

**LA FILMFORUM ORAL HISTORY WITH AMY HALPERN FOR "PACIFIC STANDARD TIME:
ART IN LOS ANGELES 1945-1980**

Interviewer: Adam Hyman

Cameraperson: Chris Komives

Transcript Reviewer: Ben Miller

00:01:37 ADAM HYMAN

Today's date...

00:01:40 AMY HALPERN

October 17th, 2010.

00:01:44 ADAM HYMAN

Oral history conducted by Adam Hyman, and could you please say and spell your name for the transcriber?

00:01:54 AMY HALPERN

Yes. My name is Amy Halpern H-A-L-P-E-R-N. And it's Amy A-M-Y.

00:02:03 ADAM HYMAN

All right.

00:02:05 AMY HALPERN

Like Any A-N-Y, which is my favorite typo on my name ever.

00:02:11 ADAM HYMAN

Any Halpern.

00:02:11 AMY HALPERN

Pick a Halpern, Any Halpern. I just like that.

00:02:16 ADAM HYMAN

And which Halpern would you choose to be?

00:02:18 AMY HALPERN

[laugh] Of the one's that we have? Hard call. My father probably. [laugh] Elegant.

00:02:25 ADAM HYMAN

Alright. Tell me about your father.

00:02:26 AMY HALPERN

Well, my father's probably why we were infected with film at an early age, all of us in my family, because my father is a film fanatic. He started out— actually—and I've only heard more of this, of his telling other people than me—as a little kid, he's the youngest of four of an immigrant family, and he used to go to all the projection booths and hang out and collect pieces of film.

He also told [my husband] David, in front of me what I had never heard before, is that he devised his own 3D projection system under 12 as a kid in an immigrant family with no toys, and that's what he built.

00:03:05 ADAM HYMAN

What's his name?

00:03:06 AMY HALPERN

Ben Halpern. So his career was he was reviewing films for the trades in New York for many years, and then married my mother and then he worked for United Artists in Paris. Well, he worked for United Artists in New York first, and then they took a job for two years in Paris. So my first school was there. It was a public French school. Which when my parents discovered they could legally perform bodily discipline, they took me out of.

And then I went into an international school in Paris. And I never spoke French in front of my parents. My father overheard me talking to the concierge, it was the first time. My mother said that they would try to get me to talk French in front of their friends, their expatriate American friends, and I'd always refuse because— she said the baby mind was, if they understand me perfectly well in English, why should I speak another language to them.

Anyway, I wasn't into displaying it, so that was two years in Paris for U.A., and then he moved back to New York, we all moved back to New York and he worked for United Artists and then Filmways, and then Universal and then ultimately moved out here [Los Angeles] where he ended up as the Vice President for publicity for television at Universal. But in his youth, he would see a movie in the morning for review, he'd try to catch one at the Museum of Modern Art for lunch, and in the evening take my mother out to the movies.

He was very hardcore. And when I was little, there were lots of films he wanted me to see, and we would go freely to because in a city, in a real city you can let children loose, and so we could freely go to the Met, or to the Museum of Modern Art, or the theatres in New York city and see what there was. So I saw a lot of good stuff at the Museum of Modern Art young.

And also, we were accustomed to going to theatres for free with passes on certain occasions, which is an experience everybody should have. It's also why I'm not afraid of an empty theatre. I mean, people think to see something on a big screen in an empty house is very sad. I don't. Because, A, I've been to enough industry screenings where you are privileged to see something displayed well; B, it's less distracting. There are fewer people around.

But also why not have that luxury? And also I would rather be in a big theatre with a choice number of people even if they were spread out, I think. Although, I must say the other evening was very nice. That was a really [unintelligible] house. I have to thank you for that.

00:05:45 ADAM HYMAN

Which?

00:05:46 AMY HALPERN

The Filmforum audience the other night blew my mind because five out of the ten movies were silent, and there was a true silence in the room. A true silence. Ah. It was like a gift. It was really exquisite. I liked that very much. It's so rare.

00:06:03 ADAM HYMAN

Yes, we get that. [technical]

Tell me the names and roles of your mother and siblings.

00:06:17 AMY HALPERN

Roles is a hard call. My mother is a renaissance woman of the old cut. That is to say, a genius cook. I mean, her cooking is beyond reason.

00:06:29 ADAM HYMAN

What's her name?

00:06:30 AMY HALPERN

Lois Halpern. Lois Jewell Gordon-Halpern is my mother, who was a literature student in Queens. First, I guess, in her generation to graduate college. Worked as an editor, a proof reader at various magazines like *Mademoiselle* in New York, a very correct job for a young lady. Was intimidated out of working at the *New York Times*, which was what she wanted to do. They walked her into the copy room where she could have gotten a job given her level. And my mother is an incredible beauty, and when she was younger—I mean, you never saw her young. First of all, dressed to the nines and took extensive care to make sure she always was looking perfect. Which was a big problem for me in my youth because I just found that a reprehensible expense of time. But it actually was formative for me because of the relationship between pain and beauty, which is very intimate.

And the fact is it's expensive to be beautiful. Beauty is expensive in the world, and to make something beautiful for people or present something that already is there and is beautiful is an expense. So that was a priority of hers. We would go shopping to the corner, and everybody else would be served in a different manner, and she would be served like she was royalty always, just from her bearing and her politeness and good speech, but really because she was the kind of the beauty that looks like it's in italics, surrounded by other people.

I always thought she was like another species. But I thought both of my parents were another species from everybody else I saw because they had a good relationship in a world where there were few of them. They have a good relationship. So her art forms were the table. Every evening would look different, with different dishes, different everything. They food would always be amazing. That's why I think of cooking as the great tragic art form. Someday I will do something more extensive about this. But the fact is, we were a family of six. She would spend a large part of the day making something fantastic, beautiful presentation, delicious to eat, and — [makes noise] — gone. You know, gone instantly because five hungry people besides herself would sit down and it would be over. And there's no press for such an art piece, and so I was always was troubled by this in a big way.

When we had company and she did an even larger thing, occasionally it was a larger audience than we. So it was one of her art forms. Another is, she would make clothes and wear them in this incredible way. Then she finished all the furniture that she would find, incredible antiques. Refurnish them. Embroidered. I mean, all the classical female art forms, including conversation, which was also not available to me. None of these things were available to me in terms of— Well, actually embroidery and hand crafts are, but

the other things just—I was never patient with. And I didn't forgive her for many years for that expense of time. Now, I realize that it's one of the few art forms permitted to women traditionally. The problem is it's total ephemera because now she's an attractive woman of a certain age, but she looked like a god for most of her life. And it was what she could do with herself, also. It was how she looks, and also what she did with it. And she's very self-conscious, and she's not relaxed, and she doesn't want to be photographed. So it's not a public art form, in a certain way. It's a private art form. And that's what well-bred women are supposed to be raised for, is private art forms for private collectors.

00:10:25 ADAM HYMAN

So at what point did you start perusing public art?

00:10:35 AMY HALPERN

Pretty little. Although, I wasn't thinking about it as a perform—I don't think I was thinking about it as a public anything. I was dancing little. Little, like six. My elementary school friend's mother was a dance teacher. So I started dancing and choreographing stuff little. But I had total stage fright, so I wasn't happy in front of an audience. I wasn't interested in performing. It was only if I was into something and the audience happened to be there that I could function at all.

00:11:03 ADAM HYMAN

When you say you were choreographing at that age...

00:11:08 AMY HALPERN

Well, it's true. Well, you learn a piece of music—or not—and then you structure what movements you'll make within it. Did you ever hear of Frank Zappa's remarks on composition? I mean, he thought of himself as a composer. He was one. But he defined a composer as someone who would take materials and arrange them to an idea. And so I was doing that, little. Mostly just my dancing.

I didn't get to push other people around then, much. I mean, one didn't do that. But were told to design a piece, choreograph a piece, and also improvise them. So it was another art form I was into early.

00:11:48 ADAM HYMAN

So at what point did the family move here?

00:11:54 AMY HALPERN

They moved without me. I was already out, living in an apartment in New York when they moved.

00:11:57 ADAM HYMAN

Oh, okay.

00:11:58 AMY HALPERN

No. I'm a total non-Californian, except as an adult coming out here to find work and go to school. [technical]

So, I should tell you —so, I'm the oldest of four.

00:12:54 ADAM HYMAN

Yeah.

00:12:56AMY HALPERN

My sister, Nancy, is a year and a half younger. She is a fantastic, fantastic creative public health activist who has invented an N.G.O. that has graduated, I think, more than 400 people into careers with the only qualification that they are bilingual. So that's my sister who is very high in my esteem, Nancy, who is the mother of Arwa and Adnan who are... Adnan has worked with me a lot, and appears in films of mine. But he's also worked doing sound and other films with me, most recently Foley. Most recently he had a headset on for the first time, and had the experience of putting a cup down on the table. Those are her two children. Arwa is in several of my films — as a baby she appears in *Falling Lessons*, and as a teenager, and then as a 20 something year old in *3-Minute Hells*.

And then there's Andrew, my brother, who is a dazzling guy who works in commercials as a producer. Then there's my sister, Nora, who is an art administrator, but is also a fine artist herself but put that aside out of conflict of interest because she liked to curate, and thinks she may take it up again sometime. The younger two, I think, have the best design chops in the family, and both of them have decided not to be artists, which is an interesting decision that they both consciously made. My brother did it, I think, for finances, because he refuses to be impoverished, and he has a family that he wants to protect to the nth degree. But I actually think they both have better design chops than I do. Sort of interesting thing.

So historically, we move back to New York City. I went to a peculiar elementary school for six years in New York City called Hunter College Elementary School which is a teacher's college laboratory for Hunter College, which is a big education university, among other things. A complicated interview and IQ test is how you get in there, and the classes were very tiny, maybe 20 people. My family is comfortable middle class, my whole life, and I was the poor kid in the class. So that's just to give any idea that it was not based entirely on merit. And I also know that the method of using Stanford Binet IQ test is also very flawed and very faulty.

And the proof positive of that that I know of personally is that in the test that I had when we came back, I think I was six, and among the things that they would do is show you a picture and then ask you to state the outcome. You know, what can you do with a kid? Give them a physical image of something and have them interpret it. So when it was over, the woman said to me, your child— Excuse me—To my mother, said, your child is very bright, but there is a question that she didn't get and we don't understand why that is. Well, what was the question? Well, the question was a picture of a fat man stepping on— well, remember? Well, you don't because you are a Californian. It used to be in New York subway stations they had— for one penny you could put it into a scale which would tell you your weight, and they were—I don't know who came up with this idea, but almost every subway station had one. So the image that I was shown was one of these things with a fat man stepping onto it. And so the answer was, you know, what is happening in this picture? Or what's going to happen? And I drew a complete blank. So when my mother was told that I had missed this question, she said, well, that's an easy explanation. She said, we just spent the past two years living in Paris. They don't have any in the metro. She's never seen those, which demonstrates to me that any child not growing up middle class and in an urban situation is not going to do very well on an IQ test, generally speaking.

00:17:09ADAM HYMAN

I don't remember experiential images on an IQ test. It was more like shapes and matching up sequences of shapes or something like that.

00:17:17AMY HALPERN

How old were you when you took them? Do you remember at all?

00:17:19ADAM HYMAN

Second grade maybe. I don't remember anything else.

00:17:21 AMY HALPERN

This would have been before first. So that might be why they were using pictures. I don't know though. I can't certainly speak for them. Anyway, I spent six years there, and one of the peculiarities of the school besides what they called at the time the new math and reading laboratories, where they had graded reading material by color, and you would work your way up. And a rubber padded gravel-y ground in our playground, but the other and most, should we say sustaining experiences at that school— two of them. One, is that I from the very early age was critical about how I was being taught, just furious at the way subjects were divided and not connected and that it was achronological. And there was no developmental anything. You were just told things as a child by fiat. That really infuriated me. I don't know if I was made conscious of it because I was in a teacher's college, but I doubt that because nobody came in and talked to us about education. I guess I was just easily agitated then. And the other thing was that we were frequently on closed circuit cameras. Nobody had video those days. I'm talking 50's. Nobody had video. So to have a closed circuit camera in a room, in the corner, especially un-manned because they were on an automatic— they were being driven from another room— was extremely unusual, space-aged, and totally fucking terrifying.

I mean, they would usually tell us, the next day they're going to shoot, but these camera placements would be in a corner of the room, and my usual experience would be sweating bricks trying to remember what seven times eight was, or that you'd be called on in the classroom and you'd hear the camera go [makes noise], and you could tell that it was panning towards you. It was just an odious experience. I had nightmares of cameras coming out of the bushes at me. So I have grown up very scopophobic [laugh] as a result and it probably also has a lot to do with why my career is behind the camera largely, with a couple of interesting exceptions.

00:19:32 ADAM HYMAN

Well, you seem— well, we'll get into that. I was going to say, you seem all so willing to be in front of the camera more than most people I know.

00:19:40 AMY HALPERN

Only for very close friends who I [have] the most utter confidence in. I have no interest or desire to be in front of a camera, and I dislike most of the images I've seen of myself. I can also say the scenes in which I've had to appear in my picture—in *Falling Lessons*, which I think is the only time I've done that except for hands, which I don't have the same issue with—were the absolute hardest to cut because I just wanted to excise the whole part and couldn't.

So I'm getting at ease with my own image, but it's not something I'm partial to. It's also one of the reasons that after a couple of years as a professional dancer—although, didn't interrupt my school projector—but I was in a company in New York that got reviews in the New York Times and was well-reviewed. And several of the people in it, when they graduated high school, stayed in the company. I went to school. But dance is a very limited form in my experience and in my estimation. A, I've never wildly enjoyed being a spectator of it. I think the best spectator position with the art of dance is to be in the body doing it, or close enough to— or at least have a body that relates to what you see and feels it, which most people do because we have the same basic equipment. And also, it doesn't have any close-ups.

So early on, it was clear to me, and also it's too limited in terms of your personal arc, if that's what you work in. First of all, you're stuck with your own body, which may not be your favorite instrument. You know, mine is not my favorite instrument. I mean, the bodies that I like watching move are not my own body. I suppose I've had some opportunity to see myself because there are a lot of mirrors in dance rooms.

But on the other hand, the other interesting historic thing is, all of my dancing was done before anybody had video. So I have zero record of myself performing. So I only have word of mouth and memory of what it was. Which I feel a little wistful about, actually.

00:21:46 ADAM HYMAN

What kind of dance?

00:21:48 AMY HALPERN

I worked for a really brilliant choreographer—really brilliant—named Lynda Gudde. Lynda Gudde. Actually, I dedicated *Injury on a Theme* to her.

00:22:00 ADAM HYMAN

How do you spell her last name?

00:22:00 AMY HALPERN

I've got to spell Linda for you because that's also weird. She spells it L-Y-N-D-A G-U-D-D-E. I think when I met her I was 14 or 15 and she was about 26, and she was a dancer in Anna Sokolow's company. And Sokolow had been a Graham dancer. So it's in straight orthodox modern dance lineage. And Gudde was of the aesthetic that the movements should be natural and not fake looking movements, which I have a limited stomach for effective gestures anyway. There was a lot of walking, running, simple gestures. [technical]

All right.

00:23:12 ADAM HYMAN

All right. So, the dance [unintelligible] company.

00:23:17 AMY HALPERN

Oh, yes. So Lynda Gudde was a severe, extremely serious person who grew up on a sheep farm in Missouri and moved large quantities of sheep with her father who is a sheep guy, and an alcoholic who gambled and once owned the entire Texas Stockyards, because of gambling, and then lost them. When he was indisposed, and people would come to buy sheep, they'd say, oh, you can talk to the Gudde girl. She knows as much about sheep as any guy.

So she came and she, I think, saw Martha Graham dance. She was at school in Iowa or something and was dancing, and then said, well, she's not young, and I will be the next one of those. Extremely focused person. She taught me how to read. I mean, I was already reading a lot, but she taught me— what she did was she furnished our interiors.

She was the opposite of somebody like Balanchine, who said, I don't want my dancers to think. I want them to do what I say. And Lynda was the opposite. What she would do is fill you full of images with poetry and reading and paintings, and then tell you physically where to go and what to do, but what she also did was allow you to improvise and then she would say, keep it.

So although she was the autocrat and was respected for that, one had the sense that she was using your own personal qualities in movement and your own ideas as well. She was fierce, and she was dedicated, and I also learned from her something that I wanted to talk to you about, which is how you support your art practice. I learned from her that you never expect anybody to pay for it.

Now, hers is to a tragic degree, let us say, in that when I met her she was teaching dance as phys ed in a public high school in New York City. And in order to pay for the expenses of running a dance company was also typing for the Rockefeller Foundation after hours because she could type 100 words per minutes, which at that time was a marketable skill. It's also how I made a living from the time I was 16. This is all pre-computer when very few people could type.

I learned to type because I was a heavy biology student and planning to be a surgeon, and my handwriting is a terrifying handicap. I would take reams of notes, come back to study them and be unable to read them in two days unless I copied them. So I took a vocational class with the other kids who were not taking the academic classes I was taking. I learned how to type like a beast, which was both great— you know, it's how Bach trained everybody. I mean, the whole tradition in music is you copy manuscripts, and as you copy them, you're learning how they're structured. So I was doing that with my biology notes and got to be a really monster typist as a result. But from Lynda, who lived super poor, super emaciated, on 13th between 1st and A in New York City and was totally devoted to her craft. When I first was in her class I thought to myself, what a bitch. I hate this woman.

Because she was the rare example of an unsmiling woman. I mean, she had a sense of humor, but it wasn't her first— well you wouldn't say was her first quality. She was serious, serious, serious, and there was no step outside of the trajectory to have more clear ideas and make your work better. She did one commission for the Library of Congress.

When Robert Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children* premiered, it premiered with a choreographed piece by her in D.C., but I believe that's the only commission she ever received. I mean, we did beautiful performances, and [sounds like] Kris Lagore from the Times that we were tremendous. I think she was a great choreographer. She died stupidly, of course. I mean, she was impoverished always, couldn't afford the company after a while. And she was also a painter. And became more of a painter when she stopped having her company, and was plowed down by a bicycle delivery guy on 2nd Avenue. I mean, people don't think of a bicycle being able to kill a person, but actually a guy in a bicycle going 40 miles an hour can plow you into the sidewalk. The head damage that resulted from that and the drugs that they put her on made her blind, gave her seizures, and finally she died of that, in a short time. And very tragically, I think, because she was an artist who should have been funded, if there had been any justice. Her stuff was so immaculate. Really clean, strong. One of her pieces was called *Living Dead* like the Bocklin painting, *Isle of the Dead*, and was to Bach and Pontecorvo [probably music from a Pontecorvo film, perhaps *Battle of Algiers*]. We did beautiful music with her. After I left the company, or that is to say, when I was 16 I went to college in Binghamton, which was for her an incredible defection and betrayal.

But of course, if I was going to be a surgeon or something I needed to go to school and plus I was interested in academics. I did not want to be a dancer only, and I'd pretty much already realized that it was not a satisfying form. But I was, at that time, not looking for an art form. I was looking to be a good surgeon. So when I came back that spring, I then became the lighting technician. There was a lighting designer, but I ran the cues because I knew all the pieces intimately, and I knew where. I remember before that time, I had always thought of technicians as the bad guys. Primitive thinking, but you can understand how it is. If what you're doing isn't intuitive, visceral, kind of has the organic momentum that the music insists on, and the ideas behind the movement propel you into, the last thing that's going to be sensible is some guy's going to miss a light cue.

It's just like, huh? How could you fuck that up? How could you do that? So I always thought of the technical people as—it's ironic since I'm a technician for a living—but I thought as the technicians as the enemy or the insensate necessary, but somehow encumbrance. Then I had my first experience on a dimmer board, and now I've always played with lights sense I was very little.

I don't know what the frequency is, but I can tell you the innumerable times somebody walked in when I was in a room messing with either a curtain or a Venetian blind, and someone said, why are you sitting in here in the dark? And a child can't say, what do you mean the dark? I would say it's not dark in here. I mean you're playing with a light source, it's not dark in here.

Now, I could defend myself from anybody who wouldn't understand what I was doing. But then that's what I was doing a lot of anyway. So to have the lights set and be controlling them with an electronic dimmer board was very exhilarating. I've never gotten over that. I'm a dimmer freak, even at this moment. In fact, in this building, which was built to our specs, there are dimmers on almost every room light. Not to mention the four 2K dimmer circuits I have in here for working with. Anyway, so that was formative, and she was formative for me just as a savage, unsmiling creature. Very much loathed by my mother, who felt that we were being manipulated, but that wasn't true. Our parents thought that we were—my sister and I—were morbid and dark because we really wanted to know what had happened in World War II, which most people didn't want to talk about.

They found our fascination with that troubling, and they found the fact that Gudde's art was not—her pieces were seldom gay. I can think of one that was... I forget what it was called, but *The Greeks* was our working title. It was Greek's statuary moving, was the idea of it. And we were full of wind and light and just projecting this. It was a pretty amazing piece. But that's the only one that was not dark. [laugh]

Another one was called *River Whores*, which scandalized my parents. First of all I was a blazing virgin, so what did I know about such things anyway? Well, I didn't. I mean, you still know. I had seen *La Strada*. [laugh] I saw the women on the street everywhere. I mean, I knew what was what to some degree, and I was reading everything I could find. So I knew what was what to some degree.

And that was based on -- *Nights of Cabiria*. *La Strada*—it's *Cabiria*, not *La Strada*.

00:32:43 ADAM HYMAN

[technical]

00:32:45 AMY HALPERN

So let's see. Andrew, Nora, Nancy. We've been through my siblings. Sort of.

00:32:52 ADAM HYMAN

But what got you from the school—well, the [sounds like] Anish, we talked about. So school right after that.

00:33:02 AMY HALPERN

Oh, wonderful.

00:33:02 ADAM HYMAN

Any of your experiences... and how did you get to just being a dancer at 14?

00:33:07 AMY HALPERN

Great. The junior school was fantastic. I met my first—I had a wonderful, loving elementary school teacher for three years, Ms. Mayflower—Mayflower—Mayweather? I can't remember, but she was lovely. The kind that you should have for children. The kind who genuinely loves everybody in the room and wants everybody to get it. But then I didn't really have good teachers, or teachers that I liked until junior high school.

I was very dismal, and I went to a very public junior high school because I—none of my siblings went to Hunter. I mean, I had my eyes open. I knew it was a rarified environment, not to mention it was not co-ed, the junior high. Which struck me as idiotic and further unnatural behavior. But I knew I was surrounded by privileged people, which was not the world, and so I declined to go to that junior high school, and

instead went to Junior High School 44. Which was savagely fierce and physically dangerous to be in because it was a violent place.

00:34:15 ADAM HYMAN

Where is it?

00:34:16 AMY HALPERN

77th and Amsterdam. But that's where I met my first great teacher who was John Gatto, John Taylor Gatto III. He was my English teacher who actually has become famous for writing a book called *The Dumbing Down of America* and for coming up with that phrase. That book, the hub of that book is a speech he gave when he was given Teacher of the Year for the State of New York which was, I think, the year he also retired from doing it. And it starts with, "Before you honor me in this way" or "as you honor me this way, you should know what I'm being paid to teach your children." And then he goes through these seven lessons. One of them is your position and rank based on class, age and accomplishment. Two, the Lesson of the Bells. I'm mangling the order. The Lesson of the Bells, having to do with change of class time. "Nothing you are ever doing is important enough to continue when the bell rings".

Three, conditional praise. You know, you encourage by means of grades, or discourage. You raise up, you lower with... Another one is not to have any free time after school. The idea of homework where a child is always policed and never has time to experience elders or any other activity that might open their mind and give them an idea of what their interests are. I can't remember all of them at the moment, but he wrote that book. He was experimenting on us, or he was formulating that on us. We remain, I think, his favorite class, as it turns out, because I still know him. And he's written about my class in his subsequent books. What he would do, is he would say, read *Moby Dick*, and if a discussion was really intense and the bells rang, we would continue, and he would write a lateness note for every single student in the class to the next teacher saying, "They are not at fault. I kept them in for discussion".

When the class was unruly, this was in the days of black boards and sponges to clean them, and the standard issue in New York City public schools were aluminum pitchers; right? Not breakable. And when he wanted order in the room, he would take it and pound it and just pound it on the table. I remember, I think I had one for—or I wanted to have it—that was completely smashed in from having been used for that.

He was spirited and he was large, and he was a fierce defender of us. When I felt that I had little value as a human being on the planet, because Nancy and I both agree that in— when we were both about ten or eleven, we both went into existential despair permanently— or not subsequently permanently, but it felt then permanent, and why do we exist, and why? I didn't have a high opinion of myself.

And John improved it radically by making me think that I had something interesting to say. In fact, he would actually—I would stick around after class some days or after school, and go out and have a drink with him. My best friend and I and possibly another teacher who was a friend of his, who was a guy who did not care for me and I didn't particularly care for—the social studies teacher, who I think was an ex-Marine and said my name with an edge.

I can still hear the way he said, "Amy". It made me dislike the name very much. He was the guy who told us about basic training that he was in, where they'd take a bunch of guys into the woods, interrogate them, and then let them loose with a glove or a sock and then they'd capture them again and make them kneel on a 2x4 and try to make sure they don't say anything except their name and number.

Anyway, he was the other version. But anyway, John—and this was entirely chaste because he has a wife he's in love with madly. And there was no hanky-panky, and we weren't drinking alcohol. I was probably drinking orange juice. But the fact that he dared to spend time talking to me as if something I might say might be interesting probably saved my life literally because I was in a crowded household where if I

opened my mouth at the dinner table—we ate together every single night, and most of what I was interested in was considered weird by everybody else at the table. That gets very tiresome. It made the house feel very crowded, which is why I moved out at 15. At 15 a friend left town for the summer and I was able to have an apartment in the Village, well, because I was working full-time anyway. Then I went to college at 16 in Binghamton.

00:38:53 ADAM HYMAN

Wow.

00:38:54 AMY HALPERN

I never lived at home again because it was just too crowded. There was no rancor, it was just too crowded and it's debilitating to be around people who think your interests are not fascinating.

00:01:06 ADAM HYMAN

So what was the full-time job you were doing at 15? Where you not at school anymore?

00:01:12 AMY HALPERN

Well, in the summer. Since I could type like a beast, and since the family wasn't rich-- I mean, in high school I had maybe 50 cents in my pocket plus bus fare. First I babysat from an early, early age, and then I was typing in offices. So at 15, I think, maybe at 15 I was still a [sounds like] counser, sort of like herder of small children.

00:01:37 ADAM HYMAN

So when were you being a dancer? How did Lynda even find you to be a dancer in the company?

00:02:152 AMY HALPERN

It was a phys ed option at my school, and there was no way I was going to do gym. It was too stupid. And I loathe team sports. I've just never—I like watching movements, but I'm not interesting into chasing a MacGuffin around a field. I just couldn't ever quite get into any motivation for those things. And she just happened to be who was teaching that class, but she had a company that would meet after class—I mean, after school. So I was dancing five or six days a week because there would be rehearsal every single night. There would usually be a class or two during a day. I mean, I was heavy academic student. I was a maniac. You're supposed to be a maniac when you're very young. You have all the energy you never have the rest of your life. So it's appropriate to burn it, burn it, burn it, burn it.

So I was doing heavy academics, but was lucky to have a philology class even in my public high school. But every day after school there was a rehearsal and on the weekends. So I was dancing six to seven days a week. That's professional. This is a key idea: What is professional? Okay. It's one of these questions that has troubled me since I was little, because I was in a professional dance company young.

And he would say, oh, you're not a professional. Well what's professional? Professional, I was told, is when you're paid for something. Well, that's of course, a fiction, but it's a common fiction, and so that was very interesting. That means an amateur, an *amadore*, a lover of the thing, is considered less than someone who may or may not be very interested in it, but is paid for it.

And I've of course seen that borne true at every level. Once a year when we did concerts, Gudde would give us a small amount of money. Well, that changed it. We are professional, but we were professional. We were performing and getting reviews with every other company in New York City, and our reviews

were very fine reviews. So we were placed there. I only remember one review. I was one of what she called her basic eight.

There were basically eight dancers. I was the only European white in the group. We were mostly black, Puerto Rican, Cuban and me, white and Jewish European. And my sister was in the corps in the larger group. I don't want to digress too far on her, but I was going to say something about professionalism. Oh, yes. If you are dancing six or seven days a week, you are a professional. Anything that would debate that is an idiocy, I think.

So, of course, coming to Hollywood, and since there is no defective guild system anymore, that you learn at your own expense regardless of whether you're in a school at not. My trajectory was to work on film sets, sometimes paid and sometimes not. But of course I was always a professional. [laugh] So I just wanted to make that aside about money, because we have to talk about money a certain amount in these interviews anyway, because money is just so important.

I mean, we've just seen Ken Jacobs and Carolee Schneeman liberated by the fact that digital video is affordable. And we've also just watched Chick Stand die with unfinished films that were fantastic. For years before she died, wanting to find somebody to find money so she could print them, and not having access to that or to anything. So money is very important to talk about, especially when we are talking on a historical record for what's important to preserve.

Her films are now being preserved by the various archives— Pacific Film Archives and the Academy. But what pisses me off intensely is that I've seen work of hers that was in progress. There's one 40 minute reel that is devastatingly beautiful and rich. Her camera work was so sure and fantastic and fun. Her editing so on, and you can't escape the delivery of what she's giving you. You can't because it's just so generous.

And I said, Chickie, why don't you show this? She said, because the soundtrack isn't finished. And physical infirmity and lack of energy-- lots of physical infirmity kept her physically from her bench working on it, and lack of money kept her from printing it or working on it. So we'll talk about money some more in a bit. What else is the next question? Okay. So then I had John Gatto as my teacher.

00:06:46 ADAM HYMAN

And what were the names of the school?

00:06:48 AMY HALPERN

Junior High School 44. Julia Richmond was my high school. High school in the 60's, actually near Hunter College on the east side of New York, which was odd because we were west-siders. But it was considered the best public high school in New York at the time, and had what they called the country school, which was some head mistress's concept of the crème-de-la-crème getting advanced placement classes.

I don't know if the so called magnets that they have here are like this, but I was able to take college level biology and philology, which is not normally offered in the school, though it should be offered everywhere. Linguistics— love of linguistics is not taught anywhere in the United States, which is one of the reasons we are scandalously illiterate as far as other languages are concerned. That and the arrogance of having English as the culturally imperialist success story on the planet.

00:07:45 ADAM HYMAN

So how did you get out of high school? Well, did you get out of high school a year early? Did you skip a grade somewhere?

00:07:50 AMY HALPERN

No. I started early because I skipped kindergarten. So I graduated high school and went to college at 16. It sounds like an advancement, but it was actually fraught somewhat because I was emotionally not the same age as everybody else [laugh]. I was proclaimed by my best friend's mother in high school "a Holy Innocent," because even young I was rebellious and iconoclastic.

And rather indifferent to some of the normal mores that were important to people. And not mild in my opinions.

00:08:38 ADAM HYMAN

How did you choose Binghamton?

00:08:39 AMY HALPERN

I didn't choose Binghamton. Binghamton was by default, an interesting by default. I had always intended—because I had a sterling academic record and I wanted to be a surgeon, and because I'm a Jew, I knew the Jews were deselected at Ivy League Schools—I thought that would be entertaining and appropriate. I'm an east-coaster. So I had an entree invitation to visit Pembroke, was interviewed. Pembroke seemed just about fine to me. I mean, I was right. It was one of the most insular parts of the United States as far as New England was concerned. Oh, yes. Rhode Island, very insular. So it was Pembroke, Brown. I applied. I had a sterling, you know—very high academic record and a good interview, and Sokolow—oh, I studied with Anna Sokolow, who was Lynda's choreographer, and danced with her a little bit in her sort of larger company piece that she did.

And she wrote me a very nice letter of recommendation. It's the only school that I applied to. Except somebody said, here. Fill out this form for the state university. So I said, why? And they said, fill it out. Binghamton—SUNY Binghamton, Harper College is the best, is really very good and it's the best in the state. So I did, and I was very affronted when I got an admission because they had nothing in my writing. It was all form, you know, little pencil checks.

They had literally nothing in writing from me, which—how did they know anything, except these numbers on paper? I had good ones but that doesn't mean anything. But Pembroke, I had been assured of getting in by the interviewer, and by the fact that my record was fairly sterling at the time. When the acceptances and rejections were sent out, I never received one. For weeks everybody else knew what schools they were getting into or weren't getting into, and I hadn't heard anything.

So finally the college counselor at my high school called them. No—she got a letter in the mail after everybody had been informed saying this person, Amy Halpern, has been disqualified for consideration for admission because we never received a transcript. So she called them and said, find it. You have two copies, one on your form and one on our form, which you found unacceptable. They put her on hold, they found it and they put me on the waiting list [snaps fingers] like that.

Years later—well, never mind years later—my philology teacher who was also an extraordinary teacher—I had wonderful teachers in high school. One was Lynda Gudde herself and the other was Mary Einhorn, who was a daughter of a rabbi who had been shipped to England as the [Third] Reich rose with her brother, and was co-teaching at Julia Richmond in English and philology and at Barnard. Very, very bright woman. But of course had had the experience of being a persecuted Jew and had lost her father to the Reich and all of this. She said to me, you didn't get in because you were a Jew. And I thought, well, I don't think that's probably the case, but I don't care. I'm not in, so I'll proceed from there. Years later, when I worked with Brianne Murphy, who was the first woman—and for a long time the only woman—D.P., the only woman director of photography in the entire west coast camera local, Brianne Murphy—who started as a producer, so she was indefatigable as a cameraman, first off—And also because she had a low voice, and she said herself, because people thought her name was Brian. They'd call up and say, is this Brian Murphy? And she'd say, sure. And they'd book her, and they'd say, well, is your boss showing up soon? And she'd say, who? Are you talking about the producer? She say, no. Where is Brian Murphy? She said, I'm Brian

Murphy. I'm Brianne Murphy. I'm the D.P. And by then it was too late to kick her off the set. She shot a lot of TV. Anyway, Brianne had gone to Pembroke. So I told her the story I told you and she said, "Oh, are you Jewish?" That was just like that [snaps fingers again]. Then I realized Mary Einhorn was right.

I always found it questionable that they wanted a photograph. You don't need a photograph of a college student. You want to see what their writing is like, and you perhaps would like to speak to them. You don't need to know what they look like in a photograph. There's another anti-representational experience.

00:13:08 ADAM HYMAN

What year did you start at Binghamton?

00:13:10 AMY HALPERN

In 1970. And so Binghamton was by default. Everybody was delighted that I got in because it was actually very hard to get in there apparently, and I was peeved. At that time I didn't know if it would be medicine or architecture, but I was still heading towards medicine, but at that point I was already tormented because I thought I could be a good surgeon, but I didn't know that I could riff, that I could do anything fresh as a surgeon. I thought I could probably be technically excellent. That was one deterrent. I just didn't feel my imagination going into new things you could do that way. And the other deterrent was the idea of being on call for your entire life morally because you have a skill that can save somebody. At that time I was seriously considering political assassination as a mode, and even when I wasn't thinking in those terms the idea of suckering somebody who would like to see hanged, like Richard Nixon—who I really fully expected to hang as a major betrayer of the United States. My violent instincts were at odds with the Hippocratic Oath.

But also the idea of having a prescribed curriculum the rest of your life, that is to say, keeping up on all of the constant literature and staying on one trajectory when my mind was doing this sort of thing all the time—it was finding association. So I wasn't sure what I was going to do. Then I went to Binghamton thinking maybe about architecture. And this campus is built in pink brick in a place that's overcast all the time. Salmon pink brick. It's a hideous. I mean, the people who built it must have been blind. I couldn't comprehend that anybody called an architect would do that. So then I thought, you know what? And I began to look at it more, and thought, you know, if you're an architect, you don't get to create things very often. Mostly you're doing office subdivisions, so then I veered from that. Also being in the daily hideousness of the campus in Binghamton, which was such a physical inappropriateness.

00:15:16 ADAM HYMAN

[technical; recorder off]

00:15:26 AMY HALPERN

So I went to Binghamton, and discovered—although I'd seen a lot of experimental work my whole life—really the scope of it. I discovered, to my amazement—first of all I saw the canon of what was great, which was not a surprise. And they stole my canon. I was lucky enough to be taught by Ken Jacobs. Larry Gottheim, who comes to film by being a visual ecstatic, but also by having been a Dostoevsky scholar first.

So he came in as a verbal academic, which was a good way to come in. He started the department with Ken.

00:16:10 ADAM HYMAN

Can you spell Larry's name?

00:16:11 AMY HALPERN

Larry Lawrence Gottheim G-O-T-T-H-E-I-M. Home for God. I think he had been at Yale as a Dostoevsky scholar, and then he came to Binghamton where he was teaching literature I guess, and decided what was necessary was a film department. That film as literature was necessary. I don't know at what point— he had already started to make films when I was there, but he just started.

And his films are exquisite. I can tell you about them but I would take lots of time. But he was my first meeting of somebody who— no. I had met a lot of filmmakers because of my father's work. A lot of people in film and had little... but they weren't intimate in terms of my personal pursuits because my father worked for the actors and directors a lot in mainstream. For example, I knew Cary Grant when I was five. And he was very nice, and he asked me to marry him. [laugh] And he said he would wait, but he died. But I really young—because we had met and seen a lot of people that were famous—my sister and I were totally indifferent to fame and people whose names we had heard of before. I consider that being well-raised. But we got a little snarky.

But there was a time waiting for a bus in New York City on Sixth Avenue, and there was a picket line of the Musicians Union or some—I think it might have been the Musicians Union, and they were picketing where we were waiting for a bus and a guy— there was a very Machiavellian looking guy with a little beard who looked vaguely familiar but we didn't remark on, and another man came up to us and said, “Do you know who that is?” And my sister and I being wild New York kids, natives said, “No. If you'd like an autograph, you may have ours.” We were awful. But we remember that very distinctly. On the one hand, had we been unduly rude or cruel? No. [laugh] But, anyway. In Binghamton it was the first time I met filmmakers whose work met me. Whose work got me in a deep private place that I had not been able to verbalize before, ever. Ever. So I realized, seeing this scope of what more there was to be done or to some degree what more could be and should be done. Before I had never even thought of making any art, really, because I was so gratified by what I read and by the music I heard and the paintings I saw, and I wasn't coming up with images that I felt were not made already.

And I thought, well, all this work has been done. My job is to just dig it. Dig it. Dig it. Dig it. And if I don't understand it, dig harder. Dig. If you really, really can't— I mean, the expression that was quoted yesterday... “Nothing that is native to humanity is alien to me.” And things made by human beings for the enjoyment or edification of other human beings are generally— there's usually something in there you can get off on. And if you can't, relax and try it again, and then you can decide if you hate it or not, or if it's insulting your intelligence or if it's a waste of your time. So I already knew I had a good practice about appreciating work because I had been let loose in museums as a young child and knew that that was an act of seeing. Act of seeing was something I had been into since I was little.

Even my portraits of myself as a seven year old, it's usually eyes and bushes. Like, the only thing that I would draw of myself was the eyes because that was the only thing that was interesting to me of a sense. And music was something beyond one's reach. I mean, I played guitar passionately and wrote music when I was a teenager. Not electric. Acoustic and actually Travis-picking and that sort of thing. But got too nervous to perform.

Once, playing music for three people on my instrument—I mean three people I knew just in a small space—I was so freaked out singing in front of anybody else, that my voice took on the underwater tremolo of Buffy Sainte-Marie from sheer hysteria. In school I studied clarinet and was the soloist in the junior high school orchestra, but because I couldn't cut loose and improvise on those instruments the same way I could as a dancer, I felt limited and decided by fiat, I was not a musician. Even though like most people, I think of music as the highest art form. Only because you can't resist it. It comes. It takes you. Unless you block your ears, or you take on some sort of an antagonistic brain space and try to shut it out, which is always a mistake. It's a mistake to do that in any surf. Right? If you're in surf, you're supposed to find the wave and roll with it.

And usually there's a way to get off on it. Almost always. Almost always. Anyway. So I met Ken Jacobs who was a fantastic teacher, is a fantastic teacher both in traditional work and new work. For example, one of the first things I remember doing with him was taking apart Tod Browning's *Freaks* on an analytical projector. It was the first time I had access to tools like that because once again, there was no video. One

had no access to the film image. And one had no access—certainly never—to slowing it down. So to be able to see it frame by frame like that was mind-boggling. And to do it with a brain with teeth and claws and get into all the things that are suggested by it, I was suddenly in heaven. Because when I was seeing films as a kid, I wasn't talking about them with anybody.

00:22:27 ADAM HYMAN

But you said you had also liked seeing a lot of the canon even prior to going to Binghamton.

00:22:32 AMY HALPERN

Well, yes, I had.

00:22:33 ADAM HYMAN

What sorts of films, though? What were you seeing?

00:22:34 AMY HALPERN

[overlapping] The one that crosses my mind is, at the moment, Yoji Kuri's strange, bizarre animations for example. I have terrible memory for names. But, for example, Chris Marker's work was very familiar to me, very familiar to me. The first film that I saw that made me think that actually they could get in there—besides that I love masterpieces, and of the normal hagiography, right? Kurasawa and Bergman... But my favorite filmmakers were Yvette and Ruiz, Raul Ruiz. At the moment [sounds like] DePlashan blows my mind and [Krzysztof] Kieślowski. So the traditional works, the canon, the orthodox, yes. But also I had seen Chris Marker and other stuff, but I don't remember names of anything. But at Binghamton, of course, and also because they were friends of everybody, and everybody was then traveling, I got to spend a lot of time with very important filmmakers and see what they were doing. Not just their work up close, but seeing them up close. So Hollis Frampton, is one of the saviors of the world who's unknown to everybody. An American genius who most people have never heard of, whose work is so deeply nourishing. And Ken's [Jacobs] and Larry's [Gottheim] and Ernie Gehr was young then, but he was doing beautiful work, very beautiful. In fact, in our corridors is where he made *Serene Velocity*. Which is, I think, one of the first great films about fluorescent lighting. Among other things that is great about that film is that hideous oppressive green.

00:24:23 ADAM HYMAN

So were you there while any of them were making...?

00:24:25 AMY HALPERN

Oh, yeah.

00:24:25 ADAM HYMAN

Well, I mean, were you present for the filming of or for the creation of any of the films?

00:24:28 AMY HALPERN

I have a feeling— yeah. I have a feeling that *Serene Velocity* was shot while I was there, I think. So, Hollis, Brakhage came by a bunch. I recognize both his genius and his problems very young because, for example, I was very lucky to collaborate with Ken Jacobs. I worked with him both in Binghamton and in New York City in his New York Apparition Theater working in the Shadow Play Company.

And that was one way that the performative experience that I had had as a professional came into play because I get to this place where— as usual I found most people asleep wherever you go, especially when you are young. Certainly, most adults, but also a lot of your peers seem to be unconscious, and this was during the period when there was a Vietnam War. Every single week in high school we were on the street. And I came very close many times to having my head clobbered. I mean, there's nothing like the experience of being in a crowd of people when a horse comes through with somebody with a club and gets the people next to you. You know, these are formative experiences and important to have. So why my peers—the ones who weren't there and the ones who were socializing it up in Binghamton—were always relaxed, I still didn't get. I get it even less here where it's more of a pervasive thing, this sort of relaxation.

Anyway, but for example, I would walk down the hall with Ken and Hollis and have a conversation and then Stan Brakhage would be there and I would suddenly not exist. You know, what Carolee Schneemann said yesterday about sexism is not a small matter. Actually, Larry once told me— I'm talking about two dead people and one live one. Can I do that? Yeah. Chick Strand once told me— no. Larry told me—Gottheim—was in a panel with Chick Strand and Stan Brakhage and told me that he was appalled by Brakhage's rudeness to Chick Strand, who was a master filmmaker. In a way, not unlike him in terms of being a romantic mystic, lyric filmmaker and highly deserving of respect, and that he was so off-handed with her that Gottheim was embarrassed for both of them. Embarrassed for Stan in his malfeasances. I was too young to be self-defensive, but I did observe it young.

But now let's talk about this for a second, because it's not the most interesting topic in the world—gender—but it has to come into this mess because it's very significant.

00:27:23 ADAM HYMAN

Um-hum.

00:27:23 AMY HALPERN

All of my colleagues were men, and I was a blazing virgin very late. I mean, I was already in film, in school and having had no physical experience with another body except when I was dancing with them. But even then I realized that sex is the primary metaphor for any dramatic construction. So I knew that it was a necessary bit of knowledge. Plus, I was reading, and in everything I read that was literature was written by a guy. And they speak about women a certain way. So A, as a very young girl I realized that when something says “he”, it means “he or she”. I mean, I just had to decide that or I would never had read anything. I would have been too deeply offended. So I stopped doing that. So I don't have a big hang up on he, she, how you describe it. I am pissed off with Ms., M-S. Ms. pisses me off. When I get mail, solicitations for funds with that on it, I scratch it out, and I've sent them a letter back saying, if you are interested in my support and involvement, be so kind as to remove the M-S from the front of my name. My name is Amy Halpern, or technically Amy Halpern-Lebrun, because I'm married to somebody. My marital status has nothing to do with my name. Nothing to do with my name. And Ms. means either “Miss” or “I'm declining to discuss my marital status” in an aggressive and defensive way. Why would I want to be part of that bullshit? If I can't be Mr. like any other guy, I don't want any kind of prefix on my name. Sir is nice. You can call me sir, but Mrs. or Miss pisses me off, and Ms. pisses me off even more. Halpern is fine.

But about gender, there's more important things to say on the subject. So reading “he” for “he or she” early on...

00:29:28 ADAM HYMAN

Well, just briefly, your classmates then, you were the only woman. I mean, who are your classmates?

00:29:34 AMY HALPERN

Which classmates?

00:29:34 ADAM HYMAN

At Binghamton.

00:29:35 AMY HALPERN

In Binghamton. Oh, no. There were a lot of women in the classes. Lots of them, and some very interesting. Marsha Braunstein, who is an interesting artist, I haven't seen. I would love to see her. Really interesting, brilliant woman doing interesting stuff. An interesting woman named Barbara [sounds like] Badenadito, complicated and interesting, who is actually in Hollis Frampton's... The film in which she and a guy are yelling at Frank something-or-other, are yelling at each other. It's a fierce fight between a man and a woman.

00:30:03 ADAM HYMAN

Critical Mass.

00:30:05 AMY HALPERN

That's Barbara Badenadito. Helene Caplin, who was also interesting and beginning to do some film work there and maybe some sound also, and has later become a lawyer. She's still friends with Ken and Flo. I don't know her now. But not very many women who actually got into anything film-wise. In *The Shadow Play* there were a couple.

00:30:27 ADAM HYMAN

Men? Any classmates at Binghamton who stuck around in the film world?

00:30:31 AMY HALPERN

Yeah. When I got back—I went back to New York. So what happened was this: I went to Binghamton, began to make films there, and got this great sense of this fantastic conservatory. Because really the best filmmakers in the United States and the world—and excuse me. I left out Peter Kubelka, he came more than once. To see Kubelka speak is really, very, very rich. So it wasn't just Americans. But when I began to realize I wanted to make films and started to make them, I didn't want to do it in the hot house because it's one thing to make rarified work, but you can't just do it because you're in a safe place. The world is not like that. And plus, I had always felt, well, it's fine if I'm going to be a surgeon or a doctor, I'm happy to be supported through school, but when I had decided not to do that—which had always been my plan—I didn't feel it was my parent's obligation to support that anymore.

And just to prove it to myself since I was ambivalent about giving up this trajectory, I did the schoolwork and didn't hand it in so I could destroy my academic record, which I actually did do. And I sent my parent's this—I mean I had never had C's in my life probably—and I sent them this thing and said, up my permanent record with a runcible spoon. You don't have to support me anymore. I mean, it wasn't the same missive. But that's what I did. What I did was, I left school. I went back to New York City to work full time so I could afford to make film. And I was 17 or 18 at that point.

00:32:11 ADAM HYMAN

So how many years did you stay at Binghamton?

00:32:13 AMY HALPERN

About a year and a half, but I went back there sometimes— or once. [laugh] Traveling when you are from Manhattan is not an easy matter. We were a non-car family. We were pedestrians. You know, pedestrians— happy, proud pedestrians, New Yorkers.

00:32:31 ADAM HYMAN

Where were you living when you were in Binghamton? At school?

00:32:34 AMY HALPERN

Oh, no. There's a place called Brown Road. Well, I must have been there a year and a half because the first semester or so I was in a dorm, which was odious. Three in a room. I mean, the usual corporate crap. Three in a room, and I was in the top bunk. If I sat up to read, I'd hit my head on the ceiling. It was deeply offensive. I did most of my reading in a concrete construction conduit close by.

There was a construction site for the school, and I would just go there and read. Plus I was nocturnal by nature, I am nocturnal by nature, and the two roommates I had would wake up first thing in the morning and get dressed and go out at six. So it was inequitable. So then I lived off campus in a street called— I think it was Oak Street down the block from Arty Spiegelman and his friend Bob Schneider. So as a shy, young creature, I was going and drinking with them and hanging out there and not involved with anybody. I was not involved with anybody in any of that period of time.

00:33:41 ADAM HYMAN

So in a year and a half, you moved back to New York?

00:33:43 AMY HALPERN

Yeah.

00:33:43 ADAM HYMAN

Should we go there?

00:33:44 AMY HALPERN

Yeah. First I want to talk about the things that happened in Binghamton. Because besides the 3D Shadow Play Company which we worked with and performed for audiences of children and also adults, and Ken made these beautiful pieces out of it that we performed. Then Hermann Nitsch came, and Hermann Nitsch is an Austrian artist who— I mean, I was thinking about him last night looking at Carolee's movie, *Meat Joy*, because it was extremely close to, only with completely other intent than what Hermann Nitsch was doing with his wife.

He came. He explained to a large group of people what he was doing, and I think it must have been Larry and Ken told us in advance that he was coming to do a piece and would want volunteers. Since I know how to work seriously, I volunteered to be involved in this. And what it was was a piece that involved a ritual involving meat, blood, organs, dead animals. It was rather astonishing. And because I would, I was one of the two main people who was lying in a floor underneath a crucified lamb which was having buckets of blood poured on it.

And then on a cue I was dragged across the floor with the other guy. I was supposed to scream on cue, and then that same piece of meat was hoisted on a pendulum over a huge circle of people who push it back and forth chanting, and the idea to gain some sort of group catharsis. Then at the end of that the lamb went to Larry Gottheim's marvelous house up on Brown Road and Kubelka, who's a Cordon Bleu chef, cooked it.

And we all ate. It was pretty heavy business. That was the first night I was ever kissed on the mouth by anybody. I was holding a snake belonging to Josh—Larry Gottheim's son—and hanging out in the periphery because I was on the shy side. I was new at the school and there were all these hipper older kids, and I was holding this snake— and also the experience of that performance was very, very terrifying because if you've never been in buckets of blood before, it's not a smooth, simple liquid. It's granular and has albumin-ish material in it. It's much ickier than you'll imagine. It's much more... it gets you pretty deep. And I had never screamed. I had never screamed in my life until the rehearsal in which I was told to scream, and I actually heard this female, blood curdling scream come out. It was, like, wow, that was interesting. But when we performed the piece full-tilt— and we were in white t-shirts and jeans and boots.

And the blood was on, then I had a completely transportive experience of being in a battlefield and lying there. The blood was very intense. So before the dinner party we would cook this lamb, and I went into a visceral screaming response to get out of this body and get out of this blood and get out of this damp, sticky t-shirt that was really extreme. And the fact that Binghamton was rainy and muddy all the time was fine. So I stepped out of the building, walked under a bridge where there was water dripping down and tried to drench myself of some of it, rinse myself. And there's a series of photographs taken of my screaming face taken by somebody of complicated motivation, no doubt, which ended up in the yearbook, a copy of which I do not own, which are horrifying photographs of a woman covered in blood screaming. But it was important to do these images because at the time we were killing people every day.

I mean, not that we're not doing that now, but then we were doing it slightly more overtly in Vietnam. Slightly more overtly. It was not a police action anymore. It was actually a war. This is untenable to anybody who's human, I thought, and so to make these images available was necessary and important. And that almost got the school closed down. That performance— the triple city area of Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott freaked out—and Vestal—I can't remember if it was three or four cities. They freaked out of their minds and almost closed the school. I remember we had to go on a radio station and explain that his motivation in doing this was not to be just shocking and stupid, it was to actually give people a classical, like an ancient Roman or Greek cathartic experience. So whether or not I like the work—and I have mixed feelings about that—it certainly was effective, and I did it because I knew how to perform and I knew how to be serious. If somebody says, go here and do that, you go there and do that. If the reason is good enough, I will do it. If. Now, I think the “if” is why they can't draft women in any army. I think they cannot. Because men you can put through basic training and make them obedient, but women will if you say, “Do that”. They will say, “Why?” And there out the window goes your entire military M.O. It would stop things [makes noise and gesture]. It would stop the entire proceedings if you had to explain why something was being done. But I think most women and most people who were encouraged and well-raised would question why they're doing anything they're being told to do. I think that's the job of all teachers, is not to teach people to be obedient, but to teach them to question everything that comes at them. Generously, but question it. So performing in Binghamton— anyway, I left Binghamton.

I made one film there, or began to make a film there, which I shot in New York City which was choreographed bird flight. I still have a very elaborative catalogue of all the flights. I was shooting regular eight millimeter. And it's hard to get bird flight. You hang out a lot, and I had a lot of it and I had it all deployed on a trim bin in Binghamton.

And that was the first disaster in my life in a certain way because somebody—and it would have been somebody who knew me, and I think I know who—threw the film away into the trash while I was not there. Somebody who had actually shared a dwelling with me before, was in charge of the premises. It was fairly devastating since I spent more than a year on it. It would have been my first movie.

So then I moved back to New York because I did not want to make films in an approved place, and I wanted to do it in a real context, and I knew I needed to pay for it. So I went back to New York City, got a really perfect job for a well-bred young lady at Woman's Day magazine in the food department, which is the most important and the founding department of that magazine. And for almost four years, I typed every single recipe that went in there with 12 copies straight to press. It was before electronic linotype. It's when linotype was still being set. My copy went straight to press on a numbered form, which was exacting work. I also had to proof read them with my supervisor, Charlotte Scripture, and they fed us lunch every day. I

was the only young person there. And it was an interesting— it was the only stable structure in my life because I had my own apartment. I was not talking to my family very much, although they were 15 blocks away, because I needed to survive alone.

[Reel change]

00:00:14 AMY HALPERN

So, we can begin with a visual aid. Shall we?

00:00:16 ADAM HYMAN

Okay, sure.

00:00:17 AMY HALPERN

Because actually, on the one hand, losing that movie was a complete, emotional disaster. And nobody had seen any of it yet. Larry and Ken had not seen any of it yet. But certain obstructions are very useful in life, and this, I keep this on my desk, so I'm going to show you this picture, which you may come in on. It's a Saul Steinberg cartoon. Are you focused? Are you happy? I think it's part of the job of the muse is to present obstruction. So I went back to New York...

00:01:01 ADAM HYMAN

What years then are you working at Woman's Day?

00:01:05 AMY HALPERN

I think '72. Maybe it's only three years. '71, '72 to '74. Because I know I came here on July 4th, '74. So, '71 to '74, something like that. So I moved back to New York. Worked full time in a place and began to make films in eight millimeter. That's when I bought my Revis splicer. Because wonderful eight millimeter, unlike execrable Super 8 millimeter, is a perfect half size of a regular 16 millimeter frame, which is half the size again of a 35 millimeter frame. And you can splice 16 millimeter and eight millimeter on the same unit. And so that's very agreeable to me. And so, I was working with a little Nizo camera, with a very beautiful lens, a Nikon lens, that I had. It was my father's and I had sort of persuaded him to lend it to me. So that's the first camera I shot with.

So I was working at Woman's Day nine to five, and then from five until nine, adventurous and interesting things would happen, but I wasn't spending time with anybody. I had an apartment on 101st between Riverside and West End, that had a big, round table. Some of the same furnishings that I still have, actually, are from then.

And I was cutting on rewinds, and using a projector. So in that room, I had my first impelled filming experiencing, where there's something you just have to do. Just have to do. My first, first film, after the one that was destroyed—or around the same time, but not an edited film—was what I call *Roll #1 For Nancy*, my sister. Which is a three-part movie, cut in the camera, of images that were just heavy for me growing up, because we still lived where I'd grown up, so there's bubbles and round glass objects and such at Riverside Park.

There was that film, shot with that camera. But the more difficult stuff, so I started working on a picture called *Three Preparations*. Oh no-no-no. That's what I was trying to work on, which had to do with, very much involved with painting and the idea of composing within the frame, which is a painterly concern. The idea of precise composition in the frame and moving things slightly, or repositioning them within a frame that were still life.

So *Three Preparations* was still lives that were animated by camera movement, all three of them. But the film I was impelled to make, that I was about to tell you, was *Peach Landscape*. Because I had a gift of being in *Woman's Day* magazine in the kitchen, which was a privileged department. We were given a yearly gift of these very specialized canned peaches, but from the special stash. And I was given one of them.

And I opened this can, I love canned peaches anyway, they're sort of a cross between fruit and candy. I opened this bowl, this can of these exquisite— they must have been *Cling* because they were the orangish, beautiful slices. And I put them in a *Dansk* bowl—that was the bowl I happened to have—and went out of my mind.

It was so exquisite I couldn't stand it. And so that was the first time I was like, [makes noise], you know, got to film, got to film, got to film. So, I made that movie then. But the one I was working hard at was *Three Preparations*. The original title of that movie was *Slow Flush*. I now realize it requires too many footnotes to explain what kind of flush I meant. And when Jonas Mekas reviewed our show—because I was in a show with Phil Wiseman, Kenny Ross, maybe Mark Sacker [Error? Lushe Sacker and Mark Graff are listed on Wikipedia as among founders of the Collective] and myself, the other founders of the Collective For Living Cinema—Jonas printed the name of the film as *Slush Flush*. Which I thought was a sort of unappealing typo.

I wasn't self-defensive enough at the time to send in an [word?], which I should have done. But that's the film that became *Three Preparations* anyway. So anyway, here I am in New York, desperate for the kind of edge. At the time *The Millennium* existed, *Anthology* was only beginning to exist, and I think I was there before it was there, looking for something of this sort.

And *The Museum of Modern Art* only sometimes shows this kind of work. In fact, rather rarely, actually, when it comes down to it. So, I was strung out, very strung out. So when my colleagues from the school, graduated, that is to say Ken Ross, students—these are students of Ken's and Larry's—Ken Ross, Phil Wiseman, and we were joined by a guy named Lushe who was the father, step-father of the girlfriend of one of them. I don't remember what his connection was. We founded, because we were missing the meat of film, the meat of film, the viscera of film was lacking in New York, there's no place really to see it regularly. I think this must have been before *The Anthology* was founded, or we wouldn't have needed to do this. And so, these guys and I founded *The Collective For Living Cinema*.

On most incorporation papers for non-profits, there are three slots that you need to fill. The president, the vice-president, and either the treasurer or secretary. There's always those things. And there were four of us. Since I'm well-bred, and a girl, I generously deferred. This is related to gender and it's important to note. As a result, I'm not on the paperwork, although I helped curate almost all the shows that we did for the first two years when I was there. Set up the chairs, projected, and everything. When the history of *The Collective of Living Cinema* came out, I was omitted. Which is a grief of mine. It's a grievance that I would like repaired, actually. One of the reasons must be because I wasn't sleeping with any of the other people in this group. Usually if there was a woman involved in anything, she was a part of the baggage of one of the guys involved. But I wasn't baggage of anybody. I was barely over being a blazing virgin at that time. Thank you. So on the one hand, gender was irrelevant to our activities, and on the other hand, gender is why I was omitted. I have no doubt. And it's taken me many years to think about this, because I wasn't involved with Kenny or Phil that way.

And they ceased, at some point, to answer mail from me. When I moved out here. So I was kind of disappeared. It's funny about the East Coast, West Coast thing. You know, I'm an East Coaster to the core. And I've been living here [Los Angeles] since 1974 and people always say, oh, now you're Californian, and I say impossible. Because in California, one of the traits that's valued is to be laid back. And New Yorkers cannot be laid back.

We have to be either nailed back or dead. Or very old. Or very sick. So I never felt distanced from New York, but I did feel, in some ways, as if I was being omitted somehow. I know what it's like to not answer mail. I'm also bad at answering mail, but that was a kind of poisonous one, as it turns out.

00:09:06 ADAM HYMAN

So where did the collectives...?

00:09:20 AMY HALPERN

The end of Oasis. That was 1985. The end. It's tragic existence. Which, if I remember correctly, there were a couple of years when Filmforum was not happening. When we started.

00:09:36 ADAM HYMAN

No, we'll get to that. They started at almost the same time. [technical]

What I'm actually trying to figure out is who is exhibiting experimental film in LA between '70 and '76?

00:09:57 AMY HALPERN

Doug Edwards at The Vanguard.

00:09:59 ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] Doug Edwards, at The Vanguard, that was it?

00:10:08 AMY HALPERN (CONTINUED)

The question is, who was exhibiting experimental film in the '70s besides Doug Edwards at the Theatre Vanguard, which I think was managed by Jules Engel's wife, or love. Very nice lady. That was the only place, except for Elfriede's house, Elfriede Fischinger, who was having salons that were curated by Bill Moritz. So that was a major place to see experimental work at the time, if you were lucky enough to be invited.

But there could be 15 people there. So it was a word-of-mouth thing, but on the other hand, it was very fecund because people would bring their new work there. Not a lot of people. But, the O'Neills, and Bill Moritz was showing his work. Harry Fraser's work that he was involved with. And everybody else's. Lots of Fischinger work, of course. And [Jordan] Belson and the Whitney Brothers.

00:11:07 ADAM HYMAN

Well how did—we're way ahead—but how did you even find, when you, lets wait for when you go back to LA...

00:11:14 AMY HALPERN

Went to LA, yeah.

00:11:15 ADAM HYMAN

Back to The Collective for Living Cinema, where did you screen?

00:11:18 AMY HALPERN

I have a bad memory for places and things. I know that some of the time we did it at the 92nd Street Y. And that might have been one or two seasons, but that I can not remember. I know they've got historians working on it. That history must exist. I guess I was peeved and I didn't read it. So I don't know. But I

know that part of the time we did it at the 92nd Street Y because that was available for cultural work, as it still is, thank God.

I mean, it's one of the wonderful things in New York City. When they bought the building I had been out of New York for several years, so the White Street address, I was never at. Because, consistent with my struggling to make a living in New York, when I came out here, I was also struggling to make a living. The leisure to travel just didn't exist. Which is why I was unable to rectify having been obviated from the memory of my colleagues in New York City.

00:12:21 ADAM HYMAN

So what other thoughts of The Collective would you care to share?

00:12:28 AMY HALPERN

We were looking for elemental film. What we do, what I consider what we do, is elemental film work. Elemental, that is to say, it has nothing to do with narrative. It has nothing to do with character development. It has nothing to do with about a subject. You might say in some ways it's a direct follow from abstract expressionism, in terms of being concerned with the materials of making film. What Ken and we all refer to as the meat of film. You know, the substance, the matter of film. The viscera of film. And so the pulse of 24 frames a second is precious to us. I mean what is it now? It's not 30 frames a second in video, because everything's now interlaced, it's trying to be seamless. But that basic pulse of 24 frames a second was part of it for us.

We showed, for example, Bobby Fleischner. Now, in terms of models of how you make a life and also make film. What are the models? Very interesting problem. The first models I saw were Ken and Larry. Ken Jacobs and Larry Gottheim, both of whom were full-time professors making a living. But those were the days in The United States when a single income could support a family.

Well, those days are long gone. But as far as the model of how do you prepare, how do you make work that has nothing to do with commerce. I assume we're not talking about commercial films. That's the premise of what we're doing here is. And I heard myself think the other day, I've been through film school. Let me just say this here. I've been through film schools and I've taught in several of them. Sometimes for long periods of time. And one of the truisms that one is always told is, of course, you never pay for your own film. Which is a laughable statement and I think it's fairly venomous to train people with. Because it hooks them in from square one into the idea that it's a commerce, or a manufactured product, as opposed to something that you do freely. Not without expense, but you do freely from yourself. Entirely for the effect it will have on an audience, with no consideration to what would be sellable, catch people's attention, play to the lowest possible common denominators, you rope them in by showing a little flesh. Now I don't fault films that have used flesh, because flesh is important. And flesh is also necessary to be liberated.

So the bodies of work that a lot of people have, when they're showing nudity, I think is signal to the development of a healthy mind in the United States, which we haven't achieved yet. Of course Hollywood cinema has done everything it can do undo the good done by these films in the '60s and '70s, about trying to naturalize nudity.

Nothing could be further from the case, actually. I mean, unfortunately, the films that are made now still use nudity in a titillating way, and the type of sexuality you see on the screen is more often than not, rape, or some other form of violence. And I think that rape is the American form of sex that's most highly promoted, and it is not good for gender relations.

It's not good for the equality of men on the planet. It's not good for healthy families. But that's what we get taught from square one. Anyway, being in a context in which film has nothing to do with this, it has nothing to do with selling product, it has nothing to do with merchandising. It has only to do with the one-on-one relationship between the person seeing and what's being shown to them.

It's supposed to be done in a generous way, so that you give people mental and visual, emotional and intellectual tools to play with. And to philosophically undo damage. These are tools that cannot be taken away from you. Now that, that's the form of liberation that is what motivates me to make movies. The fact that you can learn something that even if you were hogtied, you would have the resources to mentally and visually—if you were lucky enough to still see—to go somewhere and be somewhere of your own volition, even if you were detained by force. Or by more mundane things, like detained by having to make a living because you're supporting somebody, like a child. So these things are the constraints people really do live with. Since that's the norm, then I think it's incumbent on people who have any perspective on it, to teach ways to get out of that. Or to live well despite certain constraints. And also to refuse other constraints.

So that's why we founded The Collective for Living Cinema, is because although there were some other films that we examined that were from Curtis Harrington and others that were more narrative, or more... they're [not?] very conventional, but let's just say, in the conventional filmmaking mode, to some degree, most of what we were looking at and showing was new work by people who were struggling to make images that would thrill. Not titillate. Thrill. Enhance your walking down the street. Enhance your eating a meal. Enhance and make you more generous talking to other people. These are kind of useful things. But the best definition I ever read was *A Defence of Poetry* by Percy Shelley, one of the most useful things I ever read. He spells it right out. Why is poetry necessary? It's because it exercises those aspects of our faculties which make us human.

Primary among them is the ability to be compassionate and imagine somebody else's existence besides your own. That's the fundamental need. It doesn't have to be a person, it can be an object. But to take yourself out of your own small concerns, into a larger space. So that's what motivated our curating, and that's why I put up endless numbers of chairs, and took down endless numbers of chairs. [laugh] And worked a full time job in a straight context and had the—Geraldine Rhoads and the other one, whose name I can't remember, the two, the editor-in-chief, and the vice editor—both wondering why I, working in the food department, which was the pivotal department of that magazine, why was I not working my way up the editorial ladder.

Well I tell you, it was zero interest. But the fact is, what I had is a very good job for moving into publishing that way, if I had the slightest inclination. Nothing could have been further from my desires. But it was a fantastic place to be. And talk about gender—my boss, there was a woman named Glenna McGinnis. People called her The Duchess. She was not a beauty. And she was very forceful. On the one hand, she spoke deferentially of her husband, The Colonel. But, she was a real force. And she had started *Woman's Day* magazine in World War II as a two-page thing to help women extend their food rations. That's what the hub of the magazine is. So when I worked there, she was now an elderly woman, and the head of General Foods would call her up.

Since I was the receptionist as well as typist for all the recipes, I was privy to some of her conversations. These corporate dudes would call up this powerful, clear-sighted woman and say, well Glenna, how are we doing today? With this phony male voice. Jive stuff. And she would say, well, Sam, or John, I'm just so hairy-assed. She liked to say things like that. She was very cool. So I was in this safe context in the daytime, and then I would leave and do all sorts of things. I was not—I was seeing the guys that I was doing The Collective for Living Cinema with, but I wasn't really seeing anybody else socially, except people I'd bump into. My one colleague at work was a gentleman named Moses Wiggins. We were working at Fawcett Publications in the middle of Times Square. Not Times Square. West of there. Yeah, Times Square. Times Square. And so, Moses was in charge of the physical properties of the, it was kind of a joke, but he was in charge of the physical aspect of the plant, which was several floors of the office building we were in. He is the only person I talked to about film, and film was further from his context than you could possibly imagine.

I think he was from the deep South. He was black. I don't know what level of school he'd gone to. Very, very intelligent, and interesting guy. Very interesting guy, who had massive forearms. He looked like the Michelangelo David. He was built to a very enormous proportion. Enormous afro. I remember going down, and he would give me a ride home sometimes. Because I was on 101st Street, and he lived, actually he lived in the 80s. But he had a car, he would give me a ride home. On the one hand he was very tough

and rough and I would come in there and talk politics when I had a little business to do for my department. And then he would give me a ride home, and after the whole day of trying to snow me and shock me by things he might say, I would tell him about what I had just shot. And he would turn to me with his eyes opened like a child and say, really?

He was like, there for it. So, I was learning how to piece together my supportive inspiration by other than the usual means, because I was outside the context of having— I mean, my teachers were very great. But they were not teaching me filmmaking. They were teaching me about film. But nobody impacted my own work because A, I wasn't showing it to anybody except while I was working it.

And that has been the case through to today. The people who are filmmakers, friends of mine, people who's work I like and admire, don't ever see work, almost never see work until it's finished. For better and for worse. There's a spelling error I made, which I probably wouldn't if I'd had anybody else in the room with me, for example, on the most beautiful title I've ever shot. Which I had reshot already twice, and it doesn't have the magic of the first time, even though it's spelled correctly. I may try one more time.

At the time, [1970s New York] Ken and Flo Jacobs were an occasional presence, when they weren't teaching. But something that was a real, full-time presence when I came back to town, then there was The Anthology, also. Or, it was beginning to be The Anthology. Also Richard Foreman, who is an amazing playwright, who I consider close to a filmmaker in terms of some indefinable essence of energy, which I can't quite put my finger on.

But he was a great inspiration for me as a filmmaker because he could pull off these events that would get you into transcendent state of mind. Through outside, everything else. Among the things that were interesting about that, it was the same Lafayette area, SoHo area, which was not yet full of boutiques, it was still warehouses and artists at that time. It was much more like deeply scary and elegant.

Not what it is now, sort of superficially so, perhaps. But also still rich. Anyway. So there were a lot of experimental filmmakers who were in his company. For example, one of his main actors, who played a character named Max in several of his plays, was a very dear man named Bobby Fleischner, who was a full-time special effects cameraman in New York City. And he was somebody who was a friend of mine. He was a '40s guy. I think he was older than Ken and Flo.

Anyway, so Bobby Fleischner was one of the filmmakers. Andrew Noren was also one of the other filmmakers who performed at it [Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater]. He often played a character named Ben. I spent some time hanging out with him a little bit. Oddly enough, at that period of time, I was still really young, I was then about 19 and also extremely unsophisticated in terms of human relations, but he was mistaken in thinking I was malleable. Noren was.

The second person I went to bed with, which was somebody I didn't know, by design, was a Spanish painter who invited me to move in next door and be his muse. He was a very nice man, I liked him. A good painter. And I said, but, but, *I* need a muse. [laugh] I didn't move in.

00:25:41 ADAM HYMAN

What did he say to that?

00:25:42 AMY HALPERN

He didn't have a good answer. He's a nice man, but he also wanted a wife and a muse. All artists need that. Women and men. You don't always get that. It does make you more efficient, though, that's for sure. Healthier, more efficient, happier, live longer.

00:26:04 ADAM HYMAN

To have both?

00:26:05 AMY HALPERN

Yeah. It's harder for women.

00:26:08 ADAM HYMAN

Yeah. *Three Preparations*?

00:26:14 AMY HALPERN

Yes. Okay, so this was basically a still life examination of the frame. So there's no movement in anything that I shot, innately. But there are three sections, and one of them is *Stalice / Frameline*, which is the usual thing, a wine bottle with a flower in it. What I liked to do in New York, the second they were available is get an iris in a wine bottle. And then you would use *stalice*, which is dry, so it's not perishable as a flower. And out the window where I lived was 101st Street between Riverside and West End. North-facing. And so I used that window a lot. I filmed by that light in the day time, and cut on that table.

It was actually an old butcher block cutting table. A butcher block which I used. *The canononball Section*—which has perhaps been seen more than the rest of the movie, because I have extracted it and shown it by itself—is a baby game I used to play when I was little. It was one of those things I would like most to render on film, is the kind of un-self-conscious delights children have, which cannot be verbalized, or they don't verbalize, which are inchoate.

I mean, it's human nature to play and to find the light in objects. One thing that I used to do—and my mother said I started— I just spoke to her on the phone, she said I was five when I started dancing in dance classes. But since I was mobile as a child anyway there's things you just do, which are movement for pleasure, before that. And one of them was, there's a place on Riverside Drive where I grew up—I was on 86th Street, that's the family seat— But, on 89th Street is The Soldiers and Sailors Monument. Further up is The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. But The Soldiers and Sailors Monument has in it, first of all, along Riverside Drive are old Revolutionary War cannons in place. You can actually sit on them, which is fun. But near the monument is an arc in which have been set in the ground in cement, a whole bunch of cannon balls from that same war.

They're facing across towards New Jersey and the rest of The United States. They're a very appealing configuration for a normal New Yorker. Because all New Yorkers think of themselves as separate from The United States. If you walk on these things, you lose your balance constantly, because you're standing on these little round objects. So it influences your gait. And so the combination between trying not to fall over and walking from one to the next, builds a rhythm, which is pretty fantastic.

So I filmed that. That was something I was really pleased with doing. But that was by design. I thought about that. I thought what would I want most to film, and that was one of the things. The other thing that I was filming that I wanted most to film was translucent objects hanging in the window. So I had some old Czechoslovakian glass drops, probably from a chandelier, that I filmed a lot in that window.

Like all the other films I was making then, it was silent by design. I actually love silent films deeply, and I really, even when I came out here, I still thought I would continue forever to make silent movies. Which is why it's curious that I ended up as a sound mixer. [laugh] But you tend to what you don't know, I think. It's a normal, healthy, human instinct is to gravitate towards either what you don't know, or what frightens you. And so, both of those things were true with sound.

00:30:02 ADAM HYMAN

And then what about *Filament*?

Ah. That was the second time I was compelled to shoot something. That was a more elaborate production arrangement. So I was pretty isolated in New York. My friends were still at school, and I was working full-time as a secretary. And in my isolated state, I found that there was two hours of radio in Greek in New York City every day, I guess it was at the time. I knew some Greek music because we danced to it.

We danced to the music of Hadjidakis, Manos Hadjidakis, who's one of the—of his generation—one of the famous—he did, *Never on Sunday*. The first Greek film that had Greek music in it. I would listen to the radio and listen to the music, and I sort of blundered my way into learning Greek that way. At Woman's Day magazine, seven blocks away from—it's not there anymore—but it was my favorite restaurant called Molfettas, The Brothers Molfetta. My grandmother used to take us there. And here I'd find myself at Times Square, seven walking blocks away. So they would feed me lunch and then I would walk there and have either a cup of coffee, sometimes I'd have a smoke. At the time I was smoking a lot of cigarettes, and maybe I'd have a smoke of pot. That was very rare, but I would occasionally do that. Or a glass of wine. And write in my notebook and then come back. They had a juke box with, of course, Greek music on it. The waiters enjoyed my regularity as a customer, and thought I was a fine young person. Also, they were very generous, so they would say to you in Greek. - they'd like to teach you a phrase or two – “How are you? What's new?” Well no, what's new wouldn't be it, that's too complicated. But how are you? And so I got frustrated with just saying good or well and I bought an immigrants dictionary on 42nd Street, and began to— well, I learned the Greek alphabet from a Webster's. That's the family bible, as I was raised by my grandfather in this regard. The family bible is Webster's Dictionary.

When I asked him overtly, when I moved out here, I said grandpa, we never talked about this. (Both of my grandparents kept kosher homes, seemed germane). I said grandpa, what's your favorite, do you have a passage in the bible you want to recommend to me? Anything you particularly care for? He said well, you know, it's not my favorite book. That was his answer. [laugh] He said my bible is Webster's Dictionary. I already knew that, but it was nice to get it explicitly like that. Anyway, that dictionary taught me the Greek alphabet. So then I bought a Greek dictionary, and when they'd say how are you, I could say “cloudy”, or “fuzzy”, or some other bizarre answer, and it's so rare that anybody would do that, they really encouraged me.

Also listening to the music, which is a mode of learning a language I highly endorse, because I had been convinced I was a linguistic idiot, because part and parcel with the inability of most places in The United States to teach any other language than English, I had a beast of a French teacher when I got back to Hunter. After having lived in Paris two years. A woman named Madame Hopstein, who was a fierce beast. And unkind. And convinced me rather thoroughly I couldn't possibly speak this language. So I thought I was a linguistic dodo, but I did learn to speak conversational Greek, and was also partially motivated by the fact that I left in '74, and '74 is when the Junta fell, that the US government was paying for out of our tax dollars. It was a very brutal dictatorship.

And of course, the Greeks who lived in New York, the ones who would make money there and go back and forth and spend their money and enjoy the benefits of being an American Greek, were supporting this regime. I didn't support this regime or our government. Except with my tax dollars, which I couldn't avoid. So speaking poor Greek, but being in a social circumstance with other Greeks, it was a marvelous opportunity to use a word incorrectly and scandalize them, but bring some truth to the table.

So I'd step out for half a second from being some babe who was there. Just, you know, some other female form that happened to be there, and instead of saying “oh shit” in conversation, I would say [speaks Greek]. There's a difference between [speaks Greek], which is just shit like you'd say in conversation, normal shit, shit. [speaks Greek] means actual, like sheep turds. So when you say [speaks Greek], you're saying turds.

So I could make a mistake like that in reaction to something someone would say, the most literal I could get. So that did motivate me to speak better Greek. That was part of it. Then what happened was, there was a Greek who frequented the same restaurant who I was being recommended to by the waiters as a very good woman. So we would have conversations, and I wasn't getting involved with him. But he did educate

me about Greek music. And, he said well, if you like Hadjidakis then you can't like [Mikis] Theodorakis, but he is the greater musician. So he began to play me lots and lots of Theodorakis. Where as Manos Hadjidakis was, let's just say, apolitical, but he was a rich person.

Which takes you out of being apolitical into somebody who is more politically, as a factor. And then there was Theodorakis, who had fought in the resistance against the Germans, and then was a Communist member of Parliament, and then had done jail time in Greece for being a Communist. But he is a composer. And indeed Hadjidakis' music was very beautiful, Theodorakis' music is like Bach. I mean, it's over the top. And when he uses lyrics by [Federico Garcia] Lorca or somebody else, he's illustrating the sense of the words in the music. So I'd heard quite a bit of it, and then I wasn't spending any time with Yannis at the time, and I heard that Lincoln Center was going to present Theodorakis. So, I bought myself a seat in the orchestra. Right up—some place in the middle of the house. But in the center. A good seat.

I went, and I was indeed totally blown away. Because even though I didn't speak the language, he was illustrating the lyrics by what he was doing, and it's the kind of music that, you would have such a total emotional response. Like seeing *Battle of Algiers*. When you leave a movie like *Battle of Algiers*, you will get up and you will go act, unlike other movies that make you think. His music, you could leave the auditorium and rip a wall down with your hands. So I was extremely impressed by him and by his music. Beautiful and nourishing. In the middle of this concert, I hear a voice behind me that said, see, I told you Theodorakis was the one. And I turned around, and Yannis is right behind me, by some fluke.

Anyway, I learned that he was going to play another concert in Stratford, Connecticut. Now if you're a New York school kid, one is probably—at least in the days when there was any funding for the arts, which was the case when I was a child—you would occasionally, maybe once, maybe twice, get on a school bus and drive to Stratford to where they have a Shakespeare Festival. An ongoing Shakespeare Theater. So I knew it was feasible to do in one day. But I was a non-transportation person. But when I heard that he was playing at a subscription concert, and not only that, but that there had been paid ads against his appearing, because Stratford, Connecticut is an extremely conservative town, I figured well I would take—I called The Greyhound and said can I get there through you?

And they said yes, you can. You arrive there and then it's a cab ride. And I was not enterprising as a person. I was very shy and I was a pedestrian. If I could get there by foot, or by a bus, I would do it. But anything else was too complicated to imagine. And nobody in my family could drive yet. It was like a non-concept. So, I got on a bus, I had 20 bucks, because after paying for rent and some amount of food, exclusive of what I was given. Every single week I would put the pennies and the other change together and go to the bodega on the corner, change them into singles so I could buy myself a meal. Every week. This is working full time in the '70s. At any rate, I had 20 bucks with me, on top of the cost of the ticket. I figured, well, a cab drive one way, and if it's too far I'll walk back, and the bus leaves this place at midnight, so I should be able to make it.

So I get to Bridgeport, which is where the bus stops, and discover that the bus terminal is closed at night. So there is no place to wait for that bus. The neighborhood is dangerous, that there had been three rapes on the block that week. Than, "What are you here for? You're here to see that Communist?" I got actually, like grilled by the newly appointed head of the bus station, who was maniacally trying to synchronize the two clocks. I remember he had a little bow tie, and he was some sort of little political appointee who asked me how I voted. It was really most extraordinary. Because it turns out there was no public transportation to Stratford from Bridgeport. None. And it wasn't a couple of miles, it was more than ten miles, which is not walkable before the concert, at any rate.

And there's no place to wait when I come back. So, here I am. I'm completely unward. And so the police, there was a guard there. Not a policeman, but a guard, a security guard, who offered to give me a ride. So he told me some things about, he told me that there had been paid ads against Theodorakis appearing all week. He had been put into this subscription concert at the last minute, so he hadn't been a desired, you know, it was a classical music series, I guess.

I sat between furs on both sides in this theater, listening to really raw, fantastic music. I said to the people on either side, don't worry about the words, just listen to the music and it will open up for you. But, I was in an alien location. And I also, when the thing ended, I was afraid of everybody who was surrounding me, and I had no idea how to get back to this place where I didn't really care to wait until midnight for a bus anyway.

So I did something extremely uncharacteristic, which was when I realized the only people that I trusted at all were the people who were on the stage. And I've never cared for going backstage, either when I was dancing or when I'm seeing something. But I felt that it was my only hope for getting back to New York safely. So I went backstage, against my inclination, and talked to the guy who was the lead singer and translator, a guy named Petros Pandis. And he said, why, why don't you come back to New York with us? You may ride on the bus as my guest. And I said, as was my habit at the time, because I lived alone, and as I say I was a blazing—I was no longer a blazing virgin, but I was just past that, barely. I had not had relationships, and I was not at ease. But I had also read enough literature to know that men are typically tortured by women, by the alleged “being led on”. And so it was my normal thing, if somebody asked me out for a drink or for dinner, I'd say “Okay, you're asking me for dinner, or do you want to go to bed? Because yes to dinner and probably not to bed.”

And so [to] Petros Pandis, the stranger who'd just offered me a ride on the bus, [I] said well, that's very kind of you. I just would like you to know that I'm very happy to accept your invitation, but I will not go back to your hotel room with you. He said “Oh. Well nonetheless, you are my...[guest]”.

So, it was a long story, but anyway, I'll shorten it.

Anyway, so I'm on the bus back from Stratford with this extremely fine orchestra. He [Theodorakis] had just done the music for *Serpico*, and actually we heard it on a cassette player. We were driving through a thunderstorm. It was very heavy stuff. So I didn't sit next to Petros because I wasn't meat for him. And he said, well why don't you sit next to Lambros, he's the production manager. Who spoke, and I didn't speak, I mean, a few words of Greek only. Bad, bad Greek.

But he spoke some French, and I speak French like a Barbarian. I said I am a Barbarian. I'm an American Barbarian, but you understand me perfectly well. We had a long conversation with other people around, and he invited me for drinks when we got back to town. So I answered him the way I would naturally, and if we have that understanding, sure. So, we get back to their hotel on 57th Street. One of these wonderful musicians walking away from their instruments in this New York lobby, and I'm protecting them because you have to do that. While I'm waiting until the artists are settled in their hotel rooms, for Lambros to come out for a drink, someone comes up to me and says, Mikis understands—now mind you, I haven't had a word with him yet—Mikis understands that you are going to have drinks with Lambros. He's very concerned with Lambros because he drinks to excess. Please protect him and make sure he doesn't drink too much. This was my instruction from the maestro. So, that's very interesting, I thought. Anyway, we finally go. We walk two blocks down, there's a Greek bar, Greek run bar. Excellent.

So he starts putting them down. Well I put them down, too, because I'm drinking with him. I tried to slow him down, I said we're drinking together, so I'm— anyway, I got quite, quite lit. And I'm not a big drinker but I have done and occasionally will do. But he got ripped. I mean, he couldn't stand. Fortunately for me, one of the two bouzouki players also came down to this bar.

Now this was a very chaste, sort of virginal young man, this bouzouki player. No English at all. We understood that he and I had to take care of this guy, and so he and I practically carried him back up to the hotel room, put him in bed. I had to fight my way out of the room, because he chased me into the hallway nude, pulled me and slammed the door on my hand. Really. Anyway, I knew I still had my 20 bucks to take a cab home. But by then it was four in the morning, and I was drunk. And it's one thing to be drunk and go home, but it's another thing to go home to 101st Street where you really need to have all of your radar working because it's a dangerous neighborhood. Anywhere is a dangerous neighborhood at night if you're by yourself at four in the morning. And perhaps more so if you're female, but maybe not necessarily.

But maybe more so, because, the laws as they are now, if you're going to rob somebody and get caught, you might as well rape the person. Because the charges for the theft are going to be greater than the rape anyway, you might as well have it on the house. So, [name?] the other bouzouki player, when I escaped from the room with my smashed hand into this hallway, makes the come-to-my-room gesture. And I went oh, no, you too? Like I thought we had an understanding about what we're trying to do here, is take this guy and make it safe and put him to bed. He made known to me that he had two beds. That he wasn't going to do anything. And so this extremely nice person—who I understand is no longer living alas, I found this out when I was in Greece just this year—tucked me into this bed.

I woke up in the morning. I had never done anything like this before. Woken up where I had no idea. In Binghamton, I had, but it was in the same house that I lived in. I look over and there's this sexy guy in the next bed, you know, with a crucifix and a hairy chest and a string tee shirt. What's up? And so he and I can't talk to each other.

So we started to, with single words, try to talk to each other. It ended up he's pulling out the bouzouki, and singing together and playing music, and then the other bouzouki player walked in. And he was also very nice, and said, well now you're in my city, and I've been your guest, now you'll be my guest. So I walk them down to Molfetta's, which was this great restaurant.

Now, so we're sitting at my table, which is one of the ones right near the window. Of course, we're having a wonderful time, and in walks Petros Pandis with a couple of women. [laugh] And [name?] was a guy who would never pick up a woman, ever, and probably had a fiancée, is my bet. But was just a chaste guy. So when he saw him and me sitting at this table, he went kind of nuts. It was really funny. But I wasn't worried about him because there were two girls waiting for him in the hotel when he got there. So he had nothing to complain about either.

But anyway, when Theodorarakis performs, he wears a black long-sleeved shirt. And he's playing these fantastic, syncopated rhythms. Part of which are the meat, the true deep essence of this music, which is that it knows how to take sadness and turn it upside down. And so his hands disembody. They're lit. They disembody. It's a phenomenon that occurs because of how he costumes himself. So from the time I saw him at Lincoln Center, and certainly when I saw him at Stratford, I was, oh, my God, I would just love to film those hands.

Somehow it came up in conversation with these two guys, the two bouzouki players, and they said, well why don't you come with us to Philadelphia? That's the next place on our tour. I said, well tomorrow is Monday and I have to go to work. Then I realized no, this is an opportunity I couldn't possibly resist. I said can you get permission for me to film? And they said oh, yes, we'll try to do that.

So here I'm suddenly— now I should say I went to New York City thinking somewhere, somehow I'd find someone who'd say, hey kid, I understand you want to shoot film. Here's a camera and here's how it works, and you know what, you can borrow this for the weekend. I just really thought that would happen. I don't know why I thought that. My fantasy, or the idea of a guild system.

I just thought that would happen. Or maybe I just relied that my sincerity would carry me to this place. And it had not happened yet. So I did not have a camera to shoot with. However, we had just founded The Collector for Living Cinema, and Kenny Ross had just bought a brand new Beaulieu. So I called him at midnight on Sunday and said, Kenny, this is an outrageous proposition I'm about to make to you. But, it's an appropriate one for what we have agreed that we are doing together. I said I need to borrow your camera tomorrow and take it to Philadelphia. Anyway, and I said, I realize it's unreasonable, it's a relatively new camera, but for all the reasons that we founded The Collective, in a certain way, you must lend me this camera. I'm not normally this forceful in anything, but I really needed to do this, I really needed to shoot him. I have left out an important detail. Which is that that was the period of time in which our government killed [Salvador] Allende. [Orlando] Letelier was murdered in DC, although I think that hadn't quite happened yet. But we were—as we are now, but then more so perhaps—we were executing people around the world in order to promote our politics in The United States.

We were also teaching our forms of torture and execution to other people. School of the Americas, which I wasn't yet aware of, but I know that in Greece, our military "advisors" were advising brand new and marvelous forms of torture which were being used on a population. And Theodorakis' music—even "Make your bed for two, for you and for me, and we'll embrace until dawn, and everything will rise fresh". Even that could get your club closed in Athens during The Junta.

So, I had every reason—and Theodorakis was performing on a limited visa. Did you know there was such a thing? In The United States? He was on a limited visa. He was not permitted to have any press conferences, only perform his music. I thought perhaps he would be assassinated. The chances—it would have been so easy to assassinate him.

That was in the air those days, and it was happening. So I had a very strong motivation to film him before it was too late, as well as that the phenomenon was exquisite. So I went to Philadelphia, to Independence Hall, filmed him from the wings on three different film stocks. I took three film stocks. Plus-X, Tri-X and 4-X, which was then available. I think 4-X is now discontinued. Alas, one of the great film stocks that Kodak has ever manufactured. Gorgeous grain structure and very fast. Then I filmed him with progressively faster film stocks. So that the hands become progressively more halted and disembodied. That's what I did. That was very amazing because... lots of things about that were amazing. It was very cold. It was a windup camera, and the tension was so high in the air that a peculiar camera phenomenon—but I don't know if you've ever run into or not—but it's distinctly related to film running through a camera as opposed to tape stock. The static electricity of the cold, the extreme energy in the air, his gestures, which are wild, and I was on a close lens with him so that when he would make a move like this, it would be like a blow to my physical body. The energy of that event and, as I say, the cold air, made a static electricity condition so that there are exposures on the film stock like little lightnings, about five times in the course of the shooting, which you can see.

I mean, it looked like an effect. Well they are an effect. But they're an effect that occurred by the nature of the event. They oddly enough occur after he makes strong blows. So I know that part of my own electricity must have played into it, besides the regular static electricity. So that's the movie called *Filament (The Hands)*. I guess I must have called it *The Hands* after Delvaux the painter, a Belgian painter whose works, there's several of them in The Museum of Modern Art. He actually—once again, about nudity—he paints nude women, dressed men. And the women are frequently doing something, like looking at their hands. His paintings are very beautiful. So, I guess that's part of why I titled it. The title in Greece is *Your Hands*, but that doesn't work for an American. Anybody in Greece at all knows who he is.

00:11:33 ADAM HYMAN

Why *Filament*?

00:11:36 AMY HALPERN

Oh. Because the amount of energy, the charge that he's carrying, the fact that these hands are glowing, energetic sources of vital essence. And also, at some point in the film, another artifact occurred, which is a—and I have no idea how, because it's a strange place to get a scratch—in the middle of the frame in one of the rolls, is a scratch right in the middle, but not from top to bottom.

So I don't really know how that occurred. But there it is. And it looked like a sort of glowing, it's really the hands that are glowing, but there was also that scratch that looked like a filament. And the idea, you know, the filament carries the energy of all the other parts of the electricity in a lamp. I actually tell this to people on film sets if they are impatient with the actors. A good way for them to cultivate necessary compassion for an actor is to think of them as carrying—the performers in front of the camera are the filament that takes the entire amount of electricity that the entire crew is putting into it.

Because they're carrying the drama, the dialogue. They are the objects in front of the camera. So the idea of the filament is being that teeny weenie fragile thing. Actually starting out as a hair, right? That's the

first thing that Edison was using was human hairs, I think. Something that is perishable but can be vivified and radiate light. So that's why it's *Filament*.

00:13:12 ADAM HYMAN

All right. There's more... Why did you move to Los Angeles?

00:13:17 AMY HALPERN

Because I wasn't getting any equipment. Because the expected experience of having somebody say, here kid, here's a camera and here's how to use it, wasn't happening. I was going nuts a little bit. I was really impatient. How do you get your hands on equipment? Where's the person who's going to show me how to use it? It wasn't so much being shown, it was how am I going to get my hands on a camera? Furthermore, because I wanted to do stuff that was irregular, it was not sufficient—I mean, yes, I am beyond grateful for the miracles that occurred shooting *Filament*. Down to its technical flaws. I mean, if I had been trying to shoot something specific, especially if it had been a job to get that performance, those electrical shocks—although they're not obtrusive—are technically flaws to a perfect image. For me it's not sufficient to get these things by accident. I also take exception to the idea of the word experimental, in the kinds of films we make.

You know, Faure was called experimental in his music. I was very reassured very young by reading his remark on this. He said when I'm in my studio by myself, or working one on one with a musician—I don't think he said that, but—when I'm working, yes, I experiment. When I take it out of there and present it to an audience, it's not an experiment. It's something that's been worked out already and is being presented.

So I take exception to calling these films experimental. I'm not experimenting on the audience. I experiment in private. Part of the extension of that was, well if that's the case, then I have to learn total technical control. Because I don't want to get something fantastic because I was lucky. I mean, I would like to have the merit, the good karma, whatever it is, to have these accidents occur. But making work is all about control, plus courting circumstance out of your control, and so I needed to become an excellent technician. So this wasn't happening. As you know, working eight hours a day on something vapid is debilitating, physically. Because, in fact, eight hours out of 24 hours is a lot, is a big proportion of your time, and doesn't leave a lot left over for doing anything else. Except eating and sleeping, and if you're lucky, showering. And, you know, making a comfortable nest. Not to mention do anything creative, or having any pleasures. So I just couldn't figure it out. So I decided I would go back to school, and NYU was close. And my father had been the first film graduate on the GI Bill. He was the first film graduate at NYU Film School after the war, on the GI Bill. There wasn't much making of film at the time.

I left out something important about my dad, is that he wanted more than anything to be a combat photographer. And he just couldn't get the gig. He got other gigs, but he couldn't get that one. He did some photography, but he didn't get to do, you know, he wanted to go into combat with a camera. Maybe not combat. I think probably more like he wanted to be on an airplane with a camera. But he wanted to do something involving camera work and film. But anyway, he was the first graduate of NYU, in the film school. So I thought, well that would make sense. I had sort of a warm feeling about it. So I applied and got in, which was a nice surprise. So I called them and said, can you tell me about how to get student aid. And they said oh, you're too late to apply. I went out of my mind. I mean, I was working full-time. It would have been difficult to go to school at all. But the outrage of being admitted to a school and being told you're too late to apply for student aid was just like beyond me. It was like, how outrageous. I didn't get very angry with them. I was totally blown away, though. I mean, God, what a blow. What an outrage.

So, then I called my family, they'd already moved out here by then, because Universal wanted him out here for many years. Finally they moved him out, one of his yearly trips he came to visit and they said, we'd really like you to move out here. We'll make you a vice-president and we'll pay for your move. And he said well I don't know if my wife would like to live out here. So they sent for her. She came out. They said, well we don't know if we really care to remain here. They said okay, we'll pay your apartment for a year in New York, which they did. So I lived there.

Which would have helped going to school, but I still couldn't afford to. I mean, I couldn't pay the tuition, and I couldn't pay the rent or food. So I called my family and said, now what do I do? I mean, now what do I do? You know. It's like, been dangled here, here's your admission. Fuck you. So my parents said well, UCLA is a very good film school and it's a state university. If you came out here and established residency, you could pay for, it would be a reasonable amount of tuition and you could live here. Well I didn't care to live with them. That was not a likelihood. But the idea of coming out to a more reasonable fee for school was not unreasonable. So, I had already been out here. When they moved out, I flew out with them to check out Los Angeles, because I have two younger brothers and sisters. Nancy, the one closest to me already, had her own apartment in the Village. I had my own apartment on 101st Street. But the younger two were still in junior high school, and I flew out with them to see what this Los Angeles place was. I truly did not approve. Which has been borne out, actually.

Well what happens with teenagers here is, because there's so much conspicuous consumption and everybody has a car who's an adult, even if they've never worked a day in their life. Nancy and I, who'd gone to high school in New York with 50 cents in our pockets, here's my little sister, outraged that my father won't give her a car. [laugh] And there's a huge amount of money and all this display of wealth. It was very distasteful to me in every respect. But anyway, so I'd seen it. So I did not move out here out of desire to be here in any way. But I also knew that the... I'd seen people come to the west coast and disappear. Including the guy from whom I got my apartment on 101st Street. I had the intuition that, because of the news that was coming out of here and lots of other things, that I could become healthier there mentally, by coming to California.

I just had this feeling that it would—I wasn't sure. But really, it was to come out here because there was more film stuff to do, and there would be this place that had equipment and more work. So I came out here, spent a year typing and working, taking classes at the UCLA Extension. Dante, Italian, Physics.

This time I found Jim Doolin, who's a painter, was a painter, a wonderful painter. It's his painting of the Santa Monica Mall that appears in *Falling Lessons*, which is a seven foot by seven foot painting. He was somebody I could talk about things with. Even though he would say I don't know anything about film and I can't really talk about it. I said, that doesn't matter. You can talk about making work and correct procedures and method would be fine.

I typed for a year in Century City while doing this. I worked first for a temp agency, which would put me places, which is a lot of fun, actually. It's a very interesting thing to do, which I recommend to people. Because you can tour businesses in an intimate way, troubleshoot them and improve them, because you're seeing their function and how flawed and what's screwed up, and then move on. But I ended up for a couple of years working for something called Tosco, The Oil Shale Company. [laugh] I was outraged by their use of the article. Very arrogant company. The best thing about it was—besides that I sometimes worked in their finances department and observed the vast loss of receipts and expenses that were being claimed for yachting trips by the various people who ran the company. And to sit there in the accounting office and see this happen was kind of fun. But the most fun was, one day I covered for the executive secretary of the chief of the company, who had an inner door leading to his office, as well as an outer door. So I heard the following conversation one day, which quite stunned me.

“Well Jack, those damn fools in Washington know they have to”—this is in 1975. No. '75 it would have been—“Those damn fools in Washington know they have to pass that off-shore drilling legislation sooner or later. By the way, are we still on for quail hunting on Sunday? You can bring your bitch, I've had my dog spayed.” And I'm in this office like, did I really just hear that? You know. Is this Central Casting, what is this? It was so incredible.

And after that flaming cloud shot at the beginning and the end of a movie called *Self Portrait as a City*, which is mostly shots in Manhattan, the beginning and end shot is a shot from very high up in that office building, at Sunset and the traffic on Santa Monica Boulevard. They were still building Century City then. It seemed like a very— anyway, it was a great place to make a shot out the window.

So that film, *Self Portrait as a City*, has everything—I don't even know if you've ever seen that one. I don't know that you have. I haven't shown it for a lot of years.

Well, yeah, so that movie... that was curious because that's about the shape and the openings between buildings that happen in New York. But I couldn't be there. So I drew the shot, and Larry Gottheim shot it for me and Kenny Ross of The Collective drove for me. And he made that shot to my specs. I forget about that because I don't remember that as being the first time I used a camera operator, but actually, it is the first time I used another operator than myself.

So I couldn't believe it, that people would actually want anyone else to shoot their films for them [laugh] when I got out here. How could you trust anybody to shoot your own films or even light them? So when I came out here, to my astonishment, there was a craft I could actually work at as a great skill in the abstract, and not be concerned with what didn't interest me. Which is the narrative or the characters or the costumes, God knows, whatever other period stuff. The art decoration, which I could enjoy, but I'm not interested in. So when I got out here is when I started doing lighting for real. I mean, with tools and instruments.

00:24:46 ADAM HYMAN

So should we talk about that, or should we talk about your starting at UCLA?

00:24:50 AMY HALPERN

We should talk about starting The Collective. I'm not even sure I was in the film school yet. I mean, The Oasis. I can't remember...

00:24:59 ADAM HYMAN

Oh, well then so when you got here, you were...

00:25:04 AMY HALPERN

When I got here, I guess I was...

00:25:04 ADAM HYMAN

[overlapping] What were you attending? Where were you meeting at?

00:25:08 AMY HALPERN

You mean the beginning of the Oasis? No, I must have been at UCLA, because the reason—I mean, Bill Moritz, avante-garde films' beautiful human secret, Bill Moritz, was teaching a class at UCLA for one semester, which I was lucky enough to take. He showed lots and lots of work. He's an entrancing individual. I mean, he was a Renaissance gentleman. He spoke five or six languages well, knew the history of literature, the history of music. Did you know that he was a singer with a beautiful voice? Oh, to hear him sing Handel. He also was somebody who, in his early teens, announced to his parents that he was going to become a castrato. Which they forbid. And he invited me to Elfriede's [Elfriede Fischinger, widow of Oscar Fischinger] house.

00:26:04 ADAM HYMAN

So how did you meet Bill? Just because he was teaching?

00:26:08 AMY HALPERN

He was teaching experimental film. One class at UCLA. I don't remember if I was if I was actually in the film school or not yet. I don't remember. Because it took a year, I think it took a year of my establishing residency before I could enroll. Or apply, maybe. That's right, because I hadn't finished college yet. But I came in as an undergraduate. I took concurrent classes that were in the university as an extension student, and then got into the film school. But I don't remember if I was in the film school yet or not. But I went to his class, at any rate, because I was desperate to see experimental work. That's where I met Bill Moritz who, at that time, the only place showing experimental film in LA was the Theatre Vanguard on Melrose.

I don't think Doug Edwards was running it when I was there, but he was running most of the time I was here. It was not every week even. I don't remember what the periodicity was, but it was not every week. It was more rarefied. Once a month maybe?

00:27:20 ADAM HYMAN

There was a conceptual calendar, and it would be like four shows a month, but sort of scattered unequally. Not just in a week.

00:27:29 AMY HALPERN

Maybe so, yeah.

00:27:29 ADAM HYMAN

Yeah.

00:27:29 AMY HALPERN

Whatever it was, was not regular. And, you know, precious when it occurred, but it wasn't all the time.

00:27:38 ADAM HYMAN

Did you attend those?

00:27:40 AMY HALPERN

Oh yeah. Yeah. When I could.

00:27:43 ADAM HYMAN

Tell me about shows at The Theatre Vanguard.

00:27:45 AMY HALPERN

It was nice because it was like a cute... [technical]

The Theatre Vanguard was a wonderful place to see experimental work because it was a miniature theater. I can't picture it very well, but it was on Melrose, so it was a walking street, which was a great improvement over most of Los Angeles to begin with. Which I did not care for the first nine years I lived here.

I mean, it's lack of urban qualities wore me out, and had me walking around alone, downtown at night. [laugh] Where I could just be among bricks, instead of these two-bit facades, which most of Los Angeles is made of. But that block, that part of Melrose, which is at the head of the west end of it, it was an easy place to go to because it felt like a real street.

And the theatre was small, it had a little teeny weenie marquee, and it really felt— it was precious. It felt precious. Doug was an elegant and erudite host. Elegant. I mean, he was one of the best dressed men actually I've ever seen, in terms of, you know, he would wear these beautifully draped pants and an immaculate shirt. He was a dandy. But a dandy coming out of his being a true [word?]. And so the films that he showed were beautiful. I'm pretty sure Bill was collaborating with him, but I'm not sure. I know that Jules Engels was deeply involved with it, and his beautiful wife was the manager of the theater until she died.

That was a great place. But as I say, it was irregular, so you couldn't rely on these screenings. So there was really no home. And that's why I came up with the name of Oasis when we got together, because here we are in a cultural desert that has the chutzpah, and I may use this technical term which we all know, the 'chutzpah-ed Los Angeles,' to think of itself as the film capitol of the world, and you can't find a projector that runs slow speed, a silent speed. When I first showed my films to some people at UCLA, I had to rent a projector that would run silent speed. I couldn't believe it. This is a film school? It's a famous film school in The United States that can't run a film at silent speed? What's wrong with this place? I mean, it's so provincial. I still feel that way.

I mean, the idea that, in a town that thinks it's the film capital of the world, where you never see first run masterpieces from Europe, Asia, except in festival or rarified circumstances, maybe they run three days. Maybe four, maybe five. But usually once in a festival, and then poof, never again. This is no film capital, friend.

So, anyway, to have that little theater was very nice. Although it was only very rare. I don't know what they did in there the rest of the time. Actually. They must have done something. I don't know what. Maybe it was somebody's toy. But I don't really know how it supported itself. Barely, no doubt.

So Bill Moritz put this bug in everybody's ear, mine, Pat and Beverly [O'Neill], who I can't remember if I had been to their house yet, before that first meeting. I don't remember. That might have been the first time that I went to their house. And that meeting was Roberta and Grahame. Roberta Friedman and Grahame Weinbren, who at that time were a pair. The O'Neill's. David Wilson and Diana Wilson, both filmmakers. A woman named [sounds like] Suri Darmakar, who was a sheik, who was a friend that I had recently run into. No, I ran into her there. I did not know her there before. But she immediately evaporated out of the situation. She's not an experimental filmmaker at all. She's a yoga teacher. There's evidence of her in my work. I have a film called *Pythoress*, in which she appears. Also she's in *Falling Lessons*. And I can't remember who else was there. That's what I remember of who was there at that first meeting. I'm sure I'm omitting something.

00:31:49 ADAM HYMAN

Was Bill there?

00:31:53 AMY HALPERN

The funny thing is, I think Bill was not there. Because he wasn't going to be in the organization. He wanted the film— He was correct. He wanted the filmmakers, who were the ones who needed to see the movies, to get together and show their work and other people's work. It was beyond the scope of his function, and I don't think he had ever any intention of running it or being involved in it.

So from square one it was a complete cooperative. We screened once a week for five years. I might have been the only one who wasn't in a couple. So functioning for me was twice as hard as for everybody else, since there wasn't necessarily any food where I lived. But, our one social event for the week would be we would get together and set up the chairs, the projector, or meet and do curating meetings.

And it was very exhausting, but we did that. It was all filmmakers. All and only filmmakers doing it. All that time, and we got somebody in who wasn't one, or who wasn't one at the time, particularly, was a film

student. As soon as he got people in from the outside was its demise. That wasn't its only demise. Our finances were always precarious. We had one enormous sell out, which was a surprise. That was Maya Deren's *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. That was such a huge sell out. At that point, we were on, I want to say Varick [Street] but it's not Varick. What's it called downtown, around the corner from Al's Bar?

00:33:22 ADAM HYMAN

Traction?

00:33:23 AMY HALPERN

Traction [Avenue]. Yeah, we were down on Traction. And we had a sell out with a huge line remaining after the theater was full. On that occasion we had two shows. Brian Eno showed up flamboyantly with a cockatiel hairdo. It was like an amazing screening. I mean, our screenings sometimes would happen—the same as it is with the Filmforum—you can have eight or nine people in there as an audience, or you can have a crowd.

And there's no telling, it has nothing to do with the merit. I mean, as far as I've been able to detect. I've been in screenings where masterpieces were shown, there were seven people in the house. This also includes European features as well, where there's like nobody there. So I can't predict that.

But, yeah, we got somebody else in who said, oh, you know, I could get work study from UCLA if you would hire me. This is a poisonous question. [laugh] If you hire me to be an assistant to the Oasis, I can get some work study money and you can pay me just a little bit. Well, nobody was paid to do anything then. It was all out of our own pockets.

But we acquiesced to doing this. This person lost us Kevin Thomas reviews for a year. Which is part of what killed the organization, because without a single review in the paper, there is no audience. And she failed to get [Kevin Thomas] parking. I mean, it's incredible, these tiny details can kill something. But they're not nothing. The cookies and the parking are important.

00:34:54 ADAM HYMAN

Why the cookies?

00:34:56 AMY HALPERN

Because if you're going to drag somebody out, especially in Los Angeles where everything is at least a half-hour away, or 40 minutes, or more, A, you have to make it comfortable for them to come in for landing. And B, you have to get them some hospitality when they show up. That's basic civilized behavior. Or, if we were Muslims, it would be without discussion. It would be one of the fundamental things we would have grown up with. Of course when somebody comes into your place, you offer them something. So that's why the cookies. [laugh]

00:35:25 ADAM HYMAN

So in what places did you screen?

00:35:29 AMY HALPERN

In the Oasis?

00:35:29 ADAM HYMAN

Yes.

00:35:31 AMY HALPERN

A place called The Haymarket, which is a sort of lefty operation. I don't know who owned the building. It's been in and out of... That's near MacArthur Park. We were there for a very long time. And then we were at LAICA on Robertson.

00:35:46 ADAM HYMAN

Which stands for what?

00:35:48 AMY HALPERN

Los Angeles... maybe Independent Contemporary Art, or Institute Of Contemporary Art. Something like that, I don't remember. It was actually an architecturally-oriented art organization. So I don't really know what their official mandate was. I think they had some other exhibits there, too. David Wilson did one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen there. He did that show *Tying Dogs Legs*, all these 3-D...

00:36:18 ADAM HYMAN

How was that Filmforum? Did he move it over to LAICA?

00:36:20 AMY HALPERN

I'm talking about the full display with all the things in it.

00:36:24 ADAM HYMAN

Yeah, that was Filmforum?

00:36:27 AMY HALPERN

I thought we also staged it at LAICA. I could be wrong. My memory is not clear. I remember being embraced by those things. But physically I thought they were at LAICA, but I could be mistaken.

00:36:36 ADAM HYMAN

I just found the postcard from the Pasadena Filmforum for the initial...

00:36:41 AMY HALPERN

[overlapping] I have it on my desk. With the two dogs, with the two wolves on it. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Let me show you this, as it just occurs to me. This is single frames from the *Cannonball Section of Three Preparations*. It's not a great presentation, but I enjoy seeing the frames this way.

00:37:11 ADAM HYMAN

Mm hmm.

00:37:11 AMY HALPERN

Which brings to mind something which is, let's just say a problem with the way my brain works. I'm one of these people who cuts sometimes really short amounts. Like four frames. And so, these tiny splices can be very difficult.

00:37:28 ADAM HYMAN

Okay. So Oasis, who else then was involved?

00:37:31 AMY HALPERN

Tom Leeson, who's now at CalArts. He arrived. I can't remember where he arrived from. There's a guy named Tim Shepherd, for a while. Morgan Fisher, in and out. Oh, Paul Arthur for a while. I think that's mostly us.

00:38:00 ADAM HYMAN

Susan?

00:38:01 AMY HALPERN

Susan sometimes, mm hmm. Susan Rosenbloom. Sometimes.

00:38:09 ADAM HYMAN

So how would it work? How were the programming meetings?

00:38:13 AMY HALPERN

Kind of anarchic, with votes. [laugh] That is to say, everybody has opinions, everybody would raise the idea of what films they were either interested in seeing, new or were curious about. We would make a case for what we wanted to see, and then we'd vote on them. Shit, the first thing I wanted to do was have Ken Jacobs out here. It took years. I mean, just to give you an idea of what kind of democracy it was. I guess there were like seven, or nine of us. Six, seven, nine. Something like that. And, you know, consensus is difficult. So.

00:38:49 ADAM HYMAN

So tell me more about them. How was it, practically? Like, if people voted on something, who actually arranged the show? Contacted the filmmaker?

00:38:56 AMY HALPERN

We took different turns. Different ones of us had different offices over time. So I was the president for a while. Other people were president for a while. I was never the accountant. I guess that was not my skill. But, we each did parts of it. I remember it was sort of mushy. I remember it was a lot of work, and we each did some of it. And hiring an outside person who wasn't motivated the same way we were was really a bad thing.

But on the other hand, you know, you do need assistance. It's hard work to do this. As you, yourself, personally know. Because being an impresario is a lot of work. You probably do much more work than we had to. because you do, well, there's one of you, and you have a certain number of people helping you, some of the time. But it's not the same thing as— this really was like an all for one and one for all.

We had the Oasis out of desperate personal need to see this work, and secondarily to show other people. But really because we had to see it. In those days, there was no Netflix. There were no video rental shops. Things were not on video, and video wasn't happening. So in order to see these movies, you had to rent 16 millimeter prints and project them. Which nobody objected to, either. Because that's the correct way to see work that's made that way.

00:00:14 ADAM HYMAN

What technical things can you remember? Like, whose projector? Or how much was admission or things like that?

00:00:23 AMY HALPERN

Really? It could have been like \$4.00 or \$5.00. It was cheap. And it certainly wasn't supporting us. I mean we barely made it. I think there were grants from the city some of the time.

00:00:34 ADAM HYMAN

Who came regularly?

00:00:37 AMY HALPERN

You know who came regularly? Mark Hardin, who is now a heavy professional, special effects guy doing motion control. And he comes to— oh, I've seen him at Filmforum screenings. But I remember him as being the first member not us on our list. And he showed up. He was one of the people who showed up, just true blue all the time. I think he's a Midwestern guy, a very, very lovely human being. It was spotty, as always. Usually it was us, some of us, most of us, or some of us, not always. We took turns running it. Sometimes somebody couldn't show up, so we didn't all always show up.

00:01:21 ADAM HYMAN

Were there introductions? Were there Q & A's?

00:01:24 AMY HALPERN

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

00:01:25 ADAM HYMAN

Tell me about it.

00:01:26 AMY HALPERN

Hard to do. It's very difficult to do. I was just thinking I shot two—I was talking to Chris—that I shot two interviews of two people who we programmed in those days, who I hadn't seen for 20 years, in San Diego, when Stephanie and I went down. One was Dennis Pies, who is now Sky-David, and the other was Louis Hock. Both of them—for example, Louis came with party favors, which I really like in a screening. I like to get program notes. I love to get program notes and I love any little gift object that comes with that any time there is a party.

So he gave out—I still have them, but it will take me more minutes than we have now for me to put my hand on them—but he gave out teeny, weeny, little viewers, single frame viewers that hold one 35 frame, but you get— no, he was giving out one at a time. I took two because, of course, with two of them you can make 3D. And they were of somebody running, was the image. I thought that was really lovely of him. I like that kind of a gift. Something that takes you—it's a physical object you can take besides program notes beyond the screening to continue thinking about what the person gave you.

Ken Jacobs has given out many times a single, small piece of ND filter to put over one eye to make the Pulfrich effect on anybody, on any piece of film that has any planes passing by, just to make a distinction between the two eyes to enhance your 3D vision. And that's a party favor you can take away too, and you play with it and it makes you think. I like that sort of gesture. So we had that sort of screening. I'd like to

think that it was a tender place where the audience would be necessarily an encouraging audience, although not everybody likes everything and that's normal and fine.

But as far as the way our audiences felt, they were pretty pleasant. Then when I started going to UCLA, I'll be damned if I could get anybody to go with me. There was nobody I know from UCLA, from my entire horde at UCLA who ever, ever practically, I'm not sure ever, came to a screening of ours. I mean I don't comprehend this, but there you have it.

00:03:39 ADAM HYMAN

When did you start at UCLA?

00:03:41 AMY HALPERN

I think in '76, I think it was.

00:04:51 ADAM HYMAN

What were communications like with Filmforum then through the years?

00:04:56 AMY HALPERN

Well Terry Cannon, of course, you know is a local saint. And he's a good friend of David Wilson's. I mean we knew about— you know sometimes Pasadena feels very far. Really, if you own a car in Los Angeles, no place is far. Or everywhere is equidistantly far. There is a filmmaker named Everett Lewis, a good filmmaker. I worked on a picture of his called *An Ambush of Ghosts* that Judy Irola shot, a really good picture. Genevieve Bujold, really good picture. And Everett always used to say, in Los Angeles, everything is half an hour away.

Now I think it's more like, maybe it's like 45 minutes away. But he's right. Once you're in a moving vehicle, you really shouldn't give a shit what the distance is. You're comfortable, go. But sometimes Pasadena seemed a very far to go in those days. And even now, you know, we hardly ever make it to Newtown, even though they have fantastic events. So there is some distance thing about Los Angeles. I mean it is provincial. Each little village sticks to itself.

00:06:03 ADAM HYMAN

So do you remember coordinating guests with Filmforum or anything like that?

00:06:06 AMY HALPERN

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, it would fall to various people to pick them up, to feed them, to take them around.

00:06:17 ADAM HYMAN

What else can you tell me about Oasis? Can you describe to me a typical screening?

00:06:24 AMY HALPERN

Not a typical one. I could tell you about a screen that Chicky did at LAICA of all new work, that blew everybody's mind. David Lebrun still talks about that screening because they were peers from UCLA. They both were in school at the same time at UCLA, a generation— a couple of seasons ahead of us. I mean all this work, it was so...these huge movies. Actually, I think that may have been the screening in

which she showed *Soft Fiction*, the one that I'm in. Actually, I'm in *Soft Fiction*, I'm in *Cartoon le Mousse*, my hands are. And I'm in *Kristallnacht*, swimming in icy cold water. [laugh]

Shee showed all of these movies and some other ones at this one screening. It was like all new, all fresh, dense imagery, you know, beautifully choreographed. It was spectacular. And her sound work, and her editing, one of the most beautiful cameraman that I've ever seen the work of. Just such a sure hand, a sure eye. It's so inspiring to see her stuff. It's funny, I was thinking about— I have a bad memory of her name, and so last night I was trying to remember whose names I wanted not to forget to mention. But as I was thinking of it, I was thinking of Chicky, you could safely say well, what kind of an influence did Chick Strand have on your work? And the answer is kind of like none [laugh], in a serious way because first of all, I'm very slow. She had seen my work, and then there was a long wait to see *Falling Lessons*, in which both she and her husband Marty appeared. I think by the time I finished it, Marty had died, and when Chicky saw the movie for the first time, she said to me, that's the strangest film I've ever seen, which for her, was a wonderful thing to hear.

But the fact is, there are similarities in our work in that the work is for both of us totally sensual, totally tactile, totally the music of texture and light. So we had that in common, but I was already doing my stuff and she was already doing her stuff. So although I got to assist and place a light once or twice, you know, do a little lighting for her, but not very much. Mostly, I was appearing for her as a prop because I was helping her. I was still finding it very appalling to be on camera.

I should say one thing. I was an extra once in New York in a movie before I was making films. Well, I knew I was beginning to shoot, but I had never been on— I had no attraction to large scale productions. But from my Greek friend, I learned that Jules Dassin was in town to make a movie about the storming of Polytechnic by the Greek Army. They put bulldozers through the walls of the Athens Polytechnic University with people sitting on them and killed a whole bunch of people. And he staged something in a soundstage in New York and my friend said he's looking for people to be in a riot scene. I

So I went down to a Westside Soundstage and had the terrifying experience of running around. It wasn't tear gas. It was as if— It was, you know, movie smoke, but it was a very terrifying, interesting experience. Then I never saw the movie, but I've recently learned that this movie, which is called *Provo* (The Rehearsal) is now a classic in Greece, but it was not allowed to be shown in Greece when it was made because it was still too fresh. The critique of the government was still too fresh. What else was I going to say to you? Something about starting to work on movies in LA.

I just want to make sure we have Oasis captured. Rather than the content of a screening, just like physically?

Oh, sure. Sure.

00:10:39 ADAM HYMAN

What was the entrance, and approach, and everything else? And describe the Haymarket, if you can.

00:10:44 AMY HALPERN

...The Haymarket is a really cool building. It's a very cool building. I would say vintage.... I'm not sure if it's 1880's or 1910's, but it's an early building. It has a sort of theatrical entrance. There's steps up to what—I may be mistaken—but I remember it as a wooden front door, a very large gate, sort of like a big, front door. You'd walk into a small lobby. We would set up a table in there, and then there was the big hall. Subsequently, I've been in there when they had a club scene going on in there. It's a big interior space in which we would put a screen and set up chairs.

It was like a community auditorium space. A dark, and large, and spooky. It's hard to find anything with any historical roots in Los Angeles unless you're looking for them because the forces have usually sponged

them, cleaned them up, and renovate them. So to find something that's really old, and funky, and has a history like this building does was fantastic. It felt great to be in that building. And right near one of the few urban, two block areas in Los Angeles near MacArthur Park, so there is foot traffic, although we're on a side street.

We're near— Really, actually, I think Otis used to also be right close by, I'm remembering this only because on the other side of the Haymarket was a great paper store, which isn't there. I think it was Boggs and McBurney [sic], a place you could just go and get fantastic paper. They're gone, I believe.

00:12:12 ADAM HYMAN

Chouinard was also right over there.

00:12:13 AMY HALPERN

Huh.

00:12:14 ADAM HYMAN

Those are the art schools.

00:12:15 AMY HALPERN

Huh. I have mixed feelings about art schools, generally. I have strong mixed feelings about art schools. It's kind of attraction-repulsion. I think it's kind of pernicious on the one hand to go someplace and say, you know, I'm an artist". I have a problem with this. I think the word artist is an honorific term, unless you're a painter. You can say you're a painter. That's a craft. Like, I can say— I say I'm a filmmaker. That's a craft. I'm a cinematographer. That's a craft. I'm a gaffer. That's also a craft. I am a juicer. That's a craft. But to say an artist is another thing altogether.

That's honorific and you have to be given that by somebody else, and it doesn't stay. That's a matter of a person's opinion if they see your work. So to be in a place where it's not just condoned, but it's encouraged for a 17-year old who can sketch to walk around saying I'm an artist is troubling to me. I tried the expression on once when I was about 19, actually in Molfetta's, this restaurant. I was there for my lunch, a stranger starts to talk to me. I start talking to the stranger. They said what do you do? So I tried the phrase on for size. I said well, I'm an artist. I work with film.

And he said to me, really? He said, I knew an artiste once. She even made her own costumes. I never said it again because actually, I already had the inhibition against saying it because it's an honorific, but that was such a funny punch line. Although there are artists who do make their own costumes. I think Carolee Schneemann makes her own clothes.

00:14:06 ADAM HYMAN

Well how often would the members of Oasis then show their own new work?

00:14:15 AMY HALPERN

Seldom, because we weren't there to show our own work. We were there to serve our curiosity and need to see other people's work. So I seldom showed my own stuff. We seldom showed anybody in the group's work. Every year or so, we might have a screening of our own stuff. Although, I mean as soon as Pat had anything new, we always screen his stuff right away because of course, we all wanted to see his stuff right away. And I guess that was true. If somebody had a print, then we would eventually have a show. But the sense of it was on the hand extremely casual going in. If I can compare to the Filmforum at the Egyptian, the edifice wasn't as much as a film thing.

Well you sort of feel sometimes of the Egyptian like the step-child, right, because there's this big screening that's going on and then the real stuff you're there for. But since it's not the main thing, there's a little bit of a step-child aspect to it. We were never in a place where that was the case. When we were setting up our screenings, for example, on Traction, downtown was not gentrified. There were not a lot of white people living there. There were a lot of people in the streets and there were a lot of people in the tenements around there, and there were a lot of people in the single occupancy hotels. Al's Bar was there so there's a rowdy, great punk scene going on.

It was pretty cool. But as far as anybody living down there or it being a chic neighborhood, or there being any restaurants, no. There was Chinatown and the Pantry, and at that time, a joint called the Atomic Café on First and I guess Los Angeles. But there were not really a lot of joints anywhere down there and so going down there was a trip. You were not going down there where there was anybody else. We were going down at the middle of nowhere setting up a screening in a room. That was very thrilling. We were nobody's step-child. We were doing this thing down there. It felt like you were excavating or presenting something in a vacuum. This is what it mostly felt like.

00:16:09 ADAM HYMAN

How did you find this space?

00:16:19 AMY HALPERN

I don't remember how we found it. I wasn't the one who found it. I don't know how we found Traction.

00:16:26 ADAM HYMAN

How about the others?

00:16:30 AMY HALPERN

I really don't remember. Sorry. I don't know. And at that time, I wasn't diked into any school. So those of us who were, like several of the people—There's a note someplace I read in some of our materials that it was mostly people involved with CalArts, but I wasn't associated with anything having to do with people this way. It was entirely because I was a desperate filmmaker. I left out a funny story. When I first got to LA, I had my films and I had no place to work. At that time, my parents lived in Westwood and they had a neighbor, or a neighbor a block away named Zarkoff. And it was Mort Zarkoff's family. Did you know him at USC?

00:17:10 ADAM HYMAN

He was there. I didn't ever have him as a teacher.

00:17:13 AMY HALPERN

I didn't really know him except that he was a neighbor, and I met him, and I said, do you know where I can cut? I'm desperate to just get on a Moviola. And at that time, I was cutting *Filament*, an adamantly silent film. He said well, it's summer. There's hardly anybody working there. Why don't you just come and use one of them? You're welcome to come with me. There's no problem. So I got in his car with two shopping bags. I was like a desperate mad woman with a pair of shopping bags, and my films, and my splicer. And I would go to these little bunkers and try to cut while next door— USC had an interesting double deal with the Navy and there's a program for naval people to learn filmmaking at the school. So next to me, I remember distinctly, there's a bunch of guys who would be editing some sort of violent picture in the editing room next door. There were gun shots, women screaming, and the guys laughing a lot. [laugh] That's what I remembered while I was trying to cut *Filament* silent. It felt very hostile.

But on the other hand, I think anybody who had used the Spartan as their ideal is misguided from square one. I mean a military— It's one thing if *mens sana in corpore sano* is allowed to be a cultivated body that has his own ideas. But the mind you're looking for is one that is corporate and polite. That is not my idea of *mens sana in corpore sano* and a military order is not what I admire. I did not find it a warm and cuddly place at the time. But on the other hand, having been on faculty there, I certainly think that it's a more supportive school environment in many ways—not for faculty, but for students, certainly more so than UCLA was, which is where I ended going.

Which was almost a complete vacuum, as far as instruction was concerned, in the film that I'm interested in. There was one cinematography teacher. That's all I wanted to learn was camera and lighting. And there was one person there who I later learned was an extreme alcoholic, which may explain why his responses to anything I showed were so limited, but maybe he just didn't get what I was doing. He showed one raking light once that impressed me. Once, on a chest of drawers. But beyond that, there wasn't a lot of there.

And when I showed work, he wasn't reacting to what I was showing, which were usually lighting gags. I did a short project. It was called *Probable Light Source*. I thought it was very hilarious. It was a view through two doors, and there's light hitting the side of a trash can, a gray, vertical trash can. You can sort of see part of it. You know, if it the light is hitting from the side, it makes a white strip. And somebody passes the camera, goes out through the door, and as they go by, you see them turn and look and they turn the trash can, revealing that this straight kind of light is actually a painted white stripe.

Anyway, I thought that was hilarious. Okay, I thought it was hilarious. But he was also obstructive for a lot of people. I gave up looking for him or anybody else there. They have had some great camera teachers there. I just happened to be there for more than five years when there wasn't anybody, more than five years when there was a total dearth of that. It seems like a long time. More than one person's school career could be damaged by that lack.

And when I had been there a couple of years and was working on my own work, one day, a young woman came to me in tears. And I said, what's the problem? She said Frank Valert told me I couldn't be in his camera class. And I said, why not? He said there were already too many women in his class. And she said, but Frank, there aren't even half women in this room. And he said "It doesn't matter. They can't do it anyway." And he wasn't busted or fired. Now I didn't have that experience with him. I had a pared down version.

He would have gotten an ear full from me. What he once said was that he had a problem— he had a problem with use of a certain vernacular language in front of ladies. I said Frank, then what do you do if I'm myself a lady, using this language? Does it make you uncomfortable? Anyway, it was a funny— it was weird. I said I'm not a crew member. Crew speaks crew. If you have a linguistic difference with me or you won't say something when I'm in the room, that's not okay. It's not cool, right? But I was never damaged with to the degree that this young woman Marcy was, or other people who were actually overtly told. I can't hardly believe that that was said to somebody.

But even then, for example, the "Project One" teacher that I selected, thinking he would be interestingly antagonistic and would help me enunciate my ideas while I was talking to him about them, was useless for that also. I mean all they were interested in was in narrative structure and also in sneaking up behind you and putting their hands on you as well. So that was not okay. I dealt with him interestingly though when I realized he was going to do that because when you're in the editing bench and someone walks into the room, it's distracting.

So one day, I actually walked up to him and I walked—on purpose. I had to be in the mood—but I walked up to him closer than normal. And I put on my kind of hale and hearty voice and said to him, well John, I can't tell sometimes if you're a friend or foe, but it sure is swell having you around. And then he backed off. That was interesting. But anyway, the only professor I had there worth his salt, besides Teshome Gabriel, whose classes were stellar and fantastic—

00:23:19 ADAM HYMAN

How do you spell his name, please?

00:23:20 AMY HALPERN

Teshome is T-E-S-H-O-M-E, and his last name is Gabriel, G-A-B-R-I-E-L. He died this year recently, but he was an Ethiopian film scholar who helped coin the idea of third-world film. And his class, Third-World Film—in which he showed African cinema, Asian cinema, South American cinema—was the class in film. Also, Bob Rosen taught the classes, mostly, in more standard cinema. These were classes with a couple of hundred people in them and private analysis because the group was too large to talk. Also Edward Brokaw's classes.

Ed Brokaw was my great professor. He was an editing professor and taught “Project One”. But even my relationship with him, which was actually very close—I used to hang out with him and we'd walk around and drink coffee and that sort of thing—but he didn't see my work until it was finished. And then he was very pleased. But he made sure I was able to do it. So he facilitated it academically for me, that I was able to keep working. But he never asked to see anything and hardly ever saw anything that I was working on.

00:24:38 ADAM HYMAN

So who else was at UCLA at the time when you were there?

00:24:41 AMY HALPERN

I was in a group of really interesting colleagues. My closest colleagues, they were Michael Miner, who is now mostly known as a screenwriter, but he's a filmmaker. He's a marvelous cameraman. And he's a good editor. But now he mostly writes... he wrote RoboCop, which changed his career from—I mean he loves to direct and he likes to direct his own work, but the last thing I'm aware he directed is called The Book of Stars, which had a wonderful actress... Jenna McLaughlin maybe is her name, a young, good, good, young actress. And it was a decent story.

But poof, there end— also, Alex Cox with whom I worked. Oh, but my other close colleague was someone who is now a cinematographer named Tom Richmond. The three of us used to hang out and shoot together a lot.

00:25:35 ADAM HYMAN

Who was three? You, Tom...

00:25:37 AMY HALPERN

...Michael, Tom, and me. We did some small films together where— isn't it funny? I ended up doing more assisting than anything else. And when it was my turn to be assisted, it didn't happen. But hey, I don't know if that's gender or just the fact that I was not insisting as much as I should have. But yeah, Michael made a really beautiful movie called *Labyrinths* when we were at school together that—there's an older person in the school who was a further ahead of us, he's the cinematographer who shot it for him. It was a science-fiction movie. In fact, it was inducted in the Library of Congress really early when they started doing that. It's quite good.

I think, but I could be wrong, I'm pretty sure the star of it is Marina—I can't say her name...

00:26:25 ADAM HYMAN

...Abramovic.

00:26:25 AMY HALPERN

...Abramovic. I'm pretty sure before she was a performance artist. I would like to check that with him. I keep forgetting to check. I'm pretty sure it was she. It was having to do with, you know, space travel, and an alien... Actually, it was humans going into space. That was one my one experience as an art director because I did quite a bit of the art direction on that. We built this one room that was supposed to be a preparation chamber. It was pale blue walls and cloud shapes on the walls, and it was designed to be shot with a wide-angle lens while he's being drugged and prepared for this journey.

And his cameramen refused to operate the way Michael wanted him to do it. And I said, Michael, ask him to leave the set and you shoot it. So he did. And it's perfectly fine. So I did that, and designed a rooms and sets. What other films did we do then? And then the other interesting filmmakers who were there were the black filmmakers. So I worked with a lot of them. I shot a movie for— Well she's not black either. She's East Indian. Monona Wali. I shot a beautiful movie for her called *The Gray Area*, which was black actors.

I ended up doing— That didn't interest me very much. I was very well-raised. I was very lucky when I was young. My parents had black friends. And those black friends had other black friends. I was extremely fortunate and also when I was very little, we had black housekeepers. So I was exposed early to R&B very well. But also, as I was older, my parents had friends who were in the black cultural aristocracy. I got to meet James Baldwin very young, face to face, in our apartment. Nina Simone played on the piano in our living room, was not a polite guest. If she hadn't had an outlet, she could have been an ax murderer. If her genius had not had some other outlet, and a fantastic outlet at that. Arthur Mitchell, people like that.

So I naturally gravitated to who I thought were the finer black filmmakers in the film school, with whom I got to collaborate. Julie Dash, for whom I lit a movie called *Illusions*, a really beautiful movie. I think it's a short feature. I think it might be 40 minutes or less. And with Charles Burnett, and also with Barbara McCullough, who I met up working as a post-production, I guess special effects supervisor at Rhythm & Hues for a long time. Those were the interesting and cool people to work with that I thought. I was usually the only white member on the set, often, often, often.

00:29:33 ADAM HYMAN

What would you be doing on those?

00:29:34 AMY HALPERN

Oh, lighting, always lighting. Lighting and camera always. Yeah, I operated camera for Barbara and did lighting. She also shot a lot of stuff with Horace Tapscott. I was exposed to him through her first, and then later on ended up filming a lot of rehearsals and performances of his.

00:29:51 ADAM HYMAN

Where is all that?

00:29:52 AMY HALPERN

Where is all that?

00:29:53 ADAM HYMAN

Yeah. We can talk about that. Barbara has some of it. I don't know if she ever finished that movie. Some of it I have, the person who allegedly was putting it up. It basically all fell to me to do all of it, and there was nobody there but me doing it. That person sort of evaporated and so I have it, and I need to put it in the archive at UCLA that they've done at the music school for Horace's work. But it would be nice to show first.

00:30:23 ADAM HYMAN

Yes. So is it like synched up as a performance?

00:30:27 AMY HALPERN

It's video, so of course it's synched up. We'll talk about this later. Yeah, because I mean in fact, I need to hand it over, but I haven't ever yet done so since he died.

00:30:38 ADAM HYMAN

Make sure it's preserved and dubbed and so forth.

00:30:39 AMY HALPERN

Yeah. Yeah.

00:30:41 ADAM HYMAN

Well let's talk about this then. During this period in UCLA in working with various black directors, and let's talk about what other cultural things you were putting yourself in the thick of or experiencing in Los Angeles in that period.

00:30:55 AMY HALPERN

Well, I mean for one thing, the culture of the film set was intriguing to me, the culture of the mechanics of making a movie where you have control of lighting a camera is what I was involved with. So since that wasn't being taught at UCLA, I needed to go onto film sets to learn. So I would take leaves of absences. I mean I was essentially there. The joke was UCLA was the best rental house in Los Angeles, the cheapest rental house for equipment. In the face of my experience of dearth of instruction, that certainly was true in my case.

So I was spending a lot of time where I saw craven environments on film sets of the standard product in order to learn how because I didn't care. I mean I had certain rules for myself, which still hold. Like, I won't do anything that I think is fascist. But my original rules were I won't do anything fascist, racist, or sexist. I still won't work on anything racist, although I've worked on a lot of race, what I call race pictures, in which race was the subject matter.

I was a crew member in a lighting crew of a picture made by my friends of mine called *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka*, for example, which another classmate, Jonathan Wax and Peter McCarthy and produced for Keenan Wayans. It's a very good picture with really good actors in it. So that's a race picture, or a racy picture. But it was apparent to me instantly, almost instantly, from UCLA on and from any film set that I had to give up on not doing anything that was sexist, because there wasn't practically a single film that I've ever seen or been in on the set of, except my own and our colleagues, that didn't have stupid, sexist shit in it.

I would have never worked a day if I'd stood on ceremony with that original intention. Even smart directors, even smart writers, write and direct idiot parts for women. Idiot parts. And it's culpability not in terms of the writing, it's culpability in the costuming. I'm not joking about that. You know, if you have an adventure film, what kind of an idiot would show up in high heels? I mean yeah, your legs look better in high heels, not shoes I call them. I wear them too from time to time, but they're not for walking in. And they're certainly not for running or climbing ladders in, although I have them do. I mean it's a stupid idea and it's insulting. It's like wearing a hobble. The fact that that is still the precedent and it's disgusting to me.

When I first started doing film on film sets in 1974, when I got out here, I was the only girl on the set. Well yes, that's kind of fun, I better enjoy, because in 15 minutes, that's going to straighten itself out, I thought. Well, that 15 minutes is passed. That 15 minutes is now... am I mistaken? It's 36 years ago, and there are still very few women on the sets. And it's insensible. I mean women, even in the most conservative and reactionary environments, are raised to be responsive to the physical environment and the look of things. That suits you perfectly as far as your awareness behind camera and in lighting a scene. So why aren't there more? I really don't understand it. It's something I've dealt with a lot because I'm a New Yorker, and I am an oldest child, and a defender, and so I don't take kindly, for example, to people putting their hands on me out of nowhere. It's just offensive. My normal impulse is to commit bodily response, you know, hit somebody. But I've learned not to do that because I really love working on crews, and I like men.

I just didn't know how to react for a long time to that kind of stupidity. I would be carrying a 5K lamp and walk by the rent-a-cops and somebody else sitting there with their food in their mouth and they would make some crack about oh, my God, look at her go. I've never seen a woman work so hard. And first, I would blush and keep walking. Then I started answering them as the years past. "What do you mean? Have you never seen a mother? Didn't you have a mother? Have you never seen a woman with a baby and a two-year old? The baby's heavy and the two-year old is going that way, and she's carrying groceries. What do you mean you've never seen a woman work that hard?"

I mean what's wrong with this? And also, film equipment, as one realizes working with it on a daily basis, is designed on a physically human scale. That means you can lift it if you are strong enough or figure out how, except in the cases where a silver bullet 12K, which really does take two people to lift it into a stand, most of these things can be carried by one person. It was deeply offensive to me lots of time. And I wasn't so happy some of the time, but then I realized my calling, which is joke repair, because one day some joke was being made and, you know, it's funny, but it's also obscene and offensive. And I thought well, I can't act like I don't get it. I love sex and I know about it. And I like men, I like women—not necessarily sexually, I just like people in general. So why am I not laughing? It was funny, even though it's like twisted. So then I realized I should laugh and then repair the joke. It came upon me suddenly one day. We were rigging this stage some place in Burbank. And we're on the ground, you know, raising, because the ceiling has grips, electricians everywhere. And we're yelling jokes back and forth. And someone says oh, I can't tell that one, she's here.

And I said I'm crew, tell the fucking joke. So the joke was, okay, how can you tell your wife is coming? The answer: Who cares. So I laughed and I said that's funny, but it's the wrong answer to the joke. The correct answer, gentleman, is ask her boyfriend. [laugh] And when I realized I could make a grip blush, my entire life changed. I felt suddenly at ease because I realized it was dishonest of me not to laugh and it wasn't really as funny as the real joke could have been, and also because you don't really want to offend the people you work with. You like them. You'd also like to straighten them out. I mean men, even sophisticated men, men who have lots of experience with women, or many of them, so ignorant about women's desire and what that is. Let us think about transgressive for a moment, because last night we saw the screening of transgressive films, which translates mostly as very edged stuff. Like MM Sera's *Chop Off*, in which the guy's sensuality has to do with actually amputating parts of his body and the sensuality of that.

You know what's transgressive, even to this moment? Any woman who says "I like to fuck". That's transgressive. Mae West is still transgressive because women are not supposed to admit at having a desire. And what I was about to say is even men who are sophisticated in mackdom, you know, have had many, many, many conquests in their life, still don't know—and I know this because I've had conversations that were explicit on the subject—still don't get that when they're in a situation with somebody that they're kind of flirting with, the desire that arises in a woman is also painful and a physical pressure that has to be released. And just because a woman may be the first to say no, given the two of them, doesn't mean she's not in agony also. So this kind of a fact, which is a stone fact, I mean I'm assuming both of you know this, because you're both friends of mine and sophisticated men. But the fact these certain things are not known by men means it's a great subject for joke matter, a great topic for instructive humor. I'll tell you the best line that I ever came up with was a stroke, which thought was a walking moment from Mae West, the Saint.

I was at a film set, a small film set, I was gaffing a small movie. And we had our first meeting, or I guess maybe our first work day. The sound guy is an extremely shy man but with his shirt unbuttoned down to here, but a very shy man with his shirt unbuttoned down to here, who would look me in the eye and didn't ever offer me a cup of coffee. But when they called lunch, we passed each other in the doorway going to wash up before we could eat. And the cameraman was right behind me so he had an audience for this joke of his.

So we passed and he grabs me flush to his body, an extremely intimate hug, which was a little shocking. And because I'm a New Yorker, and as I say an oldest child, my first visceral instinct is to smack somebody. But I liked him. Plus, I could tell he was frail in some ways, otherwise he would have looked me in the eyes at some point previous to that. And so I said, careful, don't turn on equipment you don't know how to operate. And he dropped me like a hot potato. But that man owned a Nagra. And he'd be damned if anybody touched it. That was a metaphor he could comprehend, and I felt like that was my moment of liberation in my life from this because it's just a non-comprehension. So it's made me much more generous towards the lead-footed attempts that men are compelled to make towards women because they're not making them back, and also more generous towards both sides of the operation. I don't think women— Women are more, in some ways, oppressed in distinct things, like finances and work.

I mean Brianne Murphy got work because her name sounded like Brian and her voice was low. If I were a more strategic person, I would change my name to something else. I would have, because I know I would have gotten more work, guaranteed. I would put money on that. But other than that, I think it's a bum deal for men and for women. Divide and conquer is what I saw. If you can't be friends with people of the opposite sex, you are profoundly fucked.