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## **SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE**

### **Skowhegan, Maine**

#### **Transcript of lecture : Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt**

**August 2, 2013**

**Transcriber: Judith Stoodley**

Introductory remarks (Michael Berryhill, Dean): The one and the only Sheila Pepe.

(applause, cheers)

Introduction of speaker (Sheila Pepe): Good evening. How's my sound? (cheers) It gives me great, great pleasure to introduce tonight's speaker, visiting artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt. A queer pioneer, ground-breaking artist, and fellow New Jersey-an. (scattered cheers) Say "Yay." (cheers) In 1994, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion, Tommy, a Skowhegan Governor, came up to Skowhegan for Governor and Trustees Weekend, sat down at a table by the lake after brunch, and shared his first-hand account of the Stonewall Riot. He told of an un-theorized collective intelligence, born of experience, an unromantic accumulation of facts and conditions used strategically to make change after the fact, but crafted in the moment and on the street, from ingenuity, tenacity, and a willingness to put it all on the line. That day Tommy gave me a lasting image of the rites and rituals associated with a transubstantiation of grit into glitter. Born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1948, Lanigan-Schmidt briefly attended Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and the School

of Visual Arts in New York City. As a young artist he worked with the filmmaker Jack Smith, as well as playwright, actor and filmmaker Charles Ludlam, with whom he became close friends. Lanigan-Schmidt's work is born from many sources: the sacristies of Linden, New Jersey; early modernist works of Florine Stettheimer; the streets of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Manhattan: Hell's Kitchen, Times Square; and the performed creations of early queer modernism, post-modernism, and modernism. As such the work has been highly influential, even during those years when it's been less visible in the mainstream. If you have ever made art out of school craft supplies: pipe cleaners, cellophane, foil paper, or have boldly stapled or glittered, made images overtly religious or queer or both, your work relies on precedents set by the studio practice of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt. Or if you have a strong attraction to domestic accumulation, holiday crafts, and part decorations, or if you have ever turned your home into an installation site and performed within it as a total art event, Lanigan-Schmidt helped plow that ground for you as well. Holland Cotter names some of Lanigan-Schmidt's influence more specifically in his recent *New York Times* review of the current three-part exhibition "Ecco Homo," at Pavel Zoubok Gallery. He writes of the other artists in the exhibition, naming Lanigan-Schmidt's influence direct in the art of Christopher Tanner, and more oblique, though unmistakable, in pieces by Nayland Blake, Tony Feher, Oliver Herring, Christian Holdstat, Hunter Reynolds, and the late artists Arch Connelly and Greer Lankton. Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt has exhibited extensively throughout the United States and Europe since the early 1970s, including the Venice Biennales of 1980 and 1984; the Whitney Biennial of 1991; and the 1999 exhibition, "The American Century" at the Whitney Museum. His work is represented in various public collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery,

the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. He was honored at the White House by President Obama in June of 2009 for his courageous participation in the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion; was awarded a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant in 2011; and in 2012 was the subject of the critically acclaimed retrospective, "Tender Love Among the Junk," at MOMA, PS 1. An instructor in the MFA program of the School of Visual Arts in New York City since the mid 1980s, Lanigan-Schmidt was Skowhegan resident faculty in 1991 and 1997, and he was visiting faculty in 1992, and has served as a member of the Board of Governors ever since. So please welcome the legendary—(laughter) and you know what that means—Thomas Lanigan Schmidt back to Skowhegan. (applause)

TL-S: First of all I want to ask your indulgence, because I haven't done many digital slide presentations. So Daniel, my assistant, will be helping me along. The first digital presentation, it was like a month ago at the Morgan Library. So this is—This presentation is distilled from like about a thousand old slides brought together into what I would feel would be the strongest features of what forms the aesthetic I represent. And notice I say "the aesthetic I represent" rather than "my aesthetic;" because I honestly believe that most art never happens, because it slides by and people don't make art like the art they see in life. Okay, that's the theory I will push till I die. Also, you out there, your questions will be very important to me. So no matter how stupid you think a question is, or insignificant, it means a lot to me. This is how we flesh all this out. Otherwise it might degenerate into narcissistic solipsism, (laughter) which is always possible with self-indulgent artists. Okay. So I'm going to start out with the word *infrastructure*, which I think all of you know what it means. It means like when you flush the toilet, the turds go somewhere else. (laughter)

That's the infrastructure. They go into—Like in a city they go into an enormous sewer system. And if you were to remove the toilet and decoratively place it in your living room, and use it for excremental purposes, it would just build up and be very unpleasant. Okay, so we know what an infrastructure is. And that—I will continually go to themes of constructing infrastructure. Okay.

IMAGE

Now here we're going to start in a particular time and place. This is the town I was born in.

Okay, you see the picture—Oh, where's the green spot thing? (pause) Ah! Ah!

(unintelligible) Okay, good.

Comment: (whispered) Press the green button.

TL-S: Okay, the green button.

Comment: (whispered) Thank you.

TL-S: Got it. Okay, this—Oh, it's a red spot. Okay, this is—That neat little white line going through there is not an historical reality, which will not matter much to most people, but it has a huge influence on my family and my life, 'cause this is the New Jersey Turnpike in 1950. I'm going to digress a second here. You should read the essay Tony Smith wrote on the New Jersey Turnpike that he wrote before it opened. He took a car ride; he knew some people and he was able to get on. And he wrote about it as a work of art, 'cause he was, you know, influential in forming the minimalist aesthetic. So he rode it and writes about it from the perspective of seeing it aesthetically. I'm going to speak about it as a hugely destructive force in my family's life. And then it also tells the future in a way; because when it was made, this was a country of like two-lane interstates all over the place. And this was one of the first big—like six-lane—highways. So it was like—Now if like on Facebook, if I know

like a lot of Russians on Facebook, they send me pictures of Siberia and it looks like New Jersey. And they all have like New Jersey Turnpikes; I have pictures come from Israel it looks like [Jersey]—Everywhere looks like New Jersey. (laughter) So in truth, then, New Jersey is like the avant garde. (laughter) Because the avant garde—Avant garde is not picked out by *The New York Times*. It's what foreshadows things that follow. It can't help itself. It's not just an emerging marketing mechanism; it's a cultural reality that is a force unto itself, but it's a force made by the people forcing that force, or (unintelligible) whatever word I would pick there. But anyway, this—that there—ripped the neighborhood in part. Like that little white line is not so little. That's like ten/twelve/sixteen houses across. This is what the neighborhood looked like after it, but it set in motion a huge economic madness of like banks like playing every ethnic group against each other, and redlining and greenlining. That means they scheduled some neighborhoods for like slumification, and other ones for like what later we called gentrification. So that's the beginning, where my family is like thrown away from this area, which was the area they came to as immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—And so this area was a mix of immigrants, and a mix of people in the great migration coming up from the South—African Americans. Everyone was getting long. I'm not going to say getting along like in the ideal; I'm saying getting along with a lot of tension. But that the tensions got crazier when the banks cashed in on it. And so up to today the madness that is avant garde of the madness we had heard today—not a nice avant garde.

## IMAGE

So like now we're going to go to something you're totally familiar with, another avant garde. See? Marcel Duchamp. Now like... there's actually a big distortion here. That bottle

rack is not that big compared to that; I think a lot of you know that. And also, it's amazing over the years the way the presentation of the bottle rack has gotten cleaned up. Awhile ago it was always presented as a kind of dusty, dingy bottle rack; and now it's become this kind of like pristine thing. Now I'm showing this—Again, to go back to that word *infrastructure*, this starts to create the infrastructure of art that eventually becomes the conceptual infrastructure. But (unintelligible) art happens, Duchamp uses a medieval concept that he doesn't tell people: it's called transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is when the priest in the Catholic mass says, "This is my body, this is my blood," to the bread and wine. And in Catholic theology the appearances of blood and wine remain, but in Catholic theology the bread and wine become Christ's actual, factual body and blood. So Duchamp.... No, he's Parisian. And that was like—The big theological schools of the Middle Ages were in Paris; he just takes that medieval concept and he figures, "Well, you know, no atheistic bourgeois society is remembering that, so he'll bring it back. And also he's well aware that a society that's filled with engineering marvels, like the Jersey turnpike....(laughter)—Uh, because he did say that—

IMAGE

Oops! We don't go there yet. Wait, I went to the wrong thing. Okay, thank you, Daniel. He did say that the greatest achievement of the United States was its plumbing. And he's probably—I mean that's just the beginning of madness of amazing things, because plumbing is like really a good thing. Okay, so like here he says, "This is my art." It's very—It's exactly like the priest at the Catholic mass. So it's—an artist to this day is empowered through that sacramental gesture to go to anything to be included in art, and say, "This is my art."

IMAGE?

So now we go to... I'm going to the wrong thing here. Okay, we haven't been there. Thank you, Daniel. Ah, the old neighborhood! Now this—this bleak tenement—I do love. But the corruption of the town and who gets paid off is very apparent in that those wooden back porches were called fire escapes. Contemplate that. (laughter) Would you want to escape a fire on a wooden fire escape? I rather think not. (laughter) Okay. But also—back to Duchamp—there's the kitchen sink, down there... laser. (unintelligible) You've heard that expression, "Everything and the kitchen sink?" Okay, 'cause my grandmother.... Okay plumbing infrastructures didn't exist when she was growing up. So when I was a kid I would visit her and other relatives in this building; she'd turn the faucet on and she'd say, "Look at that. Look at that. Look at that." And like that was awe and wonderment at like... that the brook was indoors. Okay, so this was—Going back to.... I'm talking about cultural things (laughs) most of you have no inkling of, because the world has changed so much, but that it's built on these changes. Now this neighborhood--I bet you couldn't guess what neighborhood this is. And even I--- It's Elizabeth, New Jersey, but... it's highly significant in what it notches into popular culture. This is the Soprano neighborhood, the real Soprano neighborhood. Elizabeth, New Jersey, if you look it up online, you look up the DeCavalcante family.

IMAGE?

Elizabeth, New Jersey, Peter's town—this is right on one of the streets edging on that. Okay, this building during prohibition—a lot of my relatives lived in Europe until like—probably up into the Sixties, and then most of them moved to other places. But there was—Back in the Twenties there was a speakeasy down that alley down this side; and indoors

my Aunt Rose had, left over from Prohibition, she had tons of little bottles that said things like *Anisette*, *Jack Daniels*—different names—any name you (unintelligible). And it was added—Back in Prohibition it was added to like some kind of digestible alcohol, and it became whatever it was labeled as. And she had saved them. And the nice thing about growing up in a place that's run by the Mafia is that you don't know it. They would never tell the kids. So like it's just like—There's always like a relative with a basement full of like restaurant equipment or something. And then next time you visit them there's bowling alley equipment. But it's just there. I mean you don't—No one goes up and says, "No. This fell off the truck." (laughter) I mean later on they might, but like I didn't know anything about it until I was like eighteen.

IMAGE

Okay, now we're getting into thicker art here. Okay, art as the liberating factor is on the left side. That's—Does anyone know what that is?

Response: (inaudible)

TL-S: You're right. I'm so glad you know that, 'cause like that—That's these guys that were in Alcatraz, and Alcatraz was considered a prison that no one could escape from. Well, these guys actually escaped from Alcatraz by using art. They made those heads. It took them a long time, and they actually made a studio above their cells that no one knew about but them; and then they made those dummy heads out of plaster, toothpaste, and everything they found around that they could get their hands on. It has some oil paint into it. [sic] And then one night they put them in the bed to look like their heads, and they escaped. So that—that is like—That's art, and it's also a metaphor for something about art, that art brings us to a place of freedom. Now on the right is William Adolphe Bouguereau,

as I noticed a giggle all through the crowd. Uh, William Adolphe Bougereau, tragic figure. Yes, he kept Cezanne out of his salon, and was.... When I was going to school he was considered the villain of the Salon: evil William Adolphe Bougereau. But in the genius of popular culture he's kept alive through Christmas cards, and—And so he's probably—More people probably look at him than Cezanne, 'cause—I mean that's from a Christmas card, right there.

IMAGE

Okay. Goddesses and gods. Does anyone know who that is in the middle?

Response: (inaudible)

TL-S: That's right. That's Marlene Dietrich. (unintelligible) That's another goddess. Okay. Yes, that's a picture my father had from the Second World War of her signing autographs for the American troops. Okay. So we could kind of put a spin on this, that that's kind of like Mars and Venus, you know, the god of war and the goddess of love. So these things get passed around and redefined forever and ever. And also, it's actually—This is a wallet-size picture. I think you can tell that by—You may have seen like older pictures that—from some of your relatives that have that kind of edge cut around it. And speaking of art in life, you know people carry their wallets, they carry like a little gallery of their families in there. Once I was at a place called The Catholic Worker; it feeds people from the street. And I have these friends who have been ex-seminarians, and they were working there, and suddenly some man on the soup line had a heart attack on the floor, and he was dying and kind of like moving around; and they wanted to find out who he was, and they went in his pocket, and as his wallet fell on the floor, and there was all pictures of Jesus and his family and everything. It was like that was the gallery of his life. He didn't need an art world. It's

amazing when someone says someone's "pioneering the use of photographs" in their art. I mean it always already exists; and like if you need the superstition of canonization, good for you; you're religious. Okay? (laughter)

IMAGE?

Ah, religion! The Virgin Mary. This is in Italian Harlem. Ah, I love [this]. She like is the precursor of the Barbie doll. (laughter) That is my favorite Virgin Mary. (laughter) Look at the face. She has like mannequin hair. She's a masterpiece of folk culture. And I've gone to this procession many times. I love the procession, but for some reason I don't totally get into like swooning over her [and] asking her for favors. Don't get me wrong. I pray. But this Virgin Mary is—I—I aesthetically really like her. But at the same time the Baby Jesus—See, she has a real human hair wig on. And look at Baby Jesus on the left side. He's got like.... What's that crazy little like straight-haired wig he's got on? (laughter) That crown on his head is on a spike that is jammed into his head. (laughter) So it's kind of jauntily crooked; you can see it's kind of tilting there. Ah, yeah, let me point—Thank you, Daniel. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

IMAGE?

There. There's the jauntily—Thank you. I will need that again—jauntily tilting crown. See it? It's on a different axis than his head. (laughter) See, in art school we must talk like that. "Okay, that axis and that axis are totally different." (laughter) So that's a conflictual axis that nevertheless increases—It just does increase the right amount of tension in the figure; 'cause like as he goes down the steps—if I could show you like a movie of it—the crown actually bounces around, like boom, boom, boom. (laughter) And like it always looks like it's going to fall off, and it never does. And then he has that crazy little wig on that like—It's

interesting because there's== People are very proud to donate the hair, and that's good.

And then the whole combination of the thing is something—Again I really love this as art.

And—But there's a little footnote going on through this, is that, in the history of American Catholics, the Irish Catholics and the German Catholics came over first, and then the Italians and the Polish came over. And for some crazy reason the Irish like were dead set against this type of thing; and they would try to annihilate it every chance they get, and try to turn Italians into a sort of minimalist or reductivist religion, which it isn't. Okay.

IMAGE

Oh! Another one. Jan Steen, yes, yes, yes. See this child there? This represents my Catholic (unintelligible) in a Protestant country. 'Cause like in the old, old way, before Kennedy— (unintelligible) world—Talk about infrastructures—always will refer to infrastructures—the Catholic world was considered foreign until Kennedy got elected—John Kennedy. So this is a picture of like a Dutch Catholic family. See, they're wearing little Protestant outfits. You can see they have that Pilgrim outfit on? See? Which is who founded New England, right? Okay. So—But this little child here, no Protestant would hold that Baby Jesus statue that she's got. See? That she's coveting idolatrously. Actually she's not idolatrous. She's piously holding it. But see, I'm saying that for a reason, because (unintelligible) the perspective, you can say, (laughs) “Well, I don't care. I just see it as a Steen thing. I don't care about these religious details.” Or maybe you do and you think, “What do I care, either way; if she's like idolatrously clutching it, that's the Protestant perspective. Or if she's piously holding onto it, that's the Catholic perspective.” I'm saying it because this (laughs) is a metaphor that never ends, for like the snobbery of art in the art world. The art world's always, “We like it 'cause it's this way and it's not that way. Or it doesn't go far enough, or it

goes far enough, or it has the edge or it doesn't have—" I mean all these expressions are like—I don't know. Okay.

IMAGE

Ah! My—Ah! (laughter) My family. I'm the little kid over here. See, my art is, it's heavy in sociology. We haven't even got to pictures of my art yet. Okay. But—Oh, there's a doll there too. So see, the family has given—is succumbing to consumerized secular humanism here. See, although the presence of nuns are here, (laughter) attesting to the deep religiosity in this family, and the kind of cultural syncretism—This is Thanksgiving, a Protestant feast day. Okay.

IMAGE?

Oh, she's a Protestant, that one, yeah. (laughter) Okay.

IMAGE

So like—So see, it's ecumenical, it allows for other faiths. Okay.

IMAGE?

I'm the one there with the red tie. These are my mother's sisters. These kind of outfits for nuns were ditched in 1966. So this is the outfits they had probably since like the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Okay, so there's [an] enormous amount of stuff going on here culturally. But the doll that my sister had.... Ah! And these—This was the beginning of dolls with rooted hair. See, now all of you—All of you that had dolls grew up with dolls with rooted hair. But there was a time, boys and girls, when dolls had little wigs glued on their heads. (laughter) And those little wigs.... So this is rooted. My sister's very proud of that, because you could pull that hair, tease that hair, comb that hair, and it would not come out. But that the little wigs, what me and my sister used to do was that we'd put like hot water in the bathtub, stick the

doll's head in, and then the glue would melt, and then we'd push it way down over her face.

(laughter) So this is—The art-making impulse is founded in play, boys and girls.

IMAGE?

Ah! There—This is 1965. You can tell it by this “nay (phonetic) ’65.” There I am as a teenager, bursting at the seams, wanting to get out of this world, although I loved this world dearly. There's my nun aunts. Oh, yes, thank you, Daniel. I need constantly—Thank you for reminding me (unintelligible). There I am on that one. Now this was a world that believed it would never change. But there is the gay teenage nephew: me. Already I was going to New York and—pardon my speech—getting laid. Okay, I was already seeking what would be called (unintelligible) some kind of celestial paradise. Okay.

IMAGE

(laughter) So, like—But they were as yet unaware of this. But something in them—This one here, when I was going to go off to Pratt, she said to my mother, “I don't know if you should let him go off to an art school.” And my mother said, “Why not?”

She goes, “There are boys there that—” Oh, there—My mother was packing a brown blanket with brown satin trim—I mean it was the dullest thing in the world—and she says, “See that satin trim on that blanket, Mary?”—That's my mother's name, Mary. And my mother goes, “Yeah?” And she goes, “There are boys at art schools that like to touch satin things!” (laughter) I knew what she was [talking about]. I was surprised that her level of like a kind of repressed sophistication was really quite poetic. (laughter)

IMAGE

Ah! Uncle Johnny. (laughter) He was going to become a Franciscan. There he is. Now this has a nice—The car in the background is a nice touch, see? And this is the real picture.

There's nothing added in this or-- This is the actual thing. There he is, and he was going to become a Franciscan priest; but he was forced to leave the seminary for "excessive scrupulosity." (laughter) What is that? I mean because I mean.... I don't know where to start that. I mean they're all—They're really anti-sex and everything; so what's excessive scrupulosity? (laughter) I mean.... So like he leaves, and then he has-- like he gets married and has six kids. So I guess he gave into post-lapsarian impulses, yeah. Okay.

IMAGE

Ah! Nuns on the runway. (laughter) Yeah. There's my somewhat relative – nun relatives again. Okay, they would go off and do like missionary work in other countries, a true— Thank you, Daniel. I always do that, always do that. Yes. Okay, those are propeller planes out there. See? Notice that. Notice how technology changes, boys and girls. Also notice that this nun's veil is chicly transparent, or there's a transparency there. This was a French Canadian order that had come from French Canadian noblewomen that had fled France to Canada during the French Revolution. So they kept certain like traits like, you know, a transparent veil. And a certain kind of glamor they had. Okay. And they don't look like this anymore. But back then, if someone went to an airport.... You never went to airports. If someone you—a relative took a plane. Now it's like riding a car or something. People would get dressed up, like in their Sunday best. So there's my Aunt Rose. Oh, she married Uncle John; she's the one. Yes. She's the one that had the six kids from the man of the excessive scrupulosity. (laughter) But also, this is in 1960s—Thank you, (unintelligible)—and—actually 1950s, but she's wearing 1940s clothes, which I like, because like I cannot stand those movies that do exact retro research; they're totally out of touch with the way life really was. People always dress in a kind of hodgepodge; and like to pretend in the

Fifties everyone was running around looking like Doris Day is just a lie, 'cause it's not true. So if you're thinking that... (laughter) I don't know what—how to follow it (laughs) Don't cross me. Okay. (laughter) (laughs)

IMAGE

Ah! This is my beginning of like art, power, publicity. There's me. (laughter) Nice child. I made this church totally on my own. That nun had nothing to do with it. (laughter) She didn't! But this kid's mother was in charge of publicity for the town. So he was my friend. We used to dress up in bishops' hats and run around our basement, chanting hymns and things. Well actually we didn't run around; we walked around piously. Yes. (laughter) Okay.

IMAGE?

And so we were forming our own little church, excommunicating people. We actually got in trouble for excommunicating the kid around the corner-- His mother—'cause we made a bull of excommunication with a stamp with a wax seal and everything. (laughter) And the kid's mother kind of knew where it came from. She stormed up my family [sic] into my kitchen and yelled and screamed, and so I had to apologize for that. Okay.

IMAGE?

But anyway.... Here I had no inkling what I was getting into within the corridors of power. It prepared me a little bit for the art world, though; because like this kid's mother arranges this chute, right? It's at the school; the nun jumps in and acts like she's in charge of it. See, I love this nun, because like, you know, if I were to tell you she was secretly a man, (laughter) it would make sense. I don't think—(unintelligible) makes sense, just works. Okay.

IMAGE

But then like, also, something started that I love, that would follow me for my whole life. It says “Thomas Lan”—“Thomas Schmidt.” Laughed (Left? 32:09) That’s not Thomas Schmidt. That’s not-- But that would happen over and over again, at like art openings, at like places like Holly Solomon’s. Holly Solomon would say, “Thomas Lanigan Schmidt.” And they’d always shake someone else’s hand. I mean they wanted someone from central casting. So all of you out there that don’t look like artists, there’s hope for you. (laughter) Okay? Not everyone that looks the part gets to do it. Okay.

IMAGE

Here we have the church extended. The little cardboard church keeps growing and growing and growing. And like it has here has a Russian Orthodox Church on one side, a Catholic church there, confessionals here. It’s like--And it’s done in this like ethnic style of pretty colors and everything like that, ‘cause that was the neighborhood and that was everything I knew. I still love that aesthetic. I mean it keeps me going.

IMAGE?

Oh, there’s my sister’s foot. Yeah. (laughter) I’m sure some of you have seen those kind of slippers; they have a kind of little fur around them—Well fake fur, really, not real fur. And they’re usually made of like a vinyl-ish stuff. Okay.

IMAGE

See... my mother’s little village (laughter) that like lights up. But I—my mother was a genius at this kind of like simultaneity, of creating a place with multiple references; ‘cause there’s the ocean there, like and the sky. And then the little—each little house is—and then the mangers is (33:50)—There’s no sense of like Renaissance scale in this. Like these

people are enormous. (laughter) There's this pink thing that no one knows what it is.

(laughter) That right there-- 'cause you like that (unintelligible)

Response: I have no idea what it is.

TL-S: You have no idea—That's right. You continue to ask me, "What is that? What is that?"

I can't—I don't know. I don't know if it's the Easter Bunny or a pink pumpkin; I don't know to this day. (laughter) Anyway, this was my mother's—These little houses light up, and they're all—What's funny about these little houses but fascinating, they're done in a kind—They're done, actually created, in perspective lines. They're not—Most of them are not frontal; they're actually made sideways, so that they have a kind of like dynamic look. And they're made out of like a kind of sandpaper painted—

IMAGE?

Ah! This is "Swampville." Okay, now we're getting to art. Okay, now this—this was in the—I had even forgotten about this. This was in the PS 1 retrospective that was a couple of months ago. This is on—back to Duchamp. These are on lasagna pans. So it's [a] ready-made frame, 'cause I adore Marcel. And like... And speaking of like solid aesthetic thinking, there's the refinery tanks there. Refinery is not refined. I mean it's what—where the petroleum, raw petroleum, comes from, and then is made into gasoline and different things and stored in those tanks. And so this is "Swampville;" it's a composite of where I grew up, which.... This really doesn't look like it, and yet it does look like it. But if you look at the tanks right there.... See? What they were called in the town was the giant marshmallows. And they looked like giant marshmallows. See, they didn't need Claes Oldenburg, who was going to do things like that. There's a sense, a good formal sense, of people that could—And just—This is way back in the 1950s and 60s. And also this type of style; it's a very

sentimental, Christmas card-y style. Now also, you can't tell much from this picture, as often with a lot of art. This is made with layers of contact paper. Does anyone know what contact paper is? Someone knows. Someone raise their hand just so I can—Okay, good. One person does—Oh good. A good show of hands. So it's clear contact paper, and in between are layers of like felted magic marker, pen, and then there's like nail polish and all kinds of reflected material. So like in a slide like this you're not going to get the full impact of the reflections. But see, the actual lasagna pan is probably like, uh, eight by ten inches. It's pretty small. But this is part of a piece that had like a 135/140 lasagna pans; and it's about an attempted suicide of a gay teenager in the--It's actually myself—in the early 1960s, I would say. Uh, and we're going to go back to the word *infrastructure*. There was no infrastructure—intellectual infrastructure—at the time to speak about being gay at all. The only one was from psychiatry condemning it... or religion condemning it. And it's very important for you to know this, that the liberal left back then thought it was a mental illness, and the right thought it was a crime. Occasionally individuals could be nice, but it wasn't until gay people took the bull by the horns, took the law, you know, on, and started to find our own culture on our own terms that things started to change, because people were just as happy to let gay people get aversion therapy, which was shock treatments, to try to get you to become straight. It was very much like the Michele Bachmann mentality, but that was it back then. So like know, boys and girls, those of you who are gay here, you have walked over the backs of a former generation that like built the bridge for you. There was no bridge. So like... know that. Okay.

IMAGE

Here we have—These are early memories of desire, I would call [them]. This is the Catholic

mass. There's me as an altar boy. Okay. Now these two kids, they're the same age; but this is the one that's like growing up queer, I was in love with the other altar boy at the time. His voice was changing, and he was someone who could pass for like twenty-two, right? And like—And so I—But I was like this like pimply (38:50) bespeckled (possibly means bespectacled) child. Yes, and madly in love with—he's called Sal here. Here we are, altar boys at the mass in a nice ethnic church. Now this object here is like a little tent-type thing. It's called a tabernacle. In the tabernacle goes the consecrated host; that means the body of Christ, okay? So it has a little door on it, you move the tent aside, the little door opens, and the body of Christ is stored in that tabernacle tent. Remember that, because we're going to make reference to that in a little while: the tabernacle tent.

IMAGE?

I had a little tabernacle at home. I made a little altar because I was like priest pretending. Oop! Back, back back.

IMAGE

Okay, yes? Okay, this.... This is like the (unintelligible)—Okay, this would be called what? A gay stroke magazine? I don't mean stroke like having, you know, no blood rush (unintelligible)(laughter) I don't mean stroke like old people get—I think you get it. Yeah, I mean.... But anyway, this was the main—the only connection to any kind of form of gay culture when I was a teenager. And I didn't even know about these magazines at all until our parish priest gave a sermon to, you know, get us to be virtuous teenagers. And so the priest in his sermon.... There's like—ah, like a hundred candy stores in town; and back then there was a lot of little stores. Things hadn't become like they are now. And the candy stores sold magazines, newspapers.... And so the priest gets up in the pulpit and he says,

“Boys and girls, you are not to go to the Sugar Bowl or the Penn Sweet Shop.” That narrowed it down to two. So I knew where to go, you see? (laughter) It like—I was very proud and happy that like I could figure out that equation. You know, you didn’t have to go shopping to every place then. And so like I went. Okay.

IMAGE?

I had—See, the altar boy outfit, my mother would clean that. That’s that little outfit there. See, that’s called a cassock and a surplice. The cassock is like the long part, the surplice like a little white angel outfit, okay? And so our mother would—my mother would—everyone’s mother would iron that. So I carried that over my arm with a hanger hanging from it after serving mass. And I went to the Penn Sweet Shop, which had the other sinful thing about being near the railroad tracks; because the priest said, “Things near railroad tracks tend to ignore God’s law.” (laughter) Well, I guess it had something to do with, you know, the technology of secular humanism, the railroad, had to have like revolutionized everything. So like maybe that was it. But also I knew when I looked at that railroad, it went to New York, ‘cause the town was like three towns from New York, and I knew if I touched the rails, it was an unbroken line to the big city. Okay. So I go to the Penn Sweet Shop with my altar boy outfit over my arm, and I buy a copy of *The Daily News* as a kind of smokescreen. Now believe me, I did not want to go in there and steal. I was forced to... (laughter) by this oppressive culture. I said, “I need those magazines.” This is all going on inside me. See, the inner life.... Think of your inner life looking for external form here. No infrastructure, but the Penn Sweet Shop and these little magazines. That magazine. Like those. So I got like one or two of them and stuffed them into the cassock and surplice over my arm. And I was so surprised the guy didn’t see me... or he didn’t act like it. I felt, “Wow, I really pulled this

off.” (unintelligible) (laughter) And you got it, okay. And then I took them home, and I (unintelligible) had a huge collection of these, and I was very proud of my collection. And.... Oop, the wrong thing. Wait. I keep thinking that’s going to do this.

IMAGE?

Okay, back to this. My little tabernacle at home was lined with... ‘cause I have [a] little altar there that was authentic in its details; ‘cause like at the Morgan Library, when I gave the talk and I used this, one of the curators of medieval art said, “You really know how to set up that altar. It’s got blah blah blah blah to the altar cards; it’s got the tabernacle.” I— “Oh, yeah, I know my stuff. I know my stuff.” Okay. So like in the sacredness of the tabernacle in my parents’ basement, lined with satin, I put my little magazines in between the satin and the wall inside; and when I went off to Pratt many years later, I came back [and] my mother had not found them. They were still there. Later on they disappeared, though, so someone found them, but no one ever brought that up. Okay.

IMAGE?

So know this. So that’s high—That’s a pretty good metaphor for “this is my body, this is my blood” being stuck in the place where “this is my body, this is my blood,” in the tabernacle. It’s like that’s the most sacred, uh, like “this is who I am.” Okay, and like—Oops! What happened? (pause)

Comment: I think it was a fly that just got bumped. There was a bunch of flies around.

Here we go.

TL-S: Okay, we just go normal now? Regular?

Comment: It’s moving away (unintelligible)

TL-S: It'll work. I'll do it. (unintelligible) just press it. Ah! We don't want that yet.

IMAGE

Okay, there. Okay, it'll (unintelligible) Okay, okay, okay. Okay, good. So there. Then erotic focus becomes like "This is my body, this is my blood." That's what's called cathexis. It involves catharsis, when you have a release. But the cathexis is the embodiment of the feelings and to the form you focus on. And so there was—Again there was no—no gay culture then at all. Okay.

IMAGE

This is years later. These are not going to be in chronological order, 'cause remember, this is broken down from like a thousand slides. In the late Sixties I tried—I started making a bunch of things just because I liked them, like bishops' miters and crowns and things like that. And I would invite people to my place on the Lower East Side. There was no.... The art world back then didn't have people showing art in their places and calling it a gallery. Now that's very common, but back then it was like nobody was doing that. So this was in a thing called The Sacristy of the Hamptons, and like... slowly people were coming to see it. And there was-- a conceptual underpinning to this was like I was very angry at the Bauhaus, 'cause the Bauhaus was always saying, "We're improving the lot of working class people." Oh, they did not. I mean they could care less. I mean I've gotten attacked when I've said that at places: "How can you say that about the Bauhaus?" (laughter) "I (unintelligible) beautiful thing. Why are you being so negative, spewing negativity? (sobbing sound)" No, no, no. No, no, no, boys and girls. The Bauhaus deserves to have negativity spewed at it. (laughter) And I will be doing it. Okay.

IMAGE?

‘Cause they took places like Elizabeth, New Jersey, and believe it or not, The Projects were inspired by Bauhaus thinking: They took groups of people who were from big families that had their main socializing in the kitchen, because they didn’t have serving staffs; and made these little teeny kitchens to try to turn them into nice bourgeois Americans. Now what the fuck is that about? When—I mean when the family gets together to cook with all the relatives, the kitchen is a living room, not the living room. And so that came up through like, you know, the whole line of thinking, that there was going—that some improvements did happen, but like not, a lot of times. So I thought, “Well, what is the aesthetic of the people I come from?” And it really is this kind of sparkle (47:33) aesthetic. People that know they’re going to die. People that are really like in the nitty gritty, that have very little security, that like look at dreamy things and don’t use them to escape, but use them to feel good. And also, in this, is like all these materials, ‘cause this is like—They’re all aluminum foil, all technological materials of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century that were coming into their own in the 1950s and 60s. And so like it was—One of the Bauhaus tenets was like: “use new materials.” And you know, it’s not like a cathedral made out of stone; it’s like plastic; it’s metal. And so this is all plastic and metal, but really cheap stuff, and really just done to dazzle. And also to kind of like fall apart. But not fall apart. (unintelligible) ‘Cause like some of these still exist, and like I had to fight like hell to get like people to like put the—I figure well, if Egyptian art could be put in a Plexiglas box, why not anything I make? And like no, the people would—Collectors would always say (speaking in falsetto), “Oh, I want it to be free.” (laughs) (laughter) What is that? I mean talk about schlock. I mean it’s brain schlock, yes? Oh. (laughs) (laughter) I got stuck in that (unintelligible) (laughs)

IMAGE?

Oh! At the same time I was making this: “Twinkie.” (laughter) “Twinkie.” Yes, “Twinkie.” Okay. Yes, it’s hard to tell these stories. ‘cause I was actually a teenage runaway. And somehow I learned to talk artspeak along the way, because I (unintelligible) in the gay world of the Stonewall and things like that it was a gay ghetto world. Now in a ghetto world all classes come together from whatever group is being ghetto-ized. And so I would meet curators, I would meet—I met Jack Smith, I met Charles Ludlum; and they were totally in tune with the reality of back then, and it’s a reality that will always exist, and... uh... one of the things they said, “The only real art is in the street. And so when I was making this I wasn’t even thinking about making art. I was thinking about that I was going to marry the guy I loved in high school. And it made no sense. And—because he was like.... I mean I was gone from that town. So anyway, it was like—It’s very similar to the way heterosexuals think, though, but it’s homo-fied. Anyone I would meet at the Stonewall that looked like him I would objectify into the total celestial focus of him. So I was always having sex with *him* that wasn’t him. I think you know what I’m talking about, boys and girls. (laughter) I mean although we talk a good one about objectification, we know we do it. (laughter) Okay. So like anyone that looked like him was objectified as him. And so—And then somehow “Twinkie,” which is—These are the little—little picture that face there is, (laughs) is from those photo booth pictures, and it’s just put in there. And like this was going to be—like I was going to have a houseful of little pictures like this with a husband. Now, it’s interesting—Okay, back to culture, infrastructure, gay marriage. Okay? Language that is used today in universities, a lot of it was used in the street forty/fifty years ago. And then people use it. Like I was invited to talk at Columbia once; and everyone—all the young gay

people—were grandly, you know—gay young men were calling everyone “she” and “Miss Thing,” blah blah blah blah. And like—But they were acting like it was invented by like some kind of like postmodern analysis or something. No, it comes from the street, boys and girls. Really, I mean that expression “Miss Thing” eventually entered into hetero-ness and used in regular TV shows. And as you can see, any show now and then someone’s going to call someone “Miss Thing.” But when I first came to New York that was a nitty gritty street term, just used among street queers. And you see when people give a high five now, believe it or not, there was a kind of like “Gimme five” that straight people do; (unintelligible) you put your hand out like this, and then someone slaps it and they go “hehe.” (laughter) Okay.

IMAGE

Street queens would make fun of it by saying—putting their hands up and bouncing their hand off of it—“Bing!”—in a kind of like—kind of like very-- I’ll use the word—faggy way. Like a limp-wristed kind of way. It was kind of making fun of this. But it was—And then that eventually becomes the high five. And the source is lost. This happens all the time. This is why groups that invent so much culture are always furious at the mainstream, and I applaud this; because it hurts when people act like “We’re just going to acquire hipness. And it just comes from nowhere except to make us fabulous.” No, it comes from somewhere. And somewhere wants to be thanked. Okay.

IMAGE

(laughter) Oop! This is the picture out—Oop! There’s something wrong with this. It’s not coming out all the way.

Comment: There’s flies.

TL-S: That's a fly. Okay. (pause) Yeah, it's (unintelligible) a little. It needs to be somehow moved (unintelligible)

Comment: (unintelligible) the cord?

Comment: Yeah, I think it's this.

TL-S: Okay, well this is—Remember when question time comes, I want questions. I'm not saying I can answer them well, but I'll try. Oh, thank you, Daniel. (pause)

Comment: Uh... so switch—go.... Swap this plate.

TL-S: I'll try my best.

Comment: Do you need this thing with the—

Comment: No, no, no. You can go back to the slide show. And just hit play (unintelligible)

Up at the top is says "options." (unintelligible) "options" at the top? And then

(unintelligible) So it should work now.

Comment: We got rid of the flies.

TL-S: Ah, thank you. Thank you so much.

IMAGE

Okay. This is a picture taken by a photographer named Fred McDarrah here. This is during the Stonewall Riot...Rebellion. Back then it was called neither/nor; it just was something that happened to changed the world. Okay. I am the person in the striped shirt. These are my friends. Historians tell me when they come to visit that I may be—I can't prove it and I hope it's not true—that I may be the only one alive of all these people. Um... Now this group changed the world, because this group fought back when the police tried to raid this bar, the Stonewall. Now, speaking of infrastructure, speaking of giving meanings, speaking of people—a group—defining themselves, in the Stonewall it was what was called a dance

bar. That meant it had a jukebox that played like Motown music, and you could dance with your friends. Now there's another bar on the other side of Manhattan called The Tenth of Always. You could dance fast but they wouldn't let you dance slow; uh, because the management just felt like it was—It turned their stomach or something to see two men holding onto each other and being affectionate and showing some kind of connection beyond just, you know, [a] blow job in a parking lot—Which don't get me wrong; it's fine, a blow job in a parking lot. (laughter) But like there's got to be more, too. I mean it's a nice... quickie is always good. (laughter) But, uh... um... the Stonewall—And they're both Mafia bars. But the Stonewall had a management that um... People—Like there's all different opinions, and some people say, "They were greedy. They just wanted—" That's all true, true, true. Some people say, "The place was a dump." Yeah, but it was the only place we had to go to, and I liked it a lot. Uh... They allowed slow dancing. Now the s low dancing was basically an embrace. It was nothing lascivious; it was just an embrace of two people holding each other. I'm going to get to that, yes. Okay. Thank you, Daniel. (laughter) Yes, your help is greatly appreciated. (laughter) Yeah, okay. Okay, so the slow dance... Now we were all—We had all been in things like—I had been in a thing called Catholic Youth Organization that had dances. And so when I ran off to New York.... Okay, I ran off to New York because I, um, couldn't go back to Pratt because there was no money; it was very complicated. And my father decided to make a man out of me; he put me on a ditch-digging crew, which was really nuts, 'cause I'm not physically strong. That was supposed to segue into a construction job. I mean this is surreal. I mean I (laughter) could barely tie my shoes. And I mean (unintelligible) going to make a man out of me. The day I was supposed to go for the job I just ran away from home and didn't go back. I mean I had no money in

my pocket. And like somehow I met a group of-- This was in 1966—other gay runaways. They were all teenagers too. And like.... But, to flesh this out, everyone had had horrible things. There were people in this group that had, um, boiling water thrown on them by their parents; people that were thrown through plate glass windows. Because it was like if—It was just considered like if your son or daughter was gay it was okay to hate them; that was the culture back then, which is very nasty. So the group that ended up knowing each other was a group that had a hairpin trigger. I mean people that were going to fight no matter what—I mean really fight. This is—This is not—This is like--It's a classic kind of Marxist situation. This is what people (unintelligible) known as the lumpenproletariat. I am from the lumpenproletariat; imagine that. That means the group at the bottom that ignites a revolution. And then once it's ignited—the ignition happens—groups that have more organizational skills come in and have the knack for organizing and picking up on that momentum. It happens with every significant revolution. And then the event is able to take on the momentum that gives it lasting power. But it needs that spark of that moment from a bunch of people that are willing to die but don't even think about it. Um—don't even think about the dying. In other words, if someone says I could die, no. Just know that if you've had boiling water thrown on you; or like thrown through a plate glass window, something like that; or someone cut you up with a knife at home, you've seen Hell. So like... there are many other Hells, and like you face them. But... Okay, the Stonewall people threw bricks... but it's back to the slow dancing. Holding onto someone, when you're denied doing it... uh... has a lot—and still so—A lot [of] heterosexuals—I'm not attacking heterosexuals; I'm just saying you can take a lot for granted, like you can just put your arm around your girlfriend or your boyfriend, and you don't have to look over your shoulder to

see if someone's going to like hit you over the head. I mean there's gay people that can still happen to. Okay. But the dancing in the Stonewall, the slow dancing, was the place where like a person—this group of teenagers—the total reality of becoming a person happens. The affectionate reality comes before the conceptual mechanism; because this is physiological. And this is—It's also—So much of the basis of art is affectionate more than conceptual. Okay, so the reality of this being the only place where people could hold onto each other—gay people—and feel that kind of affectionate love was challenged by the police that night. So this group of people was not going to take that. Now I'm going to sum this up by this person the most. Yes, catch that mosquito, [Daniel. We] must get those flies and mosquitoes out of the way, out of the way. Yes, thank you. Okay. Can anyone tell me what they think is in this little cute little purse.

Comment: A brick.

TL-S: A what?

Comment: A brick.

TL-S: You got it. Wow. Hey, that was good. You're the first person ever to get that. You must have known that already.

Comment; (unintelligible) you mentioned bricks.

TL-S: Okay. Well, wow, you're good. No, no. I always do that, and people won't get it.

Wow, I'm—(laughter) Yeah, that has a brick in there. And what's amazing is that's the perfect little purse for a brick. (laughter) I mean it's just the right size. And like, do you know every time this picture is shown, no one ever points that out except me. I mean this picture is shown as like (unintelligible)—Okay, this is like a news photo, a documentary photo. So like for years the *Village Voice* and a million papers resisted anyone in this

picture having a name, an actual name as a person. It was just supposed to be a generalized group of gay runaways, nameless, lower class, under class. [But] I knew the name and I kept harassing and sending the information. Eventually—only now—the names are starting to be said. I mean that person is drag queen Chris, not in drag, see? But the brick is a major component, 'cause this queen was a tough cookie who wasn't going to take any shit, and I never saw the brick hit anyone over the head, but it was ready. And like I never wanted to get in an argument with anyone here, because like you didn't know where it was going to go. But that night it went in the direction of like changing the world. And because like—you know, like the Bob Dylan song, "When you aint got nothin' you've got nothin' to lose?" That was the essence of this group. Okay.

IMAGE

So that combines with this. This is what—I was making these, along with the "Twinkie" figurines at the time. Now this is done in like a kind of regular expressionist style I would say. And at the time I remember like, you know, looking up different art movements and things, and reading about, you know, these writers that would say things like about expressionism and "the Bohemia of the night in pre-Nazi Germany," and like "all of that rawness and everything." So I thought, "Oh, I'd better make it in that style." So it's—But it's a figurine that was supposed to go into my dream house with my husband that never happened back then. And this is called "Drag Queen Hooker and Baby Doll." There's Baby Doll. (laughter) Okay.

IMAGE

And these were made right around the time of the Stonewall. And like this art from back [then], I really like this stuff a lot; because like the styles are not consistent. What's

consistent is the materials, because I was fulminating with anger against the Bauhaus. So I was sticking with the new materials thing. I wanted that to be the thread that held them together, and no one ever catches on to that. I mean they just don't get it. But they are staring now, because like "Twinkie," who you just saw a little while ago—"Twinkie" actually made it to *The New York Times* this Friday... after, like what? Forty fucking years? (laughter) I mean it took forever.

IMAGE?

Oop! What are you doing? (laughter) (unintelligible) do that. (laughter) Okay.

IMAGE

There's Jack Smith. Jack Smith, Charles Ludlam—God was I lucky to know them; because like the art world back then was Donald Judd and a bunch of minimalists. Oh God! (laughter) And they were tyrants. I mean 'cause they – Minimalism believed it was like some kind of like secular godsend in the linear—They had no sense of cyclical history at all. They believed that they were the fading out of art as the older systems, and they were the replacing all that. [sic] I mean you've heard all this stuff, I'm sure; there's a lot of art systems that proclaim that. But no, boys and girls, they're systems and you can create counter systems. Really, it's—it's all made up. But by saying that I don't mean bad made up; I mean it's made up and made into reality; because Jack Smith said, "Art is real magic." Think of it. It's something astonishing when it's great art, but you know it's actually made through the imagination and materials. It's no sleight of hand. So him saying it's real magic, and then both these guys, Charles Ludlam and Jack Smith saying the real art is only in the street, I'm hearing this while in those Stonewall days. I started to hear that like in 1967. And so imagine, I'm a street queen with a bunch of other street queens, and I'm

hearing the world that I'm in given these like huge certifications of its validity. In other words I'm not being—It's not that thing where like, you know, you stencil the word[s] "Hi. I'm gay. I'm the world" on the wall in a box letter, which is typical art world signifier, and then you're somehow legitimized—no. This was saying that the systems that people create in life themselves were the art, and that making those systems into an intensely realized symphony of those systems was elevating to high art. It's art already, and possibly high art on its own. We can say the art of the street is time-based... and the word didn't exist. No word [existed] then, like installation [or] anything.

IMAGE?

Okay, there's Jack Smith, the father of installation art. Now he didn't know that word. He didn't care. And then Laurie Anderson.... She says that "the father of installation is [an] apple-cheeked white girl." Right? She just says that. And like—And one day I saw her in the Seventies, and she said, "Who do you like as an artist?" And I said, "Jack Smith." She goes, "Who's that?" I mean she—if you want to be like—I hate the word smart—She jumps on the bandwagon; she's smart; yeah, she knows how to do it. Just... Am I going too crazy? I'm sorry. (laughter) Okay. I'll calm down. (laughter) Okay. That's Jack Smith, the founder of performance art. And Laurie Anderson, wonderful woman. (laughter) Yes, said that about him, so that means something. (laughter)

IMAGE

There's Charles Ludlam. There he is as Saint Obnoxious. And like his plays..... It's real sad; they both died of AIDS. Like Charles died in his forties, Jack in his fifties. And back-- There was a time if you got AIDS you were dead. I mean there was no chance of getting better before all the different ways of keeping going came along. But their aesthetic—I mean

'cause I—Some of you have seen *Flaming Creatures*, and I heard that you saw the Charles Ludlam—what's it?—*House*—not *House of Wax*. What's it called (unintelligible)

Comment: *Wax Museum*.

TL-S: *Wax Museum*—Yeah. You've seen it. (1:07:52) So like when you see Charles Ludlam perform, because you can see it in that. That's Charles Ludlam, and Charles Ludlam is the drag queen woman in that that like... Back when he did that, I mean all those hints, the makeup hints and everything, come from Thirties movies and stuff like that. Back then that wasn't something that like—That was something the art world hated. They really were mean about anyone not making a Donald Judd or some derivative of Donald Judd. I mean today there's at least a lot of variety that you can resource and that you know that there's a huge range of things you can work with; and that's really good. But back then there was the tyranny of Judd-ism.

IMAGE

Okay, this is "The Summer Palace of Tsarina Tatlina." This is—It gets remade many, many times. This was in the Nineties. It was first done in the Sixties in my apartment; and it's basically what it is here: a bunch of chalices; there's just a lot of glitter, a lot of sparkle, a lot of fake candy, a lot of gold rats. You can see down here... gold rats, gold rats; they're climbing all over the place, (unintelligible) all over the place. Uh... this was done to be a kind of like sumptuously entertaining piece, to have it like be enjoyable. But at the same time it has a part of it that's supposed to be about making fun of like the sacred superstitious quality of art. More art than religion, 'cause religion at least knows it's about this stuff. But a lot of times people don't even think about art. They just read up on what's

getting paid attention to, and then kind of superstitiously go along it like—It's kind of—The art world is a faith-based community, boys and girls. You know this.

IMAGE

Okay, there's a detail of the same thing. Again this goes back to my anti-Bauhaus-ness of like all, you know, what would be called new materials, not art materials. A lot of saran wrap, cling wrap pearls. Office staples are the main element. Lots and lots of cellophane. Lots and lots of like floral wrap.

IMAGE

Here's another [variation]. And these are all replayed variations. This was at the Grey Gallery at NYU... uh... and when the PS 1 retrospective it was done another way; [sic] 'cause it was made so that what could happen was it gets put away like Christmas decorations, then reconfigured every time. It has no like exact way it has to get done, because I— But... Since it's a certain use—And also the objects are not all the original ones from the Sixties; some of them are newer, meaning from the Nineties.

IMAGE

Ah! This was the—This is called "Pontius Angelicus," this was done in 1973. Holly Solomon. She was a pretty revolutionary dealer. She pioneered what was called Pattern and Decoration, which I was not a part of, but which I had something to do with, because this is very decorative. And like a little anecdotal thing: I used to show my art where I lived, but then I'd give it away. I wanted to be—because.... Okay, the apartment I had was like in Murder Town; that was the Lower East Side back then. And... thank you. Um... And it was thirty-five dollars a month, which is not a lot of money. So like it meant that like I had a lot of free time to make my art, and I could entertain the thought that I was like somehow like

Saint Francis of Assisi or something. And I would give away the art in shopping bags to people. So this is a drag queen artist that I knew that I gave a few shopping bags of art to. And then Holly Solomon, who had been someone who had her portrait done by Warhol, was going around looking at art. She goes to his loft... and for some reason he throws all his art in my bathroom when she's coming. He just throws all these gold rats and chalices into the bathroom and they're all over the place. I guess he didn't want her to see or—I don't know. She asks to go to the bathroom. See...? You never know these moments. Holly Solomon had to go to the bathroom. (laughter) And like.... So I get a call from Eddy; that was the queen's name. And he was nice enough to do this, 'cause he could have fucked it up if he wanted to, but he didn't. And he said, "You know, this art collector wants to come visit you." And I said, "No. No, I hate them. They—No art collector can come over to my house." I said, "It'll bring down the wrath of the neighborhood on me." And so he said, "But she can call you?" I said, "Okay." So Holly Solomon calls, and I said something like, "Listen, lady, if you want to visit me, don't come around wearing diamonds and fur coats." And she said-- (laughs) I love her voice—She said, "Let me call you Tom." She would never call me Tommy because her son's name was Tommy, so she always said, "Let me call you Tom." (laughter) And she says, "Tom, believe me, me and Horse"—That was her husband's name—"love art. Our children love art. We love art dearly. We want to—I want to visit you and see what you're doing. I'll wear a cloth coat and a little babushka on my head." (laughter) Okay. So I said, "Oh, that's nice. You can visit me. Okay." I was pretty young. I was in my twenties, early twenties. Okay, so she comes to visit, she knocks on the door. But she was a ham actress, you know that? She studied acting with Lee Strasberg and people like that. But like Lee Strasberg came to her one day and said, "Holly, you shouldn't

pursue this career.” (laughter) And she said, “Why not, Lee?” He said, “You’re too good.” (laughter) Go figure. Now that’s genius. What does that mean? (laughter) Morally good? Good as an actress? I mean it just goes on forever, ‘cause—I mean she told me that. And then I would meet thousands of people as the years went by. So I’m not telling you like horrible information that, you know, degrades her in any way. I mean what does it mean? Okay. So—Oops! What have we got here. I keep touching that. Right where--- We’re there still. Okay. Oops, now we’re going back to that one. Thank you.... Okay.

#### IMAGE

Yes, yes, yes. But... Holly Solomon harbored rancor in her heart because of that. Okay, she came to my place and she bought a few things. She opened her little change purse and she takes our three crumpled up hundred dollar bills. “Here’s three hundred dollars, Tom, for some gold rats and lovely [chalices]. Thank you, Tom. Thank you.” Three hundred dollars is a lot of money, right? Okay. But something was brewing in her. She resented. She resented that I told her not to wear fur coats. So many years passed, and in the 1990s she comes to my building, which is still a tenement, but in a lovely neighborhood, Hell’s Kitchen, right? So like-- but she comes in and she says, “I smell smoke.” I said, “Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing.” (unintelligible) smoke, but there’s smoke coming up from the basement, right? And like she has an argument with the woman on the first floor, who’s saying, “There’s nothing wrong.” But the smoke is coming up from the basement and the building was starting to burn down. But I—Holly Solomon insisted that we go to the fire department around the corner. And so like we walked—and she’s wearing a fur coat this time and a lot of jewelry and looking like a million dollars, right? Okay. With like a snazzy hairdo and everything. And she jaywalks across 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, she goes into—in—into the

firehouse. She doesn't go to the little desk at the front like I would and say, "Excuse me, I think my building's burning down." (laughter) She walks right into the Irish Stew room where they're playing cards; and she goes, "Men! Fire!" (laughter) Holy--! I thought they were going to say, "Get out of here." No, they stood up, like at attention, like she was the queen of the world. (laughter) And then she goes, "Follow me, men!" (laughter) They go and they put their firemen outfits on like that. (snaps fingers) They get those big axes like that. (snaps fingers) They all follow her, jaywalking across 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the cars honking and everything. "Men, follow me!" She's wearing this fur coat; she's—right in the middle of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue with them she turns to me—And remember this is—When she came to my and like bought the gold rats and everything, that was like in 1971/72, something like that, and now we're going up to like 1997 or maybe 2000 or something like that; and like she turns to me and she says, "You see, Tom? It pays to know women who wear fur coats and jewelry." (laughter) And I thought, "She waited all that time." (laughter) I love moments like that, 'cause like that was wild. She got me. (untranscribable sound) And I was happy, 'cause like she saved the building from burning; it was really started. (1:17:27) They had to break down the door; the boiler had burnt dry; and there were some boxes nearby that were burning from the burning system underneath. It was like a bunch of gas jet things or something. And she really—And they were able to catch that on time, 'cause the super was in the hospital. And so like women with fur coats and jewelry, yes. I mean what can I say? I mean the world is full of these paradoxes that defy principles I clung so deeply to. Up. So there. So anyway, back to this one. She says at the time and when she comes to visit me, she says, "Horse and I love art. We don't have a gallery yet, Tom, but we have a place to (something) 98 Green Street; we want you to make something." So I make this, 'cause I

decided—Okay, my next door neighbor had just gotten murdered; and the neighborhood was very bad. And he had been my protector. I mean I had lived there for seven years, and it was a nice man who was involved in gangs and drug dealings; he was like that. And like—No, he was very nice to me. I would read poems to him and things. And.... But like once he got murdered, the people who didn't like me were going to act out. So like I decided I had to find a new protector, and Holly Solomon came along. And then—So this got shown and she bought it; she bought it for like two thousand dollars, and I was able to move up to where I am now; and I've been there ever since. So like I allied myself with her for awhile, and till she died like in about the turn of the century; and now I'm with a gallery called Pavel Zoubok.

#### IMAGE

Okay, this is—Well what it is, it's a chalice, a (unintelligible); it's all about the body and blood. That whole thing there. That's a sunburst which is actually based on neoplatonic principles about—This is called a glory, all—like a halo—all those gold things coming out there. Okay, there's the bread of Christ's body right in the middle. Okay, thank you. Okay, right there. Now it's interesting, actually and conceptually, that like the holy object is right—that white thing in the middle there, the piece of bread. Everything emanating from that, again called the glory, is about the power and delight of this. And that is something—That would be a—And that's an endless bone of contention in art, about reductivists want it just to be that; and you can think of a million parallels to this (unintelligible) who would say, "The bread on its own is what it's really about." And then someone else who is—like me- who would say, "But I want the delight of the magnitude of what this is about, going on.

So this again is about that magnitude of the body emanating joy through Christ's body here.  
Okay.

IMAGE

Whoa! That was—That was Ivan—This is Ivan the Terrible's favorite icon, kind of bug-eyed Jesus. I love this, because—Okay, it's made out of layers of cling wrap—sandwich wrap—and like you can't tell here, but the layers [are] colored with magic marker, little pieces of aluminum foil, and all kinds of things. As you move it's a lot like medieval enamels and Byzantine enamels, 'cause that's the stuff I like, so I always want to make things like that. So this picture actually—Again, here you can't really tell much about the way the light shifts within it. And like—But it's a very interesting kind of like thing the way his beard looks kind of like [a] testicle beard. I mean it's... And again, it was Ivan the Terrible's favorite icon that I got that from; so that gives it a kind of spooky resonance.

IMAGE

Ah! This is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This is "Iconostasis's Doors;" and the entire "Iconostasis"—"Iconostasis is a wall covered with icon pictures; in a Russian or Greek Orthodox Church it stands in front of the altar that symbolizes where heaven and earth connect in a mystical way. And like again, this is in the collection at the Met, and it's made the same way as the other one: It's layers of sandwich wrap, and the light moves and flickers in it. And I was just.... There's actually two sets of doors. One is in the.... The whole thing is in Aachen, Germany, and then just the doors are at the Met. But they don't ever show it much. They'll loan it out, but I don't think it's ever been in a show there. Okay.

IMAGE

This goes back to the lasagna pans, and this is—Okay, the story of the lasagna pans is like when I was a paperboy I would get up every morning like four thirty and deliver my papers. And I really loved doing that, ‘cause like I would just do it; I didn’t even care if I made money from it, I just liked it so much. And.... But I’d ride around the town; the seasons would change; the sun would rise, ‘cause it was like... at that time, which reminds me of like the—Does anyone know what the expression “breaking night” means? Okay, I’ll tell you. Back in the street days, with the street queens that I was friends with, if you stay up all night—It’s a really beautiful term, breaking night. If you stay up all night and you’re up all night till dawn, and you’re waiting for dawn, and you’re kind of up with your friends and everything, and dawn is happening, that’s breaking night. In other words you can’t break night by getting up just before dawn, like I am as a paper boy, but even though there’s some connection. You actually feel the kind of something of being part of like the earth turning when you do that, especially when you’re a teenager. Breaking night. And being-- And in the street, I mean, ‘cause no one had any power or anything; it was the romance of life itself kept everyone going. So to be part of like the new day coming up meant a lot. Okay, but back to—This story again is about the teenager who tries to kill himself ‘cause of a bunch of kids beat him up, calling him queer and things like that. And these are all about how he delivers his papers that he rides around, taking comfort just from the beauty of things. And the beauty of things is not—again, not an escape; it’s an articulation of what beauty can do. Beauty is a solace that brings us away from our pain; and that they’re both important, but I mean when people deny the importance of beauty I just think they’re liars, to tell you the truth, because I mean they’ll always fall for a pretty face.

IMAGE

Ah, there's the town more. Again, these are hard to talk about, just because looking at them doesn't give you the full scope of what they really look like; because the layered saran wrap.... Uh, no, these are layered contact paper—with the shifting of light within them can't be conveyed much in this static shot.

IMAGE

Oops!—no. Oh yeah, that works. That's the—The baby being baptized there is a signifier of what—Okay the kid gets beat up, the paper boy. The baby being baptized is like a signifier of a rite of passage, because in an orthodox—Russian Orthodox—baptism, the baby gets put all the way under the water. So now just reflect upon that. Somehow, physiologically perhaps, the baby knows. Not in the conscious sense of "I could drown," but they must feel it. So like a rite of passage like that is extremely strong. Where you're like put in a position where you're like on the verge of being murdered or dying, and then you live. See, and that was my metaphor for surviving those years of like being a gay teenager, that you get through it; 'cause then there's the kid under water now, right? If the priest stays there that kid's a goner, right? And then there's the coming up. In Catholic [theology]—In orthodox theology (unintelligible) it signifies the resurrection. It's interesting when people think that it's about washing away of sins. That's cute. That's nice. But actually the resurrection symbol works much better, because the drowning part is so... That is such good art. There's the union of the physiological there and like the spirituality of being human, all combined in one thing. I mean whether a person believes in it as a religious thing or not, it certainly knows what it's doing.

IMAGE

Okay, there's the beat up kid with his guardian angel. Okay, I don't have a shot of him like slitting his face, because what happens is he cuts up his face. He's... In his own thoughts... See, it's interesting (unintelligible) there's a story that goes with this; and [a] peculiar little thing about the story is that no one knows but the guy himself; it's all going on in him, he (unintelligible) But because there's no surface (1:27:14) for homosexuality that I positive, the whole thing happens inside him, meaning that he—Okay, at the end he does not kill himself; he cuts his face up, but in the dialogue with himself he considers himself a coward for not killing himself, 'cause he's structuring this on the kind of like... that he doesn't have the guts to go for the max. It's kind of like very teenage-y thinking. Um... And then it goes through the whole night. He cuts up his face.... He makes a bunch of pictures that he gives to a friend of his he loves, like the other altar boy; but the other altar boy doesn't know why that's happening. And then the next morning he goes out and delivers his papers again. It's the whole cycle of like the night, death, the dawn.

IMAGE

And that one there, that's him going out to deliver his papers. That's based on an 8<sup>th</sup> century Armenian manuscript of "The Harrowing of Hell by Christ." Like coming out of Hell and bringing everyone into Heaven. I really do like those kind of references. Uh, so again, this is about a world that has no surface articulation for a teenaged gay person.

IMAGE

Okay, this piece was in the Whitney Biennial in '91. This is called "The Naked Macho," and it's based on a fantasy, actually. I used to have a friend that I would play records for, and he never had his clothes off; but I would always imagine it. I really am proud of the tan line in this; (laughter) 'cause I think it's very well done. And again, the little guy over there, that

represents me; and then the other guy—We're both the same age, but it's like that craziness of like that world I grew up in was. There were these guys that they really looked like they were twenty-five when they were sixteen. And they could go to New York and get served in any bar. Oops! Oh, wait. Whoops!

IMAGE

Okay, there's "The Infant of Prague," as a symbol of liberation theology; this was made in the Eighties. And it's world traveled and like, uh.... But it's funny. Like one time there was someone making a catalogue with this in it. I said, "That's 'The Infant of Prague' as a personification symbol of liberation theology. And the person—The catalogue come out and they say, "liberation philosophy." It's like that crazy kind of like anti-religious thing. Hey, I have every reason in the world to be anti-religious. But at the same time I'm not going to deny that like uh... religion as an entity is not going to go away, because it's an art form. And it's interesting how liberation theology comes up again and again. It came up when Barack Obama was elected President because of.... You know, the word is about—in liberation theology about... the theology comes from the bottom, not the top. It comes up from the bottom, and I consider what my art is about coming up from the bottom.

IMAGE

Okay, now that is—That's just a couple of weeks ago. You will recognize the young priest person as—it's Daniel, here. Okay, these—This is me and my friends, playing. This is um.... Basically 'cause like we go back to be (1:30:51) like John Dewey, and Charles Ludlam would say that. Art is Play—capital P—like you know you play a theme by Beethoven. I mean Play used with a capital P. But play as like this magnificent area where Charles Ludlam would say. "When you're an adult and an artist you can play in the way you couldn't when

you were a kid, because you have the self-discipline to reign it in and extend it. So this is something that sits on the edge of life and art. This is all orchestrated by Glenn Santiago; he's the one on the far left there. Agosto Machado's in the middle as the Pope. And Agosto was in a lot.... Agosto was a great performance artist who is not very well-known but is very respected, because he doesn't pursue fame; he pursues the art of it as the essence of it; and Jack Smith was a good friend of his, and Jack Smith took lots of pictures of him. So you see that there are these underworlds that will always exist that are not obsessed with like.... I won't call it selling out. I would call it with like kind of—with making a diminution of your sensibility to fit the forms that are currently adulated at any time, um... which people will do for a few years of like sparkle or something. And so there's this example, and you can see how—There's me. Glenn made the mitres. There's Daniel. Daniel's the younger person there, who's freaked out by these crazy older people. Okay.

IMAGE

So now... That's the last slide and we'll go to the finale. Okay, can you do that? Okay. And then we'll go to questions.

MUSIC SOUNDTRACK HEARD (VIDEO?)

(applause)

TL-S: Okay (unintelligible)

Question: Tommy, hey!

TL-S: Yeah?

Question: How are you?

TL-S: (unintelligible)

Question: I was wondering if you could talk about your feelings about your—some of your

imagery being, um... kind of read as being straightforward and devotional, even if being strange and exuberant. Like if it was encountered and read as just straightforward and devotional and religious, sincerely, and... having—not having any feeling of the criticality or your experiences in the—the experience of actually being in front of it, if it was just experienced as a religious icon.

TL-S: Okay, I have no problem with that, because I do believe, uh... that the artist—Okay, the artist is the first viewer of their art. From then on it has a life of its own. If someone enters into it that way, that's fine with me. There are many other ways to enter into it, and so I—if someone were to use it devotionally or see it devotionally, I would not object. I would hope people would look further. But people won't always; and again, it's—it's.... My art is about—I hope—about a kind of seduction that brings people in. And all seductions don't always end up at the ideal focus of that seduction. So again, I have no problem with someone viewing it devotionally. Does that answer...? I hope. Okay, question?

Question: Could you talk about your usage of humor in decoration?

TL-S: Excuse--? Whoops!

Question: Could you talk about your usage of humor and decoration in relationship to a defense mechanism to some more--?

TL-S: Well, um... Oops! Humor—Humor is always.... Any group that's being persecuted automatically adopts a system of humor; it just goes with survival. So—And the humor can often disguise itself in ways that are undetectable to the group that's doing the persecuting. For instance, when in the street, back in the Sixties, the police were referred to as Betty Badge, Patty (Paddy) Pig, Lily Law. And so like that became like Lil or Lillian; and so you could be with a group of like other gay teenagers, or just gay people in general back then;

and say, “Oops, girls, it’s Lil.” That was the code that (snaps finger) right away got the point across, “There’s the cops.” Or Betty or Patty. Like Patty Pig. And it was like—You didn’t use the Patty Pig one once, ‘cause they were kind of on to that, ‘cause back then hippies would call the cops pigs. So but the humor, um, in my art, again, um... it’s there, I hope, for a lot of layers of things. If someone gets it, they get it; I have no objection to them not getting it. I have a huge respect for the audience being included in things; and I want—I want people to be involved. And it’s made for everyone, so that part of it being there is like seeing how people respond. And people will sometimes find humor that I didn’t see, even. And um... so it’s an endless question and an endless answering process. Uh... question? Oops! What am I—What’s going on?

Comment: (unintelligible)

TL-S: Oh, am I making that call?

Comment: (unintelligible)

TL-S: Oh. Okay, question? Yeah.

Question: I have a question. Um...

TL-S: Yeah.

Question: I’m sort of thinking about you saying how, you know, for all of you like gays who can hold hands in public or whatever, you’re riding on the backs of the work that your generation did. And um... I’m wondering like.... I don’t know. This isn’t a really well-formed question, but—

TL-S: (affirmative sound)

Question: It’s sort of like: What do you think the obligation is—or if there is an obligation—to queer artists or gay artists now, or just like queers or gays in general, who are riding on

the backs of the work that you've done, and the sort of like the inheritance of, uh... queer artists who are aware of and maybe have some like inherited grief about the AIDS epidemic and the work that you guys did as like artists. In other words, like how do you feel, um... what that role should be in the work of queer artists now, or people—if it's taken for granted, or if it's like this subdued grief, or.... Do you know what I'm saying?

TL-S: I think so.

Question: Okay.

TL-S: Okay. First of all I would say that—Again I encourage multiple meanings coming from myself and coming to myself. So I would say like “riding on the backs;” I would also say, “extending” on the work that has been done. But the thing that bothers me is when people make—have no curiosity about anything before them. That's when I get really angry. And I really get angry when like say a gay person that is passing or straight says something like, “Oh, if all those (unintelligible) weren't there, or like people that look so (unintelligible) or something, people would accept us right away.” That pisses me off when that happens, because like on that Stonewall picture that's in there, when that picture was taken there should have actually been twice as many people in that picture, but only the fairy queens have the guts to be in the camera; the husbands all ran away. So like there's this culture.... I mean we're all artists here, so we're involved in the formation of culture; we're involved in like expanding cultural possibilities, a whole huge variety of things. So I just hope that people take a responsibility for culture seriously beyond their own self-indulgence, and don't stop at like—'cause it really did bother me when I had to go to Columbia University that time, and a lot of those students were acting like they invented things. They didn't invent. And they had—Some of them were—had enough humility to

acknowledge that it didn't start with them. Others were kind of very dismissive, and I found that really offensive; because they come into a situation where like an academic institution that at one time would have had nothing to do with them, finally when it's more or less safe to do it, acknowledges them and gives them some space and some time to speak, and then they have like [absolutely]—[They're] blithely unaware and don't care that a bunch of like lower class queens like gave their lives for them, so to speak. They think it begins with the middle class, and that's wrong. So like--But again, I would say I'm not casting that out as a whole big chunk of concrete to fall on everyone's head like you're all bad. No, no. It depends on each person and each individual how they can rise through their own curiosity and empathy to the situation. And yeah....

Comment: (inaudible)

TL-S: Yeah, okay, 'cause you're the new generation. Say something. Well say something.

Unidentified speaker (Daniel?): So uh in the—Holland Cotter's *New York Times* article, the uh.... Christian Holstad... is Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt—Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt's cultural and spiritual heir; and um... Christian Holstad doesn't know anything about Tommy's art at all. And likewise Martha P. Washington—I know, I worked for him. He doesn't—did not know who he was. Okay? He's a great guy, doesn't know Tommy. I know Tommy. Tommy doesn't know him. He doesn't know Tommy. We call him Pagan.

TL-S: Oh, don't tell anybody that. (laughter)

Unidentified speaker: But what's (laughs)—The other thing, Martha P. [Washington]—Right? Marsha?

TL-S: Marsha. Marsha P. Johnson.

Unidentified speaker: Marsha P. Johnson.

TL-S: A street queen.

Unidentified speaker: A street queen. You can maybe take that and run with that real—  
(laughter)

TL-S: Okay. This is a—Okay. Marsha P. Johnson is somebody—You can just Google Marsha P. Johnson and YouTube a whole bunch of—You can find information on Marsha P.

Johnson—was a street queen who died about twenty years ago, and was really a great artist in the sense that Marsha's outfits were made from what was around.; they were always kind of happy and there. Um. Okay, but at the show that's currently running at Pavel Zoubok, there was a picture on the wall that no one consulted me about before. And it's supposed to show like different street aesthetics and things. And it says, "Marsha P. Johnson being harassed by the police." And it was an African American queen that was not Marsha P. Johnson. So like—And like there it is, and so there starts this cultural process of, you know, misinformation being put in motion. And so I went to the gallery owner and I said, "That's not Marsha." I did this very quietly and privately. Eventually like yeah, it got corrected and everything, but it was amazing to me that this kind of like presumption and initial arrogance, that like what? A black street queen is all black street queens is Marsha? I mean that's kind of like really fucked up, if someone's denying the individual their individuality. 'Cause I mean I said to one person—One person kept saying to me over and over again, "That is Marsha. That is Marsha. That is Marsha." I said, "No, it's not." I said, "Well just get a picture of Marsha somewhere and put it there and you'll see it's not Marsha. And they did, and they put the information out, and sure enough, you know, that picture wasn't Marsha P. Johnson. See, these are like the art that people do not know about. And the people that made it, that didn't consider themselves artists. So that story is very

significant about a kind of cultural presumption that is endlessly being recycled, and a lot of people won't open their mouths about; 'cause they figure, "Oh, I don't want to rock the boat. They'll badmouth me and then I won't get a show," or something like that. I mean what the fuck is that? Okay, I don't want to go on too long. Okay, question? Yes. (laughter) (laughs)

Question: Um... hi. That's a big one to jump from. But I'm curious as to how your family has responded to your work over the years.

TL-S: Okay. My parents are both dead now. Uh... they never.... Okay, they—they were somewhat supportive of the art, just 'cause they.... You know, they're not bad people, but they had a lot of issues and ignorance, because they never at all would deal with the gay thing. My father, from the moment he found out till the moment he died, couldn't mention it. My mother, when she died, left me a bunch of like church-y books with little things written in [them] like, "I know you're going to meet a wonderful woman and be what God wants you to be"—that kind of stuff. So like, you know, they had an edge I didn't like; and yet at the same time, again, they were basically good people. I mean I think anyone out there that has dealt with this that knows that like I can't hate them, because like they gave me a good upbringing and everything like that; but I know they were fucked up. Yeah?

Question: (off mike, mostly unintelligible) religious imagery (unintelligible) in your family, and there was any dialogue around that with your family members?

TL-S: Well, I'll tell you—I'm going to tell you a horrible little story. Um... When I was a teenager in New York, about when I was nineteen or so, I had a boyfriend who was a relative of Billy Strayhorn; that was a friend of Duke Ellington's. And his name was Danny Strayhorn. And Danny was in the Alvin Ailey Dance Club—Dance Group. It was just starting back then. And so I had the one aunt who's a nun; she was like presented herself as

like the “hip nun.” I mean you’ve all run into this [phenomenon]. Okay. So I honestly innocently go to her with him at the convent she was at in Brooklyn. And she was very like tight-lipped about seeing us. And then when I’m leaving she says something stupid, like she goes, “You’re not shocking me. You’re only doing this to shock me.” And I thought, “What the fuck is going on with her?” ‘Cause I just thought she would like say, “Great. You know, you have a nice boyfriend” and everything. Then she calls my mother, and she says, “Not only is your son a fag, but he’s dating an N-word.” That’s pretty nasty. And this is a nun saying that. You know, love of Jesus oozing out of her? I mean that wasn’t very nice; that was pretty ugly. I mean it was just—I could go on and on talking about that type of like Irish-American bigotry, ‘cause that’s the side of the family it was. Does that answer some of the question? Or all of it? (laughs) Does it? I hope.... (laughs)

Question: (off mike, inaudible) (laughter)

TL-S: Okay, okay. (laughs) Okay, question?

Question: Hi, Tommy. I’m over here. (pause)

TL-S: Okay. Oh, hi. Yeah.

Question: Hi. I have many questions, but the first one is: What do you think of Second Vatican Council aesthetics?

TL-S: Oh, I don’t like them, I hate them.

Question: Okay, that’s—

TL-S: There’s no aesthetic. It’s like an indifference to aesthetics.

Question: (laughs) Okay, Thank you.

TL-S: It really doesn’t have an aesthetic.

Question: My follow up question, and then I'll let this go, is: Can you tell us the Cooper Union story?

TL-S: Oh, the Cooper Union story. Yes. In like Nineteen—I think it was '67 I wanted to go to Cooper Union. So back then, if you get into Cooper Union, you're in and there's no tuition; and I had—have never any problem drawing in the very realistic style. And so I go to take the Cooper Union test, and it was in the Great Hall; that's where Abraham Lincoln gave his talk. And it was an all-day test; and about midpoint some Cooper Union representative gives out a blank piece of paper and gets up like, you know, in front of everyone and says something like, "Here at the Cooper Union we want you to be who you are. We take very seriously that you should be you." It was done in this like beautiful kind of like exalting, exalted thing that like, you know, an eighteen year old loves to hear, "Like wow, nobody understands me, but someone will now." And so—and he said, "We're going to be honest with you. This is our psychological evaluation. Write about yourself on this blank piece of paper. So I wrote about being gay. I used the word homosexual because I thought it was the proper word, 'cause gay was a street word back then. And I was already living on my own; I wasn't taking money from my parents or anything. But as the other people to contact—'cause you know, when you do certain kinds of applications it says "other person to contact"—I put my parents. So I get the—Months pass, and I get a letter from Cooper Union and I, uh—I'm rejected. And I think, "Well, this is crazy, because I can draw that way they want and (unintelligible)." And then I kind of like don't think much about it, and I go home for like some holiday; I go to visit my parents. And I say to my father, "I don't know why I got rejected by Cooper Union." He says, "Come into the basement." I go in the basement and he says, "They called me in there." He was like—like

his temples were bulging; his face was turning red; and his neck was throbbing. And he goes, "They called me in and they told me about that essay you wrote. They showed me that essay you wrote." And like he says, "I don't want you ever talking about that to anyone again." And then he says this thing that I found so crazy; he says, "And if you ever tell your sisters...." And I thought, "What is--?" (laughter) I mean it was like, what world is he coming from that extended in all those directions? So me, being like, I guess, idealistic and naïve or something, make an appointment and I go over to Cooper Union; and um... I go to the admissions office, wherever it was. And there's a guy there that was obviously a closet case. I mean he was—he had a certain acute attention to certain perceptions of fashion that were very gay. And like—And he says to me some crazy thing; he says, "I have no problem with you being that way, but you should never let anyone know." That's the world that was back then. And then, to add nut-ness to more insult to more injury, I call up the civil liberties union and they say, "What are you calling us for? You should call a psychiatrist." That's the world. See, to get some—The only way to get across (laughs) to anyone what that world was like is through telling stories that have to do with the reality of that world. That was a world that was so different from the world now that it was like a different culture. And what's nuts is to think that people like Mitt Romney and those people wanted to go back to that world. I mean they were actually pushing for that? I mean 'cause they still live in that world. Even though they don't they want to, or [maybe]—I don't know. That was crazy to hear that bunch going off during the election. So I—That's the story.

(affirmative sound)

Question: Well, okay. Hi.

TL-S: (affirmative sound)

Question: I have a lot of like strong feelings about everything you're saying; so I'm going to see if I can be articulate. Um.... Oh, I also like totally cried at the PS 1 show; it was like really powerful.

TL-S: Oh, thank you.

Question: Um... the thing that I'm thinking about is so like ritual in a religious sense is like enacting belief physically. Like doing things with your body and with objects as a way of realizing your belief, right? So it like dissolves the distinction between ideas and things. And like for me that resonates so powerfully with like what happens in queer culture, right? That like it's not just that we believe things, it's that we have to do things in order to make the beliefs real; like the beliefs are only real insofar as we enact them physically.

Um... so I just was wondering if you could like talk a little bit more about um... that idea, like believing things with your body and objects and with your relationship to objects.

TL-S: Well, at a certain point you start to realize when you're a child that there's a world out there and a world inside. Very early—I mean I would say, um, what I'm always aiming at is a kind preverbal aspect of art. I honestly do believe there's a kind of post-verbal and with-verbal art. Most art needs—because we're total creatures who need it all. But anyway, religion is always—It's always a problem for me. And like there's a part of me that wants to rant and denounce it; and then there's another part that says, "No, I should approach it in a more understanding way, 'cause it's not going to go away." But at the same time I do resent when religious leaders politicize resentment. In other words, the way they—Okay, like the last Pope was deliberately and very actively constructing a language against gay people that was very similar to the language that Christianity constructed to create a virulent anti-Semitism. I mean—and this Pope, I like things about him. But when

they say things like, “Gay people are destroying the fabric of civilization and the family,” that’s incendiary speech. That is really telling ignorant people they have a right to hate gay people. That’s like totally leaving the love out of the equation, and saying that there’s this pariah group that is going to bring down culture. And then they throw the devil at you, which is the neatest little ugly trick they could come up with, because it means that any ignorant person can say that anyone that disagrees with them is inspired by the devil. And then they have to like eradicate this person. And historically it’s happened over and over and over again. So that that part of religion I find really repugnant. Um... the poetical sacramental part I really like a lot, because people need it. People need the hopes of transcendence, and people feel the longings of love and the longing of transcendent love. It’s kind of something that we’re almost hard-wired for. Um... It’s just when religion gets involved in—It’s kind of—Like when a bunch of like celibates in their sixties are advising people on their sex life, I mean that’s crazy. (laughter) I mean that is just lunacy, when like the Archbishop of New York or something issues a statement on how people should conduct themselves in purity or blah blah blah. I mean they could spend all of that time and energy talking about how people like misuse their power and their money--I mean everyone in the world could get fed. But they don’t. They go for the easy resentments of like other people’s sex lives, and the easy resentment of someone who says something like, “I’ve worked hard to feed my family, and then all—there’s all these fags and dykes out there having a good time running around, having party dresses on all the time.” (laughter) I mean... but for someone to actually like pinpoint and exploit that is pretty ugly, and I feel like that’s what a lot of religious figures do. And.... But I like the Christmas decorations and everything. (laughter) (laughs) So I mean I hope that answers. I’m never going to totally

get rid of it; it's a part of me. But at the same time, anyone that would say anything bad about it, I would not argue with you. Uh, question? Did that answer something? (laughs) I hope so.

Question: I have a question. In front here.

TL-S: Oh, you're here. I can't tell (unintelligible) I mean raise your hand, because I hear it but I don't see it. Okay. Yeah.

Question: Um... so I'm not sure how to ask this. I don't mean it in like a flip way at all.

TL-S: Okay.

Question: I'm just curious if you've ever considered... uh.... This is going to sound weird now that I'm—

TL-S: (laughs) (laughter) That's all right.

Question: (laughs) –now that I'm saying it out loud; (laughter) but have you ever made other kind of representational work, or used—or like other types of appropriation outside of religious iconography?

TL-S: Oh, tons. [It's] just that in compiling this (laughs) somehow I wanted to like streamline it a little. There's a lot of stuff that has nothing to do with religion; that is, it's a lot of times based on the sentiments and concepts, how people fuse them together in pictures and feelings. So like, yeah, but for this presentation I chose to emphasize a lot of the religious stuff and the gay meeting together there.

Question: So like the stroke magazine, I think is what you—how you described it.

TL-S: Yeah.

Question: So is that a [sic] artwork or is that just a documentation of the kind of—

TL-S: It's both.

Question: Okay, so that's—

TL-S: Yeah. It's like I will deliberately fuzz the lines at times, and I like that, because it um... it--- For me it keeps it alive. I want to keep it living, and not have it get too ossified. You know, not get constipated, so to speak.

Question: Right. So it was never like a, uh... a joke for you to use the religious iconography—

TL-S: No, no.

Question: -- and the sort of idea of spirituality and transcendence to talk about these other things that... uh... sort of populist culture would necessarily associate with?

TL-S: No.

Question: Do you know what I'm—Do you understand what I'm—

TL-S: Yes—no, no. The populist aspect is.... Okay, the culture I grew up in, and this is a lot—Okay, the Catholic Church in the past forty years or so has lost like in this country like one third or half of its members, because.... Okay, I grew up in a mixed ethnic Catholic neighborhood. But the people—The people were not stupid and they did not like their priest lording over them, or their local bishop. So it's like it was always like a religion that had a strong folk element and was very sensual, and I just.... American Catholics, for the most part, have not been like they've been publicly depicted lately as a bunch of ranting anti-abortionists and things like that. [There] are people even crazier who will—I mean 'cause I'll go online, I'll talk to other Catholics and they'll [say]—And they'll say crazy things like that. I mean but these are people that like troll it out there, so to speak. They'll get into the thing like about birth control like thwarting God's purpose—I mean some crazy thing like that. And then I'll try to get into their head a little by saying, "Well, birth control

prevents abortion. Isn't abortion worse in your estimate than like, you know, a bunch of sperm landing in a condom? And like they say, "Oh, no, each sperm is sacred to God." I mean crazy stuff like that. I mean who can put up with a 13<sup>th</sup> century mentality? Acting like each sperm is a homunculus. (laughter) I mean that's what that comes from. Like it's a little man like going into the garden of the woman, and the woman has nothing to do; there's no egg there or anything. That's the Catholic theology; even though they won't admit that, they will admit the science of it, but their actual theology comes from that homunculus thing. And they should just leave it, 'cause most of those priests don't pay any attention, that they know that's stupid, you know, acting like there's a little man. You can see it in our history; you've all seen it in like the pictures of the Annunciation, where sometimes (unintelligible) the Virgin Mary gets impregnated by the Holy Spirit. There's like a—the Holy Spirit is represented by a dove, and in some places like a little kind of happy little man, like... (laughter) perkily flying through the air; that's like the homunculus, the homunculus of Baby Jesus, who's going to become—who's not tied down to the filth of sperm. I mean (laughs) it's very crazy. It's kind of fascinating, 'cause that's like God the Father having sex with a virgin so that he can have his Son, and he's his Son anyway. I mean it doesn't make sense. I mean—See—I mean I can believe in anything that doesn't make sense, but like... I don't know what that sounds like to you; but like I mean 'cause anyone that would really think through a lot of those things would think like—like a monk praying to Christ for unity with Christ. A monk is technically the bride of Christ. Go figure. I mean that's very—what? Homospiritual? (laughter) Homospiritual—But no one will ever go there. It's like you can read endless poems by Saint Bernard about the longing for union with Christ; and then the image is always called (2:08:02) a kind of marriage imagery. But like... they will never like

clarify, except they never get past the homunculus not being able to fulfill his purpose in God's plan. (laughs) (laughter) I mean I love that lingo, because I can—(unintelligible) See, but that's—Actually as a child it was churchspeak that prepared me for the art world. All this far out language usages that no one in the real world [ever] cares about. I mean you go home—If you go home for a holiday, like, and you wanted your family to speak artspeak.... (laughter) What happened to you?

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): I was kicked out.

TL-S: Well, you got mad at your mother for watching—

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): I got strangled.

TL-S: Yes, his brother tried to strangle him—

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): I got into a fight...

TL-S: Oh, he loves strangling?

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): I was strangled.

TL-S: Well, you're alive. I mean-- (laughter) (unintelligible)

Question: I have a question.

TL-S: Yes, but—Okay, he was angry 'cause he had just came home from—just come home from school; he was angry at his mother for watching Netflix all day 'cause he wanted to talk art theory with her. Now—again, then his brother attacked him and tried to kill him. So like how(unintelligible)—typical American family, I would think. I mean 'cause but like—

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): What do you say?

TL-S: (unintelligible) But like churchspeak is very similar. (unintelligible)

Unidentified speaker (possibly Daniel): You faze out sometimes; you like faze out. When

you talk churchspeak you faze out. When you (unintelligible) churchspeak, and the same thing (unintelligible)

TL-S: It's—Again, yeah, it's similar (unintelligible). Churchspeak has this—all those word flip flops. Again... and the art world has that too. I'm very thankful to the church for like um... getting me involved in a total make-believe world that I like. I mean that's full of words, words, words. Like I mean, you know, the Assumption is the Virgin Mary going up into Heaven. It's not like I'm assuming something. It's like she's being carried up to Heaven. I mean that kind of word usage, you can't top that. Maybe you can. I don't know. Okay, question?

Question: Over here. (laughs)

TL-S: Okay.

Question: Um... going along with that, these parallels you've been setting up, like church speech and religious speech, I was wondering if you had any specific thoughts on prayer.

TL-S: Prayer? It's a thing that like it's—It's connected—In what way do you mean it?

Question: Well, I mean we talked a little bit earlier about like ritual and—

TL-S: Oh, ritual and prayer.

Question: Yeah.

TL-S: I thought you meant my personal prayer life or something.

Question: Or like... Or that. You know, anything. I mean it's your mind.

TL-S: Well, I pray. But I don't pray with it like attached to prescriptions and proscriptions. I don't pray things like, "Oh, God, don't burn me in Hell." (laughter) I don't go there. To me that's like silly. I mean, you know, I'll pray to like—I'll say, "Well"—like I did tonight—I said, "Oh, please, I hope I can do this." (laughter) I mean that's a kind of prayer. Like that's

a kind of prayer. And like I'll do that. And like I don't get into it in any dogmatic way, though.

Question: But I like mean is there a kind of parallel, if that's like the religious—Like if that's—there's a place for prayer in this like religious system, is there like a parallel in your like art life.

TL-S: I would go back to—It's kind of that distinction people make between established religion and spirituality; and that if you have a kind of spirituality you can take the usages that you want from any religious, spiritual or philosophical system and then utilize them in the way you feel they work for you. Now Catholic bishops hate that; they call it "cafeteria Catholicism." And like—But I guess that's what I am. (laughs) What can I say? And like but at the same time I mean... You know, when this country was founded, when they said the thing about not establishing religion, that was really—That is really intelligent; because when religion gets ahold of things and says that thing like, "It's for your own good. We're going to kill you." (laughter) "Or else we're going to torture you. Then we're going to kill you. And maybe you'll get to Heaven, because like you're doing work (what? 2:10:21) we want you to do." What does that mean? Saying you acknowledge what they're talking about while they're torturing you. I mean that's why there can't be an established religion. And I admire that intelligence, knowing the powder keg that religion can be, to kind of make it—Maybe it gets nicer when it's not given power. I don't know where to take this (unintelligible) I have my own spirituality, hope it works somehow. Okay, question?

Question: Hi, Tommy. Over here.

TL-S: Okay.

Question: I'm going to change the subject slightly. Your materials have been incredibly consistent from like—what?—age nine or something.

TL-S: Very early.

Question: (laughs) Can you talk about that?

TL-S: Okay.

Question: Do you ever introduce anything that's more than ninety-nine cents into your work? (laughter)

TL-S: That's.... Okay, that wouldn't be the way I conceptualize it, but it's close. Okay, when I was a kid.... Okay, the bishops hat is like—Where's a bishop's hat? Can we find a bishop's hat?

IMAGE

There's a bishop's hat. Okay, that triangular thing. Okay, when I was a little boy I was an altar boy; and in the Church, the bishop comes to town that's like the big kahona, [sic] right? Okay. So like he's not wearing his hat and I would be the one to hold it. And he comes into the church—There he is with the hat on, and like it's dazzling, like fabulous, sparkling gems. The little kid—which I was short—was always the one to hold the bishop's hat. And you hold it in this very ritualized way. It's flipped upside-down with the bands in the back, hanging over the front so that when he puts it on [his] head it flips back over. But it's passed to him through like ten people; like they go in size, taller, taller, taller, and higher—more dignity or whatever. And then when it comes off his head it goes the same way in reverse; it goes to a lesser priest, a lesser priest, (unintelligible) and then eventually it gets to me. So I see that it's all diamond sparkling. Okay, but when it gets to me I'm thinking diamond sparkly.... There it is. I can tell it's two pieces of cardboard, with maybe

like something like a damask tablecloth sewn in that shape; and it had on it plastic gems that were like very similar to the ones that were in like cowboy kits, of like red and orange, and that holes sewn through the plastic through like maybe red hot sewing needles and things. It's interesting how we perceive, based on sometimes class, perceptions we're taught about like the dignity of an object. I looked at it and I was very happy. I did not know that some people might look and say, "What a piece of junk." I didn't do that. I looked and I said, "This is beautiful because I can see the thinking in it. I can see that these objects are not gems; they become gems. I can see they're not even glass. They're plastic. But they're the same plastic I have on my little cowboy holsters. So there's this whole configuration of like meanings and elements pulling together in this. And then there they all [are] sparkling and glowing; and they become symbols of the gems. See, symbolism is just a natural thing. [Because to] have a gem be symbolized and then have the gem itself be another symbol is pretty magnificent; and then the light emanating from them is another symbol. And it's not a symbol that is some kind of esoteric thing. It's a symbol that just happens like.... You know, people set up a Christmas tree they don't get into interpreting it very much; they just know it delights them. And it's about light, sparkle.... It's about a [primal]—It's primal. I mean if you think about it, what we worry the most about, if the sun goes out we die, okay? That's it. At night we want light. Up here you've got to use a flashlight; it's basic. So like when like you have something that—I mean the sparkle celebration thing, you'll see it everywhere. Anyplace that has to do with this primal nitty gritty thing, if you go to like a strip joint or something where there's like lap dances or something, they usually have little twinkly things on. You know, they don't have like Bauhaus outfits on. (laughter) I never saw a Bauhaus lap dancing. (laughs) I mean.... That

might be a—I don't know, there could be some. No, I put great value in like very primal desires. And because I had to fight to discover that, I don't take that for granted. And by that I mean sexual desires, and I also mean like the stuff that like people want to—sometimes want to say, “Oh, that's just cheap and stupid.” And—or “Why isn't it real gold?” For me the point is that it's not (laughs) real gold, and that the celebratory twinkle is about trying to hang onto that little bit of sparkle; because you know it's going to go out eventually. We're just all going to be dead some day and the lights go out. It's over. Oops! Question? Okay. (affirmative sound) Yeah.

Question: Actually over here.

TL-S: (unintelligible) (laughs) Yeah.

Question: I guess it's a little bit of a follow-up to Carrie's question, because it regards the length of your career. Um... you mentioned a lot of what other—I guess—places where culture is created outside of what the books understand as capital A Art--

TL-S: Yeah.

Question: --like Martha P. Johnson, and the Church, and um.... And I felt like your work was so consistent throughout, from the moment—like from that church you built as a little—as a young boy, and then to your installations today; and I'm just curious if there was... or what the moment was like when you realized that these objects that you were creating had this cultural value or market value.

TL-S: Okay, is that the question?

Question: Yeah, the question is like what that moment, if you can think of that moment as a specific moment, even, or what that was like.

TL-S: Okay. Ah, market value. Market value. If—Anyone that has any dealings with a gallery, you know that like, um.... Okay, if I were to say like—Back home, when I was like sixteen years old, someone said, “What do you want for this?” I—“Oh, give me twenty-five dollars.” Okay, then you’re in a gallery, (unintelligible) “Oh no, that’s twenty-five thousand dollars,” whether they sell it or not. I mean there are artists that starve because the gallery won’t drop their prices. That’s market value. They make it up, and then people look at it and say, “Your art sells for twenty-five (laughs)—three hundred thousand dollars?”—Whatever. And like maybe it does, every now and then. But usually it doesn’t. And but people see that price in like an auction catalogue or something, and they don’t know the increments going on in between, and they just think that’s what’s happening. That’s market value. Market value is a consciously inflated thing usually. Okay. So market value is one of the ways that the art world substantiates its sense of its tangible reality. Okay, now what was the other part again?

Question: Well I was just more curious about like when you realized that that was...

TL-S: When I realized I was an artist? (unintelligible) aiming at? Or what?

Question: I guess yeah, when you realized you were an artist that had... that your work had this cultural value that like (unintelligible)—

TL-S: Okay.

Question: --was part of like what the books would call capital A Art versus uh—

TL-S: Okay. I always thought of it as capital A Art, and... but capital A Art not in connection to the art world. But I always knew it had a power. When I was in like ninth grade—This was in Elizabeth, New Jersey and this was in the Catholic high school that was for the part of town that was like the Mafia part of town, uh like where the baby Sopranos went. Okay,

so I was in high school, the ninth grade, and like these kids, they were very kind of conscious of like not picking on someone weak, and I was weaker than them. So this group of Italian kids asked me to draw pictures for them of like strippers; and I got so into it. I made the pictures of the strippers; I got glitter nail polish and pink ballpoint pens and everything... made the strippers. I was very proud of myself 'cause I did like a stripper does: I did not make anything really showing. The old-fashioned art of stripping was to continually reveal and conceal. So I had all these pictures with like these strippers with like little pictures behind them on loose-leaf paper, with like little happy face type things that—it wasn't happy faces yet, so this was like pre-happy face. And like with like, you know, games, and their Mafia boyfriends, like the little champagne glasses and bubbles coming up and everything. So these kids would collect them, and the tradeoff was that they would protect me from these [sic] whole bunch of like bullies. These kids were tougher than the bullies, but they were not bullies, and they would protect me. But what happened was, some nun saw these pictures, and like all of these kids had to go to the principal's office, and their fathers were there, kicking them to the floor; it was pretty bad. My father came in; he didn't kick me to the floor or anything like that. But the whole configuration was a configuration of the power of art. Okay, the power of art there saved my life, because these kids.... These kids meant business; I mean this was like a pretty raw world, where like, you know, they would throw—The bad kids might throw another kid down a flight of stairs and not care if he was dead at the bottom; it's was like that. And so that was—That's a recurring theme in my life, about the—And then when I moved to the Lower East Side with the apartment that was thirty-five dollars a month, I mean the man that got murdered that was my—more or less a protector.... Okay, the way it evolved with the—My apartment was

getting broken into like every day. And like—And one day this guy knocks at the door. And like I look through the peephole and I say, “Oh my God, it’s Ernesto!” And he wore like a black cashmere coat, very Barack Obama, okay? And like ‘cause his great aspiration was he wanted to be part of like the Italian Mafia. And so he knocks on my door, and I had like a set of encyclopedias, and he says to me, “Can you read?” And like ah, my grandmother only went to the sixth grade and (unintelligible). So I was not surprised to hear someone ask that kind of a question; I said, “Oh, yeah.” And he said, “Read me a poem,” or something like that. So I read the poem called “The Blind Men and the Elephant.” It’s about a bunch of blind men feeling the trunk or—And each one gets a different perspective--one the feet, the leg, the tail—on the elephant. They’re all talking from where they’re coming from and they’re all wrong. And then he asks me, he said, “Well, just when my relatives need something and they write--need a letter for school (unintelligible) you help them write or something.” Okay. And then he said, “And then nothing will happen to you in the neighborhood.” And so like that worked out that way. And like it was—He was very frank and direct about that. Okay, these are all situations where like I would have really gotten killed eventually, had these people not interceded—intervened—whatever. And art, something to do with culture, was always in the middle of that. Something to do with like that.... Okay, he was a person who was aspiring for his family for something beyond what that neighborhood was. And so he was (microphone feedback) looking for—Is it working? Yeah? Okay. He was looking for any way he could to find ways to make that a reality. And then one day—Again, he was dealing drugs and all kinds of things. Um... One [day]—I lived on the fifth floor, and one night I heard—I came home and someone said that he had gotten taken away or something. And then later in the morning, like four in the morning, I heard,

coming up the stairs, the relatives—the woman relatives—were crying, and it was getting closer and closer. It was very—And I'm not saying this in any kind of denigrating way—It was very much like an Italian opera. They were screaming full force, 'cause they had gotten—they had been called to the—someplace, whether it was the morgue or something, to see his dead body, right after he got shot. (unintelligible) a guy got shot pointblank by people that thought--- I mean these stories are like—I—When I tell them.... I actually don't like to tell them, because there's a strain that runs through the art world where people kind of get giddy hearing horrible things, "Like, oh wow! (laughs)" And I can't take that. But anyway, the point is that the connection between Art—capital A—as a thing that has a certain power and connection [to] people is always there from the get-go, from when I was a little kid. And the art world was just another link in the chain of that. When I met Holly Solomon it was a very conscious connection to her. Ernesto was dead, he was gone, he was not going to help anymore, it was very sad. She was going to come along and I was going to get out of that neighborhood, and it happened. Now that's like it's summing up a lot of stuff with a bunch of quick words that can sound almost cold... uh... but that's the relation, in my life, between art and power. And... what it is in each person's life is.... How you structure that is up to you. I mean a person can conceptualize it into a kind of like rarified language if they want to. I mean I never experienced it that way. I always experienced that as a very practical functioning of life. Being here is part of that. I mean that's an extension of that. I'm very happy to be here, and I know that's part of the relationship to the power of art. So it plays up all the way from childhood. It plays up from when I was a kid in like the fifth grade. I'm called to the principal's office, and there's the parish priest that everybody—Benedictines—Benedictines or monks.... Um... The monks that had the monasteries, that

they're always talked about in history books as preserving culture during the Dark Ages—the early Middle Ages—And he says to me, "You can draw, right? You're going to do the bulletin boards for the whole school." And the nun is standing there seething, making dirty looks at me, because he was the pastor, she had to do what he said... and, so starting in the fifth grade, I never had to go to class. I would go to this little room called the school library, I'd lock the door, look at endless books, I'd make everything I had to do for these bulletin boards in like five or six hours, and spend all the other time there just looking at books. And like that was that. And so I'm very spoiled about these thing. I've always been coddled by powerful people. (laughter) (laughs) And they got the bulletin boards out of me. So I hope (laughs) that answers the question. But it goes way back, way, way back. It starts early. (affirmative sound) Yeah, question?

Question: Hi.

TL-S: Yeah.

Question: (off mike, inaudible) Can you hear me?

TL-S: Yeah, I can hear you. I can hear 'cause you're there.

Question: (inaudible) I have to admit that I listened to all of your talks here. And you were here in '91 and '92—

TL-S: '91 and '97, and somewhere in the middle.

Question: In... The first time you came to Skowhegan, were you like the gay [representative]? I mean it was early; it was '91; I mean it was like things—gay things were happening; but it wasn't like today. I mean like how gay was Skowhegan when you first came here?

TL-S: '91, it was like... I would say a lot of closet cases. You know, a lot of people who are gay but don't admit it. Uh... and that were very cautious about protecting (laughs) whatever they think they have. By '97 it was very open. '97 was a whole different time. But the funny thing was to me... I mean (laughs) it had always been—And for myself it has always been that time, the time of hasn't-even-come-yet, of like it always being just a regular part of life that is no big deal. And I never understood—Ever since I was a kid I never understood why people could get so crazy hating gay people, and they do. It's like who's the Senator who said—What's that one Senator that's gay? What's his name again? He said (unintelligible) there's a few of them. But someone asked him why people hate gay people, [and] his answer was so good. He said, "Because their leaders tell them to." That's a good answer, because it goes to the clergy, it goes to a lot of people. [It's] sad how people won't explore and think for themselves very often, until something becomes an issue that's being thought out for them. I mean I never had any problem with it, since I was a kid; I just thought, "Look, this is me. It's—" I mean when I went and got that little magazine I was like twelve or thirteen or something. I just thought, "This has got to happen." I said, "I am not going to like.... I'm going to spill my semen having a good time; it's going to have a meaning attached to it." I wouldn't verbalize it [like] that as a twelve year old, but it came down to that. It was part of the growing experience. It's exactly parallel with any heterosexual kid, I would think. You go through your adolescence; your body says, you know, "The caterpillar's turning into a butterfly." And you want to fly. So like unless you honestly believe you're going to hold out and embrace the joys of Heaven someday—which I would respect someone doing, as long as they didn't degenerate into fulminating hatred

toward me for not wanting to do that, which does happen... Um... everyone's different.

What can I say?

Question: Thanks.

TL-S: Okay, so more questions, or where we're at? (laughs) (applause, cheers)

END OF RECORDING