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Oral history interview with Larry Fink, 2023 February 6-8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Larry Fink on February 6, 7, and 8, 2023. The interview took place in at Fink's studio in Martins Creek, PA and at the Allentown Art Museum in Allentown, PA., and was conducted by Ben Gillespie for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

LARRY FINK: Hello, I'll talk slowly and quietly. I'll talk about absolutely nothing.

BEN GILLESPIE: [Laughs.] Her transcribers probably won't like that.

LARRY FINK: And now, when I begin to talk, ducks will squawk. The sky is full of black flies. There's no butter on your bread. There's actually nothing in my head. What is this day going to be comprised of? Nothing but memory.

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BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, and away we go. Hi, this is Ben Gillespie with the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, here with Larry Fink. It is February 6, 2023. And this is the first session of his oral history. So, Larry, I would love to hear about where you were born and what you remember of your childhood.

LARRY FINK: I want to tell you that your name Gillespie signifies to me Dizzy Gillespie. And if you in any particular way, you know, accord yourself to Dizzy, we might have a strange interview. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: I didn't bring a horn to blow on, but next time.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, a bent horn, for that matter. Yeah, Dizzy was a great player and a very friendly guy. So, where was I born? I was born in Brooklyn in 1941, the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital or something like that. I was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around my head a couple of times. My father had a choice, so the doctor said, "to see whether or not he wanted to keep the child or keep his wife. He said, "I like my wife a lot, to hell with the child." However, we both came out all right. [Laughs.] What was the—I'm sorry.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so you were born with the umbilical cord wrapped around your neck.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, which is probably a metaphor for some part of my life, which is to say that I've always been particularly strident, but also very, very careful. Not entirely—in my early days, I wasn't so careful since I got arrested for smuggling narcotics and so on and so forth when I was 17. Not narcotics, but marijuana, and not on a big scale, but it was—the government had informers and I went to jail.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, we've got a great journey from [both laugh] birth to 17. Tell me more about your parents.

LARRY FINK: Well, my mother was a Communist, but a bourgeois woman, who loved minks, and she actually left the party because the party was very, very puritanical, as such the case in many times in America. And puritanical means that you didn't wear mink, you wore threadbare clothes perhaps, or at least things that don't call attention to yourself. And Mom liked to call attention to herself. She was a really classy dame. And my father, as well. He was a very, very sweet, kind man but with a good taste for jazz music, where I learned it, and opulence, culture of all kinds, and just comfortable living.

The both of them loved alcohol, after 5:00. My mother said if you were drinking before 5:00, you're an alcoholic, otherwise you're fine. They drank like a motherfucker. [Laughs.] So,

1941, when I was born, when I was one and a half, my folks who loved swing music, constantly were dancing to records at the time. And so when I was in my bassinet on the floor, those guys were dancing to Benny Goodman around me. So my first appreciation to music was on the floor with the dance steps of my parents. And I actually remember it, which is pretty interesting because at one and a half, you don't have much of a comprehension. But I do remember that, and that's interesting. And so, you'll have to help me, Ben, because I tend to phase out. I don't know why, my brain has lapses. I don't know exactly where we are or what we're doing.

BEN GILLESPIE: It's like photographs.

LARRY FINK: Exactly.

BEN GILLESPIE: Phasing in and out. Okay. So, your parents. What did your parents do? What did your father do for work?

LARRY FINK: Well, Dad was an insurance man. He was trained as a lawyer. But he had a very, very severe, you know, heart condition which, at that point, wasn't curable, valves or whatever it was, and today he would be, you know, if he was—with that condition, he would be alive. But it wasn't today, it was yesterday.

[00:05:06]

So, at a certain point, he died of a heart attack on the way to a bridge game or something like that. Mother was just simply a—I wouldn't call her a home keeper because she wasn't good at that at all, except she was super tidy. But she was an organizer, and she was a Communist, as I said, "a bourgeois Communist. So, she got kicked out of, or she left the party because of their spare understanding of how things should be done in life. And on the other hand, she kept on organizing. She was part of the Civil Rights Movement in some small degree, and then she was very much in the Women's Strike for Peace, organizing all over the place. And then when the Gray Panthers came about, with Maggie Kuhn—Maggie Keen or Kuhn? I don't know—she was the head of it. And Mom was, as it were, second in charge, and she was the United Nations representative for the Gray Panthers. So, every Thursday or so, she would go down there and spill whatever beans she had to spill.

So, she was very, very active. And she was the prime energy in the family. Of course, she was controlling and talkative, and so on. Dad was laid back and accepting and so on. So. Lapse.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me about—so, did you just have one sister, or did you have more siblings?

LARRY FINK: No, sister Liz, four years younger than I, and she died about four years or so ago, I forget time. And she was, compared to me, who was a rebel and was getting into trouble with the law, getting kicked out of school, and never getting any good grades, and so on and so forth, sister Liz was the perfect student and an incredible intellect. And so much so that she went to Reed College, which was an incredible intellectual school, amongst other things, and [inaudible] [00:07:33] and sister Liz finally studied law and, indeed, was a lawyer. And she was a lawyer for all of the radical concerns like for the Attica brothers at that time, and for the Puerto Rican nationalists, you know, when they came in and invaded the country, so to speak.

And she did very, very good work, and she was noted to be the most rational. And I think she worked in, in accordance with Bill Kunstler, and all of the leftist lawyers of that time. Sister Liz was the one who never went to get any acclaim for herself. She wasn't interested. She just went to work, and hopefully, you know, balance some of the injustices.

BEN GILLESPIE: And so, at home when you're growing up, so, you have a lot of activist influences with your mother as a Communist, being involved with the Gray Panthers, your sister was very involved, as well, thinking about social justice movements, you have music, what else are you imbibing from the culture as you're growing up in Brooklyn?

LARRY FINK: Well, those guys, the parents were very, very friendly with some painters. And there was paintings all over the house. And the painters that they were involved with when Moses Soyer, Raphael Soyer, Anton Refregier, who was actually unknown today, but was a you know, a good muralist. And—

BEN GILLESPIE: —we have his papers and an oral history.

LARRY FINK: Really? It'd be interesting to read it.

BEN GILLESPIE: I'll send it to you. So, all of the good Communist imports.

LARRY FINK: Mm-hmm. And so, Moses became a friend of mine. And when I first started to go to the city when I was 15 or 16, or something like that, I would go right to Bleecker Street where Moses had his studio, because I was scared of the streets. I mean, Jesus Christ, you know New York, fuck. But I was going there because, you know, because New York, fuck, you know?

[00:10:00]

But I had to have a home base. So, I'd always go to Moses's studio. And there's a whole series of photographs here somewhere, maybe they went off, of that. And so, I was 16 or something like that. And I was photographing Moses and the pictures are really actually kind of deeply beautiful. So, painting was very, very important in my life, but realistic painting. And I didn't know—I didn't start to understand abstraction and abstract expressionism, et cetera, et cetera until much later, when I met—through my girlfriend, Terri Shuuty [00:11:01], I met Dore Ashton, and her husband, then Adja Yunkers, who is a very, very sophisticated, you know, European leftist, but also a great, great abstract painter. And those guys had a deep influence on my understanding of how energy is placed in the frame.

It wasn't just literalism, it was something to do about the form of the story, which had to be impacted. You know, how do you communicate a simple thing? Probably through simple forms. But maybe not.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, where else are you going in New York when you're growing up? Are you going to the museums very frequently? Are you going to jazz clubs?

LARRY FINK: Jazz clubs, lots of jazz clubs. Somewhat museums, but museums were always a little chilly for me. You know, I wasn't so inclined, and so aggressive to go out to museums to pick up girls, which was a big sport at that time, you know, that's where these characters would go out and look around and see, "Wow, whoa, let's talk about Mondrian." Actually, he was talking about his penis. But I didn't do that. And I was very, very—I was trained to be a feminist and a moralist and even though I was smoking pot from an early age and involved with some pretty, you know, heavy characters, I used to think of myself as the prince, as a pure agency within a corrupt field.

I don't think that my friends who I thought of as corrupt field would have thought of themselves as corrupt. They thought of themselves as explorative, and a necessary, you know, tangent for rebellion to, as a word clarify the air in a very, very conformist culture. But I was a little bit miffed by some of their behavior. So, as far as museums, as I said, "I went to them, and galleries. And then there were no—in those days. I was photographing all the way. And so, what you have here on the shelf, here are pictures from the '60s, not so much the '50s but the '60s and the '70s and so on and so forth. And—I looked at your eyes looking at this thing, and I said, "Hm, there must be something wrong."

BEN GILLESPIE: She doesn't like things rubbing on the microphone too much.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. So—

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so you're photographing the whole way. That's important information for me. Tell me about first picking up a camera. What drew you to it?

LARRY FINK: Well, my dad gave me you know, Super Icon 2B, a Zeiss camera, fold out, nice camera, beautiful lens. Because, you know, I was a bad kid. I was always getting kicked out of school, suspended from this and that, you know, a mess. You know, basically I was rebelling against my mother who was a real pain in the fucking ass on the deepest level. But I was also—I didn't like to be in the midst of the flow of humanity, you know, I needed to be alone. So, I was always like, flailing and, you know, and getting myself in trouble.

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LARRY FINK: I'm foggy today, man. I stopped smoking pot about three days ago so I could be clear for you. And I might say, it's the worst thing I could have done. [Laughs.] I don't smoke pot all day long, by the way, I smoke in the evening just to go to sleep. But, you know, it does—it makes you foggy. So, it makes you feel good, and sometimes in the first 45 minutes, you might even have some revelations. But then in the next five hours, you're a dud, you know?

BEN GILLESPIE: So, 72 hours later.

LARRY FINK: [Laughs.] So, I've been—my life has been a combination of being revelatory, and absolutely stupid.

BEN GILLESPIE: I do think that's the human condition in a lot of ways. Okay, so, he gave you camera as, like, a therapeutic practice?

LARRY FINK: Yeah, basically, he gave me a camera because I was sniffing around in the artfulness of their house and stuff. And I had a Brownie or something, and I started to go out with it, you know, and I was, like I say, getting into trouble all the place. But as soon as I got the camera in my hands, I was not in trouble at all. I was just out there exploring, you know? And at first it was—and this was in West Hempstead, Long Island, because they had moved from Brooklyn to West Hempstead, this, you know, middle class community with a little woodland around it, and so on. And so, I took the camera and started to go out and photograph the woodlands, not people, because it was very uncomfortable to do that.

And I have to say that throughout my whole entire life, photographing people always gave me anxiety, which is an interesting thing to say, because what I'm known for is photographing people, obsessively, and intrusively. And not intrusively in the sense of being hostile, but in the sense of being close. But the first picking up the camera and starting that, I was always, like, insecure, and anxiety-filled and guilt-ridden because photography, by definition, is invasive, you know, and reasonably aggressive. And many photographers actually work in a very aggressive and nasty style. But I didn't want to do that because I really basically was photographing to see—actually to caress the more noble energies of mankind. I used to photograph which I thought was the dignity of man. And I always thought I was photographing people in a very kind of positive glowing kind of vein, I thought.

And when I first saw Robert Frank's pictures, I didn't like them. I respected them but I didn't like them, because he was such a kind of a misanthrope, you know, it was a grumpy look. And he made people look sallow and so on and so forth. And I thought, "Horrible. My pictures are not that." But actually later on in life when I look back at my early pictures, they were very much like Robert Frank's, and not necessarily stylistically, but in terms of the atmosphere and the attitude they were embellished with a certain anger, a certain disillusionment, and at the same time, you know, threads of hope.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so those nature photographs you're taking in the woodlands, what was your primary exposure to photography before that? Was it through, like, *Time Life* magazine, through other—through print media or are you just seeing it out in journalism?

LARRY FINK: Not journalism at that time though, but yeah, with Dad, Mom got—they brought home books you know? And they were probably *US Camera*. I remember I have actually the very, very early *US Camera* annuals, where they had little portfolios and stuff. And then, like, you know. And then Dad brought me home *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson, and that was that. It was such a beautiful book and such beautiful pictures and that, you know, gave photography deep credence, and allowed me to think of myself on a higher plane. By being a photographer all of a sudden, I had an identity, which I've lost a long time ago. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: we'll get to that. I was wondering about that. Cartier-Bresson definitely seems like a touchstone for the energy, the depth, and the versatility—he's not formulaic. Okay, so Cartier-Bresson with *Decisive Moment.* When was your first exposure to someone like Brassaï, or Walker Evans, do you remember coming across their work?

LARRY FINK: Brassaï. Walker I wasn't so concerned with. I looked at his work and, you know, excellent work but it's a little bit chilly for me. Whereas Brassaï, for me—and Doisneau, when you look at Doisneau's pictures, which worked at all the ways as Brassaï, But Doisneau was much, much more comedic, and much kinder than those guys. Those guys were fine, they weren't nasty, but like, you know, Frank and Winogrand, those guys could get nasty,

but the earlier ones didn't have that nastiness. They had European hope, you know, sadness, certainly, but hope. Whereas Doisneau had nothing but love in him, you know, and comedy. Always funny.

So, those guys were the deepest influences on my picture making. And then, of course, I studied with Lisette Model, who had a deep influence on me in terms of not necessarily looking at her pictures and becoming her style, for sure, because I never even saw her pictures, but I saw her and she told me that in my picture making I should never make judgments, that making judgments on upon people is antithetical to what you really want to do, which is to receive them in an open face and respect the vicissitudes of the humanity. So, she, as a photographer, but as a moralist, gave me the reason for being.

BEN GILLESPIE: How did you meet Model?

LARRY FINK: Well, funny story. I was what 17, 19, I don't know age, but I had to go out and get a job, because I had to make a living. I don't know, I didn't actually have to make a living yet, because the folks had enough money to skirt me along. But nevertheless, I wanted to, you know, be a mature person. So, I went out and got a job at Ray Jacobs studio. Ray was a terrific photographer. He was a commercial photographer, but he also studied with Lisette and made his own color pictures, quite good, early. I don't think he's known now today or referred to. But anyhow, he's a nice guy, but I was a lousy worker. [Laughs.]

Ray said that I reminded him of himself when he was a kid, you know? And that was both very good and also very bad because I came to the studio, and he had all kinds of tasks and chores and stuff that you have to clean and then find out what to do about and just do them every day so that the studio runs, you know, impeccably, professional. And I was nothing but amateur in the most debilitated way. So, he fired me. But in the middle of that he was also a leftist, and he and my mother started to talk back and forth. And so, it was he that said, "Listen, your kid's really a lousy worker. I can't keep them at the studio. It's just not happening here." My mother goes, "Oh." You know, once again a failure, you know? And then so he said, "But listen, he should study with Lisette. This is what should happen now."

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And so, that's how I was introduced to Lisette, through Ray Jacobs. And Lisette and I became fast friends, and I was her student. I never saw her pictures ever. But she told me about these moral issues and how to open up your eye for things and so on and forth. And then off I went, you know, and then I met, you know, I met Diane Arbus, you know, and we didn't become fast friends, but we certainly knew each other quite well. And I never knew or hung out with Friedlander are Winogrand. Garry Winogrand, I didn't like much at all, he was quite a, I felt, to be kind of a bully. And Friedlander was very, very pulled back kind of guy. So, in those days, I mean, Garry's dead, Lee is alive, but Lee and I are kind of not friendly, but very respectful.

So, and it turns out that he's still working and I don't work as much as I used to because there's no work for me. Photographically I'm not, I'm not, you know, doing a lot. I haven't done a lot. But we're still out there, you know, we're still probably the longest producers of an industry, you know, that's ever left.

BEN GILLESPIE: It's definitely a long arc and quite a cohort that you were involved with through the set. So, how are you supporting yourself? Do you do start work as a freelance photographer after being a tutee?

LARRY FINK: Well, what happened, you know, it's interesting, because in 1963, and I was working—was I working for *Catholic Magazines*, then? I'm not sure when the hell that all started. I was basically being supported by my parents to be actually honest but picking up a couple of jobs on the side, a portrait here and the like. But then in 1963, '62 to '63, I was up in Harlem, working a lot up in Harlem. What the hell was I doing up there? Anyway, I went to Harlem, because I was very, very involved with Black culture, jazz music, and blues, and whatnot like that, from my parents, and so on. And also from Civil Rights, you know, ideas and so on. So, I was up there, and I was hanging around, and a guy named Ken Marshall came to me and he was just starting up the program called HARYOU-ACT, Harlem Youth Opportunity, which was part of Johnson's Great Society money.

And he said, "Listen, you're a photographer, huh? I said, "Yes." He says, "Do you want to teach photography?" I said, "I've never taught before." He says, "You'll probably be okay,

let's see what happens." And so, he gave me a job. And I went—I had 13 students. And we had—I built a darkroom for them with the money that they gave me, you know, I started to feel really pretty good about myself. I was actually working for Civil Rights, and in photography, and working with these terrific kids, and they were terrific, and being able to build a darkroom, you know what I mean, all that stuff. So, I worked at HARYOU for a couple of years. And my photographic program was radical in the sense it wasn't necessarily training photographers to go out and do practical things, like wedding photography and things that would add to the community. I was thinking about them adding to the bigger community, of the hopes of humanity and idealistic. That was that was my want, which is why I got fired. [Laughs.]

Because HARYOU, indeed, had to become a practical operation, they had to put kids into work and stuff like that. And so, after a couple of years, I got fired, along with Rick Summers, the guy who taught theater and who was doing street work, and so on and so on, and a big number of people who took a leave, you know, the first revolution, if you will, was idealistic and perfectly attuned to hopes of the future. And that was thwarted by needs of the present. And that's what happened to me. So, anyhow.

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LARRY FINK: Boom, I got down from that and I said, "Fuck, I've got to make a living." And off I went to freelance. So, putting together portfolios and making pictures and folios and then calling up magazine editors who were probably just kids like myself, but I saw them as part of the establishment, and I hated them. Not really hated them, but like, I was anxious around them because they had something that I needed, which was a job and money. And anytime there's a disparagement between need and want, you know, in other words, when you need something from somebody, it's hard to become fond of them. Later on, when you need something from somebody, but you're an equal member, it gets people in youth working the system. But in the early days, you're not part of the system and so, you're hungry for it at the same time, belligerent about it in a way. So anyhow, contradictory stuff going on. More questions, more questions?

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so you're working in Harlem. Where are you living at that time?

LARRY FINK: 8 Amsterdam Avenue, which is now Lincoln Center.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, was your social life still going to jazz clubs?

LARRY FINK: Absolutely.

BEN GILLESPIE: And who were your favorite artists of the time? Or which show would you definitely make it uptown to see?

LARRY FINK: Well, I was still involved pretty much with the realist painters, you know? But I don't know if I went to a lot of art at that time. I was really out there in the streets looking at life.

BEN GILLESPIE: Sorry, the terms are too flexible, I meant more musical artists. Who were you listening to?

LARRY FINK: Oh. Well, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, come along to Charlie Parker, who I never got to see. I was always going to the clubs that had swing music, like Child's Paramount [00:02:32] and so on and so forth. So, I would see Jimmy Rushing, who became a good friend of mine, Coleman Hawkins, and Lester and my brain is foggy, but there's a whole bunch of cats out of the swing method. And I never got to see Charlie Parker or—certainly saw Coltrane later on, and Dizzy and Miles, and all those cats were just across the street at 52nd Street, but I never got there. I was on 48th Street, at the Metropole. So, that's—I was basically at the Metropole every night.

BEN GILLESPIE: I wonder, what are you photographing on your own time, then, while you're —

LARRY FINK: —everything. But I believe at that time I started to—I was part of—I had some success and I got involved with an agency called Three Lions Agency. And Three Lions was a

good little agency comprised of three Jewish brothers who had escaped the Holocaust and were involved with basically *Catholic Magazines*, in the journalistic sense otherwise, they were doing commercial work. And I wasn't doing any commercial work in the sense of advertising, they did that, they got a couple of guys on squad and that's where they made their big money, but I was their favorite son in terms of the journalist deal. And so, since their relationship to journalism was with *Catholic Magazines*, I worked in the first part of my life, five years, I guess, for *Catholic Magazines*, which is funny because I was a godless, you know, heathen, pot-smoking, you know, Antichrist kind of a dude.

But the point, the point is that going to *Catholic Magazines,* and they would assign me to photograph a day in the life of a priest, a day in the life of a certain family, a day in the life of all kinds of Catholic small stories about humanity, because that's what their magazines were for, to assimilate the people inside the religion by introducing them to themselves, you know, making them appreciate themselves. And I was out there to do that kind of photography.

[00:05:05]

And I learned how to—I still don't believe in God, but I learned how to understand how people's beliefs work, and how deep they are, and how they have to be respected. So, I worked with the Catholics for the first part of my, that's where I got my, as a word journalistic, you know, training. Until—when did the Pope first come to America? [1965 -ed] Whatever Pope? [Paul IV -ed]

BEN GILLESPIE: I don't remember the exact date.

LARRY FINK: Sixty-something. So, there was—the Pope was coming to America, and I was freelancing again. And so, I went up to Perry Match [00:05:45], met a cat named Paul Slade, who's the head of the Photographic Bureau. And Paul took a liking to me and put me on the Pope job. And so, I got to—I didn't photograph the Pope, but I was in a team of 15 photographers, you know, working around. And boy, that was a big thing for me. That was huge.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, what did you get to photograph if not the Pope directly?

LARRY FINK: Well, just, you know, the crowds, the crowds, the crowds, the source—I don't know the word, but anyway, the scurry of energy on the avenues and what was happening, and various symbols and whatnot that people held to their breasts, crosses, or who knows what, you know— So, you, you know, when you're a photographer, you—in those days, if you were actually working for someone, they wanted you to do photo essays. So, you would pretty much scan the whole tableau of what was happening in front of you and make, hopefully, you know, reasonable pictures or impacted pictures of whatever that was, and then they would publish it to give the sense of the event. And then, of course, you would want to photograph the creme de la crop of the event whoever, whatever it was, and that would be there as sort of the headline.

Unfortunately, magazines, as they went along, became much more involved with celebrity. So, when, in later days, when I got assignments, which were many, they just asked you to photograph the celebrity, so you didn't necessarily want to—for practical reasons, didn't point your camera all the way around and encompass the whole of humanity. It was pretty much selective like that. Which in a way was fun, you know, but not as interesting as the old way, for me.

BEN GILLESPIE: Certainly less atmospheric.

LARRY FINK: That's for sure.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, yeah, the photo essay form is—so when do you start photographing parties?

LARRY FINK: Whoa. [pause] Jeez, I have no sense of time. Went from—Hey, Jamie? J? When did I start photographing parties?

JAMIE CABREZA: Such as, in general?

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

JAMIE CABREZA: You had parties from like, 1977, I mean, in *Social Graces*, you are going to gallery openings. So, I would say early to mid-70s. I mean, I think you were bringing the camera with you, wherever you were going. But it wasn't—and then you met, um, like, say for the *Social Graces* parties, I remember you specifically telling me it's when you met Priscilla?

LARRY FINK: McOstrich, yeah.

JAMIE CABREZA: So, she was a student of yours?

LARRY FINK: She was at Parsons, right.

JAMIE CABREZA: And she kind of introduced you to that world that you weren't really going to.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. So, '60s, '64, or '65—no, '74, '75, '76, '77.

JAMIE CABREZA: Yeah, I think parties. I mean, in the '60s, I see you mostly out in the streets, I feel like?

LARRY FINK: Right.

BEN GILLESPIE: And you definitely went to like *The New York Times* and did like those New Year's Eve pictures in the '60s. But not necessarily going into an event, I feel like, to photograph the party, per se. Music, yes. Music, definitely, you know, earlier. You know, as soon as you started photographing, you were photographing music, but not necessarily parties, right?

[00:10:00]

LARRY FINK: Yeah, thanks.

JAMIE CABREZA: Mm-hmm.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, well, let's think about photographing music, then. What was your setup? You're telling me about the flash with the wires.

LARRY FINK: Well, no, in the early days, I didn't do that. I wouldn't do that. I mean, in the early days, flash was, like, antithetical to anything I ever wanted to think about as a photographer, because it was so terribly invasive. Pow, you know? I wouldn't. I just wouldn't do it. So, it was all available. I mean, the reason that flash came into, into the play is the technology at that time, wasn't advanced, like it is today, digitally. And you couldn't photograph available light up to, you know, after a certain point, you just couldn't do it, you'd have to, you know, force the film and make the grains, and so on and so forth. So, I went to flash.

But I never went to flash on camera like, like Garry, or Lee, or Diane, I went to flash off camera because I was very involved with the drama in my pictures, drama and physicality, and getting a sense of being immersive. So, yeah. So that's that. Then going back to the '60s, '68, it was just the streets, a lot of protests, a lot of, as I say Catholic work. Then, I was starting to work with *Pageant Magazine*, which was around at that time. And then the *New York Times Magazine*, not so frequently, you'd never get to be frequent with them. I had other folks like Steve Shapiro, were equally as good as I, but Steve was more orchestrated to be inside the system. I was always—my leftism was actually a negative force at that point, because it prevented me from being comfortable with getting ahead in the system because the parents were delusional in their leftism, and they thought that the revolution would come along, and everything would change up, and there'd be a whole system of events. And I always thought that I would be part of that, and that when it rocked and rolled and came out the other side, that I could be, you know, in a provocative place.

And so I didn't—like, getting ahead, like running around and hustling was always a kind of a discomforting kind of, you know, life, because I didn't like the nature of the system. Whereas that I say, Steve Shapiro, who just worked for *Life Magazine*, and so on and so forth, who did great pictures, you know, and probably got paid.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me more about your protest photography. So, you mentioned earlier that as you started photographing human subjects, you had a lot of anxiety, which is

understandable to me thinking about the notion of consent that's in it, you know, the relationship between you and whatever you're documenting. So, how did you feel moving through these protests and those pictures and how did those pictures develop over the course of the '60s?

LARRY FINK: You mean pictures of the protests?

BEN GILLESPIE: Right, were there any there were especially memorable?

LARRY FINK: This morning? Not this morning, no. Now I'm really clogged up. The one thing about photographing protests, I have to tell you, is that it's such a huge event and people almost expect to be photographed because they're out there, they actually want to be seen. So, a photographer is actually you know, a conduit for them being present and being you know, available for the cause that, actually, they salute. So, photographing protests or anything like that big mass, it was a ball because I—

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LARRY FINK: —had no longer any trepidation, I would just wade into it and hold. It was like a dance, you know, pecking, pecking and bobbing inside the masses of people trying—and then also trying to make yourself, make your way up to the podium where the real action is. Most photographers would stand at the podium from the very beginning so that they can photograph the celebrity, so to speak, or the important people. And I always, always in my life, wanted to not do that, even though maybe in my life I've also done that, just because I'm a professional, but I was always interested in the backside, the ass of the matter.

BEN GILLESPIE: I had a side question, I guess. So, were you familiar with Hiram Maristany and the Young Lords and that vein of Puerto Rican activism in Harlem? Was your sister involved with them?

LARRY FINK: She might have been, I don't remember her involvement with them. But I was—yeah, I was familiar with them. But I had no relationship to them.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, there are so many nodes of activity in the city.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

BEN GILLESPIE: How long did you live at 8 Amsterdam?

LARRY FINK: Oh gosh. It has to be said that that was the great guitar player, Bruce Langhorne's apartment before I got it. And I used to actually—when my first forays into the city, in those early days, was right straight to 8 Amsterdam Avenue, to Bruce's flat. And we would I would play dulcimer, and he would play guitar, of course, and we'd spend all night smoking weed and playing blues. It was fun. And then I inherited the apartment when Bruce and Judy left. And do you know him, Bruce Langhorne?

BEN GILLESPIE: It's a familiar name.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, he used to be the accompanist for Odetta. And, and he played with Bobby Dylan. He's actually Mr. Tambourine Man.

BEN GILLESPIE: Oh, okay.

LARRY FINK: He was a very, very happy dude. Very happy dude. And a great, great musician. He had this hand, these fingers were all amputated right up to there, so his style of guitar picking was rather percussive because of the nature—so, he had a unique thing going here. And he really knew his harmony, man,

BEN GILLESPIE: Did you ever photograph him?

LARRY FINK: I've got some pictures of Bruce, not too many.

BEN GILLESPIE: What other musicians where you're hanging around with, with Bruce or anyone else?

LARRY FINK: A little bit later on, John Jokai. And I'm so sorry that I'm so foggy. Two weeks ago, I was really clear. [Laughs.] And I haven't done anything to destroy myself.

BEN GILLESPIE: Well, I do appreciate the lack of self-destruction. Tell me about, so, whose photos are you really taken by during the '60s? And so, you talked about, so you didn't see Lisette's work while she was teaching you. And what about, so Lisette and Weegee, what about—are you seeing much of their work at that time?

LARRY FINK: I wasn't seeing any Lisette work at all.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, not even out in the world?

LARRY FINK: No.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay.

LARRY FINK: No, I wasn't looking for it. I mean, it was, you know, it was funny. I had a very selective relationship with her and she just told me about stuff and what to look at it, but also what's the nature of the reason for photographing, and so on. And then, we just were friendly, you know, stuff.

[00:05:12]

But I was looking at Cartier-Bresson, completely, you know. And I guess I was looking at Doisneau, all the European photographers. I had very—Winogrand and Friedland and the guys, I actually avoided them. And Robert Frank when I first saw his book, *The Americans*, I scowled at it and decided never to be influenced by that stuff. As I said earlier on, I said I actually looked like him to some degree. But there was another chap, Walter, Walter Rosenbloom. Terrific photographer, very under-known. And dammit, man. If you squeeze your forehead, you're supposed to get information out of it, but it doesn't always. [Laughs.] Who else was I influenced by? Oh, I know. Simpson. Simpson Kalisher. Kalisher, yeah. Who was his brother? He had a brother named Kalisher, also, obviously, but so I had the Kalishers.

I actually was looking at a lot of paintings, you know. Well, in 1963, when I met Dore, then I started looking at paintings, you know, considered, really. Started to look at Adja Yunkers, and De Kooning. And then, I was always looking at the expressionists, Chaïm Soutine, the greatest fucking painter ever. And even Mondrian, and you know, all of that, at that point, new stuff, you know, was coming our way. And I was like—it was just really, really influencing me.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me more about that transition. So, you grew up with so much social realism, you know, the great American social realist movement. We get to the '60s and abstraction. How did you learn to relate to abstraction when you're so used to the maybe the ideological baggage of realism?

LARRY FINK: Exactly that. Well, it was interesting because Dore and Adja, and Terry Schutte less so, but those two very major hitters in culture were leftist, as well, big time. But they didn't necessarily have social realism as their as a principle. They just were leftists, you know, in political terms and humanistic terms. And they taught me about how it's the reconfiguration of energy, you know, that all songs have to have a structure. And the structure doesn't necessarily have to be one to one with the word. And all paintings have to be complex and have to have a structure but also have to be mysterious. And that the social realists, you know, for the most part, took the mystery out of it, you know, so that they can tell the simple story. And the simple story was sometimes very beautiful. We have at the house, a Moses Soyer book, and if you look at it, he did some pretty interesting stuff, mentally, which I was much more at that time in the early days, realizing his very, very set, you know, descriptive compositions and stuff, but actually, he was a painter with some degree of painterly abstraction, you know. He really was kicking ass, actually.

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I wish I had it. I have some Raphael Soyer and some Moses in the house, but I never got the more advanced work because I just didn't know it. Anyhow. I'm sorry, man.

BEN GILLESPIE: I'd love for you to talk more about Soutine because it's not every day that

someone tells me that they love Chaïm Soutine's work.

LARRY FINK: Really? Why?

BEN GILLESPIE: I'm not sure why. I think under-appreciated is probably the word I would use, but such an innovator and so much energy in those canvases.

LARRY FINK: Oh, unbelievable. And the use in the palette of white, you know, it's glissando, it's amazing, alone? He was just absolutely, you know—he was, you know, angry to the point of hysteria and enlightened to the point of, you know, of revelation. I mean, he just was amazing. But the sensuality of his paint, you know, because that was the thing about it, took expressionism and made it into a deep—I mean, he was the first of the abstract expressionists, if you would think of it that way, because he was so involved with the paint, you know, and the materiality of paint, the sensuality of paint.

And for some reason, no particular reason at all, but for some reason, I was drawn to it, you know, so essentially, one could say that I was drawn to pure energy, you know, which even though I'm known to be a literal photographer, the power of my pictures is because I'm painterly, they have abstract, you know, constructs all the time, you know? When I look at your face, and I want to, you know, bring forth the humanity, but immediately I'm looking around you and seeing what's, what's here, and what's there, and what's here, and what's there, you know, and how can I incorporate these elements, not necessarily to tell a story, but to balance the flurry of energy, which comes to the center, which is, you, you know?

So I'm constantly involved with known and unknown forces, you know, to see whether I can push them into my palette, into my canvas, which is why my memory is so flawed, I'm just looking at you and your shirt, and this thing over here, and the light, you know? [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: As soon as you said that virtuosity with white, I was like, oh, that really tracks for, of course, a photographer, that relationship, I mean, I love Soutine's work as well, because you—the process is felt in every, like millimeter of the canvas, we can tell exactly what was going into it, and the effort, and how you pull all the elements together to express and explore something, and it's not an end in itself. They don't really feel complete, or inert, but it's how do you—how do you leave it so there's an opening for someone to come into it, into that space? And painting with white, I think, that helps me think about that, too, for the photographic, and for like this is—how do you slip into this? What does it mean to be alive in a space and how do you capture that without killing it?

We could talk about paintings all day. Do you want to talk about Mondrian? I love Mondrian, too, so Mondrian and Soutine, that's a great pair. I'm glad you—

LARRY FINK: [Laughs.] Pretty opposite.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think that's a good pedagogical pair, though, that is telling me that you're a great teacher.

LARRY FINK: Used to be.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, are you still teaching in the '60s, after—so, you're teaching at Parsons and around picking up gigs?

LARRY FINK: Yeah, you know, I mean, I started to teach at—actually, I had gotten in a relationship with, after the HARYOU thing, then I came down to the Photo Workshop at the Shakespeare Festival thing and Ben Fernandez was in charge of that. So, Ben and I had a relationship, and I was sort of his second teacher in charge.

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LARRY FINK: —and I used to have some degree of conflict with Ben, Ben would—who was a terrific guy, warm guy and a generous guy, but also, before he was a photographer, and he studied with Alexey Brodovitch, who took them out of—he was a heavy machine operator. So, he's a working-class guy. And he always had that essential insecurity, Ben did, about—so he would always sort of, "Do you know who I am? I'm Ben," you know, and he would, he would fluff his feathers in ways, which, to me, was unnecessary, A, and B, uncomfortable for

me to hear because it wasn't necessary. But he did it, nevertheless because that's the way he fortified himself, you know.

And today, I look at it from an entirely different perspective, but then, it was like, oh, I was working with this guy. But nevertheless, I always thought of myself as being the more pure agency inside this Photographic Workshop that he had put together at the Shakespeare Festival down—not festival, but down at, you know, on Broadway. So, I was teaching out of that with Ben after HARYOU. And I guess I was making a little bit of coin but not much, you know, and then at that time, I was starting to freelance and stuff. And then teaching, then I went on with Ben for certain years, and then he went on to Parsons. I think that I got a job there because the nature of how to make a living and teaching and so on and so forth, and also freelancing, was to get several jobs, because each job would pay you three grand or two grand or whatever. And in order to pay your rent, you'd have to get more than that.

So, you would get—so you would teach at Parsons, you would teach at Cooper Union, you would teach at School of Visual Arts, you would teach at wherever, and make your money. Anyhow. So, at a certain point, I was teaching at Cooper and for whatever reason, Eugene Tulchin left the job, and I became the chairman of the photography department at Cooper Union, which was fun, because it was like really great kids. And what did I do? The new dean was a woman. The men who were teaching at Cooper, for the most part, were misogynists at that time, and sexist in that masculine kind of way. And I wasn't. And I forget her name, but the new dean asked me would I testify towards the idea that some of these men were abusing the young women, you know, in the programs, in one way or the other, I don't know how. And I said I would. And that was the end of my career at Cooper Union because they had a very tight union thing, and it was all locked up. And I was like, cutting into it.

So, that was that. So, I taught there for about three years, and I was a chair for about one year. And then, when I went with the new dean to testify against misogynism, I was gone. However, I was still teaching at Parsons, in the school with Ben Fernandez, and then, I guess we move to the country around 1973 or '74. So, I started the teaching—so, Joanie and I moved to the farm. And by the way, Joan Snyder, who was my wife then, was a great painter. At that time she was an unknown painter, but I was basically, in the early days of her career, managing her.

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And I didn't do—I was actually behind Joanie 100 percent. I loved her paintings and loved her. And so, I spent a great deal of time, you know, in an operational way trying to help Joan. And Joanie wasn't involved with homemaking at all, so I would do most of the cooking and everything I could do to help Joan, because she would just get into the studio, because she's one of those painters that paint, paint, paint, to this very day, you know. Martha's different, she's yin yang. So, I wasn't paying attention to my career, so to say, I was paying attention to hers, and then teaching and photographing all the while, on the streets, just you know, going out and trying to find stuff to look at. It's all over here, someplace.

BEN GILLESPIE: I know you had a piano in the apartment from Joan's oral history in 2010, where she mentioned it, in a joyous manner, that sort of joy creation of the quiet one might expect from home that was not always there.

LARRY FINK: No. I played piano from the early days, but I play it badly. I play it worse now. Fingers are getting a little stiff and whatnot like that. And I never—I'm a real asshole, I have to tell you. I'm a master of intuition. Master, absolute fucking master. When it comes to orthodoxy of study, I have no relationship to it whatsoever. No discipline.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think it's another institution that you're deeply skeptical of.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. But, you know, I regret that today, I have to tell you, because there are people—well, I just don't have that kind of mindset. You know, some people can have enormous amounts of information, and they can bring it right to the foreground. And even though I've experienced a lot, a lot of it sort of floats backwards, you know, and I don't have the capacity to recall it. And especially these days, I don't know, I guess it's maybe it's age, or whatever. It's a pain in the ass. And it's also—it's not forever. I mean, for instance, as I say, two weeks ago, I could have probably remembered anything in my whole life, succinctly. Today, I'm like, a foghorn, you know, in the midst of a bank, you know, the bank of fog. And however, but I do regret that I didn't have more discipline in studying stuff

because there's information that I'd like to have, to be able to recall for, not to compete with others and tell them what I'm actually talking about, but just because it's interesting, you know.

But I read and read and read voluminously, and don't necessarily retain it. But my engagement is exciting. And when I'm reading it, and I understand it, for sure, but I don't have the capacity to say, "Ooh, spick-it-a-stick-a [mimics a machine] [00:08:52]," you know, and bring it right out in front, you know. I just don't have it. So, it's a pain in the ass.

BEN GILLESPIE: Not one of those good Marxists who could tell you which page and subheading in *Das Kapital* Volume Two, everything—

LARRY FINK: No, I couldn't do that, no. [Both laugh.] I'll give you a summation of the whole philosophy, but I can't necessarily give it to you piece by piece in terms of how it was produced.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me about your approach to teaching in those days.

LARRY FINK: The early days?

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: Well, you know, I've always said, you know, and this is from the early days right up to the present, which I'm not teaching right now, but nevertheless, is that I don't teach photography, I teach the person in front of me. What does that mean? Photography is a vehicle. What photography is, is a methodology in order to encapsulate the life in front of you in ways which are important to you, you know. So, in order to make important pictures, it's not about photography, it's about what's important to you, as a person, what's personal, you know what's frightening, what's this, what's that?

[00:10:02]

It's always—whatever information I'm interested in, it's also, needless to say, always embellished with the emotions, you know? It's interesting. Now, I taught at Bard College for 30 years along with Stephen Shaw, a great photographer and a great teacher, but he says in his thesis for understanding, he's always involved with perception. Okay, but one thing about Stephen is, is that he's emotionally, I wouldn't say frozen, but very, very held, because he comes from an upper class, you know, thing. He's a very held kind of guy, he's not coming forward. I'm a kind of huggy, touchy feely kind of guy, you know. And so, the two of us when we taught together for the first 15 years or so, we had a great program, because I was like that. But Stephen teaches photography. And I teach the person in front of me through photography, which means when I look at a picture, I know where the energy is, and whether it's successful or not and I can point it, I said, "Look what you've seen here."

And over and over again, when you can tell, within two weeks whether a person has talent, and then within the course of a semester, you can tell what, actually, the person is comprised of, what they're made up of. And that's one of the things that I've always had as my passion, is to understand people, is to look at them, and to see what nuances there are in their face, in their forehead, this little cleft in your forehead right here, what does that mean? So, just to be curious about, well, the geography of physiognomy, you know, and to be curious about, just what makes us up, you know, what makes us tick, so to speak. And photography is a good ticker for, you know, for allowing an immersion into insight. And stuff.

BEN GILLESPIE: That's such a lifetime of wisdom, of teaching. And so, going back to those moments when you started teaching, were those sorts of texts, or were there things that you wanted to draw their attention to for photographers that they could look to, or painting? I guess that are just so many things, because photography can interface with the world on any axis.

LARRY FINK: Photography is, indeed, an open sesame to the world, about all things, at least that kind of photography. Today, it's not so much. Today, it's the kids doing weird things.

BEN GILLESPIE: Too omnivorous, at a certain point.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. I'm not sure what the hell they're doing. They've gotten away from photography, so to speak, in its pure sense, you know, moved into art form, and what not.

That's also moving into career and moving into, basically, just trying to do shit. It's all bullshit, lot of bullshit out there. However, the people who are doing it don't think it's bullshit. So, I honor their attempt to be in their life.

BEN GILLESPIE: We could talk about market corruption later. [Both laugh.]

LARRY FINK: Sure. So, now what was that about?

BEN GILLESPIE: What materials were you bringing in the classroom to teach with?

LARRY FINK: Well, you know, it's interesting, I never thought—there are some folks who teach a class saying, "Okay, go out and photograph like Cartier-Bresson, go out and photograph like Eugene Smith, go out and photograph like Gary Winogrand," and so on. I didn't do that. I actually taught a class without influence and continued to do that throughout my whole entire life. Because essentially, because of my intrinsic hunger to understand the individual in front of me, I taught the kid to try to understand the individual in front of them to see what they felt. And photography is pretty easy. So, I taught them immediately, you know, ap stops and all of the various technical kind of things, and the same thing with the darkroom and printing this way and that way, and how nuance is very important, and how sensuality of tones and stuff like that is very important for expression. But essentially, I taught them to be them—

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LARRY FINK: —selves. What do you feel? What does it look like when you feel that way? You know, how do you—you know, so I actually asked them lots of very, very personal questions about stuff, but not personal to the point where they revealed themselves so that they felt vulnerable because there were some teachers, I think Eva Rubenstein's hosted workshops and make people cry all the time. I'm not interested. I like tears, they're fine, but I don't want to make people cry. I don't want to upset them. I just want to help them. And I don't think that being so invasive, and so assertive, and pulling people apart is a big help. It's hard to repair.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think it's good for us to take a break before we get to *Social Graces*. I'm wondering is there what else you're thinking about from the '60s, if you can cash anything out of the fog bank?

LARRY FINK: It's ridiculous. Well, let me look at the '60s.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, we can always look at pictures.

LARRY FINK: There you go; pictures make it happen. Oh, it's pre rolling.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, I've got a good tale.

[pause]

LARRY FINK: These things were actually more recent than the '60s for sure.

BEN GILLESPIE: These all do look later. Okay, so something I know, tell me about—so, the book comes much later, but weren't the photographs from the '60s for *Fink on Warhol*?

LARRY FINK: Well, let's look at it.

BEN GILLESPIE: Now, I'm going to follow you with the cord.

JAMIE CABREZA: You want the Warhol book?

LARRY FINK: Huh?

JAMIE CABREZA: The Warhol book?

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think there's a copy on the shelf over here. Oh, this one even has sticky

notes.

LARRY FINK: [Laughs.] Yeah.

JAMIE CABREZA: I know with *Fotografiska,* you talked about Malcolm X, too.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

JAMIE CABREZA: From your work in the '60s.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think that's one of the problems with having such a rich and varied career, is you have too many points to talk about.

JAMIE CABREZA: I think so. [Laughs.]

LARRY FINK: So, the story is in the '60s, since I was working in Harlem in 1963, at HARYOU-ACT, I was always going up and hearing Malcolm. I was more involved with Malcolm than I was with Martin. And Malcolm, actually, in a matter of speaking, saved my life. It was a nice story. It was, I used to go up to the Audubon Ballroom every Thursday night when Malcolm would speak. And he was an unbelievable speaker, an unbelievable guy. And one of those Thursday nights I was there, and usually the only white guy in the crowd, and in the back, and I wasn't photographing because I didn't think it was appropriate, in no way would it have been accepted.

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But a young woman stood up in the front, and "Brother Malcolm," she said, "Remember that speech you gave a couple of weeks ago called 'The Ballad of the Bullet'?" And she turned around and he pointed at me, and she says, "I got a bullet for that man back there." Now Malcolm said to her, "Sit down, sister. That man is going to vote with you." And that's a piece of history. [Laughs.] I'm absolutely pleased to be able to tell that story. So, yeah, Malcolm X was a real strong guy. In America, you know, you can be very, very free with your expression, you can talk anything you want, but as soon as it becomes politically or socially disagreeable, depending on the extent of how disagreeable it is depends how long your life is going to be.

When Martin started the change from beautiful peace to world order, he was shot. Malcolm was into world order from the get go, and up to a certain point, he was allowed, and then he was shot. Kennedy was of world order, but had a liberal personality and was introducing things which were going to be progressive was shot. So, America is a free country until you actually exert that freedom in principle ways that might affect change, you might get killed.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me more about those, going to hear him speak in Harlem. And it's amazing that you don't—I fully understand why you wouldn't photograph in that setting, but then it's interesting how that lives on as a memory, and as a very—it's a different subset of interactions, maybe, and experiences.

LARRY FINK: What did you just ask? Why wouldn't I photograph there?

BEN GILLESPIE: No, I understand why that would feel a little strange. I'd love to hear more about that, or just more about the experiences.

LARRY FINK: Well, it's all Black folks, I'm just a kid, you know, really, and a white photographer. I mean, I wasn't on assignment, and they didn't know I was coming, and I don't like to be intrusive, and especially in situations which might stimulate, you know, real discord in the future.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, you're hearing Malcolm talk uptown, and you're hanging out with the Warhol crew elsewhere,

LARRY FINK: Where the hell has this Warhol thing gone?

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so we're looking at *Fink on Warhol*.

LARRY FINK: I guess they're in the back. I'm so foggy with dates.

[00:10:01]

LARRY FINK: Yeah, these are all the '60s. This whole book is the '60s.

BEN GILLESPIE: It was an eventful decade.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. the whole thing. The Malcolm pictures are '63, Columbia '68, another in '69, the Warhol things were in '66. Washington protests. Yeah, it was an extremely eventful decade, for sure. So, cool. So, the event of me photographing Harlem, and the revolutionary activity, and Andy Warhol seems to be contradictory. But it's not contradictory because I wasn't hanging around with Andy Warhol at all. What the Warhol pictures came from was an assignment that I had from a literary magazine called *Eastside Review*, a guy named Shepard Sherbell, apparently another successful photographer today. And he put it together, and he says, "Why don't you photograph these Warhol guys, you know, take them around town," and it was way before Andy and them were so terribly famous. So, this is Ingrid, and I don't know, you know all these. I guess I have pictures of some of the superstars that other people don't because—but I don't know. I had no relationship to how important or not important they were. I guess they were just people to me, which seems to be the case most of the time.

BEN GILLESPIE: Farm life.

LARRY FINK: Mention of the word "wall" probably put him—so, anyhow, these pictures, the Warhol pictures were in the '60s which the only time that I spent with Warhol was, I think they were about three days, all told on this assignment. And so basically, I got—there's him and his team. And we transgressed across the Lower East Side. And we just walked around the Lower East Side trying to find scenarios which would be interesting to make a picture. And so, the Humble Gents Social Club on the cover of the book, which is a wonderful thing, and then there were some butcher shops, I believe. This was '57, this picture, from a clothesline. These were assignments for *New York Magazine*, early times, with Clay Felker. And his Warhol. This is just the Eighth Street Crosstown bus. I love this picture. You know this book?

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm, I've gone through it.

LARRY FINK: And these are just—this is someplace, some bar, somewhere. And this is across the street from me on 12th Street. And here's all the Warhol stuff. And that's Eighth Street, 12th Street, so on and so forth. So, I just got those two guys to get together and we got them together and bingo Bango, I did the pictures and—

[00:15:00]

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LARRY FINK: —I never saw them again, except here and there and everywhere, since I was, you know, involved, I went to Max's Kansas City and all those places that, you know, hip people went to. But that wasn't the point of my existence. I was equally as intimidated by the artists, even of my own age, because they all felt like they were part of a community, the art community, and for some reason or another, I didn't want to be part of the art community. I mean, there's a good reason for me to live out here in the country alone. I don't want to be part of a community. On the other hand, I'm supposed to be, or I was trained to be a community-ist, or a Communist, which is community-oriented in the extreme.

And when I would think today about what I was actually thinking about in that utopic fashion, it's absurd. Human beings just don't do that. They don't get along very well. Or they do sometimes, but generally speaking, there's always the gleam of antagonism, you know, which is within us. And this a great photograph, this one.

BEN GILLESPIE: Do you remember the title of it?

LARRY FINK: Oh, it's just *Eighth Street Crosstown Bus*. But it's that kind of picture, which puts me in legion with Robert Frank, you know? It's actually a good book. And fashion shoots, now what the hell was I doing fashion-wise? Oh, yeah, that was the *Eastside Review*. There was only one bout out there, and we put this gang together. But once again, you know, unlike a fashion photographer, who would have everything pristine and all, you know, gleaming edges and whatnot, here she is over here, you know, I wanted to incorporate a fuller sense of humanity within the—Warhol in a barrel. And these guys, this is just the, what you call it, studio, Warhol's silver studio, what was it called?

Anyhow, it's where we went to. Here's Warhol. And these are guys from that punk—his band. Yeah, these are all the band members. And I really, essentially, despised these people at that time because of their hipness, because of their coolness, because of their—not anti-Black but no relationship to where the struggle was going on, you know. Here's a fellow. This is—wow, what the fuck is his name? It's ridiculous that I don't know. Who is his second manager with Warhol, do you know?

BEN GILLESPIE: His name is right at the back of my head also, and he looks very familiar. We'll come back, we'll fill it in, that's fine.

LARRY FINK: This is Robert Cordier, who was very influential in my life, because he picked me up and actually, he was the guy who I went on the trip with the Beats. He picked me up when I was 17, and he was from Belgium, and he was a writer, and an artist, and he saw my talent and he brought me along. So, Robert was very important, he and Eddie Hochman. And here's Andy on the streets. And once again, I wanted to get Andy and all these fancy types involved with these kids, you know, to make the—give the photographs, at least, a sense of real opportunity, and this contradiction. I had them playing handball, I mean, you know, absurd things to do with fashion, which people do today.

[00:05:00]

This was—I wasn't—I'm not interested in the fact that I was predating certain kinds of tendencies that happen today, but I was. And nor did I take it any further, you know, in the sense of, I wanted my career to be this, I didn't want it to be this at all. I was just working. So, you know, when you're working photography, you're just working. So, one day you might be photographing this beautiful gal and a crystal ball, and the next day, you might be photographing taxicabs, you know, with flat tires. [Laughs.] And, you know, the next day, you might be at the Catholic Church, you know, photographing the rosary, and the next day, you might be photographing an underpants factory.

So, that was the nature. And then the next day you're photographing Malcolm X, and then the next day you're photographing Columbia University raped by the cops, which is right there. And the next day you photographing Bill Kunstler, you know, then you go back to Warhol, and then you're over here at a Vietnam protest. You know, the '60s were really rich with contradictions. And the next day, you go down here with Black Mask, you know, trying to invade Wall Street, you know. Big guy. And you're photographing Julie Garfield, Garfield, she had a granddaughter who thought I looked like John, and then fell in love with me for a second, in time. And then, the next day you're photographing the punks on the street on 11th Street. Here's my neighbors. And the next day, you're in Harlem. So that's—and then, the next day you're in front of a political thing and the next day, you're over here. And then, you're—you know what I mean? Like, every next day is an open sesame for experience, from that to that. Take a bath.

BEN GILLESPIE: Maybe this was a good moment to pause and then we can come back to—can have a coffee break, think about where to go.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, yeah.

[Audio break.]

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so we're continuing the first session with Larry Fink. It is still February 6th. [Harmonica music]

LARRY FINK: Keep on talking.

BEN GILLESPIE: That's the harmonica coming in to give us a little theme music.

[Harmonica music]

LARRY FINK: Way out in the wonderful world.

[Harmonica music]

LARRY FINK: Let's talk now.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think that's the best way to set up talking about our friends, the Beats, and maybe thinking a little bit about improvisation as a framework. So, how did you get involved

with the Beats and taking pictures of them? We already talked about Robert Cordier a little bit.

LARRY FINK: Well, I was hanging around the Village, while I was hanging around the Village, while I was hanging around the Village, I was meant to reap and pillage. However, I was just hanging out around the village smoking weed and doing silly things, being a bohemian, and I got involved all of a sudden. Turk LeClair was pretty much the star of the show and Bobbie, Bobbie, Bobbie, and Motha, Motha, and Ambrose, was a certain gang of cats who used to hang out on MacDougal Street. And I started to hang with them a little bit. And then, there's two guys who were going to make a film called *The Stoning Machine*, Robert Cordier, who's director, and an actor, and filmmaker, and everything else, coming from a famous intellectual family in Belgium, and a guy named Eddie Hochman, who was an American entrepreneur, and hipster.

[00:10:02]

And they picked me up because Turk, and Mary, and Ambrose, and what, were going to go, or were planning to go and take a cross-country trip and get down to Mexico. So, they picked me up—and actually they picked me up quite well, because I borrowed my father's car, and that was another Oldsmobile, two Oldsmobiles, with 12 or 15 Beatniks in them, [laughs] and took off one sunny morning into the foggy day. And the Beats were on their way. So, we just traveled, and the photographs in the book are not necessarily representative of any chronological time, or any responsibility to where we were, or what. But we were everywhere and in any place. And we—anytime—somehow, these guys have an amazing capacity to find the hippest coffee shop, because they had no other ways to make a living—and by the way, this is me—but to read poetry, and pick up the coin that would fuel their lives.

So, that's what we did. We went from town to town, from city to city, reading poetry for a day, or two, or three, and hanging out. And they also have amazing capacity to be able to score pot, wherever they were. And I was just enthralled by the fact that they had such skills, since they seemed to be skill-less as far as the ordinary life was concerned. And I was just basically photographing. So, I had a position in that tribe of being the photographer. They didn't like me, particularly, because they felt me to be middle class or something like that. They all were, too, in a certain way, but they liked the fact I was a photographer, and they liked the fact that they were being recorded, because without a photographer and without being recorded, they didn't exist.

And if anything, this band of ragamuffin villains and interlopers wanted to exist and wanted to be known as being on the forefront of some kind of social movement, which would then tear America from its conformist origins and move it into a different and more enlightened place. Contradictory to that enlightenment, these guys were all angry, and nasty, and you know, smoking weed, and some of them shooting heroin, and, you know, while they had highfalutin vernacular, they had lowfalutin, you know, activity. And I was in the midst of it all, photographing as I did.

I didn't look at the pictures after I came back. I put them all in a box and they never—they stayed in the box. I never—they were published once in Letter Francois [00:13:44] through hope, Robert Cordier set that up. But basically, they were unknown. I was not like Danny Lyon or any of those folks who were making their books for their photographs, I just let them sit in the box. And in the box they sat until the box opened one day and told me that the pictures were inside were pretty interesting. When was this book published?

BEN GILLESPIE: Let's check the front. Where did we hide the date?

LARRY FINK: In the back?

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, I thought it would be there. Okay, I don't—oh, 2014.

[00:15:00]

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BEN GILLESPIE: So, these photos, weren't—so, that's the first time that all these came together. Oh, and this is what led up to your arrest. Is this what led up to your arrest?

LARRY FINK: Yeah. I got arrested at the border for smuggling pot. Now we all—all those

guys, as we say, we read poetry and carried on. And we actually spent two or three weeks in St. Louis. It was in a big mansion. And I don't have photographs of that, unfortunately. I do, but they're not good. Because the woman had just divorced the husband the family and stuff and she was looking around for enlightenment, and somehow or another—and she used to hang out in this coffee shop that we went to, the Blue Angel, or Blue—I don't know what it was called. And she picked us up and she took us back to the mansion. And we all lived there with her [laughs] for three weeks or so.

BEN GILLESPIE: This isn't the mansion, is it?

LARRY FINK: Exactly.

BEN GILLESPIE: Oh, is it? Okay.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. So, that was one thing. And then, off we went down to Mexico City. And then, we got to Mexico City, and we were shepherded around by a bunch of Americans, hip Americans who lived down there. But I was uncomfortable with the whole thing. I wanted to get the hell out of there. By that time, I had made friends with a cat named Cleon, who was a conga drum player. He was fabulous. And another poet guy named Bob Ackerman. So, we all took off in my Oldsmobile to go back to America, to see whether or not we could do as everybody was doing, which was to keep on making a living by coffee shops, and just basically live that Beat life, which is a life without any kind of conventional prescription.

And that we did. We scored some pot in Monterrey. Little did we know that from Monterrey up to the border was all little telephones that the pusher could report to the feds on the American side that there was some pot coming across with this person or that person. So, essentially when we got to the border, we were a known factor. We were going to be drug smugglers. Well, the drugs we had was only about a handful of pot. We really needed some. It was just a hedge stash. We weren't interested in smuggling; we were just interested in being.

However, at the border we knew something was up but we didn't know what was down. So, we separated. First, we drove the car across with no pot in it, then we went back, I went back and met with those guys and we all separated, went three different ways. I had all that bag of pot in my socks, okay? I got across, we all met, they all went to church and prayed and all sorts like that because they felt the energy was wrong, or right. I didn't do anything like that because I wasn't trained to do that, but I just went along with it.

So, we had the pot, and we had the Oldsmobile and we all three at a certain point jumped back into the Oldsmobile after all of these kind of religious machinations and fears, and drove about 10 miles. And bingo, we were surrounded by cops, plainclothes, and G-men circled the car. We came out of the car, and they had those Gatling guns, those machine guns and they were shooting at our feet, [inaudible] [00:04:21] like that. That was my first experience with the law. [Laughs.] It put a dent in my psyche. [Laughs.] It did not kill me. However, it did place me in jail.

And of course, being idealistic and the commissioner having a red nose, being an alcoholic, he said, "How come you're smoking that pot, young man? You're a nice-looking young man." I said, "How come you're drinking with all that red nose on top of you, man?" I didn't endear myself to him.

[00:05:00]

So, I got into the jail in a way where I was treated badly, because I treated them badly. And I stayed there for some time. And then finally I called my mother. And she said, "What? What did those Beatniks do to you?" I said, "No, Mom, it wasn't the Beatniks, it was me." But she couldn't accept that. So, Mom came down and got me out of jail with some money, I'm sure. And we got to meet with a lawyer, and so on. And Cleon and Bob were still in jail because they didn't have the money for bail. So, I guess it was two months later, we had a trial. And we had a trial in front of a judge who had appointed by Roosevelt, who was a sort of a liberal guy, and the lawyers picked him, and so on and so forth. And we all got suspended sentences because what we were charged with was possession, conspiracy, intent to sell, and smuggling. Each one of those charges was 35 years mandatory.

The only thing that you get off on with a suspended sentence was failure to pay contraband, pay tax on contraband, which is no longer a law because contraband being illegal, you don't

pay tax on it and so on and so forth, so it's self-incriminating. So, anyhow, but we all got off on suspended sentences, and they went their way and I never saw them again, and I went back to Long Island, where my parents lived with the idea that I would be on federal probation for 10 years, which I was. My probation officer was a man named William Guerra. And he was a nice guy. And I have a feeling that he loved seeing me every month because he probably was involved with loan sharks, and gangsters, and any number of various kinds of, you know, primary capitalists, [laughs] and I was just an innocent kid with a pot habit.

And, in fact, he saved my life, Mr. Guerra, because once I was hanging out with a guy named Dick Bonza [00:07:44], who was a schoolmate of mine who went to Columbia, and then we were smoking pot at his place, his room. And the Columbia people caught him doing that and said, "What's up here?" And Bonza said, "Well, it's Larry Fink supplying it," and blah, blah, blah, blah. And Bonza, prick that he was, you know, knew that I would be—if you're on probation, and you get busted again, in any kind of form, there's no trial, you just go up to 10 years.

So, I got busted again. And I called Mr. Guerra, before anything happened. I said, "Mr. Guerra, I'm in trouble again." He said, "I know, Larry. We can put you up for 10 years but we're not going to, because you're better out here than you are in jail. Because you have potential and we think that we want to have that potential served, and it won't be served in jail. So, you're a free man, but will you please not ever pot smoke again?" Yes, sir, I promise." And of course, I smoked right away. But he was a really nice guy.

So, when anybody thinks about the law and the probation system and stuff like that, and they say it's all evil, and probably impartially, that's true. My experience was different. I was lucky. So, that's an interesting story.

BEN GILLESPIE: It is. I think that is also really illustrative of your interest in the personal and the human, and how that interacts with the structural and how we understand the big concepts, but then the actual manifestations and how we engage with them can be so different. I would love to hear, could you tell me about this photograph?

LARRY FINK: Sure. It's Mary. Mary Kraft was her name. And she was Turk's girlfriend. That was, I think, in Cleveland.

[00:10:01]

And she was just there. And I was just there, and somebody had a camera and I guess it must have been me, [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: So, the field is so dark from your usual work, and then, it's well balanced here by the black page so you can actually get the contrast out of it.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, it just feels so close. And then you get the hint of depth with the lights kind of blurring out in the bottom corner. So, a pretty good adventure for [laughs]—

LARRY FINK: For a 17-year-old guy, yeah. Yeah. That was my first—now, I mean, ever since I got busted, you know, I mean, for 20 years after that, every time I would see a cop behind me in the car, I wouldn’t—I would just fear it, you know? Unnecessarily, really, but psychologically, it was—my experience was, you know, pretty heinous with the law. And it just—now, today, of course I'm way older, and I don't have that kind of feeling any longer, but it took a long time to leech it out of my system, how brutal that is. And even though I wasn't brutalized, really, but the apparatus of being busted and going to jail and what not like that is—and when I was in jail, you know, I had those kinds of Beatnik concepts, which is everything is all, I'm here, this is what my life is comprised of, period.

And while I was in jail, I was having pretty much fun because I was teaching Spanish kids how to teach English, and, you know, integrating myself into the jail population, and you know—and accepting as such, and I didn't care if I was in jail or out. It was just an experience for me. Mom didn't think that way. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: The birds have a lot to add. Okay, so we've been talking about the Beats. Are you ready to talk about the lead up into *Social Graces*?

LARRY FINK: I'm ready to do anything.

BEN GILLESPIE: Let's talk about it. Let's talk about the when you—so, we—the assist from Jamie, earlier, thinking about when you started photographing parties, when do you envision or think of *Social Graces*, starting that body of work?

LARRY FINK: I never thought of it, in terms of making it into a book, a project like that, no. It wasn't intellectualized. But this is what was intellectualized. The first part of the pictures was not necessarily the pictures in Martins Creek, with your Sabatines and the Oslins, and all these, excuse me, working class people. It was the upper-class guys, the debutante balls, and so on and so forth. And the reason I was photographing them is because I was interested in power. I'd photograph their parties and Wall Street, anything I could do to get close to power, when that was based on my political construct. I wanted to somehow or another document the upper classes and the upper strata of power. I didn't get up to the top, but it was part of me, like my mother, who, a Communist as she was, was also an envious capitalist because she always looked at wealthy people with a degree of avarice, but also with envy.

And that was, as one knows, one inherits what their parents have. My father had none of that. He was really a sweetheart. And, fortunately, that's what I've become now, in my older days, more like my father, and not angry like my mother. Anyway, I had to work on it, because that anger was, like, during my twenties, thirties, were killing me, and also excluding me from places where I could have been comfortable at if I didn't have that kind of—

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LARRY FINK: —separation. However, to go on from there. Where were we?

BEN GILLESPIE: Let's talk about photographing those debutante balls and high society parties.

LARRY FINK: Oh, yeah. We were right there. So, I was photographing—I was teaching at Parsons School of Design. And many of the kids were, you know, upper class kids. And one particular student of mine named Priscilla McOstrich, very, very sweetheart of a young woman. And she used to go, she told me, that she went to all these highfalutin balls and stuff like that, these parties where people got dressed up in tuxes, went to fancy halls and so on. And I asked, could I photograph? She said, "Absolutely." And she got it—she made it very, very possible for me to do that. And boom, I was off and running at the track, man. I was like one, fancy filly of a horse. This was so exciting.

And there, I started to use the flash. Because beforehand, as I told you, I thought the flash was invasive, and philosophically and emotionally, I wouldn't do it. But I was going into fancy balls where there was not too much light, and everybody was wearing a black tuxedo or a black gown or something like that, and so, I had to use the flash. Now, I didn't use the flash on camera like some other people did, because I liked to dramatize things, as I've said before. And indeed, I lingered around, or laid my turf, as I was always in these parties. And I would photograph, and everybody would—young people would be asking me what I was photographing for, because I obviously wasn't the party photographer with, "Pose, smile," I wanted something in between the smiles.

And I would tell them, to give myself a credential, that I was photographing the archives of gaiety. And they liked that. That worked really well. And it was true, anyhow. Even though I wasn't interested in gaiety, as I was interested in most anything. And I did that. It fueled me for years, and years, and years, and years. So, every week or so I would go into a big ball and photograph, and photograph all night until 5:00, and then drive home and develop the film and then go to sleep, and then look at the contact sheets, and make prints, and so on and so forth. That went on. And that was my work in between other works, which I would do for—I forget, when, it's the '70s, so I might have been working with Blackstar. I was working with agencies. Yeah, I was working around, trying to make a living and doing so.

So, then we moved out here to Martins Creek, Joanie and I, and I needed a lawnmower. I didn't have money, so I went down to a place I knew was going to be a lawnmower's place, was John Sabatine's house. And John would sell you a lawnmower which was working and

then it would get broken down, and you would come back, and then he would fix it, and then it would come down and be broken down. And so, he would basically not repair things that terribly well so he could get more business. Small opportunist capitalism, when you don't have any large opportunities, you take small. And so, I got to know him quite well. And then his wife Jeanie, who becomes, actually, the star of the show, was an outrageous person. No compunctions to show you anything. And she liked me. She called me Chutz, C-H-U-T-Z, I guess, Chutz. And we got along just fine. So, I photographed her and everybody else around, and then, Pat, and the kids.

[00:05:01]

So, I used to hang out down there, smoking weed, as always, and photographing, and having a good time, basically. I'd come back to the farm, develop film, hang out. What else is there to know?

BEN GILLESPIE: So, when did you start taking pictures of them? Almost immediately?

LARRY FINK: Right away. Well, no, the lawn mowers came first. So, there was a couple of weeks that we had to get into our—you know, figure out those lawn mower deal. And then it was picture time. And they were fine with that, all the way through.

BEN GILLESPIE: Did you find those relationships helpful as you were transitioning from your longtime city life to country life?

LARRY FINK: Very. Well, it gave me purpose. I mean, hell, the farm now, as you see it, it's a compound, you know? I wouldn't call it elegant. But the thing is, is that it's well developed. So, the farm gave me a tremendous—now, it's Joanie Snyder who was making some degree of capital, so, we had the farm first, and she basically supported us. From time to time, I would go out and do some gigs, but they were far and few between, but Joanie supported us. And basically, I'm fairly handy. Not expertly so, but enough to get everything done. So, basically, I built this whole studio. But the first studio we built is over there, which is now a guest house, but was Joanie's studio, and I put up the walls, and I cleaned—actually, all the buildings, down here was all filled with manure, her building over there was filled with all kinds of crap, and the ceiling was cracked and stuff like that. So, I put in a ceiling, and I put in a thing, I cleaned it out, you know, and put doors on it, and all that kind of stuff, so she could work.

The most important thing for me at that point was for her to work, you know, and also for me to keep on working as a country guy towards the farm, you know. So, I did a lot of buildings, and a lot of cleaning, and a lot of clearing, years of it, in fact. So, all the places now are lovely. And now, they're being developed in a better way by Martha, who has a much more elegant sense of things. So, if I can make money, she can do things. If I don't, she can't.

BEN GILLESPIE: It's a good—we like a team effort. So, why did you choose Martins Creek with Joan?

LARRY FINK: No particular way. The reason we chose Martins Creek is because it was close enough. We were looking to live in Clinton, New Jersey, where our friends were, Gary Keen, Bill Umbridge [00:08:15], and so on and so forth, other artists that Joanie knew from Rutgers, where she went to school. But Clinton was too expensive for us, we didn't have that cash. So, we got a real estate agent person, Karen Keen, and we basically rolled around the neighborhood. I didn't want to come to the country, I was perfectly happy in New York City, but I said, "Okay, if we go into the country, it has to be the real country."

So, as you know, the road down to this farm is about a mile long, and we're really locked into our own sobering relationship with being alone. So, we found the farm and it's got eight buildings on it, or whatever. They were all broken down, as I suggested before. And that's what I did for years, is just to build this fucking farm, and give it its identity, and give us the ability to use all of the stuff that we have. And I would, from time to time, go down to the Sabatines and photograph, the Oslins, and from time to time, have an assignment. I'm not a photographer who photographs obsessively every day, not at all. It turns out that I'm an extremely talented photographer, [laughs] and a fast one.

[00:10:03]

And so, if you look at other photographers' contact sheets you'll see ding, ding, ding, ding,

ding, ding, ding, ding, a repetition, when they photograph incessantly, and then they'll choose later on what picture might be the best, and one doesn't know what it is. But I don't, I never worked that way. I work on one picture, and I just wait for it to form for me, emotionally, and formally, and structurally, and I'll take a picture, maybe two, maybe three at the most. That's it. Because that's how you immerse yourself in somebody, you actually watch. Picture taking isn't the issue, it's seeing, if you're watching deeply, and then you—if you're a photographer and you're watching correct—not correctly, but clearly, there's a moment in time where you merge with the subject, as a portrait, the subject, even if it's landscape, you emerge with it in terms of its languor, its beauty, and you make a picture, which if you [inaudible] [00:11:22] and choose later, you don't choose later, you choose then. You've been chosen.

BEN GILLESPIE: There are so many directions to pursue there. I do love the—so, the handheld flash I think is so great because you get such different topographies in your pictures because of them. And it's also a very different spatial sense, because it's not just like a flash of vision, you know? It doesn't stand in with where the camera is. And in some of your pictures, you also appear as a story. We've got the mirror, or that. How do you think about yourself in the implication in your photos? I guess that's what I'm trying to get at, a very roundabout way, of how you—because you're not just an eye, on scene.

LARRY FINK: I'm not just an eye on the scene?

BEN GILLESPIE: Not just a transparent eye, because you're involved in the scenes, like you appear in those party pictures. You're part of the community when you're taking.

LARRY FINK: I'm wearing a tux.

BEN GILLESPIE: You have the costume ready.

LARRY FINK: So, I'm not part of the scene. I'm only part of the scene by the fact that I'm photographing. I don't go home with those people and they're not my friends. I'm not unfriendly to them. And even though I come—I originally came to the situation with a political taint, thinking to make, you know, nasty perhaps, perhaps nasty pictures of the upper class, I found in looking at the pictures that I couldn't be nasty. I had no capacity for being nasty or making nasty pictures. I can make honest pictures, I can make clear pictures, I can make critical pictures, but they're never nasty. They're not taking subjects to make them look terrible, you know? I'm not like, what's his name? Bruce Gilden, who's a nasty photographer. He doesn't think so. But he is. He's also a nasty guy. Most everybody keeps away from him. They don't keep away from me because I'm not nasty. So. [Laughs.] But I did try with all my heart and soul to make these upper-class—

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LARRY FINK: —pictures into politically diadramatic? No, I don't think so.

BEN GILLESPIE: Didactic?

LARRY FINK: Didactic is like educational, or—

BEN GILLESPIE: —diagrammatic? Diaristic?

LARRY FINK: No. Forget about that word. I did try to make them accurate and cutting. And I did that. But I didn't make anything where I want to distort people so that they looked unlike themselves for my own political purpose. I couldn't do that.

BEN GILLESPIE: So how did the *Social Graces* book project come about?

LARRY FINK: So, I had these two bodies of work, and I was working on them. I never thought about having a book in my life, because having a book is a big deal. And I didn't think it you know most folks who are careerists, you know, they'll have a book. And I had a career but I wasn't careerist, per se. I was just out there working. I didn't think about future tense books, but somebody, who? I guess it was—it might have been Robert, somebody. [inaudible] [00:01:48] Anyhow, in some fashion, some way or another—okay, I know, so it was Carol Kismaric, who's now dead, was the original editor on the *Social Graces* book, but she and I

edited together. I took it—I made the sequence in the original book.

So, anyhow, however I got there, I got to Aperture, with Michael Hoffman as the chief. He's the guy who took the pictures and gave it the title *Social Graces*, and it's brilliant. And Carol Kismaric helped, deeply, with the editing and such like that. And I just couldn't be more thrilled, then. I was, like, completely ecstatic because not so much in a careerist way but like, just a primary, visceral way of being at that fancy house and with all these sophisticated people, and laying the pictures on the tables, and the floors, and laying them out for your book, I mean, my God, man. This is hot stuff, you know?

And since I had—my mother really was yin yang all the time, she thought I was a prince and at the same time she would slap me down in evil ways. So, basically, my self-image was not good, was on one hand pomp, puffy and pompous, on the next hand, I felt I didn't belong anywhere, you know? And in a way my camera, in my whole life, has been a search for other people's identities, perhaps to find my own, which I think I probably have. I'm 82, I know who I am.

BEN GILLESPIE: There probably is still a few nooks and crannies you can search,

LARRY FINK: Yeah, there are. [Laughs.] This coffee's strong, man. My memory is starting to come back. Actually, I'm doing—we're doing all right.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, I think there is plenty to work with. So, how did—so tell me about the response to *Social Graces*. It comes out, do you remember anything about the reception, or just being thrilled with publication?

LARRY FINK: Well, I was thrilled with publication period. Okay. So, that's me. But then apparently a whole lot of people liked it. Really. Somebody told me it was the book, when it came out, was on Cartier-Bresson's bookshelf. That gave me a big, big thrill. [Laughs.]

[00:05:10]

But I really didn't—I lived in my own world, a subjective world. Thanks, honey. And so, I didn't really know. I mean, I didn't do the book to opportune my career, I just did the book because somebody told me to do it, I did it. And when the book came out, and I didn't necessarily—it actually screwed me up a little bit, because it did—now, before the book I had had a show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1978. So, people were taking notice in my work which really confused me a little bit and made me very proud, but it confused me in a way that I said, what the hell can I photograph now? You know, here I am, "successful," you know, and talked about, and the book came out after that, but then it made a big stir, you know, in the community. And I don't remember it exactly, but I do remember thinking that I'll never photograph again. I can't—I went out to photograph and I was imitating myself. I was making the same pictures, and so on and so forth, like that.

And basically, then I started to become a successful photographer after that, because that's how you—when you're just out there doing generalist work, and putting your portfolio together in a generalist kind of way, you get generalist kind of pictures, and people think of you as a generalist and most often won't hire you except maybe once a year. If you come as specifist, as a specific item, like—what's the word? Like you need a book, and the book, what do you call it, catapulted me to be noticed by the trade, and people started to give me assignments, and I thought, "How can I photograph? All of this stuff has been done. I can't—you know, everything I do is imitated." So, I had a work, I was asked to work, and I was absolutely petrified, and blank of it all. It was a hard time, actually. The time of my most success was the hardest of all. It was funny.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, there does seem to be a lot of things happening quickly there.

[Harmonica music]

LARRY FINK: Cry like a baby, life is unstable, me and Mabel, that's what I call her when I play. [Laughs.]

[00:10:21]

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay. I'd love to talk about the sequencing of these photos, something that I've just noticed that I'm sure many people have noticed before, that we begin with an

embrace, and we end with—

LARRY FINK: —a smile.

BEN GILLESPIE: —of the guy peeking out the storm door, which, I think about, yeah, sometimes it's an invitation, sometimes it's a goodbye. Same with the hug. Tell me about how you—so we go from the balls to the local party. But how did you think about sequencing it? How did you find your song and your pictures here?

LARRY FINK: Well, I tell you, I'm not much of an intellectual. And I'm not particularly programmatically organized. So, I didn't put a lot of thought into the sequence. As I said, Carole Kismaric——may she rest in peace forever and ever, nice woman, good woman, smart woman—did the original sequencing of *Social Graces* and she did it at the Aperture office, such a long time ago. And I came in, and basically, I'm not a particularly controlling person. So, I know how to control, but I don't—I'm not interested in controlling others. And, in fact, I wasn't even interested in controlling pictures. I was just interested in making them. I was interested in the open-hearted thrust towards experience. And then they came back with these pictures from all of their investigation.

So, anyhow, Carol put them on the floor in a certain way, which didn't make any sense to me. So, I kept them on the floor, and swirled them around this way and that way, this way. And for some reason, this sequence made sense to me, but I don't have any kind of—so basically, the sense that I mean is not necessarily a literal or a political sense, this one means that one, in course to that one, or something like that. It's a visual sense. So, this arm coming across is this arm coming across that way. So, you have a page where there's energy going that way.

One in the darkness like that, but also it's about intimacy. It's about flamboyance, in two different degrees, and sensuality. This picture is so famous now, it's unbelievable.

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm. We're looking at a Studio 54 picture.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. Amazing, it just—even Stephen Shore, when he had his one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, put this picture up on the wall and talked about photography in some regard or another, within his own model's intelligence, which is really quite profound. Stephen Shore is a very, very smart man and a very, very good photographer whose pictures don't interest me particularly, but I certainly respect them. He's still looking at that fly, he's looking at you, too.

BEN GILLESPIE: Circling.

LARRY FINK: But, you know, unlike in this one for instance, these faces are both smarmy—

[00:15:00]

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LARRY FINK: —you know, it's all about gesture. The print on this original book here is really too light. Where's the other book?

BEN GILLESPIE: I put it over there. Maybe I can [laughs] wheel without unclipping.

LARRY FINK: Let me see.

BEN GILLESPIE: And so, this book comes out a few years after—

LARRY FINK: —it's funny, because this is a powerHouse addition. And so, Daniel thought that it would be a great idea to get this thing done again.

BEN GILLESPIE: This is—and it goes all the way to the edges.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. So, you see—

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, you definitely got a different dynamic between the photos, that way.

LARRY FINK: Now, today, for instance, I would even print this darker to get more of a sense of the flash, there. This one goes way too light. This one's a better print.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, this is a clenched fist in Washington DC, February, 1975.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. I call this picture, by the way, *The Chicken's Revenge.*

BEN GILLESPIE: I see it.

LARRY FINK: So, we—I mean, it's interesting. We—Daniel had to buy the rights from Aperture in order to print this book. And he did so. And then when it got out, and it just came out just when some fucking national tragedy happened, 9/11, or what. When was this published? Whenever—something happened, where we had a show at Yancey Richardson's Gallery of this stuff, and this book came out, blah, blah, blah. But it was at a time that nothing could go forward. Nothing, absolutely nothing, because it was a 9/11-kind of tragedy, if it wasn't 9/11 itself, you know? So, it didn't sell out like we thought it might. But nevertheless, it's a beautiful book.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me about the way you learned from the MoMA show, which drew from these photos, but was it these precise photos? I mean, I would imagine there'd be—there's quite a gap in time. So, how did the project develop from the MoMA show—or, maybe, how did that come about? I haven't asked about that yet.

LARRY FINK: Well, the MoMA show came about by Carole Kismaric, asking me to—she—I wasn't a careerist. I wasn't going up to the museum, I wasn't going up to here, I was just trying to make a living. But I wasn't, you know—I don't know what I was doing. But the Kismaric sisters who were deeply—

BEN GILLESPIE: —almost. The buzzing is a fly, for the recording. [Both laugh.]

LARRY FINK: So, Carol brought me up to the museum and she said, "Let's—let me look at these pictures," you know, and I poked around. And so, she said, "Hey, listen. Do you want to see John Szarkowski?" I said, "Yeah, sure. What the hell." And everybody's, like, clamoring to see John Szarkowski. And I went into his office, and he had looked at the—seen the pictures before. And he said a whole bunch of intellectual stuff which I understood nothing about. I just didn't have a clue what the fuck he was talking about with these pictures because they were just my pictures, and I did them for certain reasons. And his construct for understanding was entirely different than that. So, that's that. But he said, just like this, "Do you want to have a show here?" At that time, being the stupid leftist that I was. institutions and everything else were tainted. Leftist elitism was really stupid, because they want to occlude, you know, all those situations behind us and go into the new future. It's bullshit. We're all part of a government of the past and the future and the present, all at the same time, and all times.

[00:05:03]

And so, of course, I said, "Well, yes, I do." And he scheduled it for several months later, you know—

BEN GILLESPIE: —I think it was 1979.

LARRY FINK: Something like that, yeah, '78, '79. When I go up to the museum today, and they ask me, "How did—when you saw John, how did—what'd you do about this show of yours?" I said, "He just gave me the show." They said, "Holy shit," because today is completely perverse. It's all about committees, and benefactors, and this and that, and also about politically correct, you know, ideology, mostly now it's Black, and gay, and so on and so forth, that people are showing, which is great, because those were people who were, you know, who were pushed back, or not even seen, to the fore.

So, indeed, this work, especially from the Black population, sometimes is extremely powerful, and wonderful. I've seen a lot of—the gay contribution so far is, and I haven't been really researching it deeply, is pretty paltry, you know, because—well, whatever reason. But what everybody has their say now, which is good, but the regular people, a white Jewish guy couldn't have a show at the museum now, because it's—politically, it's the wrong political time, irregardless of the fact that the pictures might be very, very strong, and I'm talking about myself, but you know, so on.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so moving from that show to the book, so did things really start to change, did you feel that your career shifted a lot after the MoMA show? Or did it—did more

things need to coalesce?

LARRY FINK: I don't remember how it shifted, in terms of any kind of commercial work and stuff like that. I do remember that I was always now immediately part of the photographic community. And that people thought, you know, quite well of me, and so on. And it was still pretty amazing to me, because I was really under cultural. I mean, you know, thinking of myself as a rebel and somebody who would never go to the foreground, you know, because of the nature of the politics of my work and my passion for political left and stuff like that, I was always one step removed from trying to be inside the mainstream.

I never analyzed it very correctly, you know. But I do know that people were paying attention to me, which frightened me, and which also paralyzed me, in many ways, photographically, because I didn't know what to do. People were paying attention to this work, and would I go out and photograph parties and so on and so forth again? No, I couldn't. What else would I do? And now, I had—I was sort of a big shot. And I had a reputation to uphold, so I had to make bodies of work which would be, you know, appropriate to the status that I gained. And that was horrific. I mean, it's destabilizing in the extreme. So, here's this guy who's sitting up on the mountain of his pie, you know, his cherry pie is bursting with energy and happiness, he's inappropriately depraved and dismembered, as far as action, as for future action, because he doesn't want to repeat himself, and he doesn't know how to go forward.

So, it was years that it took me to get back into photographing with some degree of rigor, even though I continued to do assignment work, whatever it happened to be, but as far as personal work, I didn't have a clue. However, in assignment work, I always insisted for myself to be personal. So, I would take care of the gig, you know, in terms of what the magazine construct was concerned, but I would always try to do better, and better, and better, and better, and more and more meaningful stuff, hoping that the magazine would publish it, but knowing full well, that they might not because their commercial considerations were very different than my personal considerations.

So, when magazines published the things awkwardly or not correctly, or something like that, I didn't get particularly upset. Other photographers will go out of their brains. For me, getting a magazine assignment was making two or three, maybe $5,000, and asked to photograph something which I wasn't ever thinking about before. And I was thankful for that. And I would go off and there I was, you know, programmed into a new experience, which I was going to make some coin on, and I was going to photograph it as best and in the most passionate way that I knew how. And that's how I evolved. So, it was like skipping stones across the water. And the next bank would be whatever assignment it was, I'd skip it this way, and the next assignment over here, like that.

[00:10:59]

So, basically, I was just being tossed asunder into various kinds of realities, all of which I appropriated and enjoyed immensely, and learned from, and then, photographed as well, in that learning period. So, it was all good.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think we're at a great stopping point for today. For my own edification, so, you have some pictures here that are printed quite large. I was wondering, in the '70s '80s, so you're showing at MoMA, are there other gallery spaces, and how are you—what scale are you showing at, I guess? Did you like seeing your photos at a certain scale? And in a different space? Because the book feels so different from how it looks on a gallery wall.

LARRY FINK: Oh, yeah. Big time. I like books better than gallery shows.

BEN GILLESPIE: It feels more intimate?

LARRY FINK: That. And also, it stays around. You can hang on it. Gallery show is like a month and a half, two, and eventually, it's that. People see it, and this is—it's a reference, a gallery show is something more elite. But was the original question again, sorry?

BEN GILLESPIE: So, it was quite convoluted. But the—so what scale were the photos for the MoMA show?

LARRY FINK: Oh, scale. So, scale, I guess the MoMA show was probably not even 16 by 20. No, maybe it was—I used to print only 11 by 14, which is a smaller size. Then, when I went up to 16 by 20, I thought I was like, you know, inventing a new world. And when I went to 20

by 24, oh, goodness. And now, these are 30 by 30. I love them.

BEN GILLESPIE: They look great.

LARRY FINK: You know, they really are. It's terrific. You know, and you can't put them in your hand, and they're going to fold up, and whatever. But for wall space, they're just beautiful. And then, for many people they're too big, for many people's walls, in terms of stuff. But I just love it this way, you know? And I don't—I'm not printing a lot of them because there's no reason to, but if there is a show someplace, you know, which is considerable, then I'll print them that way. There's a show now at Robert Mann Gallery in New York, but collectors, be it as they may, are always interested in vintage.

So, the stuff at Mann's gallery, which is *Social Graces*, basically, is all vintage. Meaning that it's about 16 by 20, and 11 by 14, you know. And they're beautiful prints, and they're all on silver and stuff like that, but that's what's going to sell. If a collector comes around and wants to spend 6,000 to 10,000 to 12,000 bucks, they want what they think is vintage, you know, where I would rather sell them this for 12,000 bucks. And I Goddamn know that these prints are better than my vintage prints because I didn't know how to print. But these guys have their own sense of criteria in what's worthy and what's not. I'm not going to interrupt it.

BEN GILLESPIE: I guess if it would interrupt a sale then it's probably not worth it.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

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BEN GILLESPIE: That does—the different formats. And I guess that's one of the joys of photography is getting to ride those out and see how the technology has changed over time.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, it's fabulous. No, I mean with our ink, you know, we can print things that you could never print in silver. Oh, never, in the shadow areas and stuff like that, you can bring shit out that's just fabulous, you know? And I love it. I mean, I don't—I'm a bum. I don't have to do any work at all. I mean, Jamie does it, and Susie does it. And I used to—all my—I've had assistants for years, decades, because I'm a lazy bum. No, not that, because I'm a production photographer. Nowadays, not so much, and so, I'm just being spoiled. But I have—you know, I haven't worked on any of this stuff for years, but I know exactly what I want to be had, what the criteria is, and what my pictures should look like. So, they're very painterly, in terms of tones and stuff like that they go back and forth. Because I—you know, painting is deeply involved in my consciousness. So, my assistants are great. Jamie's fantastic.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, good shout out for the assistants. Okay, so just to wrap up, I realized I didn't ask about the Guggenheim fellowship. How did that opportunity come up for you? And how did it help you develop the project?

LARRY FINK: It paid the rent. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: That's developing the project.

LARRY FINK: How it came up? Well, you know, you go out for it. You send your pictures in, and whatever, and if you win, you win. Everybody is talking about who you should see and who's on the board and had a political this and political that, and it's all true. But I didn't care because I had no control over that. So, I just would send the pictures in and see how that—and apparently they liked it. They liked it twice. They liked it for *Social Graces* number one, which is the, you know, Martin's Creek—no, they liked it for *Social Graces* number one, which is black tie. And they liked it for *Social Graces* number two, which is Martins Creek. So, basically, the Guggenheim made the made the book be possible, because they allowed me money. And in those days, today you get about 35 grand, then it was only 12, but it was enough to pay the rent for the year and whatever else, and get some photo supplies, and so on.

So, just in the most simple way, it allowed me to continue to work, you know, on a personal level. And you can't complain about that. But it also allowed me a certain amount of attention in the photo world. But I don't remember specifics in that level. But, nevertheless, I do remember that I became a cause to celebrate for some. And for many, actually. As I said before, Cartier-Bresson had my book on his shelf. So, that was the biggest thing in my fucking life.

BEN GILLESPIE: Well, I think this is a good spot to leave it. We'll celebrate the high and come back with all of the good things, and then we'll come back to talk about what follows.

LARRY FINK: Okay.

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BEN GILLESPIE: We'll start.

LARRY FINK: Spiel, spiel.

BEN GILLESPIE: This is Ben Gillespie with Larry Fink. This was the second session of his oral history. We are at the Allentown Art Museum in Allentown, Pennsylvania. And today, I'd like to start by talking about your show that is currently on view at the Allentown Art Museum with Judith Joy Ross. So, could you tell me about how that came into being?

LARRY FINK: Well, Max Weintraub, who's the curator here, new curator, and apparently a very, very responsible one and a nice guy, he and I became, not friends, but friendly, he came up over to the farm once and so on, just being part of the community, and I'm part of the community. And I offered him the idea not too long ago of having Judith and I have a show. Then, I passed it by Judith and she had first said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, I can't organize all my prints out here at the house. And I'm scheduled to have a big show in Philadelphia," and she went through a, you know, a bit of a dismissal of that idea. And so, I passed that by Max. and Max said, "Don't worry, we have a whole bunch of pictures here at the collection, we can do the show, nevertheless." So, without any kind of stretch on Judith, it just came.

And as far as my stuff is concerned, it was a show that I had put together, which was shown during COVID time, at Fotografiska, which is a kind of a photographic museum in New York, a brand new one. And they are pictures of, basically, the '60s, pictures of when I was working as a teacher up in Harlem, pictures of kids, and so on. So, it's that. And that's how it came to be. So, I just basically offered the two of us, and was quiet for a while, and then they said, "Yes, let's do it." And we're doing it. It's up. That's it, simple.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah. And your pictures have a really great dialogue up there. Is that the first time you've seen your pictures alongside Judith's in a gallery space?

LARRY FINK: Absolutely. Yeah, very much so. I mean, I always thought that we were connected, not necessarily in style for sure, but in that both of us looked for the offhanded humanity, you know, which comes from in between moments. And sometimes her pictures have the people looking right straight at her, but in such a way that's not just a picture of somebody looking straight at you, but somebody who's really inquiring, as she is, as well. And so, there's a real magnetic inquisition, if you will, between her, the viewer, and the viewer as well. Because she—they see her, she sees them, and it's a relationship.

My stuff is different. My stuff is, I always work towards trying to get the offhanded look, not looking at me, but being themselves, doing what they do. And I always—probably every one of my pictures is something to do with empathy, that even though there's some very, very spicy and complicated compositions, and so on and so forth, the person. or the people in the midst of it all, I have to feel them, or feel myself in them, or feel them in myself, as we are all related, in some form, in many forms, by our emotions, and by our collisions, and collusions, and allusions and illusions. We're all related. And so, my pictures, like my life, is about what it means to go underneath the flesh and see if you can find the blood.

[00:05:00]

BEN GILLESPIE: We do love finding the blood, as it were. And so, I want to talk about a little detour in your practice which I was reviewing, which was your—so after your MoMA show, your invitation from the Seattle Art Museum to shoot out in the State of Washington. And so, it's so amazing that you're going from these shots in Harlem, you know, the city work that you're so known for, and *Social Graces*, and then, here comes Larry Fink the nature photographer.

LARRY FINK: [Laughs.] Photographing loggers, right? No, it's hardly the nature—I mean it's the nature of the being out there. And actually, I went to Camp Simpson, which is no longer, there are no longer any in the forest, internal logging camp villages with all kinds of—with all

things considered. Anyhow, I went out to Seattle, and I was dedicated to photographing loggers. Why loggers? Because I was had moved to the farm several years previous and I was heating everything with wood, ardently, and I was cutting, cutting, cutting, cutting, old, dead wood out of the forest and dragging it back with my Jeep truck and winch, and, you know, had a good taste of hard work every day, actually.

And so, when I went out, when I was hired, so to speak, or given the fellowship to do that, I figured, fuck, let me see what the real guys do, you know? And the real guys do a hell of a lot more than I did, [laughs] every day. They cut trees which were as big as a house, you know, which is unfortunate, but it was the way—that's the industry. So, it wasn't so much I was doing landscape, I was doing logger-scape. And rather than—and I was criticized by some in Seattle, in the art world, and in the moral world for making these loggers heroic, because basically many of them, not in my turf, but the word clear-cutting and devastating the forest, not for them, they were getting a daily bread salary but for the profiteer guys, the guys who were making paper and wood and so on and so forth.

So, I was criticized for heroizing these guys who were basically the running dogs for the imperialists, as the early, early Chinese Communists used to call it. The Chinese Communists became the running dog for the imperialist, also, ultimately. So much for Communism. So, off I went and bingo, I met a guy named—I was allowed to meet a guy named Davey McCardle, who was a logger, and he was an independent logger. And he—I rented a Bronco, and he, and I, and an old guy that was a friend of his, took off and we just traveled around, out into the—from Bainbridge Island all the way out, up the Forks, you know, way out at the tip of the state, photographing logging, as it was, throughout all of that territory.

I've never been happier in my life. It was amazing, very macho world, and I wasn't a macho guy, but I certainly became one really in a hurry. Not necessarily in terms of being desultory towards women or whatnot, or trying to get it on, but just swaggering along, as kind of a new forest man [laughs] and photographing, obviously, you know. So, I made it.

[00:10:00]

And many of the freelance loggers who I joined up with, thought well of me because unlike many photographers, they said, unlike most photographers, in fact, I came up and worked with them up way up on the mountain. With most photographers, they said would stay down by the site where the machinery was and the logs would come. Ultimately, at the end of the day, there'd be a lot of to do down there, but they wouldn't—so, every day, for weeks on end, you know, I had 40 pounds of gear on me in my backpack and stuff like that, and I would have my Mamiya C330, and whatever else camera, and I would photograph, and fall off cliffs and [laughs] so on. I got to be quite agile, like a mountain goat.

And I had a lot of fun. And then, Joanie Snyder, my wife, then, said, "Hey, it's time for you to come back." I said, "No, I like it out here." [Laughs.] However, that was the end of that project. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: That's such an interesting departure, from the taking pictures of protests, and the party photos, and then the loggers.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, it was definitely a departure. And a necessary one, because when you keep on swirling around all those tuxedos, and black ties, and smarmy attitudes, you know, it's not a hopeful look at mankind. The loggers were, even though, as I said, I was being criticized for heroizing these guys. But these guys are heroes, you know? They do work which is unyielding in its danger. And they work for people with money concerns, and so on and so forth, but that's not their concern. Their concern is to make a living so they can support themselves and their four families. [Laughs.] Davey McArdle had three families, actually, because he was a Mormon. And so he would go from here, to there, to there, to everywhere, you know, having all these wives and children. Crazy. Unfortunately, I didn't photograph him with his families, which would have been another project entirely.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay, so the—I'd love to hear about the beginning of your teaching career at Bard, which was, I believe, 1986 or so. But how did you—you just had such a fun ride through the 1980s so far, and I know Bard was a really fruitful place for you.

LARRY FINK: Well, Stephen Shore became the chairman a little bit earlier than when I came on board. And there was a position open after he got there and started organizing. He's a terrific organizer and a good educator. And there was a position open. And I applied for it, of

course, because I was just teaching around at Cooper Union, at Lehigh University, where I was, at School of Visual Arts, so on and so forth, making a couple of bucks here and a couple of bucks there, but not enough to sustain myself and Joanie, at that time. But it was hard. So, anyhow, but unfortunately for me at that point, Ben Lipson, [00:14:29] the critic and photographer got the job. And he was bad at it. And in fact, what had happened is that Stephen took a sabbatical and decided to have me as his replacement part, being the chair of all things. And even though I—

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LARRY FINK: —hadn't done that before, I was up for the task. I know how to organize things quite well, even though I'm not doing that, haven't done it for years. And Ben Lipson was fucking up. He was still there. And he was going to Israel to do talks, and he was leaving the school for a week and two at a time, and he would tell the students, "Make believe I'm still here and just talk amongst yourselves." So, I got wind of this, obviously, and I had to fire [laughs] Ben Lipson for being insubordinate to his construct of being an educator. And that was a lark because Ben was important at that time, and I wasn't so much so. And so, I did. I got rid of him. And I think I pulled in Laurie Dahlberg or somebody. At any rate, that was my —on a sabbatical leave, I did all kinds of empowered things, you know, I wasn't shy about using my power, even though it was temporal.

And then Stephen came back, and I lost my job, and so on and so forth. And then, there was an opening because Ben was fired and was it Laurie? No. Well, anyhow, however it worked, it was another opening and they, they put me as the—and so, I worked with Stephen as the second-in-command, so to speak. And Stephen Shore is a very, very, very good photographer and a very, very tidy man, and a very held, very, very—extremely smart and perceptive guy who can quote Shakespeare backwards, you know, and so on. I can't. But he's not an emotional man, even though he's an emotional man, for sure, but he doesn't show his emotions. It's not part of his program.

And I'm, on the other hand, a completely emotional guy. I do have a lot of structure in me, but I really dedicate life towards the emotional principles of feeling. And so, between the two of us we put together, it was a fabulous program. And kids were starting to really find out about it, "Whoa, Larry Fink is famous, this is un-fucking unbelievable," you know. So, anyhow, I was having a really good time and teaching the kids at Bard how to see, how to feel, how to be. And Stephen and I worked together expertly and harmoniously for decades.

And Stephen wanted to advance the program so that newer, younger folks could be part of it. And he was very good and getting money. And he had some money people around. And so, he started, he brought in An-My Lê, and John Pilson, who was An-My's husband. Who else did he bring in? Laurie Dahlberg, which I actually brought in, and a whole bunch of folks, you know, very, very hip, splendid photographic folks [inaudible] [00:03:55]. And I started to phase out, because our marriage was over, in terms of the intensity of that duality. But the program was still very salient, and I had no real complaints except that when I was finally phased out, I was allowed to come back in because they liked prestige. So, I have prestige, some kind of status, and I kept on winning awards, you know, and being ICP [00:04:34] Man of the Year, and all this kind of crap that happened, that can happen to you, not necessarily does happen to you.

And so, I was kept on, and I—but I'm a real classroom teacher, because I like to see the evolving principles and power of the students in front of me. But when I was kept on I was only given sort of seminars and workshop—not workshop but seminars to do, and while that while I could go in there and give a good critique and critical analysis of work, that wasn't really what I loved, you know. That's more elitist than anything. And I really love the nuts and bolts of it all. So, when I was finally phased out, it was time for me to phase out. And then, that was that for Bard. I loved Bard.

[00:05:48]

BEN GILLESPIE: I can tell. And it also sounds like empathy, again, was sort of the glue of your pedagogy, just like in your photographic practice?

LARRY FINK: Absolutely. No, every student that I ever, you know, talked to or met, I quite frankly, didn't remember anybody's name. [Laughs.] But quite frankly, I remembered all of their faces and their impulses. And what I did was just try to give them the courage to

liberate their own imagination through the act and the art of photography. For me, photography is not an end in itself, it's just a method and a conduit for an immersion into human life or landscape life, for that matter, but to have a landscape without any kind of emotions in it is not really talking about how deeply small we are, and how vast all of those vistas are.

Stephen's pictures are highly emotional, even though the emotion is very, very subtle. Mine are highly emotional, and my emotions are not very subtle at all. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: Did you find that teaching made you a better photographer? How did it feed back into your own practice?

LARRY FINK: I don't know if it made me a better photographer, but it certainly made me a smarter photographer. Now that I haven't been teaching for several years, I'm getting dumber and dumber all the time, because there's something about getting in front of a classroom and having, you know, kids work, and also referring to some of the masters and so on, and talking about it, and talking about it with the kids and so on. Which you know, makes you a smart guy, you know, and lately, you know, now I'm just alone and Martha is smart as hell, but we don't talk about art all over the place. We talk about you know, utensils and whether or not the garbage has to go out, you know, it's a marriage. [Laughs.] So, you know, nobody's showing off at home.

Basically, teaching is showing off, at the same time as being receptive to other people, and allowing them to show off. The whole business of being an artist of any kind is basically a show-off occupation. Think of it, most people, you know, work in factories or in offices or in corporations, you don't show off. You do the fucking job, and then you go home, and you, you know, watch television if you're that way, or you get high if you're that way, or you try to do some partying if you're that way, you know. But basically the job leeches all of your improvisational creativity from you, and makes you work for the man, whoever he may be.

BEN GILLESPIE: Well, thinking about showing off in a different realm, tell me about the genesis of your boxing photos.

LARRY FINK: Funny story. As always, I was working as a magazine photographer and Kathleen Klech was the picture editor, brand new picture editor just coming out of school at the *Manhattan, inc.* business magazine. And she had known my work because I was out there in view a little bit and she respected me a lot. And she called me up and she thought, "Maybe he would work," because people would think that fine art photography wouldn't work for me. I was just—I loved to work for people, even though sometimes there's some degree of compromise in that, it doesn't make any difference. You just try to solve problems for other people. I like being generous that way with my skills.

[00:10:28]

So, Kathleen called me up and said this, "Would you work for us?" I said, "Yeah, okay, sure." I was broke, so I was really happy. And she said, "Well, I want to photograph Jimmy Jacobs." I said, "Who's Jimmy Jacobs?" Well, Jimmy Jacobs is Mike Tyson's manager. And Mike Tyson is a young guy who's not champion yet, but who's coming along. And Jimmy Jacobs basically took over from Cus D'Amato, who was deceased. Cus was one of the great boxing trainers and managers. Jimmy was also. He's dead, too, now. So, I went off and photographed Jimmy Jacobs. But it's interesting, because when I was a kid, on Friday nights when my parents went out, me and the babysitter would listen to the boxing matches on radio. And I loved it, all the talk about slugging this and slugging that.

But then it stopped, of course, time went on, and I had no boxing in my life at all. And then I would watch it on television, and it would give me anxiety attacks, and I'd have to get away from the television set and move to the next room. So, but when I got the assignment to do Jimmy, and then I got into the ring over at Catskill, where Tyson and Jimmy and ultimately, Cus D'Amato, once upon a time, situated themselves, I had this odd revelation bouncing up against the rings, ropes, elastic, as they are. This revelation was, I love it here. There was something about being there in that world that was organically and splendidly, I'd call it, nourishing. And so, it wasn't so much that—and some other folks, photographer folks would take a guy like Tyson and they just follow Tyson, you know, because he's going to be a big shot, you know.

And I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in the whole matea [00:13:07] the whole

community. Laurie Grinker could follow Tyson, and now she has a show, or did have a show, and just published a book with powerHouse, and I think he's doing quite well, because Tyson's still a celebrity of sorts, and was a very good champion until he didn't want to be anymore, and then he was lousy.

So, with that organic feeling of the rightness of that immersion, I continued on with boxing. So, every week or two weeks, I would go down to Philadelphia, to the Blue Horizon, which was a theater which was then turned into a boxing ring, and I would photograph. And then I got friendly, more or less—not friendly, but a relationship with a chap named Russell Peltz, who was a promoter. And he allowed me everything. He allowed me to get back in the dressing rooms, in the ring, closest I could get, and so on. He was wonderful.

And that went on for years. I just kept on collecting pictures, doing nothing with them, and then it stopped at some point, I don't remember the time sequence, but I—it was a long time that I was immersed in that.

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LARRY FINK: Invariably I was doing probably assignments on the side here and there and everything, because that was the way I was making a living. And by this time, I think I was—no, I was still with Joanie, I forget. I don't know—I've forgotten all the time sequence in my life, but I do know that Joan was my first wife, P Estanyich [00:00:25] was my second, and Martha Posner is my third. That I know. [Laughs.] And Martha Posner and I have been together for about 30 years, which just is miraculous to think that we still get along, have a good time, run a farm together, and slug it out. Thirty years, holy shit. Amazing. Anyhow, back to boxing. I don't box with Martha, we wrestle.

BEN GILLESPIE: It's such a fascinating ecosystem between the promoters, the various trainers, the fighters themselves, you know, there's sort of like, stand ins, and there's everything around them. So, I like hearing about your photos capturing the community, because we get used to the figurehead, we love celebrity culture, but then, actually, it takes a lot of cogs to make that machine move.

LARRY FINK: Oh, boy. It does.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, your runway pictures sort of remind me of that, as well, like, diving into this ecosystem that feels a little bit hidden, where we get the figureheads, or the big names, but actually, there's a lot of activity behind the scenes.

LARRY FINK: I'm not—I mean, the celebrities are the celebrities, and when you work as a photographer for hire, you have to go photograph the celebrities, because that's what they're interested in. So, I met a lot of celebrities, and a lot of—some other photographers were enamored of all of that and made sure that they got friendly with the celebrity so that they can be part of the celebrity team, and possibly, a celebrity themselves at some point. And I really wasn't interested in that. I was really just interested in, in the back scene, you know, in the place where people worked, you know.

And for me, the drama of the celebrity was less so than the drama of actually trying to crank out the amount of work that it takes to put a ring together, to put a fashion show together, to put anything together, you know? It's people who work for living—let's say work for their living, and they work for the living, in terms of trying to construct or orchestrate an operating theatre so that what they're doing seems to be significant.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, it is interesting, all the preparation, and the anticipation, and the self-restraint, and regimentation to prepare for these moments like the runway show, which is very brief, but, you know, the planning is unbelievable, so many people coming together, so many hours, for a brief spectacle.

LARRY FINK: I always call it the runway show, you know, I call it—I call it a theater without a plot.

BEN GILLESPIE: There might be plots behind the scenes.

LARRY FINK: A lot of plot behind the scenes, but the scene itself has no plot. It's empty, except for the fact that you're showing some piece of material, you know, on somebody's body. And that's the plot. That's the plop. [Laughs.] Yeah, backstage in a fashion thing is so

hysterical. Have you been there?

BEN GILLESPIE: Through your pictures, I can feel that, the wild tension.

[00:05:00]

LARRY FINK: Oh, God. I mean, I would get there in the morning and you know, just hang around for a while until it all started to happen. But they'd all come in, you know, and there's so—I mean, there's so much money involved with this, millions of dollars to put this show together. And the last people I work with were Jil Sander, and it was a nice group of people, and I worked for them, asking me to do what I do, which is, you know, the candid pictures of people who are not important except to the fact that they're extremely important, because they're all part of the process of putting on this theater without a plot, one person going down the gangplank and having to fall into the deep dark waters of the public appraisal. Pretty good, huh? That's a pretty good one.

I'm clearer today than I was yesterday. I slept. Actually, interesting, I only slept six hours, which is probably the best way to do it. Twelve hours makes you kind of a foghorn. So, where was I?

BEN GILLESPIE: You're talking about Jil Sander, the performance, the pressure.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, the amount of anxiety, you know, everyone, you know, from the makeup people to the models themselves, to the designers and stuff like that, it was amazing. And then, they would come to that one specific moment, and they'd go out in the runway, and take about maybe five to 10 minutes of show off and bingo, and they'd come back in and like, [sighs] like some odd, glitzy orgasm, which had no flesh, only cloth, and had no sensual preamble, not at all. But the sense of sensuality had been presented to the public because of the style of the clothes and the way that the model is holding themselves. And then finally, the sensuality all combusts at that moment and then you're left with, in a way, a joyous frailty, and a—what's the word? De-combustion, or something like that. Yeah, it's a crazy industry.

The thing about photographing, you know, I don't like to photograph—I mean, for instance, if I would—I don't know about working as a photographer, I liked the assignment because it gave me permission, fashion, or boxing, or any number of assignments that I took, it gives one a permission to photograph. And I've always been as a photographer who actually is known for a rather, not aggressive style, but certainly looking at people in a very, very personal and honest way, from close up, you can't just do that anywhere, unless you're this very, very aggressive and very, very not caring at all about how folks look at you.

And I do care. And I'm not that aggressive. And so when I had these assignments, you know, it gave me the permission, to go to somebody's home even, who's supposed to be signified, and they welcome you in with open arms, you know, more than open arms, with open heart. And you say, well, it wants to be candid, and they want to pose, first. Over the years, it's become more and more pose, pose, pose, pose, more and more hatching, more and more suspicion, which is not only about photography, but everything in American life. People are, unfortunately, very suspicious of each other for whatever reason. But so, I would go in these places, and I was, like, welcomed in, here comes the photographer. And then I would go about, you know, doing my off-kilter work. And that was the way I was able to get those kinds of intimacies.

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They laughed; they wanted me to be with them. And that was fun. All these things, the boxing matches, the fashion things, they're all the same. It's all backstage and presentation. And I'm a backstage man.

BEN GILLESPIE: Well, and photography fits into their framework, you know, they understand the importance of capturing that.

LARRY FINK: Each of them are, in very different ways, exhibitionists. And the boxers would immediately come in and do some pump up such like that, and I would photograph that, but then I would allow them and said, "Okay, that's enough of that. Let's—you can go about your business. I'll just photograph you as you allow me to do it," as they were being attended to.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, it's certainly a very different role in the ubiquity of photographic images today, how people—as you're talking about the posing, posing, posing. But I want to tag that to come back here because the other backstage project that I did not know you were part of, but then now I really want to ask about is *Rent: The Musical.* How did that happen?

LARRY FINK: I got hired.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay. That's a great way for something to start. [Both laugh.]

LARRY FINK: I forget who did, who was hiring me. But somebody says, "Okay, Larry is the perfect guy to go backstage for *Rent*." And I did that. It was fun.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, the backstage man.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. In fact, I remember this funny story, there was a time when another photographer, the more conventional photographer came to do the conventional portraits and the portraits of the group, and so on and so forth. So, I'm sniffing around out there, you know, and he's up on the stage, and they're working, and I'm down here, you know, in the audience place. I take my camera, I start to make a picture, and the photographer goes out of his brains. "You can't do that." I said, "Oh, okay." "No, get out of here, man. I don't need another photographer around here."

But anyhow, I'm the famous photographer at this point, you know, I was hired for my fame, or whatever. And this other guy's, you know, probably a well-known commercial photographer, but he's the cat with the attitude. And so, I left—of course, I left them alone. I'm not interested in any kind of sparring match between professionals, that's for sure.

BEN GILLESPIE: Unless it's in a boxing ring.

LARRY FINK: It's funny. I remember that. Yeah, he really was out of his fucking brains I was there. Oh, honk, honk.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, you took some great pictures backstage there, and also out in the East Village. Do you remember much of the process? And it's just—it's a great shoot, the way it's all presented in the *Rent* book where they have collected production photographs and your backstage pictures, and out in the East Village with some of the cast.

LARRY FINK: I forget, now, how does that work, with the East Village?

BEN GILLESPIE: There are just some shots out of the cast, walking around. I wish I had the book with me.

LARRY FINK: Is that what we did? I forgot, actually. Did I go out in the streets with them?

BEN GILLESPIE: According to the book, you did, yes.

LARRY FINK: Oh, yeah? Maybe. [Laughs.] Can't know, mind won't tell me.

BEN GILLESPIE: That's okay. Well, I mean, it does sound like the salient memory would be the other photographer and the intensity of emotion which tends to drive memory.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

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LARRY FINK: I have nothing else to say.

BEN GILLESPIE: [Laughs.] So, we talked yesterday a little bit about the long arc of the party, as in the party of photography. And so, I wanted to ask about one of the more recent projects, which was the *Vanities*, the Hollywood parties, and how differently charged that is from *Social Graces*. So, I was wondering what the impetus was to return to that format, kind of, but in a very different way.

LARRY FINK: Well, the impetus, or the—at a certain point, I started to work with and be

under contract for *Vanity Fair Magazine*. The way I got the job in *Vanity Fair* was something to do—well, I had an agent named Bill Charles at that time. And Bill was a very, very, very, very aggressive agent. And a good one, and ultimately destroyed himself, but that's another story. But so, Bill built me up and he was a—he understood that parties would be my commercial—I would be commercially fulfilled, in other words, he could—that's why he could sell about me, easily. The other stuff, landscapes or whatever, wasn't saleable, but the party stuff was very saleable, because I did a good job, obviously, and had some, you know, museums and whatever, books, track record.

And so, he went out into the commercial world, you know, and he sold me as the party photographer. Indeed, I started to do a lot of parties in those days, not so from my own volition, like it was early days, but nevertheless, there's something about 200, or 100, or 25 people in a room or a hall, all been imbibing and vibing, and sniffing each other out, and doing what they do, and twirling, that's totally exciting. It would be exciting to me today. I just like it when people are together, and their energy is like spit firing across the space. So since Bill was propagating, was promoting me as a party photographer, I was known, I was quite well known in the commercial, fashion, and design, so on so forth, world. *Vanity Fair* and Graydon Carter was there. Tina Brown opened up a magazine of her own called *Talk*, which I suspect was supposed to go up against *Vanity Fair*, competitively. Tina Brown gave me the opportunity to work for them under contract for 50 grand, which was a considerable amount of money. I was certainly going to be taking it.

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But before I took it, or even started to work for her, Graydon came in and said—brought me into the office there, and said, "Do you want to work for us? We can offer you a contract." I said, "Tina just," he said, "No, you can't work for Tina if you work for us." I said, "Well, then what are you offering?" He said, "We can talk about that at a later date." The interesting thing is, is that he offered me $450,000 a year, which was more money than I ever made my life. Bill Charles was ecstatic. I wasn't unhappy. And off I went, for working for *Vanity Fair*. Now, after all, if you look at the magazine, and you look at my work, I'm not equipped, or not —shall I say, not equivocated to be a *Vanity Fair* photographer. But he wanted me because of the conflict between he and Tina, and my party skills.

And indeed, so off I went to Hollywood, photographing all of those parties out there, and the Academy Awards and the *Vanity Fair* party, and so on, which I did every year for 10 years, and other parties like the New York Film Festival, anytime that *Vanity Fair* was throwing a party, Larry was there, working along with Jonathan Becker, who works for them still, today, and the hell is his name, the other guy? Anyhow, a bunch of photographers, you know, quite good. But the other guys would all photograph people posing with a smile. And I would do it the other way, like I always did.

After about eight years, the photographers would start following me around and every time I would sort of get a little nuance, they will all go in there with their flash to see if they can, you know, have these people pose and fuck up my picture. [Laughs.] So that became really difficult to continue to make, so to speak, personalized pictures under the aspect of having these other competitive photographers, you know, come in there and depersonalize the whole scenario. So goes it with life. Freedom is not forever.

BEN GILLESPIE: How did you feel about those parties versus parties and the balls you were taking photos of in the '70s? Did you find yourself in a new relationship to them? I guess more money maybe makes it a little more fun.

LARRY FINK: Well, I liked the fact I was making money, I mean, in the '70s I wasn't making a dime, it was all my own stuff. But in the '70s, by this time, I think I had published *Social Graces* or something like that. And so, I was working idealistically. And when I started to work with *Vanity* and stuff like that, I was working materialistically. And the early idealism wasn't alive, because it had fulfilled itself. But I must say that every time I make a picture, to this day, just some part of me which is innocent, and idealistic asks the life in front of me to be as fulfilled and as rich, and that could be also ugly, as its potential goes, and when I photograph, I try to explore, you know, the deeper realms of public life.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yesterday, you described yourself as a pure agency in a corrupt field. And did you still have a sense of that, during?

[00:10:05]

LARRY FINK: Now?

BEN GILLESPIE: Now, and has that felt like a useful framework as you approach different photographic projects and subjects?

LARRY FINK: No, it'd have to be applicable to, you know, where I was while I was doing projects, photographing some of the folks in Martins Creek, it's just simple. It's just folks that I'm interested in. Like I'm going to be photographing down at the fire department down in Martins Creek nowadays, and I haven't gotten to do it yet, but I will. And then, I wanted to photograph some of the oldest people in town, really, you know, really homebrew stuff. I mean, I'm pretty much off the Avenue in New York. Younger people are there. And some people think that this old master, you know, wouldn't work. I would actually, even at my age. I'm still in shape. But younger people are there, and they're plotting their way through the terrain.

And I have a massive reputation by this time as being one of the great photographers, which gives me nothing but pleasure to think that people think that way. So, when I come back to Martins Creek to photograph, I photograph just simply, to see what these people look like, how they feel, what they embroider their lives with around, and so on. Simple. And maybe, I don't know what the pictures will be used for. Martha says maybe it'll be a book, and I don't know. I don't work with a book in mind. I don't work with a show in mind. I don't work with a public pronouncement in mind. I work to see what I can learn by the pictures that I make.

BEN GILLESPIE: Speaking about ongoing threads and returning to, what do I want to say here, rich material, thinking about protest photography again, and is it *Outpour*, your photo series from the Women's March and as a self-identified feminist from a young age and witnessing the changes, I'd like to hear about that project and what felt—

LARRY FINK: Well, you know, it was no project, really. It was a day. And I went out, I said, "Oh, boy, look at this. This is amazing," kind of thing. I went down to Washington, you know, for the big Woman's March when Trump jumped into the presidency. And I photographed. I know how to do that. Quite different than anything I had done for a while. And a whole lot better than anything I had done previous before, way back then, because I'm skilled, very skilled, in terms of organizing time, space, moments, things like that. But so, the pictures are —but most importantly, forgetting about me pumping up the fact that I'm skilled, is that the women were absolutely beautiful. And that's what I felt throughout. First of all, I couldn't—as a journalist, I couldn't get to the podium. There was 260 million folks there. I wasn't going to be pushing. So I just stayed in my little section, along with the women that were in the section, too, also couldn't move out, and photograph them, their hopes, and the aspirations, and the yearning, and the glory of their faces.

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LARRY FINK: And they were just exquisite. And I felt—because I had become, I don't get cynical, but I had become totally dismayed, coming out of the '60s with protests, and protests, and protests, and you know, the idea of protest, you know, or this kind of march, you know, it was ridiculous, but it doesn't do anything, blah, blah, blah, blah. And whether or not it did anything, certainly it's just going to be incremental. But whether or not it did anything, and what it did not for me to analyze, I'm not a social analyst. But what it looked like was that these women were proud, were noble, were concerned, and were angry, but not angry to the point of ire or ugliness, but angry, a rational anger, based on the fact that Trump was in there.

And the thing is, is that little did they know how angry they would really become after he started to affect his premises. Because Donald Trump is a cartoon fascist, a very dangerous man. I think had the march been done a little bit further into the future of that moment, the faces of the women wouldn't be quite so valiant and hopeful. They'd be more enraged. So, anyhow, the little book *The Output* came from that moment of realization that it was also—since I had marched and photographed during the '60s, this was another, not a replay, but an addition to what it means to be a concerned citizen. That's what we all are, concerned citizens.

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LARRY FINK: The man on the street.

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BEN GILLESPIE: Sorry. This is Ben Gillespie with Larry Fink. This is the third session of his oral history. It is February 8, 2023, and we are at his farm in Martins Creek, Pennsylvania. And Larry, you were just telling me about a memorable experience photographing a party in the 2000s.

LARRY FINK: Well, memorable seems to suggest that it has, you know, deep moral or social significance. And this does not have any of that in particular, beyond just a little nuance about breaking boundaries. And the story goes that I was on assignment to photograph Jay-Z. I forgot what magazine at this point had me do that. But he was friendly enough, not necessarily friendly in a very personal way, but he, you know, he allowed it and stuff. But he had, as all stars have, a sizable coterie who would protect him, you know, and give him the ambience that he wants to have around him. And so, I was just tagging along and photographing here and there, when I was allowed, because there's some degree of selectivity in terms of when the photographer can come into the scenario and not, even though I might—the photographer might be an important one, it's still, in all, the celebrity is more important to anybody, especially within the moment of being attended to.

So, anyhow, I paid attention to all of those rules. But I happened to be overtly complimentary and friendly. And so, one of his young women who was part of his team was wearing a particularly beautiful dress which really fit her well. And her swing and swaying of her behind really outfitted that dress in a glorious way. I did not talk about her behind when I talked to her, because that would be totally inappropriate. However, I did say, "Young lady," whatever I said, you know, "What you're wearing today is very, very beautiful. And I really, really, really admire it." And, and she huffed me off in a diffident kind of way. And perhaps 15 minutes went by and all of a sudden, there was another fellow from his coterie which came to me and said, "You can't photograph any longer. You're coming onto our women."

And I said, "Well, that's kind of sad, because I wasn't coming on to anybody. I was just giving somebody a compliment." And they said, "You were coming on to our women. You've overstepped your boundaries." I said, "Okay." And woebegone to me, there I went. My assignment was ruined and so on. Okay, so I was flattened out. I was supposed to, I forget, I was supposed to travel with them to Chicago and whatnot. Like, it was a big assignment. And so, I lost my contact with Jay-Z, and I lost a certain amount of money, which I always depended on, which is clear. Okay.

Time went by and I went on and did other things like that. But I got a call from *Esquire Magazine*, I believe it was and said, " I understand that you have a bunch of terrific pictures of Jay-Z. Can we use them? We're doing an article on him." I said, "Sure, you can." So, I sent them up and they were not appropriate in terms of they were little glimpses of this and that but they wanted something which was a little bit more fleshed out and, if you will, intimate, you know, and commonplace, just him being, rather than on stage. So, I said, "Well, I don't have that." They said, "Well, will you go and, you know, meet with him and hang out with him and his enterprise?" I said, "Sure, for a fee, of course," and so on. So, off I went to photograph Jay-Z again. And this time I wasn't going to flirt with any of his girls at all.

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So that I did. And it was quite successful, I guess we photographed him as an ordinary person. And I found him actually to be rather personable, and he was very, very—one of his gals was pregnant, and he was very, very florid, and complimentary, and supportive. And he was just actually a pretty regular guy, in terms of how he interfaced with his crew. And I was not entirely surprised, but it was lovely. And indeed, I photographed the commonplace Jay-Z in the office, and here and there, like that, and indeed, it did get published in *Esquire.* That's the nature of that story. But I was definitely thrown out from Jay-Z's enterprises in the preamble of my relationship with him.

BEN GILLESPIE: Two men from Brooklyn.

LARRY FINK: Yeah.

BEN GILLESPIE: We've talked about how photography is so intimate and can be so intrusive, and the contract and respect that you want to have with people you photograph. Have you been kicked out of other spaces, or has it been threatened?

LARRY FINK: My memory is so fucked up, it's so bad. Not too many times. That was a significant one. And that one, you know. But otherwise, no. I mean, I'm a pretty easygoing guy. And I sort of fit in, and with more regular people, rather than star-studded people, when you come in, and you're conversant and conversational, and you know, they like it, rather than the photographer just being, you know, icy and distant, and photographing our imperative, and programmatic, and demanding, and controlling, I'm just basically, you know, laid back and stuff. And ultimately, you know, I get involved with them, and I sit down at the dinner table, and become part of a friendly crowd for at least a moment in time.

One of the things about being a photographer which is interesting is that you're called upon by your own particular predilections, and also by people who want to work with you to enter into people's worlds. And by photographing their worlds, you're essentially asking them to be as real and as intimate about stuff as possible so that the photograph would take on a relationship to what it means to be alive in those people's shoes. And so, as the photographer, I would be there for you know, maybe a day or two or an hour or three, or whatever like that. But basically, the inquiry that you're making is not like, "Okay, that's the picture." My inquiry is different than that. It's more like working like a suction cup, as close as I can to this thing, and trying to personalize it, as well.

And then presto boom, you leave it, and you've had quite a deep experience, and perhaps the people who you were with had a reasonable experience with you. But boom, that's the end of it. Now, some photographers, I know Mary Ellen Mark was very enamored of movie stars. And so, when she went to photograph certain people, she engaged them in a way where she would start to be part of the program, and, you know, moved on up into that world. Something about me, which is very, very isolated, friendly guy that I am, I still tend to always want to go back home and not— I'm not a social climber, you know.

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There have been scenarios where I could have socially climbed from the immersion that I had originally, and I could have hung out with them and said—oh, I remember photographing out in East Hampton and Montauk and stuff back in the *Social Graces* days, and everybody said, when I would photograph a party and some guys would say, "You want to go out in a yacht?" You know? And keep on going, the yacht was going to go to France or something, you know. And I said, "No, it's okay, I'm going home." And I always wanted to go home at the end of the day, rather than continue the trajectory of where I am. So, in other words, I wasn't that enamored of being a star, or being with the stars, or being inside that rich existence, you know, even though I had a taste for it, a taste was enough. I didn't necessarily have to swallow the whole pill.

With Tom Ford, who actually, when I had a show in Paris, where he has his office and other places, he sent Martha and I, because Martha's always coming with me, three dozen white roses with an apology note that he couldn't come to the opening of the show. And we thought that was a pretty cool thing to do. And I had a relationship with Tom, and I'm trying to rekindle it, from being in the fashion world. But I guess, I don't know exactly why, but I photographed him pretty extensively when he was younger, and we didn't actually happen into any kind of relationship, but we got along. And he turned out, to me anyhow, to be a pretty nice guy.

One time I remember, this is kind of a funny story, when we would go to the—when I worked with *Vanity Fair*, and I would always photograph the Oscar party, Tom would be there, and everybody that you could possibly imagine who was important was there. In fact, after I stopped photographing those parties, and even though I'm a very, very famous photographer, I would ask the *Vanity Fair* people, could I come to the party this year to make some photographs on my own turf, you don't have to pay me and whatnot. No, because I wasn't high up enough on the echelons of whatever to be invited. I couldn't afford the steak that I was going to eat. [Laughs.]

However, back to that, at one of the parties I'm photographing—and I'm happy, by the way, to eat in the kitchen. In fact, I took it upon myself to think that was a more noble position, than to eat at the white carpeted table, to go eat with the workers, because basically, that's

what I'm supposed to be signifying, that workers of the world unite. However, I'm coasting around one of those particular parties, and I come upon Tom. Tom recognizes me and says he wants to introduce me to the people that surrounding him, you know? And he says, "Oh, hi," he doesn't say Larry, he says, "Hi." And he introduces me as Ron Galella, the very—who's now deceased, but the very, very aggressive, good photographer, but not great photographer, and certainly not a subjective photographer, and certainly not me, and I'm not him. And I said, "Tom, but I'm not Ron Galella, I'm Larry Fink." He says—and he gets down on his hands and knees, on the red carpet and prays to the Lord and—

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LARRY FINK: —asks for forgiveness. [Laughs.] Which is really something, to have Tom Ford, one of the more important members of the Hollywood and whatever community, you know, get down on his knees and ask for forgiveness because he's fucked up in terms of identity. I forgave him. [Laughs.] And then, I met all the people and everybody was happy, and I went upon my way, you know, photographing others. That's a funny story.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think that was an invitation to misbehave while you had someone else's identity attached to you. So, I realize I haven't asked you about your transition to digital photography from film.

LARRY FINK: There was no big deal. Some people get really, you know, heady about it all and they don't want to transit. They want to keep with film, they want to keep on developing film, they want—it's more beautiful, blah, blah, blah, blah. And indeed, silver prints are quite beautiful. But so are ink. And in fact, ink prints, when you're working off the computer, with all its potential for subtlety, are often far better, and the shadows and whatnot are more assessable, whereas when you try to print them, it's just an awful amount of work. I do miss, no longer certainly, because it's been years and years and years, but the darkroom and all that stuff, you know.

I mean, I went back into *Social Graces* days, I mean, my gosh, I'd be in my tux, I'd drive to New York, you know, I'd photograph for seven hours at a party, you know, I'd smoke a joint, drive back home, I'd develop the film, the 20 rolls of film and so, the 10 rows, whatever, right then in there at 4:00 in the morning, you know, and then go to sleep for two hours and make contact sheets at 8:00 in the morning for no particular reason. There was no there was no commercial concern. It was just the obsession that I had, what I wanted to see. And then at 12:00, at noon, I would be able to see everything that I had shot, and 5:00 in the afternoon, I would start to make prints, for no particular reason of urgency at all, save for my own. You know.

And back to. . . Take me somewhere else, or the same place. I just lapsed.

BEN GILLESPIE: We can go anywhere. We're talking about the cadence of your party shoots, shooting the party all night, coming back, developing at the darkroom. So, did you have a dark room—where was your darkroom here? Is it in the barn?

LARRY FINK: Oh, right here. Yeah.

BEN GILLESPIE: Oh, wow.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, no, it's all its storage now. But it still works. I mean, if we would get a lot of stuff this way and that way, you know, when we start the waters running, we have a small amount of chemical around, we could develop film and we could actually make prints. I have two very, very beautiful old Omega D-5 enlargers, you know, just sitting waiting for a print, and it's not going to happen. So, this transition from digital, is that what we're talking about? It was an easy transition for me, because it was really terrific. You saw the picture right away. You didn't have to go through all the process of stuff, which we really loved. But to see the picture right away, or to come back home and plop it on the computer, it depersonalizes it, for sure, in terms of the energy, and you don't build up the muscles in your arms, also. It's very good to be dodging and burning. You really—that's the kind of exercise that they actually recommend for you, which is repeated action. So, my forearms are really powerful [laughs] from dodging and burning, and from swinging an axe and using a chain sword, it's the duality of purpose.

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As soon as digital came in, it was mine. You know, I guess I first used a Nikon or something like that. And then I switched over to Fuji. And now I use Fuji and all of it. I have a Leica, they're all everything's digital now, so, I use digital. The only thing with digital which is a pain in the ass is that early on, certainly, the lag between when you put the shutter down, and when the shutter actually goes, is much, much slower than mechanical. And so, you had to appropriate that, you had to take that kind of reality in, and actually start to think about the subject matter, and how you want to photograph something which is essential to its being. But with the early digital, especially, now it's much, much better, but you had to, in a way, take a breath before you actually are—or take a breath after the—understand the nature that you had to take a breath after the shutter was squeezed, and that's where you would, you know, get the intuitive essence of what you were looking for.

So, there was a bit of the technical glitch there, which was a pain in the ass. But it didn't necessarily, you know, take me away from the fact that this was a wonderful thing, that this stuff was—now digital also, now, especially I mean, my God, you can crank it up to 38,000 ISO and photograph up the asshole of a giraffe, which is very dark.

BEN GILLESPIE: You're speaking from knowledge?

LARRY FINK: I have deep knowledge with that asshole. [Laughs.] There's still some folks out there who will not use digital. And, you know, I don't understand why not. But I understand that it's part of their credibility, as a romantic photographer. But I don't have any sway with it.

BEN GILLESPIE: That is interesting, of sort of the cadence of the shot itself, where you have the breath and that moment, and maybe how you approach composition or like trying to capture, trying to catch a moment, since we know that you only take maybe one, two, or three shots, you're not repetitive.

LARRY FINK: No, I'm not a repetitive worker. Well, that's the whole deal. If I was a repetitive worker, and many people, you know, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, and later on, they choose what they think is the best one. But I'm so involved with looking for the soul of the person in front of me that you the idea of ding, ding, ding, ding is not what I'm interested in, because that's not the soul, that's just activity. You know, and it might be accurate activity in terms of what their existence, you know, feels and looks like, but I'm looking for the time when, there's a merger between them and me, not necessarily them looking at me, but me looking at them and finding when there's a moment in between moments, you know, which can signify something deeper about them than what is usually felt, or seen, or allowed.

And that kind of shooting, where you only take one or two or three pictures, and usually the first one is the best one rather than the third one, because it's there and then when that emersion comes. So, with the older digital and even sometimes today, the lapse, which is just a nanosecond is enough to throw that kind of search off kilter. And you have to just—it's a science. You have to get inside—not only do you have to get inside the asymmetrical moment of the person or of the activity that's in front of you, but you have to understand the nature of how the shutter is going to work, and so when you can make that picture so that it resonates with your intention.

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It was a transition. I viewed it with some positive aspects. I wasn't dismayed by it. It just was something that had to be learned and then finally utilized. I don't get too bent out of shape by anything. Martha was just telling us this morning about our finances and stuff like that, and she's the manager of all of that. I just make the money, she manages it, and she works harder than I do at this point, because making any money right now for me is lucky because I've been around for a while and people come to me and say, "Would you like to sell this or that?" It's more about the archive getting out of here rather than assignments, where I used to be on the phone 24/7, you know, with editors, and so on and so forth. And that was hard work, and going up uptown with a suit on, you know. And now, I just, you know, I've been around for a long time and I make very good pictures, and so, people come to me and they want to put it in collections or—but still, it has to be—the farm is expensive, and we have help, and so on and so forth.

So, Martha has to understand all of that and I don't. And she was just like slapping me around this morning for being, you know, a dreamy asshole, which I can certainly be, and she's very, very practical, profoundly practical in the most profound way, which I love. I love a lot of things about her.

BEN GILLESPIE: I mean, you certainly have a separate island here which is kind of—which sounds like it's been really restorative and helpful for your work in general, that you come here, you're not stuck in the city, you're not selling yourself uptown every day in a suit. You know, maybe not quite an oasis, but you have something that feels more grounded and where you can hear your own thoughts rather than running around.

LARRY FINK: Absolutely. Yeah. No, the farm is isolated from the world. And it's way back into another century, in terms of, you know, quiet and reality, it's like being out in the frontier, which I prefer. But as I said, I always, in these parties and so on and so forth, I'd always opt not to go out on the yacht and sail the glorious seas with the highfalutin coterie. I just wanted to come home and be back out here on the frontier, where I can have my own thoughts without being gobbled up by social enterprise. It might be that I've smoked pot all my life, and that tends to, at first, socialize you, and then, the second part of your experience with it is to not socialize yourself, it's to want to go back and be quiet. That's, I think, probably part of the fact that I didn't surge ahead because the pleasure that I got from —

[Audio break.]

LARRY FINK: —good story.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay. Go ahead.

LARRY FINK: It was in Italy, I was doing an ad job, I forget what for, or who for. It might be Jil Sander or someone, but whoever it was, it was. Jil was actually free, what was I shooting? Anyhow, it was a standard ad job and in an ad job, they always give you the lip service that they—

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LARRY FINK: —they want you to do everything your way and nothing else but the creative truth, because they've hired you because you're Larry Fink, or Bruce Davidson, or you know, somebody of note, and to do it your way. And then when you get on set, the setup, whatever it may be, you know, is to be photographed their way. Your way is absolutely subordinate to their way. And basically, they want you to do the still life, or the model, or whatever like that, and to photograph it incessantly. Did you get it? Did you get it? Did you get it? Did you get it? They ask. Of course, skilled as I am, I got it on the first shot, but because I'm being paid at that point, way back then, 35 grand a day, something like that was pretty high, and that was from my agent who pushed me up to a big pinnacle.

So, if you're getting that kind of money, you just keep on shooting, because ticka-ticka-ticka-doon-doon-doon [mimics sound of a camera shutter] [00:01:16] because that's the way—those ad guys are comfortable, because most of them are just interested in satisfying the client, and so on. The fact that I was a teacher was good, because the client would often be on set with you. And so, I would go around and say, "Okay," and I would talk some stuff about how I would photograph and this, and that, and so on and so forth to give them some comfort, and also to illustrate to them that there could be a creative process going on. There was once one job where I came in, and I shot it their way, and it was something to do—it was a bunch of people around and I said, like, "Okay, let's do it your way." And we spent a half a day or so photographing, taking the ordinary shots for the ad men. And then I said to the client, I said, "Listen, could I ask you to do me a favor? Let me shoot it my way. Let's get these people to move around and be more spontaneous, and you know, just more socialized."

Okay, bloom-bloom-bloom-bloom-bloom [mimics sound of a camera shutter][00:02:40] and so, three hours went by, and his people socialized this way and that way, and so on and so forth, and I photographed as they interfaced. And I had certainly a lot of fun doing so looking at—such as digital, as it comes out, you get it, it's perfectly on the screen right away, you know. So, they compared the two shoots, their way as it were, the stiff stuff, and my way,

which was taking into consideration all the things that they needed in terms of practical terms, but the spontaneous, improvisational way of social interfacing. And of course, they liked my pictures better, and decided right then and there that they would, for the ad campaign, they were going to use the stuff that I did in the candid fashion, you know.

I was really happy because you don't get often a chance to transform something and make it more real. Most of the time, it's so rigid. And I have to think that it makes sense with Italy. I don't think it would happen in America. Americans are pretty fucking rigid, especially when it comes to money and what's supposed to be done with it, you know? So, anyhow, that was a ball. And I made a lot of money. Oh, that's the air compressor upstairs. We're not recording now, are we? Yes, we are.

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BEN GILLESPIE: —process on these. This is Ben Gillespie. We're continuing the third session with Larry Fink on his farm in Martins Creek, Pennsylvania. And we're looking at some pictures, as he has been perusing through his entire trove to put together a retrospective book. So, we have two pictures drawn up in particular from the 1960s.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, I think they're about 1961. And they're on Fifth Avenue and 57th Street. I think at that point, Fifth Avenue was two-way, and the traffic lights were antique. You can't see them any longer.

BEN GILLESPIE: Oh, yeah. They're two ways. Wow, Fifth Avenue two ways.

LARRY FINK: But I would go up—how old was I?

BEN GILLESPIE: Twenty-ish?

LARRY FINK: Yeah, 20-ish, somewhere, you know, and as we already ascertained, I was a young leftist. So, I went up, I would go up to—not very often but up to that corner and photograph with, not hostility, but with a certain critical acuity about the bourgeoisie, in those terms. Now that I'm part of the bourgeoisie, it seems a little silly that I was doing that. But then again, it was exactly what should be done at that time. So, I photographed with a critical eye towards the bourgeoisie. And in this picture here, especially the second one, this one where they really look nasty. This guy looks all clenched, up, sallow-eyed and critical, and she's open-faced, but a sour kind of hunger, for whatever it was behind that window that she wanted, these bourgeoisie were people of wealth, and people who wanted to have things.

And me, the little leftist bourgeois, would get very, very close to these people. Basically, they were looking in the window, and I was right over here on the window. And as soon as they started to move in, and I saw a moment, I snatched it. And it's amazing how complicated this picture, because I wasn't a very complicated photographer at that time, in terms of my own understanding. But this picture is as complex a picture as you can possibly want, and with as many layers. And so I only saw this picture, oh, probably 20 years later. It was probably in my eyes at that time a failure because it was, whatever. I don't know exactly. But it's extraordinary.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, there's just tension across so much of the entire picture plane.

LARRY FINK: Yes. And the interesting thing is, is that the shadow—not the shadow, the reflection I should say, has as much power.

BEN GILLESPIE: If not more.

LARRY FINK: If not more. Because here he gives has a, you know, kind of a nondescript profile. And here you see the basic, the beckoning of his materialistic soul. And she, we don't see much about her here except her eye. But here, you see that she and her husband are quite well aligned. And the same here, one thinks this is mother and daughter. See the characteristic, do you think, a mother and daughter? It's different, longer face. So, I guess mother, you know, older woman and friend on the Avenue. Now I have to tell you about some photographic technique here. You see how dark this face is?

[00:05:00]

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: I don't believe it's that dark in real life. I think I probably burnt it in so that—because what we know from painting and whatnot is that white, or brighter colors, always come to the foreground. And since the foreground is here, and this thing is over here, and she was probably looking at me in some degree, and anybody who looks at me from a frame, generally speaking, not always, but generally speaking, when they look at you, then it becomes a picture of you. If you're photographing them looking at you, then it refers back to you in a way which you don't—I don't necessarily want. So, I burnt her in so you can't see who she is and what she does and what she' perceiving so that we can get more impacted with our couple here. This is a good picture, but this is a better one.

And then I would go back downtown and smoke pot. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: Where was your darkroom set up at that time?

LARRY FINK: Where the hell was it in 1961? I think I must have been living in at 8 Amsterdam. Where was my darkroom, then? I never had a dark room in my kitchen, as many did. I always, somehow or another, figured out how to make the means to have a studio. So, this one, I don't know where the darkroom was, actually. I forgot. But I had been, after 8 Amsterdam Avenue, moved down to Christie Street—no, I moved to the Bowery first, 331 Bowery, a big back loft. And the darkroom was downstairs. And it was essentially a duplex loft, the upstairs was all for living. It might have been there. I spent glorious hours in the darkroom.

After the Bowery, there was Sixth Street, because the Bowery, the fire department came and got us out of there. But we actually resisted them. We became, possibly, without being heralded as such, the first resistance towards the fire department. You know, artists would live in lofts, illegally. But they were great places, and they would fix them up like they were home. And then every so often, in this case, in my case, the landlord, Seymour Finkelstein had six or seven buildings like this where he had artists, you know, positioned. And the fire department would come in every six months, or every year, and get rid of everybody. They'd have them exit because they were not living there legally. And so, and then Finkelstein would have an empty building or so for a while, and then he would rent them out again to others, without necessarily repairing them or anything.

So, after we went to court on constitutional grounds that you can't clear another person out of their home without due process, and we actually won. But since we were living in a place which was not fire appropriate, we still had to leave. We could come back in the day to work there, but we couldn't stay there overnight because it was not appropriate for safety reasons. And then I and then some others who turned around and sued the landlord, Finkelstein, for fraud. And he, of course, you know, put out settlement money and so, we weren't able to bring it all the way to court because he had bought some people out, and they copped to it. However we got a couple of bucks, and off I went to Sixth Street. That was around that time.

[00:10:08]

So, what else you want to talk about?

BEN GILLESPIE: Let's talk about the process of thinking through a retrospective book. Has that been—

LARRY FINK: Well, you know, you're looking here with 500 pictures on a table. And then, the box over there, there are 500 more, and probably 150, if not 200, went out with my magnificent design person, Yolanda Cuomo. And she took them away and she's now in the process of designing the book. How I chose them was that I didn't choose them. I couldn't. So, when I had all those pictures here around and all those scattered on the tables, and so on and so forth, and I would look at them, and I would come in every day and say, "This is no simple process. How in the world am I going to choose one picture over another?" and stuff like that, because each one of them have a story and a relationship to my life. But objectively speaking, since I'm a teacher of photography, I can objectify my own pictures as well as anybody else's, in terms of composition, qualities, intrinsic moment, you know, and so on and so forth.

But knowing each one of these pictures and taking each one of these pictures, and being so

close to them, I just couldn't make any choices. And I waited. I would shuffle the pictures around to see whether or not there's some kind of language in between the pictures, against the idea of visual inference, and did that a bit, but I couldn't come up with any kind of succinct continuity because I didn't want to do it chronologically as a book, I didn't want the book to be chronological oldies but goldies, with some stuff thrown in from the sides. I want it to be very different than that. I didn't know exactly what it wanted to be, but it needed not to be what was seen before in other books. Obviously, there will be some of that stuff in the retrospective book. But much of the stuff from the '60s and wherever has never been seen by anybody in life. And that's exciting.

So, as I said, I made no choices whatsoever until Yolanda came. And then she put the table in different ways, and she and her assistant, Bobbi, a very, very smart young woman, started to tear pictures out this way, that way, and I would say "No, no, no, no, no." And I'd say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes." And I'd say, "No, no, no, no, no, no, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." And based on my emotional property to the pictures included. But finally, they came up with a choice of stuff. And tomorrow we'll be getting a book design. So, essentially, the retrospective was chosen by Yolanda. And Yolanda had worked on other books with me, on boxing, and on fashion runway, and so on. And I know Yo for 40 years. She's an old trooper. She's done probably 50 books in the last 10 years. She really knows her shit.

And she said—at the end of the session, she said, "You know, Larry, you one of the best photographers I've ever worked with." And that, above any curator or whatnot like that, that would say an equivalent thing, they wouldn't say it so directly, it made me feel really good, because I know my work is good, but I didn't think it was—you know, I thought, "I'm just working."

BEN GILLESPIE: It also sounds like a great reflection on the strength of the relationship you've cultivated with her, in being open and adaptable.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. I mean, we don't hang out. She has—

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LARRY FINK: —you know, a family and husband, she lives up in Jersey someplace, and hardly talk. But she's so frontal and down to earth, and smart and has seen as much visual work as anybody in the world but is absolutely almost the antithetical relationship, not an intellectual. She's just—in terms of talking stuff out, she's not interested in getting into a lot of glad-handing and garble about a lot of ideas. She just goes about the business of pictures in a very practical and effective way.

BEN GILLESPIE: Tell me about that picture with Larry Gagosian.

LARRY FINK: Where is he? It's not Gagosian, actually. Did it say Gagosian on it? Oh, no, Aby Rosen.

BEN GILLESPIE: Aby Rosen, okay.

LARRY FINK: It's Aby Rosen. You know who Aby is.

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: I do, too.

BEN GILLESPIE: For some reason I thought it looked like Larry. [Laughs.]

LARRY FINK: Well, actually, it was just before he was going off to lunch with Gagosian, and I have some pictures elsewhere but they're not here, I think. They were not particularly great pictures. I don't know, I think I had an assignment to photograph him. This—my relationship to these guys, quite wealthy and quite landed guys, is that I always felt myself to be privileged to be in their midst, not because I wanted to be in their midst, but because I could see what they looked like and make a picture, or—and so, what about that picture? Which is pretty interesting, because he looks very smarmy, and he's looking at me straight, direct, talking about not having people looking at me, but the fact that he does look at me with a certain kind of dark and calculated judgment is the actual corpus of that picture. And then,

we have the Indian chief here, a painting that he bought and put on his head. And so, it's interesting that he was nothing like an Indian chief, even though he's a chief, but he's no Native American man, either. Aby, I think, came from a German family and his father was a real estate mogul, and he took over the mogul-ism, and took it further.

He's the guy who was responsible for the Seagram Building, and so on. He's a pretty big shot. And once again, I could have hung out with Larry and made friends with him. And indeed, there was part of me that wanted to because he represented money, of which I'd had none at that time. And it could have been that I would have made some sales, and it didn't happen, because when I went back downtown I wanted to stay back downtown. I didn't want to hang out with Larry Gagosian in his fancy digs. I'd have to pretend too much. I don't like pretending. But there he is.

The picture I had been interested in, this was an assignment for some magazine or another to go photograph whatever it was. So, here I am. The thing about this picture is, is how I remember so deeply how—what is that? Oh, it's the heater.

[00:05:08]

I'm always back there, here's this phalanx of people you know, moving around in their own socializing drama, but they were boring. And the energy that was skated in between were young sophisticated bougie kids. But all of a sudden in the middle of that, was this arm and, like, triangular thing, pops forward this reasonably empty faced, but beautiful, head, which in a strange way, in the midst of all this social interfacing and activity, she—does it look like repose? Does it look like a spiritual moment? Or does it look like plagiarized absence? One doesn't know exactly what it looks like, but it looks like something, and it ain't ordinary.

BEN GILLESPIE: It's such an interesting dynamic between the trio in the middle there.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, this thing is amazing.

BEN GILLESPIE: And we're getting triangles out front, otherwise, but all the light is pulling in there.

LARRY FINK: Flash is coming up. It's a good picture. It should have been chosen for the book. [Laughs.]

BEN GILLESPIE: You'll get your chance tomorrow. Another really ambiguous face, it looks like Jermaine Dupri at the Oscar party in LA.

LARRY FINK: Yeah. Yeah, I mean I don't know who the cat was, even though he must have been somebody because he was at the party. But once again, he looks at me, but he sure doesn't look at me like Gagosian or anybody, he looks at me with a kind of—there's two forms of energy in there. One is, like, coming at me aggressively, and the other one is like, "Why in fuck are you photographing me? Who am I to be signified like that?" you know. And also at the Oscar party, everybody expects to be photographed like, posed. Here comes the flash, man, camera, boom, smile. And I, of course, was, you know, the spy, if you will, in there in the room, even though I was dressed up in a tux and representing *Vanity Fair*, I was hardly a spy, but I was a spy in a way. And this cat probably saw the fact that I had this quasi-seditious ambience about me. And I was, in a way, outing him, and not in the way that he would like to be signified or outed, which is with a smile and a, "Here I am, the big shot." So, there's kind of an aggression and a trembling, at the same time.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, and the figure who intercedes, is that his bodyguard or someone else?

LARRY FINK: One doesn't think it's a bodyguard, but it's certainly a big form. Here's Joanie Snyder when we first bought the farm.

[Audio break.]

BEN GILLESPIE: I would say, do you want to repeat that?

LARRY FINK: Oh, yeah. This is Joanie Snyder with her raincoat and a hat, right here at the farm. We still have that table. And we just gotten there, pretty much, all these years ago. Hey, sweetheart.

MARTHA POSNER: Oh, okay—I didn't. Okay. So, it was one of the first times I went out

photographing with Larry and it was for a music gig. I think we were in the city, and some jazz club, and Larry was hired by someone, maybe *Vanity Fair* or I don't know, someone to photograph this gig, this musician. And we were there all night. And Larry's like at the side of the stage and he's dancing and this, and he has not taken his camera out at all. And I remember wondering when he's going to photograph. And it wasn't until the very end of the gig that he, you know, was ready to do it, because he was into the music, and clearly into the energy and everything else.

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But anyway. So that's the other thing. And then also on ad work, if I'd been with Larry, the people would always be very concerned that he wasn't shooting enough. And he would always have to overshoot so that they would be able to relax. He would get the picture relatively quickly. Are those different glasses than you had the other day?

BEN GILLESPIE: No, they're the same.

MARTHA POSNER: Oh, I guess the green shows better in the light.

BEN GILLESPIE: That's the trick.

MARTHA POSNER: That's the trick. All right. That's it, I'm just taking the trash out.

BEN GILLESPIE: Was that a common strategy, for you to wait until the end of the night to shoot at a show?

LARRY FINK: No. But with music, often, that would be the case, yeah. The music would take me out and I would be with it. And who knows exactly what the gig was and how important it was to make a picture after all. But Martha's experience is like, "What the fuck? What kind of professional is this?" You know? [Both laugh.]

BEN GILLESPIE: And you knew you could get the picture.

LARRY FINK: We went out, driving out to Western Pennsylvania where there was a concert of drive by truckers. And that was really early in our relationship. And we got there, working for *Rolling Stone*, and we got there a little late so we couldn't get through the fence, there was a fence, you know, big. But as soon as we got there and the security guys came, like this, that and the other thing, and I just went and said, "*Rolling Stone*," and they opened up the gates like this, you know, and let us come through to the stage, you know, parked the car right behind the stage, you know? I mean, you don't get that privilege too much, you know, but if you're working for *Rolling Stone*, and you're going to be, basically, the promotional agent, the photographer, you know, for the crew, like that. And Martha was, like, quite amazed because they were in the midst of all of this stuff. And it was just—and she came from not that kind of opportunity at all since she's actually, even with all her force and her wisdom, and actual nobility, she's actually quite respectful of power. She's not part of it. I am. I'm power itself.

BEN GILLESPIE: I know that being a photographer has afforded you so many chances to be in the middle of the action, especially for music and so on. It's amazing to continue to have that, and then to have an excuse to be up close and personal.

LARRY FINK: Yeah, no. Exactly. That's, I mean, the thing is, I was interested in everything, but it wasn't—I never, never, never, never stood in the crowd, you know, in terms of like a big concert or something like that, I was immediately going backstage. And being a photographer allowed me to do that, being a photographer with credentials, let's put it that way. Because being a photographer, not necessarily, everybody today is a photographer with a camera, you know, as today, and even yesterday, they didn't want anybody backstage or anyone in close proximity to the act, or the star. But the photographer from an institution, from *Rolling Stone* or from *Vanity Fair* or like that, immediately, you're part of the superstructure and you're a necessary cog in the wheel of communication for whatever it is that they want to sell. And so, basically, I took advantage of that deeply. And even times when I wasn't working. I would just—if I wanted to get someplace and go backstage, or, you know, in the front row, I would just flash my press card, and get there. I don't like to be sur—

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LARRY FINK: —rounded by people with nothing to do. I don't hang out very well, expect at home. This picture here, the Wall Street picture, Wall Street is Wall Street. It's taken in the '60s, couldn't be today. But it was a group called the Black Mask, sort of a splinter from the more orthodox revolutionaries at Columbia University, and so on and so forth at that time. And they took it upon themselves to get all dressed up with, you know, black masks, and skulls, and walk on down to Wall Street, which they did, and I followed them. And I was only, probably, 20, but I see how, in all of these pictures, how comprehensive I was, in terms of finding the scenarios where the contradictions were impacted, the bourgeois, and things like that, Wall Street, Wall Street.

This guy, very important to have this thing going that way, with no attention to this at all, and the woman reading the literature that they probably gave out, peaceful in her own scenario, and here's this aggressive force coming forward. This is part of the—like this is what they looked like on the avenue. So cool. But anyhow, as a young photographer, I really, really covered my bases. I wasn't trained to do that. I didn't go to classes to see how to be a journalist. I just knew how to be a journalist, because life is nothing but a journal. If you don't know how to enter it, understand it, analyze it, and appreciate it deeply, you've missed out.

These prints come actually from Italy, they're not something I would print. But they're not bad.

BEN GILLESPIE: So, were you still getting mentored by Lisette at this time? Would you bring her pictures and talk about them? Or was it really just sitting and—

LARRY FINK: We would just sit and chat, and we became friends and we'd just hang out. But I—after a certain point, I never brought her any pictures. I studied with her in terms of bringing her pictures for about a year and that was only maybe four times, five times. And then, when my mother came into town, who was you know, a left wing bougie gal, or fancy gal, and Lisette loved her because she was the same in many ways, even though she was much more talented than our mom, and much more broad in a world way, worldly way, but she really liked my mom because she was a piece of work.

So, she would come out to Long Island. I would drive her out to Long Island, she'd hang out for a day or so. That was kind of fun. Lisette would say "Darling," even to my mother. She would say, "Darling, what is it that you are thinking about?" Lisette was beautiful. And Lisette, at a certain point, when I started to become more popular as a photographer as time went on, she started to be—and my compositions were getting much more succinct and complex and such like that, she started to become very critical in my work. She called me a mannerist. And now, I think that's a great thing to be called.

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Mannerism is a beautiful period of aesthetics. But she did so in a way which was very critical because she felt that I was straying away from the guttural purity of what she felt my work should be. And then, unfortunately, with Lisette—did we record this the other day? She had a dear friend named Felicia Sachs, who was a psychotherapist, Riesen [00:05:46] and I was given to Felicia by Joan Snyder because I was smoking pot and Joanie didn't like it, and she figured maybe I could get cured. And I did for a while, but it didn't work. But Felicia at a certain point, when I was starting to move into that thing called transference, said, "You should never see Lisette again, she's very bad for you." And she was Lisette's good friend. But she did that. And indeed, I paid attention, which is my foolish, you know, decision or non-decision, may the case be.

And so, for years I didn't see Lisette. And then I stopped Felicia because I felt she was all too controlling, and then I went upon my pot smoking way, my life force, and I did reunite with Lisette before she died, but I missed—and we were buddies. we were really, you know, like, we would really confer. She liked me a lot. I loved her. But my therapist was the intimate antagonist to our relationship, which was really quite profound.

This picture here, not a great picture, but it is a preamble to the *Social Graces* fancies. Had I done it in *Social Graces* times, this would be more articulated in this, and so on and so forth. But it's much to do about very, very high styled hair and very, very sallow look off from the bourgeoisie. This is a picture here that I really, really like. The dog's name was Rose. And we used to—I had a really awful snowmobile and she would track off to the front road with me,

I'd be on my snowmobile and she'd, you know, be flying along in the weeds. And this picture is so delicate, and all of a sudden, you're surprised by this flying dog. I've always liked this one. I thought it should be in the—I mean, a lot of these pictures could be in the book, you know?

Then you talk about energy force. To the common eye, this is just a group of, you know, swing chairs, you know. But I positioned myself so that they seemed to dance around a bit. This is a straight line. This is a curved line. This is a line that goes this way and that way. And then, here's the supreme being on the wall. It was important, but more important is this gestating group of chairs, which for me, take on a kind of a dance-like kind of quality, more muscular than ballet for sure.

BEN GILLESPIE: And this was in Phoenix City, Alabama?

LARRY FINK: Mm-hmm.

[00:10:00]

It was some story. I was out on a gig. This wasn't the gig, but it might have been when I was going across the country photographing poverty for Graydon Carter at *Vanity Fair.* I like this picture. I just love it when you can take inanimate stuff which can be utterly boring, and give it a cadence, and a sense of, if not life, but muscular structure. How could you have this elegant peacock on my farm?

BEN GILLESPIE: What was the peacock's name?

LARRY FINK: I don't know. That was a beauty, though. Yeah, with these funky buildings and stuff, you don't expect you'd usually have peacocks when you'd have all kinds of flora and glory, and it's like, "Hey what the fuck is this?" This is a working-class peacock, you know?

I don't know if this ever got in a book. This is the guy who introduced me to *Social Graces* in many ways. He was an alcoholic, and he loved to drink, obviously, and was a member of the —I guess this was the Elks, or one of those kinds of clubs. And we became friends and hung out with him a lot. And he took me to the American Legion where this was photographed, and to the Deck club, and this club, and like that, and this bar, and that bar. And so, I was—basically, he was my subject matter manager. I remember coming home from the bars, man, I will be seeing four lines on the highway. Fortunately, in those days, there wasn't much traffic around because I was really endangered. I would get so fucking drunk. Yeah, that's the American Legion with Lud Berkeley.

BEN GILLESPIE: Have you found that people in spaces like the Elks Club would more generally respond differently to the camera in their midst, now? Has that changed significantly over your career?

LARRY FINK: Well, I haven't photographed those folks now in a long time, so I don't know anything about them now. But people's relationship to photography has changed profoundly, because we live in a celebrity culture. When you point to—well, what happens? Since I have —my urge, and my impulse, is to photograph candidly, it became almost impossible because as soon as people, wherever you would go out to photograph, or see a camera and somebody working it, they want to pose for you. In the old days, they'd pose for a moment in time, then go on with their business. But now, there's all kinds of primp and pomp. And it's a huge pain in the ass. Or they'll do this, some kind of, whatever that symbol is, you know. And so, everybody—as soon as the camera comes out, people, you know, take on a posture. And that's changed, big time.

Once upon a time in the '60s and stuff when everybody—when you'd go out in the Avenue to photograph, nobody ever suspected anything except that you were a little bit unique. Now you're part of the press and you're hated or loved. It's not all—

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LARRY FINK: —days. You found the same talk from other photographers, for sure.

BEN GILLESPIE: Yeah, the ubiquity of the camera and the photographic image has definitely

reshaped our relationship and awareness, just fundamentally. Even friends' children, now, how familiar they are, immediately, with the apparatus, and posing, and thinking about, "We need a good take."

LARRY FINK: Yeah. I mean, everybody wanted to pose and look good in a picture forever and ever and ever, that's for sure, but not quite so much in this kind of theatrical, dramatic, you know, and hungry fashion. The hunger, basically, is the thing that fuels that kind of posing. "I am. I exist. I look like somebody else." And that's also true, too, is that people want to look like somebody else, some star that they admire, or come up to. So, "Man, I can look like Jay-Z," you know, rather than be yourself. "Who am I? Why am I important? I'm only important if I would assume a posture, which was ordained in a way by its stardom." I think it's very sad. I think it's basically—really, all of this stuff is just de personal, I think, in a big way.

Well, we talked about Aby Rosen, let's talk about Bill Kunstler. Bill Kunstler was an incredible revolutionary lawyer with, not an empire like Aby had, except he had an empire of intellectual behavior and radical disseminating structure. He was the lawyer for the Chicago Seven, he was lawyer for the Black Panthers, lawyer for anybody you can think of on the left. And he was good. He was a great orator. He was extremely thoughtful. And egoistic. And my sister used to work in accordance with him and she was not egoistic, nor was she—she was also not a great orator, but a great lawyer in the sense of she humanized the legal, the construct of conversation, and oftentimes, won her case because she humanized it.

She had a client by the name of—Bill didn't have the client—Albert Victory, who was in jail for some odd thing, kind of a gangster kind of a guy, but a good guy. And he was out for a little while, but they were going to go get him again. And sister Liz said, "Albert, go get yourself arrested. I'll get you out." [Laughs.] And that's exactly what happened. He got himself arrested because they wanted him, and she fought the case, and brought it to the court, and he was free. And he's free today. He's in California. I have to call him one of these days. I haven't talked to him in a couple years. He's a good guy, Albert Victory.

This is definitely two different types of potbellies.

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: That's what I was interested in, really, was this fucking belly. Yeah, I like all this, the smoke and dust, but it was the belly that really drew me into the picture. This guy, by the way, it was a beautiful thing and totally religious picture. But he was just a guy who was begging for coins in the subway down in New York on the first platform where you would then go to the second platform, and then down to the subway.

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And one can photograph him any number of different ways. But his hands were like an El Greco painting. And that's when Martha was talking before about the painterly references. Getting out of bounds, out of bounds. Here's a picture of Peter Brooks—oh, it's got caught in the chair?

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm. I'll fix it.

LARRY FINK: This is probably 1957, '58, and that's Peter Brooks in his Model A Ford with all kinds of paintings strapped to the side. And he took off across America, to drive all around America for several months. Peter Brooks came from Van Wyck Brooks family. And he was a painter, a bad one, actually, but a romantic one for sure. He had a low voice and rolled his own cigarettes.

BEN GILLESPIE: I know the Soyers and the realists we talked about, then, already how American social realism was important in your formative years, we've talked about abstraction in the '50s and '60s, and the energy of the canvas, and seeing how that might work in the picture format. Are there artists who have continued to inspire you or there have been new founts of discovery for you as you've gone along, anyone in particular?

LARRY FINK: Well, for sure, Philip Guston. I'm going to sit down, now.

BEN GILLESPIE: Okay.

LARRY FINK: I didn't know Phillip, well, at all. We only had a couple of conversations here and there. But what we were talking about isn't important for here. But his paintings, and his transformation were glorious, you know, from the most incredible color field abstraction, but with the same palette as what he had originally when he was doing social, you know, social realism stuff. Very political social realism, because he was coming out of a left position. And when he came back to realism, kind of a cartoonish realism, with the same palette that he had been affecting all the while, but with the level of absurdity, and comedy, and the whole art world went up in flames when he did that. Critics, it was galleries, it was anybody else, would say, "What the fuck is this? This is bullshit." And when I first saw it, I said, "Whoa, this is extremely good."

But once again, I guess what might differentiate me from others is that I really have a keen eye on energy, not on style. I know about it but that's not the important thing. The important thing is what is the energy, the intrinsic energies that drives a person to use a style or a palette, or a way of drawing, or a line? What makes the painting tick is what makes the person tick. And if the person isn't ticking, the painting ain't ticking, either. So, that's one of the concerns I have about a lot of younger artists today, is that they are careerists. There's nothing wrong with wanting a career, for sure, but being a careerist artist is in opposition to what art is supposed to be for.

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Arts is supposed to be after mysteries, not after strategies for advancement. And some of the art, and I'm not really so blessed with being able to see much of it because I'm not going to New York, and I don't go to gallery shows, and so on and so forth. I'm not going to run around and buy 1,000 books for $1,000, but I do know, just from what I see, is that a lot of folks, young folks out there who are trying to do something a little different than somebody else, or some style a little bit different so they would be able to get it, get their own gallery and the gallery show and be talked about and so on, that's not the point of art. The point of art always was to delegate your consciousness into trying to solve the problems and mysteries, of the Lord, or spirits, or something, not the problems of career.

So, that's, I think, probably an elementary change which has come about now. Did you find that, too?

BEN GILLESPIE: I was just looking at an oral history that was conducted last year with Myra Greene, who's an artist who uses photography and textiles. She's in Atlanta. And she described this as a teaching problem, where, "How do you encourage self-actualization? How am I telling you that you need to find your own problems, and then figure out your own solutions? You shouldn't be copying me. I don't want to send you out there to do the style of someone else, I want you to go out there and build your own style." I guess to my mind, it comes hand in hand with the—just the prevalence and the permeation of visual culture, where it's easy to—we learn about the styles in art history, and we're always looking with that kind of serial eye, to be like, "Oh, this stroke puts it in this sort of school or this subject matter." And sometimes that hyper awareness is really a straitjacket or confining. And sometimes constraint can be really powerful, you know, you go on a strategy someone wants you to shoot in Italy, and so you're like, "Okay, I'm going to be there, there'll be a shoot, and I'm going to find a way through it," and then other times you can be laden with the baggage of so much has already been done, I'm over overly aware of it.

LARRY FINK: Well, that's really interesting, you know, because now here I am like, fuck, I'm going to be 82. Anyhow, now I start to get referential. It's a pain in the ass. Because before, I had much more of a passion for what photographs of life in front of me could do, in terms of how I could add to the culture, or satisfy the whims of collective, or whatever, you know, or just basically be part of the ladder that I'm perpetually climbing to find out what human meaning is, how I fit into that. But nowadays, because I've seen so fucking much, not only of other pictures, of other photographers or of painters, but my own work, that when I pick the camera up—and this is exactly what I tell students not to do because some students are very referential because they've been taught a lot of different, you know, workers and stuff, and some teachers will even go out and say, "Photograph in the style of Cartier-Bresson, go photograph in the style of Robert Frank, photograph in the style of whomever."

I don't think that's a good lesson. I think that that's an easy job for the teacher to do. The harder job is to be able to be in a place where you're just asking for information about the student and see whether they can profit from their own, what's the word, confession. But

nevertheless, back to me, to this referentialism, it's burdensome, because I used to say and still believe that the photography isn't important, it's what the experience is in front of you. But when the experience looks like a photograph of that—

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LARRY FINK: —similar experience in the past tense, and you immediately look at the experience in front of you with all kinds of referential, you know, overtones, pretty much, I have to really go [noise of exertion] [00:00:19] and muscle my way through it because it basically puts a forcefield in front of me, which I don't want, but it's just there because I had so much fucking knowledge. And I'm not really an intellectual, I don't have that kind of knowledge where everything is particular and pedantic, but I do know stuff, and so, it's problematic.

So, anyhow. Down there, in Forks County, it's a while, about 15 miles, seven miles from here, it's something called Forks. And it's house, by house, by house, by house, by house, by house, it's just, you know, a suburban thing. But it's not a luxurious suburb. It's like a house, by house, by house, by house. And I've always been attracted to it, negatively, you know, and thinking maybe I would photograph that, but I have no access into the inner circle, meaning I don't know the families. And I'd have to—if I wanted to do it, I would have to get involved with the families. And that would mean that I have to go knock on doors and say, "Hi, I'm Larry Fink, the photographer down the street. Do you mind if I make a picture of your backyard event?" But I would put them in context with all of these 17 other houses of the same ilk, you know, the conformity factor is unbelievable.

But then again, this family, I'm sure, if they're reasonable family, have their own spontaneous interchange and combustion. So, I'm interested in seeing if I can humanize something which is actually is there to dehumanize you, except it might be not, because it's your first home. And that humanizes you, because you have something, you can hold on to something. So, I think, you know, so that is a lot of contrary events, you know, in the mind of many. The doctor that I work with for my neck, for my spine, for pain, a pain management doctor, he's an Indian guy, it seems. And I went up there last week to get some therapy or whatever. And he told me that he lived over here in Forks. So, I was just sitting in bed the other night saying, "Shit, that's cool. Maybe next time I see him, I should ask him whether or not I can come photograph his family down there, or him, or whatever. That might give me an entryway because I'm sure that he'll be networking, you know, with the neighbors, but maybe not. We don't know." But it opened up something for me.

So, that. And I want to photograph locally now because there's no reason to photograph internationally. I've done that and nobody wants me to. I'm not going to be traveling at my expense to do something which is exotic, because nothing is exotic. But so, I want to do that. I want to photograph the fire department here in Martins Creek, and guys, and maybe even Martins Creek as a neighborhood itself, the older people and stuff. We'll see. But I'm going to start, I'm on the trail of working again, sniffing it out because I haven't worked really in a year or so. And so, it's time to get active. You being here isn't such a bad thing.

BEN GILLESPIE: I was just thinking about that, the burden of knowledge and referentialism as you were talking about it, because we've been talking so much about music and literature, and reference in music can be so generative. I mean Shostakovich and how those late symphonies can take the theme from William Tell Overture and transform it into something completely new. And he's always cannibalizing his own work [laughs] to brilliant effect, being able to pull those themes and find different colors in them, that you might not have caught before because there's so much to be done with sequence, with grammar. And you've got a pretty good orchestra here. You've got so many different parts that can sing together.

[00:05:00]

LARRY FINK: Do you want to sing?

BEN GILLESPIE: I know you forgot your harmonica today.

BEN GILLESPIE: No. Yeah. Those are actually original Daumier prints. He was a big influence on me, Honoré, Daumier. And I mostly saw his drawings and his prints and those kinds of

political kinds, but he was a motherfucker of a painter, really. I mean very, very saturated. And way outside of the realm of this kind of, you know, literal description. He really got into the saturation of paint. And the same thing with Moses Soyer, my old buddy, you know. I was looking at that book the other day, you know, it's saturated with paint, really. And he was so anti-abstract expressionism, but ultimately, what Moses was doing at a certain point was equally as abstract, and equally as expressionistic, painterly-wise, as what Rauschenberg was doing, except he wasn't getting Coke bottles and other kinds of cultural references in his style.

So. Do you see that that trio up there, Ben?

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: That was me at my bar mitzvah.

BEN GILLESPIE: Oh, wow. Was that out on Long Island?

LARRY FINK: Yeah. And my dad, my mom, and Larry and his one button suit, which they fought against, they fought me for. It was powder blue. But I was a sad hipster. [Both laugh.] I actually remember that moment. At the aftermath, we had a party in the only temple we had in West Hampstead, which was in a Quonset hut, a big airplane—and the rabbi was a racist because we had hired a band which was all Black, quite hip, some good jazz players. When they came into the door, the rabbi ran to the door and said, "You can't come in here." My mother got wind of that, "Fuck you That's our band, and our friends. Now, they're going to come right in here." The rabbi went, Rabbi Ballard [00:08:45] his name was, went—in the midst of all of that kind of conflict, I was quivering in my powder blue suit. The event went over and then the party and I remember making my way up to the podium at the party. shy and awkward, disheveled, beleaguered by being torn in so many different directions. When I got home I took off that suit really quickly.

Nina, see that picture of the soldier?

BEN GILLESPIE: Mm-hmm.

LARRY FINK: Nina Berman is the photographer's name. And that poor devil, he was supposed to marry that gal, but then the military came around and he did that, and he went off to the military and he got himself maimed. And that's an extraordinary photograph of war, its claim upon you, and this lovely, poor, obliging young woman going forward. I'm led to understand that they divorced.

[00:10:28]

And the little guy in the leather frame over there was me. Silly little doofus. Where else do you want to go?

BEN GILLESPIE: I think we're probably at a good moment for closing thoughts.

LARRY FINK: Okay.

BEN GILLESPIE: We're in a studio that, those Daumiers are great on the wall.

LARRY FINK: The who?

BEN GILLESPIE: The Daumiers that you were already pointing out. So, it's a beautiful day on your farm in Martins Creek, you've been reflecting on your long career. What else are you looking forward to in this moment?

LARRY FINK: Well, we have a retrospective book on the way. What I'm looking forward to is loving my wife as I do forever and ever, until I die, and giving her more peace of mind than she actually has now because she has an immense amount of responsibilities. Because, as I said before, she handles the finances that I make, and she doesn't, but I do. But she handles them, and it's a real fucking belligerent pain in the ass, the bureaucracy. It seems that every day something comes in from somewhere, A, wanting money, B, wanting the information, C, wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting something. And she has to get on the phone with these people, and they put her on hold for 17 hours, you know, it's a common experience.

So, the idea is, editorially speaking, of automation, you know, basically is totally inefficient.

Because when you had a person on the phone, and they have, you know, the rules and the regulations in front of them, they could say, "Oh, yeah, this, this, this, this, this," and you have a conversation, you feel like you're humanizing, you solve the problem, whereas when you—anyhow, that's not about me. That's about just inherent in—which is—anyhow, so I'm looking forward to living with Martha forever.

I'm looking forward to hanging out with my grandson. As he gets older, he gets more polite and more cogent. I have a strangely unsentimental or unifamilial way of looking at him. I'm not by definition in love with my grandson, just because he's my grandson, even though I should be, but I'm not. And at first, when he came around, he was a spiky little doofus. And I just didn't like him at all, I'd rather not see him. But I would see him, certainly, because he's part of my daughter, who I really love. And my daughter and I have the same kind of mindset, which is to say that we can see a lot of things. She's more intelligent than I am, I think, and what we can see, we can see ourselves inside the scenario. So, when we look at people, we also look at ourselves.

In other words, our consciousness is from behind our head, not in our head, but behind our head, so we're looking at ourselves, looking at the others, talking to the others, being of the others, and stuff like that.

[00:15:00]

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LARRY FINK: It's an existentialism which is highly subjective but at the same time objectifies you within the scenario. Martha doesn't have that. Joanie Snyder doesn't have that. But Molly does, because I have it, and she inherited it, thankfully or horribly, because it's a crazy way to see. But it's the thing that probably made me a photographer, a good one, because it's not just about the event in front of you, it's about you as part of the event, because you're perceiving the event, and you click out of a relationship between all things. That's why I wouldn't—I'm not a good photo journalist because I would get on a story and do all the photojournalistic things, but I'd be looking for, you know, a bow tie over here, or a—whatever, you know, sensual elements, much more involved with sensual elements in life than the necessary story. Molly has that. And I love her for it. We have a lot of fun together because we click.

So, I'm looking forward to living my life out with my kid, grandson, too, but the kid. And I'm looking forward to getting this retrospective book done. And we're in the process of doing it right now. And I'm looking forward to thinking that—or I'm thinking that when I look forward—when it does come out, that it may create a stir. And I'm looking forward to the stir. At my age and with my reputation, I should be looking forward to a museum show of a grand proportion. But nobody's come forward on that level, not to any chagrin on my part, but to minor frustration.

In today's day, the museums and the institutions are making up for time spent negatively which is to say, time spent avoiding Black culture, and Black photographers, or Black painters or what have you, and women culture, and women's painters, or Puerto Rico, anything to do with third world stuff. And indeed, that's correct to do, at this point, but it is a big pain in the ass. Not only for me not having a show or not being offered a show right away, but for many people who are quality-based because some of the folks that they come in from the different currencies are not that good. But they're there, so they should be, you know, applauded within their own rights. Sometimes criteria drops down, but they'll be, you know, the popular trends.

Anyhow, I'm looking forward to thinking that maybe the retrospective book will stimulate some kinds of opportunities, like having that big show. Because even though—if I die before I have a huge, big museum show, there'll be one right after my death. [Laughs.] And Martha will—and my prices and pictures and stuff like that will go up appropriately, proportionately, go up from 10 grand to 40 grand in a hurry. I just saw a Ming Smith who had a show at the MoMA, good photographer, and her pictures sell for 30,000 bucks a piece. And mine don't do that and I'm older than she is. But it's the way the market works around. So, I'm thinking that Martha—if when I die, and if I had—whatever and how, I'm thankful for the fact that I'll be able to leave behind a small empire that my wife and my kid will be able to appropriate and live on, comfortably. That I like.

[00:05:07]

I'm looking forward to the world revolution which isn't going to come. [Laughs.] And I'm looking forward for people to be kind to each other, which probably won't come either. That's what Bertrand Russell said. And all of my philosophical meanderings and wizen thoughts and informational constructs, I've come down to a conclusion that the only thing that we'd have to do in order to save the world and improve it some is to be kind to each other. But unfortunately, human beings are very, very mean-spirited, and can't be very kind, as well, clearly. But I think that the proportions are out of whack. Look at this, we have so many wars across the world, more so than ever before. But that also might be because of communication systems. We know more about these things. Before, they were localized and now they're internationalized. I don't know if that does us any good, but it certainly gives us things to think about and to be frightened of. So, I look forward to, not a brave new world, I look forward to the potential for rekindling hope amongst people. But I don't know when that'll come.

BEN GILLESPIE: I think on that hopeful but unsure note, which is the way each of us travels through the world, this is a great time to call it. So, this is the end of the interview.

LARRY FINK: Okay, cool.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]