Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ron Athey, 2016 June 17-18

Funded by the Keith Haring Foundation.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ron Athey on 2017 June 18 and 19. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, at Athey's home, and was conducted by Alex Fialho for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

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

Interview

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Ron Athey at Ron Athey's home in Los Angeles, CA, on June 17, 2016 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

Let's just start at the beginning; when and where were you born, and just talk a little bit about that childhood and background. You can dive in with some specifics.

RON ATHEY: I guess I have to admit; I was born in Connecticut [laughs]. That was a Navy father that year so I was born on a Navy hospital in Groton, CT, but I'm from kind of a multi-generation California family, typical dustbowl refugees before that, Okies.

ALEX FIALHO: And how long had you been in Connecticut and how did you end up in California?

RON ATHEY: I was there one and a half year. I was a baby so I don't have any memories of that time. My mother was schizophrenic and she had a boy and a girl by a McDonald. She had a boy and a girl by an Athey [laughs], always separated before the girl was born in both cases. You know, our span is four people born in six years, and then all brought back home to her parents.

ALEX FIALHO: And that's California?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, so we were in Pomona.

ALEX FIALHO: And were you primarily raised by her or by other family?

RON ATHEY: She spent her life, since I was a baby, in institutions, so I was raised by my grandmother and my aunt; her sister and mother.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay, can we talk a little bit about the two of them?

RON ATHEY: Oh.

ALEX FIALHO: I know.

[They laugh.]

RON ATHEY: Cracking open [inaudible].

RON ATHEY: I do have a really clear first memory of being in a kind of crib inside their bedroom. And, you know, bars and light and probably disturbed to be coming back from Connecticut and being, you know, held hostage in this room with older women wearing beehive wigs—

[They laugh.]

RON ATHEY: I just remember the situation. So it was a mother/daughter slept in the same bed. That were the head of the household.

ALEX FIALHO: And it's your mother's sister; your mother?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, everybody's matriarchal. I met my father when I was 25.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay, and primarily raised by the two of them. Do you have much of a relationship with your siblings as well or—

RON ATHEY: I did. I also had a grandfather who died when I was 14, who was kind of the sanest element in that mix but, you know, a construction worker, keeping an eight-person household, the only one person who ever worked. So obviously we were on benefits and child support from the Navy and different ways of surviving like that.

ALEX FIALHO: And strongly religious, to say the least,.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: Which you've written a lot about.

RON ATHEY: Yeah. I've written about it. I'm constantly researching the histories of Pentecostalism, which the first church was in LA where Little Tokyo is now; Azusa Street.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: Which was 1911; a one eyed black minister [laughs]. You know, it had these kind of progressive starts and then became more thought of as being a Southern religion later.

ALEX FIALHO: They were deeply involved in the church?

RON ATHEY: They were deeply involved in the philosophy, which would be equally spiritualist as much as Pentecostal. And there wasn't quite one church that [laughs] handled all that so there was a lot of side things going on.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did that trickle down to you, as a young one?

RON ATHEY: I mean, maybe now I can see through their eyes in a different way. Like you have this way of coming to understand existence and energy, and then the way you would teach anyone; the way you see through their lens. Everything was like an apocalyptic opera to them.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: It's dissociative like reality is so grim it fractures into this, you know, grandiose musical about your life. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Wow, and they had—I read in your recounting they had a particular stake in you as a young one.

RON ATHEY: I have an intense experience of knowing, of being manipulated by prophecies; like the whole house. If someone can channel the voice of God and a prophecy is given then everything has to start veering in that direction, so I was told that I was born under this calling.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow, from both grandmother and—

RON ATHEY: Grandmother and aunt and, yeah, others; always so dinged out. [Laughs.] She'd go along with it maybe but—

ALEX FIALHO: Tell me a little bit more about that operatic quality or the dissociative quality. How did you see that playing out later?

RON ATHEY: I think it's grandiosity. It was a lot of classic things were—they'd come from the culture of faith healing. There's a type of hypochondria embedded within that. So you can believe that you have cancer, and you're just in pain all the time for like five years and then you're healed at a healing service. So they were like in that third-generation of healing services. Like always [our great-grandmother Audry –RA] would be linked in and it's an odd it's an relationship to bringing, changing your body under the power of God or taking on—they were probably more about the Book of Job than any other part of the Bible. Not all the loving, beautiful, miraculous parts—the miserable son of a bitch [laughs]. I kind of just pieced this together. The incest in Job and the incest in the house that I grew up in; it has similar parallels with that; the daughters and like particularly my grandmother. I won't go and name my sister's names in that. It's like implicating other people but it was dodgy. You know, weird to grow up in that kind of environment, and I think it's still lacking language to describe female to female incest. You know, and it started for my sister when she was four so that's a weird household, you know. Eight people in a three-bedroom tract house in Pomona. [Laughs.] With that going on with all this religion, like everything was always enhanced and symbolic. I mean things I still treasure is you would have a dream and you would sit down with the grandmother with the dream book volumes, and kind of try to interpret your dream and also be encouraged to finish dreams.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: That's the kind of skill set that you get from being raised like that.

ALEX FIALHO: That was sort of the overriding narrative of your youth, right?

RON ATHEY: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: It wasn't like much sports or, you know, there wasn't much else happening. It seems like the religion was at the forefront?

RON ATHEY: Nothing else happened for very long, you know, and again, we lived in a neighborhood that went through white flight and we didn't leave and so I was almost always the only white person in class, but we weren't allowed to bring people of color home. We weren't allowed to bring anyone home to our house.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: That was specified, as well. It's like, okay, we're isolated in a place you don't believe in. You splinter away from how you're being parented when it doesn't line up with the reality of school, and I wouldn't even call that being semi-socialized. I was older when I kind of started really talking to people about who I was where, you know, you press the truth up against the light and like have profound weenager angst awakenings.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, wow., Are any of the narratives that came from either grandmother or aunt worth telling or directive or was it just the whole picture?

RON ATHEY: I mean, I guess you could say they were seeing me as this John the Baptist character, and that my aunt was going to bear the second coming of Christ. So—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: I was so wrapped up in that that from, you know, kind of when I was 15 years old forward when I kind of crashed. I always tried to make sense. Like how have things that felt so intense not mean something else? If the premise is a lie or you were hijacked by someone. I already recognized I was given something. I was too energetic to just be deceit. So things like the glossolalia [spirit language –RA] and automatic writing. I could understand what those were through the other things going on in culture.

ALEX FIALHO: Was your belief system in that sort of like Messiah part full—did you have a full belief system in that at that point?

RON ATHEY: I did have a full belief system in that. I mean, of course when your belief system collapses, you feel all the times you have that wiggly feeling like, oh, this is crazy.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: But [laughs] I also didn't have much infiltration from other people.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: In what kind of information I was getting. And it was—you know, it was properly a schism to be dumped with your mother's mother because she's a schizophrenic or has, you know, severe epilepsy—it was always the bottom line like we're going to take you to care; take you to child services. That's your option, and I was also this kind of living saint. I wasn't treated the same as my brothers and sisters.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you have a sense of why it came on you in that way?

RON ATHEY: I can replay scenes in church, you know, just being like this special, sparkling child with tears streaming down my face, really engaged with everything. Of course, I got extra attention and pulled up to the pulpit. You know, it's like vaudeville in there. What element in here can I manipulate? Here's a crying child—

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: This is the story I wrote about the static juice but I really was sat up there and the minister took his wife's shirt off and tore it into squares and put tears and these little safety pins that made them like relics. People lined up for them and then you're supposed to go home and sleep five hours and go to, you know, I was still in grade school then.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: Like really, really esoteric the way I was feeling; energy around me and the idea of being grounded

was more of a universal idea than actually being in the room I was in.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Was art at all at play in that—with them or with you?

RON ATHEY: No, whatsoever. It was [laughs] it was kind of anti-art. It's that grim, Protestant, impoverished, white trash aesthetic. Like everything's kind of like flat. I can't think of one person that cared about the arts. They cared about celebrity culture. You know, that's the TV generation; 70s on pills watching stories. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

RON ATHEY: Art came—wow, I'm like a program kid, you know. Art came from something called the MGM program; mentally gifted minors, so early on. The first play they took us to. It was everybody who was smart that seemed like they needed a program, so the counselor arranged to bring us to see Eartha Kitt in *Timbuktu*, at the Pantages. So it's mid-'70s. [Laughs.] To be from a suburban town to go into the music center to the ridiculous chandeliers and things. I'd never been in an environment like that. And then to see a really grand sensual play.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: That was at the Pantages. But we were like season-ticket holders at the music center.

ALEX FIALHO: Through school?

RON ATHEY: Through school, so I guess theater was the beginning.

ALEX FIALHO: Was that in your teens or was that earlier?

RON ATHEY: That was earlier. Maybe weens [laughs] from when I was a weenager.

ALEX FIALHO: Was that the way that the socialization or semi-socialization of school rubbing against the family background?

RON ATHEY: I think that was more interpersonal relationships. I think the final one was—I excelled in biology, physiology, so I had two summers of interning at the Jonas Salk Institute.

ALEX FIALHO: In high school?

RON ATHEY: So that was the final—Yeah, I was 16—15—I'd been holding it in like oh, God, this is real. How do I get out of this house? How do I graduate early? How do I, having really kind of matured late and came into my own at 15. I wasn't a smart 14-year-old. I was still like a little baby angel and all of a sudden [laughs] you know, I had this awareness suddenly of other parts of the world [laughs], and then to be with other people taken to another program. That program was called Upward Bound where we stayed at the dorms at UCSD, and then various vans would take people where they worked all in the either medical or biological science field.

ALEX FIALHO: And that was stay away camp?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, you know, Black's Beach is straight down and it was still the '70s. Nude body paint parade on the Fourth of July. [Laughs.] I had never seen the hippie culture either. I knew about the Chicano movement, like kind of post riots with black uprising; that sort of cultural back to Africa movement. Those were things that were inside of my schooling, which were influential. But not hippies.

ALEX FIALHO: When did sexuality come into the mix? At that time too?

RON ATHEY: Sexuality; let's just say—sexuality started very incestuously in-house but not in an abusive way. Maybe I was the abuser. So I'll just say I had years of sexual experience before I found an outside one, and was pretty polymorphously perverse well into my 20s. I still lived with women and kind of go back and forth in between. So maybe being into everything and being like a natural born pervert I never had like coming-out issues [laughs] or anything because I think I always had that pervert complex, from even a child.

ALEX FIALHO: How did that play out in the family space?

RON ATHEY: Families are always guilty in those situations. I think of the little makeup and slips and weird play that goes too far when people have a born queen fag-in training sort of child and all of a sudden one ballet leap tips it all off [laughs] and then you start having them try to masculinize you a little bit but nobody really cared enough. [Laughs.] I did go as far as like American football and I joined like a Cholo Boy Scouts troop for a year where we like shot a gun and drank a beer, and I got one nosebleed boxing and decided it wasn't for me. [Laughs.] But then kind of faded away from that and then became very druggy, which came from its own angle.

It was from properly being a broken child. I was put on Valium, two mg, four times a day, from when I was nine.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

RON ATHEY: So by the time I was 15 I was taking handfuls of them in different strengths and I didn't really understand what addiction was, and at some point I started realizing that I'd start going crazy when I didn't have them. The doctor got arrested and [laughs] my supply got cut off and that's part of what my time in San Diego was; a month of it going through this intense detox.

ALEX FIALHO: Was school—you said biology, Jonas Salk Institute— was that a focus for you; academics.

RON ATHEY: Yes and it's intense when you decide, okay, I'm going to be a scientist and the anger my family had over me not being a minister like my grandmother basically threw a plate of food at me, threw a bowl at me, tipped a table over on me. You know, like really agro about it.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you the oldest, the youngest?

RON ATHEY: Middle. Third, out of four in that house, and I have four younger brothers through my father. He's from Arkansas. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: When there was that break; you were moving away from Angel Ron, Messiah Ron—how did that go over?

RON ATHEY: I had to conceal it because I had been so participatory in church; like speaking in tongues and the backup prayer system. It was duly noted that I had stopped participating, and so it became kind of a standoff; avoiding—then there was no line between being a teenager and an adult at Hollywood discos. I was going to the Odyssey, Ginos too. There were a lot of underage discos and going home with somebody 35. [Laughs.] Somebody with coke. When you're a kid and Hollywood is new to you and there was a million clubs then, but not the restrictions keeping you from getting in deeper trouble.

ALEX FIALHO: Was church a weekly thing? I know you said it was a tense situation.

RON ATHEY: We hardly ever stayed involved with a church. That's how problematic my family was. They'd have a fight with the minister and be trying to take over the church. They were just out of their mind so we had a home—my grandmother would call a prayer meeting that might go on for a couple of days with them screaming and crying and sweating and fasting and at home.

ALEX FIALHO: How about your aunt in the second coming?

RON ATHEY: Whew.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. That's a big one.

RON ATHEY: [Laughs.] I mean, if you tell someone from when they're born that their aunt is going to bear the second coming of Christ and then marry Elvis Presley, it doesn't sound like a laughing joke, but that was kind of the clincher line with one of my little semi-sexual girlfriends when I was 15.

ALEX FIALHO: The clincher line that—

RON ATHEY: Yeah, that I said that and she was like—what? What does that have to do with anything, with reality?

ALEX FIALHO: Where did she get that vision? Dare I ask?

RON ATHEY: Between visions, and she had hundreds of automatic writing communications from her dead grandmother. There was a psychic painted portrait of who was the Saint, so her entire story was penned out through the voice of Audrey. [Laughs.] So there were layers—there are relatives I've never even met that were part of this insanity because she must've been the original Pentecostal person of them.

ALEX FIALHO: And the automatic writing was her writing?

RON ATHEY: My aunt did the writing channeling the dead grandmother—

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly, and you didn't do any automatic writing?

RON ATHEY: I didn't. I experimented. I don't know what I wanted the possession to be but I didn't write anything. [Laughs.] So I do it now.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly. I was going to say. How about the speaking in tongues? Where did that come in and how early?

RON ATHEY: That happened at nine and I think there's a gauging of a willingness; probably when everybody is screaming in times, it starts with, you can feel the nervousness on your lips, on your tongue, and so then all these ladies with aromatic oil on their hands close in on you and start shaking you and rubbing you and [inaudible noises], you know, creating rhythm. It's like trying to give you the speed, the right speed inside of you. They wind you up. It's really a neurological—there are steps to bring you to [laughs] – to unbridled, ecstatic vocals. They want you to get the performativity and you get even vocal response. It was like call and respond—and people start layering and then when you've had enough of the spotlight, someone yells over the top of you and takes over. t's a weird, improvised choir. People moving around really freaky.

ALEX FIALHO: And those were mostly the tents—

RON ATHEY: So those would have been the evangelist meetings, raggedy storefronts, you know, closer to the desert. Scrappy parts of beyond Riverside. And the other way; the fancy Ms. Velma.

Once in a while the tele-evangelists pop off; of course famously debunked for having secret speakers on them.

ALEX FIALHO: Is this all southern California?

RON ATHEY: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Does it go much further than SoCal or—

RON ATHEY: No, not with white people.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: You go to the great story of Aimee Semple McPherson; how these fiery evangelists, when they get Hollywoodafied, it's really interesting. Ms. Velma was just part two of her illustrated sermons, constructing fashions of the day in a kind of country singer version of it. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: And you'd travel with the family? Everyone would get in the car and drive over—

RON ATHEY: Everyone would get in the car. It would seem like we'd be driving for hours somewhere dusty. And get out and it could be eight people when you get there. It could be 40 people, but that seemed like a crowd. If it was the kind where there were microphones and 200 plus people, then it seemed like it didn't connect as deeply. It was more about the big healing meeting show, but not the group experience of everybody speaking in tongues together and messy dancing. You couldn't fall asleep in church with the rocking that hard, and the healings were grotesque. It's just shamanism, vomiting in a bowl. There's a lot of drama that starts crossing over into psychic surgery.

ALEX FIALHO: And were you invested at that point? Were you looking forward to these meetings and in the car excited?

RON ATHEY: Absolutely, absolutely. Especially to already understand the vibration of the tongues at nine. I was fully ready for it.

ALEX FIALHO: Proud of that probably?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, that was my specialty. [Laughs.] But I didn't know how to function in the world. That's the problem with living in that tiny of a bubble It's hard to find the context again of being a child, via the religion, then even more with the family having this grandiose apocalypse laid out; that you're just right on the cusp of this. When I hear people wound up in that now, it's always like comedy now. But I actually lived in it. [Laughs.] It makes you nihilistic. There's no real—if you're not like wound up and crying over the joy of Jesus and having the ecstasy of Saint Teresa, it's kind of a grim thing just to sit there waiting for everything to go to hell. And think that by suffering that somehow it makes you purer. I don't know what the point is of the martyrs who survive [laughs] Do you get an extra badge or something? You don't get any rewards and no one claims to. It's a sorry ass fantasy to have. Just to jump ahead; because—

that specialness sat right on top of when everybody started dying of AIDS and, you know, it was intense personalities. It was intense personalities of the dying, afraid of the Typhoid Mary's—there were so many unknowns that were just filled in with ugliness around the disease and within there you had high southern drama coming out of the Scarlet O'Hara dying, having a competition with the one across the hall; like the negotiation of these heightened personalities was intense and also keeping track. We all had popular friends but we also have obscure friends that wouldn't have anybody to visit them so almost prioritizing—that's a weird job to have.

Everybody's dying so now you have to prioritize who's the sickest and who has the least friends and where I start.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, and that was about 15 you made the break, more or less, with your family?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, and so then I had to do my time finishing school and this way of getting away in summers at the Salk Institute was probably life-saving,. I was very mentally unhealthy by then.

ALEX FIALHO: Which gets us to where? Are you on your own? Are you living by yourself?

RON ATHEY: After family was a little rough.

ALEX FIALHO: Is this like late '70s?

RON ATHEY: I graduated from high school a year early. So I graduated in '79.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: And that's when I left. I was like a straight A student my whole life until the last like two years and then I was so druggy; there was this kind of crash so I wasn't exactly jumped. My application, I never even filed it to UCSD, and I never knew how and there was hardly any support in that area to go to higher education. So finally I got advice to make up my last chemistry grade so I had to go to Pasadena City College and I was semi-homeless. I kind of went through a rough year like that, and then stayed with my sister's family, her husband's family. So I lived with a Filipino family for another year while I stabilized through that kind of transition.

ALEX FIALHO: And did you start making work then with Rozz?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, right after that. I'm trying to remember where—so from in between that house, and I still worked at this Greek restaurant in Claremont and was couch surfing. I met Rozz when I was coming back from the Salk Institute because the Upward Bound program where they took you out in the vans from Claremont, at the Claremont College. Rozz—the very beginning of being a garage band, Christian Death rehearsing was in Claremont. Friends brought me over there after one of the weekends we came back, and so we're going a few times over the next year. We finally got to know each other and exploded into an intense, three-year relationship, which is an eternity when you're that age and crazy. [Laughs.] Wow, three years. That's like 10, you know.

ALEX FIALHO: That's collaborative. I'm curious about the jump—was it him, and working in music, and a band—how did performing come up? You had seen performances, thought about theater earlier on, but—

RON ATHEY: I think it was more the sort of intensity of the DIY movement that—you wouldn't think, I don't know how to play guitar. You just, being out with someone famous for something else, and do it anyway. It was a really free period at that time – I didn't know how to read sheet music. And within the scene, I don't like to give punk the credit for everything but listening to punk, seeing other things happening. The performance artist Johanna Went performing. There were some people who produced things like COUM Transmissions performed here in the mid-'70s, which I wasn't at but the documentation and resonation of that was still here. Same thing in '80 or '81. Herman Nitsch performed here, so it's kind of through *High Performance* magazine. I wouldn't read these. They're fucking boring essays. I just looked at pictures of somebody in a glass tankful of cow guts for 12 hours, you know? It started opening my brain about how you could communicate on a deeper level than words sometimes.

And also reading, these publications that started coming out, like industrial culture handbooks from research publications where you get the idea of Throbbing Gristles. Experimentation in sound science like psychoneuro acoustics. So then thinking about images the same way, you have to go a little union with the archetype, but suddenly I started– always having a brain from these visionary days. That's always producing a certain finding or way to lay it out, a logic. So it was always like a thesis everything I wanted to make? Maybe it still is. Always starts from a question, and I let it take on a life somewhere with finding the answer. Answerish.

ALEX FIALHO: You said you weren't seeing any of these, but were you seeing anything at this time that was impactful? Or was it mostly the photos?

RON ATHEY: I did go see Johanna Went live, so she was the most impact. I was reading books to save my life. Like reading a book every few days. *Naked Lunch*, all of it, everything by Genet, all of it. Trying to figure out where—I needed a logic, you know what I'm saying? And part of that logic was to not just sit myself wherever I sit but understand the lineage of not just the gays, but like the actual people, like Burroughs, who didn't fit those categories.

And still was prolific and didn't go up in smoke – behind an overdose. You know? In these lives, there's a lot of

tragedy of self-destructiveness and risk taking that doesn't always pain out as the survivor in the story.

ALEX FIALHO: How were you getting exposure or access to these materials? Were you talking to folks? Were you moving on to the next one?

RON ATHEY: I am still the same. I always have sounding boards. There was a woman named Patrice Repose who performed with Nervous Gender—Nervous Gender offshoot called Gobshits. And she was kind of the first literary intellectual I met. She wanted to direct me and Rozz in a version of The Maids.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: [Which is still stuck in my head, like me and Rozz. And who would direct it, do The Maids, and redo it, how much? Anyway, that's a whole other thing I could talk about for an hour because it's exciting. But, just actually reading a monologue that long of Solange—yes, Solange and Claire are the two maids in Genet's The Maids, and imagining two pre-Goth drag queens doing it. –RA] I developed a taste within that stuff really rapidly. It's funny how you only know how to do things the way you know how to do it. I only knew how to do it in a religious way. Which means I didn't know what was going on in pop culture. I couldn't like anything from pop culture anymore. And I still have a knee jerk reset to that every time. I would be embarrassed to talk about Beyoncé and Lady Gaga. I don't want to cross reference it even when they step on my world. Sometimes. Only time I'll ever say anything. Like stay out of here with your bad music. And your thieving art directors who want to use someone's life work for a two second look in a video. It's shitty.

Anyway, it operates on a different level and it doesn't jive with me so much, this alignment of Jeffrey Deitch, Marina, all the people in the everything's better celebrity moment we've been in.

Bob Wilson, you know? I mean, he's already in gigantic theaters and worked with living legends, which occupies a different category but pop stars. I never wanted to see Madonna or work with her, do you know what I mean?

So I made my little church of abject culture I guess.

ALEX FIALHO: I love that. Let's talk a little bit more about Premature Ejaculation.

RON ATHEY: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: The name—

RON ATHEY: Me and Rozz, we were just working off of an idea that we had about how Burroughs did cut up writing and we read about it and we weren't trying to be disciples. We were just trying to take an idea, randomness, reordering. And intuitively becoming one, in the writing through cut up or through automatic writing together. We would do sound experiments that were in that same mind, like running with a shopping cart under an underpass,with a tape recorder on. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: How early into the relationship did you start making work together?

RON ATHEY: Immediately. Because, you know, that was his gift to me, he was just an artist. Always, writing in the morning, playing guitar over and over again listening to everything Sparks ever recorded for some un-god known reason [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Were you making work in any way before? Or considering yourself artistic or making art?

RON ATHEY: I was artistic. I was always doing drawings and collages and more. They were like thought boards I was putting out. But somehow through all our amphetamine and messiness, nailed down a date for the Premature Ejaculation and do it, it was just one of those moments where I showed up and I found my outlet.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: Like I found the frenzy in PE.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. That's early 20s or late teens?

RON ATHEY: It's like 19-20, right in there. [Laughs.] Little monster.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] You said it. What were some of the things you guys were doing?

RON ATHEY: We wouldn't have known how to say that we're facing abjection. But that's exactly what we were doing. Even as a project we thought, okay, we're going to hitchhike to San Diego because we knew some lesbians there we were going to stay with. We got as far as San Clemente but we took a lot, five hits of acid

each. We were like I don't know if people would give us a ride just 10 more stops. We didn't do very good with the long haul ride. Rozz had a little suitcase and inside the suitcase was a rabbit head that was decomposing and it smelled really bad. So the running punch line of that acid trip was "reeks of death." Reeks of death. We were on a heavy death trip and that's what formulated death rock, that became Goth in that scene.

That's the music writer Brendan Mullen. Pomona, the Inland Empire, the gothic crucible, three kind of important bands coming from that region.

ALEX FIALHO: Which were?

RON ATHEY: There's Christian Death, Super Heroines, who were actually from Long Beach and then members, scattered from around, of Castration Squad, which included Alice Bag who was east LA

ALEX FIALHO: Were you doing it for a platform? For an audience? For you?

RON ATHEY: I had no way of articulating that at the time.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly. You were just doing it.

RON ATHEY: It was just like, we're doing this. I don't know how you say this. There is no scene for you, for what you are, so you become. And you're with somebody else, like the power of us being two, and everybody wanting to be a part of this music scene, but it expanding beyond that. It was really exciting. And it wasn't hard to do. It was natural, it just rolled out that way.

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

RON ATHEY: When we performed—how many people would go to punk shows, like performance art? But it was like Rozz and whoever Ron was [laughs] and then it was just everybody, Pomona's like this halfway point between O.C. and LA like a triangle. It was everybody from, people like Social Distortion and The Adolescents and all the hardcore bands of that time.

Seeing two freaky fags, like cut through as you can see their road kill on a cross. Some chained up 15-year-old boy that wore high heels being whipped. It was just a mixture of hitting the mark and our naivety and a hot mess [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: How was it landing? If that mattered at all. Probably not.

RON ATHEY: I feel like I—maybe I still do it. When you discern something that could be bad, that could be, you're over their head a little bit mind blown, a little bit uncomfortable. I could feel the register. It wasn't a100 percent friendly crowd and that was completely appropriate [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: When you get that reaction, what is your reaction?

RON ATHEY: I guess that's why performance isn't entertainment, right? You just—you have to accept that it's the way that interacts with what you put out there is how it landed.

ALEX FIALHO: How about some of the photos?

RON ATHEY: They are Karen Filter photos for *No Mag*. She was kind of a rock and fashion photographer and Bruce Kalberg was the editor of that paper. They just put all the archives online now. It's amazing to have like, Raymond Pettibon when he's only doing Black Flag flyers. To have the girl bands like The Bangles and then have Gina Pane or Kipper Kids sort of profile in there. He was kind of art savvy and understood the intersections.

ALEX FIALHO: And you guys were featured in some way?

RON ATHEY: He kind of commissioned us. So we did this in Rozz's bedroom in Pomona. We had a bedroom full of tombstones and plastic apparently [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. And where else?

RON ATHEY: Pomona Arts Building.

ALEX FIALHO: What was that and how were you there?

RON ATHEY: That's where it was a hot mess and really just playing pure noise. I think it was kind of absorbing whatever I though the Actionists did and whatever I thought particularly COUM Transmissions did would have been more closer to how I was feeling and our timeline. And then having seen Johanna Went and probably I

thought she's moving around in this trance. It's kind of like what a shaman does or a witch doctor. Absorbing all those and with my experience of being able to spirit dance. I already knew how to perform. Or whatever. I knew how to jack myself up into a different state.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you playing any music at this point?

RON ATHEY: No, just like screamy vocals. Rozz did more of the music and we'd have guests like Mary Torcivia on the drums.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you ever play music?

RON ATHEY: I never did in there. Much later I did an opera with Juliana Snapper who helped me just embrace my non-musicality for being musical [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: And were you guys excited about PE? Were you thinking about it as a longer-term project or how did it develop?

RON ATHEY: I'll say it again later when the '90s come in, there was nothing to strategize. It was this expression that had to come out. So it just kept unfolding.

ALEX FIALHO: That's interesting.

RON ATHEY: I think we talked about a third performance. I was on a downward spiral in some ways with too many drugs and I got arrested a few times. And in the meantime, Christian Death became almost mainstream. And I kind of went with the flow. I didn't feel like I needed to be performing every week anyway. And I was happy to help the band and help stage the shows and help with the looks and concepts of that. As well as Eva O's band, Super Heroines, which was concurrent.

ALEX FIALHO: And then how did it develop? Or end.

RON ATHEY: Oh, then [laughs]. I think the second show, that was it for PE. We did two live shows and one performance for camera and then a lot of recorded sessions and collage work which somehow survived, most didn't.

ALEX FIALHO: And then how did your relationship come together or disband?

RON ATHEY: It was funny. When the band was playing more I met this metal guitarist Eva O, so I left him for her to go live with her because we were together. We didn't have anywhere to live so he went back to his mother's, his parent's house. I was living with a woman in Long Beach and then he became a part of our relationship because we were part of the same scene so we were kind of in a triage until I went to jail. [Laughs.] And then I came back and then we moved downtown. So we lived in Hollywood at the end of the relationship. It was just getting too dark.

ALEX FIALHO: And where did you go from there?

RON ATHEY: There was quite like a druggie, suicidal period of my life. Kind of couch surfing until I started working at a punk clothing store called Poseur on Melrose—'83 and '84, I worked there. And you know you get people like 12-year-old Alexis Arquette coming from the Valley wanting everything punk. Like she comes back and says, "I was so gaga over you. I was only 12." I didn't even notice. Some buck-toothed Valley kid wanting Doc Martens and bondage pants [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: That's good. [Laughs.] Buck toothed Valley kid.

RON ATHEY: That's another really public part of my life where I know a lot of people from. I've had intense different crowds.

ALEX FIALHO: From the punk store?

RON ATHEY: From the punk store. I met Althea Flint there, who said she wanted a makeup artist, like that's when she had a skinny, huge Mohawk with antennae and she was being carried by two body guards and wanted two of everything in the store. She didn't really care what it was [laughs]. We already knew she was sick. That's early, '84. We went to the Larry Flint for President party at the house. I don't know how many months after that she lived.

And I always thought of different people she used with, if they'd contracted it from her, that was a funny different level of experiencing druggie and AIDS life.

ALEX FIALHO: When did AIDS come into your consciousness? What was the first time you heard of it?

RON ATHEY: I remember the GRID stories and I think I wasn't really in a gay scene, somewhere in a music, now you just say a queer scene, but it was more mixed that that. There was one party here called Theoreticals, which was the merging of punk, art, and hardcore leather men. It was in a leather bar we could walk to, three minutes from here. It's not open anymore, called the One Way [laughs]. I was probably most in that crowd, like some of those guys you get attached to. There's like a really old, amazing rockabilly guy called T-Billy. I remember when he started getting sick, I knew people from the beginning. Maybe not as that kind of early New York concentration. And then being in the scene. But on the other hand I had two scenes. I had an IV drug user scene and a gay scene, that didn't necessarily intersect at all.

ALEX FIALHO: That were both being hit.

RON ATHEY: So I got it twice as bad and probably had more relationships with women with AIDS than other people did because of the drug rehabilitation and dual diagnosis groups that I went to at that time.

ALEX FIALHO: Was art a part of your life at that mid-'80s moment?

RON ATHEY: Until the mid-'80s and then I had my recovery years where I felt like I had to strip my identity and not be gnarly fucking Ron, ready to die on the moment for anything. You know? I just had to be a jeans and t-shirt guy for a few years. But my process never stopped, I never stopped writing and I never stopped visualizing things. I felt kind of frustrated and I started going back into my cultural world through this guy here who was a D.J. called Jack Zinder, did a club called Fuzzyland. This is like high kitsch, where there'd be an art band playing at Mr. T's bowling alley and people had the Polynesian theme and meta-subversion. But it was a way back to re-meet up with different artists I already knew from other scenes. When I was talking about theoretical parties, those went on from like '81 or '82 until the end of the '80s; that would have been my old school connections. [Laughs.] And Poseur I only worked '83, '84 and then '86 is when I became abstinent. I became straight edge essentially.

And then later that year went with two friends to get tested and I was the positive one out of the three. Let's say I was in a situation where I had so much support in recovery and I was also a good speaker so I sort of got pulled into this. I was somebody who could speak at a meeting at House of Uhuru, to an all-black meeting of 300 people about having AIDS, not differentiating or knowing anything, just having to deal with the death cloud and continue to not get the security blanket of heroin out. Actually just face it and how to go through it. I felt like I objectified myself again into a symbol.

That's what I felt like when I left science into an already punk community when I would feel that unrealness and what it added up to. What I was standing in for while I was doing that. I didn't always leave enough room for me to really deal with it.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you react to seroconverting?

RON ATHEY: It was a death sentence then. It was really hard to know. They couldn't see the virus then, so it was just the antibody and even still it had been lots of speculation because I always had unique traits [laughs]. And I never had the diseases of the day, like KS or pneumocystis or CMV or anything. I had platelet anemia, so I had to have my spleen removed. That's a weird feeling. When you do something major that you think is weird western medical, like let's just take his spleen out. Like should I have followed it? Like you don't. It's also something that didn't completely resolve the issue. I still go into hemophiliac periods where I bleed a bit. It's not dramatic but it's just weird when our blood is that thin, after you've had your fucking organ removed. But that was like '89, when I had my spleen removed.

My neighbor behind me who was the lover of the painter Tony Greene.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, amazing.

RON ATHEY: Who's been in a few biennials. Norm McNeil. Norm also had his spleen removed and was never sick and was a long-term survivor so I was wondering, maybe, there's something in that replication that happens. I don't know. No one ever had a strong theory that I understood, but I would talk to Norm about it sometimes.

ALEX FIALHO: Norm was Tony's lover?

RON ATHEY: Tony's lover who lived out the back alley, directly one house from here.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you know Tony?

RON ATHEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ALEX FIALHO: Were you speaking out in these meetings from the beginning? Or was that something you had to work yourself up to?

RON ATHEY: Usually you had to have a substantial amount of time to qualify but I had a little more than a year. I was doing like almost circuit speaking. I mean it's all volunteer and it's all, it's also what we're doing right now. If I keep phrasing what my story is, I always learn more myself. [Laughs.] Because every time something shifts in your life; moving back from London and starting over again recently. I taught at CalArts last year, part of it was full-time and it disoriented me. It was a big life change, but also like, okay, I'm back. I'm going to be 55 this year. You need to update your philosophy. I welcome this interview for that. I need to put some pieces together [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: At what moment did you become straight edge?

RON ATHEY: '86.

ALEX FIALHO: Were they in tandem?

RON ATHEY: Because I was straight edge—I mean that's probably the positive part of a common cause support group, is that you have people that say, "Now you're clean, you can think clear, you should know what you have. You need to get tested." These were things that eventually, I had more of an awareness of from being straight edge. And a community that needed to heal.

ALEX FIALHO: How was the transition to straight edge?

RON ATHEY: That was the last stop because I kept doing methodone detox and other things, but heroin's hard. You just have to have this big gap between the last time you did it and when you can stop obsessing about slamming heroin. [Laughs.] It's all I wanted, you know? Because I felt like I was in a trap. I didn't want to live in a trap. Dependent on something.

Once I got in it, it was like religion number three, right? Going from Pentecostal, to the religion of punk and art, to the not just 12-step, but general recovery mania. And I wish I was as open as I was then because I don't feel like I deal with a lot of things very well. And then because I was new to AIDS and there's like Hay Ride at West Hollywood park doing likebody work and lectures and tapes on visual healing and things like that. Really wacky, new age stuff, it's not easy for me to [laughs] muscle through that—but it's important to understand some of the premises. And then more dramatic like Marianne Williamson, most dramatic, giving the All Saints Day sermon at the Episcopalian church on Hollywood and Gardener. You know, kind of AIDS and fag haggery and celebrity hitting that pitch within it and seeing.

I found it all interesting and I went, until I got bored of it. And I would do other things too like Vedanta and [go to Ashram in La Crescenta –RA]. But I never wanted to have another god or another holy book I think [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Damn.

RON ATHEY: I wrestled with the aspects of 12-step recovery that are cultish. There's no exit plan in that. You just have to make a jump for it. You do the slow fade out and then, yeah. It was a period I probably needed. It was 20 years.

ALEX FIALHO: Meaning?

RON ATHEY: Well, I'm sure I wouldn't be alive now if I hadn't been straight edge. I've had other gnarly periods in my life, so [laughs]. I ended that period later.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm interested in when you said that you probably knew more women in AIDS as a result of the IV drug community.

RON ATHEY: I knew more women in AIDS than like gay support groups. Not that there were more women. I feel like you need to go to the support group for whatever stage you're at. To go to support group where most of the group are dying and you're just HIV positive, what does that means. I would never feel like talking over; there was a hierarchy of sick people. There was a Creole woman who had KS all over her face; it was supposed to be impossible for women to get KS in that moment of thought. It just made it maybe realer to me that it affected a bigger group.

But all those groups were so judged. It was easy to buy heroin, really hard to buy a needle, through all of my using, there was no clean needles. Not until later. That was a really sad period. Because culturally, so many people used IV drugs in the '80s. And got Hep C and HIV that way.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Los Angeles in relation to all of this?

RON ATHEY: [Laughs.] I don't know why drugs come in waves to places. Is that what you mean? I could talk about it from a drug angle.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

RON ATHEY: I was with heroin much more east LA Latino circles. And then pills going more to south LA and black circles. You know, coke, South Central. Like it made you ambitious to get all around town but also insane to be driving around that many Class A's [laughs]—

My best friend robbed a lot of banks and shot someone at the last one—a car followed him and died escaping from prison falling 14 floors. '80s.

RON ATHEY: There is one thing, when I tested positive. For me, it really made sense in my little "ye old rugged cross-life."

ALEX FIALHO: Cross-life?

RON ATHEY: Because of this apocalyptic religion, everything always felt like the world was ending. And then suddenly in my immediate circle being a queer punk, IV drug user, it really was. When there were real scenes going on, in the way communities' sat or overlapped within those scenes, we were able to live in bubbles where you never felt that bad about the Reagan years [laughs]. You could be angry, but you never thought you were a person in society because, this is this outsider special-ness. That's the Genet factor always; I hate people, except for people who are being oppressed [laughs]. Then they're sexy.

These bubbles we'd form, I think that's what got lost. We always have to look also at the context of the line of media, now it's going to the Facebook app on your phone or cruising apps. I'm talking about a time before you could even be on the computer [laughs].

We thought different. And the bubble was the only way you could survive or you'd probably be such an angry radical you would have went up in smoke. Sometimes I think now when I overreact to what's going on in the world, which there's plenty [laughs]. I think, "Wow, I'm actually expecting the world to align with something I would want or my vision." And then you get a little taste of it with the Bernie vision, but of course it's the possibilities that kill you, not the reality's been the same. It's flatlining in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: You wrote, "It took very little work to parallel experiences and my doomsday religious narrative"?

RON ATHEY: That of my '90s performance work—the meshing that energized it, that they fell together.

I've heard these bits, this parallel example that I've been inspired by people who got what was going on, in their work. Karen Finley and of course the Diamanda Galas's piece on dementia.

It's where these things that happen in private life explode into something, like how I said I fracture into a symbol, but they become an icon of the moment. You can't shake it, like scared dementia or overheard at a funeral, that sort of thing that caught you because you realized what's really going on again.

ALEX FIALHO: When did you transition again from Ron in the T-shirt and jeans to whatever the next part is?

RON ATHEY: [Laughs.] Method go-go. Club Fuck! started.

ALEX FIALHO: That's what I figured.

RON ATHEY: I had really been a part of body art, meaning the piercing and tattoo scene. Always, before drugs, during rehabilitation, that was the through line. I think a lot of other people too, maybe not as extreme down and ups, but everyone had been getting dolled up for a decade and all of a sudden there was somewhere to be almost naked [laughs]. Club Fuck! And, in San Francisco, Uranus, there were a few clubs—

ALEX FIALHO: What's method go-go?

RON ATHEY: I was stealing that from the Jackie 60 girls in New York. Go-go dancing and gear, and then the club would have people from the piercing store, the Gauntlet, do a performance like Elaine Angel, and people from more like Threshold like a kink club, and then also Durk Dehner from Tom of Finland. So there'd be SM scenes, SM places, piercing. There was a lot of skill set sharing going around, and it re-ignited me to go back to this bodywork opera [laughs] sort of grandiosity with different skills. And already having custom made things for costumes or working with designers, I was able to start working deeper on looks and skills for these like theatrical presentations. But everything was in place. I didn't seek them out. It was just, everything I had to work with changed.

ALEX FIALHO: How did you get involved?

RON ATHEY: In which scene? Like the SM—

ALEX FIALHO: Body mod, SM, tattoo—all of it?

RON ATHEY: After I broke up with Rozz, I was with Edward from the band Nervous Gender.

ALEX FIALHO: I wasn't even of age. I would have been like 20, and he was taking me to leather scenes. But even when I was with Rozz, I would go with him to a leather bar, wearing chaps, getting butt-fucked at the bar, drinking piss underneath. It was a three-ringed circus of what was happening in that leather scene that was at its peak in the '70s and '80s here, and went downhill after that.

So it was really reverse ageist. I was this little like punk twink to them and it's like, "God, I'll never be 35 and a real guy." You couldn't be a real man and be in your 20s in these like rough scenes. I had a way of exploring it from the outside. Once in a while I'd end up in the crazy druggie adventure on the back of someone's motorcycle somewhere and something would happen [laughs]. But it seemed like the only thing that really had edge, that had experimentation, and I could like feel the range, from just flat out sadism to something tantric, and sort of exploring within there. Public demonstrations of that is theater, a theatre of pleasure and pain. You could laugh at the way it's done in the cliché way maybe, but some people are just so real or they come to life as an exhibitionist. I enjoyed analyzing those dynamics in people.

ALEX FIALHO: So that's a pre '86 engagement?

RON ATHEY: That's pre, though I didn't find a home there because it was so complicated. I didn't know how to, I never knew how to communicate. But, I can go before that, going to West Hollywood as a teenager coming of sexual age when everyone was the clone, plaids and the giant mustache and the tight jeans and the cock ring. And I liked looking at it, but I didn't want to talk to it or fuck it. [Laughs.] I liked just walking on the street and having somebody pull up, you know, cottaging was still full time then. I liked adventuring more. Then nobody went to Griffith Park. There'd be like five naked men in Griffith Park each on a different hilltop jacking off in those days if you went for a hike. [Laughs.] There wasn't any families or someone walking a fucking dog. You knew that that culture was going to disappear, so I really treasured it while it was working for me. You could always read John Rich and get a tidbit, like if a place isn't happening, leave. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Was this AIDS moment what was shifting it? How did it shift these scenes?

RON ATHEY: In the cruisey scenes, I think there was a lot of denial. Probably if your flavor was straight trade, you could see as news picked up, that element started filtering out. You stopped having random, weird blow job encounters with straight people.

ALEX FIALHO: Yep.

RON ATHEY: [Laughs.] I feel like by '86, probably if AIDS hadn't come out, I was just starting to like come into my own and mature, and would have enjoyed the things that were suddenly chopped off because I didn't know. To me it was very hard to function with that. I would go to a bar down the street and meet someone beautiful and fantastic and then you'd get to the, "I'm positive," and they would almost collapse.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: And it was still like mid '80s. It's like, "Wait." [Laughs.] You know, it's like mid-to-late '80s by then. They still were going through the whole drama with you. And then that's when people started getting HIV-poz tattoos.

And, because I worked at a newspaper, I already used bulletin board systems and like a computer from work at home by the later '80s. So I'd dial 818—I can almost remember the number of Delos. It was bulletin board cruising with pictures and profile. So already figuring out how to—

ALEX FIALHO: What do you mean not online pictures ?

RON ATHEY: Because there wasn't online so you would have to dial a number to go inside a chat room that's how that worked before there was a World Wide Web. [Laughs.] And of course, horn pigs had already figured out how to use it for like combing the neighborhood. There wasn't a culture of time wasters online. So, you know it would just be like –

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.]

RON ATHEY: —everyone meant business.

ALEX FIALHO: I love it.

RON ATHEY: Everybody was ready—you just had to like match up close enough and do it [laughs]. I'm sure there's articles about it it's called Delos, D-E-L-O-S. And I wrote about it for "Honcho." And I think that was that line before there was like a recon. There were people I met in Orange County and Dallas, I started writing this thing about people's flats. What's that critique of interiors, luriddiggs.com. I thought they lifted my idea. But it's an obvious idea, because sometimes you can't help but do social studies when you go to trick at someone's house and it's half IKEA, half grandmother's cottage all loaded into one place. With no taste, whatsoever. Love it. Anyway, sidetracking but I have a long relationship and thought about the online disclosure, of being able to come out as positive. It's always, still, a weird conversation.

ALEX FIALHO: And were you doing tattoos, bodywork, at this moment?

RON ATHEY: I was getting them. Never done them.

ALEX FIALHO: And then Club Fuck! was a way that all this came together?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, Club Fuck! was the nugget that brought everything together. Even what in a way would be the dynamic of the audience I had a lot through the whole '90s, which was all the body art aficionados. And then, all the kind of people that became Queer Nation or had sympathies to that. And then even like more like proper kinks Then, of course, we added a period, something like Madonna does a sex book, you know, that imagery got so used up, it had an impact. It's just an outfit. That's okay, I won't cry over it.

ALEX FIALHO: Were you involved in Club Fuck! scene before it coalesced into a venue?—

RON ATHEY: Yes. One of the people who started it was Miguel Beristain. And he worked on Melrose at this store Flip where some British blitz kids worked. It was like a weird used clothes store that would also do new things. There's only like 10 stores on Melrose in the beginning, it was very dress-up [laughs]. So I always had a relationship with him since the earlier '80s. And then, the person I was the closest to Cliff Diller, he was from Oklahoma and Texas and went to makeup school here, which was like "queen" [laughs]. Tiny, didn't know anything about anything, but had that kind of peer magic full-on energy; never ran out of it. And really evolved during this experience of putting the club together and then became an actor in Reza Abdoh's play *Boogie Men*, where he was, drowned in it. There was an AIDS patient in an upside-down hospital bed. It was like a pretty incredible. Also, weaving the AIDS story into a bigger apocalypse and one of his main actors was a kind of a Burroughs look alike. Yeah, we have to make sense of these things I think; culturally.

ALEX FIALHO: And then the scene came together, Club Fuck!, were you involved from the beginning?

RON ATHEY: Yep. The first one. Go-go dancing and participating in other people's performances and doing test runs of mine. And then, almost immediately, the bigger club Sinamatic. Club Fuck! only held 100 people.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

RON ATHEY: —with three people [laughs] running it, it was kind of a pet project. But, Sinamatic in West Hollywood—the venue used to be known as Peanuts. Every Saturday for more than 10 years, that ran.

ALEX FIALHO: And that was a similar vibe?

RON ATHEY: It was bigger, so you had bigger budgets, but because of its area and the club you'd get random people; bridge and tunnel trash, secretaries in a little black dress having a freaky date [laughs]. But then, Siouxsie Sioux and Budgie [came in when I was doing a performance at Sinamatic, it was a club on Santa Monica Blvd –RA]. It could be really random. Jeff Striker not getting attention, so he pulls his pants down [laughs]. Just manic West Hollywood-ness. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: When did you start working on performances at Club Fuck!? How did that come back together?

RON ATHEY: Within a few months. It was just a real activator. That's why I call it, "method go-go." It's just being in public, moving, of course it cheapens it to call it go-go dancing because the go-go dancers were Jenny Shimizu, a pre-Buck Angel. [Laughs.] You know, then all the girls that formed the neo-burlesque movement like Michelle Carr and Kitten Deville. It was really like proper high-femme and gnarly femme-butch like the juxtaposition of who would be dancing at the time. It was strong.

ALEX FIALHO: It's in the venue.

RON ATHEY: Yeah, and of course, Bud Cockram carried on doing lots of porn.

ALEX FIALHO: It was dancing and performance all mixed into one?

RON ATHEY: It was the beginning of this techno-dance, like Chicago, Detroit, London were particularly the main contributors to it, Wax Trax Records and in England it was sheep on drugs [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. And your role there was right in the thick of things?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, it was also interesting to go from reeling it in to just going for it again. It was a celebration of life in a dark time. Things had to be at that pitch. During the height to the worst parts of AIDS and activism and the loudest, noisiest part of it. Everything had to be noisy or it wouldn't be felt. You know, the best parties were ACT UP benefits. That was an arm of Club Fuck! We'll give you two dancers and a performance. You know, like a package at Club Fuck! and ACT UP benefit at a warehouse somewhere. It was absolutely wild and spirited and people celebrating the moment. That kind of dynamic is really hard. You can't strategize it on a regular day.

ALEX FIALHO: How did it feel to be getting back into performance? Natural and organic?

RON ATHEY: It felt natural and organic, but now it actually had somewhere to be. It wasn't like, "Okay, you and Ross are like the Gods of death rock and doing performance art." So we're going to—you know what I mean? We never actually, PE was never a scene. It was ephemeral for sure, we never were planning something that would take on a life of its own even though PE continued as a noise thing and Rozz's projects, but it just worked so many times.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And what were some of the early projects you were working on at Club Fuck!?

RON ATHEY: [Everything that became the performance *Martyrs and Saints*, part of it showed in April ’92 at Highways -- part of this festival around Fakir Musafar, a performance artist and early proponent of the modern primitive movement, that Douglas Sadownick curated -- that Keith Hennessy was also a part of and then Fakir Musafar, of course, and Carla.

Well Doug had different political strategies for the curation so they were almost like live sex shows with two women, like “Monologue from a Sling,” I could call it [laughs]. And Fakir doing a public ritual and then me. –RA] That wasn't weaving AIDS into it—it was definitely weaving queerness into the body art expression of that time. And then, on the board at LACE, when I was asked to perform, I think Dennis Cooper spearheaded it, so that was a strong affirmation to take the work out of this low-tech, even though I like club energy, you'll never get what you want. Like you won't even get the light you want. You have to know where you're working and have a good time doing it.

But once I had like a whole week to build the *Martyrs and Saints* fantasy inside LACE, that always became the end-object of why I was making performances. So I did that, *Martyrs and Saints*. I did *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life.* And then with *Deliverance*, which I got an English Arts Council commission to do, I started thinking, "Maybe my work has this endless juxtaposed thing about it because I can only afford to work in five minute bits at clubs." It's always high energy, so part of meeting Julie Tolentino and working with her and understanding through the way she sees art and dance about connective tissue, I understood the work more. The way it's articulated and the way it moves through. If you give it 60 minutes, the way all these thoughts and movements move through it, I can just see it through a different contour after I started working with her.

ALEX FIALHO: Nice.

RON ATHEY: '90 to November '92 at LACE was kind of more guerilla galleries with P.E. or anything. It was the first time I was really in a space with technical support, money support. I knew how to get the people's support, like the cast, I already worked with at the club. I started out I think with a cast of 12 [laughs]. I used to always forget that *Solar Anus* was the first solo I did and that was like '98, '99, that was quite later.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. I think, let's take a little pause before we jump into the next phase.

RON ATHEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

[Audio break]

ALEX FIALHO: There are couple people you mentioned in talking about Club Fuck! that I wanted to talk about. One was Reza Abdoh. I'd love to just hear more about what was Reza like?

RON ATHEY: I met him through that same process that he cast people from various communities, like the *Goddess Bunny* was also in that play. All of these people contextualized within LA Theater Center. You know, from his bio things like he was in a Robert Wilson play when he was eight years old in Tehran.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: It was amazing to watch how he organized people and got these performances out of them

because I went to a few rehearsals and also with his play *Quotations from a Ruined City.* I traveled with him in Europe from Hamburg to Barcelona with that piece, just spending time with him. It was like that split between someone that has really important work to do so that they work like hard beyond what a human being could do, what a director does. But is also getting sick with AIDS and traveling with accouterment to make a macrobiotic meal. We have a lot of different periods of AIDS, what people did to take care of themselves. It took a lot of work, It felt like the right opportunity since I was already in Europe to travel with him to those two performances.

ALEX FIALHO: And that was to do his performances? As a performer?

RON ATHEY: I was just in the audience, but I was just spending time with him. I have a cameo in his movie *The Blind Owl* [laughs], where I light Cliff on fire. I never saw it—if it made the cut. But, it was just fun to be on the set.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Cliff? Do you want to speak a little bit more about him?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, Cliff died before *Martyrs and Saints*. I don't know, I felt like I was coming back to life with caring about things. I also worked at the *LA Weekly*, so I'd get things early. I had the galleys to David Wojnarowicz's *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline*. F or the Karen Finley *Memento Mori,* we would read a different chapter every Saturday [laughs]. And he was properly close to death and going down there with a skeleton and putting him in a hospital bed inside a museum because, again, making ourselves something beyond real. I guess, by becoming a symbol; a symbol of a symbol. Reality within a reality with that one because it was just surreal; like we were absolutely absorbing every word of the text while being in Karen's situation, kind of honoring the way she set that up.

ALEX FIALHO: Can you say a little bit more about it? The performance and where it was and what it was?

RON ATHEY: This was the big Karen Finley show at MOCA, *Memento Mori*, some of the actions now—that's early '90s, it's no later than '93, but it's probably earlier. It's these simple actions like tying a ribbon around the iron gate; putting flowers in; and the involvement got deeper as she went into it. Then it finally ends up in the sick room where everyone's just in hospital beds with visitors.

I think a lot about what work is, in time. And then what work is so specific to the moment. And that was really specific to the moment. I don't want to tie a ribbon on anything right now, leave a flower somewhere. In that moment, everybody was so mutually fucking raw, it was a beauty to have that set up. And then, performances of hers alongside events.

ALEX FIALHO: How about James Stone?

RON ATHEY: James Stone, I had a problematic relationship with a little bit. You know, we were always mostly good. There was a fracture in that group when Cliff was dying and I felt like him and Miguel were really greedy. Like they had taken over his share of the club and would give him money if he came down to go-go dance like half dead. It was kind of like the ruthlessness of some people but also how desensitized are you, everybody was sick and dying, so maybe you have to like target a villain sometimes within the other victims because Miguel also died of AIDS. And James recently died of leukemia, so that whole three that started Club Fuck! are gone.

ALEX FIALHO: Yep. How about the show that just happened at One Archives? I'm curious about what your take is

RON ATHEY: I came out to it when it was reduced to a smaller show. I'm always interested in the archives and it's an archive space. But I'm maybe more interested in how does it look now? I don't know if it answered that to me in a way. If I could stand back or see—I don't think you can do it in that way where you're—like even if you had a show of the Viennese actionists if you showed like neo-actionists in the next room, it's a bad juxtaposition. You know, like I want to understand more of what those Club Fuck! energies evolved into.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And maybe visual art isn't the form?

RON ATHEY: Right. Yeah, also it's like that's why really curating a show is really expensive.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: Like there is existing like hundreds of hours of video of the club in full swing. It had really unique elements that I think would stand out—you know, because clubs you had to have been there. You know, it never works in a movie [laughs]. Maybe video installation could have saved it [laughs]. But I think I'm too close to it.

I didn't give that enough thought to stand back and ask what does this look like you born after most of it?

ALEX FIALHO: We were just talking about Club Fuck! and how it might look different from someone who was

there and I think in response to that, actually I didn't know about Club Fuck! before, and saw the show. I think Toro Castano was one of the curators.

RON ATHEY: Yep.

ALEX FIALHO: And he was talking about it as the opening of a conversation, moreso than anything else. And I think it definitely was that. At least for me, generationally. I got to see, like you just said, Jenny Shimizu was a go-go. I got to see that; I got to see you. People like Cliff or Cathy Opie's photographs. It brought that up again. I think it can go a lot of different directions from here.

RON ATHEY: Yep.

ALEX FIALHO: And I think that is a good question though is, "How do we think through performance club, life?"

RON ATHEY: Yep.

ALEX FIALHO: But in terms of doing your performances there, were they the short segments that later got theatricalized, at LACE or elsewhere?

RON ATHEY: I would bring the concept to Club Fuck! Like, for instance, the Saint Sebastian was probably one of the early ones that started playing with, and so that became the ending scene of *Martyrs and Saints*. So I started with the end.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

RON ATHEY: Even though I always have, like prequels set out. When Cliff died and he was having a morphine delirium.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: And almost built a pyramid structure in his room, I kind of made that the opening of the piece by the time of LACE. So a lot of times, they would be real things. And the nurses, I became close with.

ALEX FIALHO: The New Blood Tier was the pyramid?

RON ATHEY: Yes. For a while, Cindy [Cynthia] Carr was writing for the *LA Weekly*. She took a little break from New York, and I think she covered the Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati while she was here, and a few things. I became close with her, and therefore more knowledgeable about David Wojnarowicz's work, so she was working at the *Weekly* then when he died, and she had to fly out like that night, before an event. It just gutted me. Because it kind of via her and Julie and a few people I know, that made connections to me, as somebody that I thought would be one of those meetings with somebody who gives you so much. His passing gutted me, so that became the nurses in that piece.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: I never had to strategized a scene, it would just be the way I coped with loss, it would unfold as a drama.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. And you just sort of had a vision of it, where it would come and you'd create that?

RON ATHEY: And so the last thing I did, which I just did in Toronto, *Messianic Remains*, kind of a whirling dervish fashion, I cut and paste all the John Genet text from *Our Lady of the Flowers* that has to do with divine sickness and death and funeral, so it's only about that, which in a way, he's describing, how do you make a piece about somebody like that? You can't make a ballet of it. And it goes into actually pulling the punch, it's an interesting thing to read later, what happens when you're at that pitch.

ALEX FIALHO: And for *Martyrs and Saints*—for instance, at LACE—how did having that platform, a week to test the lights, , amp things up?

RON ATHEY: Well, I want to be a magician, of sorts, so in a way I know what light, smoke and mirrors does, and used all three. Mostly it's concentration. To hit club stuff, you have to already, imagine, you already know what the soundtrack of the club is, so that's going, and then you imagine it being stopped. And then what happens? You have to come in—you either have to come in at that pitch or higher, or you have to start off somewhere

really clean and monotonous, and trust that eventually people will come down to that. Except that they're drinking and on ecstasy, so they probably won't.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

RON ATHEY: So then you wonder, what intensity you work at has to do with your context, which mine—I never went to art school, I didn't come out of any art center. I don't have mentors or colleagues. Only as I made work, people that I met and collaborated with later. You know, always learned tremendous amounts from. You know, I engineered what I made and did based on that. I don't have expertise in movement and sound, and even with research, I had a few research residencies, and research assistants—that was happening in that Club Fuck! moment, kind of exploding I think and I was trying to back it up with history. That was always really important to me, instead of just being in the moment. The spoken word stuff was going on—"I have AIDS and I'm angry." AIDS the Musical, or other expressions that were really directly addressing it. And I think I wasn't interested in that.

There's complicated reasons why maybe I don't understand why I'm not an activist, some of which goes back to this view of coming from an era and a family where I saw myself as a real pervert, somebody that people recoiled from, because they were against everything that I was., I really understood, being a sodomite on a Christian level, and had a certain mindset. That was just how I saw myself, thinking—inside, I felt like I wouldn't be an asset at a protest. I wouldn't even just be one, I would be a deficit. Self-censoring or something. I did go to a few where I felt like I had to, I got swept up in it. But it was never my medium.

ALEX FIALHO: Why the deficit idea?

RON ATHEY: Because I felt guilty of something. I felt I have been judged, sometimes. I don't feel that at all these days. But those habits die hard. Where you still fall in a line. Maybe just in general I'm not a joiner, after—I didn't even come from being a joiner religion. I don't know how to do that.

ALEX FIALHO: You said a little bit about the ideas of learning from the people you're working with—let's just talk about a few of them. From *Martyrs and Saints,* who were you collaborating with?

RON ATHEY: I had a fantastic long-distance relationship with Julie Tolentino from when I was just doing club things. She knew that the *Martyrs and Saints* was going to happen that night, and she wanted to start bringing me to New York. It kind of started as that idea.

Who—Of course, the Clip Club was at a peak, and she was dancing with David Rousseve, she had half a dozen things as usual going on. I can't remember what the next gig was, but she was helping me figure out production stuff. A year later we met at a tattoo convention in San Diego, because her girlfriend Alistair was a tattooist, so we finally had a rendezvous point. That was a nice other intersection of our lives. And she worked with me through the whole trilogy of works.

ALEX FIALHO: I was reading—you two did a performance for Visual AIDS' Day Without Art together in 1992. Where was that?

RON ATHEY: I think it was at a warehouse across the street from Highways, but I actually think it was Eli Broad's storage space, and they used it for a bit. We did an endless procession, with images we were currently using, and then pumped it up with bigger dresses, and lusher props.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: I remember that struggle, it was a Day Without Art, but everyone does special art for it on that day. It was kind of the World AIDS Day angle, it was more easy to not fight the "without," but yet, we're still here doing it.

If you think about the victim art essay, there is a lot of different thinking around these issues. It's hard to give something its due when it punches through as special interest, like the art from the women's building is still art. Just every movement where it's adrenaline-fueled like that time filters it out later, how it sits in a different context.

ALEX FIALHO: And how about something from *Martyrs and Saints*, the process?

RON ATHEY: I think the process—I'm almost ashamed to say it; I was almost a pure drama queen. Pure melodrama, during the early days of understanding the way my archetypes work. When I was a youngster and I'd been awake on crystal meth for a week, I went outside of my room in the American Hotel in downtown LA, and on every telephone pole was Saint Sebastian had been on the rack, and then Martyr on there, so it was like this stretched out weird man there talking at me. That image was always so deep in me.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: As a committee, in a way. I kept expressing through it.

ALEX FIALHO: Why were they on the poles?

RON ATHEY: Hallucination. [Laughs.] But I think of Yukio Mishima as Sebastian, or ways that the narratives always come back around, and I find out years later, whenever there would be an outbreak of plague, they would start pressing the Sebastian coins again. The church tidbits, you get—so there was a lot of links, not just the sort the campiness of his gayness, even in the Middle Ages. There's the thought that those paintings were quite camp then.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, definitely.

RON ATHEY: That's what—as Dr. Sharewell will say, "Saucy, if not salacious."

ALEX FIALHO: I like that. What's that from?

RON ATHEY: There's a thing on YouTube from Channel 4. There was a show that I was on—

ALEX FIALHO: Okay, I was going to say, I just heard that—

RON ATHEY: And she does an art history sort of run through of erotic torture and religious paintings, which was a reference I was already giving before *Martyrs and Saints,* that was what I was looking at, was giving these paintings that are always very amber, right? That would be the lighting design. The lighting design was taken from paintings. And even later, the lighting designs would be taken from their reference. An idea that—the collaboration with Dominic Johnson—it was all Pink Narcissus lighting for him. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Fantastic.

RON ATHEY: Let him have her pinks and baby blues. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: I think I read somewhere that you have a fast-paced vision that sort of hits. Then you create the scene around that?

RON ATHEY: The only way, because you don't have the right words, I just started kind of looking at it as the neurology of experiencing, creating, everything as a neurology. The pulse in it.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: The quickening.

ALEX FIALHO: How were you thinking about an arc to a performance?

RON ATHEY: I like it when I can really understand the elements that are happening within, instead of thinking it as "Do I have to bend this into theater, or bend this more into work that happens within a gallery?"

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

RON ATHEY: I enjoy more and more, like, I always used to—I think the '90s, because it was theatrical—it was in a theater format, it was really hard to do site-specific things. Basically I'd be given a factory and turn it into a theater again. So starting from doing solo stuff and then breaking that down, I've started responding to space more. And then when I learned more about acoustics and started responding to that as well.

ALEX FIALHO: How about audience, in terms of moving from, I assume you moved from Club Fuck! to LACE for instance, from the bar crowd standing up to a seated crowd?

RON ATHEY: That bothered me at first. I couldn't reckon with it. The main—one of the main supporters for me, was ICA London, through the '90s. And to bring a whole bunch of people from LA to London, they wanted more than one show. And since it was kind of a theater for us, I'd do up to three, if it was big pay, I would do three. But then, three nights of seated audience. We would do midnight show at either Torture Garden or Fist, which were both wild. You know, cut the techno, we come out in white polyester nurses' outfits with Divinity, a bastardization of what we'd been performing in the theater earlier. And Leigh Bowery came to the performance at the ICA, I had lunch with her, and that was a super exciting entry into London, with big work and edgy venues at night. We were just keen, working as a unit, you support each other, so you don't really care if you're tired if five other people have to do it too. I couldn't do that, perform three nights in a row. I'd be out at the club, performing. It was a drug.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes.

RON ATHEY: Yes, and everywhere had the equivalent. We'd do, PS-122 in New York, we'd do late night Meat and Jackie 60, and when Julie was doing Tattooed Love Child. Yes, because I started off with this wave of work, all that '90s work came out of Club Fuck! Initially, that's how I saw my audience. Now I've graduated to seated audiences. It was also a little bit more activist, like cinematic where there would be hundreds of people there, but maybe a hundred of them came to see you specifically. Another hundred know your work and are glad they are there, and then the other hundred are like, "What the fuck is this?" I like that, for what I did at club shows, which was a little bit harder paced.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. How about that big crew you were working with? So Julie and Pig Pen and Divinity Fudge. Let's untangle that a little bit.

RON ATHEY: Yes.

ALEX FIALHO: How were you working with each?

RON ATHEY: The idea of negotiating boundaries, having been in the Club Fuck! scene and even more private S-M scenes with a lot of them, I kind of know who they are and what their boundaries are. The participation would be based on that. And then sometimes, the only way somebody would be turned out a little bit, would be to match something else. Then they would say, "Okay." We evolved into being just completely uninhibited. For me, I just didn't want to do a gay show, and in the '90s, butch women were ruling everything as far as I was concerned. That's just who I worked with and who was—

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

RON ATHEY: It was a really public dike period. You know, like club-wise. Of course, all you have to do is look at the safe sex is hot, sex kissing campaign. It was a sexy moment. To me that speaks for itself, but it's not the common with everybody.

ALEX FIALHO: Who were some of the people that you incorporated, then?

RON ATHEY: Divinity Fudge, who I still make new work with. Some of the people—I won't name them—I had a couple of people who were people like me, who straddled two worlds. Like, they had a night life, S-M world, but they were straight edge, a base of people were like that. We were about half and half like that.

ALEX FIALHO: Okay.

RON ATHEY: That I suppose created another super strong foundation—and then we needed a couple of people to drink the champagne. You know, the presenter opened up, "Here's your $1000 bottle of champagne, darling." "What?" So we would get Julie too drunk.

ALEX FIALHO: Funny, *Martyrs and Saints*. Let's talk a little bit about each of the scenes. Nurse's Penance, we touched on a little bit. But that's Wojnarowicz related, let's talk a little bit more there?

RON ATHEY: Yes, I guess a lot of *Martyrs and Saints* came out of hospital hours I spent. You know, and in those hours, you bring reading with you, you make writing, and some of these intersect as ideas and non-linear narrative that's more like you have this hallucination and you go through this rhythmic pattern, and you're in another hallucination. To me it's like sharing an experiential contour. Instead of making a narrative. Because I approach it as—if you know the story of a Course in Miracles, it's told, "Yes, this Jewish chick kept having Jesus talking in her ear." And she had to write these volumes. But I couldn't let go of this martyrology idea, and specifically Jesus, which I found more problematic, because I'd just come out of this punk, anarcho-punk, crass, a lot of really anti-religious on a protest level. I was kind of tired of it from every angle, but I'm still the Passion of the Christ, I still had to work through it. I think that was the source of *Martyrs and Saints,* even though I didn't start off there.

ALEX FIALHO: In what sense?

RON ATHEY: There were images I had to play out, still hung up on this grandiose Christianity that was still a part of me. And somehow I just absolutely couldn't move on, in the way it plugged into the feeling of the AIDS pandemic, the disaster.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of those images, and how did they play out?

RON ATHEY: Well, the heavy load of support systems then,hich is what a lot of characters of nurses or butch women would play, the way people had to pick up people's lives, or fold up people's lives, who just instantly died the moment they got sick. I think all the things—besides the memorial pieces, which I feel are a strong stream of consciousness expression. They came like that, it's really, almost born perfect. But the other ones that were more like a philosophical exercise. They happened to different degrees of success to me. Whether any message

was communicated or not.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Saint Sebastian as a figure? And I guess caregiver Irene, too, is related.

RON ATHEY: I think it's that, Saints Irene and Catherine tending the body of Sebastian that's always the one that's better, it's activated. Also if you read deeper in it, there's also a suggestion of a resurrection myth that he died from the arrows, and she brought him back to life.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh, wow.

RON ATHEY: Instead of just cleaned him. But that scene is described as the in between, because he was arrowed, and then he was killed by stones. Actually, he wasn't arrowed, that was the excuse for the first erotic painting of him. Needed props. You can be Nellie if you're full of arrows.

ALEX FIALHO: What do you mean, he wasn't arrowed? In the biblical story?

RON ATHEY: In history, there's no indication that—even though he was an archer in the Roman militia—he wasn't martyred that way.

ALEX FIALHO: I see.

RON ATHEY: The final death was by stoning, so there's this mythology. But that it has a resurrection myth in the middle of it is no small thing. There's also a link to tongues, his first miracle when he was alive there, who became Saint Zoe. Zoe was the prison warden's wife, and he converted them all in jail. And she was basically a spastic palsy, she couldn't speak, in her mouth. And so he started making the sign of the cross inside her mouth. It all blurted out. Every element of that story. And then he's the patron saint of athletes.

ALEX FIALHO: Exactly.

RON ATHEY: It's just like being a different kind of gay, like the kind of gay you wanted to be.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the gay angle on that, with the puncture and—

RON ATHEY: Well, the gays, they never stop until something's wrung out. The way imagery is consumed is hard to reckon with sometimes. I just went along with it as a cultural obsession—or it's a particularly homo obsession with Sebastian. Of course, there's the Derek Jarman movie *Sebastiene*.

ALEX FIALHO: I'll show you another artist, his name is Michael Richards, that I'll show you, that will take this in a different direction, but.

RON ATHEY: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: I'll show you that after this.

RON ATHEY: Is it Sebastian-related?

ALEX FIALHO: Sebastian, yes.

RON ATHEY: Then, of course, Mohammed Ali was Sebastian on an *Esquire* cover.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes, exactly.

RON ATHEY: That's beautiful. So you think of that, Ali in a beautiful body and graces torture. It's always been that perfect image.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's stay on *Martyrs and Saints* for a couple more minutes.

RON ATHEY: Okay.

ALEX FIALHO: Even the title. Let's break down—who are the martyrs, who are the saints? Or is that important?

RON ATHEY: That wasn't important. It was more—it's almost like talking about—if you're talking about something ghosting an event. And the corny thing would be to think of like guardian angels. But if you introduced a whole universe of that level of archetype. The martyrs and saints in this plague would be the ones I'm interested in.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes. How did working through it in performance—how did working through AIDS as performance feel for you?

RON ATHEY: I found it a way of answering questions. Maybe also by creating group experiences, like with the cast. We had a contract thing—you have to love me. Because some of the pieces, we had to do so much pre-piercing at the theater, three hours early, people had to have things sewn on them and they had 100 piercings done. We were just always willing to find a space. But I think taking this local community—with a few guests—out somewhere else, we started picking up road travelers. The first time we did a UK tour, Fierce Festival—produced tours for me there—I needed drummers, so I got these two guys from Glasgow that were drumming with this band, Test Department. And one of them, Russell McEwan, he still performs with me. That's my European counterpoint over there. If I go anywhere in Europe, I usually bring him as the second or third performer, or drummer. But, you know, it was like an excuse to have a family. And you have a different quality life when you put it all together in Croatia, or a really plush tour of France, or somewhere grim in Germany. It's just amazing to get all those experiences with sometimes ten people on the road, never less than eight.

ALEX FIALHO: And it's just a heightened moment on stage—

RON ATHEY: Trying not to McDonald-shame people who haven't had home food for a while. "That's home food?" Bless. I know when I lived in London for a while, I'd get hankerings for some things, so I'm not judgmental.

ALEX FIALHO: I feel like it happened very fast, the level of—it feels fast to go from Club Fuck! To LACE to—in a couple of years.

RON ATHEY: To bigger spaces? It was an inertia, though. And also my day job, was a newspaper that would let me take as many days off for art work and tours.

ALEX FIALHO: Was that *LA Weekly*? And through the whole entire time, the whole '90s and zero zeroes. That's a long time.

ALEX FIALHO: What were you doing for them?

RON ATHEY: I was the editor's assistant, and did a certain amount of writing and calendar listings under contract, with kind of a two-part wage.

ALEX FIALHO: Which department?

RON ATHEY: I was the Editor-in-Chief's assistant.

ALEX FIALHO: The whole damn publication?

RON ATHEY: Yes. So I worked with Harold Meyerson, the political editor. I worked with people like Steve Ericksen and different arts editors we had.

ALEX FIALHO: And how about *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life,* and how that came from *Martyrs*—

RON ATHEY: Yes, *Martyrs and Saints*, I feel like we did, it was at the beginning of everything, and things weren't so defined. By Four Scenes, I felt Modern Primitives Incorporated something really was going on in that body art side.

ALEX FIALHO: Modern Primitives Incorporated?

RON ATHEY: I'll just say this, because I have fellow artists that chose not to reveal—or not until they were dead—that they were positive, because they didn't want to be David Wojnarowicz. They didn't want to be—every time you say their name equals AIDS, comes up. And I knew I was too many things. For that to, like, bother me. Someone stops there, that's where they needed to stop. Here's what I think was driving me in Four Scenes was, there clearly started being a moral polarity where you either changed and became really responsible, and you were going to have gabies and marriage, or you were classified as a nasty girl. And there was very little willingness to see gray area and the term 'slut-shaming' hadn't been invented yet. So you just felt like, "Wow, I don't even know if I want to be alive if I have to act like I'm a straight person that's respectable." And also going back to, shaming is a big part of that, pervert that I thought I was, that couldn't even stand up as one person at a protest without being a deficit, without being problematic, that the pervert was there. Clearly not celibate.

But also, an early influence of mine was early Annie Sprinkle. I went to see Annie Sprinkle porn, not even Annie Sprinkle art. I got Love magazine, which was a magazine she published out of Italy, that would have pregnant women in bondage. The first pictures I ever saw publicly of [inaudible] with giant things growing through his chest, and they were having an affair at that time. So they're kind of like revealing—there's something about a Monica Troit film when she was doing her father's [inaudible]. It was deep. The idea of carving out your own sexual universe. Reading Pat Califia, just thinking, you know, I don't know, not having to respond to dominant culture, but ignoring it instead.

ALEX FIALHO: Yes. And that is *Four Scenes*?

RON ATHEY: *Four Scenes* was that. You know, there's the "Ron & Bob post-AIDS boy-boy shows." The text is of that moment, where no one knew what was re-infection, what that could mean, that that was not possible or possible, but the action is still being surgically castrated, simulated and then still partnering up on a double headed dildo and then having that cut in half by Shiva. The sort of, what do you call it, not cheerleader, but somebody who's a symbol for something. It was a trickster shaman. So everything in there unfolds into something ridiculous.

Wait, I think I jumped the performance, sorry. That's *Deliverance*.

ALEX FIALHO: Oh I see, I see.

RON ATHEY: Wow, that's deep—these are the first signs of me starting to mix up—it's turning into one plot.

ALEX FIALHO: When you created *Martyrs and Saints*, was it as a trilogy at that point. Or how did the trilogy components come in?

RON ATHEY: I always worked serially, and I knew there'd be one after that. I didn't know if there might be one more or not. But I just always know that—I don't think I'm finished and then think of another one.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the human printing press scene from [inaudible] life?

RON ATHEY: That was just impulse—for people into blood sport play, if someone does a fancy cutting on you, they'll make prints until they get a perfect print, that's like your momento, and then you get bound and shoved for whatever. So the idea of seeing an impression of the wound and bringing it at three points so everyone was in a close proximity to an impression of the wound, just as a concept, rocked my boat in that moment. And going back to Salk Institute—I think in biochemical terms. I'm not someone that can't fathom and understand microbes and how people get diseases at all. So I always like suss the health and safety side of my brain. It was a really mechanical thing. The only reason I ever had to explain it a million times is because of what went down politically. Otherwise it was never an issue with people there. Ever. People have a problem with other stuff, you know, but not that.

ALEX FIALHO: Talk a little bit more about the idea of the towels on pulleys, you spoke to it quickly, but the idea of seeing the wound closer and having the audience implicated—

RON ATHEY: It's a kind of industrial repetition, like an impression of the wound, impression of the wound. When we did LA Theater Center, it was so big going out through Azor, Ex Teresa, and Mexico City in a cathedral. We had to make about, we reckoned 120 prints to divide by three so that it would get to the end and we could do a more liberal spacing between towels. But it won't clot as long as you get it up in time before the clotting agent happens. So it's really like a stamp.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: And then towards the end I start getting a little less generous. You give it a harder slap. I thought it was kind of a perfect scene; that's problematic in a lot of ways too. We never thought about it because we just are people who love each other and experience each other, but there was a question with race that was brought

up at one Q & A real far after we had already did it at like five different cities, someone was considering it: How can you let a white man cut you from an elevated position, like reading it and black, white American post-slavery dynamics?

And I can own it. Like okay I can see what would be a real problem with that. Darryl is really different, like takes on a different idea of what it is to be a liberated black person in America and it's not to be a victim or keep score, he has a really strong, just what you need, right, someone white to give you your sensitivity politics. I just let her be—she gets belligerent.

I just think, we put an image out there, and we mean what we mean from the front of our brain, we mean what we mean that comes spontaneously or from some other place, like you've channeled it. And then sometimes the way you do things doesn't read the same way to the world. I don't think there was any embedded racism in that scene, but that it could be read that way, reads as a problem, because this is our context. I do think all of that '90s work was American work. Like I always labeled it American, being a person who didn't always feel American. The way the work responded to or what it rubbed against was always specifically American.

ALEX FIALHO: Can we talk a little bit about the context of "scarification" and that piece and what Darryl's practice in "scarification" is?

RON ATHEY: This, again, is modern primitives unlimited trademark—we explored, modern city tribal people or urban aboriginals. There's a lot of slang for it. But it had a dynamic when it was new, that really had potential to mean different things, and it felt really freeing of identity in a way, even with accusations of appropriation of, I don't know, most of them like nonexistent oceanic tribes. It's the origin of tattooing, the heavy black work. So also scarification but I like cutting people, so I would try on different people and people who don't keloid, white people that completely heal up or certain white people, you stuff the wound with ash, it forces it open for a little longer, so you get a little bit more scarring. Darryl is really black, but he doesn't particularly keloid. I've done other people like a Puerto Rican friend who it looked like a wax drawing from melted wax, it was like beyond 3D, it was a little bit like, "Whoops." It's a medium that, there is a lot of fancy scarification now too, where a little bit of the skin is cut out and it's harder to heal but it's more precise. But it still brings—like when people look at you who don't have access to that experience, it's like it's much more violent than a tattoo or maybe a piercing. So it came out of our both identity practice and there's some play around that cutting to.

ALEX FIALHO: You sort of hinted at the political furor that happened, but you'd performed it a few times before you performed it in Minneapolis. Right?

RON ATHEY: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: You performed it as *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* and then were excerpting it in Minneapolis, is that correct?

RON ATHEY: Basically we performed all of it with a reduced cast. That's what happened, we didn't have enough budget to bring everybody, but we did do a version of every scene. The timing was almost the same. But that was the first time I ever started thinking about it in an economy. So there's not enough money to bring everyone, so then the work has to change. I didn't really know where I could sit about being a purist and what a piece needs to look finished.

All LA and a bit of clubbing, performing in clubs in New York and San Francisco and in between before Lawrence Steger brought me to Chicago to Randall Street Gallery where I did an experiment. Doing *Martyrs and Saints* all with local people. That was the only one time I did any of that work with that—

ALEX FIALHO: How'd that go?

RON ATHEY: It came off, it was fine, you know, the community were gorgeous, like this black dike firefighter chief was the one that has like the ax when it breaks down the door. Really fierce people I got really into it. But maybe a little bit taking the reading as being really proper SM community, which I think I'm not part of a community. This is something else. So you know those—that's why I liked working with the same people, because you didn't have to negotiate that every time. Like what it meant for them to participate in the performance.

ALEX FIALHO: Do you think of them as collaborators, are they performers? If you were to re-perform it now, would they be involved? I'm curious about each individual.

RON ATHEY: Of the '90s work I didn't consider them collaborators on that level, of collaborating, with forming the material. Maybe fleshing it out. Collaborations a weird word. Because there's collaboration with two people who already know up front that it's going to be a piece by them two, and they got to dream it all up together, but then most collaborations are ones where you want to work with the musician or this or that and they may or may not have anything to do with the content. It was a combination of stuff. But I fancied myself the visionary laying it out and I didn't know how to work any other way.

ALEX FIALHO: And it seems like such a team, like I can't think of these pieces without the people.

RON ATHEY: Absolutely. But they wouldn't be re-performed. I wouldn't know how to even like get my head around that. Again what I said about the Karen Finley *Memento Mori,* like in that moment it was profound, but right now just like going to a museum and tying a red ribbon around a gate for me would feel corny, for any of the local things, like it would feel gratuitous, or like it was missing its mark, like where it was supposed to happen, like the grieving for that thing.

ALEX FIALHO: That's why when you said that you performed *Martyrs and Saints* in Chicago with performers from the local community—

RON ATHEY: It was something else. You know, it couldn't—it wasn't that same work. That's different. If I had a core team I could pick up people because they would really bring them up to speed and somehow the bonding was kind of key to that, of doing all the prep. Like that's when some people do a prayer circle. We'd just—everybody loved each other, everyone was flirtatious and made each other feel sexy. Like there's a real appreciation of, yeah, we were properly a poly company.

ALEX FIALHO: Sounds fun.

RON ATHEY: From this side, thinking of it now, it was like a little bit of a queer utopia.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: I always say those things just happen. I was going to jump to doing a PhD in England with Johnny Goulding. My thesis question, every week, was like can phenomena be constructed or, I'd rephrase it each time—then I thought, is that what all my work is to this point, can I make a phenomena explode?

And a few times, I've hit that trance space performing. One was doing Sebastian with my friend John John who's coming soon, in Lyon, France in like a steel bunker that's semi underground. And I didn't know where I was or what was happening, but I was on the track of the action that I'd planned to do. But it was also like kind of suspended in a system, off the ground. That's not performing, I didn't know anybody was there after all. It was an ecstatic state that happened— All the kind of like French body monsters really got it. It was intense—that kind of experience does get more like church or something, you can't reproduce it.

ALEX FIALHO: That's actually a question I have, is for instance performing Sebastian in *Martyrs and Saints*, what are you actually feeling, with the arrows in your arm, with the needles in your forehead?

RON ATHEY: I guess you could look at it in one way as a high. Because after you've had—it's almost like acupuncture. You can overload your system by getting too pierced in too many places, so brain is just spraying. Leads to the mood of the scene, leads to reeling out what's been motion into like static image that's so hammy too. So you know you're going blind from blood in your face, so then you don't even have sight to be self-conscious about, so you just—that's when I invite something to move through me. And the self-obliteration I've been like half bleeding to death in a wig and I start moving like somebody else. The articulation of my movement is being channeled. That's a goal, you know, the majority of the times in performances. Sometimes you have to muscle through a bit of it to get back on track. Still here, tech's getting fixed, everything—there we go. But it's when I really don't have to think through it. That's why I don't do things once, I'm not one of those one experience people. I find my way through the grove every time I do it. And by the two years point it hits it.

ALEX FIALHO: Is there a performance that's particularly intense for you physically?

RON ATHEY: I mean a lot of that '90s work, I think if we reformed it with the same people we don't have the strength to do it anymore in that way. Also when you build up to having regular wounds, your body remembers how to heal itself, so we're not actually going through the same thing that someone else would go through just doing it out of nowhere. So that work, doing it the maximum four nights at PS-122 with one late show during that whole stupid NEA mess. But that worked because it's a group experience. I don't feel like it's me, the work. That is, "Us work."

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

RON ATHEY: Because it's almost imagining like a psychic machine. Everything has to work in the machine. It's not about one person controlling everyone, we worked a lot with a hypnotherapist, especially on the third part of *Deliverance*, we're moving at the same pace while not looking at each other, the same distance, being equidistant, scenes that called for that kind of hypnotic quality to it. And it really punched it up.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you rehearse? The piercings and—

RON ATHEY: No, I mean those will be done in a—that's when I would use some club things like—if like suddenly they're having like a small ACT UP benefit at the gas lamp at 4:00 p.m., like an all day Sunday thing, so then I would think let's see if that thing works, and would insert it into something; either at a club night or as a guest appearance sort of thing. Yeah but I wouldn't in an empty room hardly. Let's just start cutting through everything.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting.

RON ATHEY: And so it did take that, like I rarely—someone has to court me to do a cutting on the outside—it lost any private fascination for me. By using it so much in expression.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the sensation of moving some of the things that you were doing in a private SM or not SM scene to a public space? Even in terms of like how it physically affects you. Was it a heightened sense to have people watching or is it a weird transition?

RON ATHEY: But I think in play party scenes sometimes they can be quite large too.

ALEX FIALHO: True.

RON ATHEY: So it was similar but not self-centric. It wasn't erotic in the public. It could be charged, but it's like once I did, for a Lars von Trier's porn company, I was jacking off for a scene. It was like—there were 30 people and the big stupid boom over your head. And the only way to do it is to splinter yourself, like I'm performing and I'm fucking and I'm—It's like you're two—you do fracture out from yourself and performing heavy body stuff is exactly the same. Like you're not feeling—like if all of a sudden you said I don't know why but I want you to put a needle all the way through my bicep while I sit here—you would really feel it no matter how much we had eye connection. You try to surrender to it whereas if you're doing it in front of 1000 people, it would be this crackling thing, it would hurt in this way where it hurts over here somewhere. It's like, you know, an out of body experience in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: Interesting. Yeah, that makes sense. Publicness.

RON ATHEY: Yeah. Publicness changes everything, it's a different element. That's why I love images so much and I still think in images and I teach performance for camera. So sometimes I try, I would to do a body of work in that direction.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: It's just it's not instantly gratifying like performance. It's like okay, you do, and then what do you do with it? Then you make it into a project, and then what do you do with it? Then you either give it away online or you have a showing of it. It's different options and there's mediations involved, whether it's going to be a printed matter or video.

ALEX FIALHO: How does some of the body mod and scarification relate to addiction? For you or otherwise. Like the highs or—

RON ATHEY: No, I think—for me, they're not in the same camp. It's like the other side. I was looking at a picture of me in the late-'80s when—because I woke up at like 4:00 in the afternoon everyday most of my young life and I was like dyed black hair, as pale as I could be living in LA. And then when I started trying to stop taking heroin and I had a rich boyfriend, I'd be like in the Yucatan reading a book with diamond rings on. And reading *Happy Death* by Camus, where he gets a sun tan after I think after having TB and it's like—fuck it, I'm going to be tan like tan as a wet fucking brick. And I spent a month in the Yucatan. I was like black. But then of course when you have long black hair that's in the sun it like turns this brassy hideous color plus blonde-Dina roots. I was like a weird hippie on the other side of that trip, but I knew myself a little better. I became—that's the first time I really

started knowing I needed to court nature for spirit, mental health. Like you can get in a city loop. And think why, it's not that important? So in '85. Yeah, and I hadn't quite hit my straight edge thing and I was—so you know. Some people help you change your life, but they help you change it to something you don't want to be like doing coke and drinking Jameson. Like we're watching old junkies turn into wino's. Sometimes the next thing isn't that nice either, it's just less offensive to people around you.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's move over a little bit to like you said the messy NEA stuff.

RON ATHEY: Through that—let's just say through that whole process, from when this front page story hit and went on the AP newswire. Because if had just been a Minneapolis story, you know, no biggie. I always was thankful that I worked in the media. I already knew how to give interviews because I was on the other side of interviewing. I knew people have their three or four points and you could ask them anything and they would prioritize the point. And that maybe I only took it as serious as I know once a paper starts yellowing no one remembers the stories in it, you know. So I didn't feel consumed by it, but I was in 200 newspapers in a really short period of time, re-patching that AP story. Cheesy things like the *World Weekly News* to lots of long interviews where people couldn't believe I was actually a smart well-mannered polite guy underneath all that. A lot of people don't know how much the world changed between then and now. That was a totally different reality.

ALEX FIALHO: What?

RON ATHEY: That people weren't used to people having modifications and— it was like that left handed compliment, wow you're really amazing, even though you look like that. You know straight out I went through it over and over again. I tried to like compartmentalize it, and at some point I realized the person I was talking to from the NEA and the person I was talking to from the Walker had slightly different goals for what they wanted out of me in the interviews. And I didn't, I really didn't call myself an artist before that and I'd never imagined what sitting here and filling out an arts application for funding from a public body—they weren't on my radar, it wasn't a decision to be an outsider. I had no idea that I could've possibly got something of that. I didn't know that spaces are funded by 15 alliances like that or whatever. Money places. So while I was savvy in some ways, I had no idea what I was protecting.

You know, other than the right thing that truth had been manipulated into a Jesse Helms agenda, which of course it was obvious I was going to fight that. But then, that I was entering, before I even started being blacklisted in the U.S., nobody would touch me for anything. Like why am I working so hard for free to defend these people to have these spaces that are afraid to show me or anything like me? I take it as a heavy stand—I'm in the Lee Edelman camp of no future, like fuck the child that stumbles upon anything. This world is here for us now.

I also think that there has to be some smarter queer factions that start formulating philosophies again, not just basic boring human rights like marriage, which should've already been. We evolve however, we evolve. I'm not going to be a Jean Genet where I still want homosexuality to be illegal. But I understand—people don't know how much magic is left behind when things conform. Every step, you get something, and you lose something. You lose the sparkle.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk a little bit more about that you hadn't applied for grants. Had you applied for grants before? Did you apply for this NEA travel grant?

RON ATHEY: I didn't apply for anything. That was just the math equation that the press were given. Like here's our budget, just because of the space and what funds the staff are paid out of. Approximately $120 of NEA money went towards this performance. The only way that that was ever used against them was because the person who was the source for the story was a former disgruntled Walker employee who—I was just there, last

year for—like their 25th anniversary of it. Whatever that was, is it 30 now? Yeah, it's 30 something—the 31 year—because they didn't get it together last year. So there was a series of talks, but this writer—the *Star Tribune* writer who had the beef with the thing. She came and she donated her archives to the Walker because she just retired from journalism, she's an older woman. Then she came to the conference just to I don't know protect her angle or something. And I thought that was really weird. It was also like a conference I kind of got tricked into going into.

ALEX FIALHO: Was it a conference around this controversy?

RON ATHEY: Yes. And so I left wounded again in a way from this one—let's just say, I didn't leave wounded, but I didn't—there was no reason for me to go. It was all Minneapolis processing something you never got over.

ALEX FIALHO: Well what wound happened to you there in that process?

RON ATHEY: They were just using me. Again, the people that I know weren't able to get behind my work. Like the Patrick's [inaudible] was supposed to show me again, and that was the package deal that I would do this—I wouldn't have said yes to the conference. Because I thought okay performance and then now there's a context. Here's new work now, here is the conference, but then you know close to the time but before my ticket was booked—no my ticket was already booked, then the Director said he had never been on board and he hasn't seen my work live and he won't show anything he hasn't actually seen. I rolled my eyes up over the – just whatever. To some people it's enough to go somewhere and talk about something. I'm not so interested in that period. It's like hideous American politics, finally years later I watched a video of Jesse Helms presenting me, like an effigy on the floor, and saying that my name is pronounced A-hyphen-thee, so I'm like Ron Athey. So we went through this whole thing like that like completely fictionalized by him, there's nowhere in the world to find me trying to be ground about my name. Like A-thee, Ath-ee, I don't really care what people call me. And then more things that were just—then I kind of got it. Oh this is just, he's performing like Ann Coulter does. You know, she's not really that snaggle-toothed. She's just making money for being an asshole. And he had some kind of agenda for being an asshole and did a lot of theater around it.

And when the NEA 4 happened, I kind of grimaced when I thought I know what they do, and it's really nice work. Just because someone's naked for a minute, it's not mortification of the flesh. Live sex show, health and safety nightmare. Like they didn't have any of the list that I had stacked against me, but because I thought that's how I would get in trouble maybe. I thought how do you apply for a grant and you give them all like your monologues? I don't think I'd know how to have a piece that ready, whatever their requirements were. But the way trouble is brewing and I think even before me, they were making bad attempts at people like Joel-Peter Witkin. You know, like people that have always been outside of there, like what?

ALEX FIALHO: How about because—it came after the first few waves of Culture Wars. Wojnarowicz, and Mapplethorpe, and the NEA 4. How soon after was it? A couple years.

RON ATHEY: Just a couple years. Yeah, spring of '94.

ALEX FIALHO: It just kept coming, in a way.

RON ATHEY: Yeah, because the October performance at PS-122—it was produced in kind of an exploitive way. You know, it didn't help me. I had to pull every resource on earth to make. It was one of those things where one of the main problems was journalists. There would be like 60 journalists on the list at each performance. I don't want to pay for their story. You came here to write a fucking story, buy the ticket and support the arts, it's not Broadway. It made everything—that was the last big thing I did in the states after that, until recent times and everybody was prickly. Some various people donated money to make that happen. Mark was so nervous. I can't even think of his last name. He was director of PS122. Mark—I'll think of it later. But at least he did it. I don't

know what they do there now, like theater, things that run really long. It doesn't interest me.

ALEX FIALHO: It ranges. They have some good experimental stuff in my estimation, but.

RON ATHEY: Let me take a break. Can we?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, do your thing.

[END OF TRACK.]

ALEX FIALHO: This is Alex Fialho interviewing Ron Athey at Ron Athey's home in Los Angeles, California on June 18, 2016 for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution, card number two.

RON ATHEY: Silverlake life.

ALEX FIALHO: Yesterday, at one point you said that your work was interested or explored American values, or an American context.

RON ATHEY: It sat American,.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. And I'm curious what issues are raised in your work in that way and how you address them?

RON ATHEY: Hmm. Now I'm feeling like I overstated it [laughs]. No, I think the kind of American/Christian culture—I feel like whatever country you live in, whatever's the dominant culture, you become that. Like Jewish people have Christian ambiance about them from here—

you know; you can't escape it [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: And then that's a main issue that's explored your work?

RON ATHEY: That's one thing I think, the way I frame questions—I just recognized it as an American perspective even though I have outside information. It's a starting point.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the fact that most times that your work has been shown, it has been in international contexts?

RON ATHEY: [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: How does it translate? And then, how does it—as an American project or if sits American—what's the relationship to that international showing context?

RON ATHEY: I mean that always tripped me out because I guess it doesn't rely on words—even when there's words, it doesn't rely on those words so much. It has been shown in a lot of different countries where people don't really speak English like the Italian countryside. Then, there's other countries where everybody does; like German countries, Balkan countries as well.

I think when it's enthusiastic [laughs], it's in Catholic countries, specifically. I find London a lot like LA/New York, you know, an urban response. Similar configurations and communities make up the audience.

ALEX FIALHO: How about '95 in Ex Teresa? Let's talk about that because we did *Martyrs and Saints* yesterday, we talked about the three triology parts, and that seemed like a big moment—

RON ATHEY: That was a—Guillermo Gómez-Peña asked me if I wanted to perform in Mexico and he wanted to hook me up with the space Ex Teresa, which had new curators. So a woman named Lorena Wolffer worked on bringing me there, through—we did everything to go there [Laughs.] We raised money; I had to do kind of a double contract to teach a performance workshop at a college, the governmental college so paid for part of it that way. We did a benefit at the Fault Line. We did bits—excerpts of the piece in LA—outside in the courtyard on high, like six-foot risers. A sequence of things. You know, we did everything to be able to bring—and then there were also people that just came with us that have performed with me before, so we had a cast of 25 to do, well really all of *Martyrs and Saints* and *Four Scenes* and we hadn't completely fleshed out *Deliverance* yet then so we just chose a scene with just Julie and Alex Binnie that was on the wall that separated Ex Teresa courtyard from Templo Mayor, the Aztec ruins. So we were historically in an important spot. Then wasn't even as crazy as

now; to imagine you're on intersecting ley-lines is a nice thing for a performance. But I started working with this Argentinean artist and astrologer named Madeline—I'll think of her last name in a while because it's hard to remember. She does astrology for artists. She'll do a reading of the chart of the space and then you in the space—your performance in the space and you can overlap key members performing—sometimes I do that. It's not like I would cancel. I'm not like a crazy '70s person that would cancel performance, but maybe you're kind of keyed into what to expect. A wild ride, maybe.

ALEX FIALHO: It was a church? Ex Teresa?

RON ATHEY: It was a de-sanctioned convent. I think it was 17th century. And so they have two chapels. And then the kind of courtyard ruins and a miniature chapel; so we could use any of it—so we used all of it except for the tiny chapel [laughs]. We started with *Martyrs and Saints.* And basically before everything, people had had like pre-existing piercings that had to be done for things hanging from them or whatever later had all that done ahead. So you've have like weird, invisible like wire sticking out of here, inappropriate to *Martyrs and Saints* that would be used at the end of *Four Scenes*.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow.

RON ATHEY: So it was a really long day for us. Probably the performance time was close to six hours and almost everyone stuck it out, which to me, since I haven't been schooled in durational performance art, to me it seemed like a lot to ask of a crowded audience. Then we went to the next chapel, and with a short 20-minute intermission, literally, we opened *Four Scenes*. Oh, I know, the intermission was *Deliverance* on the wall, then we ended with *Four Scenes* in the bigger chapel.

ALEX FIALHO: And it was all performed one night? That was it. Not to say "it" but—

RON ATHEY: All in one night. The next day, I had one day off, so we took a taxi to the Temple of the Sun and the Moon. And they had like a little TV plugged in and we were on TV, full-frontal nudity, no censoring. With no communication either. Like "Woo yeah, woo!" You know, we didn't speak enough Spanish—we had someone with us—

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. And of course the church context was exciting?

RON ATHEY: You know; it was the ultimate fantasy—it was good. I don't know if that was the first time, I mean, it was the first time, I think, that I had used a Catholic structure. Of course—your acoustics are perfect. The only inhibition is you're in a protected space so you can't drill anything; everything's done with trees in that situation. I can live with big trees [laughs]. And we had access to the National Opera's props. The kind of fancy chair I needed was a throne from an opera. Everything was bumped up—you know, you have to bump it up when you're sitting in big space.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the team of 25 at that point? It was a big group of collaborators and—? How did it feel?

RON ATHEY: Of course we split into a few groups so we were just always storming through town. Either for props or endless dinners. There's a special thing at arts festivals, but a thing that starts driving you crazy of having dinner with 40 people—having lunch with 40 people. Even Watermill is like that. You know, its like, "I don't want to eat with the 80 people." Takes like hours. [Laughs.] Not every fucking meal [laughs]. But that was memorable and everyone we love grabbed a hold of it. And still lots of friends came just to be there for it, just like an ultimate fit.

ALEX FIALHO: Fantastic.

RON ATHEY: Probably the only similar show that I was—challenges were thrown my way, were what I call the *History of Ecstasy*, in Naples at the Madre Museum. The Madre Museum is a contemporary art museum, but it's on the property of and contains a chapel that has from some era of Spain the Queen Mother's body. And that's where I was commissioned to do a piece in that chapel. But then you can't have any sound with like a Giotto frescoe hanging above the coffin. So they got waffled—well into it, a big commission was given kind of a massive white cube. So had to restage it all in the very middle of the room. Going against [laughs] what I thought I was working with—back to the hygiene gallery aesthetic. But it made me discover something with staging. Staging in the round and building the set as we went along. Fake jeweled, beaded curtains that the cast brought in and hung up all around the concert grand piano; kind of drove into it. It was good—my mutated classical meets the abject [laughs]. And I used seven performers, which I kind of directed into a format.

ALEX FIALHO: When you say that it was a similar kind of challenge, what is the challenge there?

RON ATHEY: They were similar in that they were in these holy places— but then I got bumped over to the extra

contemporary one. But still the city and the feeling was still there, even if not having the gothicness.

ALEX FIALHO: It's very interesting to me because you've said things like "staging" or "directing." How do you think of your work in relation to theater, but also as an artist, it seems like you're also directing and staging—

RON ATHEY: I work—now I work however I feel like it, but I have strong periods like the '90s I only did group work, which I would call theater. And it also had somewhere to sit in Europe which is new, experimental theater festivals—instead of waiting to find your slot at a museum. Museums are much less frequent. So it had somewhere to sit there. It's also really tedious and a sink hole; it never mattered how much money I got [laughs]. You know, it's expensive vision. The main problem being, because it's physical, it can only be reproduced so many times. You can't do a week run, let alone a six-week run. It never pays for the materials, which may have something to do with why I run things as long as I do. Then, from when I did *Solar Anus* it was like, "Do I always need a Las Vegas going on around me to get to the nugget?" Or, "Can I do it alone?" I was so involved in creating big spectacles that to then shrink it down—I thought *Solar Anus*—the creation of it was really different than my fears of showing it; the making of it just happened, in two weeks. I didn't have to like massage my brain to get any of it out [laughs]. I didn't have to wait for the fear of deadline—kind of, but—other people's [laughs]. But, really in two weeks, the entire crown, dildo, high heels; all the Pierre Molinier references were in place and manifested. There's some benefits to living in this mainstream town. Like guilty people working for Hollywood that are willing to [laughs] make things. I've realized there's a lot of talented people here that don't necessarily work on high art.

ALEX FIALHO: What is some of the research that goes into a performance? Yesterday you said that a lot of your pieces are history backed-up and—

RON ATHEY: Yeah, I need to see it multiply in different phases through history—or different ways. I think *Solar Anus* because only one thing happens is a good example. From reading, five years earlier George Bataille's the *Solar Anus*,— it started out with an idea of just wanting a tattoo on my ass [laughs]. And then it was really only that essay and all the research I could do about Pierre Molinier and all those action photographs specifically. Then backing it up— there's a quote from Liza Minnelli that the first time she sang a concert, Marlene Dietrich got on stage with her to do a bow. And when they bowed, Liza looked over and there were two needles going through the back of Marlene's neck with rubber band wrapped around it—like stick a needle in that way, and go that way, and then put a wig over it—over the needle tip. A pretty amazing living art sculpture. The whole like face-hook came from that legend, which I don't care if it's true or not [laughs]—it's juicy. Someone's pulled out the fucking staple gun [laughs] when there were just two haggy. It's temporary plastic surgery, thrills me. Even like Flawless Sabrina does a thing with clear tape, picking her face back up before she even puts her wig on. Genius [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Amazing.

RON ATHEY: I always come back to these themes of twisted, fucked up glamour, decomposing sparkle, and then defiance—to just lay back in a chair in the middle of a performance and have your high heels start penetrating you is kind of like—like, "Woo!" [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Yep. A "fuck you."

RON ATHEY: But to do it to violin music that's already been on a loop making—it's like a hypno track. It's also not funny—because it has a sort of melancholy in the air. I guess maybe that's something that I do—the way I modulate different elements.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. That's another thing, too. I went home and last night was watching on YouTube a two-minute clip of Saint Sebastian from—I think probably *Martyrs and Saints.* But it struck me—the music; it was club-sounding, techno-sounding.

RON ATHEY: Oh, okay so you saw the old footage—

ALEX FIALHO: Old, old footage, yeah. How do you make the music for some of these performances?

RON ATHEY: I decide who's good to work with. I've worked a lot with Juliana Snapper on more the neuro stuff—a-rhythmic things that don't quite line up—[laughs] if you feel like that while you listen to it, but you don't know why. She's super savvy in that way. There's a musician down the street from here that worked with Little Annie in the '90s, David Harrow. And he's like an electronic genius. Othon Mataragas is who I did all the automatic writing ones with, him on the piano.

ALEX FIALHO: How about *Solar Anus*, the shift from groups to one. As a solo performer, how did that feel? How did that sit with you, that move?

RON ATHEY: I was so focused on the concept of not making it the theater ones that I didn't even try out anything. I just packed it up and got on the plane. And the first performance was in Ljubljana [Slovenia]. And it went off perfectly. You know, I couldn't quite do a dildo can-can without assistance from my arms. But that's being in the moment of what really happens as opposed to what you fantasize happens. But I didn't even know the hooks would work on the cleats and the crown to the effect. So that was all pretty thrilling, but—again, I think I talked about this like articulation I go to when I feel I'm in it—and I just became some kind of Louis XIV queenie monster in my body—I was half there [laughs]. Doing it was kind of one of my favorite performances. And I was able to do it a lot, too. I didn't get tired of it for about five years.

ALEX FIALHO: Why one of your favorites?

RON ATHEY: It feels like a poem or something, it opens up and closes back up; it doesn't meander [laughs]. I don't know, it's just what it is. And it dares to be lyrical. And I did a number of things I've never done. And then it's only me and I don't even go anywhere, I'm just me on my weird sling chair that someone in Britain told me looked like a Zimmer frame [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: How about elements of drag in your work across the board?

RON ATHEY: Oh, yeah, that's a funny one.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I love it.

RON ATHEY: I mean, I've went from drag character to just pieces of drag. Like I think in "Self-Obliteration" with the blonde wig I'm trying to trigger a hallucination that I'm like an air-freshener doll— [laughs] in a car. Franco Bikes said I look like Pamela Anderson on acid;

like I actually feel it. I used a whole bottle of Sublime fake tan with the sparkles. I'm

like sparkly brown. I think in the '90s I was more experimenting with drag characters that were a cross between me and then the archetype of Miss Velma's sister, Amy, a nun, whatever. They were all what I called the "Holy Woman." Archetype drag [laughs], bustles, the Trojan Whore. Actually making a drag body that had a drag body underneath it. And then a rectum full of pearls. That was where the pearls started. I made for Leigh Bowery's memorial at Matthew Marks Gallery.

ALEX FIALHO: You made which part?

RON ATHEY: The Trojan Whore.

ALEX FIALHO: Outfit? Persona?

RON ATHEY: Everything. The concept just welled up when –

ALEX FIALHO: Did you wear that to Leigh Bowery's memorial, or you had the idea at—

RON ATHEY: There was a memorial performance with Lady Bunny and various New York characters at that time. Diamanda was there [laughs]. It was spirited.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: So it continued, then I did it at the Leigh Bowery memorials at Love Ball in Amsterdam that followed not that long after that. Somewhere in that period.

ALEX FIALHO: How about Diamanda?

RON ATHEY: I've never crossed paths with her. I've been a fan since she did a new music festival in 1981 and it was broadcast on public radio. She played LA in '82; the Litanies of Satan tour. Yeah, the last time I saw here was at Antony Anohni's when she did *Meltdown* in London, I went to most of the shows of that. And Diamanda did a fantastic new work.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. One question I had was documentation. So there's the film *Halleluiah* with Catherine Gund or photos by Elyse Regher—how are you thinking about documentation in these moments; whether it's photo by Elyse, for instance, and why is she the one taking it? Is that someone you're hiring?

RON ATHEY: I've rarely worked at that level where I could bring in my own people. Sometimes the space will. Like they'll even ask me who I want to bring to video—the *Leaving London* performances I did, all had camera people, like a contract. If I could start over [laughs], I would have never let anyone take a picture and controlled it. I always think of the live thing. Because I did really well making the book actually tracking down the '80s

people. But you can see where there're just a few people per year and then all of a sudden when everything goes digital, it almost gets to be too much; everyone's photographed "Self-Obliteration." I don't know how it will look for the photos that I like. [Laughs.] I'm bad at photo-editing. It's funny I ended up in the photo for camera department. That's going to be the next work I do. [Laughs.] I like to do moving image work and—only for photograph, that won't exist anywhere else and start working a little bit differently. I could go on and on about the problematics with who's copyright is it with the photographer. I work a lot with Manuel Vason, he's an Italian based in London. And, he has this concept of a 50/50—if he ever sells your photo. If someone documents my work while I'm doing it, that's different that going to somebody like Opie's studio and doing a shoot. If you want to charge for being a model, that's fine. But nobody's going to consider it a collaboration because you're breathing. [Laughs.] But with documentation, it gets trickier. I had a few people that were trying to get paid for prints even though they were initially paid for a newspaper or something. It's like, "I get it you can't be bothered." But you can even be on a big book label and still not have any budget [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: How about the photos by Cathy? Let's talk a little bit about those.

RON ATHEY: They were—that's a relationship, right? So that's picked up various chapters. But you're talking about the large format Polaroids, specifically?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: Well that was—I think the whole concept was first suggested by Patrick Moore. And the Estate Project, you probably know him.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: Because we had done her portrait series, but then she did these other photos for me before every performance; it's a different '90s theater thinking that I needed to have press shots, which I did for calendar listings for all the tours—of things before they're actually performed so we would stage them for her. Like *Deliverance* we did all that—before that it was Elyse; so different aspects of photography with her before we got to this. This was very—

ALEX FIALHO: It's amazing.

RON ATHEY: —it was a massive amount of work, but it was massively supported with enough of the right people. I had a registered nurse, piercing experienced person, who I've worked with a lot; Lauren Pine. She helped me with all that body stuff and we had another one helping with *Divinity* as well. We were just well supported to do all of these in two days during a blizzard on 2nd and 2nd [laughs]. And to be able to see them, right? You know I think that's what I would say, you don't have any energy when you do too much performance for camera, because it's just like how long can you keep doing your thing and pretending you're in it.

Whereas, we would do like that, and the process is dramatic. It'd be pitch black and then they'd give me a countdown when this light that felt like a torch was going in my face. And it would just be really hard-core strobing. And having a look in the dark that you can hold through the adjustment so the final—sometimes I'm a bit intense [laughs]. It's the opposite of what they say, stars look so intense because the exposures took so long. But these are the opposite [demonstrates]. And a really small range of focus—the focus is so tiny it's like that big and everything goes soft focus so that they have a painterly quality. But to be able to see, it took so many people inside the room. It's really camera obscura, they pulled out the poster-sized sheet. And they're about five percent bigger than life. So you can tell if there was a spot, or if the face was wrong, we'd do it again.

ALEX FIALHO: I'd love to see them all in one room.

RON ATHEY: They were only in one room, once. At Thread Waxing, at the opening and then—

ALEX FIALHO: With Lia Gangitano?

RON ATHEY: Through Lia, and that was my beginning of a relationship with Lia. The best person on earth. That was the only time they were together, then—I forget, in the Guggenheim survey of Opie, I think there were seven select ones or something—

ALEX FIALHO: Looking at the Opie photographs reminds me of—is it *Suicide Bed*?

RON ATHEY: That is it—that's what it's called. So we renamed them, too, to the name of the performance scene they came from because I thought *Catherine Opie Untitled* was misleading. [Laughs.] That worked out, and I learned to have patience with the way business and gallery world works. When you deal with somebody who is managed—it's different; you don't just deal with the personality of people in different cities who have an opinion.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's touch on *Suicide Bed*. We didn't really dive into it yesterday; just as a scene from *Four*

Scenes?

RON ATHEY: *Suicide Bed* was, instead of thinking grandly through history and archetype, it was just how I worked my way through being the most suicidal IV drug user on earth. In a way that came really natural, thinking about compressing several of the worst nights of my life that fit in this category into one scene. And then the sort of autistic rocking of having a nervous breakdown in bed is easy to turn into a rhythm. And so it was this two-part thing—I've had a few dreams in my life that just stopped the period I was in, stopped the darkness; that strong of a message, the absolute. Not that hopefulness that doesn't go away right away, like a real change and this dream is also a part of this scene.

ALEX FIALHO: You've had dreams in your life where you wake and are—

RON ATHEY: It was like a vision quest dream. It gave me an answer and a direction. Almost like an intervention.

ALEX FIALHO: Which stopped the darkness?

RON ATHEY: Yes. So that was what this was. And I was putting too much information out there and I just did it in the spirit of being true. And then this photograph was the one that actually, looking at documentation back on, I felt like it worked, but it worked so well that it freaked me out [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: Why?

RON ATHEY: Because—I think because I got it; so in a good way. But sometimes getting what you're going after doesn't feel like juicy—it feels more like turkey-neck [laughs]. I was happy with it in other ways. And that was maybe the starting the progress of being willing to try solo work, because that was my solo scene. That's my first solo scene in my work.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool. How does it feel to perform "Suicide Bed?"

RON ATHEY: It's a process action. I can let my head go anywhere, but I'm going to go diagonally like needle, needle, needle,, varying in numbers from 16 to 25 until I get to my deltoid. And then I'm following the text in my head. And I feel emotional, but I feel again—what I was saying about everything else—you feel disconnected because you're in this heightened state.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. Wow.

RON ATHEY: Nothing's too melodramatic for me [laughs.] At least not in that second [laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: These photos by Cathy are so amazing.

RON ATHEY: I think that text makes me think about if somewhere deep inside you, you feel like the things that have happened to you in your life, you feel doomed and then the dream crashes that. Just this dream of what it symbolizes to see almost like a healed spiritual mirror of yourself. And, in dream symbology, flying is powerful, but lifting straight up is more powerful— there's a cognitive dream exercise of running in a dream and then you fly. That's like an exercise to fly but then there's just that you don't work for it. It wasn't me engineering it. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: One of the authors in *Pleading in the Blood*, I don't remember which, says of your work that it advocates or makes visible the right to bleed in public, and I wanted to talk a little about blood, specifically. It's interesting to read some of your earlier bio about stigmata and bleeding from parts of the body, let's just start on the concept of blood with stigmata in the early—

RON ATHEY: Maybe it was stigmata that made me have no boundaries around blood. I think I was one of those freaky children. I wanted to see the inside of everything. [Laughs.] That's why I was a good science person, I'm not squeamish. I see it differently. I see it as the fluid of life that's just a prick away from escaping. [Laughs.] It ruptures anyway through your nose, through your ass, through all kinds of places. So I always wanted to—it's like a biological urge, was the initial, and then the stigmata makes it like a miracle about where you would bleed from. I already understood this kind of psychosexual ecstasy of Saint Teresa parallels in there, just filling up until the side wound of Christ opens. As a child, not knowing these psycho sex magic cults that fixated on the side wound of Christ as an orifice to sexually penetrate. Whoops that's blood? That got lost. I'll tell you what's tricky about blood and then I'll give a colder answer about the polemic of it. What's tricky about having a history of bloodletting is where different types of bloodletting sit. There's the self-harmer which has gotten a lot of attention since the Lady Princess Diana came out as a self-harmer, but of course that's a huge part of the ambiance of punk as well, of the rotten safety pin through the nose and cutting and the germ burn on the arm. That was the youth culture I came up in, as well as that kind of violent self-expression, the mortification of the flesh. So to not have to erase that to go into a blood art direction, by being savvy enough about '60s and '70s

performance artists and actionism, Hermann Nitsch et cetera. I think for me specifically, I didn't want to erase or hide the pathos, that's what *Suicide Dream* is also about including, where it sat in that piece, where you get tribal, you're all over the place with aesthetic in a way of body modification.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the polemic that's colder?

RON ATHEY: It's kind of like what I was giving about me and *Divinity* and race yesterday, you can't control what the current polemic is of things sometimes—and then with blood there was the concept like Marina Abramovic, [inaudible] working with blood, then during Silence=Death, blood=HIV. I didn't understand that until the NEA with *Divinity*. No one questioned that that blood could be negative. It wasn't coming from me. [Laughs.] That's when I understood, wow, that AIDS wraps itself around things. That's what all of that blood was seen as that was coming out at the audience, when it actually wasn't and I hadn't thought of that.

ALEX FIALHO: Yup.

RON ATHEY: But I owned it because there's so much blood in that piece in different ways. And then, later, as this kind of performing, people like Franko B, Kiera O'Reilly, we're all programmed together enough, to where Franko was really out there "I'm not HIV positive" and Kiera was a woman making references to Victorian medicine with leeches and cupping and different things like that. So then it kind of went back. Now when people see blood they don't necessarily see HIV. They probably should see Hep C, but they don't [laughs]. That's a cycle, in one not so long period of time which follows the contour of AIDS in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: How about transmission and contagion?

RON ATHEY: So you're talking about health and safety or—?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: Yeah, that's a real risk that we try to take precautions against and negotiate things –like in real life negotiating gloves. You can wear gloves in the scene [laughs] because it's low risk, but not no risk. You cannot use gloves—it's pretty negotiated. Especially with solo, I kind of know where all my stuff is. When you start getting six people, eight people you're filling up rooms with different things, then for the sake of protecting myself I always need people with credentials trained in blood and airborne pathogens, whatever—having a nurse, whether they're working as a nurse or not [laughs] is always another good one. They also know how to talk to local hospitals about what we need.

ALEX FIALHO: And when you say "When you have six people you're filling up rooms," does that mean backstage?

RON ATHEY: I mean, backstage and then local staff have to be trained and I can create drama sometimes. People like to get grossed out or spooked out that are union employees from some old German theatre. But usually they would step up, because the presenters would deal with it right. They'd make it like a meeting. Decades later you'd go to another one of those meetings and be like, "Oh my God, this is still an issue." Somebody from the country moved to the city and works in theaters is wide-eyed like, "Whoa!" And I have a lot of time for them, it's just the repetition.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. When you say you have a lot of time you mean consciousness raising?

RON ATHEY: If they're open-minded and they're just properly ignorant in a way, or if their fears are really real I respect them. I don't need phobic people to work with me or have sex with me or anything. I had to come to that [laughs] in the '80s. It's okay, really, there's someone for everyone. I've had several discordant relationships and the last one was, it makes me nervous the whole time, it's that thing when they get tested again where I gasp when they say they're negative again. It's thinking, "Oh I've been suffering" and not from having extremely risky behavior. You just figure the luck of the draw, if you keep rolling the dice, I don't know, I still have my experiences from earlier HIV times with safe sex.

ALEX FIALHO: How about audience reaction? Because I think it's one thing for you to have a consciousness around these things and because you're living in these worlds and dealing with it in a daily way with your practice. I don't know if it translates.

RON ATHEY: You mean if somebody crossed the line—

ALEX FIALHO: No, I mean like the audience having – I guess it happened with the NEA, where just the fear of transmission becomes a furor, you know.

RON ATHEY: I'd probably like them to leave—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly.

RON ATHEY: —but a lot of them never – early on there would be kind of contracts or there's still the notices sometimes. I had a terrible time in Warsaw [laughs] not that long ago, where the mayor's office had them announce that I was HIV positive and it was supposed to be – it was "Obliteration." People were supposed to be close to me on every side and instead they were cordoned off on an upper level. It was preset, so I didn't know that was going to happen so I just had to say, "Okay, they're never going to come and now my soundtrack's started." That's probably one of the worst HIV phobic places I've been in, in terms of how it went down but it's just another experience. [Laughs.] Again, there's the polemic about blood. I think people see blood and they don't see it and I feel like I'm working with my body in a different way. I could say, "Okay I'm ready," to work in other themes and I do. But then, I think everything is present with something when you evolve it forward, and I'm still showing the latent state body, the sexualized corpse. There's [laughs] these things that don't work through, they just change with age, they change with where we're at with awareness around different things. Current politics change everything, even right now, immediately post Orlando, everything queer has a little crackle to it. [Laughs.] A little bit more, "Not taking everything for granted" moment. Hold that.

ALEX FIALHO: I would imagine or think that either then or now, folks might say a radical part of your project or performances is the way that blood is such an element of a performance that involves people living with HIV and HIV negative folks.

RON ATHEY: Yeah.

ALEX FIALHO: I'm curious what your response would be to the idea of that as radical.

RON ATHEY: I think it's radical because we live it radical too. It's not a radical fantasy, it's a reflection of life as I and we know it. The people around me said—That's one of the trippiest aspects of it. I don't know what to do at this point when friends just sero-convert and I joke, "Welcome to the dark side." I don't know what to say. There's a million medicines now. You'll live on chemotherapy for the rest of your life.

ALEX FIALHO: What did someone say to you that helped?

RON ATHEY: That's when I had to go to support groups and the ambiance around it. It was a death sentence to me in 1986.

ALEX FIALHO: Thirty years ago.

RON ATHEY: —it was like 1986 when I got my news and I was already such a freshly clean, looking at life through different eyes. I deal with really big things well. I didn't act out. I didn't fall apart. I didn't crumble. I didn't muscle it either. I just got active. Yeah, it's nagging everyday life that finishes me off. [Laughs.] The thought enough is one big, horrible news. You deal with it.

ALEX FIALHO: How about long-term surviving?

RON ATHEY: I honestly sometimes don't know what's wrong with me, with dilemmas I get in.

ALEX FIALHO: Like medical dilemmas?

RON ATHEY: No, they can be mental health dilemmas and just life planning dilemmas. I just think from a super eye perspective, you're in this black cloud of dying and there's this three therapy moment and then it's all fuzzy. Especially not having to take drugs. I just completely became separated from it. But that doesn't account for AIDS. [Laughs.] But it doesn't account for the social either. Where are all my closest friends from that era? Of course, some people survived. I have amazing friends from other places, but it's not the same thing. Why didn't I ever go to college? Why didn't I do anything proper? [Laughs.] I just kept trying to live through the decade. And even lucky never to be really sick, it's still a head trip to have gone through it from that point. Not that I think it's an easy run now, just so many mixed messages about the drugs. Not wanting to let you know that when you're undetectable, safe sex means something else. There's a lot of weird issues around the truth and restraining pleasure. It went through a lot of changes.

Then I found myself on, not on the other side but knocked for a little loop over the PrEP controversies and the adamants on either side. If I had to read everything – I personally think if there has to be a toxic generation to break a link in the chain, who cares? I'm tired of every hardcore bottom. thinking you're going to be positive no matter what because you're probably going to fuck up once with the wrong person, probably more than once. It's just human. So if you're going through your slut period, PrEP [laughs]. But it goes so far with the call for the axe on Michael Weinstein, the hate over AHF not supplying PrEP. I don't really get into that debate, I'm not sure what time will tell about how toxic PrEP was, and I think it's effective if you follow it.

ALEX FIALHO: Yesterday you kept saying there was periods of AIDS in relation to how we were taking care of ourselves. What were some of those periods or phases of how one living with HIV took care of themselves? Or you in particular.

RON ATHEY: The beginning was a lot "New Agier." Everybody went to Hayride [laughs]. Marion Williams—

ALEX FIALHO: "Hayride" being what?

RON ATHEY: —Louise Hay. A healing, shopping place almost. And it wasn't a hustle; there was a peer service from this philosophy of hers. I think that impulse that suddenly everybody—we all know the pinnacle, but it's not like we were in this apocalypse to actually do what you should do, which is work on developing your philosophy around it [laughs] so you can actually cope with it, rather than judge people by those who can deal and those who can't, to actually really go after the tools of how to survive it. I think that was really clear and not just my own decision but a lot of people did, with the going in and take what you need and leaving the rest behind. I don't want to belong to a cult, but [laughs] I want to be healthy and spiritually healthy as well. So I think that was key. I quit smoking for eight years and became macrobiotic. I always go from shooting heroin and eating donuts to being macrobiotic [laughs] and meditating for a minute.

ALEX FIALHO: How about the intensity of your performances as they relate to you being HIV positive?

RON ATHEY: And dealing with my doctors about that.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, exactly. Or "health" or the strenuous—

RON ATHEY: One of my doctors had to admit that there is something to bleeding out a controlled amount of blood, in that your body instantly has to make fresh blood, so maybe [laughs] there's a thing from the needles themselves working like acupuncture by creating a controlled trauma to an area that increases the chi. I never introduced bacterias to my body. I never—in Premature Ejaculation, I broke bottles and crawled through them but in later performances there was never—we were always aware that if a wound was open what the next action was.

ALEX FIALHO: Which was what? In the performance.

RON ATHEY: In *Deliverance* there's an enema, so I wouldn't have had already had my nuts stapled and in that scene so the proper sterilization happens in between [laughs]. To be specific.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: That's good. You just mentioned nuts stapled. Let's just talk for a minute about the eunuch. That's an image that I've flipped through in your book with others during my trip to Los Angeles, saying "I'm here. This is what I'm doing." It stays with a lot of the people. I mean, a lot of the pages and images stay with a lot of the people but –

RON ATHEY: I think going back to being really aware of this pleasure activism in a polarized time, things felt judgier and judgier, so working within these new trickster themes imagined to be castrated—so using still surgical staples, clothes, and a really tight double C so you can make a zipper of your scrotum. If you tuck properly it can be almost neutered looking. And you'd better have the remover [laughs] because you don't want to do it with two pliers, they'll be torn up. I'm just lost in the image and forgot what the issue was. Oh, the background of it. When I was thinking about that for the "Trojan Whores," also where that came from—where I would come out in and basically—I did it simultaneously. Trojan Whore was in a piece I did with Lauren Steiger called "Incorruptible Flesh" and then it happened within *Deliverance*, which we did a double tour of sometimes in Europe. Anyway, Lawrence had given me these Alejandro Moreschi recordings, the last surviving eunuch who was older, but the Vatican—Eunuchs had fallen out of favor, or castrato. The Vatican let him take refuge, so they recorded him.

There's a series of recordings by this old dear. I had a soundtrack that inspired more and then for the premiere, which would be commissioned by the English Arts Council, the ECA. That's when I had Leigh's gown and used his beaded face gear only for that performance because I wasn't allowed to leave with them, unfortunately [laughs]. Also those are too signature of him. I didn't want to be Leigh, I wanted to refer to Leigh and I felt like Leigh was also one of those neutered persona sexually. He wasn't giving sexuality female or male, it was like, sometimes he did those cartoony characters the best. But then he would let out an enema full of glitter [laughs] swinging on a pole. She was nasty just in a different way [laughs].

ALEX FIALHO: I like that.

RON ATHEY: His technique of using a handful of spirit gum and a merkin, just taping everything and gluing

everything in place and letting it set.

ALEX FIALHO: Wow. One scene I think of when I think of the eunuch is the double-sided dildo.

RON ATHEY: Which is called "The Second Castration." The double dildo is cut in half. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Got you. And that's with Brian Murphy? Can we talk a little about him? We didn't bring him into the room yesterday.

RON ATHEY: Brian Murphy also came out of this Club Fuck! era and for a period of time was my boyfriend, one of the few I could make the transition to still working with [laughs] and he was a vital part of the company. He was also a trained and accredited body piercer. Somewhere everything mushed together and the work was made but I have to say parts of the work were about him or couldn't exist without him. And he only died—because we were living in the same place and the same time and the places we were coming from were so similar. Even as exes we could turn into that symbol and do a double-headed dildo show even though we weren't sexual with each other [laughs]. That would be like two exes, porn stars, "Oh, do we have to make a movie together?" You know what I'm saying? It was never like that. You just do what you do and when it turned on it, it would just be like a wild ride, getting wilder as we toured longer [laughs]. Getting ridiculous. That scene is—I have a morbid playback of it in Croatia in Zagreb. We did a festival called Eurokaz. The Balkan War was kind of ended-ish. And there's a lot of people from the war, a lot of Croatian machismo. Also very intellectual based theatre practice from that city. A really mixed audience in that way and then younger kids were so ready to rave after the war [laughs]. That's all they wanted to do. They just wanted to rave. That's the only way they could articulate it. We had kind of this mixed audience, but then when a live sodomy show happened, I felt like a curtain of denial flipped up. Some people walked out, but I think most people didn't see it, didn't comprehend it and then you get the next scene and they'd be back. I actually felt a lifting of the consciousness of the room. And then they got the next scene where it's not suddenly –- close the curtains and it gets back to the girls in ninja outfits hanging us upside down in body bags and suddenly we were a little bit more Nine-Inch Nails or something. It was our way in.

ALEX FIALHO: We didn't touch base about the end scene of *Deliverance* and how it was the end of the Torture Trilogy and how—-

RON ATHEY: I have so many feelings about that piece. I don't think I've talked about *Deliverance* specifically so much—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, so let's dive into it a little bit.

RON ATHEY: The end scene I would try it a few ways. The first times we did it we stayed in the bags until the audience were gone, so it fucked up the—it was kind of trying to do something almost theatrical and make it end in this way where it's cheap to clap, like, "Okay, they're not going to come up. What do we do?" You know, it made it really awkward. I kept getting feedback. People were leaving like, it felt like emotional blackmail. They couldn't take it. It wasn't welcome or wanted to go that dark. They were willing to go—

ALEX FIALHO: When you say "end in the bags" you mean?

RON ATHEY: Me and Brian and whoever the third – we used different guys for the third one. Sometimes it would be Russell McEwen or Billy Wright. It was a few configurations but it would always be me and Brian. So we're covered in dirt and body bags and it's like three graves and Julie choreographed Pigpen in cross. They're literally crying and they pull one needle out of their head so they're crying blood and really crying and making a crying noise to a movement. I think it's really heavy but it needs that "so okay, dig them out." Think about popping out of a cake. Pop out of a pile of dirt. Pow!

ALEX FIALHO: It needs that.

RON ATHEY: It needs that and from that experience it gave me—I feel like I gave myself permission to end pieces any way I want to. Sometimes I don't want the endless awkwardness so I'll just stand up like a cha-cha and start clapping and change the mood; hijack the mood into like a campy, goofy direction just as a lift. I'm phobic of these things where I feel like I'm manipulating people. Keeping them awkward—it doesn't turn me on to make people awkward. I think if it's over you'll still go back to thinking about it if everyone does the ritual clapping that happens after those type of performances. It's a release to clap.

ALEX FIALHO: I think that's a critique of a lot of intense performance art, for some people, is that it tries to manipulate an audience in some way.

RON ATHEY: And if it finds another way to do it, like milks it too hard. There are a lot of things that are too serious. Even sometimes – *Solar Anus* was the best audience gauge, the way I did it. This nine-minute film

consists of my asshole being tattooed and then animated, colored light starts prisming out of it.

ALEX FIALHO: [Laughs.] I love that part.

RON ATHEY: If there was laughter, I came out so full. If there was no laughter, I knew there were some grim motherfuckers who were taking this like art, like what's going to happen next. Then I'd have to work for it, to get into it. That's the weird thing for serious art if it works life that, if my cue to feel confidence was the audience laughing—I'm so against comedy. I see people lined up for the laugh factor and I'm screaming at them, and they're already laughing.

ALEX FIALHO: How about audience reactions in just a general sense, feeding off the audience—

RON ATHEY: I always saw the audience through a real churchy lens, like as a collective witness. Performance art's weird because it's not about entertaining necessarily. There's cabaret factions in performance—performance is everything – but largely why you can take the piss out of performance is not trying to please anybody. It's trying to make something happen. [Laughs.]

That probably helped me with stage fright and wondering about the concerts. It's like, "Just do it," and, "Okay, I'm going to do it," and feel this wave of people but I'm not going to get specific and I don't need after critiques from random people. I've evolved in different ways around audience. I used to love to just keep them in their place and then I started— well, venues changed, that's what happened. When I started performing in the early-'90s everything was a black box, even the coffee shop was a black box, so you could create the perfect little magic theatre piece within a black box. And then it all switched to regular looking galleries and even industrial spaces that have like a light grey wall, never having the luxury of darkness again. It changes it from a tech angle, you can't throw a light and then a white wall is shining. It has nothing to do with holding attention in. I learned to work with people, the idea of having a sea of people on every side of you. I still don't know how I feel about doing something durational where people walk in and out. I've done it a handful of times and I don't know, enough people want to do that anyway. I don't have to be one.

[They laugh.]

ALEX FIALHO: One thought too that I have is that in this thread of Americanness or international contexts that you're already, I don't want to say foreign from an audience, but if you have a big cast and you guys are all an obvious community. How does that factor, you're already sort of foreign in appearance?

RON ATHEY: I think it changed a lot, and probably, frankly that's another one of those things from the '90s that can't carry to today. That not with my work, that level of enthusiasm where it was needed, like church in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: Level of enthusiasm around—

RON ATHEY: Around my performance with people going through AIDS with activists, interloping with body art, tattoo enthusiasts. Even the audience itself was activists, I think in a way. Those were really enthusiastic groups. I actually think they did relate to that. Or, maybe they didn't relate to the action but they related to the value of the action—

ALEX FIALHO: In an international context as well?

RON ATHEY: In an international context.

ALEX FIALHO: Cool.

RON ATHEY: I get that they got that. I also get that if I tell you the sensational things are so sensational in retelling that it's only been lately that people look at the other things; the research or the setting and whether I'm going minimal or maximal. The sensational things take up all the room.

ALEX FIALHO: In the writing about your work?

RON ATHEY: In the writing about my work and in the retelling, which is resonance. So, then it is the work in a way.

ALEX FIALHO: That's interesting. And are you welcoming that move to people's thinking a bit?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, because it's more than that, you know—and of course the book has done a lot for that. More than anything else, it did a lot for me to see the whole spectrum because I think people come into my work when they saw it and they don't know I did anything else. [Laughs.] Especially when I was more present, if I came to your town and I did three nights at an art center and then popped in a couple of clubs for cheap gigs, you get felt everywhere.

ALEX FIALHO: Now when you say the book, you're referring to Dominic Johnson's "Pleading in the Blood?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, "Pleading in the Blood."

ALEX FIALHO: One thing you said was pleasure activism, which makes you think of people like Annie Sprinkle, who we brought up yesterday. What is that to you and where does your work sit in relation to that?

RON ATHEY: I guess more in a Lydia Lunch way, she says, "Pleasure is the ultimate act of rebellion." We live in such a miserable, becoming more miserable world that to actually, be a hedonist is an act of defiance on a certain level. I think it's only evolved into more boring things like slut shaming, people don't want people who want to dedicate their life to pleasure. It takes all types. I guess a kind of personal activism I do. If I have a friend who hasn't gotten fucked in two years, I'd start pulling emergency interventions like how to get their juices flowing, if they care.

ALEX FIALHO: To move over a little bit further, in terms of activism, things like Queer Nation, ACT UP LA Let's talk about Queer Nation. It's been floating around, and ACT UP LA and how you were in relation? How were you thinking about them or what were they doing, in terms of its visibility here for you?

RON ATHEY: Of course I was thrilled by it and excited by it. It just wasn't my thing. I'd support, I'd do any benefit. I supported both of them. Buy any products. Any purchase of any and all fundraisers, instead of being one more body there. I don't know. I think, maybe it's a personality thing with me. I go from being a pleasure activist and wanting healing in all different parts of my life because I'm fighting a nihilism, that's really deep. That's pre-HIV in me. It's a deep dark spot in me. I won't ever be main stream politics activist. Friends of mine campaigning recently. I could not campaign. I'd be screaming or bored, bored to death.

ALEX FIALHO: How about gay *Pariah News* or *Infected Faggot Perspectives* as voices in this conversation?

RON ATHEY: I like these kind of expression movements that happen within AIDS. Everything was too sacred and precious. Corey Roberts-Ali would be like, oh you got the nasty girls disease? Going back to this polarity, some of us were just like, okay we're the nasty girls. We have to split the line. The other person for from *Infected Faggot,* they, how do you say, honored his wishes. When he died they put him on the cover with "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead," as the headline [laughs]. So they kept it up. I guess my last hospice experience was with Corey and I think he was going into brain cancer and they wanted to drill and put those radioactive capsules in the back of his head and he just was finally like okay, I'll go die and was really, he was still flippant. There was somebody with, I didn't know you could get TB of the liver, who went there to die and never— had anything else wrong with him. It was like, girl she's not sick. It's so minor. I guess not enough people were dying so hospices were becoming even scarier in a way. People without a will to live were going there that have been positive for a long time, but weren't really sick. Yeah, stop eating and go on quality of life drugs, you'll die within weeks at least. That was dark. I also am still in touch a lot with Keiko Lane, who was one of the editors of *Infected Faggot Perspectives*, she's going to be down here next week. What was the other one? *Diseased Pariah News*. I didn't have an in with that, but of course, I laughed when it came out and grabbed a copy.

ALEX FIALHO: Did you write for *Infected Faggot Perspectives*?

RON ATHEY: I did an interview that was published. And, I think some of my lyrical piece of writing that had to do with Sebastian accompanied a picture in there. That's what it was. I did contribute.

ALEX FIALHO: How about loss? You just spoke about Corey. We talked about Cliff. Tears are in the performance a lot, but was that a moment of a lot of—

RON ATHEY: I know periods of processing loss as it happens and other times I don't. I was in London when Brian Murphy died, of a heart attack. He had been a tweaker the last years in San Francisco. Everybody was going to San Francisco for the memorial and a friend of mine was willing to get me a ticket to go and I kind of cringed. I didn't want to be with everybody feeling. There's a thing about tears and grieving that I think it starts perpetuating itself and I just wanted to do it the pace that I had to do it at. I didn't want to get in. They had a tattooist coming.

His number was 22, so everyone was getting an XXII on them. And then I didn't do it and I was remembering beautiful things about him, like the time line broke down and I never had any judgment anyway that he wanted to go out the way he did, but something gnawed at me and it set me off and I had a really destructive cycle for like six months after that where I was being really reckless with drug use. I don't how I entered that. I felt like I was possessed and then after it, sometimes you feel like you can't cry anymore over that. You can say any philosophy that you want, that no one gets out alive. Everyone's going to die. Why can't we have a philosophy around taking death easier, but it still doesn't remove aching loss and more loss from your immediate community. It's been a long time since I made myself go to an awful funeral of somebody. In those days someone would die of AIDS, you go to their Catholic funeral where there's a really conservative family and you

weren't even in the friend section, like standing way in the back. I had an Iranian boyfriend that died of AIDS. I went to that funeral. Then I was like blonde slicked back hair, painted on eyebrows and this riding outfit, standing in the back. I was just in the moment. Boy, thinking about what I looked then, "Woo, she couldn't even dress straight." [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: When you say awful funeral, you're saying—

RON ATHEY: Awful, like not true to who's being buried. The people haven't seen their people in ages and it's tradition, a lot of these funerals, but it doesn't do anything for the people who are actually in their life.

ALEX FIALHO: What does, or what did alleviate anything?

RON ATHEY: We've all been to funerals that are actually put together by the people who shared life with the person and then it's a mixed thing. It could be a celebration in life, and a little bit of a roast goes on. Nothing's sacred, that's the way to do it. Where you can actually process a little bit and maybe fall off to the side with someone and have a little cry, you know?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah. How about apocalypse as a theme that comes through your work, and trauma, as they relate both to Christianity and then as it relates to AIDS?

RON ATHEY: Apocalypse is so subjective. [Laughs.] I mean I was raised in apocalypse; you know—I have a juicy vision of apocalypse through my childhood religion. We've been an apocalypse culture for a long time. All the iconography is all there. Now it's gotten camp though. I don't know what it means that you can buy skull boxer shorts at H&M. [Laughs.] The cheapening of all symbols. I don't want to be a victim of the system. I think it's a nihilistic system, you can lose sleep over the possibility of nuclear disaster. There's so many layers of apocalypse going on and it seems inevitable. It seems impossible for it not to happen. You have to be at an arms distance from that or else you won't live your life. Sometimes you get tired of, always rising up through what seems impossibly dark or impossibly out of your reach. That's why the best thing about age is you cycle through things enough to just be a little bit more patient. I know my perspective can change. Two good things happen and inertia goes in the other direction and it's not as dark.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, definitely. How about *Incorruptible Flesh* as a trilogy? Are there things to pull out?

RON ATHEY: I guess I'll start, '96 came out of a research residency, in Glasgow and that was me and Lawrence Steger working on that together. And it's starting point was the Catholic miracle of incorruptibility, it also has this metaphor for the living dead. It only got better later than, '96 was too early. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: How so?

RON ATHEY: Well, I think the way people look like the first cycle of three therapy, the Crixa hump cycle and also photochemical drugs in LA you see things a little stranger, like purple skin when people were on Bactrim, but there was a different coloration that happened with some of the side effects of the three therapy. I think also coming out of everyone dying, you think okay everyone's not dying, but now everyone looks like this. Or, prominent people look like this that I know went on that treatment and for a minute I thought do you have to choose between naturally dying or having a Franken reality? Welcoming people to the dark side as they are seroconverting. You take it. You normalize. All the drugs are better now, but it's that psychological overlay that I thought I was going to die in the '80s. This dark, dark film over me still and yet I can be fully alive, fully vital, fully horny, all kinds of things that don't equal death.

ALEX FIALHO: , Then it gets back into incorruptibility?

RON ATHEY: Oh yeah, also one of the cycles of the incorruptible flesh is called dissociative sparkle and imagine —

ALEX FIALHO: Love that.

RON ATHEY: —Saint Bernadette. So you have a corpse that's jerky and then there's bits of it that are supposed to be more like flesh and then you have a master artist who gave her a wax face and chest and, then a lot of those corpses that are kept shot up with formaldehyde so the last bit of tissue from a middle ages Saint doesn't disappear. And, it's really about ruffling clothes over them. I went through Rome and other parts of Italy also looking at the bodies and in a way it was so parallel with Crixa humps at the gym, that culture of that late-'90s thing.

It was a concept I could sink my teeth in really, that was just a start in '96 and also it was a start of really, this is a parallel with doing *Deliverance* research, to actually not just think about this Pentecostal Catholic struggle within my family as my only aesthetic, to actually look at all things shamanistic in a more in depth way than just

modern primitivism, instead of just being an urban aboriginal, someone really researching this need for miracle. This need for bedazzlement in all different cultures. That residency, I had a researcher that helped me really power through those things. There's a TV show called Guru Busters where educated Indian men went through the country side of India debunking local shaman, do that thing where the cobra bit a dog and the shaman couldn't bring him back to life and those guys were flying on flesh hooks. Those were like demonstration of the flesh shaman stuff. But then they leave, these places are like sub poverty, and it's like now they don't have magic. Of course they would have went back to the magic—but with a weird glitch in it for a few weeks. There's no point to busting gurus. Evangelist Jan just died, the purple haired fairytale lady, asking for your little grocery money from super poor women. Those kind of people should be put in jail. [Laughs.] That's a different kind of exploitation. You ain't getting nothing back for your grocery money. I guess also struggling with this hard line, like I'm an atheist and then I'm a mystical atheist. I'm always, I want the element, but do I want to the element just because I have a God hole because of my history or, does everybody want that?

ALEX FIALHO: Element of?

RON ATHEY: —of magic. And so the first one, "Incorruptible Flesh [in Progress]", in progress in brackets like we're decomposing, was the first time I explored with someone else my topics like on a research level, taking a movement class with him. Doing a lot of things.

ALEX FIALHO: And how did that develop things?

RON ATHEY: We made a piece that was my scene, his scene, my scene, his scene, using each other as supporting characters in that. That's a hard format to work with in a way. It's like turning it into a variety show. But, maybe it was so heavy it was kind of a good way to do it. That's one because it was juxtaposed I can't feel the flow of the whole performance, but almost exactly ten years later in Glasgow I did this solo piece, *Dissociative Sparkle* and *Incorruptible Flesh*—and the curator, Nikki Millican, who ran that festival forever, the National Review of Live Art, she challenged me to do a six-hour piece. I just kept coming back to that display, the living corpse idea. I came up with the tableaux for six hours. A lot of mirrored disco balls hanging above me and I was tripping out. I was hallucinating.

ALEX FIALHO: Living corpse being?

RON ATHEY: I made a communion thing, where you could choose to put on gloves or not and touch my body, I had the hooks hooked to the table and a baseball bat in me. Also kind of—

ALEX FIALHO: Baseball bat?

RON ATHEY: Baseball bat in my ass. So it was part of the frame and it was at an angle, but on a swivet. I know everything. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: As you should. [Laughs.]

RON ATHEY: And you know, kind of making myself a grotesque, a liter and a half of saline in my scrotum so it's inflated—kind of grotesque, genitals with a bicycle light underneath, it looked like a water balloon sack of balls. You could see the veins then through it. From the profile, the butt drops through these parallel bars of a rack. I'm in a really prone but curvatious posture in there. From the side you just see the bat, but you don't really see entry. It's like a clean line, but then up close you see the ugly balls and—something dripping off the baseball bat, like bloody lube onto the floor. Then it got, that was a learning experience. What I learned in that is that, somehow I didn't understand that I was going to lose control of the performance by letting it be interactive and by being passive and not having another mode. My mode was displayed as a sexual living corpse and it became very kind of new age-y. The only second time I did that was at Artists Space in New York and that time was trippy, more varied in another way, I think they were more like body work type people. I still felt like people were trying to relieve my pain and then I felt guilty. That's not why I'm here. Will you or will you not help me. I hate, I don't like work that baits the audience. Do you know what I mean?

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: I'm not going to change them, really unless I'm the door that opens for them. It has nothing to do with accusing them of something like you're a brutal—

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah.

RON ATHEY: So I got a little bit more varied there, but you know sometimes there could be, I don't know how many people. Maybe I could guess there were 20 people there and sometimes there'd be one person there, then no one there. Then I thought there may be three people there and I was doing the dismount coming out of it and my eyes had been pulled and I couldn't see, I had tunnel vision while in place, with blood my eyes, I couldn't see

anything. But as soon as I started sitting up and the bat was coming off and the whole time I had been sinking on it deeper and deeper, probably I know what you're thinking, the hooks pull tighter. It got more extreme over six hours and the bat was only that deep, so when it came off, it was a metal bat, and it did a full pivot and hit went clunk against the bars under it and I just heard the shuffle of feet of a whole circle coming in at me and they were really like, I don't think there was a hundred, but there was almost a hundred people, like a tight circle around me. And then I realized that was the moment, that's what all the six hours were worth was that moment. Because—that moment felt like—

ALEX FIALHO: Dismount.

RON ATHEY: I like that. Dismount, posture, shimmy [laughs].

I had a ten-year holiday from any kind of drugs and I've never been on very much treatment throughout my 30 years. Then this year that I moved back to LA I've been crappy and sick back to back all the time. Two flus in a row, every cold, so I finally got health care and I felt stubborn. Like suddenly I could see the logic of going on the newest one a day drug and that everything was unraveling a little bit with my health, but nothing was major on that side. Then I got the news that, I was on Flagyl to get rid of parasites and I was getting used to a new drug, I was talking to myself within dreams that didn't seem like they were mine. I went through that adjustment and then I felt better. The second part of the news is that my Hep C was reactive again after all that time. So, the Interferon treatment, I felt like almost killed me mentally. I didn't think I could go through it again and the new drugs are six weeks and a lot better. I'm doing it. It's just that I have to fight for my health a little bit again and I get to live another round.

It feels all real and because I was so far away from it after ten years, the reality of taking medicine or the reality of being around other people with AIDS, like properly sick people. Going to a AHF clinic that you'll see somebody in a broken wheelchair screaming and wanting bandages. I like it, I mean I meet people there, but it's still real that people are still sick and raggedy and dying and don't know how to make sense of their life in some ways. You see various things of that there and now I'm acclimated again. It feels retro to acclimate, to taking drugs and being sick and wrestling with the identity of being a sick person. I feel ashamed with my friends to keep saying oh, I feel really poorly, or I went to the doctor again and it's taken me going to the doctor like five times just to get this far where I'm about ready to get ultrasounds done of my liver.

I've been really contemplative about that. It's been making me think about the whole thing and the big missing blocks of friends and the million funerals, and I'm 55 this year and I have a lot of friends older than me. Now I'm at the point where people are supposed to start having more death in their life when their friends start getting over 70 and nothing's normal. Or who cares about retirement? Who cares about what patch in your life is like warfare? It is what happened. But six years away in London, moving back for a year and trying to figure out myself here again and then being a sick person after a year of being back, just kind of admitting I'm a sick person and dealing with that. So it can be managed disease rather than sick in denial or sick and procrastinating about getting treatment.

ALEX FIALHO: Is that bringing anything into your work? Or, is that just your overall—

RON ATHEY: I don't know what it's doing in my work because teaching held me back from making too much work. I think my brain has been working a lot and I needed a little bit of time. I worked too hard to be able to leave London and compressed a lot of gigs. I didn't want to perform. When I got here I just wanted to, "Just leave me alone." I just wanted to paint my house and get my body work clientele going so that I'd be self-sufficient here and then I started teaching. I did the worst thing when you work too much where you stop taking care of yourself and you need rewards for everything. So it wasn't really good for my health, the way I dealt with being that busy, and then the second semester I went down to half time and that's when I could take care of myself again. It's weird to have limitations now. I feel like I could be two or three people in the '90s and I can't, and that doesn't make me happy. Because I'm old. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: How about, in the book you talk a little bit about post AIDS?

RON ATHEY: I flirt with post AIDS and I mean AIDS isn't even that present in my life from what I was feeling. I think with, what I call the double dildo scene, Rod and Bob and post AIDS boy boy show, I was almost trying to set it in this fantasy setting—and then when we got into post AIDS conversations, like are we post AIDS? Are we post anything? I don't know. Diseases are—AIDS occupies its own place so much. I'm trying to think of being post hepatitis, but it doesn't have the same textures. There's no support around a hepatitis C groups in a way. I guess AIDS was so specifically personal for so long and the response, the way we dealt with it made it into something else. It's hard to move on, but I never made a pledge that it won't be over until it's cured. Am I happy that it's manageable with really expensive drugs, and it's like this big game with a lot of pharmaceutical companies? Not really. [Laughs.] But I lived through everybody dying. And it's not that. And it's not this thing that pulled everyone together, which you had a little flavor of post-Orlando, or at least people pining for that. I

guess I'm saying I'm not making a post-AIDS statement. I'm not saying that as a statement. But I will firmly say we're not in the height of AIDS—that's just stubborn. And that's a part of activism I don't like, the absolutism.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's move a little bit, to the way that your work sits in the art world?

RON ATHEY: My favorite quote—Amelia Jones wrote about my work, "Ron Athey's asshole has a very, it's either special or particular place in art history." I arrived on some level there, right? [Laughs.] And that's post-NEA. I'm in a different history for a different reason. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: How does it sit in art history? [Laughs.]

RON ATHEY: I think I sit more in art history than anywhere else, than in reality. I'm working on projects with Amelia, too. To me, it's the same as how I wonder how I ever became someone that looks at the population as a whole, and who they're voting for, like I'm part of that. I kind of buy that, too, how I sit in art history, that I came out of a proper underground that went on for years, that was seminal to various queer and music scenes. And then the world crossfaded into this place, where everything's consumed by everything. The cut-and-paste blender. I've had to understand where I sit in a lot of places due to that. And then you have to think of capital, where do I sit in art history when I'm not self-sufficient from my art? It's interesting to me what images I've made or pieces I've made, and what kind of life they have.

ALEX FIALHO: What kind of life do they have?

RON ATHEY: I think the way people look back at the '90s, and there's a chunk of people that really want to still talk about that work. And it was almost like a little example of a community, in a way, because it was the same people for that entire decade. But I can't stay in that. [Laughs.] Those parts of how we interacted in order to make that work, they're hard to describe. I could go further into it, but there was a lot of dedication, and even perfectionism put into ironing that work out, so it wasn't just a hot mess. A lot of those influences were Julie. Julie gave me a lot, some of them—

ALEX FIALHO: Choreographically?

RON ATHEY: Choreographically, and understanding things in terms of the connective tissue, of thinking of things of the context. I know there's so many invisible things, but let's say when you're working in theater, like moving it back in that direction. There's so many invisible cues, and things that have to be run through, as opposed to improvising the whole thing, and just working in one white light. Lot of tedium to make—[laughs] to make magic appear.

ALEX FIALHO: In terms of the question around art history, I know you think about your work art historically, or I think you think about your work art historically, just because of the images that you're bringing to the fore. So you're saying for instance how a painting of St. Sebastian and the amber quality might even influence your lighting. But what I think is just incredible, when I think about art history, and your relationship to it obviously is the way that your physical body—

is actually becoming the piece, or becoming the St. Sebastian. That's sort of the lineage where you get from a Renaissance painting of St. Sebastian to Ron's body, with arrows through it.

RON ATHEY: My live art theory people would be thrilled with that conclusion. Like, what it can be. It all can be awkward, too, but – I don't try to operate in a total bubble with no relationship to anything else, but I don't feel an affinity with a lot of formats of performance work that have come over. I came to be in a time of all talkie work, the monologues of Karen Finley, of course, Tim Miller, who started Highways here, so there was lots of monologue work in that '90s era, specializing in identity politics. Maybe that's why I was pulled towards LACE at first, but they weren't functioning much after that. I just kind of had to make my own places. Then this really actionist-based plain gallery work, and mono-image work, and one-on-one work, other disciplines of performance seem to be what's shown now.

ALEX FIALHO: What does your work say by not being as talkie?

RON ATHEY: It's just the impossibility of making something really happen, so that there's an actual experience. Think of it as like, How do I trigger this thing to life by the staging, by the sound, by the person that's in it to press them to this level where they have to surrender to going to this other place with it. Sometimes words also propped that up. But it's a more atmospheric or elemental approach to communicating message, going beyond words. And also knowing the limitations of risk to the body, the Sebastian is a real action, but done fake, so it's using long medical needles. I've used special cast ones too, that involved insertion tapers, so they're not interesting to watch live. If I pre-do it, it would be that way. But I'm doing a real actionist stand-in for a fatal action. That is kind of how a lot of the things that repeat in my performances are. And to me that's different than a reading where you imagine it in your head, think halfway.

ALEX FIALHO: What's the hoped takeaway for an audience member, at one of your performances?

RON ATHEY: I try to stay out of expectations. That's always been a hard one for me. I want to connect, I try to infiltrate, obviously. It's like an impulse.

ALEX FIALHO: What have been some of the better reactions that people have said to you, or things that have stuck with you over the years that people have said to you about your performances?

RON ATHEY: There's the ones that are specific to the time. It was always affirmed that it was reaching—maybe on a ritual level, on a public ritual level, like it actually was reaching the people that it was about on that level and that time of the Torture trilogy. So everything from '90 to '99 was on target with that. It's the unlikely things that stick with me, like that performance I mentioned in Croatia. There was a really old man that did a little bit of work around the theater that went to see it, and he had lost a lot of people in the war recently. And his idea of the men buried underneath, he started crying thinking about all his friends. The fact that he didn't scratch this strong line, like, "I'm not queer, I'm not gay, I'm not relating to these people because they just did a live sodomy show." He just went all the around all that, and just honestly expressed what happened to him during it. In a more comical way, I remember in Hamburg, after *Solar Anus*, kind of a line of kinky straight men telling me—a few places, it's like straight, it's like butthole activism. They were just completely enlightened, which I thought was hysterical. [Laughs.] That was an accidental activism, or promotion, pleasure promotion. I always was aware, kind of early on, I was parallel with Jim Row's side show, so sometimes you get gnarly comparisons. Like, there's an expectation –

ALEX FIALHO: What's Jim Row's side show?

RON ATHEY: Oh, it was a kind of body-related freak show that toured around, that was very part of the music scene, too. The other example being Jackass. Or even people reaching Gigi Allen, the slinging diarrhea punk musician. There was after doing all that bloody, bloody company work—each time I did *Solar Anus* in a city I'd performed at before, where there are people coming to see gallons of blood, there'd be kind of like—because I don't bleed at all, I'm just manipulating my face with hooks, but you don't see me take them out, because that's when they bleed. And I don't know, none of those kind of feedbacks ever make me think when I'm making work, like, "What do the blood people want?" or "Fuck the blood people, I'm not doing anything bloody," I still had to do it, do what I wanted to do.

ALEX FIALHO: How about generationally? You were saying before we pressed play on the recorder that you do a lot of mentorship, and you've been teaching recently. How do questions around AIDS sit generationally in these conversations you're having as a mentor?

RON ATHEY: I think it's one of those kind of extreme issues that lets me translate into other issues. I've worked with people on work that's unrelated to me, like Black Lives Matter. There's a kind of trust in place, I feel sometimes. That I'm a survivor. Maybe that's all it takes. Like okay, you went through that, and we just get into the process. But teaching, I'm still working on what I think teaching can do. I never teach anything that has to do with my work particularly. I teach research—I feel like in a generation, in this moment, there's a lot of restraint. And I naturally know how to advise in that direction.

ALEX FIALHO: Against restraint?

RON ATHEY: No, for restraint. I think less is more, sometimes. There's different levels of body exhibition. There's still a lot of people that do hook suspension stuff. But it got to where there's a guy who organizes these things in Texas, on big machines, where people just have two hooks through their kneecaps, and they're like "Whoa!" It became kind of a monster truck ritual. And it has some value in it, but it also has some "dudester" in it, it's kind of macho. And sometimes, I get pulled into those circles by people that I care about. But it's weird when things press together, but they don't want to see the difference. And so with students also, I just think—I guess I have a feeling of art history, and I feel like some things—I'm sick of blood work. I always get invited to see other people's blood work, and I phase out during it, because I think I've done it. And I never felt the need to make a statement, "I'm not doing blood work anymore." But I do side things. The thing I'm working on with a fundraiser is the automatic writing performance in LA, and on a bigger level, that's bigger than automatic writing, just on Gifts of the Spirit. So I am going back directly to that spiritualist Pentecostal place, but working with a much more experimental musician person on it, who also does structuring of things and rhythm patterns that pull the logic away from moving even. Trying a few things like that, to bring another element in that's not mine.

ALEX FIALHO: Let's talk a little bit about "Gifts of the Spirit," and that project.

RON ATHEY: From my early writing, *Reinterpretation of False Prophecies*, and then I started writing individual stories about the Gifts. Re-looking at them to try to edit them into something, I just found myself unwilling to revisit my family on that level. To actually go in deeper.

ALEX FIALHO: You've gone deep.

RON ATHEY: There is a lot more. I still go in deeper and deeper into the church, constantly. A lot of research has come online in the last five years, from different religious scholars, and particularly Pentecostal ones. I always have an eye on that [laughs]. There's something exciting about the idea of a collectively authored text, about moving Burroughs-Gysin cut-up technique one more level, not exactly doing it, like moving it. Using it to make a quick algorithm, so that everybody's present in the final writing, and using a little randomness. It's been an exciting project to actually start working with people that are more interested in psychic work—they're more into psychic work than they are in the art, yet they like the intersection. Such as these planchettes that are made with sacred objects. I feel like it has a language in connection—a static voice, automatic writing, new texts, to put all those things together, is my big goal, of a big piece. And it's a big workshopped piece. It takes 30 people, and that's before I add all these other elements, 30-35 people. And you know, after everything's in place, at least a week of workshopping. And I'm just a timekeeper in it. I have an hourglass, and a planchette, and I work with a hypnotist to make sure the ball isn't dropped on the count of three. So you hear layers of sound, through everything, that are for different people. The hypnosis isn't for the audience, it's for the writers, but the audience can still hear it underneath the other noises.

ALEX FIALHO: How about writing itself, as it relates to your practice?

RON ATHEY: I'm in a block with writing, I've been having breakthroughs getting out of—Yeah, there's something about getting older, sometimes you think you know so much that you can't even write anymore [laughs]. You're not as easily impressed with yourself, I'm a little bit more cynical. I'm trying to free myself of that kind—that's a gross flavor of writer's block. I just need to shake it off, and stop making excuses. I've started writing a few things, so that's already a good start, to have hot topics pressing.

ALEX FIALHO: How has writing helped the creative work?

RON ATHEY: It always leads to it. I think I'm trying to deal with the mental work, I had to do a little writing about just being in AIDS again, and I don't think I'm going to do a piece about that. But it can clear my head of the kind of victim feelings, or—I have been in fear, to be honest, and I haven't been in that kind of fear in a long time. So to just kind of own all that—

ALEX FIALHO: Because of the recent sickness?

RON ATHEY: Yeah, just to own all that, and reset it. As positive as I can be, I always feel like there's going to be like one, ironic knife thrown at me from somewhere that finishes me off. [Laughs.] I believe when you have flawed thinking like that, you have to go in and work on it. That's kind of an odd place where I'm at, that is a bridge to writing, other kinds of writing. It's too depressing to me to write and publish work about being a survivor unless it just comes up within something else. I'm not smart enough, I'm not that psycho person that's going to write that good thing that sits with you.

ALEX FIALHO: When you say, "Being in AIDS again," do you have a sense of what that might lead to? If anything…

RON ATHEY: I think it's just going to lead to health. It's about being in the reality of treating AIDS, and that's just making me more focused on other people. I could dig in a little bit again. I don't have any structures in my life that put me together with people regularly for reasons like that, and I could. As a person of the community and a body worker, I've always worked, I always do a certain type of work on sick people anyway. That's my personality balance, my self-centric, self-obsessed artist neurosis that I work on—I'm not me when I'm doing body work. I just channel, I do something like rolfing, I do super-deep tissue. So it's ultra-concentration.

ALEX FIALHO: Is it mostly rolfing, or what kind of other—

RON ATHEY: It's called structural body work, and that evolved out of rolfing. Once I started doing that, I can't even remember the other strokes. I don't want to just grease up a muscle Swedish-style. I like to put my elbow in it, make it reset.

ALEX FIALHO: And that's a day-to-day?

RON ATHEY: I don't work full-time at it. I start not liking it, but I like doing two people a day on the days they work, or three. So I make a half-living doing that, and it's a reality check with everything.

ALEX FIALHO: How about tattoos?

RON ATHEY: Well, a few years ago, I had my lower legs done, by the same guy who's done most of me. I'll still get them, but I'm not keen anymore. I could really push for—maybe I'll have one last hurrah where I go for the

finish line of finishing a few things and connecting things that are awkward.

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of your first ones?

RON ATHEY: The first ones I did myself. A tear, cross, and star, these are from '79-'80, they're super old, so I kind of kept them as a memento. But in '82, late '82, when I started working at Poseur, Bob Roberts opened Spotlight Tattoo, but he hadn't opened yet, he was just coming to give me cards, if I would let him put them in the store. For some reason I didn't want a tattoo until someone would do the spider on my forehead. And, you know, he hadn't even had a customer yet, and I worked at a punk store. I got it, and promoted him a lot. And that was the beginning of a big tattoo movement. There wasn't really very much custom work before 1980, just a handful of people around the world who did, if you came in with a big picture of a squid, they'd give you, like a bodysuit out of it. There's only a few people that worked on that level. Usually it was that, "I want number 16, like the skull with the dice, in size C." It was literally everything was in drawers, the transparencies that they'd then tattoo over. I was in part of the birth of modern tattooing in a way, as art directed by Ed Hardy. You can't beat this kind of intimacy, where you get a slide show by Ed Hardy, and Hanky Panky from Amsterdam, and Dan Tome from Guam, and Leo Zulueta from San Francisco, about neo-tribalist tattoo, and neo-Japanese. They were the ones who thickened the black line of Japanese work, so it's more graphic. If you think of the earlier Yakuza ones, it just looks like wallpaper. The images don't jump.

ALEX FIALHO: How does the tattooing relate to the performances?

RON ATHEY: I think *Solar Anus* is the only one that did, that included it. I think in that minute, it turned into many things. But in that minute, that there was this kind of queer community in LA that were getting giant tattoos in a style that no one had, or not that many people had. It wasn't a secret club, but even just in that—you know, I'm in a lot of clubs. If I go to a tattoo convention, it's totally fucking gnarly bodysuit tattoo guys who know who I am from those early days, from being in magazines and books, just in the tattoo circuit. That's another world, but you know, it's like to going to the mall now. Those conventions are too big, and everybody tattoos now. Once there were people, like proper graphic artists, even art-school educated, it bumped up. They still can't change the bad choices people make. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: What were some of the ideal contexts for showing your work over the years?

RON ATHEY: I've been turned out by site-specific places, so Ex Teresa was kind of number one. The first time I was like, "Wow." Going from somewhere like LACE or P.S. 122 to going to the theater within a museum, or even the ICA Theater, somewhere more institutional, or European real theaters where you have high-tech lighting grids that are almost run by a robot for setup. Really high contrast, but it's still either acoustic spaces, which are always religious rooms, and some industrial halls also. I'm really aware of how you either get lost or don't get lost in space, and why outdoor space is really challenging. I think it has to be somewhere really austere, like Joshua Tree, for instance. Like giant boulders as the backdrop, still bring the attention in. Things that have been going on here for a while like high-desert test sites, and that's in Joshua Tree area that Andrea Zittel produces. Maybe in a more Carlos Castaneda way, you just want to be a yellow line on the horizon, like you're not meant to be the center of attention. You start seeing dance, soft sculpture, people doing works out there that have also been influenced. I think it's pretty great. But public art has never been my beat, you know. I've worked with some people in Rio that they only perform in a public square. It comes out of a political tradition, it's very different.

ALEX FIALHO: If one were to think retrospectively about showing your work, how would they do that, if at all?

RON ATHEY: I think that's what Amelia Jones is doing right now. We haven't landed on an idea. Whether there's going to be video showing, I forget what artist made that Divided Circle at The Walker, they had a show and they had different related videos. But it's glass in between. I think you could have an impact of pieces.

ALEX FIALHO: Because there's good video of most of the performances over the years?

RON ATHEY: Good video or good enough. I'm not married to real time for documentation, because it's like imagining that the documentation is actually real. [Laughs.] And '90s camerawork, everything was a little grayer and flatter. Documentation used to hurt my feelings. I think we had like ruptured through the universe. And then I'd look at this flat, awkward video and be like [laughs]. As cameras got more see in the dark sensitive, things got better. And that's later. Johanna Went's videos didn't come until semi-recently, that Shirley Clarke film, because the technology to lighten film that was too dark happened. I just wanted to say Shirley Clarke. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: Are there any other folks you definitely want to say?

RON ATHEY: Not off my head, that was free association. [Laughs.]

ALEX FIALHO: I guess the last sort of wrap-up thought or question—what contributions do you think you've made

to American art?

RON ATHEY: I have trouble stating myself in there. I feel like I'd be blagging to pull something out of me.

ALEX FIALHO: Yeah, I think that's what we just talked about for the last hours—

RON ATHEY: I feel like there's an evolution to my work, and it's based on my own experimentation, not where I can sit. Even my compromises are more immediate compromises, to something I'm already working on placing in the place it's at. Not "How could I shorten this up to do this?" or "Now that everyone's doing this kind of work." I think my work sits – it's come into being. I am confident of that. Sometimes I think it's the way that the images can be talked about after being so exploited in the Jesse Helms era, the NEA. It doesn't feel totally normal. And like I said, even myself is tired of blood work. But I think it sits where it sits, that work. And it sits in about three different places over time. So hopefully there's another chapter. [Laughs.]

[END OF TRACK.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]