportive of me — very supportive, and I had a great rapport with him — I felt I was working just by myself there. And – that was all right.

**SS: So when you graduated, is that when you moved to New York?**

LM: I moved to New York about seven months after I graduated. I traveled for awhile. I moved back to New York. And I really didn’t have much of an artistic outlet for a few years. And I had dismissed graduate school when I was an undergraduate. Kind of thinking, well, I don’t really need to be studying under anyone anymore. What I underestimated, of course, was just the kind of structure that graduate school provides, in terms of giving you a community, and – a structure to continue practicing. And so in a way, ACT UP, and then Gran Fury, that I got involved in, was – a way that I reconnected to doing art, and being involved aesthetically, and politically, in something. It was a very nice way that a lot of things came together for me in New York,

after spending, at that point, a year or two not really feeling like I had found a place for myself, in terms of developing that. So –

**SS: What year did you –**

LM: – I was very fortunate. I felt like ACT UP really answered those needs. As well as many others. I mean, just the whole issue of what to do when AIDS was happening all around all of us. And –

**SS: Well, let's situate you. So what year did you come back to the city?**

LM: I came back into the city in, it would have been – '84, I think.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: Yeah, '84.

**SS: And when did you become aware of the AIDS crisis?**

LM: I became aware of the, of AIDS the week I came out. Because –

**SS: In San Francisco.**

LM: In San Francisco.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: The very week that I decided, okay, I'm coming out; I'm going to tell friends and family; there was, I think it was in the Voice, the first article. And at that point, it was, I don't think, they didn't even have a name for it. I think it was even pre-GRID. It was just a little tiny thing about a gay cancer.

And because I was in San Francisco at the time — and that was a very active community — I remember, at that time, there was this thing that I was aware of. And that would have been 1981? So I was aware of it. And even in 1983, when I

graduated from college, I remember having a discussion with friends that summer, about – us trying to figure out how transmission worked. So I was aware of it, pretty early on.

**SS: When did it first really come into your life directly?**

LM: {LONG PAUSE} Mm, Hard to say – I was aware of people becoming ill and dying as early as '83 and '84. And I think it was about '85 that I had a friend who was diagnosed. So – or maybe that was '86. But it would have been '85, '86 that I felt directly connected to it, through a friend.

**SS: Now at that time, before you got to ACT UP, had you ever been involved in any kind of mass political movement before?**

LM: Not particularly, no. I – at Princeton, there were anti-apartheid activities, and I would join a rotating protest line. But not in any serious way, no.

**SS: Okay. So how did you get to ACT UP?**

LM: That's an excellent question. I started going to meetings in the fall of – now my chronology is – I would have been – when did it start?

**SS: Jim is the timeline expert.**

**JIM HUBBARD: March of '87.**

LM: Okay, I would have been going, I started dropping in to meetings in around September; I would go to one or two. I knew about it; I felt like this is a place that I should be. At that point, I had volunteered at the GMHC Hotline. I'd been doing a little bit of work there. I started going to meetings in the fall. Yeah, so it would have been '87.

**SS: And what was your first impression, if you can think back?**

LM: It was – my first impression was just excitement about finding a place where I could be not only social, but political, and address some of the fears that I had about what I could do about the AIDS crisis; but also, a place where I could go and get information. And I think – I'm not sure I was going regularly in the beginning. I didn't know anyone in the group. And I think I started to get Daniel Wolfe involved at about that time.

**SS: Oh, you knew him from Princeton, is that –**

LM: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: Oh.**

LM: Daniel and I were friends from Princeton.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: And then – I heard about the window project, *Let the Record Show*. And I, I was actually not directly involved with that. I went and helped de-install that installation. And so I –

**SS: Can you explain what that was?**

LM: *Let the Record Show* was an installation project that ACT UP did in the fall — I think it was around November and December — of 1987. Bill Olander was a curator at the New Museum. And he offered the window space on Broadway to ACT UP, to do something in. So a group of people came together. They did an installation that combined a couple different elements. One was the neon sign for Silence Equals Death. Which at that point, the Silence Equals Death project had come up with. But we, with their permission, appropriated that. We had an LED board that was filled with statistics about the epidemic, the scope of the epidemic. I think it was mostly

information. And then we had a kind of rogues' gallery of very public figures who had made statements about AIDS that were extremely – that were bad. And we cast some of those quotations in concrete, and we had a large photomural behind them of the Nuremberg trials. And the whole thing was called *Let the Record Show*.

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So that got a bunch of people together. It was probably one of the very first events in the art world to focus attention on AIDS, certainly in a political, explicitly political way. I think it was successful. The New Museum was very supportive. And as a result of that, the people that worked on that decided to continue working together as a collective to produce material that was similar, in an ongoing way, that could support ACT UP and sort of amplify various political –

**SS: Okay. I have a lot of questions about that event.**

LM: Okay.

**SS: Was Bill Olander out as a PWA when he commissioned that?**

LM: That I don't know.

**SS: How much money was the commission? Do you know?**

LM: See, since I came in at the very end, I don't know. I, I would imagine, just from the way we always operated, that the commission was simply supporting the production. So that they would have assisted in the fabrication costs of the neon signs, and in materials and things like that. I don't think they gave us a fee. And I'm, Gran Fury really never got fees for doing work.

**SS: But you didn't have to fund-raise for the materials.**

LM: I, I don't think we did. I think that was underwritten by the New Museum. Although you might want to ask somebody who was more involved from the

beginning about that, exactly. But my sense is that they probably covered the production costs. And they were not great. It was – we did a lot, a lot of work was done by people – it was actually quite a large group that chipped in to do that.

**SS: Can you tell me as many names as you can recall, for those involved in that?**

LM: Well, I remember there was one guy who did a lot of work with this cement, who was a really wonderful man, named Don Ruddy; who I think passed away, who did the concrete work. He did sort of terrazzo, and a lot of concrete, as a fabricator. My memory is terrible. I will, I could list off Gran Fury people that I know were involved. Michael Nesline, Avram Finkelstein, Tom Kalin, Mark Simpson, I know were involved. But I would have to get back to you about a broader list.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: I knew there were more people.

**SS: I want to ask you a lot about the politics of accountability. Because a lot of the artwork that Gran Fury and ACT UP produced involved showing the faces and saying the names of specific individuals who were obstructing progress in relationship to AIDS. Were you involved in any discussions – do you remember discussing the decision to do that, or what was behind that impulse?**

LM: I was not involved in the discussions that surrounded that particular work. But certainly, just in a general sense, I think that ACT UP, and Gran Fury as well, one of our primary motives was to call the question of accountability into the public sphere. Because no one in the media was doing that. I don't remember there being a lot of hair-pulling about that issue. And I think the people that were chosen were, they were

people who had said some pretty reprehensible things, so I think there was a sense that they were fair game.

In terms of us having thoughts about, you mean about liability, or –

**SS: No, no, just –**

LM: Just, just –

**SS: – that impulse.**

LM: – those sorts of issues. Yeah – but, to be honest, I didn't, I wasn't involved in the discussion around that. And I'm trying to think if later on, if we, to what extent we continued to do that. I think – after that, I don't think Gran Fury did a lot of finger-pointing. Or we did with, actually, Giuliani and other people.

**SS: And Reagan.**

LM: Yeah. I don't recall a lot –

**SS: Let me tell you what I'm getting at, and what I kind of want us to talk about. There were people who were our Public Enemy Number Ones, in ACT UP: Cardinal Ratzinger, Jesse Helms. History has not, those people have not been historicized in the light of how we experienced them. When Jesse Helms just died, he was described in very benign ways. It's our pointing the finger at who they were, telling the truth about who they were, did not translate into how they have been remembered. And I'm just wondering what our impulse was, and why that hasn't communicated.**

**What did you feel when Jesse Helms died?**

LM: What did I feel? I'm trying to think if I had any – I had a feeling of – I wouldn't say relief. I didn't have a lot of feeling around it, I have to say. I was aware of

his death. I didn't jump up and down, and shout for joy. And I didn't really read any of the coverage around it, frankly. So maybe in my mind, some of that did stick. Because if I had read it, maybe I would have seen that there was none of that there. I'm trying to see if I really feel like the only response that we generated was to mobilize a certain amount of public and political energy to the crisis, while not holding anyone accountable, if we kind of failed in that way. I'm not really sure.

Certainly, if you looked at Jesse Helms, the arc of his political career, do you think that he had the same kind of power and influence after 1990, '91 that he did before? Or do you think some of that did erode?

**SS: I don't know about that. But look at the choice of Nuremberg imagery. Right? What does that – the impulse to have an image of Nuremberg in that installation, isn't there some kind of wish being expressed that there will be a time when there will be a hearing, and these people will be made to be accountable for what they've done? That's never happened.**

LM: Well, I think there are two things going on. One is the wish that there will be some final justice served. But I have to say, I think the other thing that's being expressed there is rage, and theatricality. So in a sense, I would say that was just as operative. And that served us well. I think it was – we were making a media campaign. And who knows how many people recognize the Nuremberg trial? And I think probably many people didn't even get that. Maybe the art writers got it, for *Artforum*. But some people got it. But for us, I think it matched the rage that we felt, and so it kept us engaged in it. And I think having those figures – I think if we really wanted to have justice served, we – if that was our primary motive – we would have been more strategic

about reaching that end. But I think we were more interested in rallying a broader attention to the whole epidemic, and getting a response, getting our needs met.

So I think if we really wanted to press for accountability – I like to think that we would have handled it in a different way. Do you see what I'm saying?

**SS: Yeah.**

LM: And I think it was effective. I think, as much as we would have wanted justice to have been served, our primary concern was to just get the government to start doing things that it needed to do, in terms of addressing the epidemic. And so we were, you know, I think we were successful in that regard.

**SS: Okay.**

**JAMES WENTZY: Can you hold that thought –**

**SS: We have to change –**

**SS: Okay, so go ahead.**

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LM: I just had two thoughts. I don't think you look to obits for a final accounting. I remain hopeful that biographers, in treating people like Jesse Helms, will handle his accountability in the AIDS crisis with more rigor than maybe an obituary in the *New York Times* will do. But I think rage makes people uncomfortable. And that means the popular press. And I think ACT UP used rage in very strategic and important ways. But to the extent that we did use that, I think we were not embraced in certain media, and there will be some people who don't – that makes them uncomfortable.

**SS: So would you say that the characteristic that people who joined ACT UP had in common was that they were willing to be uncomfortable?**

LM: That they wanted to be uncomfortable?

**SS: They were willing.**

LM: They were willing to make other people uncomfortable, yes, and willing to be enraged. And there were discussion in Gran Fury, certainly, about whether or not we were going too far. And there were fights about it, about whether certain strategies were just carrying it too far.

**SS: Can you give an example?**

LM: And there were – and there were even certain projects that were taken outside of Gran Fury because Gran Fury said, you know what? This makes us uncomfortable. I think there was the famous issue that was done for Gay Pride, by a splinter group, with the gun. Remember that issue? It was – and I can't remember what the tag line was. But it was –

**SS: I Hate Straights, that one?**

LM: I Hate Straights. I think that came up as a discussion in Gran Fury. And it just didn't take there; just using that imagery made people uncomfortable, and so that was taken outside of Gran Fury, and –

**SS: I want to ask you a question about that. Was it because the people in Gran Fury didn't feel that way, or because they felt it was bad marketing, or was a bad strategy for Gran Fury?**

LM: Well, I think it was both. I don't know whether certain people actually hated straight people. I tend to think that it was hyperbole of the way people actually felt. But I think, yeah, I think so, on one level, I think not many people in Gran Fury were willing to say, I hate straight people categorically. And I think they just thought that it was bad marketing, that it could backfire. And I think to some extent, I

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don't know whether that backfired or not. It certainly started a discussion, and you might say that was productive. But I'm not really sure what the final – whether you can even tally that, whether it was productive or not. So I would say, primarily I think it was, people just had a question of whether it was just too inflammatory to try and – not that, there was something there that people wanted to address in some way; but just thought that that was too inflammatory, that the discussion would then end up being about the tactic, rather than the ways in which straight people oppress gays and lesbians.

I think in that case, also, it was not really hooked to an AIDS issue as clearly as other things. Because wasn't that around the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall?

**SS: Yes.**

LM: I think that was.

**SS: How did you feel at the height of the AIDS crisis, when straight people were not en masse involved?**

LM: I didn't take it personally. How did I feel? I felt enraged and angry when we were empowered as a group, demonstrating, at the NIH or the FDA or on Wall Street. I can't say that I walked around hating straight people. And there were times when I felt that I wanted to announce that to a straight world, throw it in their face. I remember going to jury duty at a certain point. And in the initial interview process, where they asked about you, I remember being very clear to talk about my AIDS activism. And of course that got me thrown off the jury –

**SS: Of course!**

LM: – immediately, which was really not my objective, because I actually wanted to get on the jury. And I don't think I did that the next time, because I wanted to

get on the jury. But for me, that's a hard pose to carry, that's a hard thing to carry around. It's exhausting. So I don't think personally I walked around hating straight people, in general.

I also felt like it was – I felt like the people it affected were getting involved. And there were straight people who were coming to our rallies, and were getting involved, and I was more appreciative of their sense of solidarity than I was, I think, angry at straight people, as a category.

**SS: Okay. So let's get back to the New Museum.**

LM: Okay.

**SS: So this installation was there. You were involved in installing it.**

LM: I was actually there – I was involved in de-installing it.

**SS: Oh, oh.**

LM: I came to de-install it, and that's – because I had heard about this group, and for whatever reason, I can't remember why, I wasn't involved. I think I just wasn't going regularly enough in the fall, and hadn't just sort of thrown myself into it. But when I started getting involved in de-installing it, and then going to the next meetings, about what we're going to do next; that's really when I started going to meetings regularly, and I just kind of dived in.

So in a way, I think maybe just going to the weekly meetings didn't – I needed to be involved in a subcommittee to make it work for me. I was not the kind of person that threw myself into discussions on the floor, even though I was a regular meeting attendee later on. I just needed to get involved in a smaller group of people, and that's what I did.

**SS: But then you become hardcore Gran Fury, right? It became a way of life.**

LM: Then I became part of the group there, and went, we had weekly meetings, and when we were involved in projects, more often than that. And that was – yeah, kind of where I did the most work, in Gran –

**SS: Can you sort of –**

LM: – in ACT UP.

**SS: – describe a Gran Fury meeting? Like, where it would be, who was there, how it would operate?**

LM: They tended to be weekly. They would either be at somebody's house, or at their workplace. And they rotated around. After I think about a year, or maybe a year and a half, of having it be an open group, there was a core group of about ten of us, and we decided to basically close Gran Fury. Because it was very difficult, in the beginning, working with people who would come in and come out. And then when we were more closely aligned with ACT UP, we'd have to present our idea to the floor, and then you'd have 350 people weighing in. I think in terms of group dynamics, seven to ten is about, is really an ideal number. Because when you get bigger than that, it's just much harder to process things.

And people resented that. And I can understand some of that, especially people who really wanted to do work like that and felt that they were not allowed to. But – it wasn't something that we did lightly. We certainly didn't do it to exclude anybody. And there was, for the people that were there, they were the people that had showed up consistently, and we included everyone who had done that over that initial year period.

**SS: And how much time was it before you closed the group?**

LM: I think it was maybe about a year, actually.

**SS: Okay. That's –**

LM: And that involved the Nine Days of Actions. We were still open then, and people were coming in. I can't remember the exact moment that we closed it. But it was about a year.

**SS: All right, so let's focus on that first, and then let's talk about the period after you closed it. So when it was open, and after the New Museum; do you remember what the next project was?**

LM: Gosh, I should have brought the – somewhere, I have a chronology. I think I could find that, if you wanted me to –

**SS: That's okay.**

LM: – do that. Okay.

**SS: Tell me one of –**

LM: I'm just thinking of –

**SS: – your favorite projects.**

LM: – we did – When a Government Turns Its Back on its People, is it Civil War? We did a billboard project.

**SS: All right, let's talk about that first one. What was that?**

LM: That was a billboard that we did. We had two men in business suits, shaking hands. Although oddly — and I wasn't there when they shot it — but they actually were not shaking the correct hand. It was actually reversed, so they were shaking – left hands. But it was done in front of a kind of iconic business building. I

think it might have been the building on Hudson Street and West Houston; kind of just this generic, glass tower.

And we posted that, I think, in about three or four sites around New York City. It was a smallish billboard. At that point, we were still doing guerilla work. We were wheatpasting; we hadn't been given the resources yet to rent billboard space proper.

**SS: Okay, I just have a few questions. Who were the models? Do you remember?**

LM: I can't tell you who they were. Avram could tell you.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: Because I think he organized that particular shoot.

**SS: And was this at the same time that Felix Gonzalez-Torres was doing his billboard art? Was that something that was already happening, or is this before that?**

LM: I think it was before that, actually. Although I think his came maybe slightly after that. And that was officially sanctioned. I think Creative Time paid for that, or maybe his gallery. But that was much more aligned with a kind of traditional arts funding. We were just wheatpasting at that point. I think we did the handbills for one of the demonstrations that were dollar bills that were green, that had slogans on the back. And we did the Nine Days of Action.

**SS: Wait, I'm still on the other one.**

LM: On the other one. Yeah.

**SS: Okay. Sorry. I just want to try and get the information. So ACT UP paid for the billboards?**

LM: I think we were selling T-shirts, and doing little fund-raisers then. We did Read My Lips for the Nine Days of Action. And we made that into a T-shirt. And even postcards. So we were doing our own fund-raising efforts at that point. I can't recall whether we funded it exclusively ourselves, or whether ACT UP might have chipped in some money. But it would have been a combination of money that we raised; ACT UP might have thrown us five hundred dollars or something like that. They were not large amounts of money. We did that for, I'd say, probably under three thousand dollars; which was the printing costs – basically the printing costs.

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Don Moffat was working – he didn't have his own company then, but he worked in a graphic design studio, and he did a lot of the sort of mechanicals for these projects on his off time.

**SS: I just want to talk about the meaning of the statement. Can you just say it again?**

LM: I think it was “When a Government Turns its Back on its People, is it Civil War?” And – I think that was it. There might have been a tag line underneath that referred to the number of deaths that had occurred. It would be interesting to look at that again. But I think, again, it was fairly – it was somewhat inflammatory. I think it was just – there must have been, actually, some AIDS reference in there, and I can't remember what it was. I think probably there was a figure underneath that said X number of people, either infected or have died from AIDS. Because it would be too open-ended for it to not refer to AIDS.

There was a desire to make people stop and think: Is our government doing everything that it can be doing to fight this? And it's theatrical. Again, I think

there was a theatricality involved there, to invoke the idea of a civil war; to invoke the idea of a struggle, even an armed struggle, was a kind of hyperbole that we put out there for effect, as well.

**SS: Okay, I mean, it –**

LM: But it also reflected the sense that we had, when we were doing demos, that we were really, we were there, expressing what we felt was our right as citizens that we were not being listened to, that the government was not responding, and we were met by battalions of policemen who were dragging us off and arresting us. There was also that sense, that we were involved in a struggle that was a kind of war.

So, it had all of those things involved.

But, for instance, why didn't we – we didn't show a picture of a demo, of us engaged in that kind of struggle. We showed a rather cool picture of men in power. And I don't believe, there were no faces; it was just sort of like from the neck down, cutting a deal. Whether they were government, whether they were pharmaceutical representatives, it was not clear. They were men in power, making a deal that was, we were to infer, was not in our interests as citizens, as a public.

**SS: Okay. But also, we didn't really have rights. So we were people who didn't have rights, insisting that we were actually citizens. That's very radical in and of itself.**

LM: Yes.

**SS: Yeah. What were some of the proposals that you brought to the floor, that people on the floor had objections to?**

LM: You know what? I can't, my memory is such that I can't remember the specifics. But I remember, it just seemed like every time we brought something to the floor, there were issues of representation, with everyone involved. Which were all valid ones. But – I can't answer that question in detail.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: But I remember – the sense that you couldn't make everyone happy, and keep a focus on what we felt, and what we were doing. It just, it seemed like every time we did that, energy kind of got sucked away. And we did do a lot of, we paid a lot of attention to what we were putting out there. I can think of one instance in the group where we did a project and – it was the Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It billboard that we did. It was a bus project. And – I think there was, one proposal was to use — and what we ended up using — was to use an image of beauty contestants in, like, a Miss America pageant. And there was a struggle in the group about whether to use that image, because some people in the group felt like, well, this doesn't reflect the women who are getting HIV. They're white women, they're not women of color. And we need to be more, we need to include, we need to represent everybody.

So the discussion was: there were other people, including myself, who said, wait a minute, that's okay. The reason why we're putting the white women up there is because that's what our society is obsessed with. It's the focus on these white women who are the representations of the fetish of the female body that means that other people are invisible. So it's – that was a struggle. And in that case, we decided to go ahead and do the project without representing everybody. But at that time, there was a lot of attention paid to that. And when we did do Kissing Doesn't Kill, the bus poster, we were

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very clear that we had everyone represented there; to almost a programmatic degree. But, I think it wor-, in that instance, it worked. It was totally appropriate, it worked; it added to the strength of the project.

**SS: Well, what's interesting in that poster is that all the people of color in the poster were hardcore ACT UP members. They weren't models who you hired.**

LM: Yes.

**SS: Yeah.**

LM: Yeah. Yeah, they were also, yeah, they were –

**SS: Julie Tolentino –**

LM: – real people –

**SS: – and Lola Flash –**

LM: – yeah.

**SS: – and, yeah.**

LM: Yeah. I mean, we never, we never hired models. We never did anything like that. We were never that much of an ad agency. We were still, it – even though, as the art world embraced us and gave us more money and access, we were still always a bit of a, hey, let's go to somebody's garage and do this. We never really had – we were never compensated individually. We never had huge budgets. We were always just spending every last penny to try and realize something. And that's how it should have been. I think if there had been more money, and – it had been more professionalized, it would have lost some of its integrity, I think.

**SS: Now the bus cards enabled the images to get to parts of the city that wheatpasting did not achieve. So how did that come to be? How did that happen?**

LM: The Kissing Doesn't Kill billboard?

**SS: Well, the fact of getting anything on a New York City bus.**

LM: That was, if I recall correctly, a project that was funded partially by Creative Time. And they had the ability and the relationships with the people that sell ad space in the city, on the buses, billboards. It was always a challenge to crack into that, because it's very hard to just go to those companies as individuals, and say, here's our three thousand dollars; give us some billboards. Because they'll give you a billboard in the middle of nowhere.

So that was negotiated with Creative Time. There was a price that we paid for that, because – in some iterations of it, I seem to recall that they did not include our tagline, the important line, which was Corporate Greed, Government Inaction, and Public Indifference Make AIDS a Political Crisis. I believe that there were some — and maybe it was even in New York, and I wish I could remember exactly — but that was struck. And that was because of the involvement of these other agencies that were unwilling to really fight for that.

**SS: You guys decided to accept it.**

LM: We decided to do it anyway. We had, we printed up postcards. I know that it was in the window of the Whitney Museum, and we did have the full tagline in there. And I wish I could remember where it didn't, where that line was excised. But there were times when — not many, I think that was one of the few times where we had

to make a compromise. And we thought that there was enough going on with just the imagery, and even just the tagline Kissing Doesn't Kill, to put it out there. But that was a disappointment. And that's just – that's – that's about advertising, about really getting access to public discourse. There are limits.

**SS: So when you decided to leave ACT UP – when you guys decided to close the doors, let's say, at that point, who were the members?**

LM: If I recall correctly, it was Don Moffat, Avram Finkelstein; Michel Nesline; myself. I think Marlene McCarty was working; Tom Kalin; Richard Elovich; Robert Vasquez. Earlier on, I know Anthony Viti was involved. Todd Haynes was involved, but I think they kind of dropped out at certain points. Am I forgetting someone that you're aware of?

**SS: Well, when did Mark Simpson –**

LM: Mark Simpson; Mark Simpson was involved.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: Yeah. I think I'm forgetting one person now. John Lindell.

**SS: John Lindell. Okay. Let's talk about –**

LM: And I said Marlene McCarty, right?

**SS: Yes.**

LM: And there were, occasionally there were kind of – I think there were a few cases where people came in to work on an individual project. But that was the core group.

**SS: Can we talk about Mark Simpson? With every affinity group, and even though you were closed, you basically were an affinity group, would you say? Gran Fury?**

LM: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah. There's always the issue of when somebody gets sick, and what happens to the community relationship. Can you just address that a little bit, with John and with Mark, inside the group?**

LM: With John?

**SS: Didn't John have some sight issues? Do I have the wrong person?**

LM: I think you might have the wrong person.

**SS: Oh, okay. I thought –**

LM: But Mark didn't get sick until after we had done most of our work, actually. He got sick – it was the very – it was right before the Andrew Sullivan piece came out in the *New York Times*, which I think was –

**SS: November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1996.**

LM: – '96, yeah. So actually, by the time Mark started getting sick, ACT UP had really, ACT UP – Gran Fury had sort of ceased to be an active group. In fact, we might have kind of really said goodbye. Which was, in some sense, through a little project we did with the New Museum during their Decade show, I think it was called. So that –

**SS: Oh, okay.**

LM: – actually, we never dealt with that as a group.

**SS: Okay. So forget that. Okay, so after you guys became your own unit, what were some of the projects that you did?**

LM: We did the *New York Crimes* – although that might have been on the edge. We did –

**SS: The New York Crimes; was that part of the New York Times campaign?**

LM: That was the *New York Times*, yeah, the *New York Times* campaign, which was affiliated with an action. We did a billboard – about healthcare, which was – showing a little black baby, and pointing out that –

**JW: Welcome to America.**

LM: – the U.S. – excuse me?

**JW: Welcome to America.**

LM: Welcome to America. Right. Thank you. The only industrialized country besides South Africa without national healthcare. We did the Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It. We did a project in Montreal, that kind of back-, it didn't backfire, but – we were invited by the art museum there, that was opening a brand new museum, to participate in that. And we did a project where we created a hybrid flag, of the American flag and the Québécois flag. And basically — I can't remember the tagline — but we were trying to say – we used the tagl-, *Je Me Souviens*, which means, Always Remember, or Never Forget. And the point that we raised were, basically, encouraging them not to simply slavishly replicate all of the testing and the protocols of North America, to treat it as, to treat it as a local issue, in some way. But just using that imagery was so inflammatory that it, they just couldn't see that.

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So it was interesting how – and we were aware of that, and very leery of doing projects in other places, for that very reason. Because we didn't want to become some kind of international, fly in, do an AIDS project, and fly out. There was a time when we went to the [Venice] Biennale, and we did a project there, which I think was successful, because it created a media discussion over there about AIDS. But in the Montreal instance, it did not – I don't think it was as successful as it could have been.

**SS: Now the Montreal thing, was that connected to the Montreal AIDS conference? Or was that –**

LM: No –

**SS: – an art event?**

LM: – no.

**SS: Okay.**

LM: That was just, that was an art event. We went to the Biennale one year, and represented the U.S., in the *Aperto* section. And we took two billboards there. One of them was a billboard of the Pope, with a text about the ways in which the Vatican had obstructed – well, that is another instance where we were holding someone else accountable. Actually, it wasn't the Pope, it was Cardinal O'Connor, actually, who was speaking during the, at the First Vatican Conference on AIDS. He said some pretty reprehensible things, which we quoted. And then it was – our erect penis image, which was – help me – oh my god, my memory – it was *Beat It*, but –

**SS: Men, Use Condoms or Beat It.**

LM: Men, Use Condoms or Beat It. Thank you!

**SS: Right.**

LM: And we were lucky there, because there was a customs mishap, which meant that our billboards were delayed in customs. And so that we were unable to install our piece before the public opening. So when the day of the public opening came, we did a little media event, where we wrote on the walls. And that actually served to focus a ton of attention on us. Because it looked like they were censoring us. But I, to this day, think that it was mostly – well, they might have gotten word that there we were doing something with the Pope. But I think it was mostly a shipping thing. They just didn't have the papers. But that meant that when we finally did get them, we put them up. But by that time, there was lots of press that had been focused on us, and as I said, a discussion in the press there.

**SS: What was the behind-the-scenes apparatus that enabled Gran Fury to represent the U.S. at the Biennale?**

LM: That was a selection committee for the U.S., and I can't remember who it was that was on that committee. But that was 1989, I think? So it was at a moment when the art world knew they had to, they felt compelled to address that. There was, Gran Fury was a sort of political movement in the art world that they felt like they wanted to honor in some way. It was a pretty brief little window there, where we had support, and where people in such a committee were willing to sort of step out of the standard operating procedure, and choose a group that was totally not in the market. And I haven't looked at who they've chosen in the last 10 years, but I don't think that happens very often. But I think it would basically boil down to one or two members in that selection committee, which was something like five people — it was a fairly small committee — that just put their guns behind us, and said we want them to go there.

**SS: Wasn't Felix recently the postmortem –**

LM: Felix was, yeah. He was in the American pavilion, which was like – the *Apertos* were kind of younger artists, and then there's the American pavilion, where the one artist is featured. And he was put there recently, which, actually didn't, I didn't go, and I'm not even sure I saw everything that he did there. But – I am curious as to how stripped down that installation was. He was a minimalist, minimal artist. But I would be hard-pressed to say there was any kind of explicit politics that was visible in that show about – anything. I don't know. Maybe there was. But –

**SS: Well, it's just the acknowledgment that people died of AIDS. I mean, which, there is hardly ever any**

LM: Right.

**SS: – acknowledgment now, that that –**

LM: Right.

**SS: – had ever occurred.**

LM: Right.

**SS: So that's kind of amazing. I mean, somebody –**

LM: Yeah.

**SS: – Andrea Rosen, or somebody, worked very hard, I'm sure –**

LM: Right.

**SS: – to achieve that. It's interesting, because you say the art world, they felt they wanted to support us. But I still don't really understand who "they" are.**

LM: Well, I really think that in a lot of instances, it was individuals who did it. Obviously, yeah, it's not a monolithic, there's not a central committee. But I think in instances where political art is allowed to get into these venues that are usually very tightly controlled, it happens because there are individuals who are willing to go to bat; and also, something is happening at the time that means that there's a window of opportunity, where they can press those things. So it's –

**SS: Right.**

LM: – individuals; it definitely is.

**SS: So I just want to get back to the Montreal thing. So what was the reason that you guys went up there, or who brought you, or what was the event?**

LM: It was a curator there. And I can't remember who it was. And I know that they were interested in having political work, and dealing with AIDS. And so again, I wish I could actually remember who the curator was, but –

**SS: So is it accurate to say that after Gran Fury privatized, it had two different trajectories? One would be creating images that corresponded to campaigns within ACT UP and the AIDS activist movement — like getting the CDC definition changed, so that women could get benefits, and that sort of thing — and the other was through the art world and art world events, where there was an invitation of some kind?**

LM: Yes.

**SS: So that's an accurate – so how was that tension handled? Was there an effort to try to create a balance, or –**

LM: Well, certainly in terms of ACT UP, some of the rhythm that just had to do with us aligned ourselves with the major protest schedule and events, and trying to come up with something visual that could support what was going on. And in terms of the art world, there was a lot of discussion about which things to say yes to, and the terms that we would say yes to. We always were very conscious of not wanting to present work that would just be in a hermetic gallery. We were always insistent that there be a public aspect to a project if the project wasn't entirely in public space. We never put anything in an interior cube, and just left it there. And we turned down some things, and accepted other things. We tried to draw some of the energy of ACT UP into the art world. And I'm trying to think explicitly if there were –

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00:40:00

I think the Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It was an instance where there was a – we were given money by – I would have to go look. But it was art-world funding, but it was happening at the same time that there was ACT UP energy going towards changing the CDC definition. And so that was an instance where they kind of overlapped. We brought that issue to the art world; put it on billboards, on the street. That was never – I don't think that was ever shown in just like a museum context alone. It was a public project that was done in L.A. and in other cities. So –

**JW: Can you hold the thought?**

**SS: Okay, let's change tapes.**

**SS: Okay, so when did you leave ACT UP; even though you were still in Gran Fury?**

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00:00:00

LM: It was gradual. I don't remember an exact moment. I think it was in '91, maybe. And it would have been the time when I, I remember just feeling there was

divisiveness on the floor, and I think, in general – for reasons which I'm sure you've heard much more testimony about this than I've ever probably discussed it with people. But there was a sense that there was just that kind of cohesion that was – there was a reduction of activity. So it would have been in '91, I think.

**SS: What do you think caused that?**

LM: Well, I don't know. There are a couple things. One is, I feel like — and this is just off the top of my head — A) I think it's hard to sustain that level of activity and intensity for a long time. I think people just have limitations. And I think part of it is that we actually started having certain effects. In the time that I was involved in ACT UP, from '87 to '91, there were NGOs that were developing, and becoming stable, and taking on some of the business of holding governments, whether it's city, state, or national, accountable. So I think that was a kind of success that in some way meant that our purpose was not obsolete, but was being handled in some more institutional way.

I think that when you look at the difference in press coverage between when we started and let's say '92, the press was writing more regularly. There was an effect that meant that people – that the work was being carried on, but that people felt less compelled to kind of throw themselves into it. And even though certain issues, like healthcare delivery, or the hope for universal healthcare was still a huge issue that was not dealt with or even the extent to which AIDS was affecting minority communities, and they were not being represented; I don't want to say, or suggest in any way, that the work was done. But I think there was some sense that there was a response. And maybe that made people feel like they could, they weren't as compelled to put as much work into it.

Although – yeah, I don't know. It's a little bit of a mystery, as to why something that felt so vibrant and active did – that energy dissipated pretty quickly.

**SS: But you stayed with Gran Fury for five more years after you left ACT UP, right?**

LM: No. No, even Gran Fury really scaled back. I think the last project that we did was at this, the Decade Show. And so people in ACT UP and in Gran Fury started sort of falling off, and then there was sort of a smaller group of us that did projects. I think by '92, we were – maybe '93, we were really kind of not working on projects anymore. So it was really about a five-, at max I'd say a five-year span.

**SS: What was the reason that Gran Fury stopped working?**

LM: Well, I think, in some sense, the energy in the group, the larger group – it was a reflection of that. I think people's careers got busy; other things in their lives took time. We were not being paid for the work. And people were willing to do that to a certain extent. But then, I think, just the real world, and the time constraints that everyone had, started to take a toll.

I think there was sort of a – in the world of ACT UP and AIDS, there was that period where there were drugs that were available, but they weren't really totally working. And there was confusion about what to do next. I think the issues became more complicated, and that was a hard thing for Gran Fury, and for ACT UP. It's one thing to try and hold the government accountable to addressing AIDS; and you can use broad strokes, like providing housing and healthcare. But when it gets to the level of designing protocols for experimental drugs, and you have issues that can't be reduced to

a billboard or a slogan, certainly for ACT UP, I think we just increasingly felt like we didn't really know how to work in the same way.

And we did struggle with, prevention was something that we never really tackled. And we had discussions about wanting to do that. But even there; then you have different communities, requiring different messages. And aside from just the issue of prevention in general, which I think is kind of like an area where people are still struggling today, with designing prevention campaigns that are effective. It's very hard, it's difficult, getting people to change behaviors. So –

I can't remember your initial question. But –

**SS: Why you guys came to an end.**

LM: Yeah, I think complexity was one thing, with the kind of, what we were good at at the beginning was no longer – we were in a different river at that point, that required different strategies, and we weren't as effective there.

**SS: So what was your final project?**

LM: It was a little project that we did with the New Museum. It was a handbill, where we kind of said goodbye. And I can't, I wish I could, I'll pull up the text sometime, and send it to you. But it was – there was kind of an explanation about why we felt, why we were saying goodbye to the art world, and where we were. And I think we had a LED also, which had statistics that were current to that moment. And that was the element that we took from the initial *Let the Record Show*, where we had the same LED board. So we were sort of incorporating something from our first project, as well as sort of saying goodbye.

It's interesting to note that, I don't know, I haven't been there recently, but in the opening of the New Museum, they included the neon sign, and the — I forgot this project — the “AIDS Isn't Over for Anybody Until It's Over for Everybody” poster, which they put in the stairwell.

And they didn't have that much — they had an installation opening of contemporary curated work. But there were very few numbers of other works they just had hanging. And they had put those up, which I thought was interesting. And indicated that there is some institutional memory at the New Museum about their relationship to Gran Fury, and the fact that they helped generate us, but in some way, they recognize that that was a defining moment for them, in terms of their history, which I think is interesting.

**SS: Do they own that piece?**

LM: You mean the neon —

**SS: Yeah.**

LM: — do they own it? I think they do. Certainly, they have it in their storage, and Gran Fury — ownership was never really something that we were that interested in. We never copywrote anything. And we donated the archive that we had to the New York Public Library. So there's no — whatever remains is at the New York Public Library, or — at the New Museum, I guess they have those physical objects.

**SS: Just personally, what was the effect for you on your life of having been in ACT UP? Looking from today?**

LM: That's such a broad question. I don't even know how to answer it. It became the central focus of at least a five-year period of my life. It organized my social

life and a set of relationships I had with friends in my mid to late twenties. It enabled me to get involved aesthetically again, and feel creative, and feel political, at the same time. It addressed the fears that I had about living with HIV, or living in a world with HIV, and trying to negotiate that.

It was definitely, I think for a lot of people, it wasn't an extracurricular activity. It was kind of – the definition of who we were.

**SS: And how does that translate today? So much of what we went through — both the nature of the crisis and the experience of rebellion — are not present in the contemporary world. It's known, in a way, only to us; both sides of it. So knowing something that other people don't know, or having that historical knowledge that is, at the moment, erased — although I think it will come back — is that alienating, or is that grounding, for you?**

LM: Well, it's grounding for me, because I think it was a – it was a heightened time, to the extent that we were dealing with things that – a level of calamity that, for people our age, you don't deal with that. Death of people who are close to you; the experience of contracting a virus that could, personally, that could have that kind of effect. Even though that exists today, certainly with antiretrovirals, it's a slightly different universe.

I feel very grateful for having experienced that moment. And I do feel there is a generation of kids out there — my nieces and nephew — who don't have that opportunity. And I'm grateful for that. I wish I could share that with them, in a way that affects their lives, and changes them, in the way that I think it did me and my friends.

But I don't know. It's –

Am I pessimistic about that? I can't answer that question.

**SS: Okay. Well, I have only one more question. Do you have anything that you want to ask?**

**JW: Was your father still alive during Stop the Church?**

**SS: Oh, that's –**

LM: During Stop the Church?

**SS: Yeah.**

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LM: He was alive then, yeah. You know, that was the Catholic Church, not the Presbyterian Church. And I'm not sure if I ever showed him the picture of me dressed up as a, I had a mitre made out of gold, with Trojan wrappers making a line around the top of it. Yeah, he was supportive of everything that I was doing in ACT UP, and probably would have agreed with me about church policy. So there was never any discord in the family about my doing that.

**SS: Okay, so the last question is: What would say was ACT UP's greatest achievement, and for you, what was its biggest disappointment?**

LM: Well, I think the greatest achievement, as I said before, was sort of driving in that initial wedge into public discourse about the need to address it — in the media, in politics — and forcing that initial turnaround, and getting people to really attend to that.

For me personally, the biggest achievement was just the energy of those big demonstrations, where everyone came together, and there was a sort of heightened moment of experience, where – where your personal life intersected with an explicitly political one.

And its biggest disappointment, I think, was that we didn't eliminate all the inequities, social injustices, or even — in the world at large — and also, just within the world that's affected by HIV. Whether we're looking in America, that we still have no national healthcare. We have rates of transmission in communities of color that's going on, as well as our struggle entirely predated the explosion of HIV in South Africa, in many ways. And it's a tragedy that our, even though I think we provided models that were built upon by people like TAC, that have been incredibly valuable in a global scale — but what we were doing on a more local level — had limited — our scope was limited.

But those are very high aims. You can't expect to, I think, achieve all of that.

**SS: All right. Thank you. Go ahead.**

**JW: The last treatise was actually entitled “Goodbye, Good Luck.”**

**And I have a picture of Kissing Your Ass Goodbye.**

LM: Yes!

**JW: Was there some ramification involved in — was there any — it seems like it was more than just Goodbye, we have to leave you.**

**SS: Oh, you think it was sarcastic to the art world?**

**JW: Or — I don't know, I wasn't there. It was almost as if you were saying, well, we can't go on, and we don't think things are really getting better, but have a good life, anyway.**

LM: I don't recall there being, at that level, an intended sarcasm actually there. I think if anything, it was probably just something playful. Maybe there was a little bit of a — what's the word I'm looking for? — something wry. But I don't think — it

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was certainly not a “fuck you,” or throwing up of our hands. I think we just were, we wanting to put some closure on our relationship with the art world, and as a group, to just sort of say, okay, let’s just stop this. Because at that point, there had been about two years of, are we a group anymore, are we not a group? There’s a small group that’s doing this. There was a lot of, there was a certain amount of – ambivalence. Because I think people felt ambivalent about leaving Gran Fury. I think it was hard for people to move on. No one actually said, you know what, guys? I can’t do this anymore; I’m just not going to show up. People just drifted away.

Which is, in a way, I think, probably a mirror of what happened in ACT UP at large. People didn’t send in resignations, or formal declarations that they were not going to be participating anymore. They just, the air just left the room, in some way.

So you have read the treatise.

**JW: It’s actually on the ACT UP website. I put it up there.**

LM: Okay. I’ll have to read it.

**SS: Thank you, Loring.**

LM: Thank you –

**SS: Appreciate it.**

LM: – Sarah. Good luck.

**SS: Ahhh.**