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Oral history interview with Steven Englander, 2007 Sept. 7-Oct. 10

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Steven Englander on September 7, 2007 and October 10, 2007. The interview took place at ABC No Rio in New York City, New York, and was conducted by Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was funded by Art Spaces Archives Project (AS-AP).

Steven Englander and Liza Kirwin have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

LIZA KIRWIN: This is Liza Kirwin. I'm at ABC No Rio, 156 Rivington Street in New York City, and talking with Steven Englander -

STEVEN ENGLANDER: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: The current director of ABC No Rio. I just wanted to start with a little biographical background on you. Where were you born, when -

MR. ENGLANDER: I was born in 1961, in Chicago and my father then went into the service. And I guess when I was about three or four years old they moved to Racine, Wisconsin, which was where I was raised. I was actually like a film brat. I ended up going to NYU film school, but during junior high and high school I was like a little film geek. I would go to the Oriental theater in Milwaukee to see all the classic films back in the days when they still had repertory theaters and you could see the Janus films and all the European films and the midnight movie-type things.

And then I also used to go to the University of Wisconsin, Parkside, where they had all sorts of old films on video. I would actually drag a bunch of my friends down there, and you know, you'd party on the trip down and then I would show them odd films I'd stumbled along. From Reefer Madness to Un Chien Andalou [a film directed by Luis Buñ uel]. So I was like a little film geek in my teens, and ended up wanting to go to film school. And I could have gone to the West Coast schools. I also got accepted at NYU, so for me it ultimately was what city do I want to move to. And New York for whatever reason, the mythology of it had a lot of attraction for me. So I ended up coming to New York.

MS. KIRWIN: What year was that?

MR. ENGLANDER: That was 19 - I think 1980. 1979 actually.

MS. KIRWIN: And that was to attend school?

MR. ENGLANDER: NYU, and I was a film student there. So NYU is like well reviled in the - at least in the neighborhood now. It's a lot different now than when I was there. Back when I was there it was still mostly a commuter school and they owned a lot less property in the neighborhood and they weren't seen as sort of an enemy of the community they way they are now because they're building so much.

Anyway, I always copped to it, even when I'm in the company of people who are in the midst of reviling NYU. I had a good time there. I actually thought it was a good program and a good school. So as a kid I'd always dreamed about coming to New York, or at least getting out of the Midwest, so I came to New York. Like I said, I was a film brat.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you aspire to make films at that time?

MR. ENGLANDER: I did, and I made some and I guess during, let's say the first 10 years of being in New York I was a student. And then when I got out of school I spent 10 to 15 years working in the business on and off, just to make money. And then also did a number of small media projects, but none of my larger things got off the ground. And then during the period when they weren't getting off the ground, and after coming out of school I started reading about reading situationist material, and started getting personally like a larger critique of media in general. So I don't know what actually happened. Did I lose interest in film because I was sympathetic with the spectacle in the world that media plays in society, or was I open to that because I was never able to get my projects off the ground. You know what I mean? What was it? Or did I not try enough because I was ambivalent about - you know.

But whatever happened, simultaneously with never really being able to get my own projects off the ground, and being more open to a larger and comprehensive critique of media and the role it plays in society. They sort of went together and probably influenced each other. And then for a while I just worked in the industry. And I did other projects, political work and things, and I actually found it, you know - you could work 8 to 10 days a month, and if you lived modestly you could have all sorts of free time to work on all your other projects.

MS. KIRWIN: What sort of political things?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, I was involved with anarchist groups back in the mid-to-late '80s.

MS. KIRWIN: Which groups?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, there was the Anarchist Switchboard, the Libertarian Book Club, and then some projects that were actually just sort of default things of a few people getting together to do some sort of -

MS. KIRWIN: They didn't have a name?

MR. ENGLANDER: Didn't have a name. Actually it had a made-up name, like the Maximalists. But it was almost - it was like a quasi-joke.

MS. KIRWIN: A one-time thing?

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. The Maximalists. No, we did a few things but it wasn't meant to last. There was no effort to sort of institutionalize them.

So I got involved in that sort of stuff and was, you know, just working in the business.

MS. KIRWIN: In what way were you involved with them?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, the Libertarian Book was an anarchist book club, so to speak, and they existed to promote the ideas and give public forums and things like that. The Anarchist Switchboard was actually a space in the mid-to-late '80s on the Lower East Side, and during that period, when there was like a good amount of like ferment in the neighborhood, it was sort of a little mini compressed '60s within a period of about five or six years down here, the space was used for presentations, workshops, meetings, and people coming by were individuals involved in squatters movement at the time, freelance anarchists and radicals, other people who were organizing the neighborhood but who might not necessarily have identified themselves politically in a real specific way.

MS. KIRWIN: Those groups that you worked with, was there one that you identified with more closely?

MR. ENGLANDER: At that time it was probably the Anarchist Switchboard.

MS. KIRWIN: Why?

MR. ENGLANDER: I was actually one of the few people who was responsible for keeping it going. Like it was a bunch of - you know what I mean? I was actually one of the responsible ones who would open it up and lock it up, and I would actually pay for the - pay the rent. I was one of the few people who contributed money to make sure that it could stay there. I mean, it was a tiny little cellar thing. It was dark and damp -

MS. KIRWIN: Where was it?

MR. ENGLANDER: It was on 9th Street between First and Second Avenues. And then eventually it got turned over to some younger kids and it went bust. It ended up just turning into a sort of crash pad. It got a bit exasperating and like a lot of times what happens is the more responsible people get fed up and walk away, like myself, and then it just spiraled down and they eventually got kicked out. For not paying the rent.

MS. KIRWIN: Were you involved with Colab at this time?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I was actually never involved with Colab, and they're actually sort of a generation of, you know - they're a generation beyond me, so I wasn't actually even familiar with them, even when I'd started coming around the ABC No Rio, because at that point I started coming by here as like a patron to go to events, probably in 1986 or 1987. And it was a little bit different because you'd already gone through the part where it was like, you know, some of the Colab artists who had founded the place had already moved on. And Jack [Waters] and Peter [Cramer], who were doing stuff here during the period of like East Village performance art, had also already moved on. They were still involved. I think they were on the board of directors. They were on the board of directors at the time, but there was a different person who was actually running the day to day operations, Lou Acierno.

The signature event at that time was actually Matthew Courtney's wide-open cabaret, which was probably one of the first places, along with the Nuyoricans that brought about like performance poetry, and a few years later on, you know, they had poetry readings on MTV, you know. So it was Matthew Courtney's thing which would probably led to that, and there were all sorts of people who would come by to this event and either do performance poetry or performance or music, or just political ranting and raving. It was probably like a little mini scene of maybe, 50 to 100 people who would regularly come by to do stuff at this event.

MS. KIRWIN: Was it a regularly scheduled event?

MR. ENGLANDER: It was every Sunday evening. So it went on for about, I think -

MS. KIRWIN: Was this when Peter and Jack were -

MR. ENGLANDER: When they were on the board, but they weren't the directors at the time. The director was Lou Acierno.

So when I first started coming by, it was actually different than when Jack and Peter had come on. And this Matthew Courtney thing was really the signature event. It was the thing that most people knew -

MS. KIRWIN: Was that the thing that drew you in?

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. I heard about it and I'd come by to see him. So I had read some. At the time I wasn't writing that much fiction or anything, so a lot of - I'd like actually came to just be here. And like I said, it was during this period around the Tompkins Square Park riots. There was all this sort of political activity in the neighborhood. So there was actually like a sort of tangible buzz that was going on, you know, within this, you know, four to six-year period from 1986 or '87 through 1991 or '92. There were squatters and artists and things. Something like that would never be repeated, I think, because so many of the people - when I first started coming by here, even though at the time, sometimes I lived in the neighborhood and sometimes didn't, but the majority of people who did stuff here lived in the neighborhood, and that's not the case now.

The majority of people who do stuff here now, whether it's performing or they're volunteers here, can't afford to live in the neighborhood. The ones who do are the older ones like myself, so - who know enough people, or like fall into a situation. In general I'm very sympathetic to young people. I don't know how they can do it now. Like I said, when I was young I could work 10 days a month and have like all this free time. When I tell that to people, their eyes just open. They just can't imagine being able to like work that little and pay your rent and be able to do all your stuff.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes. What were you first impressions of this place?

MR. ENGLANDER: I probably was - when I first stepped in the door, it's probably a little bit of apprehensive, and it was more imposing then than it is now.

MS. KIRWIN: In what way?

MR. ENGLANDER: Just in terms of it was more rundown when you were to walk in, believe it or not.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you describe it?

MR. ENGLANDER: By the time I had come by, the plate glass window had long been gone and there was a mural out front, but it was - it just was a lot less clean and, you know, it just had a more rundown quality to it. I mean, even today somebody still, like one of my volunteers overheard somebody characterizing the place as an art house crack house. And it was more of that in the mid-to-late '80s when I had come by. Also the neighborhood was a lot different and there was more abandonment, there were less people on the street so it had more of an urban blight quality to it than it does now.

It took 10 years for gentrification to move from above Houston Street to below Houston Street, so down here it didn't really start happening until about early-to-mid-'90s, and then since 2000-the pace of gentrification seems to be increasing exponentially. So it was more imposing just to walk through the neighborhood to get here back then. And then the state of decrepitude of the building was even, you know, seemed even more so. It was just dirty and littered and things like that.

And then once you got inside, though, if it was wintertime you'd be, you know, the heat worked. A lot of times I came by and it was filled with people, so once you got into the room you were sort of enveloped by literal and metaphorical warmth because everybody there was having a good time and everybody was glad to see each other. There was like a positive vibe, a very positive energy that went on, so when you did walk into Matthew Courtney's event you actually felt somewhat embraced by it and the people who were there at the time. It wasn't like going to some club where everybody's sort of stand-offish and cooler or hipper than thou. There was

no sense of that sort of thing going on. It was almost like walking into a - you know a room of a hugely extended family of people, all getting together.

And then Matthew Courtney was also like a very warm and charismatic person who set the tone of the whole place. So a lot of people have extremely fond memories of coming to his event and participating in his event. And that was my introduction to the place. And then over time I had gotten to know Lou Acierno, who was the director at the time. We had a lot of things in common - media production, critique of media - and I think it was in 1990 he went to Hamburg [Kunstlerhaus in Hamburg, Germany] to do a show and asked if I would baby-sit the place while he was gone, which I agreed to do.

MS. KIRWIN: He went to Hamburg to do that show -

MR. ENGLANDER: The "10 years, Seven Days," 7 days with Jack and Peter and those guys. And then when he came back he asked if I wanted to stay here. He wanted more time to do other things, so we became co-directors.

MS. KIRWIN: And that was 1990?

MR. ENGLANDER: That was 1990. Yes, 1990 was probably - yes, it was the autumn of 1990 that they went away. Then when he came back, he asked if I wanted to be the co-director because he wanted more time to work on some of his own stuff, and I agreed to do it. So that's how I first got officially involved.

MS. KIRWIN: Had you gone to any meetings at ABC No Rio prior to that?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I hadn't.

MS. KIRWIN: So what did you think it meant when he asked you to be co-director?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I mean, he talked about the responsibilities and what the job was.

MS. KIRWIN: What did that entail?

MR. ENGLANDER: At the time it was literally curating exhibitions, making sure they got documented. Pretty much all the tasks that you would have as the director running any institution. And we just ended up figuring out a way to allocate all the responsibilities. But doing the publicity, making sure that people actually - you know, the nuts and bolts stuff, like making sure that people could get in when they needed to get in and they were let out when they were let out. Curating exhibitions on my own or with him in concert. And pretty much making sure that the place was able to stay open.

How it worked was a little bit different than what I would guess other non-profit arts institutions would work. There was a board but they didn't have a lot of impact on like the day-to-day stuff that was going on.

MS. KIRWIN: How often did the board get together, and what was the composition of the board when you were director?

MR. ENGLANDER: When I first got involved I'm not sure how often they met at first. But I think at the time there were probably about 10 of them and some of them were people originally - I think there were still some founders on it, or if not founders, people from the era of the first three or four years. And then let's say there were maybe three of them. I don't know if it would be right to call them a block or a faction.

Then there was probably about four or five of them - Jack and Peter and some of their colleagues from when they were actually doing stuff here. And then there were a few, I guess freelance types who I don't know if you could associate them with any, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: How did they get onto the board?

MR. ENGLANDER: How did they?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ENGLANDER: I'm actually not sure because they - I mean, the board here, it's a self-selecting board. It's like a board of most non-profits. It's not a membership organization so the membership doesn't vote on the board. The board chooses its board members. How they did that then, I don't know. I know now because I work with the board and I work with the development committee. I think the board's probably a little bit - we actually had to force the board to - well, it didn't require forcing. They recognized the need. The board's more - follows more the traditions and conventions of most nonprofit boards now in how we work, and that wasn't necessary once we got the building and had to raise a lot of money. As well as expanding all the programs and projects and running the

whole building rather than just have the gallery-storefront space.

How they chose themselves back then, I actually don't know. It came up, I'm sure somebody nominated somebody, they discussed it, and would choose to either elect them or not.

MS. KIRWIN: So did you live here at first when you were director? Was that part of the deal?

MR. ENGLANDER: During the period that I was baby-sitting the place, I stayed here, and then when a Lou Acierno came back, he asked if I wanted to continue. Continuing meant being the person who was here on 24-hour call, so to speak. So yes, so that was then I lived here the first time.

MS. KIRWIN: Were there other tenants in the building at the time?

MR. ENGLANDER: There was one other tenant who did not live here. During No Rio's history there were - people lived here under various degrees of legality or formality. So when the artists first got the lease for the space there was actually a family here that were lease-holding tenants and paid rent to the city of New York, which owned the building, the Acostas. One of the founders, Bobby G, Robert Goldman, ended up getting the lease to an apartment or the second or the third floor. Offhand I can't remember.

People lived here who were taking responsibility for running the place, or they would have somebody else do it. There were people who lived in the basement when No Rio had the lease for the place, for the storefront and basement spaces back in the early days. And they probably just did it. The city didn't care. There was no understanding or legal thing.

When Lou Acierno was living up on this floor -

MS. KIRWIN: The fourth floor?

MR. ENGLANDER: The fourth floor. He didn't have a lease for it. He wasn't supposed to be there and he had an informal understanding with HPD, the agency that owns the building, the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, that he could live here. So when I came in, ostensibly as the super. So we would also deal with the super tasks. We'd go to, you know, HPD's agency and pick up garbage bags. When it snowed, and you know. So there was an informal understanding that there was like plausible deniability. There wasn't a lease.

And then it wasn't until 1994 that there were actually who would self-identify as squatters who were living here. So during its history there were people who were legal lease-holders, people who were living here with informal understandings with the city, and then later on people who themselves were considered to be squatters and the city considered them to be squatters. But that wasn't until 1994.

MS. KIRWIN: Let's talk about the squatters later. When you came in, what was the character of the Monday night meetings that would happen here at ABC No Rio?

MR. ENGLANDER: When I?

MS. KIRWIN: Started.

MR. ENGLANDER: They had - when I started they had become very small.

MS. KIRWIN: How many people would normally show up?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, first off, by the time I got here and me and Lou were here, they were less frequent than weekly. And I'm not sure when the weekly meetings started - or stopped. And it might have been actually during Jack and Peter's tenure. I'm not sure. But by the time I got here, they weren't a regular weekly thing. They were about every month. And it would totally vary. Sometimes nobody would come. I would be there alone. And other times people would come just to talk about potential projects and things like that.

When I was here, because of that and because the place wasn't collective - it wasn't run formally as a collective the way it is now - now it actually is a collective. People are called collective members and we meet monthly to discuss issues. Back then that wasn't the case. It was just a monthly meeting for people to come by to talk about ideas that they might have to do things here. So sometimes people would come, sometimes people not.

At one point that was like, this doesn't make any sense. If somebody wants to do something, why shouldn't they just give me a call and we work - you know what I mean? Come to the - know what I mean? It didn't make sense. So I think it was actually during my period where I sort of phased that out because it didn't, you know, if somebody called up, well, let's meet and talk about it. Don't wait until the first Monday of the month to come and meet and talk about it. We can do it now.

MS. KIRWIN: Was ABC No Rio functioning as a community of sorts that made group decisions about things? But was there really wasn't a group to consult with at this point?

MR. ENGLANDER: At that time, that is correct.

MS. KIRWIN: So somebody brought you an idea. How would the process go?

MR. ENGLANDER: It would depend what it was. If it was an exhibition, I would probably talk with Lou about it and I would - we would confer about it, get their proposal and see if it made something, sense.

MS. KIRWIN: And did you have grant money or money at the time to do things?

MR. ENGLANDER: We had a little bit of NYSCA [New York State Council on the Arts] funds at the time. We were, you know, sort of hurting in that period, I think. So there was really money earned from, you know, earned income money from events and there was a modest amount of funds from the New York State Council on the Arts for exhibitions and readings. Then it was a much poorer organization than it is now. There were actually minimal funds to do stuff. That didn't seem particularly troublesome, though, and it's not something I worry about too much now even because of, you know, let's get it done by hook or by crook sensibility that has permeated the place since its founding. I think that's one of the reasons why not having money was never a reason not to do something. It might be a reason somebody doesn't get paid, but it's not a reason not to do a project. And that actually continues on to the - until today.

MS. KIRWIN: Somebody brought you an exhibition and you wanted to do it, so there was money or there was no money. How would it happen? What would the - you would just provide the space or anything else?

MR. ENGLANDER: It depends what we'd actually work it out because there was some that, when I was here during that period there was some that I was slightly more involved with and some not so. I mean, one of the things that happened is some people showed up to do a show that Lou had set up before he split but forgot to tell me about. And they came from far away. They came from Basque Country in Spain, yeah, while he was in Hamburg and he never mentioned that they were going to be showing up to do this exhibition.

MS. KIRWIN: So I guess you were doing that one.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. So that was actually my introduction to the sort of ad-hoc way it happened here. They were great guys though. It was actually a fun, like project to do with them. But yeah, this group of seven artists from Basque Country came by to do an installation so I put them up here. There were - and then we had access to other floors where people were, so I could actually stash them in different places and they did their thing.

Some of them ended up staying in New York, but I think at this point they've all gone back.

MS. KIRWIN: Was there a mechanism for getting information out about what was happening ABC No Rio? This is prior to the internet-did you send cards?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I think that it was really informal. So there would be like fliers and small photocopied cards, but again, you know, they wouldn't even do like four-color type printing. At one period while Lou and I were co-director, we were doing this sort of quarterly newsletter that would go out and would get mailed to the mailing list. But I would think that for the most part information about events happened by word of mouth.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay. And did you make any effort, say, with the newsletter or other forms of outreach to involve the community here, or was it - because there is a period of time when ABC No Rio was very much an activist in the community, expanding the audience with people living in the neighborhood. Are there tensions between what was happening at ABC No Rio and the locals here?

MR. ENGLANDER: In answer to the question first off, no, during that period no. But that doesn't mean that it wasn't talked about and people weren't aware of the issue. I think from the beginning there was always an effort to try to reach out to the community, and it's been something that all generations of people involved in running No Rio addressed in one way or the other, the founders, the people who were here during Jack and Peter's era, the late '80s and early '90s. The squatters.

So people were aware of it and wanted to try to get past it. Unfortunately for the most part, not exclusively but from its founding on, the majority of people who did stuff at No Rio, whether they were the people performing or reading or artists, and the people planning and organizing these things were primarily but not exclusively white, middle class exiles from the suburbs. Not everybody, but mostly. So there was actually, no matter what your values and ideals are, there's differences between those people and the people who were already here, which were primarily Dominican, Puerto Rican, and African-American people. You know, cultural differences, economic differences, social differences. It was really tough to like pierce through that membrane.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes. Maybe people were just not interested.

MR. ENGLANDER: I've never been in favor of art as a proselytizing tool, and I think that there's something a little bit patronizing about it and I'm not comfortable either speaking in those terms or doing that kind of work.

Personally I've come to the conclusion that, you know, there are social and cultural differences. They should be celebrated. We don't necessarily have to pierce past them. I think it's ridiculous to expect - well, they're not there any more, but up 'til about five years ago you're not going to expect some Dominican grandfather playing dominoes down the street to come to a poetry reading. It's not going to happen. Even if you had Miguel Algarín, or any of the Nuyorican poets come by, they're probably still not going to come. And their wives aren't going to come to a punk show, you know, and they don't care about some of the art that happens here.

Ultimately it's like by doing things for their kids that you reach them, so that's the conclusion I came to. When we do do our arts education programming, most of the outreach is to local schools. This past summer and last spring was a bit different, but usually 60 to 70 percent of the kids are from the neighborhood, 70 percent of the kids are either children of families that have immigrated here or are themselves immigrants. Because of demographic changes there's more Asians now, Chinese people than there were, than there are Dominicans and African-American and Puerto Rican kids. But ultimately that's it. I actually don't expect that the grandfathers and grandmothers or their sons and daughters are going to come, but it's their grandkids that we can reach. So that's personally how I've sort of resolved that.

It doesn't come up as sort of an abstract concept any more among the board and collective. The idea of like greater diversity and representation is something that's talked about, but how do we reach the community and it doesn't come up in that way any more. My way of reaching the community, what we do for them is literally we do this thing for the youth and I don't expect their parents to have an interest in the events that actually happen here.

But throughout the history there were - I'm not sure during Jack and Peter's era what they did here. They did do some arts programming in association with the Board of Ed and at Marta Valle [Secondary School at 145 Stanton Street], the school just down the block. And during the early days, you know, they had some exhibitions that actually, you know, brought in neighborhood folks like Tom Warren's "Portrait Show," where he had people come in and have their portrait taken. He set up a little mini portrait studio because the building used to be Gus's photo studio. So Jody Culkin did a thing called "Tube World" where she worked with kids to make, you know, this huge installation out of cardboard tubes.

MS. KIRWIN: This building was what -

MR. ENGLANDER: This building was Gus's photo studio. When we're done, if you want I'll show you the picture I have. It's a New York tax picture from 1939 that the building is his photo studio. So Tom Warren did that. But otherwise, you know, let's say a later show that was curated by Tom Morton. I don't know if the people who are living here actually wanted to see the show "Murder, Suicide, and Junk." So I don't expect that now. Sometimes we do things and we've got to sort of tread carefully. Like we did an exhibition that was work by prisoner artists back in 1999 or 2000, and the funding we got to do it also required an organizing component, but then how do you do the outreach, you know what I mean? There's a way to be somewhat racist in doing the outreach to get neighborhood people to come to this show that's about work by prisoners because if you do it in too blanket of a way you're implying that all those people have some connection to prisons. You know what I mean?

At the time there was still like a massive amount of, you know, I think it was like 60 or 70 percent of prisoners upstate came from this neighborhood and Harlem. So you know, you still have to be careful how you do it. And in that case it was an attempt to reach out to people in the community that, required an inordinate amount of delicacy to be successful but not to be insulting and racist at the same time. But we did it. There were a few public forums and we tried to let people know that the show was going on. But how do you tell a neighborhood of Dominican, Puerto Rican mothers that you're doing this art show of prisoner art without implying that maybe they'd be interested because all their sons are in prison? You know what I mean? It's a difficult thing to do that without being patronizing.

So ultimately that said, it's like you do what you do and you do what you can to actually reach out and provide a tangible service to kids. I mean, we've had kids who were part of our program who then became volunteers, who did arts classes here and then got involved in the organization, became an active volunteer.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you talk about some of the programming and, say, take a month, a typical month in the life of ABC No Rio. Would you just have one exhibition, or exhibitions and performances and poetry readings and music? How did that change?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, there's ongoing things. Well, there's a lot more going on now than there was when I first started coming back. I mean, there was a Matthew Courtney thing that was just one night a week. There would

be exhibitions and some of the people who came to his event would do other - you know, would, mostly performance. I think there was a bit more theater here and there's less of that now. And there's actually not a lot of performance and theater, maybe half a dozen times a year. Back then there was more because a lot of people came to the Matthew Courtney thing were actual performers.

So in that period it's actually hard for me to say. When I was involved in the place, there were probably half a dozen exhibitions a year. There were the poetry readings that happened on Sunday that wasn't Matthew Courtney's thing. It was more straight-out poetry. That was an event that started in mid-'80s. And it actually continues to this day. It's had different groups of poets who were responsible for it, but the Sunday afternoon poetry reading that happens at 3:00 o'clock every Sunday has been going on for over 20 years now. So that always went on.

And then there were, you know, half a dozen exhibitions a year, and then there would be performances maybe monthly where people would do something either for a month or for a short run, three to five days. And then in 1990, before I was officially involved, while Lou was still the sole director, they started doing punk shows here. After CBGB's closed their Saturday matinee because of violence, they started doing them here, and those were - they didn't book racist, sexist, or homophobic bands. They would screen the lyrics and they actually tried to create a scene that was more welcoming to -

MS. KIRWIN: Was that to head off any violence?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, well, part of it is like a lot of the people who were involved in that were the kids who got their asses kicked at CB's, so they wanted to be at a place where they didn't have to worry about that. And then finally, because there was so much violence at CB's, Hilly Kristal, who actually just died the other day, the guy who ran CBGB's, passed away. He actually stopped it because there was too much violence. It was basically skinheads, and this is back in the late '80s where there was all this ferment.

It's also another weird analogy and tiny thing. It was almost like Berlin, you know, between the two wars, where, you know, there literally were anarchists physically fighting skinheads in Tompkins Square Park. And you know, at the Anarchist Switchboard skinheads would come by and, you know, try to crash - you know, people physically fought. And there was cabarets, you know what I mean? So a lot of those kids, because the scene there had gotten so violent, wanted to create something here. And some of them were gay. They wanted to create a place where gay kids who were into punk would feel comfortable, a place where the girls would feel comfortable, and a place where black and Hispanic kids who were into that music would feel comfortable.

MS. KIRWIN: So is that an every week thing?

MR. ENGLANDER: That happens every week. So that started in 1990.

MS. KIRWIN: And they were called matinees?

MR. ENGLANDER: The Saturday matinee.

MS. KIRWIN: And were they actually in the afternoon?

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes, they still are. They start at 3:00. So that still goes on and it's still the same - different group of people over the years have taken responsibility for running the show and booking it, but it still goes on. With this same sort of purpose and mission to it. So that was going on.

I mean, over time I think I like use the onion thing, you know. It was founded by visual artists but as time went on, more layers got put on. So it was founded by visual artists and they sometimes did readings and occasional performances. When Jack and Peter did stuff here, they were mostly performance, and that's what the place was known for, but there were still exhibitions of visual art and the readings happened. And then the punk thing got added. You know, so as time went on things got added and one never superseded the other. It might be known more for one thing than the other, but that didn't mean the other stopped happening.

Now the regular events that went on then still go on. There's still a Sunday afternoon poetry reading, there's still the punks do their thing. We have an improv and experimental music series, which also used to happen here in 1990 and actually used to happen at the Anarchist Switchboard when I was involved, called A Mica Bunker which was an event put on by a group called the Improvisers Network, where they did improvisational music and experimental music. So it actually used to be at the Switchboard and then it came here, and then they bounced around a bit.

And then when I got involved again in running this place after four or five years not being here, we brought them in again. So that was 1990, so they've been here now again almost 10 years. So that still goes on.

MS. KIRWIN: There was a time when you were not -

MR. ENGLANDER: I resigned with Lou Acierno in 1991, and then I got brought back again in the winter of - I moved to live here in 1994.

MS. KIRWIN: Why did you resign?

MR. ENGLANDER: There were differences between what Lou and I wanted to try to do and what the board was willing to let us do.

MS. KIRWIN: What was the crux of the argument?

MR. ENGLANDER: Ultimately I think that it was about the people who were on the board then relinquishing control. From our point of view it really was, they weren't letting us - we thought that the people who were doing stuff here now should actually have more say in the place, and should have some representation on the board.

MS. KIRWIN: What was it, do you think, that you wanted to do this, they weren't behind?

MR. ENGLANDER: It's sort of hard to put my finger on it. It was really about trying to open up the place more. I mean, in my case sort of what's going on now, or what we were able to do in 1998 once we started working with the city towards us acquiring the building, it's what me and Lou wanted to happen in the years before but to do that you've got to open up. You can't - you know what I mean? You really need to open up to bring in more involvement if you're going to have all sorts of other projects and programs going on. People want to feel a sense of investment in what they're doing, and they actually aren't going to have that sort of commitment if you're basically treating them like an unpaid staff person. You know what I mean? It's different.

I do my best here. Except for me, everybody here is a volunteer. There's 60 of them who give me two to ten hours a week to keep all the projects and programs going. There's some things I can't do, but for the most part they're given autonomy to run the projects and programs they do as they wish. Unless it's going to cost an exorbitant amount of money or it's going to interfere with something else that's going on. The projects and programs, they belong to them. My job is to really make it possible for them to do what they want to do.

But to make that happen you have to open it up and you've got to let people feel like what they're -they have to feel a sense of ownership for it. And they have to feel a personal investment in it. Even though we figured out a way - to have a board and a volunteer structure where there's not tension between the two, and that the board isn't like some over - you know what I mean? They're roughly parallel in how they work.

We felt like we wouldn't be able to do that back then. We needed them to open it up and get more people on, or at least get on the people who were actually doing stuff here at that time. And even now, the board here, half of them, a little bit less now, maybe about a third, are actual day-to-day volunteers.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh huh. I was going to ask, were any of those previous board members also volunteers?

MR. ENGLANDER: The existing ones, or the ones in 1990?

MS. KIRWIN: The ones when you resigned.

MR. ENGLANDER: Oh, they have been. Like Jack and Peter were on the board. Let's see. I think Richard Armijo was on the board at that time, and he resigned. But they had all been involved in No Rio in one way or another. But they weren't at that time. And we wanted it to represent the people. We needed representation of people who were doing things here at that time. Even now, right now we don't have it. I usually try to make sure that I've got a young person on the board. Right now that's not the case. By young I mean early 20s. So that we don't get too disconnected from - for the most part it's young people who use the place. Not exclusively, but -

MS. KIRWIN: What exactly do you mean by opening it up more?

MR. ENGLANDER: I mean bring on other board members.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ENGLANDER: That's what I meant. So that we could, you know - first you would have that and then most people - you know what I mean? If you brought - if you were to bring - if you were to increase the board and bring on three to five people who are actually tangibly doing something here and they were on the board and they, you know, understood what the responsibilities and the obligations of being a board person are, they would - you don't just have one person but you've got that one person and all the people they work with. Not that they are an official representative of something, but by default or in a de facto way they represent a bunch of interests. So that's what I mean. Literally opening - more people and people who are actually doing things here

at the time.

MS. KIRWIN: And so you resigned.

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, we felt like we were butting our heads - it got kind of ugly, and I actually didn't go to the board meetings. We had one person, Robin Goldsmith, who had been involved in Matthew Courtney's thing and she'd done a lot of performance here, who was sort of Lou and I's ally on the board at the time. But we didn't go to the board meetings so she represented our interests and was able to make no headway.

I think we handled it clumsily, to try to change - institutionally change something. I think we were probably a bit too aggressive about it and like had no finesse or diplomacy. I mean, if I were to certainly try to do something like that now, I would do it differently. And if I was on the board and somebody tried to do it to me, I'd probably also be able to finesse their things a little bit better than we did - you know what I mean? It was handled poorly all the way around, I think.

But it got ugly. It was like infighting in an organization. Ultimately we just like stopped batting our heads against the wall, and then two years later the people who were on the board did a mass resignation and there was a whole new board.

MS. KIRWIN: What happened then?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, I wasn't around then but I think they recognized that some of our points were correct in that the people who were doing stuff here now should be the ones who are representing the organization at that level. No Rio still didn't have a lot of structure. There was a board but there wasn't a lot -there was no big staff, there was no structure. I don't think that they even knew how to address the issue of succession. If you're going to be around for a long time, you need to figure out a way to deal with a generational change.

MS. KIRWIN: Most places don't have a succession plan, but it's a good thing to have.

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, I think about it now because I want to get through this building, get the new building built, get the programs going again, and then figure out a way to find somebody to replace me, and maybe kick myself up to the board, maybe not. It's something I think about. Anyway, it didn't exist then and ultimately I think they recognized that it was something that had to be done that made sense. If it's going to be this sort of like community thing and it's got this anarchistic quality, the people who were doing stuff at the place should be the ones also to a certain degree responsible for the governance of things in a legal sense. So I think they recognized that, that they couldn't cop to it to me or Lou, and especially in the clumsy way we'd handled it. Which was, like I said, pretty aggressive.

MS. KIRWIN: So what happened two years later when they all left? What was that juncture?

MR. ENGLANDER: I wasn't around then so I can only speak from what I've read, and anecdotally from people talking. Lou and I left, and then they actually did bring in a new group of people to do some of the day-to-day programming and stuff like that. The punks were still here.

MS. KIRWIN: Living here?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, they were just doing their event here. Once I moved out, I'm not sure if anybody was living here or not. I actually don't know what happened in that stretch.

MS. KIRWIN: What did you do in the interim?

MR. ENGLANDER: What did I do when I left? Oh, I hung around for about six weeks and then I went traveling. I went to Guatemala and Mexico for six weeks. So yeah, I went - I probably, I'm sure what I did was I just worked, got some money together and went to Central America. I mean, it was a rough thing. I felt like pretty spent after it. I like needed a vacation, and I actually tried to do something and like had to walk away from it.

MS. KIRWIN: I can imagine this place would suck the energy out of most people.

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, that's kind of right, and also I know in like a later conversation with Jack and Peter, which I should add, there was like really bad blood. I mean, it was awful. You can imagine, I don't know if you've ever been through an organization that like breaks down into factions, but they get ugly. I mean, they work now - we've actually let bygones by bygones. They've been magnanimous and so have I, and we worked together for No Rio. They've been very helpful, especially when we got the building, they're doing fund raising, organizing the benefits. And you know, we actually - we got past it. We work together and we're friends.

I live right around the corner from their garden and pop by every once in a while to see them and talk to them, a dozen to 20 times a year, about No Rio related stuff. They retain an interest and are helpful. We've gotten past

it.

So when I split, I don't actually know. I know that they brought in some people to do some programming and stuff like that. There wasn't a - this is from stuff I've read in our own archives, letters and meeting minutes and stuff. There actually was somebody living here because I came across this very pleading, plaintive note by the person who was living here, who was all alone and the place is falling apart. Like the boiler's not working, you know what I mean. It was like a sort of plea for help.

You go nuts. Jack at one point acknowledged that you get this sort of fortress mentality because we're fighting the city, so you have to be somewhat defensive and suspicious of stuff that's going on? And you're living all alone here. You know what I mean? It gets to you after a while, and who knows to what degree that impacted how I handled the situation.

I remember him mentioning that at one point, and I'm like pooh-poohing it. I'm like, no way. These are legitimate. Looking back, it obviously gets to you. It's just like, you know. And anyway, I come across this letter where somebody was there and it was sort of the same thing - it's all falling apart, they're all alone, nobody's come by to help out. So there was somebody living here during that period. And then at one point the kids who were doing the punk shows, there were probably about eight of them, the board, you know, did a sort of mass resignation. I don't know how - legally what happens, but there was basically a mass resignation, or mass voting in of the new people, Jack and Peter and all those people resigned. And there were a few holdovers that sort of bridged it. But they literally gave the organization to the people who did the punk shows. That was in 1992, I think, or 1993.

And then they started doing their - I don't think they were weekly, though. Monthly. I think they started doing their monthly meetings again, where they would collectively try to decide what was going to be going on. And how to book the shows and what other sort of events they should do, what they should do about dealing with the city. Because all during this period the city was trying to evict ABC No Rio, and we had a lawsuit against them. It was a bit complicated. So they inherited that problem.

MS. KIRWIN: So when did you come back in?

MR. ENGLANDER: Then I came back to the building in the winter of '94. We'd been in these legal battles with the city. There were two things going on. One, they were trying to evict, and then there was a lawsuit of No Rio against the city for damages related to the city's mismanagement of the space. Once the board was given to the punks, they worked out what's called here in New York a stipulation settlement, which is something in landlord-tenant court. They always prefer that you work things out between landlords and tenants rather than actually force a trial where the judge has got to hear the case and make rulings. So generally, unless things are totally intractable, you try to resolve things by a stipulation agreement.

They had worked out a stipulation settlement with the city that said this, that and the other thing will - we won't evict, and this, that, and the other thing will happen. I have the agreement somewhere. I just can't remember the whole list of stipulations. At a certain point the city had started to abridge some of the things they'd agreed to in the stipulation. So that made the people who were on the board and who were running the place at the time a little bit skittish, that they were going to renege on this non-eviction thing. One of the easiest ways to evict is not to go to court, but you do what's called a constructive eviction, which is you either totally let the place fall apart so people give up and walk away, or you do a self-help eviction, which is where you just lock out your tenant. And then it's incumbent on them to sue you to get back in, rather than you taking them to court to get them legally evicted.

So they started worrying about that. And they decided, because some of those kids were linked to the squatters movement, they decided the best thing to do would be to invite people to occupy the three floors that were above the gallery space. No Rio at the time still just had a month-to-month lease for the first floor. So I was one of the people that they asked to come back in to deal with that, to take over the building, work with the other people who were going to move in and help, you know, do whatever it would take to squat the space. The understanding is we would be the first line of defense if they tried to do a self-help eviction. And if that were to happen, I would spearhead the effort to defend No Rio politically, legally and all that stuff, because they knew I had connections to the squatters scene, had squatted on and off, knew how to organize politic - so that's why I was invited in for that. I wasn't invited in to be the director of No Rio. I was invited in just to live here, to get the upper floors occupied, do what it took to make it habitable, be the first line of defense, and if there was an eviction, to deal with it, if they did try to evict.

So when I first came back, I was doing that. I actually wasn't doing anything programmatically. And then about nine months later the city did begin an eviction proceeding.

MS. KIRWIN: And what form did that take?

MR. ENGLANDER: They actually - since it's a month-to-month lease, they do what's called a 30-day notice to quit, and that was it. It's a notice we're going to evict you.

MS. KIRWIN: Why did they want to do that? Is it because the property values had increased in this area?

MR. ENGLANDER: I think that, yeah. I think that from the beginning when they gave the building to the folks at No Rio they regretted having made that compromise. Back when after the real estate show and they dealt with it by giving them a - I think that they regretted it immediately. They were pressured into doing something. They were sort of blackmailed into it. Gentle blackmail. Just bad publicity forced them to do something that they didn't want to do, and they did it and I think they regretted it.

So I think from the get-go they wanted them out. And there were all sorts of -

MS. KIRWIN: They probably didn't think you could hang on that long.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah. I'm not sure what it was. And sometimes they evicted because, yeah, you didn't pay your rent, you know. Then in the late '80s they tried to do a vacate. When they were renovating the building next door, they actually knocked into this building with a backhoe and put a crack in the wall. That's how they got the one leaseholding tenant out, by vacating them, and they relocated them to the projects. For people who were living in these rundown tenements, moving to the projects, as bad as they are, is a step up. So they relocated the Acosta family to a project, and they actually had a vacate order for No Rio's gallery space, which No Rio fought and the vacate order was rescinded and we got to stay. But they wanted to clear the building out and probably just sell it to a developer. So I think it was partly that.

So they had tried on numerous occasions, and each time they ended up having to back down because No Rio would just get political support and famous artists and other people, and you know, they'd end up just dropping it. And then some time would pass and they'd do it again.

This time what they did, they were a little more clever about it. They actually made this building part of a low income housing project. With the group Asian Americans for Equality. And it did make sense. What they did was they paired this building with a building on Allen Street that was much larger. It was like a 21 or a 28-unit building. And they told AAFE that, well, you've got to do both these buildings together. So they made it a little more challenging for us to fight back because it's one thing to just fight the city and they're being unreasonable. Then no, they're standing in the way of developing low-income housing.

So we actually were pretty successful in dealing with that, but it was kind of annoying. In retrospect AAFE I don't think wanted this building. They need - because it's only three units. It's a tiny little building. But to get the big building over on Allen Street, they needed to take this one also.

MS. KIRWIN: And how did you ultimately resolve that?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, we fought them in court. We can't actually win on the eviction because it was only a month-to-month lease. A month-to-month lease, the guy can cancel your lease. You've got to move out. So we could only fight the eviction on technical matters, which we were able to do for a few years because they kept screwing up. And then we did political organizing and we ended up having some negotiating meetings with AAFE and the borough president's office, and our city council person, Katherine Freed [New York City Council Member], got us around a table, and those weren't going anywhere either. There's no way that No Rio could coexist with their low income housing project. They wanted to make it happen but there's just no way, you know. It's like those people aren't going to want to live above a punk show. You know what I mean? It's just not going to happen.

So, you know, they tried, but it was unrealistic. And they knew it was unrealistic. It was sort of like going through the motions. For us it bought some time.

MS. KIRWIN: You had the support of your city council person?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, our city council basically had to navigate between two constituency groups, two constituent organizations in her district that were fighting. Personally she was, well, let's just get around the table and work it out. So she wouldn't come out against us, but she couldn't come out for us either because that would mean coming out against her other group. And the other group can probably deliver more votes that we do. But she had supported us in the past and couldn't not do it then. So she had to - well, what can they do? She did the best she could, which is to like, all right, me and the borough president, we support both of you. There's got to be a way we can work this out. So that's what her take was. I don't fault her for it. It's like, what's a politician to do when - you know, it's not even like a nonprofit group or some activists fighting a big developer. It's like two nonprofit organizations squabbling over real estate in your district.

So we fought them in court. We did our own lawsuit that tried to claim that their attempt to evict us was a First Amendment issue and it was due to the content of the programming that happened here. Got dismissed. It was a long shot. So it was really on technical grounds in court, and once we got our lawyer to realize - lawyers always want to work things out, too. They're like, can't we work it out? Like I said, in landlord-tenant court they always want you to do these stipulation agreements. They want to work it out.

Once I told the lawyer that we don't want her to work it out, we want her to just find whatever she could to just drag this on as long as possible, we just want to get these things dismissed on technicalities, she actually like got liberated by that and found some extremely creative ways to get them dismissed. We probably went through five evictions. Four of them got dismissed. But every time you dismiss them on one thing, they don't make that mistake the next time.

MS. KIRWIN: You run out of options.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. So we finally got down to one thing. And during that period we did more like getting political support, and then we started doing direct action. In the years past they would actually protest it at HPD, the city agency, which didn't have much effect. It was more like symbolic type things. This time instead of doing that we actually protested at the nonprofit that was trying to take the building.

Can I get this call?

[Brief interruption.]

MS. KIRWIN: I didn't say in the beginning, this is September the 7th, 2007.

And you were talking about -

MR. ENGLANDER: Oh, the direct action?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ENGLANDER: So we started doing actual direct action at the organization, Asian Americans for Equality, at their location and started protesting them for their willingness to allow themselves, the way we characterize it, allow themselves to be used by HPD to evict another community organization. And they got to the point where they were like just, you now, begging HPD to let them out of it, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: They probably didn't need that.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. To have a group of protesters outside their place. It was actually sort of interesting. I probably know more about the history of Asian-Americans for Equality than a lot of their own staff people, although the people who founded it and the people who were running it when we were there, at a certain point they - you know, it was founded by activists and then they brought in more professional minded staff to run it, and they actually had grown substantially since then. But they were founded by a Maoist organization back in the '70s.

So we actually red-baited them in our protests by somebody dressing up in a Mao hat and carrying a hammer and sickle with dollar signs. You know, it was like - and we got the New York Times to cover the story. They needed to get out of it. In retrospect, they shouldn't have done what they did. I mean, it was - I would never have done that. I would have never let myself be used to evict some other nonprofit organization that had been some place for 15 years.

So ultimately we brought our protest to them and they started really squealing to get out. And then finally we got to our last sort of legal technical argument that our lawyer had come up with. We actually called it the "last ditch light bulb argument," which is she had found - actually, this was the first time it was used for a commercial tenant. She had found a law that if a landlord has cut your electricity or any public utilities that you're getting before they evict you, they need to restore - they can't cut that and then try to evict you. So to evict us they would need to restore the utilities that they had cut during - I guess it was this period in the early '90s when nobody was living here. They actually came in and disconnected all the electricity in the common areas of the building. That's a constructive eviction. You start, you know - it's like a landlord who stops providing heat, stops providing hot water, stops providing electricity in the halls to drive people out. That's a constructive eviction.

So they did constructive-eviction-related things, where they literally cut the power to the common areas. But the common areas included the light bulb at the top of the stairs leading to the vestibule outside of the building. So because they had done that, and removed the - they not only cut it but they actually removed the copper so it couldn't be used - you couldn't just have Con Ed turn it back on. They literally had it turned off and then ripped out the electricity so nobody else could turn it on either. They couldn't evict.

So to be able to evict us they needed to not only just have Con Ed turn it on, but they needed to do all this new rewiring work. So that was the "last ditch light bulb argument." They're not responsible for the lights in our space. And we couldn't talk about the lights in the stairwell because we're not supposed to be there anyway. But that one light bulb that's outside the front door, that was the "last ditch light bulb." So that was the last argument. That was the last thing she found. And the judge ruled in our favor. That was actually a precedent-setting thing. No commercial tenant had ever successfully used that argument before.

And then we finally did our last, direct action. I didn't go along. I stayed here to do legal support, to deal with the arrests, but a group of the supporters managed - you couldn't do it now after 9/11, but a group of supporters, about a dozen of them, managed to get into the offices of the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development and do a sit-down protest in there with banners and things like that. And I assumed they would get arrested, so I was waiting and waiting and waiting. It never happened. And later on I found that the commissioner had actually-to defuse the situation-instead of calling the cops, invited them into a conference room and spent like three hours talking with her about it.

And then that led to negotiations with No Rio's board and some of the people living here, and myself, as to how we could negotiate something. And then those led to us actually acquiring the building. So that's sort of it in a nutshell. [Phone rings]

[Brief interruption.]

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it seems like so much of your energy went into fighting the city.

MR. ENGLANDER: That was the case throughout No Rio's history, though. And that was part of the fortress mentality. I mean, during the period Jack and Peter were here, similar things were going on. The lawsuit was initiated. The lawsuit I talked about, not the one that happened in the '90s but the ones that the punk kids inherited when we came here, was initiated by Jack and Peter. So it's from the beginning there was always that. I think they worried about it less before, and I think before it was almost like they didn't pay the rent or something. I don't think the city was that serious. I'm not sure when the first one was, though. It was just an ongoing thing, so I can't really speak to what went on during the first three years. I know it happened because I see the - I have the documents, so I've got the 30-day notices to quit. I've seen them. But outside of knowing it happened, I can't really characterize it.

MS. KIRWIN: So those negotiations, how long did those go on before you were able to purchase the building? Did you buy the building for a dollar?

MR. ENGLANDER: Right. I mean, the whole thing took about nine years. Between the point where that meeting happened in the commissioner's office and us actually ending up with the building, I think that was February of '98. We actually ended up buying -closing on the building on June 29, 2006. So it took eight and a half years. Part of it was getting money together so they felt confident enough to move forward. Once we worked out the deal, they did a few things. Like you do something and they'd make a bigger hoop for us to jump through. So there was a little bit of that going on in the early days, which was aggravating, but I actually never thought they were going to renege. You know what I mean? To me it actually was taking longer than everybody thought, but I never was fearful that they were jerking us around. It was just like annoying, where we're literally having to jump through a higher hoop after you get through one.

So it took a long time to work something out where we were able to really move forward.

MS. KIRWIN: What were some of the things that they had required of ABC No Rio?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, the first thing was that they said that they would move forward on the disposition of the property if we raised $100,000. And we raised $100,000 and then they're like, no, no, we want you to have enough money to actually begin doing some of the necessary work. And we think that should be half a million dollars. I mean, the budget's now, you know, what we're talking about is $2 million anyway, so it's almost-and as more time goes on, in New York construction costs increase at 1 percent a month, so every - at $2 million every year, it costs another $250,000. Yeah, the Chinese are eating up all the construction supplies, all the concrete, all the steel in the world. .

So in the long run it was irritating that that would go on. Ultimately I think what happened was I think that the commissioner - the commissioner at the time was a woman named Lillian Barrios-Paoli, and I think it was totally fortuitous that she was the commissioner at the time. She's a Mexican woman who was like part of the '68 generation in Mexico City. She was a student in Mexico City in '68 during that massacre in the Zocalo, and she was probably a student activist herself, since she went into housing-related issues. I think now she got a job at United Way. She works in philanthropy somewhere.

So there was some resonance of nostalgia and sympathy by her for them. And I think some of her staff people

weren't happy that she worked out a deal. We weren't actually able to really move forward until a different person became the deputy commissioner who we're under the purview of. It's a bureaucracy. I don't know what all the internecine stuff are. But doing things and actually not going anywhere, and then this other gentleman becoming the deputy commissioner who was responsible for us, him getting that job, it finally moved forward, so there was a little bit of a logjam.

Do you mind if I just - it will only take like five -

[End of disk one.]

MS. KIRWIN: Okay. Now I put in another disk, so this is disk 2, September 7th, 2007 of the first sesson.

MR. ENGLANDER: Okay, so we'd done the direct action thing. Did I wrap that up?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes. One thing I wanted to ask about is, during this time who were the artists or other people that you turned to for support in the nearby community?

MR. ENGLANDER: I would actually have to read it all. I guess the most famous one who actually wrote letters on our behalf to them was probably Tom Otterness, Kiki Smith. Otherwise it was just like hundreds of just - I think I've got them collected somewhere. As well as petitions and things like that. But they had been gathering over, you know - it wasn't just me who had gathered them. Some of them had already been done from the late '80s and early '90s when the city was trying to get them out based on the vacate order. So it was sort of an ongoing thing.

Ultimately I think it was really probably, you know - the easiest thing to do was actually bring pressure on your elected officials rather than directly on the agency. So to a certain degree it was probably Katherine Freed, city council member, receiving information from - and the borough president receiving information from their constituents in terms of like political organizing in that sense.

In our case, I mean, I'm actually an advocate of comprehensive strategies when you are doing activism and you, as I characterized, we have, you know all in concert, dealing with them in court, dealing with them through the normal channels of the political process, which is contacting your elected officials and going to meetings and things like that and getting public support. And then direct action. There was a little bit, the way we handled it, there was actually something there to appeal for everybody. Whether you're like liberals, like no, you've got to use the system. We let supporters that were able and willing to do more militant things to go off on their own and do their support actions. And then, you know, people were like, you know, into the sort of Byzantine strategy of dealing with the law.

So I think that it was actually those people's impact on elected officials, not those people's impact on the permanent government, the bureaucracy that's, you know, in the agency.

MS. KIRWIN: It's interesting that ABC No Rio was born out of this activist approach to real estate and it took over so much of its life when it occupied this building.

MR. ENGLANDER: Right. Well, during the period when Lou and I were co-director, we also worked with a woman named Fly who actually helped out with some design and publicity and things like that. She's still around, still a friend of this space. And at one point we actually - we're like, God, we don't even want to deal with this space, so we started looking in - conceptually working on the idea of doing things without being tied to a physical location, just giving up on it. After Lou and I and Fly had stopped our involvement, we actually did a project where we like sort of like - like a band goes in a van on tour, we put together a project where we went out to the Midwest and did some work in Madison, Wisconsin, rural Wisconsin, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. We did a traveling project out there.

So yes, we actually tried to get away from that idea, but I think that whatever No Rio's relationship to the physical space and the concept of actually having a place, you know, was stronger than anybody's will to throw up their hands at that point and say, yes, we should just not exist in a place, but you know, do things in a more ephemeral way.

MS. KIRWIN: Since we're talking about buying the building, what's happening now with the building? What are your plans or vision for the future, now that you own it?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, once we acquired the property, we actually started working with an architect to do more detailed plans and scope of work so we could actually - we got, you know, some architectural work to get through the approvals process. And then we began doing more design work for the creation and construction documents. So we did a bunch of sort of meetings among all the different projects and programs that went on here.

MS. KIRWIN: Who's the architect that you're working with?

MR. ENGLANDER: The architect is Paul Castrucci, who's a former squatter. He was the founder of the Gallery Bullet Space with his brother Andrew Castrucci. He was actually the architect who back in 1988 wrote a report that got the vacate order rescinded, so we've had a long connection with him. He built a place just down the block. He's sympathetic to No Rio. He's known about us forever, and we emerged out of the same sort of cultural milieu within the same period of time. So he's our architect.

We'd initially worked with some of the architects at Pratt, and then when we got to the next state, to go through the approvals process, and then we ended up hiring -

[Brief interruption.]

MR. ENGLANDER: We ended up hiring him to do this next stage, the design and construction that would really happen. So we met among ourselves and created a sort of needs assessment, all the projects and programs got together. And then he also met with all of them, and we all met together. So it was a holistic process, people talking about what they needed to make the facility work in terms of closet space, layout of the space, and he did a draft proposal about how the building would get laid out.

It hasn't been formally approved, but everybody's comfortable with what he did in that respect. We haven't yet determined what the front façade will look like, and that was -

MS. KIRWIN: Are you going to take the building down?

MR. ENGLANDER: The building's going to come down. During this process we also had come to the conclusion that we need to remove the building and build new. The building's in bad shape. It's not going to fall down or anything, but there's not enough integrity with the structure.

MS. KIRWIN: The city did not maintain it.

MR. ENGLANDER: No, but even if they had, you would still be in the same situation. The building actually isn't a brick building. It's a timber frame building and the bricks that are there -

MS. KIRWIN: When was it built?

MR. ENGLANDER: We're not sure. The foundation is from 1863, and we can't track it exactly, neither through the Department of Buildings documents, nor the materials that the title company found when doing the title search gives us a clear idea of - you know, we don't know how the ownership happened. We weren't able to get a clear idea of how the work happened. We do know that there was a building here in 1863, and this building is built on that building's foundation. We also know in 1917 the owner of the building did a substantial renovation. The front of the façade says 1917, but we know that the building wasn't built in 1917. He probably just put on a new façade.

So we don't know exactly when the building was built. It was built before there was a building code because the existing walls don't meet the building code. It was a wood building, and the brick that's there is just fire stop. It's in-fill. The structure of the building is actually wood.

MS. KIRWIN: You can see it in the wall.

MR. ENGLANDER: And over here there are places - over there where the wet wall is [looking around the room], where all the plumbing is, the wood's in pretty bad shape, and so is the mortar. Here it's not so bad, but still as you can see, there's no rhyme or reason to the spacing of the verticals. Usually things are like 16 inches on center, or whatever it might be. There is no rhyme or reason to it. It's different on every floor and in different spans of the building.

Our initial plan was to just not deal with those walls, and build a new structure in the shell of the old, and just let them be, and we would literally build new inside it. It would be a rehab but we wouldn't take down those walls. After the architect and the engineer did more systematic work on the walls, we were brought to the conclusion that they can't be ignored. You can't not deal with them. So if we were to build a new structure in the shell of the old, the walls are in such bad shape they would still need to be remediated because it could be hazardous once you take the weight off them with your new structure.

Like right now it's not going to fall apart. Everything's held together like a tinker toy. But what happens to those walls that are compromised, once there's not the inertia of a building being held together there. So we'd have to remediate the walls. And at that point if you're fixing a wall that you're not going to use, just because you've got to make it not hazardous, and you're going to build a new structure in the shell of the old, at that point, why not take it down and build new and then have a little bit more flexibility in designing the space.

We were brought to that conclusion about four to five months before we publicly announced it because we weren't sure how to do it. Even within our own community, I mean people like reacted strongly to that idea. They understood after conversation why it was necessary, but everybody's gut reaction was not favorable. People are emotionally attached to the place, and there was always this understanding that - I mean, ultimately when people were fighting for No Rio, it's actually for the intangible things. It's not the bricks and mortar of this building. It was really, you know, the things that happened within it.

But people managed to, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: There's a certain atmosphere that this structure creates.

MR. ENGLANDER: Sure. So everybody's stunned by that news. People were shocked once, you know, we basically in our last appeal we let the world know that that's what was going on, and there were like some stories in the community type newspapers about it. But among people here it was a bit of a shock. But they understood its necessity. It's like, you know, you're going to spend that much money to just hold onto a wall that nobody sees anyway?

We'd already decided to do a gut rehab, so it's not like we weren't going to get rid of this floor and those walls and that door, know what I mean? We already knew that it was going to be drastically different. All that was going to be here were four walls, the shell. So we're only talking about now the only difference is, instead of keeping that old shell we're getting rid of the shell too. So once it was spelled out for people, they got it. But everybody's initial reaction, everybody was kind of stunned. And I think that the architect - in retrospect I can see how he eased people into that [idea].

MS. KIRWIN: If you could even think of saving the façade?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, because the way the building's tied in, it would be way too challenging to do it. If it was like big chunks of granite - like the building next door, which was a former bank, when you leave you'll see that the main façade is resting on big pieces of granite. When they renovated that building, when they damaged No Rio, it's because they did what we're going to do, only they kept their façade. They just demo-ed the building and kept the façade and built a new building there. But because their façade is actually on these big chunks of granite, they didn't have to worry about it. It was stable.

In our case, the way the building's tied in, the engineer and the architect recommended we not try to spend the money to save it. And then once we decided to do that, the new façade, I think it will be a less imposing building. You won't have to go up those steps to get there. We'll be able to more easily make it accessible to disabled people for public events. We've got to solve that problem anyway.

We're not going to make the whole building wheelchair accessible, and we'll probably be able to get a variance on that, but for the public events space, there's no way we could not do that, and we're committed to doing it anyhow. It's easier to do that. So I think it will serve No Rio's purpose better to be able to do that. And it's just too challenging to figure out a way to retain that front façade. But it's also going to be challenging to consense around a design treatment for the façade.

So that part hasn't happened yet. That will probably take some time.

MS. KIRWIN: Wow. That's a big change. I hope you're going have photographs of the interior.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes, we're actually thinking of inviting a bunch of photographers coming to document it for us, before that happens.

MS. KIRWIN: Because it certainly has character.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. But even in a gut rehab it would change.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes. It's 2:30 now, so I should let you get your daughter. But it's been great talking to you.

[End of disk two.]

MS. KIRWIN: This is October 10th, 2007 -- 10/10/07.

MR. ENGLANDER: Uh-huh.

MS. KIRWIN: And I'm with Steve Englander at ABC No Rio at 156 Rivington and we're in the dark room.

MR. ENGLANDER: The light room of the dark room.

MS. KIRWIN: The lights are on but it's the dark room. And this is the second session of the interview. Last time we talked a lot, almost exclusively, about real estate --

MR. ENGLANDER: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: -- because so much of the story of ABC No Rio is one of real estate and the difficulties with the property and holding on to the space. But I wanted to talk a little bit today about the programming within the space --

MR. ENGLANDER: Okay.

MS. KIRWIN: -- when you first got here and how it's changed since you've been involved with No Rio.

MR. ENGLANDER: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: So when you first came what was happening here?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, when I first came by No Rio itself was just the gallery, the first floor, and the basement so it was exhibitions and performance and poetry readings solely public events. There weren't the facilities that we have now. So I mentioned I had started coming by during Matthew Courtney's event and people associated with that would do theater work and things like that in the place, and there were also exhibitions but it was all public events and Lou Acierno who was the director before me had begun working with some kids to start doing punk shows. That happened in the basement so they started doing the Saturday matinee which continues to this day.

MS. KIRWIN: This is music?

MR. ENGLANDER: This was music. So what happened was at CBGBs they used to have I think there was a Sunday matinee and Hilly Kristal ended up closing them down because they had gotten too violent. It was a real aggressive scene and the kids who started doing it here were actually -- a lot of them were into homo core -- they were gay themselves and they wanted to create a scene in the punk and hard core music scene. They wanted to create something within that that was friendly to gay and lesbian youth, women, and people who weren't white. So they actually went out of their way to not book bands that were racist, sexist, or homophobic.

So they had a real -- the curating, booking -- they went out of their way to book bands that would lead to a environment or a scene that, you know, people would feel comfortable in. At that time -- I mean it was in the late 80s. It was really aggressive and, you know, like left-wing punk kids fought Nazi skinheads. I think when we talked last time I had characterized this period of this neighborhood in the late 80s as sort of like the whole 60s compressed into five years and 30 square blocks.

But it also had this sort of, Berlin-between-the-wars aspect of it too where there were actually street fighting that was, you know, sort of subcultural gangs that were informed by their politics and it ultimately boiled down to left-wing punks versus Nazi skinheads. The punks won. There's no organized Nazi skinhead movement in New York City anymore. That's not to say there aren't Nazi skins but there's not an organized sort of group of them. One punk got killed in Tompkins Square Park and it was like an aggressive thing and there was a lot of talk about how that particular aspect of the music scene was really hostile to women, gay and lesbian youth, and people of color.

So the folks who started doing the Saturday matinee shows here were actually trying to create a place where those people would feel comfortable. Some bands are more political than others but the underlying motivation for that event was political in the sense that they wanted to, you know --

MS. KIRWIN: Make a comfortable place for people to come.

MR. ENGLANDER: Right. And be a part of that music scene. So that was going on. Back then there was also a much more -- I've actually been having debates with other people about this because technology has changed but when they first started doing these shows and for the first, I don't know, maybe ten years or so it seemed that there was a lot more involvement by everybody who was part of the scene. I mean, one of the motivating things of people in punk was it broke down the barrier between the star musician, the rock god up on a stage with a sock jammed into his -- you know what I mean? It was a reaction against that.

So everybody did something. There were like, you know, if you weren't in a band you did a fanzine. If you didn't do a fanzine you ran a little distro. You didn't do a distro you put out, you know, a little label on cassette tapes or seven inches. You know, almost everybody who was involved participated in some way and that's changed now from -- now I'm more outside of it. I was outside of it then and I'm more outside of it now just by virtue of my age but that seems to be less of a case now is that there is actually more passive consumption of the music.

More recently I've been talking to people and it's like well, the technology's changed because, you know, now

people do MySpace and bands put their music up online. There actually isn't a need for some little kid in his basement to, you know, turn out little seven-inch records and cassette tapes because that's not how music's getting distributed anymore. I think that there actually is more like passive consumption than there was, you know, when it started but that's one of the differences I've noticed over time and actually might be the way technology has changed how people do MySpace instead of making fanzines and doing labels and things like that.

So the punk show went on. Lou brought that in and it continues to this day every Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock, and there have been successive generations of kids involved in running it. And then I think at the time there was no -- they were as a collective of people that ran their own thing. They booked it so they were within No Rio. I think when I came along Lou was just curating exhibitions that he liked and when I took over from him I did the same thing for the year I was here at the beginning.

MS. KIRWIN: What were some of those early exhibitions?

MR. ENGLANDER: The ones I was involved in -- one I mentioned he forgot to tell me -- this group of Basque artists showed up and, you know, so the first exhibition I did here I wasn't aware that it was even going to happen but it was an exhibition of work by these Basque artists who had come into town. Let's see -- I guess the one that I feel sort of most proud about during that first period when I was here was an exhibition of work from the underground paper The Shadow, which was like a local paper that covered all the politics of the neighborhood from basically 1987. It goes to the present but, you know, in this period so this would have been 1990 or '91.

There were a lot of good photographers who did stuff and there was things going on all the time, whether riots or things happening in Tompkins Square Park. So it was actually an exhibition of work that was by photographers who were doing things for The Shadow, and I looked at it as like instant history which doesn't really seem to happen so much and we don't even do it too much now because here for funding purposes we actually plan -- we're more spontaneous than a lot of places but for us it's like, you know, we'll plan things three to six months in advance as opposed to a year or two years like other places.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh. Or five years.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah, or five years. But even -- you can't do instant history with a six-month to one-year window.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. ENGLANDER: So I saw it as instant history because we did this in 1991. It was things that had happened that year and within the couple years preceding that was related to stuff that was going on in the neighborhood, and a lot of the work was really strong. And then for people who were part of that scene it was, you know, it's -- you come in and you see yourself. You know, you're there so there was a --

MS. KIRWIN: Well, that's a good thing for the neighborhood.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah. Or at least within the neighborhood this particular subset.

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-huh.

MR. ENGLANDER: And then there were a couple that were just sort of -- that had been -- when I was here some things had been set into motion before I was so I think during that first year I was here and then I left that was the only one I feel like I curated and that it was like I had made the investment, and I was trying to bring aspects of the neighborhood politics and the neighborhood into the place. And there was some resistance to that that was -- remember we spoke about, you know, dealing with the people who were doing -- me and Lou and other people who were doing here at the time bumping against what the board's vision of the place was, and that was actually a part of that sort of differing vision.

So during that first year it literally was the -- just public events -- exhibitions, poetry readings, poetry readings -- the same poetry reading that was set up -- I guess it started in 1986 Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. Again, different people have taken over the custodianship of it over the years but it still goes on to this day.

MS. KIRWIN: Who does it today?

MR. ENGLANDER: Today it's a group of poets. The main one is this fellow named Bruce Weber who's actually an art guy. He works at -- he got a new job. He worked at that -- well, I'll talk to you about --

MS. KIRWIN: Does he work at Berry-Hill?

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes, he worked at Berry-Hill. Bruce Weber's sort of the instigating personality of --

MS. KIRWIN: I don't know where he's working now.

MR. ENGLANDER: -- of the poets. He got a job in a museum. He's really -- he's happy about it.

MS. KIRWIN: That's good.

MR. ENGLANDER: Berry-Hill was one. It got a little --

MS. KIRWIN: I didn't know he was involved in poetry.

MR. ENGLANDER: What's weird is he never provides any input on art-related stuff although he's not into contemporary art. I mean, his area of expertise is very --

MS. KIRWIN: Nineteenth century.

MR. ENGLANDER: All the projects and programs now are run by collectives or committees and most of them have, you know, a personality who sort of is the glue to hold it together. So Bruce is that person for the Sunday open series and he's been in that role I guess for about gosh, at least ten years now. And then the other people come and go but there's usually four to six of them who take responsibility for running the Sunday reading and who curate the -- a reading series we do with monthly readings where we work with -- it's called Celebrating Area Presses & Venues.

So each of the persons here works with another project curator that celebrates that other project. So it's Bruce and about five others and so he runs that now and has been at it for about ten years along with this broader group of people. So that reading that happens at 3 p.m. on Sunday has been going on since 1986.

Different names, different people involved but it's the same sort of thing. It's sort of strange like this place that's known for -- when you like look back at it that way a place known for its spontaneity and whatever has got these -- it's like we've been doing --

MS. KIRWIN: These long ruts.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah. [Laughter.]

MS. KIRWIN: That's all right. Continuity is good.

MR. ENGLANDER: Right.

MS. KIRWIN: You always have different people.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah, for sure. So when I -- so during that first year I was here which was like '90/'91 there wasn't a lot that was going on that I would actually claim as like a result of my having willed something into being. And then myself and Lou had been butting heads with the board and we resigned just because we felt like we weren't -- I also -- I think I mentioned I probably didn't handle it well. So we resigned. Then when I came back, which was in '94, there had been -- there was less programming.

Also in that earlier period when I was here there was also the Improvisers Network which was a program that did experimental and improvisational music, and they had actually been involved -- I think I mentioned this also -- with the Anarchist Switchboard and they used to perform there. And then that place closed down and they bounced around to another couple places and then they ended up doing it here, and that was a group of people -- they had an event called A Mica Bunker but the name --

MS. KIRWIN: A -- what was -- A --

MR. ENGLANDER: A -- three words. Well, it appears differently in their -- when I write it I write A and then a new word Mica, M-I-C-A, Bunker, B-U-N-K-E-R. A Mica Bunker was the name of this event that a group called the Improvisers Network put on which was literally just a network of musicians and some dancers who were into improvisational music.

MS. KIRWIN: What does that mean, A Mica Bunker?

MR. ENGLANDER: I'm not sure. It might have come from when they were doing things at The Switchboard. The Switchboard had previously been a theater company that was an offshoot of the Living Theater. It was people who had worked with Judith Melina in the 70s, not the 60s and then had set up their own place called The Alchemical Theater, and I wonder if they got their acronym out of alchemical -- A Mica. It might of -- just like No

Rio's name came out of a distorted sign they might chosen -- I think you can get A Mica out of there and it was a -- you know, you went -- it was a basement place. So I'm guessing A Mica Bunker is sort of like ABC No Rio's name. It was -- it didn't mean anything -- came off how letters appeared on a sign. And then they just kept the name no matter what other venue they went to.

So they did stuff there. Then when I came back in '94 I was invited in. The board -- during my absence of those three years the board resigned and gave the organization-- basically to the young people who were running the punk shows. So they were doing the punk shows and they were doing some visual art-related stuff, not a lot. The readings still went on and the A Mica Bunker folks had been doing it for a while and left because they didn't want to be forced to come to the meetings all the time.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you have to come to a meeting to be involved?

MR. ENGLANDER: During the -- I guess during that period you had to so this is after I left.

MS. KIRWIN: This was something that the punks instituted?

MR. ENGLANDER: This is something the punks did because they were like -- had a, you know, a --

MS. KIRWIN: Pretty controlling.

MR. ENGLANDER: -- a more vigorous thing. Well, they were like, if you're part of it you got to show up and help us plan how all this is going to happen -- how we're going to deal with all these problems. The building's falling apart. The city just sent us an [eviction notice] -- they were like, if you're going to do stuff here you got to help us deal with this stuff. So I think that was their idea. So they ended up -- they were like, we just can't deal with this so they went off and stopped doing things here. So they did their punk shows. There were occasional exhibitions. They stopped getting funding to do it and I don't think any of those kids -- there were kids who worked as artists but they weren't -- you know, they didn't have nonprofit background or they -- it was more like "hey, kids, let's put up a show," which we still do sometimes because it's fun to work that way.

But there weren't any people involved in terms of visual arts to keep it going with any sort of regular continuity or planning I guess, although they would do shows, you know, spontaneous things or somebody would come up with an idea and they'd be like, yeah, let's do it. So it was more of that "hey let's do a show" kind of thing. And then I came back because they were beginning to fear that the city was going to try to evict them again and the understanding was I would help deal with that situation and that's what happened. During the period when we were fighting with the city I recognized that I had to get involved in programming again because you need to ask the people support you -- you need to give them reasons why and you need to have --

MS. KIRWIN: You have to have something going on here --

MR. ENGLANDER: Just for that reason alone despite my original intentions which was not to do that I got drawn back into programming issues, organizing exhibitions and events, performances, and things like that. We went all over this pretty well but can I jump just to when we get the-so when we resolved everything with the city of New York and we basically were given the opportunity to acquire the building -- we had a few hoops to jump through -- in the short term we were given the building to do stuff in. We legally had their permission to occupy these units and do what we wanted so we had to figure out what do we want to do with this whole building. So we're making the jump from gallery storefront space that just did public events programming to the opportunity to --

-- to do stuff . So what we did was we called -- we probably had maybe three or four big meetings where people who were involved with No Rio at the time, people who were general supporters of No Rio, and anybody who happened to hear about it were welcome to come to these big meetings we had where we talked about what we want to do and what were the ideas people threw out.

MS. KIRWIN: What year was this?

MR. ENGLANDER: This would have been in 1999 -- no, 1998. We probably started planning -- once we worked out the thing with the city they were like -- squatters willingly vacate in nine months so once we resolved that -- I guess that was in early -- in the spring of 1997 and then we had nine months to figure out what we were going to do and then the people who were living here at the time would be gone and then we would start to implement that.

MS. KIRWIN: Was it difficult to get them to move?

MR. ENGLANDER: It wasn't really that difficult but it could have been, and as soon as -- I sort of feel bad about it a little bit but as soon as there were some grumblings about the people not moving out I actually like swung the

hammer down really hard and it like stopped as soon as I got an inkling that people were grumbling about that. So there's probably some people like a little resentful still about that but it's like whatever. We -- the board had signed a letter with us -- you know what I mean? It's like we made a promise to do something with the city to -- we said we would do this and then they're going to do that, and I wasn't going to be allowed -- I wasn't going to have anybody screwing up the deal.

MS. KIRWIN: Right.

MR. ENGLANDER: So there was a little bit of grumbling about it and as soon as I heard about it I basically let the world know. I mean, at that point I -- for the most part most of the people -- it's been a while -- it's probably been about three years since I got some negative feedback for having "sold out" and worked out the deal with the city. Some people would have just preferred -- there was no them unconditionally surrendering to us, right? That wasn't going to happen. So there were people who are still upset that we just didn't go out on principle as martyrs. I mean, we wouldn't have died but that we stood our ground and just lost. There were people who didn't want -- you know what I mean?

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah.

MR. ENGLANDER: They were like, you should have done the right thing and just lost. The thing is there were maybe eight people living in the building at the time. There were hundreds and hundreds of supporters and most of the supporters didn't live here, of course, and they weren't squatters themselves and since that time, you know, thousands and thousands of people have benefited from us having the building. Eight people lost where they were living, me being one of them.

When the day came to move out it was like I made it really clear that it was happening and I had people come over and we -- you know, I lived in the floor upstairs where the print shop was and the day we were supposed to move out we moved out and we smashed down a wall and put in the print shop to send an unmistakable notice to the other people who were here that --

MS. KIRWIN: This was happening.

MR. ENGLANDER: -- this was happening. But ultimately I think-- within our community, you know, not the neighborhood as a whole but our community within the neighborhood and that community extends out of the neighborhood they--

MS. KIRWIN: Supported that.

MR. ENGLANDER: -- they supported the compromise.

MS. KIRWIN: Who attended these large meetings? Do you remember?

MR. ENGLANDER: It was some of the people who were living here and were going to have to move out and they stayed involved. A number of the people who were the people who physically put themselves on the line, like the people who did the civil disobedience and the direct actions and things like that and the people who were involved in the political aspect of it, they stayed involved. And some of them are still involved. Like Seth Tobocman of World War III Illustrated still remains a friend of the space -- still comes by regularly and, you know, and he came to some of those open meetings.

But ultimately they see themselves as sort of like -- a lot of the activists will -- from people who are like -- a lot of people understood we could claim that compromise as a win and we could because this was a -- like a scene where it's like all that ends is evictions. You never get to win, you know. It doesn't happen. So even though it was a compromise we could claim it as a win and a lot of people were savvy enough and for everybody's self-esteem to claim it as such. And so they were able to move on to whatever their next cause was. I actually don't think that there's anything bad about people who jump from cause to cause. A lot of times they're disparaged. But the ones who have a lot of energy are very useful. You know, they came in. We needed their help. They did it. We won. They moved on to their next thing.

MS. KIRWIN: They moved on to something else -- yeah.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yeah. So there's nothing wrong with that. So -- but some of them did stick around for those meetings because you want to see what's going to happen. You put yourself on the line and you want to see what's going to happen. The people who are involved in the projects and programs that were going on at the time--whether it was doing the exhibitions or doing the punk shows I would say the group of people involved in deciding what should happen was primarily artists who really see themselves as working in activism.

So not so much fine artists but people who work in illustration or graphics and the World War III Illustrated group

of people -- the neighborhood activists. You always just get some nutty people who drift into political things and they were open meetings. We weren't deciding anything. It was really a feeling-out kind of thing.

MS. KIRWIN: What were some of the ideas that surfaced in these open meetings?

MR. ENGLANDER: What we have now -- print shop, computer center, dark room, and the zine library. So those were proposed. Another was whether we should turn the place into studios and have artist residencies. That was an idea.

MS. KIRWIN: Again, a living space.

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, no, they wouldn't be living. It would be here in New York -- I mean artists -- by artist residency they'd -- in this case I mean like --

MS. KIRWIN: Just studio space.

MR. ENGLANDER: Studio space -- yeah. Work space for artists. And then there was other -- doing what's called an info shop on a big scale. Info shops are little political centers. There are not so many in the United States but they're much more common in European countries -- in Amsterdam, in Paris, in London, where it's basically a -- it's sort of like a book store/social center with zines and alternative publications that's really politically focused. That one was jettisoned because we needed to do things that were broader in their focus. It also would be difficult.

No Rio was and remains a 501(c)3 organization, and although politics in that sense still is intellectual politics, when you're making a place that's really about politics it's harder to keep that out and makes it difficult. When you're about politics in that way. It would have been a bit too complicated, plus it was -- it probably would have not been ecumenical enough, you know, wouldn't have been broad enough, and it also would have invited in a request that we -- that the organization itself take a stand on things, which we actually don't and it's probably one of the reasons for an outfit that's been involved in politics for a long time that's still around -- that it's never devolved into ideological or, you know, partisan or factional, you know, disputes that end up collapsing the organization, which is fairly common within political organizations.

So that was jettisoned for -- among those reasons. That was partly mine because I had been through it where organizations collapse on themselves so I was a little bit dubious about it. But the other thing was it's like we had support that was broader than that narrow political tendency that actually tends to be the ones involved in organizing info shops, and we needed to do stuff that was wider than that. And a lot of times the info shops would get from my point of view -- and I don't even recall bringing this up -- is that a lot of times the people running them aren't especially responsible and it just didn't seem to make sense to --

MS. KIRWIN: Well, you have to man it It has a whole other set of issues related to it.

MR. ENGLANDER: Sure.

MS. KIRWIN: It's a good idea.

MR. ENGLANDER: There actually isn't one. There are book stores like Bluestockings. Have you ever visited Bluestockings on your trip?

MS. KIRWIN: Uh-uh.

MR. ENGLANDER: It's a political bookstore over on -- it's just around the corner on Allen Street between Rivington and Stanton. And there was Blackout Books but they weren't info shops so much as political bookstores that had a social aspect to them. An info shop is really sort of like a drop-in center. If you're visiting from out of town you can come there and find out what's up and be directed to what's going on. They've never been able to do it in New York and I'm wondering if American culture is just that much different than European -- it just might not work here. Anyway, it's never been successfully done.

Then the idea of doing the studio space which was proposed by artists was a drawback because you can only help - let's say you had provided six months of studio space, you have three floors, you cut them in half, you have six studios. You can help a dozen people a year if you give people six month studio residences. So we really leaned toward this idea of actually doing facilities that people would come and use on an ongoing basis, sort of maximize what it should be.

So we did print - silk-screen printing because it's accessible and it's easy to learn and anybody can do it. I mean, there's plenty of people who do it in their bathrooms or in the kitchens at home. You're not dealing with specialized chemicals. You know what I mean? It's not like more complicated printing methods where you're dealing with chemistry. It's easy. And you can teach anybody how to do it. It's not complicated. And even if

you're not a skilled artist, you can still do something and you can walk away with your end product after six hours.

So we decided to do that. One, we know that a lot of people like within our community would use it, and they still do, whether it's bands, kids - you know, in the springtime a lot of times young kids whose bands are going to go on tour over the summer come by to bang out t-shirts to take with them. Right before big political events there will be a flurry of activists coming by to do t-shirts and posters and things like that. So we knew our people would use it. It was like an easy thing to do and it was an easy thing to set up immediately, so that's why it was actually the first thing we did, knock out that wall. I moved out, we knocked out the wall and we put in the print shop. People pretty much started using it immediately. It was a while before we sort of got it regulated the way it is now, but it was the first thing in.

During - at about the time we were sorting this all out, there was a zine library that was in the Bronx that was in a squat that was going to be evicted, and if that squat wasn't going to be evicted, we might not have a zine library here. But at the time we were trying to figure out what to do, that place needed a home. And again, there were a lot of people involved within our community who were into zines. These were either as reading them or making them or just having a commitment to that form. So we basically inherited it, and that one was just sort of fortuitous. It probably wouldn't have happened if there wasn't a pre-existing collection that we would inherit. I mean, then it was like 3,000 pieces, and now what we have is over 10,000, so it's tripled in size of the past 10 years.

Then there was the darkroom, which was a number of people involved in these meetings with photographers. I'm not sure why, but there have often been a lot of photographers involved with No Rio over the years. So we did the darkroom because we also knew that, again, we could use it to teach people. You know, it's like we could actually have photo classes, and even though we didn't start with an educational programming right away, we knew that this and a print shop would at some point in the future leave themselves to do an educational program.

MS. KIRWIN: Is this used much any more, with digital photography?

MR. ENGLANDER: It's actually been a bit weird. When I'm doing the - it's being used less, but there's weird flurries that go on, and I've not been able to really figure that out. There is less demand for it. In building the new building we do plan on doing it, and I think photography is going to change and it's really going to be - there will probably be people - until the cameras with three or four times as much megapixels become affordable, people who still want really detailed stuff are still going to shoot in film and they might do medium format.

Otherwise I think that the photomechanical process of photography is going to be people who are doing things that require working in that process, whether - like one of the people who's involved in keeping the darkroom going does pinhole photography, and he's got a wide variety of different pinhole cameras that he makes. You know, it will be things along those lines. We did a class this summer that was in alternative techniques, so the instructor did a history of Dada, along with teaching alternative techniques. And they also shot in medium format cameras so that they had 120 film and easier to cut the film in 35 millimeter to do the photo collage.

So I think that if it continues, it's going to be people doing alternative techniques. Obviously photojournalism doesn't cut it. From what I've heard, like National Geographic still wants negatives. But for newspapers, I mean the imaging isn't high resolution for their publications anyway. It doesn't matter. But we made a commitment when we rebuilt the building to do a darkroom. I think it will go up when it's more comfortable working in here. I mean, over the summer it's hot. There's minimal ventilation in the darkroom but it's not so powerful and it's a little uncomfortable. So we're going to take the chance but it's a little bit nervous, you know, because you don't know what the demand's going to be.

If we have to retrofit the place for something else, that's what happens, but at this point we decided to commit to the process. But yes, the other places, like the ICP gave up a whole bunch of their space. There's a place called Printshop that rents darkroom space by the hour and they actually gave up a floor. But when I do some comparisons, like you know, I can't come up with a rhyme or a reason-how much was it used this three-month period this year versus - I can't actually do any - I can't learn anything by comparing the activity between this year and last year and the year before. There is a slight downward trend, though.

MS. KIRWIN: You may have one of the last darkrooms.

MR. ENGLANDER: That's it. Somebody hears about it, or it's like there's a flurry.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes. People are still working with film, and they might want to explore film as a medium.

MR. ENGLANDER: Personally, that's what I think's going to happen. People who are going to use it are going to

do it because what they're doing requires working with the process is a chemical thing.

MS. KIRWIN: And your computer room, when did that start?

MR. ENGLANDER: That started in '99. That was - we weren't sure what to do with that front part at the time. Somebody just was like, listen, you should really put this in. You're going to need technology anyway. Might as well devote a chunk of the building to it, make it publicly accessible. One appropriate - this was back in the time people were talking about the digital divide. They're disappearing now but there was this movement for doing what's called community technology centers, CTCs. It was like the subject. The cost of computers has come down, bandwidth has come down. You can actually get computers relatively cheap. But this was almost 10 years ago.

And ultimately that person was right - you need just a chunk. However you use it, you need like an area dedicated to doing the technology stuff. So he was like, listen, you've got to do this. You'll need it for your organization and why not make it available to people. People traveling, et cetera. So that was probably the one that came in after all these meetings happened. It wasn't one of the ones that was initially proposed through this big group discussion.

Another part of that discussion was how to restructure the organization because throughout the years there had been times when one person was running things, you know groups of people doing it. The punks were trying to run it collectively. Now we were going to be expanding throughout the whole building, so another thing that came up in these meetings was how to figure out a structure to run the place. And what we ended up coming up with was basically a collective of collectives. So every project or program that would start would be its own collective, or whatever they wanted to call themselves. I don't know what the poets call themselves. The visual arts people call themselves a committee. The punks call themselves a collective. But there's basically groups of people to run and deal with each project or program.

At the time I had gotten elected to the board, during my absence, the punks had taken it over, and then when we started fighting the city, a bunch of the board members resigned because they weren't comfortable with some of the extra-legal things we were doing, and we weren't following the advice of the lawyer they had gotten. They weren't comfortable being on the board any more. So the board had by attrition gotten reduced to the four that's required by New York State law at the time, which is like four. You needed at least four. Actually you need at least three. The treasurer can be an outside [person]. The treasurer can actually be somebody hired.

So we had gotten down to four and I was one of them, just because people resigned. They weren't comfortable with basically that extra-legal aspect. I remember Alan Moore telling me that even back when Co-Lab was planning the Real Estate Show, there were people who wouldn't participate because of they were breaking into a building.

MS. KIRWIN: Liability.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. They weren't comfortable. So it had gotten smaller. So there really were just four people on the board and I was one of them. So from the period of about - two years, 1995 to 1997 or so - no, 1998 - there were just four of us.

MS. KIRWIN: Who were the other three?

MR. ENGLANDER: The other three were - gosh. Victoria Law, Dave Powell, and Themis - it's a Greek name. Themis Chronopolous, who ended up moving away. So we were just the four basic people. But it wasn't - at that point it wasn't like the board was moving and making decisions that everybody else - the board really existed at that time because you needed to have a board. The board did the paperwork, they approved things like if we had to hire a lawyer or do stuff like that. But ultimately when we were fighting the city, it was happening in big collective meetings. The board wasn't deciding what to do.

So I resigned from the board and was hired as director because we had to raise the money to renovate the building, we were installing all these new projects and programs. You know, it just became more - you needed somebody to deal with -

MS. KIRWIN: It was a job.

MR. ENGLANDER: You needed a full-time administrative person. So I resigned from the board and got hired as director. And we expanded the board and we came up with this concept of structuring the place as a collective of collectives, and the idea being each project, the people involved in each project or program ought to run and manage their program as they see fit, unless what they're doing is interfering with somebody else's project or program. And my job ostensibly is to work with them to make sure they've got the resources and things they

need to carry out what they want to do. So that was basically how we came up with the structure that we have today, so that the place does run collectively and each project or program is relatively autonomous in terms of trying to do what they need to do to get their stuff done.

MS. KIRWIN: What happens at this moment, another group comes in and says what we want to do.

MR. ENGLANDER: There isn't any place for them. Yes. And in planning for the future with the architect, we basically made the commitment that we would plan for everything that's going on during the time we did our, you know, programmatic needs assessment to work with the architect. Would continue in the future. Nothing was going to get jettisoned. But we're not building to bring in more projects or programs. We're not making the space larger to add new facilities.

MS. KIRWIN: So they could theoretically join one of those collectives, though.

MR. ENGLANDER: Correct. If people call me with queries on how to get involved, I'll basically see what their interests are. Most people directly, you know, talk to the people involved in whatever project to see about getting involved. If I field the query, I'll talk to them. There are some people who just want to help out or whatever. We call them ad-hoc volunteers. If they want to help with fund raising or special events and things like that. So yes, if people want to get involved, they get in the project or program that interests them. Or they help out in a generalized capacity. And there's about maybe half a dozen people in that ad-hoc category who I regularly call upon to help all this stuff.

MS. KIRWIN: And in the new space can you talk a little bit about the plans for the future of the - you talked last time about razing the building and the new structure. What's it going to be like?

MR. ENGLANDER: It will be all new so it's going to be clean and dust-free, which is good for the darkroom people. There will be tiled or cement floors in all the workshop facilities so we don't have to worry about when somebody over-sprays in the print shop when they're cleaning their screen that it's going to leak into the darkroom. It will be hopefully cool in the summer and warm in the winter. So all the like basic amenities that most people expect when they cross a threshold will be there, which aren't necessarily there now.

During the period when we work with the architect on the design and we pretty much - it hasn't been formally approved by the board yet, but we've pretty much locked down how the interior is going to be designed. So over a period of about six to nine months all the groups met together to determine what their actual needs are, and what they have existing and how things should be changed. And then they also - each group also met with the architect to talk with him about - just so that there was some feedback going on, they would say, you know. And then they would meet again and talk with them and do some more discussion, based on their first meeting with the architect.

And then we ended up drafting a report that was basically program needs assessment as it relates to building design and construction. That's the title of the document. And then that was shared with the architect and then he came back with drawings after those first two things, and then there was a bit more talking and he ended up sort of revising it. It was a collective process, working on the design of the building inside, insofar as they were all there to tell them what their needs were, not only like we need this cabinet here, this is a light room, but you know, how much space should we allow for people to move, especially in the more complicated ones like the darkroom. Like, does it actually work? Is that enough passageway? And some things the architect was like, you should really allow for more because the standard is - you know, some things are standardized within the architectural field. Two people passing the hallway, okay, we need to have this much space.

As well as just like the ease of working. Also with the print shop, how should different things be located to make it easier for people to work, especially if it's going to be crowded.

MS. KIRWIN: How is ABC No Rio going to keep its anarchist edge?

MR. ENGLANDER: I think it will be the same because it's got less to do with - I mean, now it's easy for me to say now that I've reconciled myself to the fact that we're going to tear down the building, put something up new. But that actually has got less to do with the physical environment than the structure of how it runs is what makes that happen, not the building that we happen to be in. So if we don't change that, and we're actually doing our best not to. Some things we're just getting more, you know, visual arts is an example. It's like we've always - I've always done pretty good with NYSCA in terms of not spelling out exactly - New York State Council of the Arts - what we were going to do the next year. My proposal is really about what we did last year, and the implication was we were going to do something similar next year.

Some things we did plan further ahead, but we'd actually had more spontaneous shows, and they're just less comfortable now. They literally want me to tell them what I'm going to do next year. The drawback is, that's actually changed things so we do - back when I wasn't doing that and we were more open to things, I was

actually comparing this about two months ago. We do like eight or nine or ten exhibitions a year, and now we do four to six. Because at a certain point when you're planning so much more in advance, you almost feel more of an obligation to have that exhibition up longer, and then it makes it hard to squeeze in these spontaneous things. It just makes it more difficult with that sort of planning. So there is a drawback.

MS. KIRWIN: What does the New York State Arts Council money go toward in your visualized programming?

MR. ENGLANDER: Exhibitions.

MS. KIRWIN: Toward painting walls -

MR. ENGLANDER: Everything. A little bit of my salary, artists' fees, promotional materials. Mostly I guess like the installation costs, artists' fees, and publicity. But that's the way it is with every funder. When you're doing things on - even now we're low budget, but when you do an extremely low budget, you actually have more freedom because you're not answering to anybody. And once you have to start raising money to do it, whether it's from a governmental agency or private foundation, you actually have to-you're contractually obliged to do it.

MS. KIRWIN: You have a lot more restrictions.

MR. ENGLANDER: So that's actually a change in that programmatically. It's still collectively, you know, run among the visual arts community. Somebody has got an idea and we talk about it and if everybody's comfortable with that, we move forward. The lead time is six months to a year rather than two weeks, three months. So in that sense, yes.

With the facilities, I, you know, I don't - it will still be fairly informal and they'll still be inexpensive, but they will probably cost more, but they'll still be cheaper than anywhere else, even with my like revised projections that I'm doing. So I'm actually not so worried about like the sort of, you know, vibe of the place. I think people probably take a while to get comfortable in it, but I think we'll be more - it will be more welcoming to people who aren't comfortable being in like a rundown old building too. You know what I mean? Like people are just like - or they're uncomfortable sending their kids in there. So I'm actually not worried about that.

I recognize it as a legitimate concern, but I actually think it's got less to do with the physical condition of the building than, you know, the attitudes and feelings of the people within it.

MS. KIRWIN: That's a good approach. Yes. I think you're right. But you know, coming to the space it's kind of overwhelming in its decrepitude. I mean, it figures into the experience of No Rio.

MR. ENGLANDER: For sure. It took us like from when we knew that we were going to build new to actually publicly announce it, was probably three to four months, I think, you know, because we weren't sure exactly how to do it, and finally we were just like, all right, it's time to send out another appeal anyway. Now is the time to just like let the world know.

MS. KIRWIN: Are you worried about or concerned about the maintenance of the future new building? Here there's - I suppose there's a greater freedom to live in the space that's falling down around you. Are you going to be more concerned or have more energies going into keeping the new space in pristine condition?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I don't think it will be so much of that. I mean, right now the reason we don't put a lot into maintenance, because everything's being directed toward - you know you're going to take it down. That's got to get built into - you know what I mean, future budget's for the place will include -

MS. KIRWIN: Maintenance.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. In terms of the - like the pristine quality, I'm not that worried about it. I mean, it will weather over, you know, 30 years.

MS. KIRWIN: And you were going to do documentation of this building?

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes, the visual arts committee wanted to do a thing where like a dozen photographers are invited in to just document the thing.

MS. KIRWIN: Celebrating the old space as it is in the new space.

MR. ENGLANDER: So the design stuff was a collective process as well, in how we worked it. So we locked down basically the interior of the building, but what we haven't resolved is the design treatment for the outside, and that one is going to be much more of a challenge because there's, you know, so many directions that you can go and trying to consense around that will be - well, we'll see. We've only had one meeting design treatments and the architect did prepare two facades that he put out there. Not necessarily like the real proposals, but to get

some feedback to see where people were coming from. They were both relatively extreme compared to old tenement buildings.

One we found out isn't going to work, and that was basically making a glass curtain building, but the glass curtain would be all solar panels. We've had a solar consultant come by already and that wouldn't work. His measurements, there's no way it would pay for itself.

MS. KIRWIN: There's a lot of variety on this block, and it's not like you'd stick out. There's a lot going on here, so it seems like whatever you do would be okay for the block.

MR. ENGLANDER: Even though they were all solar panels, there was like a strong reaction against the glass curtain building. And then some people were - actually there was one person was like didn't want - wanted it to be like a new, but similar tenement building as the existing buildings in the neighborhood, and then the architects was sort of like rolling his eyes. Do you want me to do a reproduction? It was almost like a conversation you'd imagine like the modernist architects having with their clients in 1920.

The other one was sort of interesting, I'm a little bit worried about, was basically the building is just stucco and it's got a brick laminate on top, and then there's a wire grid and the whole building has ivy on it so it's an organic, living, breathing building. But that one, it's like - what does it look like in the wintertime.

MS. KIRWIN: Dead maybe.

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, it won't die, but they go dormant or whatever, ivy does. But then you're also going to have - you know, you probably regularly - even if you don't have to do it every year, probably every two years bring in a horticulturist.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, wouldn't it rip off the façade ultimately?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, there's a grid on it.

MS. KIRWIN: They wouldn't grow into -

MR. ENGLANDER: The architect's not worried about that. He's like, it grows on top of it. It doesn't go in. You get ivy that - there's ivy that doesn't destroy brick otherwise. I mean, there must be out there in D.C., like any of the universities that are like -

MS. KIRWIN: Ivy covered. Yeah. I do think they're invasive, though.

MR. ENGLANDER: He says there's plants where that's not a problem. But you actually have - it's got a grid in front of it and it's the grid that they're grabbing onto. But then you're going to have - you've got to build - every once and a while having to bring in a horticulturist if it gets sick, and then you're going to have, you know, there will be a lot of insect life on it. Anyway, what he wanted was feedback, so it's like poking something to get the feedback that will allow them to, you know, come back with something closer compared to what is people's response.

He works well - the architect is part of our community, so you know, he works well with the process that we have. He's familiar with it and he comes out of the squatting movement. He actually is a good choice because it doesn't require a lot of - he knows who we are and he helped us out 20 years ago once. So you don't have to - there's like no cultural - Paul.Castrucci He was actually one of the founders of Bulletspace, he and his brother founded the Squat and an art gallery called Bullet Space. Have you ever seen that book Your House is Mine [print project]?

MS. KIRWIN: No.

MR. ENGLANDER: That's huge. It's really impressive. You should see if they have it at your institution, Your House is Mine. It's a poster project that they did with writers and artists. David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992) has got a piece in it, and Miguel Piñ ero's (1946-1988) got writing in it. But it's huge. It's like this big. Silk screen prints but it's got a lead cover, so it's heavy. We have one but I keep it there because it's expensive and I don't want to keep it here. But we have it to sell as fund raising.

So he's our guy. So he comes out the squatting scene. He's been in the neighborhood forever. He understands working collectively, so there's no cultural sort of issues to try to bridge that you might have with some other person.

MS. KIRWIN: Is ABC No Rio's archive here in this building?

MR. ENGLANDER: It is, and hopefully I'll find out by the end of the month. I've actually got a request in for a

money to hire an archivist to do the preliminary work. If I get the money, I'll probably prepare an RFP to submit to freelancers and firms. If you know of anybody you'd recommend.

MS. KIRWIN: We can give you some names of people in New York. Are you getting an NHPRC grant?

MR. ENGLANDER: No. I don't know what that is.

MS. KIRWIN: It's for archives on a national level.

MR. ENGLANDER: No. It's just like special projects category of NYSCA, but the program director there is Elizabeth Merena [director, Visual Arts, NYSCA], who worked with David [Platzker, AS-AP, Project Director] in setting up AS-AP [Art Spaces Archives Project] . She was on the steering committee when they first got that thing going.

MS. KIRWIN: I can give you some suggestions of people to put the request out.

MR. ENGLANDER: So hopefully we'll do that. I've got a really crude finding aid if you want to look at it. abcnorio.org/archive. It's basically an inventory. Even to call it a finding aid, it is a finding aid because I list the contents by folder and box, but it was done by me and an intern. Basically we met a woman named Brenda Parnes [Regional Advisory Officer, New York State Archives] from the New York State Historical Society who had done a preliminary assessment of materials, gave us some rough categories to divide things up into so that we could sort it a little bit. And then we did that, and then made this rough list that's basically a list of what's in what container so that it would be easier for a professional archivist to more thoroughly organize the material and prepare an electronic finding aid and make some recommendations on how we should deal with it in terms of preparing a database and doing what's got to be done.

So yes, it's all here except for the art. The art's at a storage facility in New Jersey and Jack and Peter talked to you about that.

MS. KIRWIN: Are you going to bring that back to the new building?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, we've got to figure that one out. I've talked to a lot of people. I was quite surprised, and now it's that people really want us to keep it, and I think it's because we're still in the organization. Obviously if we were going bust - I was like, oh, this is such a headache, we've got to get some third party people who've got the resources to deal with it, and blah, blah, blah, and whether it was to Fales [Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University]), or whether it was to, you know, the New York State Historical Society, at one point it was like let's just blow it apart and give this to them, they're interested in that, let's give this to Fales. And then a number of people I spoke with, including Elizabeth at NYSCA and this woman from New York State Historical Society, this other person who does electronic databases and she worked with Franklin Furnace on their things, Sunny Yoon. Everybody was like, you should keep it. You're a living organization. And then when I said I already decided to do it, everybody was glad.

I actually even asked Sunny Yoon, what are you so excited - what's it do? I like didn't understand why. I'm so happy you decided to keep it. And I'm like, what's it to you? And she was like, because you're a living organization. And I think living organizations should keep and maintain their records until they're not living any more.

MS. KIRWIN: I agree. It can be a headache.

MR. ENGLANDER: But dealing with the records is one thing, and if we bring in an archivist to organize it and it's there, it's not like - we're not like the Smithsonian. We're not going to get, you know, people track - we might - actually that's not true. We do get Ph.D. candidates traveling across country to look at it. But hundreds aren't going to be doing it in a month.

MS. KIRWIN: You can help the people looking at it. That's good. You should maintain it.

MR. ENGLANDER: But I get about - as of now maybe half a dozen requests to look at it by Ph.D. candidates, kids working on their master's thesis. Even undergrads doing some special project. And it's not just fine arts people. We'll get people doing cultural studies. I've talked with people who are anthropology who are looking into subcultures and things like that. So there actually is a wide variety of academic disciplines that would have interest in the material. So we're trying to raise the money. So now we decided to keep it.

MS. KIRWIN: Good.

What goes on with the art's a different story. It's much more complicated because the archive I have right here and I get the - it's easy to decide how to deal with it and what to do with it. The art is so much more complicated because we share the custody with Jack and Peter. That's - yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: Why?

MR. ENGLANDER: It happened during that period when they transferred the board. Well, from Jack and Peter's group of people to the punk kids. They wrote an agreement that No Rio and Allied [Productions, Inc.] shared custody of the art work. And during all that time they had a building, never got - there's no provenance materials, there's no records that - there's no paperwork at all.

MS. KIRWIN: How anything came in.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. There's just - it's all apocryphal.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you have information for each piece or -

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes, we have the information. We have a database of it. You could track down the people, which we'd have to do It's distracting work but it's probably only 40 to 60 hours - it's phone calls and letter writing and stuff, but there's no reproduction rights to any of the material. You know what I mean? It's problematic.

With this money that I got from the archivist, I'd actually pulled - when I had my preliminary conversation with Elizabeth, who's the program director, I'm like, well, we could hire an archivist to do this, we could resolve all these legal issues with that. And the one she was interested in was this thing, because she had been part of ASAP and hooked us up - you know what I mean? For her it was something she had played a role, kind of instituting by bringing in the person from New York State to look at it. But that was one of the things was to resolve all the legal issues. But there's no releases for even reproduction rights to the material.

There's nothing that proves that we actually own it, so in terms of getting a maintenance and preservation grant -

MS. KIRWIN: You can't do anything with it. That is a problem. You could get - it's not insurmountable, but the bigger issue is one of ownership.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. But I was kind of hoping those guys would resolve it, but they just actually haven't. I think they're - I don't know. Maybe they're afraid that if they did it, some people would ask for their work back.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it's a possibility. You could open that door, but it is a possibility.

MR. ENGLANDER: But the art's more complicated. The archive is easy. It's here.

MS. KIRWIN: When is this new building scheduled to open?

MR. ENGLANDER: Well, in the agreement with the city we made our timeline really big, at their recommendation, like make it big so you don't violate our agreement. Now the budget process for New York City begins within the next couple of months. People lobby politicians, and next spring they'll start having meetings about it. If we're able to get city help to start, we would probably begin in late 2008, early 2009. And we had asked them for $1 million, and that would be enough to get through the first phase of the plan, which is basically take the existing building down, build a new envelope of the building, and then do the work so that we could get a temporary C of O in the gallery, the first floor and the basement spaces, so we'd start doing public events again.

MS. KIRWIN: It's a nice beginning.

MR. ENGLANDER: Correct. And then the common area hallway would be finished because you need that to be done to get the C of O. But the interior of the facilities would be raw space. There would be no finishes. So the plumbing would just end, and the electric will enter the panel but there wouldn't be any distribution through it. But the walls separating, you know, the hallway from the facility on that side would be complete. So hopefully we would start that if we get some city funding in city's fiscal year 2009. That would begin. That's next year.

And then it would be about a year of construction, and then during that period we'd go back into business and raise the money to finish the rest. We wouldn't start until we have the funds to do - to finish phase one. Because obviously we don't want to start and then not be able to finish. So in that plan we would at least be able to go back to doing public events programming, and then finish later.

If we were able to get the money to do it all at once, it would be about 18 months, let's say we were able to start in - let's say January 2009. It would be a year to just do the first phase, and 18 months to do it all. But that's only provided we get the money. Construction costs in New York rise 1 percent a month, so for us that means every year is another $250,000.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, I've learned a lot. I think we've pretty much covered the territory. I wish you luck and strength

in the next phase of this because it's going to be a big adventure.

MR. ENGLANDER: I made a commitment to get through the next facility and setting things up, and then I'm like getting a little old for the job. So I want to get through that and go on to my next whatever. I don't even know what it is. Fortunately for us people are sort of comfortable talking about that when I bring it up. Everybody understands, even the board, which they're like, yes, we've got to constantly be aware of that. We've got to, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: You need a succession plan.

MR. ENGLANDER: Yes. It's not - I mean, I don't know if we actually need a formal plan, but for people to comfortably talk about it, recognize that it's got to happen.

MS. KIRWIN: Wow. You've done great work here.

MR. ENGLANDER: Thanks.

MS. KIRWIN: And thank you for talking with me. Anything else to add?

MR. ENGLANDER: No, I think that's about it.

MS. KIRWIN: All right.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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