

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

Interview Transcript 05

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Interviewee:	John Greyson
Interviewers:	Alexis Shotwell & Gary Kinsman
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Persons present: John Greyson – JG
Alexis Shotwell – AS
Gary Kinsman – GK

[START OF TRANSCRIPT]

GK: Okay. So, we usually start off by asking people what they were doing before AIDS and AIDS activism, and clearly you had activist connections that had both activist and cultural dimensions to them. Do you want to tell us a little bit about what you would have been doing before AIDS hits?

JG: Sure. It's early '80s, and in a lot of my video artwork, I was doing social change documentary, working back and forth between community-based or social change documentary subjects, like the Sandinista revolution or farm workers in Ontario, and artsy weird video activism, queer video activism. So, I did the Kipling trilogy, which was taking up issues of queer sexuality and imperialism work that came out of the Right to Privacy Committee, the censorship of the *Body Politic*, the beginning attacks on, I guess, Glad Day Bookstore... So, very much video art coming out of the issues of the day – the bathhouse raids. And then of course AIDS hit. And so, AIDS inevitably became part of the video – first the video artwork and then some documentary work as AIDS ACTION NOW! got off the ground in Toronto. The first video art pieces included – that mentioned AIDS or referenced AIDS – included *Moscow does not believe in Queers*, which was about looking at tabloid hysteria and Rock Hudson headlines in relation to a very strange trip to Russia as a queer delegate in 1985 and then a second piece was shown in Square One Mall Mississauga. On the video wall, there was a little five-minute remake of *Death in Venice*, but turned into *The ADS Epidemic*, not the AIDS epidemic. So, Acquired Dread of Sex (ADS) was the new epidemic, and it was of course talking about that culture of fear and hatred that early AIDS discourses in the mainstream media and state policies have produced, demonizing queers, creating a general sense of sex panic, and trying to combat that through humor and music.

GK: Great. Do you remember when you first heard about AIDS?

JG: Vividly. 1981, I was living in New York and we were painting my boyfriend's loft and we took a break and were reading and the *New York Times* arrived and there was this tiny article and it was *the* article. It was so many cases identified in San Francisco – in San Francisco or Fire Island. I actually can't remember the details of the article, but it was the first article. And of course all that week talking with friends, "Have you heard? Have you heard?" and through that summer. And then the first person I met with AIDS was our cleaner at work. I had a job with the Association of Independent Film and Video Makers in New York, and our cleaning guy was getting sick, and he had these lesions, and of course it was Kaposi's and one week he never came to work and that was that. And so, it went from there, and there was AIDS activism that started on the ground in New York, but there were so many other things going on. This was a period, of course, pre-ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), pre-even Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), and by the time I

moved back to Toronto, there was certainly a wariness, but my work didn't really start to address it 'til '85.

GK: So, then you became aware of AIDS activism.

JG: Yeah. I was there at the first meeting of AIDS ACTION NOW!

GK: That was the meeting at Jarvis Collegiate?

JG: At Jarvis, exactly... Yeah, and all the usual suspects. I believe George was one of the main organizers, but of course Tim and Michael Lynch and... So, I became involved pretty well from the start. And it was very clear what I could contribute would be video in one form or another. So, I did start to film some marches and, sadly, I've realized over time that I lacked that specific gene of archiving. My archival gene is sadly missing. The number of lost demos and lost footage... I should be locked up and someone should throw away the key. The archivists of the world should throw the key away, because it's really a terrible, terrible crime – lots of good demos that should've been, should've been archived somewhere. But I think the first projects, the first projects coming out of AIDS activism, were *The Pink Pimpernel* and "*The World is Sick (Sic). The World is Sick (Sic)* was very much intended as documentary of the activist interventions at the Montreal conference in '89. Colin Campbell and myself went and we shot all weekend, all that week, including the opening demonstration where Tim grabbed the microphone. We stormed the barricades and grabbed the microphone and opened the conference, and continued interviewing international activists including Alfred Machela from South Africa, a wonderful activist, and whores from Brisbane.

GK: Yes.

JG: Yeah – fantastic, just amazing and so forth. *The Pink Pimpernel* was specific to AIDS ACTION NOW! and was looking in particular at the work of drug smuggling, and using the metaphor of drug smuggling as a way to open up what the work of AIDS activism was. So, it's for instance very interesting to see *Dallas Buyers Club* twenty-five years later, and think about – wow, it took Hollywood this long to make a decent film about drug smuggling – and what a good film it is. Finally, a film twenty-five years later which slams AZT [azidothymidine]. It's quite extraordinary it took the mainstream this long – not surprising, but still...

AS: You had also made the posters that were at the Montreal...?

JG: Yes. Yes. And cleverly the posters tied in with the title, [laughter] so it was a coordinated campaign. But we did... we worked at Beaver Hall, so we had a big poster party in Beaver Hall. And it was working with the available technologies of the time, which was latex paint and black and white Xerox.

AS: So, you'd Xerox and then paint?

JG: It was a combo of hand-painting and then pasting up Xeroxes with graphic – typographic design. And so as a graphic campaign it was strategic because they were like that size, and so they

were very easy to transport – sort of narrow but tall. Yeah, it was... and then we piled them all in a van and drove them to Montreal, because it wasn't possible to find a space in Montreal or access the resources to do it – driving posters to Montreal. I'll never forget the smartest version of that I've ever seen was at the Toronto AIDS conference – World Conference Convention Centre, much later.

And the Indian activists arrived and were doing a whole thing around generic drugs, and the big fight around Indian generics. And so a guy dressed as Gandhi and a fantastic queen in a sari basically unpacked a couple of suitcases of the most brilliant. And they were assembled in person, so it was balsa wood sticks, which made kites of tissue paper, which had these incredibly gorgeous hand-painted graphics, and so were carrying these aloft. And it was like a demo in a suitcase. It was the most brilliant thing ever. It would not have held up in the rain or snow, but it was of course an inside event. It was an inside demo because we were marching all around the convention centre... like, past the booths and up and down the escalators – so, genius.

GK: Great. That's great. Maybe to just step back for a moment, because you had the experience of both being in New York City during parts of this period and in Toronto. What were some of the connections you might remember between the emergence of the new waves of AIDS activism in New York and what was happening in Toronto?

JG: Well, I moved back to Toronto in '83. So, long before there was AIDS activism of any stripe. I taught in LA from '86 to '89, and was also very involved in ACT UP both in New York through friends and ACT UP in LA through the local organizing, and did a lot of video work, video activism. There were a couple of projects. There was a compilation project [Video Against AIDS] we did with video databank and Vtape – nine hours of video activist stuff and that was in '89. We did... there was a touring show that initially started at A-Space. So, it was the idea of trying to find audiences, build audiences for this explosion of video activism coming out of Canada, UK – Stuart Marshall's work – the work in the United States, coming out of Testing the Limits, coming out of ACT UP, and so networking with all those folks. There was also an important project that Michael Balser and I did called *Toronto Living with AIDS* – inspired by the *New York Living with AIDS* cable, use of cable access – a weekly half-hour show that Gay Men's Health Crisis was putting on. And this was the late '80s. Greg Bordowitz and Jean Carlomusto became friends and talked us through, you know, what a show like that could look like. We came up with the idea of a slightly different model, where we used a grant – a small grant we got from the City of Toronto Health Department – and we commissioned thirteen... Well, it was supposed to be ten and it turned in to thirteen because of Colman Jones ended up doing this, what was supposed to be half an hour and turned into a two hour epic on questioning the HIV hypothesis, and on and on.

AS: Oh, he was a denier in the...

JG: He was and you know, and this was a moment – late '80s. This was before the crazy denialists. Well, there were some crazy denialists – there've always been crazy denialists and Colman... Colman at the time was friends with Michael Callen. Michael Callen was an incredibly important New York activist. The questioning he did – I think, as it's important to really parse the distinctions between the very ethical and principled questioning he was doing around, not just HIV but around treatments. He was a huge critic of AZT. And I think, you know, I watch Jared Leto

and think, that's Michael! That's Michael! You know, there's Michael-esque moments in Jared's beautiful performance. But there's I think really important distinctions to be made and to be held onto and to remember around that moment in the '80s where there were crazy theories, which date right back to the early '80s. *New York Native* – it was like conspiracy theory of the week. I mean for the first couple of years, living in New York, we'd pick up the *New York Native* and it was like, this week it's swine flu, and next week it's untreated syphilis, and that continued through. But the questioning Michael was doing represented a principled strain of that.

GK: And just around Colman... He was very consistently involved in activism and did lots of supportive stuff. So, it was never that that was the central issue for him. It was there.

JG: I remember him, my memories of him from then would be sometimes frustrating in meetings but mostly he was, you know, he was a team player. He was part of a movement. It was later that he departed from and just became... went out on his own, increasingly out on a limb. But that series ended up commissioning everyone from Richard Fung making a film called *Fighting Chance*, talking about HIV both treatment and prevention issues in the Chinese community, gay Chinese community, to Debbie Douglas doing a thing on black dykes and HIV, to Ian Rashid and Kaspar Saxena. Kaspar and Ian made this wonderful film [*Bolo! Bolo!*] about AIDS in the South Asian community, featuring Himani Bannerji and all sorts of fun folks. And they got censored, because there was... Rogers deemed there was too much thigh stroking for them. And this is the tamest thigh stroking you've ever seen but it was too much for Rogers [laughter]. And then my piece was *The Pink Pimpernel* – the drug smuggling one – and that was my contribution to the series. We also did *The Great AZT Debate*, and we had... It was run like a game show, with Maryn Cadell – remember Maryn Cadell?

GK: No. I don't.

JG: Spoken word artist. And Maryn was the game show host and people debating AZT – the efficacy of AZT as a treatment. We wanted it to be a place where you know a series that was going out there and raising debates and doing what *Living with AIDS* in New York had done in the local Toronto context. So, that was our project. Lloyd Wong made one. Yeah, it was quite something. And then I think the – all this built up into... that was all at the level of different approaches to community activism and video activism and working inside and outside of you know community contexts and visual arts contexts and a 'take no prisoners' sort of attitude to guerrilla media, but also wanting to take of this into the mainstream as much as would be possible.

That's when *Zero Patience* was born. And *Zero Patience* was an attempt to take some of the energy and activism and attitude and anger of ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW! and put it on the big screen and get it into theatres and multiplexes. And we didn't get quite as far as we'd dreamed, but it did go pretty far in terms of getting theatrical release in 13 countries, and being broadcast all over the place. I mean I still get postcards saying, I can't believe I just saw your strange AIDS musical on cable TV in Akron, you know, or Whitehorse. So, the possibilities, the strategy was to use that Trojan horse called the feature film and use in particular the Trojan Horse called the musical, which is frothy and fun and the most inappropriate of vehicles for something serious

about AIDS, but that was in fact the point, was to say that it's you know... it's the end of business as usual. We need by any means necessary to fight this and humor and music and pop songs are actually coming from the grassroots – a fight back strategy.

The way the film got taken up within the AIDS activist community was interesting because it sort of split the troops, I think. I mean my memory of it is that some, some loved it and some embraced it, and some really didn't like it. And sometimes it had to do with style and... We were using purposely queer musical choices of the time – so, The Smiths, Pet Shop Boys, Erasure, Ten Thousand Maniacs... And taste of course is the most slippery thing, and that stale-dates the quickest musically. What's cool one year is old fashioned the next, etcetera, etcetera. So, we've almost reached the point where it's nostalgic and you know will be hip in an ironic, camp way. But, you know, it struggled at the level of style.

It also, I think, struggled at the level of politics, where you know for some people having Michael Callen in did split the room, because he was you know in the role of Miss HIV, he was given the chance to question the HIV hypothesis and so eyebrows were raised, etcetera, 'cause there was within AIDS activism – it's been disappointing in some ways the documentaries that have been made about ACT UP. They haven't brought out some of those nuanced differences within activism around the key issues. I think those films address the larger issues of loss and grief and burnout, the things which, as much as the victories, the things which you know led to the movements changing, withering, etcetera. But there was also within AIDS activism, there were all sorts of crucial debates around strategy, and... I mean they're particularly interesting to me because they were played out again in relation to South Africa and South African AIDS activism, something I became very involved in later on.

GK: Right. Maybe to just come back to AIDS ACTION NOW! for a moment. So, there were various types of artists who did different types of work, who obviously had a relationship to AIDS ACTION NOW! I was just wondering was there ever any collective group of artists who tried to do work with AIDS ACTION NOW!?

JG: No collective ever emerged like a Gran Fury, or like a Testing the Limits. Michael and I – Michael Balser and I, with *Toronto Living with AIDS*, that was a project where the two of us initiated it and wrote the grant, and then he ended up administering it. And he saw it through... It was a one-off and there was, at various points, curatorial efforts or gallery shows or film screenings and things, but they all tended to be one-offs. So, there was no ongoing initiative ever to form an artist collective, do anything. And, yeah, not sure of the reasons for that.

GK: Just to come back to the making of the signs before the Montreal AIDS conference, do you remember being approached by someone about this? Or maybe you came up with this initiative that you wanted to do it, but... Do you have any memories of that?

JG: It just came out of an AIDS ACTION NOW! meeting. Like, we have to do this and I think it was as simple as – “Oh, I've got a space and here's a design.” It didn't... I don't remember committee meetings per se. I also find it very hard to reconstruct how we actually did things before the Internet. Today, in my head, I thought... I just imagined, “Oh. And then I would've circulated suggested slogans by Gmail and they would've been debated,” but no – of course not. So, it

would've been all done live. Like, we would've sat down and done them at a meeting, but I actually I can't retrieve that.

GK: Well, I know I was at Beaver Hall when they were doing the signs.

JG: Well, we were doing them, but by then they'd already been printed.

GK: Yeah.

JG: One of the design principles was "The World is Sick / Le Monde Detenner."

GK: Right.

JG: It had been decided in advance. And then the second half of the banner, like it was a two-tiered, it was a 'split-screen' as I like to... [laughter] There's still work for me. (But Anita's going to go split screen in moments.) But that is... the point was that anything could be hand-written in. And so it was that... and there was a colour-palette of yellow and blue – yellow, blue, red.

GK: I think so.

JG: Yeah – yellow, blue, red, black. And so there were different iterations of just, you know, Gary handwriting in a slogan in French or English, and people could write what they wanted. And so that was part of the design principle, but what anchored it all was "The World is Sick, The World is Sick, The World is Sick." And then of course it played with the pun, "The World is Sick... of Your Indifference, Your Homophobia, Your..." and "The World is Sick... We need treatment".

GK: Of course, at the opening ceremony, when we seized the front, it was a mixture of all of those things with all of these things from ACT UP New York City – all mixed in together, as people are taking over the opening session. It was very, very interesting and probably different than was initially expected. So, I wanted to ask a little bit more about *The World is Sick (Sic)* first, in terms of this is obviously something you wanted to do in terms of documenting activism at the Montreal AIDS Conference, but is there anything more you remember about what the relationship was between the activism that was going on and what you were trying to do?

JG: The activism of the time was, and one of the things AIDS ACTION NOW! kept struggling with, was the American myopia, right. This is an American disease, et cetera, and so the insistence of making it global, keeping the focus global in Montreal was paramount and drove our efforts, I think, in AIDS ACTION NOW! Toronto. And I remember there were actually some tense negotiations because the Americans of course assumed that when we were reaching out to co-plan, that what we were really asking for was just them to tell us how to do things. But then, you know, they could listen too, and did listen. So, I mean I remember it being the priorities and that slogan coming out of – let's keep the focus global. And then, the video we made was very much let's keep the focus global. Let's use this global opportunity of gathering where there's these amazing activists – the whores from Brisbane, queer activists from Cape Town, to talk to each

other and create a collage, create a portrait of that. So... and that was in sync. I mean there were a number of projects likewise trying to capture the global face of AIDS activism but, for the most part, videos up until then had been focused on national struggles, and it's not surprising, because so much of the work each of us had to do had to be fighting with our national health care situations.

GK: For sure. And in terms of *The Pink Pimpernel*, which I understood what you're saying about smuggling drugs, but it was really also about AIDS ACTION NOW! in a more general way. And obviously your cast of characters was in some ways drawn from AIDS ACTION NOW! I remember being on the very top of Beaver Hall, I think, when you had us all being silly extras for the film, and you forced me to be interviewed without my glasses on. I remember that too. [laughter]

JG: I know. I know. I traumatized him deeply and I never actually thought about that before, because when you interview people with glasses and with lights, they tend to have two big, you know...

AS: Beams of...

JG: Beams of light right in the eyes, so we wanted to see your eyes. And, of course, it made you deeply uncomfortable. [laughter]

GK: I couldn't see a thing.

JG: Yeah.

GK: But I mean there's obviously a very direct symmetry or synthesis between what AIDS ACTION NOW! was doing and what was happening in the film too. And you obviously had a number of characters who were... I mean some of your actors were drawn from AIDS ACTION NOW!

JG: Yeah. So, there was... you know, the fictional spine was the Pink Pimpernel, or the Scarlet Pimpernel which became the Pink Pimpernel and it was triggered in part because it was the anniversary of '87. It was the by – what did they call it when it's the...?

AS: Bi-? The...

JG: Bicentennial. Bicentennial of the French Revolution and all things French Revolutionary were in the air and so nostalgic for. And then this dreadful black and white costume drama starring Leslie Howard about the Pink Pimpernel, I guess based on a novel. Sure. Of course, it was based on a novel – this dreadful, reactionary tale of smuggling, smuggling the royals out of revolutionary France, smuggling AIDS drugs into Canada. It was a stretch because we were... it wasn't AIDS ACTION NOW!'s top priority. I mean we were working on a whole number of issues, but it ended up giving me a thread, an entertaining thread to piece together the half-hour. It was, you know... I haven't seen it in an awful long time, and it was made in the same spirit that so much media was

made super-fast – let's get it out, let's get it circulating. You know, there's no time like the present. We can't wait... There's no time to write a grant application, you have to do it out of pocket. There's no time to think more carefully about the message, just, you know... first instinct go and do. So, I think *The World is Sick (sic)* is the more interesting film in terms of capturing a moment of history and a gathering of people. I think *Pink Pimpernel*... it likewise captures a moment, but I think shows its frayed petticoats [laughter] or its scrappiness.

GK: It was still quite wonderful. So, there's been a period of time between those films and *Zero Patience*.

JG: Those came out of '87-'88. '89... oh, in '89 I did *Urinal*. *Urinal* had been percolating all out of Right to Privacy Committee stuff. So, my life got taken over by doing a first feature *Urinal*. Then I went to the film centre and made *The Making of Monsters* about anti-gay violence. But *Zero Patience* had been bubbling along even in '87-'88 – a first version of the script was sketched out, involving... I can't remember if it was the African green monkey for sure, but it might've been... It wasn't Sir Francis Burton at that time, Sir Richard Francis Burton... It was another figure from history dug up to put to work for nefarious agendas.

But *Zero Patience* was shot in '92 and released in '93. And so it was already describing something which, in that hot house timeframe, it was describing the late '80s, and you know already things had galloped forward, and it's inevitable with campaign films that, you know, that it's such a mismatch between the campaign and the funding and what the funding allows as a time frame. And it was a struggle getting people to get behind a million-dollar budget and convincing the funders that a musical about AIDS was, you know, not going to sink without a trace and/or offend everyone in the room, but yeah that was the experience of it.

GK: Right. So, you obviously were involved in all sorts of different projects, but I'm assuming that at some point you get less involved with AIDS ACTION NOW! related stuff. How does that take place in the 1990s?

JG: *Zero Patience* sort of burned me out, because it was all consuming in terms of first making then editing the film. Then, of course, it's '93 and so everyone in Toronto is dying. And so a lot of energy also switched into doing care-teams. I was on Michael's care-team a few years earlier – Michael Lynch's care-team. I was coordinating Alex Wilson's care-team, and also taking care of Stephen, who was quite ill at the time – on and on. And it was that year of... it felt like a funeral a week. And then my mom died too, so it was just... it was a year where a whole lot of us burned out, and in particular burned out on AIDS.

And so my... in terms of my work as an activist, also AIDS ACTION NOW! was evolving of course into a different level, and victories were being won whether they were at the level of CATIE – the foundation of CATIE and what emerged out of that – legislative reform, the culture of AIDS on the ground transformed completely through that period, etcetera. It felt like the work was being done by others. I did continue... For instance, I was part of a film – a half-hour film that Pam Davenport did on Brian Farlinger and Tim and Darien. I think it's called *Brian, Darien and Tim*. But that was very much Pam's film and I was just... I was sort of around the periphery of that. I was still shooting demos but for the most part it moved on into both other projects, like *Lilies* and other activism.

The return to AIDS was, for me, came out of the work I'd been doing in South Africa, where I got to know Zackie Achmat quite well, not as an AIDS activist but as Jack Lewis' roommate. And so I was doing the film *Proteus* with Jack Lewis – a 1735 Robin Island story, living in the house with Zackie and Jack, and so we... our heads would be working on "1735" by day but then the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) stuff we'd be drawn into at the dinner table. And there'd always be people from TAC at dinner... and the activists in and out of the house because the office of TAC ended up being set up in the house on the opposite corner in Musenberg, which is a suburb outside of Cape Town. And so it was, you know, sort of by accident getting deeply immersed into Treatment Action Campaign stuff, and going off to do public meetings with Doctors Without Borders and just helping shoot, and going to the AIDS conference in Durban, where Zackie was a keynote speaker as well as Edwin Cameron and a bunch of incredible activists... so, many, many chapters along the way of getting involved in that as that film got made. *Proteus* took about 3 years – from writing to shooting.

I decided on making *Fig Trees* about Zackie in South Africa. And the first version of *Fig Trees* was a gallery installation where you'd walk from room to room, and each a room is a different scene. I don't know if you had a chance to see it. Anyway, it was at Oakville Galleries, one of the strangest places ever to stage anything, and a wonderful experience. The support of the Oakville gallery was amazing. And it was an immersive documentary opera, trying to speak about the work that Treatment Action Campaign was doing, and a portrait of Zackie's treatment strike in particular. And then when I decided to take that content and make it... transform it into a feature film, which took a couple of more years. So, the installation was in 2003, the feature film was finally in 2009. Really, through that entire decade, it trickled along. It took that long to do. It became expanded, so it became twin portraits: one of Tim – Tim McCaskell – and one of Zackie, and comparing two movements. So, the '80s and '90s in Toronto versus the '90s in Cape Town.

GK: So, one of the areas that I wanted to move into was just memories of people who died during those years. You just talked about being involved with Michael Lynch's support...

JG: And Michael was someone I'd gotten to know through his son Stefan, when Stefan was like, eight because my first job in Toronto was a lunchtime supervisor at Alpha. And so Stefan was one of the precocious students of many precocious students at Alpha. People would say, [whispering] "Oh, well, you know who his is dad is. His dad is Michael Lynch, the gay activist." But respectfully, this was a cool alternative school and Michael was you know pin-up boy for the Gay Dads – an organization he had founded. I didn't get really to know Michael until much later, and it was really through the care-team that I got to know him, you know, really in a much richer way, where I would do my shift once a week and it was actually extraordinary, because I was also handing off to just this lovely woman called Eve Sedgwick. Of course, I realized she was Eve Sedgwick, but hadn't read her work at that point, and our conversations were all about how much soup Michael had had, and you know... and then other stuff, and her time in Toronto. And so yeah, it was just you know very meaningful to be a part of that care team and then that led to me stepping forward when Alex was getting sicker and saying, "We've gotta do this." And there was no shortage of people who needed some organizing, and so that's where it led. The other deaths of that year were people... I wasn't part of their care-giving, but people like Rob Flack, a whole generation of that Queen West scene, the two guys of General Idea, Felix [Partz] and Jorge [Zontal], David Buchan, who of all that group, I was probably the closest to in the early years, like this is going back to late

'70s. Michael Smith... I think that was the first time I'd visited a friend who'd died, and visiting the body before it was taken away, which then became something sort of familiar. I don't know if you went to the house.

GK: I did see Michael before he died. Could you tell us more about Michael, because part of what we're trying to do is also provide ways of people remembering people who were involved in AIDS ACTION NOW! during these years, and he was involved in some of your films.

JG: Michael, I guess I met... I certainly met in the mid-80s because I cast him as a gay cowboy – as a singing cowboy and that whole gang of punks. So, David Findlay... oh, I'm struggling...

GK: Was Kenn Quayle ever involved?

JG: Kenn was... Kenn, who ended up being an AIDS coordinator at Queen West Health Centre, doing great public health work.

GK: And Kenn's now on the west coast somewhere.

JG: But with Michael, it was I guess he was... I guess when I got to know him, he was in one of the Kathedrals. I can't remember which...

GK: I don't know if it was A or B.

JG: So, first I cast them as the gay cowboys in *Kipling Meets the Cowboys*, then *Pink Pimpernel* a couple of years later, and they were all caring for, hanging out on the roof with you – the Dandies, the apolitical Dandies, but lurking within their ranks are the hardcore activists. So, it was fun to cast the activists as the Dandies. And Michael... Michael also did, was involved in a bunch of video collective projects, *Veggie Daddy*, these sort of AIDS awareness vids that – loose collectives were formed and fell apart and there was a... that one was a hip hop, *Veggie Daddy* was a hip hop one. They sort of were... I actually, I can't really retrieve them. In fact, they are available because one of them is in the compilation we put together at Vtape [Video Against AIDS]. And so that's retrievable in terms of Vtape's got it. But yeah, Michael was, you know, one of the forces of nature in the community on so many levels, and you know greatly missed.

GK: Were you at his memorial service?

JG: [sigh]

AS: Can I ask something before you answer?

JG: Sure.

AS: That's just so interesting because mostly when people have described him, they talk about his sweetness, that's the main adjective that I've heard. So, could you just say more about the "force of nature" in this?

JG: He was a super-sweet guy. He loved to talk. [laughter] I don't think the sentences had endings, but that was okay. Yeah. I'd agree with sweetness, but I think that... I think his ability to mobilize people and his ability to mobilize community and his prioritizing of community, and what he made possible, and he brought lots of energy into the room. Then, sometimes he was difficult to work within committee but that's okay, so... Aren't we all? I don't remember his memorial, but that doesn't mean much because I've actually found with a number of the memorials I know I was at I don't have memories of. And I think there was that accumulated, accelerating thing where the brain could only take in so many. There's some I remember vividly and others... so, I'm not sure.

GK: I think we're towards the end of our time, but are there other things that have cropped up that you would want to talk about?

JG: I talked with *Zero Patience* about how the fluffy musical was the most inappropriate genre to recruit for portraying or representing AIDS activism when I think in fact that has to be qualified, because opera is probably the least or the most inappropriate medium to recruit, but in fact opera, that was our point, because making *Fig Trees* – opera also is the genre most associated with melodrama and tragedy, and the idea of what better medium, what better genre for the grand passions and grand emotions and grand narratives of the world we live in, and you can look through the history of opera at a consistent engagement with the world. It does go against the mainstream, the grain of the what's basically reactionary, mainstream narratives, but there's all sorts of moments in opera history that are interesting moments of resistance, and it seemed for David Wall, the composer and I that opera offered us that, and so that's led to an interest in opera for other types of activism, around Palestine and around, in fact around the Iraq War. And I guess people have said – what's the next AIDS project going to be? And I'm sort of... never say never is the first thing I've learned to say, because I really thought *Zero Patience* was going to be the end. And then *Fig Trees* became the one I'm probably most proud of all the representations and engagements with AIDS. I think the crucial point that's worth mentioning is that the permission to do inappropriate genres like a musical or an opera only came from the relative wealth of representations that were already there. If there hadn't been anything else around AIDS activism, then I would've felt a duty or a responsibility to do a more conventional documentary but because those films had already been made, there were already films about Zackie and already films about Tim and therefore there was permission to do this other thing, which tried to represent in different ways.

GK: That's wonderful. I think we're going to come to an end for now.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]