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Oral history interview with AA Bronson, 2017 March 3, 5, and 6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with AA Bronson on 2017 March 3, 5 and 6. The interview took place in Berlin, Germany, at Bronson's home and studio and was conducted by Theodore Kerr for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project.

AA Bronson has reviewed the transcript. Bronson's 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

THEODORE KERR: This is Ted Kerr, interviewing AA BRONSON in his home and studio in Berlin on March 3rd, 2017, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Good morning, AA

AA BRONSON: Good morning.

THEODORE KERR: I called it your home and studio. Is that—does that work?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. That's fine. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: Okay. One way I thought we could start today is a way that sometimes you start talks, and sometimes projects, I think, is by—through an invocation.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I wonder if we want to just take a second and think about, like, who's in the room with us, or what's in the room with us, before we start?

AA BRONSON: Well, the way I usually start, even ahead of that, would be to say, you know, I'm AA Bronson. I was born Michael Tims in 1946 in Vancouver. My mother was English. She was a war bride from London. She had arrived in—she arrived in Vancouver while the war was still going on. And so—and so, I was—and my father was a pilot with the Canadian Air Force who had been stationed in London, and was bombing over—basically, bombing Cologne every day for five years or something. So they came from a very traumatic situation. And so, I was born into this post-war period, which is, I think, very different than the post-war—different period in the U.S., because the U.S. only came into the war at the very end, so the—I think, the effect onto the populace was different. And especially in my case, having an English mother who had lived through both wars, and who had, you know, a lot of experience with death, and so on.

I don't know why I bring that up, but anyway, that's the—that's like the base line for me, of where it all comes from. And so, I'm already going to diverge. I remember my mother coming to visit me in New York, around '80—'80 what? Maybe as late as—maybe as late as 1990, actually. And seeing a homeless person on the street who had a sign which said, you know, "I have AIDS. Please help." And she said, "Oh, it's just like the war." [Cries.] I still remember that.

THEODORE KERR: She told you that story in New York?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. She was visiting us. We were living on 12th Street, Jorge and I, Jorge Zontal from General Idea and I were living on 12th Street, just off of Sixth Avenue. And there was a man who was always sitting on the ground there, who was a young man, who had AIDS and was homeless because his medication had cost so much. So, I always think about him.

THEODORE KERR: Did you and your mum talk about it a bit?

AA BRONSON: Oh, quite a lot. She decided that that period was—that period in New York was like London in World War II, that it had very much the same feeling. The presence of death, and that all the young men were dying. [Cries.]

THEODORE KERR: Did you share it with friends, that—your mum's insight?

AA BRONSON: I'm not sure. With Jorge, certainly, but I don't really remember whether I did or not. I'm sure I must have. I mean, it gave this very different shape to the whole thing.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so, I'm—[laughs]—leaving your invocation question far behind, but—and it's true that when I had a friend go into St. Vincent's Hospital, which was—we were on the same block. It was in the—what year would that have been? '87, I think. '86, '87. And the hospital was so overwhelmed that the neighborhood had basically come to the aid of the hospital. And so, when you came into the hospital, the first thing that happened if you came to visit somebody is the nurse would grab you and say, "Okay, you know, we're really understaffed here, and I just want to show you where everything is kept." And they showed us where extra towels were, and where—you know, just showed us where everything was stored. And then there was a room set up that was full of food where people could bring food, and where people who were coming to stay could sit and eat food. And also, where the patients could get a break from hospital food. And it was crammed with people. There were tons of people in there.

And it was like—it all—I mean, I've never been in a war, but it also reminded me of this idea of my mother's, that this was wartime. So, I mean, her stories about the wartime were always about people—about community forming. And I guess that's what happened here. [Cries.] I wasn't expecting to go immediately into crying. It's kind of a surprise. What was—what struck me most that day, going into the hospital for the first time was the intense feeling of community. All this Chelsea community around St. Vincent's, which was kind of the epicenter of the whole AIDS thing. So, this relationship to war is really vivid for me.

THEODORE KERR: I think you did give us a good invocation, actually.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] I did.

THEODORE KERR: I think you did.

AA BRONSON: I called up my mother, Jorge from General Idea, and Robert Henforth, who was my first friend who died of AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Is that who you were visiting at St. Vincent's?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, we were really his primary caregivers, and he died at St. Vincent's.

THEODORE KERR: Around 1987 or 1988?

AA BRONSON: '87, I think.

THEODORE KERR: '87? Yeah.

AA BRONSON: I think. Yeah, he worked at the—he was a cultural attaché at the Canadian Embassy.

THEODORE KERR: Then we did—then, we have some—we have some good ghosts in the room for us.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: Anybody or anything we should add?

AA BRONSON: It depends on how far does the conversation range? I mean, is this specifically a kind of geographically located conversation in New York, in the U.S.?

THEODORE KERR: I don't think it should be, no.

AA BRONSON: I mean, for me, of course, that period, I was living in New York. And so, New York was the center of it all. But also, there was this—I was split between New York and Toronto, and Felix of General Idea was in Toronto, and also suffering of AIDS. And then, eventually, we all moved back to Toronto and they died in Toronto. So, I guess we should invite Felix into the room, although he's a bit of a troublemaker sometimes. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Okay. We can handle trouble. Yeah, okay. I think we should backtrack a bit—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —and maybe—

AA BRONSON: You were to asking—oh, no, you weren't. Okay, go ahead.

THEODORE KERR: I was—I guess my first question, then, is just: kind of clear your mind, and think about your first memory, ever.

AA BRONSON: Well, my first memories, they're kind of ridiculous. I have several, and I can't quite untangle them as to which came first. But they're all from the same period. I would have been very young. I was born in Vancouver, and at the age of two, I—well, first of all, my birth was very difficult. I almost died, my mother almost died.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

AA BRONSON: It was a big problem. But we both made it through. And then my father, who was in the air force, was transferred to Fort Nelson, which is on the Alaska Highway. So, very, very far north of Canada. Not quite as—not quite as far north as Alaska, but on the way to Alaska, not far away. And I stopped eating around that point. I refused to eat anymore. And my—the doctor decided I was too weak to travel. That—so, my mother and I had to stay in Vancouver. It caused a lot of problems. And they had to put me in the hospital and feed me intravenously for a while. I don't remember any of that, but eventually, I made it to—eventually, I made it to Fort Nelson, and all my earliest memories are from there. So, I guess I was, you know, like two, early three years old, when I got to Fort Nelson. And Fort Nelson was a little tiny air force base in the middle of nowhere—like, quite literally in the middle of nowhere. No idea why it was there. Actually, never thought ever to ask that.

And my earliest memories are—I always say that I have two earliest memories, but there's probably four, and just two of them make good stories, and the other two don't. One was falling off a dog sled, which wasn't going very fast or anything, and there was snow all over the ground, so it wasn't dangerous, but I quite vividly remember falling off the dog sled. I think it's a very Canadian memory. And the other one is being spanked and put to bed because apparently, I had been playing in the garbage dump, which was where the bears hung out, which was very dangerous. And I remember at the time—I can still remember my crib. I was still in the crib. So I was quite small. I would climb in myself. The side came down, and was generally just left down. And I would climb in myself, and I was still sleeping in the crib. I can remember that. But there were a couple of other things. There was a memory in kindergarten. So, I was there until I was four—until I was five, probably. I was there for kindergarten—anyway, and I remember—I wonder if I do. No, I think the other two memories I've got are really from Edmonton, which is from where we lived next.

THEODORE KERR: Before we move to Edmonton, can you tell me, like, what did—what do you remember Fort Nelson looking like, or your mom or your dad looking like at that time?

AA BRONSON: Well, Fort Nelson was what I called these classic post-war air force houses, which looked the same all across Canada. They were identical on air force bases. They're built quite far apart because there was lots of space. And I just remember big, expansive snow. And that's really all I remember. I don't really remember what my mother and father looked like. I mean, I don't have any memory of my father from that period at all. And my mother, I remember more as a presence, not as a—not what she looked like.

THEODORE KERR: Are there words to put to the presence?

AA BRONSON: Well, it gets mixed up with things I know—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —as opposed to—as opposed to things that I specifically remember. So, I know that, you know, her first husband was killed in the war, and was my father's co-pilot. So, there was a lot of trauma. And I remember that she used to—I was a very good child because my mother needed me to be good because she was so traumatized. She just needed as little trouble as possible. And she would often put me in my bedroom. And I was so good and quiet in there, she would just leave me there. And I remember—I remember that stillness in the house. And apparently, she told me, many years later, there was a heating duct that came out into my bedroom, you know, down by the floor, like a big, old-fashioned one. And facing it was another one, going into the opposite room, which was the living room. And so, she could get down on her hands and knees and look through the duct and make sure I was okay without having to go into the room. And that's what she would do. So, there was this thing of being enclosed and quiet, and giving her space, in a way.

THEODORE KERR: And do you remember—can you see yourself at that time, at that age?

AA BRONSON: Not really. I know I was a puny little thing, but—well, I wasn't—not that I was really small, but I felt as if I was small. I had basically every—because of this thing of not eating, also, I guess, I had—basically any illness that came along, I got it. So, I had—I know that I had pneumonia quite badly while I was there, for example, in that period. But I don't specifically—well, I do have one little memory because my mother and I both had pneumonia. And I remember, I do—so, I do have this one memory of my father making scrambled eggs. And my mother exclaiming, because she couldn't figure out why his eggs were always so much better than the ones she made. [Laughs.] And he had been a cook's assistant—and he ran away from home when he was 14, and he had worked in a logging camp as a cook's assistant. And in a logging camp, I mean, loggers eat enormous quantities of food, and require lots and lots of calories. So, they would always make their scrambled eggs with

cream. Like, a lot of cream. And that's now he made them, too, and they were delicious.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: That makes sense. And you have one brother?

AA BRONSON: I have one brother, John, who was born when I was eight.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So, should we talk about the Edmonton memories?

AA BRONSON: Edmonton. So, we moved to Edmonton—I went to kindergarten in Edmonton. There might've been some sort of pre-school in Fort Nelson, but I'm not totally clear about that. I went to—I went to—we had a dog, Juno, who was a British bull terrier, which was the family dog, apparently, on my father's side. My grandfather had also had a British bull terrier. She was extremely devoted to me. And so, initially—well, when I started going to school, she would walk me to school. And then, when I came out at noon to go home for lunch, she would be sitting there, waiting. And she would walk me home. Quite amazing, really. And she was never on a leash. And again, it was an air force base outside of Edmonton called—what was it called? I can't remember the name, but it would be pretty easy to find.

Anyway, air force base, I think just north of Edmonton. And again, these classic houses—strange kind of layout because the kitchen door, the backyard, and then, there was a—like a back alley where the garbage could get picked up, and all of that. And also, parking was back there. And then, the frontyard—because there was really no reason to have car access—there was no road in the front of the house. It was just a—like a concrete walk that went down between the houses. And nobody ever used the front door; consequently, everything was around the back. So, I remember this—and that's where I first put my tongue on a metal railing in the middle of the winter, and my mother had to come out and pour hot water over it to release me, which every child did at least once in Edmonton. And I remember the snow being about three, four feet deep at one point, and all the children had made these vast tunnels between all the houses and their parents didn't know they were there. And then, at some point—and we loved, you know, this being able to go into one place and come out at a completely different place, like a kind of maze, a labyrinth, that our parents knew nothing about. And at some point, one of the parents found out about it, and then they went around and destroyed all the labyrinth because they were worried it would collapse on top of us.

Anyway, that was Edmonton. I also remember the Northern Lights. That's a vivid memory from there.

THEODORE KERR: Where—who did—how?

AA BRONSON: Well, just standing on the back porch of our house, and in fact, even just looking out the screen door, and just this, you know, panoply—and equally, I remember, for some reason, a very, very vivid rainbow seen through the same screen door from Edmonton. And I—the other thing I remember about Edmonton was, you know, being Canada, everybody was expected to know how to skate. And I had skates. I was just terrible at—my ankles would buckle, and I couldn't, you know—but anyway, I tried my best to get—it was a kind of—it was the main social activity, was everybody would—in the winter, everybody would gather around the skating rink. And there would be, like, hot chocolate and stuff available, too. And I guess it was a small community, because it was just the one—just the little air force base. I don't know how many people. Not so many.

THEODORE KERR: Did you guys ever go into the city?

AA BRONSON: I don't remember Edmonton as a city at all. It's funny. I do know that I went to the dentist there, and I have a vague memory of the dentist. He was a special children's dentist, and he gave you a—like a rubber ball that you would press. And you were basically giving yourself gas, and when you passed out, you would stop pressing it. And—but then, he was later convicted of child abuse, and his license was taken away as a dentist.

THEODORE KERR: Whoa.

AA BRONSON: So—[laughs]—I've often wondered about that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: That's the only memory I have of Edmonton itself, is the dentist.

THEODORE KERR: And you were in school at this time?

AA BRONSON: I was in kindergarten.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then we moved to—we were there quite briefly, I guess, because then, at the age of five, we moved to St.-Jean-d'Iberville, which is just south of—well, it's now part of Montreal. At the time, it wasn't. Just south of Montreal, a little town. Again, an air force base, but this time, we didn't live on the air force base. We lived in the town, which was mainly French. Initially, we had an apartment in a like a four story high—typical sort of Montreal style apartment building. And I remember sitting on my—I would balance a chair on top of my bed—how I did that, I don't know. And sit in that chair because then, I would watch through the window, and I could watch the boys playing—I guess they were playing like, hockey, but in the summer with hockey sticks, on the street. And they were all French boys, and I couldn't speak with them. And I had no friends there because everybody—there was nobody who spoke English.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But then, about a year later, we moved to a house that was like a new suburb on the edge of that little town, and that's more where the English-speaking—I mean, it was still mostly French, but there were a number of boys my age that I made friends with, kind of friends with, living in that subdivision. And there, we were right on edge of fields and woods, so I had this relationship—which actually lasted—from then on, we always moved to these new suburbs that were, you know, a hop, skip, and a jump to a ravine or a wood or open fields, or whatever. And that kind of started my relationship to things like frogs and nature. My particular—I was in St. Jean, I set—I went through a period of lighting little fires. And I set a field on fire at one point, which was a big disaster. But we got it under—we managed to put it out without having to call the fire department.

THEODORE KERR: Who's we?

AA BRONSON: My mother. My grandfather was visiting. My father was at work, but my grandfather and my mother and myself. It—the fire had gone in a kind of linear way, and hit a little—like a ditch, basically, a little creek. And then it was traveling along the edge of the creek. So, because it was very linear, it was possible to put it out basically with a jacket or something, you know. So beating it with a—I don't know what. A towel. Who knows what? Something like that. That was a big drama. I also had these little boys in the neighborhood that I would lead for explorations into the woods, and we would all show each other our penises.

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And you just had free reign? Like, parents weren't worrying, or—

AA BRONSON: No, no. I mean, back then, nobody ever worried. And there was—I never came across any problems. I mean, I wasn't aware of any potential danger. And as far as I know, there wasn't any.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Everything was quite safe.

THEODORE KERR: And when you think back of being in the woods, whether it's a ravine or a little forest or something, do you have like, recollections of what you would do? Like, would you stop and sit? Would you climb a tree? Would you—

AA BRONSON: Well, in that particular place, it was mostly walking on little—there was a big field, and I had a standard route I would go on with a creek. And then, I would often spend a lot of time just sitting very, very, very quietly and waiting for all the life of the creek to resume its normal activity, as if I wasn't there. In particular, the frogs—frogs and toads, and—well, maybe not toads. Maybe just frogs. Frogs and dragonflies, and things like that. And the frogs particularly interested me, for some reason. And then, if I walked further, there was a woods. And then, I would just go for walks through the woods, and you know, I was very interested in what was going on with trees and the bark, and the, you know. Sometimes, you would find like an old pornographic magazine abandoned in the woods, or something like that. But that was rather unusual. But now and then, there'd be things like that. There would never be like a *Newsweek*, or something. It would always be—[laughs]—a pornographic magazine.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I don't think people hide their *Newsweek*s.

AA BRONSON: But I just—the life of the forest and the life of the creeks are interesting. Especially, maybe more of the creek, I suppose. I spent more time with the frogs in the creek than anything.

THEODORE KERR: Did you—you mentioned that you would take some other boys on expeditions. But do you remember friendships from this time?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. I mean, there were—basically, there were three English-speaking boys. There were two

brothers who were the main ones that I would hang out with, and we would go. But at some point, they told their mother that we showed each other our pee-pees. And then, after that, I wasn't allowed to socialize with them anymore. That was a big drag. But then, we moved quite soon after that. And then, the other one was a bit younger down the street, and he was—he was obviously like a troubled kid because he liked to—mainly, he liked to break things. And if he made anything himself, like even like a sandcastle, because he had a big sandbox in his backyard—he would always break down anything he made before he left it so that somebody else couldn't break it.

THEODORE KERR: Whoa.

AA BRONSON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And his—particularly, I remembered Boom Boom Geoffrion, who was a very famous Canadian hockey player, lived down the street. And he was particularly infamous for having—thrown rocks through Boom Boom Geoffrion's windows. He was a weird—very weird kid.

THEODORE KERR: Did you remember thinking he was weird at the time?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, we all kind of—it was part of the community, so we tried to deal with him like normal. Like if—I remember, he came over to our house for dinner a couple of times, for example. He would never use a knife and fork, or anything. He would always eat everything with his hands. I remember thinking how weird that was. He was definitely troubled.

THEODORE KERR: Did you have an idea of what your dad did? Like, how did you understand his job?

AA BRONSON: Well, so, that takes us up to—I was in St. Jean until grade three, grade four, maybe? So up until the age of nine. I just understood that he was a pilot of a plane, and he was, at the time—well, during the time we were in St. Jean, he was in the United Nations Peace Force. So—and then, again, we moved to Toronto after that, and he continued to be in the Peace Force. So, he was often stationed for periods of time in faraway places. While we were in St. Jean, he wasn't away that long, but he also—I'm not sure. I get those two periods mixed up, in terms of his job: Toronto and St. Jean. But he also would take supplies up north. So, he would take food up to remote communities in the north. And at Christmas, he would take, apparently, Christmas presents up to remote communities in the north, and I guess—I would presume, especially to air force bases, but also to the general populace. So, I understood what he was doing as kind of humanitarian.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you think you understood what he did? Like, was it through him telling you, or your mom telling you?

AA BRONSON: I'm not sure, actually. Well, he was very uncommunicative, generally speaking. So, it must have been through my mother. He was very silent. And I never ever heard him talk about the war. Not once. And he would say—if I ever asked him a question, he would say that he didn't look backwards. He only looked forwards. So, it must have been from my mother. Well, he would give me the facts of what he was doing, you know. That he was flying—when—a little bit later, when we were in Toronto, he was involved with the Suez Crisis. And he was stationed in Naples. So, again, he would tell us—well, he would tell us he wasn't allowed to tell us anything. That was his favorite thing, was that it was—everything was top secret. He couldn't tell us.

THEODORE KERR: Do you think it was top secret stuff?

AA BRONSON: I think he just didn't want to talk about it. But I think some of it was secret. You know, there was a level of secrecy, but not to the extent that he was claiming.

THEODORE KERR: And you and your brother, would you guys talk about—well, what would—

AA BRONSON: Well, my brother was born in St. Jean. So, I was eight then, so I was already in grade—it was near the end of St. Jean that he was born. Eight—he was eight years younger. And he had a lot of—he was born with severe problems with his ears, which took a couple of years to figure out. So he was just crying all the time. It was—and it took a while. And then, there wasn't the kind of healthcare insurance back then that there is now in Canada. So, we had to sell our car and live extremely frugally until his ears were dealt with because of the costs of—oh, you know one peculiar memory from that period is I had to go to the hospital in Montreal for him to be born, and I went and stayed—my uncle lived in Montreal. I went and stayed with my uncle, who I hated, for a couple of days. Dreadful place to have to stay. And my mother was convinced that they had given her the wrong baby because he was covered in black, shaggy hair. He even had sideburns, which all fell out a few weeks later, and he went to being a more normal looking baby. And she was convinced they had given her like an indigenous child. But, you know, as he's grown older, it's very, very clear that he's, you know—looks a lot like my father, so it's definitely—and we look like each other, so it's definitely the real child. But this was a big topic of—whether he was actually the right child or not, was a big topic for a while.

THEODORE KERR: Like an out-loud conversation?

AA BRONSON: Yes, Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And did your mom make—take steps to check in? Like—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I mean, they—she was, like, frantic about it. She was absolutely convinced she had the wrong child. So, it was a big thing with the hospital, but the hospital checked into everything, and assured her that everything was correct. And as it turns out, it was.

THEODORE KERR: Was this around the time of the ear problems as well?

AA BRONSON: Well, the ear problems were—no, this was really just when he first came back from the hospital.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: This was just—he was just like, a few days old.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And you remember it, though it was pretty impactful?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. It was—I remember, you know, they picked me up at my uncle's, and we drove back to St. Jean. That was the whole conversation in the car, going back to St. Jean, was whether it was the right baby or not.

THEODORE KERR: With your dad?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and he was stoic, or—

AA BRONSON: He just listened, mainly. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then, did life change for you all when you went to Toronto?

AA BRONSON: Toronto. Again, we were in a new suburb. In this case, next to the—what's the name of that ravine? One of the big ravines that runs through Toronto. We lived in Etobicoke—on the outskirts of Etobicoke. And in some ways, it was much the same. It was a bigger—it was, you know, a much bigger city.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And—although Montreal was close by, for St. Jean. And I was getting older, and I went to a much bigger school with a lot more kids.

Oh, just to backtrack just for one second, to Edmonton. On—I guess what's making me think of it is it happened again in Toronto. I had this history of getting ganged up on by the straight boys. And I remember, when I—almost the first thing that happened in Toronto was these two kind of school bullies came and wanted to beat me up, and sat on top of me in the schoolyard. And I guess I had enough experience with this to know to just do nothing. So, I just lay there. And then they got bored and went away. And they never tried anything again because it wasn't, you know, I didn't—I wasn't a true masochist. I didn't yell and scream or anything. So, that's—that is a vivid memory of the first arrival in Toronto. But also, of similar events in Edmonton. Not in St. Jean, though. The only thing that I can remember that kind of thing from St. Jean is they—the boys and the girls played separately in St. Jean. I guess it was like a Roman Catholic tradition in the school. It wasn't a Roman Catholic school, but—and I always wanted to go and play with the girls. And my—the teacher who was in charge of the boys' play yard was just, like, horrified that I wanted to go and play with the girls. You know, just horrified. It was very clear that this was not a good thing.

THEODORE KERR: Is it that you wanted to be in their company, or were they doing something that looked more fun?

AA BRONSON: Oh, they would—everything they did was more fun.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: I liked skipping. And he had the boys—at one point, they had a pile of gravel they had brought in that just had been dumped in the front of the school that was for, I don't know, the drive way or something. And he had all the boys picking up the gravel with their hands and throwing it where it was going to go. It was

supposed to give us strong hands. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. It—

AA BRONSON: So weird. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it makes sense that you wanted to hang out with the girls.

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Anyway, back in Toronto. Toronto, you know, because it was a—everybody played together in the whole school, and it was a very big school, it was much more—you didn't really notice whether you were playing with boys or girls. It was all just a big muddle because it wasn't divided in the same way. So, I much preferred it. And I had a teacher that I liked, a lot, in grade—what? What would that have been? Grade six or something, by then. And there was this big ravine. I would spend all my extra time in the ravine. I liked to climb. Probably, it was very dangerous. There were vertical rock faces that I would climb up and down. I got very good at climbing. I guess that was my exercise. And then, in—but I was pretty solitary.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I think I changed towns and schools so many times, like in—even in St. Jean, there were two schools, actually—that I was used to being by myself. So, a thought just came to mind—what was it? Oh, yeah, in grade—for grade—in grade eight, because of the school I was in was over populated for the public school, they had moved the grade eight to the new high school close by, which actually was designed by—I'm trying to—I didn't know—I was taking an interest in architecture by then, and it was designed by—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Parkin.

AA BRONSON: Yes, Jeanie Parkin's husband. Parkin, who was—pardon?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: John B.?

AA BRONSON: John B. Parkin, who was—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Or John C?

AA BRONSON: Oh, there are two of them?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yeah. That's why you've got to distinguish them.

AA BRONSON: Oh, I don't know. I mean, he was a modernist architect. It was a fantastic building. I loved it. It was very kind of—edging towards Mies van der Rohe or something. And it was built around a courtyard, and all the corridors all ran around the courtyard, and with walls of glass so you could look into this garden in the middle. And then, the classrooms were all to the outside of the courtyard. And it was—it was just, consequently, filled with light and air, and I loved it. I was there for one year, and then I got put in a special class for grade—well, no. I guess I was there for grade seven, and then for special class for grade eight for—they had these experimental school in Etobicoke for—it was for children who are super smart, but were not particularly overachievers. So, who were bored.

THEODORE KERR: Did that feel correct to you?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. It did, actually. I remember the guy who came to give me all this battery of tests. I can still remember taking those tests. It was kind of weird because I was the only one in the school who took the test. They had pulled me aside, and had me do all these tests. And so—and they would ask questions like, you know, ridiculous questions like, if you were in a boat—if you were like, in a big boat, and there was a little—and the boat was sinking, and there was one little boat for saving people who—how would the choice be made who should go in the little boat? You know, things like that. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I mean, it's hard not to think—like, do you have any sense of how you answered then?

AA BRONSON: Children. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Children and women, I said.

THEODORE KERR: How would you answer now?

AA BRONSON: I don't know. I mean, I think I would still say children, but somebody to look after them, though.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: And I remember, he smoked a pipe.

THEODORE KERR: The whole time? Or while he was doing the testing?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was smoking a pipe, and it had—and it had a really aromatic tobacco. I can still remember the smell of the tobacco. It was quite sexy, actually. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And it was a verbal interview, or a writing test?

AA BRONSON: It was a—kind of half and half.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: A lot of it was kind of like this, with a recording—what would they have been recording with, though? No, maybe it wasn't. Maybe he was just writing down the answers. Anyway, part of it was just talking. A large part of it. And he was a very—he was probably a psychologist of some sort, or psychiatrist, even, because he was very—he had this great bedside manner, you know? Like, he just put me right at ease somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you—was it a good choice for you, in the end?

AA BRONSON: So, the school was great, and we were bused in. There was—each grade, there was—one grade one, one grade two, et cetera, up to grade eight. And each grade—each of those special grades was in a different school. So, our grade eight—I can't remember which school it was in, but it was somewhere much further downtown than where I lived. And there was a bus that would go around Etobicoke, picking us all up and then dropping us off at all the various schools. So, yeah. I wonder how that was organized. Because the, you know, between all the classes, there would have had to been probably eight buses to handle all those people. So, it's curious how they did it because the people on my bus were not necessarily in my class. Interesting logistics problem there. [Laughs.] So, the way that the class was organized was really great. We were told that we had to do—there were certain things that we had to do. We had to do mathematics. We had to do history, and so on. There were specific slots—categories of information.

But for most of them, we were given a period of a week to think and talk amongst ourselves, and read. And then, we had a kind of class meeting, like a kind of town hall meetings where we would discuss these various things, and what did we want to learn in these various areas? Except for math—in math, we were—the class was divided into two halves for math, and one half did algebra, I think. And the other half did—what do you call it? Something that I never, ever managed to—

THEODORE KERR: Like, calculus, or—

AA BRONSON: Calculus.

THEODORE KERR: Calculus.

AA BRONSON: One half of the class did calculus, and the other half did algebra. I was in the algebra half, which was clearly not quite as advanced as the calculus half. And we could move the desks around any way we wanted. We could lie on the floor and work if we wanted. We could—basically, we were given a lot of freedom. And then, once we had decided what area within each topic we wanted to deal with, then, we had to do enough reading that we could divide it into chunks, and assign each of us in the class to research a particular chunk. And then, we had to do the research and deliver a kind of paper, a presentation about our chunk to the class, and everybody had to take notes. And then we would be tested on the end of the term on this accumulated knowledge, which, you know, the teacher didn't know, teaching it all. Only in the math. And it was great. I loved it. And I somehow just assumed that that's what university was all about.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And actually, even—I even assumed that that's what high school was all about, that it would be like that. So, when we got to grade nine, back in the same—back in the Parker building again, I was so disappointed. It was like stepping—it was like stepping back into primeval time or something. You know, like these old, old fashioned, boring techniques of teaching. So, grade eight was very important for me, in terms of thinking about how the mind works, and how people collaborate. It was, in a way, all about collaboration. And a lot of it was about conflict resolution, I guess, because there were always disagreements about what we should study, or what—I guess the teacher was, in a sense, teaching us conflict resolution and how to collaborate. How to organize in a way that we could work as a unit, to learn. So, it was a very, very interesting and productive time.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember some of the chunks that you had to learn, or—

AA BRONSON: Well, I was just trying to—as I was talking, I was trying to remember, like, history. What did we study? It's funny, I can't really remember, to tell you the truth. And I don't remember what I—I don't remember what it was that I presented about—I do—I did a presentation about Frank Lloyd Wright architecture. I remember that, but I don't even remember—would that have been under art? I have no idea what that was under, or whether it was something to do with history. But I do remember I did a lot of research into Frank Lloyd Wright. And I presented. And I remember, I had some frustration because I was trying to explain what Organic Architecture was, and I could not get my idea across. Not even the teacher could understand what I meant. And to me, in my head, it was absolutely clear what I meant, but I couldn't—you know, the way that the architecture flowed into the landscape and worked with the landscape, and with the movement of the sun and with the forms of the land, and all of that. You know, that—like the—like Wright's prairie architecture, and I could not communicate that at all. I think just because it wasn't an idea that anybody would've heard before in that—you know, in Toronto, in that time—at that time.

THEODORE KERR: Where were you getting the information?

AA BRONSON: Books. Well, then, I have to backtrack because I left something out. I'll backtrack quickly. And that is that in St. Jean, we went to the church at the air force base. And I always went to Sunday school, which was, I think, in the basement of the church. And we had done the same in Edmonton. We had a great Sunday school teacher, who was really quite focused on education—you know, religious education. At a certain point, she left. And then, they brought in this couple, who had been missionaries in Africa. And they were—basically, they would only—in retrospect, I'm a little bit suspicious. Every week, they showed us slides of African children, poverty stricken African children, and talked about the problems of children in Africa, and how good, you know, how well off we were, consequently. But this thing of always having the lights out—we were always in the dark, looking at slides. I wonder, you know, now thinking back on it, what was going on exactly. And there was no religious education. Like, zero, nothing. Nothing. And I hated this. And so, I wanted to stop going to Sunday school. But there was a prize. I was going to win a prize for perfect attendance if I could hang on a few weeks longer, right? So, I hung on, and I got my prize for perfect attendance. And then, I didn't—I never went back again. I think my parents were relieved because they didn't really want to have to go there. We were just going because of me. And the book was a book of Bible stories.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, the prize was a book, and the book was Bible stories? [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yeah, a children's book of Bible stories. And very beautiful illustrations, actually. Like, full-page illustrations.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And one of these illustrations was of Samson and the lion.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I've been doing some research online, trying to find which book it is, you know? And in that illustration, Samson is clearly naked, and big and muscular, with blond hair. And the lion—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] Yeah, those blond Israelis. And the lion was standing in front of him in such a way that his genitals were hidden by the body of the lion. But it was clear that he wasn't wearing anything. Like, I would guess that the illustrator was gay. And I was so devastated by this illustration that, to me, it was like pornography. I would—I hid that book in the—my parents bought me a big oak desk around that point. And because I was such a kind of school work kind of guy—and I was always in my room with my books. And I hid that. I hid that Bible story book in the bottom drawer, under some other things. And I would take it out and look at that picture.

THEODORE KERR: Because it was illicit for you.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. It was, like, dirty, and I'm—somehow, I knew it was dirty even though it was Bible stories. I really hid it, which was amazing. But it's around that time that I started going to the local library, whatever that might be, and started reading books on other religions, on architecture, on art. On anything to do with the occult, or palmistry, or Tarot. Anything I could find. And back then, the kind of occult end of things was a bit sparse. There wasn't a lot, but I would read whatever I could. We were allowed to take out quite a lot of books. I would always have these piles of books around my bed, and I would try as much as possible to stay in my bedroom and read books. And I would—my parents were always trying to get me out of the bedroom, you know, out of the house or whatever. I would—"I just want to read my books."

So, that started in Edmonton, and continued in St. Jean. And continued, really, in Toronto, too. In—yeah. But in Toronto, there was this added thing, and that was the Royal Ontario Museum [ROM]. And the subway line had just opened. The north-south one. Like, I guess, north of—north of Bloor Street had just opened. And so, we could—from our house, my mother and I would get a bus that went down to where we would pick up the north end of that line, where it was at that point. And then, from there, we could go straight down to the ROM, or go down further and go to the—we'd often go to the Queen Street Eatons, or sometimes we would combine the two and go to Eatons, and then go to the ROM. And so—and then, when I got a little bit older, I could go on my own. And then, I would just pretty much go to the ROM. And so, I came to know the collections of the ROM quite intimately, especially the Egyptology collections, and the Native Indian collections, and the Chinese collections. I think those three were my favorites. And the Chinese collection there is really remarkable, actually. And the Egyptian collection was quite great as well.

THEODORE KERR: I want to go back, just for a second. You mentioned that you had an interest in the occult, and related studies.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: Where was that sparked? How was that sparked?

AA BRONSON: I'm not sure, exactly. I always had this—I always had this sense, like I had some sort of extrasensory perception. But then, I also had the sense that I must be making it up. I always identified with things like Peter Pan, you know? Or what's the little fairy in Peter Pan?

THEODORE KERR: Tinkle—Tinklebell? Tinkerbell.

AA BRONSON: Tinkerbell. I think I identified more with Tinkerbell than I did with Peter Pan. [Laughs.] It was like trying to get a grip on my own idea of myself. Like, I guess, just—I wouldn't have been able to put it into words at the time, but I think just this feeling that my intuition was so strong, and what's this all about? You know, what's my feeling about people, or my understanding of people? I also read a lot of—by the way, I read, also, a lot of psychology books during that period as well. Freud, and God only knows what. And I think—I got very technical in a lot of areas, like the architecture books, and the psychology books were at pretty high level for a public school kid. I mean, it was—really at a university level, so—

THEODORE KERR: Did you go back to being bored, once you went back to the normal school? Like, in through high school?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I mean, in high school, I was bored again. All the way through. So, consequently, my marks—I remember, I used to get, like, 75, you know? It was kind of a normal mark for me in anything at all.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Everything was the same, somehow. All my marks were the same. And I was really—I really liked—I was, at the beginning of the year, when you got to come into a classroom and choose a seat, I always made a rush to be right by the window so I could gaze out the window through the glass. And my father always said I just learned by osmosis—that I didn't actually have to listen. It would just kind of seep into the back of my head somehow as I was gazing out the window. And it's true. I didn't really listen much. But I always knew enough to get 75.

THEODORE KERR: Right, but at the same time, you were self-studying, and learning—

AA BRONSON: Well, yeah. I would get bored. So, for example, in math class, during class, when I was so bored, I would do all the—there was like, extra problems at the back of the textbook for extra study, if you wanted to go further than what the class offered? I would sit and do those during class to entertain myself. So, yeah, I always had something extra I was doing. But I was very scholarly, in a way. I was always involved with information.

THEODORE KERR: And did you have boyfriends or girlfriends, or—

AA BRONSON: Well, I didn't really have—other than those two kids who I wasn't allowed to play with after a while, St. Jean—in Toronto, I had one friend who was probably gay, who I would hang out with a bit, but we didn't have so much in common. And—except we were both smart, and both kind of out of place. But we'd—I didn't—I was really more solitary than anything, in that—and through till—in high school, like after grade nine, we moved to Ottawa. So, grade 10 through 13 was in Ottawa. And did I have friends in Ottawa? I did have more friends, but they were more like acquaintances. But I had more of a social life in Ottawa because I was in—it was a very, very large high school: Laurentian. And it had, I think, five grade 13 classes, for example. Like, a lot of kids. And they put all the smart ones in one class. So, I was in a class, and there was a—what's his name? A musician was in my class. A famous Canadian musician, as it turned out later. Murray McLauchlan?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, Murray McLauchlan was in my class.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Anyway, so, I was in a class with smart, articulate kids. And so, I would have a social life, you know, basically in the lunch room, and things like that. But once I left school, there was one woman from my class, who I was still saw, actually, not that long ago. I mean, just—we came across each other and met up again. There was this one woman, Sharon, who lived around the corner from me, and I would see her, socially, occasionally. But mostly girls. I mostly socialized with girls at that point, not with guys. And of course once we moved to Ottawa, there was the National Gallery of Canada. And that replaced the ROM as my place to go on the weekends. So, I went to the—probably went to the National Gallery twice a month or so.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And again, got to know their permanent collections very intimately, and saw every single—temporary exhibitions, I would see several times. And that, I think, was very important for me. I had seen a certain amount in Toronto at the Art Gallery of Ontario [AGO], but only special exhibitions. And the AGO was a little bit harder to get to, as a child, than the ROM. So—but I did see a retrospective of Picasso, and another one of van Gogh.

THEODORE KERR: At the ROM or AGO?

AA BRONSON: I think those were both at the AGO, but maybe van Gogh was at the National Gallery. I'm not quite clear about that. Might've been—I think, yeah, the van Gogh was a bit later. That was at the National Gallery of Canada because I kept going back—you know, that painting of the corn fields, with the black birds coming out—which was, I think, his last painting before he committed suicide. I kept going back to that painting, and that was at the National Gallery. I can remember the architecture. Again, the—the Lorne Building, as it was called. It was built as the National Gallery of Canada, but it was designed to be an office building once they left it for something better. So, it felt like an office building.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, like, it was pre-determined after it was an art gallery that it was going to—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, that it was going to be an office building. I mean, you just looked at it, and it looked like an office building, right—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —of the period.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: Yes, it had a double cantilevered stair. And it had one part inside—I think, between the third and fourth floor or something, there was a two-story high space in one part. But mainly, at that time, there was no art of any size. There was very little—in Canada, anyway, very little art of any scale. So, it was mostly like, maybe nine foot—maybe it was 10 foot ceiling. But you know, it wasn't as high as this room we're sitting in. It was—everything was quite small scale. And that was very important for me because I saw, in particular, one exhibition, which was—I don't remember the name of the exhibition, although I have it somewhere. But it was an exhibition—they didn't call it Pop art because the term hadn't been invented yet, but it was an exhibition of Pop art from New York. And it was show that was toured by MoMA. And this was an exhibition—I mean, the things that I remember most vividly. Well, I can remember most of the show pretty vividly, but the things that were the most important to me was an Ad Reinhardt, black on black, one of his crosses where you have to kind of meditate on it for the pattern to appear.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And—which came also with a wall text, which was a kind of Buddhist writing by him. A fantastic text. And there was a Rosenquist—big Rosenquist piece that wrapped around a corner, in his kind of typical—I think I remember a lot of spaghetti or something. There was a Claes Oldenburg, papier-mâché, white shirt hanging from an ordinary wire clothes hanger, hanging from the—you know, the ceiling of the gallery was that, you know, that white board with little holes in it and a metal grid? Like a real office.

THEODORE KERR: Like a real office. Wow.

AA BRONSON: A real office ceiling. And it was—it was a metal coat hanger hung from that grid, with this big, white, kind of very—you had this feeling of tremendous depression when you looked at that white shirt. There

was some Marisol sculptures, which were great. There was—who's that woman that was—MoMA had a one-person exhibition of her work in the period when they were closed, and the museum was in Queens.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Lee Bontacou?

AA BRONSON: Pardon?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Lee Bontacou?

AA BRONSON: Lee Bontacou. I remember Lee Bontacou from that show. And it was funny because I remembered her pieces so vividly, and then I never saw them again until MoMA had this big exhibition, you know, like decades later. Funny how the women in general, of course, like disappeared. Who else was in that show? Warhol, of course.

Anyway, I think the things that particularly—well, the one thing that particularly struck me was the Ad Reinhardt, which wasn't really Pop at all, but it was in the show. And this kind of Buddhist text about nothing—about nothingness, and about the void. And this minimalist painting that was just a black rectangle, until you looked at it long enough that the cross would emerge from it. That show stayed with me my entire life. And it was funny because in the—maybe in the '90s, I contacted the National Gallery of Canada because I wanted—I just kept thinking about that show, and I wanted to know more about it. And they had no record of that show. The curators had never heard of it. And then, eventually, in the library—in their own archives, they found a review of the show in the *Ottawa Citizen*, the Ottawa newspaper. And that's the only record they had that the show had ever happened, was a review in the newspaper. Very peculiar.

THEODORE KERR: Because it didn't matter? It was just like, small scale paintings that was usually at the National—

AA BRONSON: No, it wasn't that. I think—I don't know why they wouldn't have—they didn't even have the invitation card or anything. It's so strange. I don't know why that would've been. I think because there was probably nobody on staff who took an interest in that material at that time. And then, what's his name—very important curator at the National Gallery of Canada, who's the one who bought the 29 Donald Judd pieces that are such an extraordinary—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Charlie Hill?

AA BRONSON: No, not Charlie Hill. Older generation than him. Because Charlie's my age. I—like, maybe the following year, this curator—a young curator came in [Brydon Smith –AB], who then focused on contemporary work, and in particular, on Minimalist and to a certain extent, Pop art. But his real strength was Minimalist sculpture. So, already in—the show I'm talking about would've been around '63, maybe, when I was in grade 13. And he started in '66 or '67. And I think in '67, '68, they bought all these pieces by Donald Judd. It was very, very early. They cost almost nothing at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And they also—he also wanted to buy Claes Oldenburg's bedroom—that famous bedroom installation, and they wouldn't—he couldn't get it past the committee. And eventually, they did buy it, like 20 years later, for a fortune. And it's on permanent display, but the—originally, he had tried to buy it in the '60s, when it was first made.

THEODORE KERR: How did you hear about the Donald Judd acquisition?

AA BRONSON: Well, that—that's much later. I didn't know about that because that happened—I left Ottawa in '63, '64, around then, to go to university. And it happened after that. But they published a catalog, I think in '68—a very famous catalog. It's a very thick, big, book. A bright orange cover—like, a reddish orange cover. And in big black lettering, it says, I think, Donald Judd. And there's nothing else on the cover. And it's, you know, if you can find that book, it's worth—I think it must be worth thousands of dollars now. You know, it's one of the treasures of contemporary art scholarship.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it was his big obsession, with Donald Judd.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you mind if we take a small break?

AA BRONSON: No, no. I don't mind at all.

[Audio break.]

AA BRONSON: So, for me, a major theme through my entire childhood is my relationship to books. And there's one important thing that happened in—I think it was grade 10. Grade 10 would have been 19—anyway, it's easy enough to figure out. There was a department store, like a cheap department store. Like, nothing special, like a Kresge's or something like. Some ratty department store that was not too far from the National Gallery. But they had a very good book department. And the reason they had a good book department was because the woman who ran it was really just a phenomenal person and loved books. She was aware that there was nothing else really in the city.

And so, I discovered there a book called *Katsura*. And it's a book about Katsura Palace—the imperial palace in Kyoto, which was built in the mid-1600s. And it's a book by Walter Gropius and Kenzo Tange. And the photos are by a famous Japanese photographer whose name I'm going to forget. But anyway, I discovered this book and totally fell in love with it, and had to have it. And I think it's the first time I had to have—I had to actually purchase a book. Because all my relationships to books before it had always been through libraries, or people giving me books as gifts, but I had never really bought anything. And I had very—my parents were very frugal. My father, I guess, was very frugal with pocket money. I got a very small allowance. And so, I had to save my money, I think, for three months, to get to buy that book. And I would go almost every weekend to go and look at the book. The poor woman—[laughs]—at the bookstore. She was very patient with me, and at a certain point, she started hiding it under the counter. She was basically saving it for me because I would tell her how much money I'd saved so far, and how much there was to go. [Laughs.] Thank you.

And eventually, I bought that book. And it's an extraordinary book. It's just—it's like the origins of Modernism in a way. You know, it's—and the texts and the photos, and then all the plans. I love anything to do with diagrams. Anything diagrammatic—like, a floor plan. If I can look at a floor plan or something, I'm in seventh heaven. It doesn't really matter what it's of. And there were a lot of diagrams in this book. And something clicked at that point. Like, somehow, my relationship to books shifted at that point. Then—is that it for Ottawa? Let me think. Anything important in Ottawa?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I mean, maybe you should say, what does click mean? Like, what do you mean?

AA BRONSON: Well, my—I guess that maybe the book replaced the teddy bear kind of thing. You know? Like, I didn't have a teddy bear, but I had a monkey. I had a monkey that my grandmother sent to me from England, a Steiff monkey, which I still have by my bed, when I was four. And somehow, yeah, if—I'm sure, in psychological terms, the book replaced the monkey. What is that called? Object—whatever it is.

THEODORE KERR: So, the book became a source of comfort? The book—

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Well, I mean, books always had been a source of comfort, but it was like I knew this book intimately. I looked at it over and over and over again. I knew practically every page. And consequently, I knew the palace intimately, too. I knew every—because the whole set of buildings—I knew all the—I knew the tea house, and I knew this, and I knew that. The gardens. The texture of it has got this heavily textured, like this linen—dark blue linen cover. And it's hot stamped with a kind of seal. It's the relationship to it was much more physical and much more intimate than I had ever had with a book before. And that—and ever since, you know, I basically became—without realizing it, I think I became a collector of books from that moment, although it took me some years to figure that out.

And then, I went to—I'm trying to remember. There was another book, and I don't remember whether I got it while I was still in high school, or when I went to university. Do you mind if I just get these books?

THEODORE KERR: No, not at all. I'm going to pause.

[Audio break.]

AA BRONSON: So, the Katsura book, just to return for that a moment—for a moment. It's called *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture* by Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange, and Yasuhiro Ishimoto took the photos. And Herbert Bayer was the book designer. You know, amazing person to have design your book. And it was published by Yale University Press in 1960. And I would have bought it then, probably. It was probably either 1960 or '61. It probably was a new publication when I bought it. And it's interesting because—you know, I gave a lecture at the LA Art Book Fair a few days ago, describing my life in terms of books. And so, this is obviously was an important one. And afterwards, the librarian—one of the librarians from the Getty came up to talk to me, and told me they have an exhibition on right now, or they had an exhibition recently, maybe, of photos by Yasuhiro Ishimoto. And he was, of course, familiar with this book.

Anyway, that—so, that was the first book I ever bought. And then, I remember this one. *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* by Vincent Scully. And let's just see what year that is. I don't remember how—1962. So, just a little bit later. I'm pretty sure I bought it in Toronto.

And again, it's curious to me, looking back, like, why these two books? One is an imperial palace. The other is a book which examines Greek temples from a point of view of—well, his idea—I mean, the thing that I remember from way back then is the thought—a relationship to the landscape. So, here we get a little bit back like Frank Lloyd Wright. But the temples are always oriented towards a space between two mountains. So, a vulva, really. The temples are the male element, and the landscape is the female element. I remember that. And then, in my memory—oh, yes. Here they are. Again, there's diagrams. There's plans and showing these relationships, and so on.

And I do remember, as a child, even, already—I read a lot of books on sacred architecture, especially in relationship to Chinese temples because of these diagrams, and because the whole—you can see it quite clearly also in the Greek ones, this idea of holy of holies, of these spaces within spaces within spaces that get progressively more sacred as you go into the middle one. And sometimes, you know, only the main priest, depending what the religion is, is allowed in the final room or whatever. And there's often ceremonial approaches and so on, so the architecture is built around a human activity, or a ritual activity, and so on. That totally fascinated me. And that's the second book that I remember from that period. So—

THEODORE KERR: What does reading a book mean to you? Like, does it mean like, reading it cover to cover, repeatedly? Does it mean poring over certain pages longer?

AA BRONSON: No, it means kind of, like, constantly devouring little bits and pieces. Not very methodically. Just as things catch my attention.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, it's—I very rarely read something from the beginning to the end. Sometimes I do, but it's—I mean, obviously, if it's literature I do. But with this kind of thing, it's more like sort of diving into the book somewhere—anywhere.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Do you want to—so, we wanted to know if there's anything more about Ottawa. But did you bring these books—so, if you bought them in Toronto, did you bring them with you to Ottawa?

AA BRONSON: No, I bought these in Ottawa.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, these are in Ottawa?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. So, I bought this probably in my first year in Ottawa.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The Katsura one. Maybe the second year—maybe grade 10 or 11. And this would have been closer to—would have been later, anyway. I'm not sure how late. The National Gallery of Canada also had architectural exhibitions, which I loved. And then, in particular, I remember one of Brasilia.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: A whole exhibition of Brasilia when it was just being built, or maybe it had just been built, or something. So, it was a complete exhibition of, like, all the architects' plans and so on. And the—what's his name, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: Brasilia is designed by—?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Niemeyer.

AA BRONSON: Niemeyer. Oscar Niemeyer. So, it included, you know, there would be a display for each building—all the major buildings, plus the whole planning of the—and again, it's very much like this stuff. It's very much about ceremonial and ritual movement through space. It's very, very—very designed like that. And when I think about it, you know, even though Katsura was a palace, a lot of the architecture is planned about how you move through these elaborate gardens. How does the body move through space to get from one place to another? And what does it—what does that mean? You know, what meaning does that carry? And how is the garden planned to—in the case of Katsura, in many places, there will be like a gap in the walk where you have to look down so that you don't fall, and then when you look up, a new element has revealed itself. There's a lot of that kind of thing. So, it's—so, my interests were obviously in kind of area.

When I was three, I told my mother I wanted to be an artist, and I never really changed through all the years. I always wanted to be an artist. But when I got to high school, I began to feel—I guess, I became aware of my

father doing all this stuff for the U.N. Peace Corps, or whatever it was. And the—and just the general feeling of the early '60s. I began to think that being an artist was selfish, and I should do something that had more social impact. And that's when—well, my math teacher, Mr. Aguilera, suggested that I should consider architecture as a place where my mathematical talents—my number talents and my aesthetic interests could combine. And that's what I eventually did. I went to—when I left Ottawa, I went to go to architecture school. And by the way, at the very end, after being a very average student through all of high school, somehow, I must have just psychologically psyched myself up to do better right at the end because I ended up being the best in the school, and also one of the best students in the city. So, I ended up getting a plaque from the mayor of the city—some award or other—[laughs]—which I still have, but by then, I'd already left, so I didn't actually—and the mayor was a woman. Very interesting.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: Pardon?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: What was her name? She was like a butch lesbian, you know? She was just like this, you know, this fierce, short thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But I always regretted that I didn't actually get to meet her.

THEODORE KERR: Do you think you were motivated by getting into a certain school or something? Is that what was compelling you to do better?

AA BRONSON: No, maybe I was a little bit ashamed. I just—I knew I wasn't doing that well. I mean, I was doing fine. I was still in the top, you know, 10 or 15 percent or something. But I knew that—no, maybe it was. Maybe I was worried about getting into university, into the school I wanted or something. Although in those days, it was not so much anxiety attached to that as there is now. Anyway, I did well in the end. The end of grade 13. And grade 13 was vanquished not too long after that, I think. They got rid of grade 13. In Ontario, it just goes to grade 12 now.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: Oh, really? 12 years later, it was still around? Oh, okay. Then, it wasn't that—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible commentary.]

AA BRONSON: So, then, I knew I wanted to go in to architecture, and I'd been reading about architecture, you know, since around grade six or seven. I knew architecture inside out from a kind of critical and historical point of view. And I wasn't totally sure what I wanted to do. Well, I was sure what I wanted to do, but I didn't have the courage. And that was I wanted to go to the Architectural Association [AA] in London. And the thought of going to another country—I had never really been out of the country. I went to London with my mother when I was four, to visit my grandmother, but I only barely remembered that. And I somehow didn't have the courage. And in my research that I did, I found that the University of Manitoba had a very progressive program at the time. And there were more graduates from University of Manitoba went to the Yale School of Architecture than from any other school in North America. So, I used that as my excuse for staying in Canada, I think. And I went to Winnipeg to study at the School of Architecture there. That was the next stage. And it—at the same time, my father took early retirement from the air force because it was, at that moment that under Lester Pearson, they decided to cut the size of the—they combined the forces, and cut it by two-thirds. So, it was cut down to one-third of its former size, and tons of people got early retirement at that point and were put on pension, my father included. And so, he retired at the age of 42, and moved to the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, where he bought an apple orchard, to my mother's horror.

THEODORE KERR: Because she went with him?

AA BRONSON: Yes. Yeah, she went with him. And you know, she's a Londoner, like, fashion and—

THEODORE KERR: Urban?

AA BRONSON: —urban. I mean, as it was, I don't know how she managed living in these air force bases and so on. But then, retiring to the Okanagan Valley must've just been like—she must've just been seeing kind of death on the horizon line, you know, like a—she was very submissive about it. Like, my father gave her the option that he could go and fly for Air Canada. He was offered a job at Air Canada. He could go to Air Canada, and they could live in Vancouver. I mean, he gave her two choices: Vancouver, Air Canada; or apple orchard in Penticton.

And to tell you the truth, I think she didn't want either of them. And so, she just kind of said, you know, you do whatever you want, kind of thing. And that's where—and he did that. So, they ended up in the Okanagan Valley. And I ended up in Winnipeg at the same moment.

THEODORE KERR: And your brother?

AA BRONSON: And my—so, my brother went with them. So, my brother, when I left home, then was nine, I guess. It's really—I mean, it's funny, my brother being that much younger. We didn't—I was more like his babysitter than anything, right? We didn't have a, I think, a kind of normal brother relationship because the age difference was too much. But I looked after him, really, a lot in my life. I was really like the built-in babysitter, and kind of teacher as well. And he was apparently very upset when I left. I guess I was so much of his social life. And my father, while we were in Ottawa, was very absent because that's when the Suez Crisis was on. So, he was away for long periods of time—months at a time.

THEODORE KERR: Were you gregarious with your brother, or demonstrative?

AA BRONSON: I was more like a parent, in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I would like—like, I clearly loved him, you know, but I would—in Toronto, I would take him for walks down in the ravine, you know, or show him the frogs or whatever. And in Ottawa, I don't really remember in Ottawa, what our relationship was like. But it was—I probably helped him with all his school work and everything. That would be my guess. But I don't actually remember too much. I remember more in Toronto, when he was smaller. So, off I went to Winnipeg, and it—my first time away from home—and Winnipeg, at that time, had a brutal climate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like, a normal winter day was 10-below Fahrenheit. And a cold winter day could easily be 20- or even 30-below. And I lived in residence for the first year, where I was brutalized a little by the straight students—especially the agriculture students, or aggies, as we called them—who immediately picked up that I was gay although I didn't even know what the word gay meant. I had no idea—I hadn't had sex yet. I had no idea what any of that was about. But they would break into my bedroom in the middle of the night, and throw my bed upside down with me in it, and things like that. So, I moved out with two friends, one of whom turned out to be gay, into a rooming house the following year.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, what happened at Winnipeg? So, I was at the architecture school. It was a very big class—120 students in first year, I think, which is big, but by second year, it was down to like, 65 or something.

THEODORE KERR: What's interesting about your description of the school so far is that you wanted to be an artist, worried that it was selfish because of the things that were going on—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —and then, your teacher told you that it was a good place for your math and artistic skills. But, did you see architecture as a response to social inequality?

AA BRONSON: Yes, I did. And this is the period—you see, that's the reason I wanted to go to England, because there was—the people I was most interested in were Alison and Peter Smithson, who are now—at the time, they were not famous, but now are famous as being two of the main architects in that kind of New Brutalism movement of the '60s. And they were mostly doing social housing. And now, I follow an Instagram feed by a British guy who's just a maniac about British social housing from the '60s and '70s. And so much information in his feed. And they come up very frequently in his feed with their buildings. And in fact, the end—and they were teaching, I think, at the AA at the time. In fact, at the end of first year, I had to figure out what to do. And I wrote a letter to the Smithsons, to see if I could get a summer job with them. And I also applied to a little architectural firm in Penticton, where my parents were living, which I got. And the Smithsons wrote me a very nice personal note, saying that I was the only person who had asked to work for them who wasn't already one of their own students. And they had to say no because they had to give first place to their own students, but it was a very sweet note. And they couldn't believe that I was all the way over in Winnipeg of all places, and I knew who they were.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And that first year, did the school provide you what you were looking for?

AA BRONSON: Well, the great thing about that school was the library—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —which was a fantastic library. Just unbelievable library. And the main reason it was a good library was because of the Dean. And the Dean was—what was his religion?

THEODORE KERR: Jesuit?

AA BRONSON: No, it was more—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: John Russell?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. John Russell. His religion was such—I mean, there was a bit—kind of a big emphasis put on the equivalent of tithing. But rather than tithing to the church, it was tithing to the school.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, he spent a certain percentage of his income on books that were donated to the library.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And every month, there was a big table, when you—the news came in that were all books donated by him. It was a fantastic selection. It was a wonderful library. So I spent a lot of time in that library. It was really, really good. I mean, even thinking back on it today, I'm amazed at how high the quality of that library was. And then the building—who designed that building? Mark, do you know who designed that building?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Maybe. Maybe he did. It was very much in the vein of the Parkens, you know of this Modernist—with—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: The John Russell Building it became. Yeah, that's true. Maybe it was designed by him, and it had a glass curtain wall cladding. It was one of the first—it was very, very early for that kind of technology, and a beautiful building. And then the architect—the people who taught there were very inclined towards things like social housing. A lot of the exercises involved group housing, collective housing. And, in fact, when I was there in first year, I remember the—I think that the fifth year students had to do social housing as their final project. And I still remember all of those projects, and I think that—what's the Canadian architect, Japanese/Canadian?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: No.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: No. Not Moriyama. More Canadian sounding name. Designed a lot of wood. Who did the college at the U of T? The—what's it called the—you know—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: What's his name?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: It's a short name.

AA BRONSON: It's a short name. Anyway, he was one of those fifth year students. Anyway, it was very, you know, very interesting—there were only a handful of fifth year students, but they were doing such interesting work. And having their projects ongoing all around social housing kind of also gave an atmosphere to the whole school in a way. It was all very open. It wasn't—the lecture rooms had doors on them, but the labs, as we called them—our drafting rooms—were just big, open spaces. If you walked in a big circle, you would go through all the years. You know. So you could see everything that everyone was working on, not just your own year.

Although in first year, we were put in—they had run out of space—and we were put in a separate, little building. Anyway, so first year, I was very unhappy in school. I did really well in first year. Second year came. I had a complete nervous breakdown. I just hated it so much. I was so unhappy. And I dropped out I think halfway through second year, along with a group of—so now we're in the time—well, let me backtrack a bit again.

So in first year I was also discovered already by the university newspaper who got me to come and do a visual arts insert. There was an editor who chose me, who tracked me down, but I was the designer. It was called *Canticle*. Horrible name, and it had a horrible sort of art nouveau logo, and I did these—and because I was very distraught about what the university was like, because I think because of having had that grade eight experience, and then university, again, was just like high school. I mean, it really wasn't different at all in terms of—I mean, the quality of information was much higher, but the teaching technique and, you know, the way that we approached learning was exactly like grade seven or grade nine and not at all like it had been in that one year in grade eight. And I just hated it so much—I just—the lecture room—also, I had this thing about gazing out the window when I was in a lecture room, and the lecture rooms had no windows, or maybe very, very high clerestory windows that you couldn't see out of. And being in this box, I felt so claustrophobic, and I just hated being in those lectures. And I started writing—I started reading and writing about what was then at that time called radical education, which was I guess what I had been doing in grade eight. It was this free school movement had been beginning back then, and by the time I was in university, it was going full force. You know, there was a magazine coming out of Toronto called *This Magazine Is About Schools*.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And there was—what's the famous free school from London? I forget. Hmm?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: From where?

AA BRONSON: From London. Summerhill, was it called? Something like that. It was a big deal anyway at that time. Kind of experimental school. And they were beginning to experiment with high schools across Canada. And I became really involved with all these ideas, and I began—and I did several, or at least two anyway, big centerfold layouts for the university paper on the subject of education in the style of a kind of like San Francisco, hippy dippy, underground newspaper, which was also just beginning to appear.

THEODORE KERR: And circulating—like in Winnipeg, you would get it?

AA BRONSON: I don't know how I came to know about these things. That's the funny thing. But by the second year—in the second year of university, there were a group of eight of us who dropped out all from the same class and formed a commune and free school—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —around these ideas about education. And we also opened a store where we could sell whatever we made, and we started an underground newspaper called *Loving Couch Press*.

THEODORE KERR: And this was all in Winnipeg?

AA BRONSON: This was all in Winnipeg. Yeah, this was—so that would have been then '66 probably.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were these friends from the rooming house?

AA BRONSON: No, actually. No, they weren't. The friends were all classmates who also had equal—it kind of was an intellectual—we kind of were a weird group of people actually, because they weren't people I was close to at all, but we all had the same kind of political and social views. And we were all uncomfortable in the university setting. And so we rented—we really started something that became known and is known today as the Osborne Street Village. We rented the first kind of alternative—we found an empty storefront, and we opened a little store in the front, and we had our free school in the back, which was kind of our studio. And then we rented a big, old house a couple of blocks away that we set up as a Digger House. Do you know what a Digger House is?

THEODORE KERR: No, what's a Digger's House?

AA BRONSON: A Digger House—the Diggers date back to—I forget which century—and they were originally an obscure, Christian sect in England. The Diggers. But then when the kind of hippy movement started in San Francisco, there was a revival of this idea of the Diggers. The main thing about the Diggers was that they—the original Diggers had no personal property and shared everything, and were this very open philosophy of how you support your fellow man. And the Digger Houses in San Francisco were communes in which anybody could come and live there. I mean, there were certain—there was a certain process by which it was self-governed by the people in the house, but they always had things like—a Digger shop was usually involved, which could be a place where anybody could come and contribute something or take something, and you still see this today, right? You can take in an old shirt that you're not using anymore and take something that somebody else has left. And the Diggers were all about that kind of thing, so we based our house on that too.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Is this okay?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: I'm leaning forward. I wasn't sure whether I was—whether you were going to turn the machine off. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: No. [Laughs.]

So the eight of us plus a guy named Steven, Steven, Steven—Steven had graduated from the university from social—what was it called?—social—sociology, I guess. He had graduated from sociology the same year, and he came with us, and then there was also one of the students who had graduated from architecture the year before—Clive Russell—was one of those students who was in fifth year when I was in first year, and he came with us as well. And the other five of us were all from second year. And—from second year architecture.

So this was a kind of important—a very short and intense period in my life but very important. Oh yeah, the house—we had a Monday night meeting at which all issues were addressed, and our idea was everything had to be by consensus, so we didn't leave until all the issues were hammered out and everybody was in agreement, which meant it was often in the wee hours that that Monday night meeting would end. And then anybody who came to the door was allowed to move in with us on the condition that they participate fully in that Monday night meeting and go by those rules. So, increasingly, I mean, it grew very quickly. And at first, it was like very interesting people. And then the city discovered us—the city government, and there was a problem just beginning at that time, which was really rampant in the '60s, of runaways.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Of teenage runaways. And there was no—nothing in place in the social services of the city to deal with such a thing because it had never been seen before. And when it first began, they began sending them to us, because they knew we would give them a place to sleep, and we would fed them. And so, suddenly, we turned into this social services unit in a sense, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Although everybody was taking drugs like crazy. It was—anyway—I'm going to have to do another backtrack in a minute because I just thought of something else. So a year after we started it, it had grown to 65 people living in this—and it was a very large house. It had eight bedrooms, some of them very big bedrooms. But still it was basically wall-to-wall sleeping bags. And, at that time—and by then we had done the *Loving Couch Press* for a year. We had done, I don't know, eight or nine issues out, and I had also done something called *The Magazine*, which Clive and I did together. We did two issues of *The Magazine* and were working on a third, so a lot of publishing kind of stuff. And in the school, what we would do was grab visiting lecturers who were brought in for the school and ask them if they'd be willing to donate their time to come and spend some time with us. They all said yes, and they all were extremely generous. And the one I mentioned who I remember the most is—Marx, what's his name, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Oh, I think that would be [inaudible].

AA BRONSON: The Brazilian landscape designer.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Something, something, Marx [Roberto Burle Marx –AB], who was fantastic. And what I didn't realize at the time, but now looking at it—I have a big catalogue I got recently of his work, and I realize now looking at his book that he was gay. And that he was like this older, gay man. And he probably—I suspect he had a little bit of a crush on me, because he spent a lot of time—I was basically guiding him around everywhere and introducing him to everyone, and we had this very simpatico relationship.

THEODORE KERR: And your relationship to sexuality at that time was—

AA BRONSON: Well, this is—I've skipped over all of that. I mean, I think the first sex I ever had was in first year university. First year or second year? Must have been—I mean, the time is also compressed. Things happened so fast. It was after I had left residence, and I was living with my two friends in this rooming house. And there was a dentistry student who took an interest in me and basically seduced me. That was very short-lived. I think I had sex with him two or three times.

THEODORE KERR: And you went on a date, or—

AA BRONSON: Hmm?

THEODORE KERR: It was a date, or—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Any more drinks or anything?

AA BRONSON: I'm okay. Thank you.

THEODORE KERR: I'm good. Thank you.

AA BRONSON: So what was the question again?

THEODORE KERR: Did you guys go on dates?

AA BRONSON: No, I never went on dates. I mean, he came to our house for dinner. He had chatted me up somehow at the school—I don't really remember how we met, and we invited him for dinner. And then he sort of stayed very late and then asked if he could sleep on the couch and then I asked if I would come and cuddle with him on the couch, and it sort of went from there. That was the first time I'd ever had sex.

THEODORE KERR: Was your sexuality a surprise to you?

AA BRONSON: Oh, no. I had once received a blow job from a—that might have been around the same time though. I am—I hitchhiked to Montreal sometime in first year university because Bucky Fuller was going to be talking, and I was a fanatic about Bucky Fuller, and it was one of his—you know—I think it was a three hour lecture in the end. And I stayed with a friend of a friend who was, you know, probably 30, and had a real apartment with real furniture and stuff and a real job. He probably was an architect. And he seduced me and gave me a blow job. That was my—I don't remember which came first of those two.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] But your attraction to men wasn't a surprise to you?

AA BRONSON: I didn't really think about it. I also had an affair with a young woman who happened to be the—who was also an architecture student—but she was also the—this couldn't have happened now, more recently—she was also the girlfriend of one of the architecture professors as well as being an architecture student. And she had an affair with me too.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: At the same time of—just after the dentistry student probably.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And, again, it was that she seduced me. And I would just kind of like open to whatever came my way at that time.

THEODORE KERR: And was the commune—would you call it a commune?

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: What was—

AA BRONSON: It was formally a commune. That was how we talked about ourselves, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And some of the things that you hammered out, was it as into it as like, like interpersonal relationships?

AA BRONSON: Well, a lot of it would probably be interpersonal relationships, yeah. I don't remember so much. And there was always this movement towards being more and more radical, right. And I remember I had read about one of the Digger Houses, they had removed all the doors in the house, and I wanted to do that. I wanted all the doors removed in the house. But I was the only one there who wanted it, so—[laughs]—it didn't come to pass.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. So you—in the mode of consensus, you—

AA BRONSON: I realized that it would only be uncomfortable for people and that they weren't going to—it just wasn't the right group of people, and so I agreed.

THEODORE KERR: And was it a big deal that five of you left school all at once?

AA BRONSON: Yes, it was a big deal at the time, and we were kind of infamous for some years thereafter as the, you know, the year that—the year of—it was 1967, I think—so it's this—what's that, Summer of Love, or

whatever.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: It was that year. '67, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Do you guys think you talked yourself into it together, or was it something like you had personally thought about already, and—?

AA BRONSON: Somehow it just kind of—I actually don't remember how it came about. It just happened.

THEODORE KERR: As a—I don't know how it would have felt like—was it—did you think "I'm improving my life," "I'm ruining my life," "This is a decision I'll never regret"? Like what were some of your—

AA BRONSON: Oh, it was like something we had to do. There was no question about it. There was no decision to be made. It was just something that had to happen, and we just couldn't stand by and let and see our own education proceed in that way. You know, in that school, that we had to find an alternative way that we felt was kind of ethically and educationally better.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because what do you mean by "in that way"? Like what was wrong with what was going on at the school?

AA BRONSON: Well, it was that—it was probably the same way university is run now, frankly, but this very hierarchal structure within the school and very little room for experimentation and no self-governance at all. All the governance is coming from above. And no decision—no self-decision making about your own education. It's all coming from above. I mean, other than you've got certain electives, or something like that, but other than that, there's no—you know—and that grade eight class had really kind of ruined me in a way, you know, because I knew what it could have been.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I just hated it. I hated how structured it was and how unnecessary the structure seemed to be, and how it seemed to me that providing that structure was working against my education, not in favor of it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So that was—that was how we thought about it.

THEODORE KERR: And in the—in the commune—it was also a free school?

AA BRONSON: Well, let me tell one other little story, and that is that when we did move in—when I moved in with my friends in that rooming house, then at one point, one of them—the one who was straight got a girlfriend and then he moved into—we were in the attic. And, then at that point, he moved down one unit into the floor below with his girlfriend, and then there were—the two of us who were gay at the top. And then around that time is when—what's his name came through—I was kind of already known as the hippy of Winnipeg. I don't know why. But that was my reputation.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And what's his name? Here we go again. Abbie Hoffman came through town.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he had been—he was looking for a place to crash, and everybody—he met somebody who sent him to me, and we had the couch in the living room, and he slept there. Weirdly enough, my mother was visiting at that moment, so it was not the ideal moment for Abbie Hoffman to turn up. But he gave me a tab of acid as a gift when he left.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Amazing.

AA BRONSON: Because he had been in Regina where they were doing—was it Regina or Saskatoon where they did all the early experiments on LSD—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the reason he was there was to participate in those experiments.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And LSD was not a street drug yet.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So I was really like probably the first person in Winnipeg to take acid. [Laughs.] And I did so, you know, a few days later probably—

THEODORE KERR: With your mom still around? [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: No, after my mom left. She hated Abbie Hoffman.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Because he was only talking about how, you know, the generation of our parents has held us back and how they've, you know—how we're entering a new era. You know, the Age of Aquarius or whatever. All of this kind of thing. The parents were only in our way and that the kind of the—what do you want to call it? Not the standards, but the—in a way, the whole structural thinking of our parents' generation was going to—you know, was in the process of collapsing, and that something new was growing up.

THEODORE KERR: Did that seem true to you?

AA BRONSON: Yes, but—my mother was, you know, horrified.

THEODORE KERR: What did your mom think about your choices? To like leave school, to live in this house?

AA BRONSON: Well, we hadn't left school yet at that time. That was just before. So then the Bob Dylan album, *Blonde on Blonde*, had just come out, which was a big deal because it was the first one where he used electronic media, I think. And when I dropped my acid—I told this in my book story—I introduced the *Blonde on Blonde* album as one of the books, and I played "Sad Eyed Lady of the Low Lands," which was one entire side of a record. I put it on repeat for seven hours and listened to that. So that was my big coming into the drug era.

THEODORE KERR: Wait, and you were in your room? It was just you, acid, and Bob Dylan?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. And then, I think that my roommate was out of town, and Paul who lived with his girlfriend downstairs came home very late at night and came up to say goodnight, and there I was, you know, sitting on the floor. I mean, he knew I was going to take acid, so he probably came up to see if I was okay. And then they sat with me for the rest of the night—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —while I watched the goldfish in my aquarium turn into skeletons and so on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it was an interesting night anyway.

THEODORE KERR: What do you want—do you want to talk about the experience—your mom's relationship to your, like, choices? Do you want to talk about more life—

AA BRONSON: Well, you know, my mother had come from a very kind of artsy fartsy scene in Chelsea and London.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Her first husband was from a family of French chefs. He was French, and they knew a lot of people in the sort of—he worked at the—he worked at the Dorchester. He was the head waiter at the Dorchester, and his father was the chef at the Ritz, so they were in this kind of society of that type of people, like fashion and food and all of that. Her best friend was a fashion designer who later became the designer for the Queen Mother, and her mother-in-law decided that she should have her own business. This is in the '30s, right? And the mother-in-law being French, that's so amazing to me, and they bought her a hair dressing salon.

THEODORE KERR: They bought your mother—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, the family bought my mother—her father—her husband's family, because my mother was from a very poor family. Her father was an artist—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who was actually by then in a vegetable state in a hospital somewhere from alcohol problems. And she didn't know anything about hairdressing, but she said she would sit at the front desk and do her nails and collect money.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And it was on the very end of King's Road on—what's it called? Is it called World's End? Land's End? Something or the other. It's where the original Vivienne Westwood Seditionaries Store was—is still today actually. And there's a—at some point maybe in the '90s my mother's sister, I think it was, sent her a newspaper clipping from the '30s—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —which is a profile of my mother in the women's section of the newspaper. And it's completely fascinating to me, because it describes the two of them. He would take every Friday off. Friday was his day off, and he would buy a big bunch of flowers, and he would come and do the window of the shop, and he would completely redo it. He would do like a—it had a kind of half wall, and he would do like a buttoned leather or backing and then this big bouquet of flowers. He would do a completely different interior each time with a complete different flower arrangement every time. Like totally faggy you know. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Totally. Yeah.

AA BRONSON: And then in the article they describe how much they looked alike. They were like twins.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they had had identical gray pinstripe suits made, so when they went out together, they would wear matching men's gray, pinstripe suits. Like, again, very like lesbian looking for my mother.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, so queer for both of them.

AA BRONSON: And they had matching pajamas and matching dressing gowns.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And they both ate the identical thing for breakfast. They would sit together in their matching outfits eating matching breakfasts in this article. And what else? There was a whole bunch of stuff like this. It's like completely nutty.

THEODORE KERR: They sort of seem like an art collective before they would have known what it was.

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So when the war broke out—so I have to backtrack to that story. When the war broke out, he joined the free French Air Force, which meant that he would be put with somebody—whoever needed him—and he was put with the Canadian Air Force, and he was trained to be a pilot.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he was my father's co-pilot. They flew together through the war and were best friends—became best friends. And the three of them would go everywhere together. And I had somebody question recently whether maybe they had been a threesome. Which, it's possible. And then one day my father was sick, and Marcel was his name—Marcel was shot down over Cologne where they had been bombing every day, and then my mother and father got married six weeks later.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Like obviously in the midst of grief for both of them. So I think it was like my father wanted to look after my mother for Marcel. My father, in the meantime, had been working in all-male communities. You know, in logging camps and as a cowboy, and had never had a girlfriend. [Laughs.] So that's sort of the background story on my mother's side. Now why did that come up? You asked me a question, and this is going back to—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, no, it's a great introduction. I said, "What was her response to you dropping out of school and living in this house?"

AA BRONSON: Oh, yeah. So when—so all the time growing up, I think she always, always really wanted me to be an artist. She wanted me, at any rate, to be in this kind of milieu that she had had to leave, I think. You know, that she had had left behind a certain kind of life, and she wanted me to have that kind of life. And she made a

point of teaching me when I was a kid, you know, like, rather excessive table manners. How to use what at the time would have been rather obscure selections of knives and forks and things. All this kind of thing. And then when I went to university—I mean, when I dropped out of university, she was I think extremely unsure. Quite freaked out about it. And when I would still go home at Christmas and so on, and she would be very, very like "what have I done" about herself. You know, like "what have I done that I've created this child whose like given up everything" and—but once I started having exhibitions, then she immediately came around full-circle. She was like completely supportive. I was traveling internationally in some, which happened quite quickly once the General Idea started. But there was a period where she was completely freaked out about the whole hippy thing.

THEODORE KERR: And the commune—how long did 26 of you live there?

AA BRONSON: Sixty-five of us?

THEODORE KERR: Oh, sorry, 65!

AA BRONSON: Well, it—the whole thing—I left after a year—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and there were 65 people at that point. It had grown gradually—I mean, not so gradually. It had quickly been growing, and then I left with Clive for Montreal, and that's another whole story. And I was—I was going to visit a commune in Montreal that also did an underground newspaper that had a very similar kind of structure and seemed—but it was also bilingual. It was both French and English, and I thought it sounded like an interesting model, so intellectually, that's what I was supposedly going to do. And then I also wanted to see Rochdale College in Toronto, which was just in its beginning stages. You know anything about—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-mm [negative].

AA BRONSON: Okay. Rochdale College was—originally it was two big old houses made into a single commune by students at the University of Toronto. And then they actually got it together to raise the money to build a—I think a sixteen-, twelve- or sixteen-story building as a new commune from scratch. Built it from scratch. Which also had an educational component. So the first—the ground floor was a space to be rented out, and then the next two floors were, I think, for educational space. And it was under the auspices of the U of T as well. And this—they were just at that point building that building, and so I wanted—oh, no. It had just opened, so I wanted to see those two things: Rochdale College—the new Rochdale College—and these people in Montreal. But really, I was in love with Clive.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And Clive was really going to Montreal supposedly because he had been transferred there by the architectural firm he worked for. They had an office in Montreal. But really because he was chasing his girlfriend who had broken up with him and moved to Montreal.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So I lasted in Montreal—I don't know—a month, six weeks, I don't know, something like that—living with Clive.

THEODORE KERR: Just heartbroken? [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Just heartbroken the whole time. And he's heartbroken also, the whole time. And then I realized I should move on, and I—I mean, I met the people. I saw the commune, but I realized I had no—when I was actually there, it seemed like a nice group of people—interesting, kind of nice, intellectual community, but it didn't grab me at all.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I didn't know what that meant exactly, but I didn't feel the connection. So I hitchhiked to Toronto and went to Rochdale. And because I knew all the people who had organized Rochdale through all the—I had spoken at a lot of conferences about radical education and the commune movement, and all this kind of thing, so I knew all these people who had set all this in motion. And they gave me—they put me in with Mimi Paige who I had known at school and who was living there, and it was set up like a student residence. So there were rooms that were single rooms, and there were rooms that were double rooms, and then there were things that were more free form where you had, like, a group of rooms like around a communal area. There were different kind of spatial structures within the building. But anyway, they put me in with Mimi and managed to lose the fact that she didn't have a roommate so that I wouldn't have to—you know—so they basically never rented out my bed, so I lived there free. And they gave me ticket vouchers to the cafeteria that they—which was

a kind of communal cafeteria. So I stayed—and that's where I also met, at that time, *Coach House Press*, which I'd been in touch with because of my interest in publishing and doing the underground paper. *Coach House Press* was an early—you know that period in the '60s when all these little, independent presses sprung up. The reason they sprang up was because all that equipment—out of date equipment—the technology was shifting really rapidly in the '60s, and all this equipment was basically being thrown in the garbage—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and people in my generation were grabbing the equipment and moving it into garages and starting to print their own stuff. So *Coach House Press* was completely made of antiquated equipment that they had gotten for free. And they mostly were doing poetry. They were kind of a sub-project of Rochdale. And so like, somebody like Allen Ginsberg came in as a visiting poet at Rochdale and then would also produce a book at Coach House at the same time, and I started apprenticing at Coach House and learning skills, typesetting skills, and all that kind of thing. Design. Actual, physical skills in putting together a book, not just the kind of skills that I was learning by accident as it were, doing *Loving Couch Press* and the university newspaper. And so I started designing books for *Coach House Press*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the other thing that was an offshoot of Rochdale College was Theatre Passe Muraille, which was the first underground theatre group in Toronto.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And their first production, called *Futz*, I got involved with, and I did a kind of lobby display for that, which was—it feels almost like a General Idea work. It's funny. It was like a kind of wall-sized, or very large, sheet of clear plastic. Multiple sheets of clear plastic divided into a grid. I heat sealed in a grid, and then into each pocket was put a pig snout in brine. Because Toronto was full of Eastern Europeans at this time, so a pig snout in brine was actually easy to get. [Laughs.] And the play involves this kind of a political satire. The central figure is a pig, so these pig snouts in plastic was the lobby display.

THEODORE KERR: I think—did you also make the program or do some *Futz* drawings?

AA BRONSON: Well, there's some disagreement about this. I'm not really sure. Fern, in working on the archive of General Idea, insists that I designed the poster, but I don't think I did.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

AA BRONSON: I don't think I did. I don't remember designing it, and it doesn't—it's possible that I did, but it just doesn't ring bell—I mean, I'm familiar with the poster, because I lived with it through that whole period, but I don't think I actually designed it. But there's maybe a small chance that I did and just don't remember. So that got me sort of very quickly into the Toronto scene. And I had been planning on going back to Winnipeg, but then around that time I had heard that the commune had closed. It kind of collapsed under its own weight—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and was over. So I stayed in Toronto and went through a period of living in different places and then I continued to work at both Coach House and Theatre Passe Muraille, but especially Theatre Passe Muraille. At a certain point, I mean, we got a—for the theatre we got a building, which was an old—the old community hall for Trinity—the Trinity Church which is now in the middle of the Eaton Center. And I became totally homeless at one point. I was completely broke.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And we were doing a play called *Home Free*, which takes place in a studio apartment. So the theatre set was like a studio apartment with a bed and a little kitchenette and everything, and that's where I lived. When the play would close down, I would move in, and I lived in the set of *Home Free* for, you know, not so long. A few weeks.

THEODORE KERR: And the irony escaping nobody? That someone had—someone who was home free was staying on the set of *Home Free.* [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: I don't know the extent—[laughs]—it was quite weird. Mimi, in the meantime—I had moved out of Rochdale College because at a certain point they couldn't continue giving me free room and board. And Mimi, who I had been staying with—Mimi had been an interior design student at Winnipeg when I was an architecture student in the same year, and this artist Ron Gabe was visiting her from Winnipeg, who I had known vaguely. You know, he was in—he was in fine arts, which was the next building over when I was in architecture, and he

was like the kind of child prodigy of the art school. Always doing kind of notorious things. And he was coming to town. And they—she really—she was really his girlfriend at that point, and she was trying to get him to stay in Toronto so she came up with this idea. She found this little house on Gerrard Street West that—and she decided that a bunch of us should move in. Me and then our friend Jorge who—"friend" in quotation marks because we had only known each other a month—but he had come from Toronto from Halifax. Had graduated from architecture and was on his way to Vancouver to join the Intermedia group in Vancouver and got sort of held up in the everything going on in Toronto. Basically never left. And all of us moved into this little house together that she found in '69.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that kind of was the beginning of General Idea. So that's the preamble to General Idea. What have I left out? Oh, when I left Winnipeg, I needed money to be able to travel. I had no money, and I sold all my books including these two books. [Laughs.] And I never—I so regretted it from then on. I mean, almost immediately regretted it. I had been building quite a nice little collection of stuff and art and architecture and so on, and I sold them all. And that looked after me for a little while, I guess, but I regretted having done it. And I never did it again. After that, I never threw anything away.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] What's interesting about all this time is that it really seems like collectivity was everywhere you—

AA BRONSON: Yes. Absolutely. Yeah. And also the—oh! I didn't—there's one other thing I should mentioned about the commune. Near the beginning of the commune, there was a professor from Regina—Regina?—I always get Regina and Saskatoon messed up. One of the two anyway. What was his name? Arthur?—anyway, he was doing his—he was working on his, I think, his PhD, and it was on the subject of group therapy for intentional communities.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so he offered to come to us once a month and do group therapy for the house. And he started doing that, and you know, already by the third time, the population of the house was growing so fast and he said for his own research purposes, it could only be the original group that he had first met with. He didn't want anybody else. So we sort of had a fight about it, but in the end we broke down, so the originators of the house—the seven or eight of us—would meet with him once a month and do group therapy. And I took to it like a duck to water. Somehow. And he asked me if I would travel with him across western Canada doing group therapy for different kinds of intentional groups.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So co-ops and different kinds of things. And I said yes, and so I went to Regina—I think it was Regina, and then from there, just traveled with him as his assistant. And we—at first, I would just be—for the first couple of times, I was just in the groups when he did them, but then he started—he broke it out so that I would do the morning—I would do the—we would split the group in two in the morning, and I would do half, and he would do half.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So he taught me enough skills that I could do half a day without him and without his supervision, and then the second half of the day, and sometimes there would be a second day, he would do the whole group. And I guess what I was running them through was kind of the introductory workshops, kind of exercises in a way about how a group works. And so by the time I finished—that probably didn't go on for a really long time. Oh! By the time we got to Vancouver, it was in the days when what's his name had started doing his therapy—Gestalt therapy. Who's the Mr. Gestalt Therapy.? Anyway, the famous Gestalt therapist—who was American, German-American I think—had moved to Vancouver Island and had set up the Gestalt Institute in Victoria, and everything called Gestalt therapy comes originally from that institute.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Fritz Perls.

AA BRONSON: Pardon?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Fritz Perls.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, that's right. Your aunt was involved in that. I remember that. I much later discovered. And we got together with them—they came—the key people from that came to Vancouver, and we also did a session of us with the people from the Gestalt Institute.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So—and my "teacher" I'm going to call him, this guy I traveled with—was very heavily influenced by Gestalt and very interested in Gestalt, which is a—I don't know if you know anything about Gestalt?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-mm [negative].

AA BRONSON: But it's about—it's about—it takes the body into account, so like—what, I mean—it always begins with—and very similar to what he was doing—it begins with, you know, what are you sensing in your body at this moment? If we were doing therapy together, I would be asking you to describe to me like, what do you feel in your body? What do you feel in your arms or your legs or in your mouth? What's the sensations—the physical sensations in your body? And beginning from there?

THEODORE KERR: So these were workshops that you were—well, I don't know if that's the word that you used—these were the sessions that you—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, they were workshops. They were workshops. So I would lead the morning part, which would be more like—it was a method that we took immediately—it was very much like our Monday night meetings. You know, like, we would go from person to person. Everybody would have to talk, and we would say where we were at, at that moment.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, it's a typical kind of process now, but it wasn't at the time at all typical, where each person is at physically and mentally and emotionally in that group and whether they're, you know, looking forward to the workshop, or whether they're afraid, and how you're feeling. You know, do you feel—are you feeling tension? Are you feeling, you know, blah, blah, blah? And then it would get more elaborate in the afternoon sessions. Sometimes very traumatic. Because people's relationship to other people as a more generic kind of relationship to people in general would start to come out of the woodwork. You know, like, people who mentally had always had a kind of barrier between them and other people, for example, would be the first to reveal themselves.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Did this come in handy on Gerrard Street? Like do you feel like—

AA BRONSON: Yes. Well that definitely was like in a very informal way. Yeah, we would—basically for the entire duration of General Idea, we were basically doing group therapy for 25 years.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We never stopped, which was going on all the time, within a kind of play structure. Not formalized as therapy, but it was exactly—all those methods. I realized that's what I brought to General Idea was my understanding of group process.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that's what allowed us to collaborate. And collaborations usually break up fairly quickly, and we were able to go for 25 years.

THEODORE KERR: And how long did you tour with them—with the doctor?

AA BRONSON: I don't know. I've often asked myself that. It might have been a week or it might have been several months.

THEODORE KERR: Really? No scope?

AA BRONSON: I can't get it—you know, it felt like a long time, but then when I actually tried to think, well, where did we do it? It's not that many places. Although we sometimes would spend some time—we did a Simon Fraser University, and we probably spent a week there all told, and we had other interactions with the—Simon Fraser had just opened. It was a big deal, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was the very, very experimental and cutting edge everything. But then when I think about the rest, it's all a bit vague. I can really only remember Simon Fraser clearly.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The other weird thing was—and at Simon Fraser, word had got out amongst the students about the workshop that we were doing, which was with a particular group of maybe a co-op or something within the school. And when we came out for lunch, there was a big crowd outside wanting to meet us.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And amongst that crowd was Jorge who was there working with this, again, collaborative group, Intermedia in Vancouver. He was there for the summer.

THEODORE KERR: And so then when you met him in Toronto, he was trying to get back there?

AA BRONSON: Yes, he was trying to get back there, because he had gone back to Halifax for his last year of school.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he was on his—and he had packed up all his belongings, bought an old car, packed up all his belongings and his cat, and was driving across Canada to get to Vancouver, and stopped—he apparently was in love with me, which I didn't know at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And found me—you know, just, I fell into his lap in a way. He came to Theatre Passe Muraille because he knew somebody who was doing a production there from Halifax, and he was a movie—he was really, as well as being an architect, which he wasn't really—he was a filmmaker. He worked as a cinematographer. A 16 millimeter cinematographer for various Canadian filmmakers over the years. He stopped to shoot a theatre production at Theatre Passe Muraille where I was, and then he just never left.

THEODORE KERR: How did he know you, to be in love with you?

AA BRONSON: Apparently when he was at the door in Vancouver—[laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: He was smitten?

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] Yes.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember meeting him in Vancouver?

AA BRONSON: I have this vaguest memory, and I'm not sure whether I've invented it or whether it's real.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I like that. So yeah.

AA BRONSON: That's how it happened.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember the relationship with the doctor? I can't remember if you said his name, or if you remember his name?

AA BRONSON: The psychologist?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, the psychologist.

AA BRONSON: I was trying to remember. I can see his face so clearly, and when I can see people's faces, I can't remember their names. It will come to me later. It's not that I don't know it, I just can't—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —pull it out of my memory right now, and I haven't been able to find any trace of him at all. I don't know what happened. I did meet him once again in Toronto in maybe about '71. He came—he tracked me down—and he came and visited General Idea. And, at that point, we were living on Yonge Street in a big like two floors—a big, huge loft, and he was very dismissive of what we were doing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because—I think because it wasn't formalized in this—the kind of way that he was used to, and because he just saw us hanging out, wearing funny clothes—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —in this elaborate environment we had built around ourselves, and he just saw it as a waste of time, I think. He like took me aside and warned me that I should really get out of there and I should get back to what I had been doing with him.

THEODORE KERR: Did you—well, what did you make of that?

AA BRONSON: Well, I knew he was wrong. I just, I didn't—I just didn't really respond.

THEODORE KERR: And the weeks, or the months, or the years that you toured Canada with him, did you guys get along? Were you friendly?

AA BRONSON: Oh, yeah. Very friendly. I often wondered if he was bisexual maybe. There were a number of girls that he bedded that were in the time that I was with him, but I always felt like there was some kind of sexual thing between us, but it was never manifested in any way whatsoever.

THEODORE KERR: And did you feel sexual towards him?

AA BRONSON: Well, you see, I had—yeah. I wasn't a very sexual person in my 20s. I hardly had sex at all really. But I remember when I first—when I went to his apartment in Regina—I had arrived in Regina, and we were going to go on this tour, and I was going to be staying in his apartment for the first night. I arrived at the door, and he answered the door, and he was naked.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: He was like—he had bright, bright red hair and a goatee—bright red goatee. He was covered in bright red hair. It was really like a satyr, like extremely sexy. And I was like—

THEODORE KERR: That's a lot.

AA BRONSON: Hmm?

THEODORE KERR: That's a lot.

AA BRONSON: Yes. Well, it wasn't what I was expecting, you know, when the door opened.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: He never tried to seduce me or anything, but I have the feeling that that might have been a bit of a test.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like to see if I was open to seduction, and I sort of acted as if this was the most normal thing in the world that he would be—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: —naked.

THEODORE KERR: Earlier you said that when you were really little you remembered feeling like you had to be a good boy for your mom. And I'm wondering, did that sort of idea stay with you into your teens and 20s?

AA BRONSON: I probably still have it now.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: But certainly, yeah. Certainly until—the going into the commune was like the real break with that. Yeah. It was really breaking from the parental rule and from the idea of being a good boy. Like trying to break—I felt like I have spent my entire adult life trying to figure out how not to be a good boy, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like it's really hard. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, it's an audio, so people can't see how you're sitting, so people can't see your body, but when I asked you that question, your hands were literally like crossed like a good boy.

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: In your lap.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: So let's think back about that moment where maybe you saw Jorge in Vancouver. What was some of your first like—we know we have an idea of how he felt about you. Do you remember how you felt?

AA BRONSON: No, I don't—I actually—I was—you know, when I focus on something, I just become 100 percent in that thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I was focused on the workshop.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I was just like totally—I had really no interest—I was interested in the fact that there were so many people outside of the door that wanted to meet us. It was like being a minor celebrity, and I had never experienced that. But otherwise, I had no—I didn't—I was still in the mental space of the workshop itself—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and so I couldn't—I didn't want to meet anyone or anything, and I didn't—I didn't really talk to anybody or anything, so—

THEODORE KERR: And then fast-forward to the house on Gerrard—

AA BRONSON: There's something I've missed along the way. What is—I thought of it at one moment. What was it? Well, I guess maybe I'll think of it. If I think of it again, I'll let you know, but I've lost it whatever it was.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want me to ask some questions to try to get it back, or—

AA BRONSON: No, that's okay. So that takes us through to the beginning of General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Right. Pretty much.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. So, can you say again who is in the house on Gerrard?

AA BRONSON: Well, when we started, it was a tiny house, but we were all completely broke. So Mimi and Ron, as he was then called—later to become Felix—had the attic. And the floor below that, Jorge had the back bedroom, and I had the front bedroom, and then there was a bedroom in the middle, which was—I think it was originally a friend of Mimi's who left and was replaced by a guy named Danny. And Danny was an actor. He was from Montreal. Danny Freedman. And then across the street, we very quickly met this woman who later became Granada Gazelle, who became part of General Idea almost immediately. She ended up practically living in the house. You know, she lived across the street, but she was there all the time. And then there was another woman, Honey, who was also there all the time. And how Honey found us or we found her, I don't know, but she was—she was also—one of us—we all kind of put up with her, but we didn't really—you know, she wasn't—she wasn't really one of us, but we let her be one of us. You know, it's a bit like that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And she lived with her parents in suburbia somewhere in an extremely middle class—in one of those houses where all the furniture is covered in plastic. That kind of environment.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We found her amusing a bit, which is kind of mean of us. Very early on, she showed us all her diaries from high school when she was younger. And the diaries were all—it's all extremely dramatic, and she writes to—a lot of it she writes to Anita Bryant who I guess back then was because of the Mickey Mouse Club or something. She writes to Anita Bryant—kind of prays to Anita Bryant.

THEODORE KERR: Annette Funicello or Anita Bryant?

AA BRONSON: Oh, sorry! Annette Funicello. She writes to Annette Funicello. Sorry.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: Annette Funicello. I'm glad you figured that out. And prays to Annette Funicello because she had met—God, what's the singer?—the same generation as Annette.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Frankie Avalon or—

AA BRONSON: Another one. Same genre. An Italian name. Mario something?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: No.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: No, it was a single guy. Anyway, and he had come to Toronto and performed in some little club, and she had seen him perform. She was all into music, and she had fallen in love with this guy, and she had gone backstage and with her best friend who turned out to be like a cute, gay boy. And Mario something. And he completely made friends with them—this singer. She thought because of her, but of course, it was because of the guy.

THEODORE KERR: Oh. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And in her diary she's praying to Annette to bring her and this guy together and she'll move to Hollywood and have this fabulous life, and—[laughs]—anyway, she was really a number.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: She lived in this kind of fantasy—very constructed fantasy world that was completely fascinating.

THEODORE KERR: And she just brought you guys the journals?

AA BRONSON: She brought us this big pile, and they were the pink ones with the girl in ponytails on cover. You know.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Pink vinyl with—just amazing.

THEODORE KERR: With a lock or no lock?

AA BRONSON: Yep. They had—well, they had locks and keys, but they were all open.

THEODORE KERR: Wow. And what—like—how did you guys relate to each other at the beginning? How did you—

AA BRONSON: Well, none of us had jobs. We had bits and pieces of work. Like I had my work at the theatre. I think mostly we hung out and took drugs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: In the living room. And then very quickly—I mean, because all of us were kind of hyperactive, but especially Jorge and Felix and I—oh, Mimi had a job. What did she do? I don't even remember. And Granada across the street ran the—was already back then running the—was called at that point I think the Toronto Filmmaker's Distribution something or other. It's now the Canadian Filmmaker's something.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AA BRONSON: It's a distribution—a collective distribution thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so one of the things is that Granada would bring home films on the weekend, and we would have—and borrow a projector, and we would watch movies constantly. So Kenneth Anger films and all sorts of stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That was great. And then we would collect the garbage—I mean, this is a story that I've told a million times, but we would collect the garbage from the neighboring businesses. And the living room—the store—it had been made into a store at one point, this little house, and it was right on the sidewalk. There was no

front yard or anything, and the living room window had been made into a store window. And so we started doing these fake stores in the window of—the one I remember most vividly was a store of nurses' romance books, because we found boxes and boxes of them being thrown away at a bookstore. So we set up this fake store, and we had a little sign on the door that said "Back in five minutes," and there was a nurse's residence immediately around the corner, so all these nurses would come and look in the window. And the word got around, I guess. The nurses would all come and look, and we would hide in the back and giggle and—but that was the kind of thing we were doing, was that kind of thing.

And it's right then that I—like we had been living there maybe three or four months that—no, because I took off twice during that period. It's weird. Time seems so compressed. You know, like, I think we only lived there like one year, but in that one year, I managed to move out twice. Once I moved to Vancouver, just for a visit. I guess I was probably only gone for a month, but it feels like a lifetime. And the other time I got my own apartment on Queens Street West, but then I moved back in again as well.

THEODORE KERR: Can you take us through some of the reasoning?

AA BRONSON: For moving out?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and then moving back.

AA BRONSON: I guess I was questioning my own—because I had gone through this whole commune thing and the group therapy thing, Gestalt—I was questioning what I was doing with my life, I guess. And being with these people who had no interest in any of these things.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Except peripherally. I mean, kind of intellectually, but it was very minor and just seemed to be fooling around all the time. They were just fooling around, making these fake stores, for example. And I was very—I think very judgmental and critical. So one of the—and at the same time, I was involved with Theatre Passe Muraille, and Theatre Passe Muraille became involved with a big, big project called the Festival of Underground Theatre, which was in Toronto in '70. I think maybe in June of 1970, in which experiments—like the biggest name—like the most now famous groups from all over the world gathered in Toronto at the St. Lawrence Center where there's two theatre spaces, and there were like three weeks of theatre productions by amazing people. And so I was very involved. I did the poster for that, and I got very involved with that, and so did General Idea. I mean, we weren't called General Idea yet, but we were invited to do something because we had started—we had started to be known as this group.

THEODORE KERR: Like the house was?

AA BRONSON: The house was somehow—because we would—I don't know, if we were invited to a party, we would all go together in a big group, and we would try to dress in identical outfits as much as possible, and things like that. We became a kind of clique or something. And we did a couple of projects with Theater Passe Muraille that were like happenings, so we were invited to do something for this Festival of Underground Theatre, which is where we did the first Miss General Idea Pageant.

THEODORE KERR: But later?

AA BRONSON: No, 1970.

THEODORE KERR: So just a second ago you said you weren't called General Idea yet.

AA BRONSON: No, we were called General Idea—sorry. We got called General Idea for the first time immediately before the festival started.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So we weren't called General Idea at the point at which I became involved, but by the time the performance happened, we were called General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And you said we got called General Idea, and was that like—

AA BRONSON: It was an accident. We were invited—the first real gallery exhibition we were in was at what's now called A Space. At the time, it was called the Nightingale Art [Gallery], and this was actually the last show under that name, and the next show they became A Space. But it was a group show of kind of conceptual art. Mostly Toronto-based but a certain—Dennis Oppenheim was in the show, and I think Vito Acconci.

And we were invited to do something there, and the project that we did we called General Idea, but they

misunderstood and thought it was the name of the group, and we didn't—and we thought, "Oh, great! Name of the group." And we let them call us that. And that we stayed forever more.

THEODORE KERR: And did you like it? Did you like that name?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, we liked that name, because it was kind of corporate sounding.

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

AA BRONSON: And extremely anonymous, and we were interested in the anonymity of it. That's what we wanted. We were trying to avoid this idea of the artist as the individual genius, and to work—I mean, already by just, by being kind of collaborative and more based on experimental theatre of the period than anything, we were already in this other realm. Not of the individual, you know. I mean, still today, the artist is the individual genius. It's never—the visual arts for some reason have never left this behind.

THEODORE KERR: But was this—was this something you all discussed?

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes. I mean, we would have these big—we were all big readers. We were reading all the time. We were all reading the latest theory books at the time. Through the '60s and '70s and well into the '80s, we were all very, very theory based and always reading the latest of the latest.

THEODORE KERR: To each other?

AA BRONSON: Well, no. Individually. Passing the books around. We always ate together, and that's something I had from the commune I guess. One of the rules at the commune—informal rules—in Winnipeg was, we would all eat together for the evening meal, because that's—and we would make it together, and we would eat it together, and that's what created the community.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And we continued that with General Idea. We always ate together. We all sat down. We had a round table, and we all sat down together along with anybody else who happened to come in. We would invite them to join us, and often those would be big—literally, roundtable—discussions about particular books we were reading at the time.

THEODORE KERR: And since we were talking about names a little bit earlier, you said, at that time, Felix was going by Ron?

AA BRONSON: Yes, originally, he was Ron Gabe, and Jorge was George. George Saia. Although his birth name was—his birth name was—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Slobodan Saia-Levy.

AA BRONSON: —Slobodan Saia-Levy. Jewish. He was born in a kind of low-level concentration camp in Italy in the war.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And when his parents were refugees after the war and ended up in Venezuela in Caracas, and they had to pretend to be Roman Catholics to go there, and so they changed their names, and he became—well, actually, he became Jorge when he went to Venezuela. But he escaped his parents by coming to Canada to study architecture, and changed his name to George to be more Canadian.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then we shifted it back to Jorge again. But, yeah, we all had—we were—Ron, Michael, and George at that time.

THEODORE KERR: And what about Mimi? Was Mimi—was that her name?

AA BRONSON: Mimi was Mimi, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: Mimi was always Mimi.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. And who else was living there?

AA BRONSON: Danny.

THEODORE KERR: Danny. The actor?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And was he an active part of General Idea at the time?

AA BRONSON: Well, he would take part in performances, but otherwise, no.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What about the roundtable discussions, or—

AA BRONSON: Well, he kind of moved out—see, we lasted—we lasted in that place, in that little house, for one year. There was no roundtable there. And then we moved into this place at 69 Young Street in the financial district where we had all this space, and that's where the roundtable was. And he—I think he left soon after we arrived there.

THEODORE KERR: But you guys moved as a group there?

AA BRONSON: We moved as a group there, and then he didn't last very long there. So that kind of roundtable discussion, he was kind of gone by then. He moved back to Montreal.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: Because he got a part in *Fortune in Men's Eyes*, and they shot it in Montreal.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

AA BRONSON: He moved back there and never came back to Toronto.

THEODORE KERR: And at this point—when you guys moved to Yonge Street, there had been the exhibition at Nightingale and the first Miss General Idea Pageant?

AA BRONSON: Yes. Well, we did projects—we did endless projects. We did the happenings at the theater, and we did another kind of theatre production called—called what? I can't remember. I mean, I've got it all right here. I can look it up.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: And we did a lot of kind of informal kind of event-like things, like, we would all go together on a particular walk, and we would call it a project.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So it was kind of—what do they call it now? What do they call it? You know, it was about event—artwork as a kind of social activity in a sense.

THEODORE KERR: Like immersive?

AA BRONSON: No. What do they call it, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Oh, it's okay. There's whole courses in it at university now. Like in—oh, God. Guggenheim did a big show on it.

THEODORE KERR: Social practice?

AA BRONSON: Social Practice.

THEODORE KERR: Social Practice.

AA BRONSON: So it's like the early days of Social Practice before Social Practice existed in like the late '60s and early '70s. And we made our film, *God Is My Gigolo*, we shot it in '69 or '70 when we were in that little house. We did a lot of different—I mean, we were just non-stop doing stuff all the time.

THEODORE KERR: And were you—

AA BRONSON: Pouring out.

THEODORE KERR: And you were thinking of it as art? You were thinking of it just as projects?

AA BRONSON: We thought of it as art. We thought of ourselves somehow as artists, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was that a shift for you? Was that a comfortable—

AA BRONSON: No, I always wanted to be an artist. I always really knew I was one, so no, I just slid right into it instantly.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It felt much more comfortable than I had been as an architect.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And had there been a time when you called yourself an architect?

AA BRONSON: Well, I worked in a couple of architect's offices. But not really. Not really, no.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: No, I didn't call myself anything, and then also because of the therapy—my working with therapy stuff and commune stuff and radical education—I didn't really know where I was headed. You know, like, I felt like it was something to do with all those things, but I didn't know what. The architecture didn't play so big a part in it anymore once I left the school. You know. It became quite a minor component in something that was broader.

THEODORE KERR: And even looking back at it now, do you think that's true, or do you actually see how architecture—?

AA BRONSON: No, architecture was a part of it for sure, and a big part of my—I don't know exactly how to describe it, but even today—like when we moved here to Berlin, I started thinking about these first two books that I remembered from high school, and I went online and bought them again.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because I sold them when I left Winnipeg and always regretted it. Right? So now I have these two books again, and there some kind of touchstone. And they're both architectural books. They're not contemporary architecture, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: One's from the mid-1600s, and the other one is much older than that, but—

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

AA BRONSON: But it's still kind of—I think on some level, it also comes back to this stuff about the body and ritual and how you move through space and, I don't know, how meaning is constructed. All these things are embedded in it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So my take on architecture came from that perspective. Even social housing in a way is all about that.

THEODORE KERR: And when you—when we think about you all living together in those first two places, what were the relationships like? How did you all—like we know how dinner went—but how was other—?

AA BRONSON: Well, we started doing *File* magazine quite early. I think I was kind of the organizer.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Capital O. I wasn't happy unless I had something to organize, and you know, I—in my life, when I look back, I see like I had this habit of founding institutions in a way. So like the commune and the school and the underground paper was one little constellation, and then General Idea, and then *File* magazine, and then there's Art Metropole, and it sort of goes along like that. And, for sure, both *File* magazine and Art Metropole—my need for a project to work in comes into play on both of those a lot. You know, like I was definitely the lead

person on Art Metropole especially, but also *File*. So I began organizing these projects and raising money for them. But not as a leader of the group by any means. Well, a friend in Holland, Louwrien Wijers described General Idea as that I was the sail. I gave movement to everything and that Jorge was the [keel. . . –AB]. And then Felix was at the back on the engine, you know—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —providing direction, which he very much did in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So—so almost immediately—I mean, we—when I look back, it's just remarkable to me the volume of output that we had in that period. Well, in our entire 25 years ago together was like nonstop production, all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Is that how you guys—is that how you got to know everybody, was through work?

AA BRONSON: I guess so, yeah. I don't know really. And through living together really. Just through the drama of domestic life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like who gets the bathroom, who ate all the cereal?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Who won't get out of bed until 2 in the afternoon, you know. Those things. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And when did Mimi stop—like, did she move out? Like how—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, she moved out—well, the whole—when we lost—[coughs]—sorry. It was 87 Yonge Street. There was 78 Gerrard and then 87 Yonge Street. When we lost 87 Yonge Street, we didn't know what we were going to do. We had trouble finding a place. And that's the point at which the group kind of moved apart. Mimi moved back to Winnipeg to go back to school, because she had figured out at that point that Felix was really gay. And Granada moved out and found her own place and got a job at the CBC as a costume designer. And basically, it was just Jorge and Felix and I left. And we ended up finding a—where was Felix? Where was Felix in that period? There's a kind of weird period where we found another space further up Yonge Street where we started Art Metropole, and we had Art Metropole in the front half, and it was our studio in the back half. But Jorge and I found a little apartment on Queens Street East. Felix was living somewhere else with this weird, young street kid. And that didn't last too long. And then we found the big loft on Simcoe Street, and we moved all back into together, the three of us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And started Art Metropole a block away and moved Art Metropole to Richmond Street around the corner from us. So there was that funny period where everything seemed to be in motion, and we weren't sure what was happening—whether we were, you know, whether we were going to hang together as a—well, we knew we would keep together as a group, but we didn't know if we would keep together as a domestic group.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know. Or just as an artist. So that was '73—between '73 and '77 it got kind of crazy.

THEODORE KERR: And did you guys like each other from the beginning? Like, was there a bond?

AA BRONSON: Well, I really like Jorge and Felix. Jorge really liked me. Felix really liked me, and they weren't so crazy about each other all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: There was quite a bit of friction between the two of them over the years, but it was also—that was also a, you know, a point of creation, that friction.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so that time was?

AA BRONSON: I was obviously the glue that held it together.

THEODORE KERR: And were you aware of that at the time?

AA BRONSON: Not really, I don't think, no. Not really.

THEODORE KERR: And what did—like, sometimes in a group or a triad what can happen is there can be weird

feelings when like two people go see a movie together and the third person doesn't—or like, how did you navigate all of that stuff?

AA BRONSON: We-we sorted that out fairly quickly, I think. The three of us had quite independent lives actually.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And independent sex lives. So, I mean, in the early days, we would—the group, when we were more like five, six, seven of us—depending on what was going on, we would all go everywhere together. It was a very tight unit, you know, and it was kind of a performance wherever we went, but once we moved into Simcoe Street, then we kind of relaxed into—you know. We each had our own—we had a huge loft, and we each had our own bedroom. One in the middle, one at the back, and one at the front, with workspaces in between, and our lives became much more, in a sense, more independent. Although we ate together a lot still. Jorge loved to cook, and so I think the reason that we continued to eat together was because he liked to cook for us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember what kind of stuff he liked to cook?

AA BRONSON: Well, his background is, you know, his parents were Yugoslavian Jews, so the—it was a lot of very Eastern European food that he would cook. He was a good cook.

THEODORE KERR: And you remember those meals?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. And so you said you were kind of independent by then, so does that mean you were all dating and going out dating?

AA BRONSON: Dating, no. Like going to steam baths and what have you, or parks, more than dating. Although Felix had the occasional boyfriend—well, he had that young street kid who also moved in with us on Simcoe Street for a while. Total disaster. But Felix tended to have more boyfriends, and Jorge and I tended to be more independent and more anonymous sex.

THEODORE KERR: And was there attraction and intimacy between the three of you?

AA BRONSON: Well, that's something I never really talk about. There was at the beginning. There was a period between Jorge and me, and there was a period between Felix and me. But I don't really talk about that.

THEODORE KERR: And then the work that you did in the house, was that like your sources of income at that time as well?

AA BRONSON: No, I mean, it kept changing. Right at the beginning on Gerrard Street, I can't remember whether it was me or Felix—one of us got a job—I guess it was me—I got a job helping at a display company that did window displays. And I was the assistant to the display artist, who would do things like paint cardboard tubes to look like wood that were supposed to be like—what do you call them, in a—you know, where you tie off a boat on the pier—for like a summer display.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You would do some like scene with, you know, in the woods in cottages and boats, and then you would have these wooden piers that the models would stand in front of with ropes and life jackets. You know, what do you call those round things?

THEODORE KERR: They're circles, and they are not—

AA BRONSON: Lifesavers, right?

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: The candy has ruined me. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yes, I know. So I would do stuff like that. And then at a certain point, the [display artist –AB] quit, because they wouldn't give him a raise. They weren't paying him very much, and they gave me his job but without any increase in [. . . –AB] money, and so I was kind of—and then I think I hired Felix to come and help at that same display firm, and he ended up though going and doing windows, I think. Like actually going with the team that would go from window to window to install things. So we did that for a while, and then Jorge had a job with one of those firms that you get occasional work from, like a—

THEODORE KERR: Like a temp agency?

AA BRONSON: Yes, it was Technical Overload, it was called. And so it was for people who could do drafting.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And Felix also got that, even though, I don't know, Felix had no training, and—oh, Felix had done some drafting. He went to a technical school for one year before he went to university, so he actually had drafting training, that's right. So the two of them were going and working on drafting projects every now and then. In various places in the city. That's how they mostly made money, and then Jorge got a job as a waiter at the—our friend Sandy Stagg opened the Peter Pan on Queens Street West, and Jorge got a job working as a waiter there. And I always got my money by inventing projects—there was like *File* magazine, Art Metropole—by inventing projects that made money. So I left the display business fairly early—relatively early—although they would occasionally hire me back if they had a big job, because I was a very skilled painter in particular, so if they had a job with super graphics or something, right? I remember they sent me to Ottawa to paint super graphics on some building once.

THEODORE KERR: What's super graphics?

AA BRONSON: Oh, you don't know super graphics?

THEODORE KERR: No.

AA BRONSON: Oh, my God, you're so young. Super graphics in the '60s—I guess emerged in the '60s within the realm of architecture—is when a building is decorated with some super-sized sort of pop.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Like a big palm tree?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I guess, but usually it was more like stripes and usually it was abstract.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

AA BRONSON: So that was the style then. More like Pop art kind of stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: And so I did quite a—I did a fair amount of that, and then from there, they got me into more representational stuff, too. I had to at—what was it called? When Ontario Place opened, I had to go and paint this—paint this like twelve-foot high hamburger on the side of a building—

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow. And then where did Felix go to university? We know that Jorge—

AA BRONSON: Same as me. University of Manitoba. He was in the building next door. And—

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's right.

AA BRONSON: And the funny thing about those two buildings—the fine arts building and the architecture building—is that they're joined by a tunnel.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And in the middle of the tunnel is the Coke machine. So the art students and the architecture students—actually, there was always a knot of people hanging out at the Coke machine, you know, of artists and architects who, thus, would date or socialize or get to know each other.

THEODORE KERR: The Coke machine is like the meat rack. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yes, exactly. It's exactly the same. Yes. It's funny, you know, like, all that planning goes into those buildings, and that was an accident, and it was so needed. You know, like that joint between the two communities was so needed, and it was provided by the placing of a Coke machine. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: So it's three hours.

AA BRONSON: Oh, we've done three hours already? We're not even halfway through.

THEODORE KERR: I know. Do you feel like talking a little bit more? Do you feel like stopping?

AA BRONSON: What time is it—is it 2?

THEODORE KERR: I'm not sure of the time. Do you have your phone?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: 2 o'clock.

THEODORE KERR: It's 2 o'clock.

AA BRONSON: Oh, so it has been three—it is, more or less, lunch hour. Well, let me think if there's anything if I can tie up that—so now we're just—we've just kind of moved into Simcoe Street. I've got *File*. I've got Art Metropole.

THEODORE KERR: And both of those can be unpacked a little bit more.

AA BRONSON: Yes, they could be. Maybe that kind of lays the groundwork anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because, in a way—well the whole shape of General Idea—the point at which we moved to New York, everything shifts and changes, and that's maybe the part that you're more interested in is the part from when we moved to New York. But of course, all this other stuff comes into it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I think all of this stuff is very important, because it gives the foundations and shares some of you.

AA BRONSON: I have a feeling there's something more that would be easy to do that's not too much.

THEODORE KERR: How about I pee while you think?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

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THEODORE KERR: This is Theodore Kerr interviewing AA Bronson in his studio and workplace in Berlin, Germany on March 5th, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Hi, AA

AA BRONSON: Hi there. So yesterday we got all the way up, like, well into the years of General Idea and I realized that we hadn't really talked about the idea of networking or the—it's kind of interesting, networking was not an idea in the '60s when we first started together. I don't know if the word network existed. I guess it must have. But, when—in the days of the underground newspaper in order to survive as kind of alternative culture, especially in a small city like Winnipeg, we had to be connected to similar groups. And in fact the underground newspapers of Europe and the American, North America anyway, and also Australia and New Zealand, were all very closely inter-knit through the mail by sending each other our newspapers, but also by sending lots of other stuff as well. There was a very strong communications network between all these groups. And I didn't really think so much about it at the time but later looking back I realized: if only we had the internet, but we didn't.

But in the early days of General Idea it was in a way a similar phenomenon that we were a kind of alternative view of art. We fell outside of the conventional art world, and we corresponded mainly through the mails with likeminded people all over the world. Not only Western Europe and Australia and New Zealand and North America but also South America and Eastern Europe and to a certain extent Japan, and this took on the name of *Mail Art*. And we were very vigorously involved. We were a major node in the *Mail Art* network and the early—well more the early '70s I guess, maybe starting around 1970. And this put us in contact with a lot of people who nobody has ever heard of but who were interesting in their own way, especially those for example in South America or Eastern Europe who were really working within a very difficult political reality. But then also people like Gilbert & George and Joseph Beuys and John Armleder, a lot of artists, Ray Johnson, a lot of artists who are now known but maybe weren't so much then. Gilbert & George actually were still students when we started communicating with them.

So again this was very—all of—and the way we thought about our work—for example, we did a project called *Club Canasta*. And for *Club Canasta*, the CBC radio had approached us about doing some sort of audio project. I think it must have been around '73 I guess, so early '70s. And they approached us about doing some sort of audio project and the idea we came up with was that we would—a group of us and some friends from Toronto, the kind of people that gathered around us—we would all have a kind of what we call a Canasta party in the CBC radio studio, where we served cocktails and we had tables of people playing Canasta. And then we were linked with telephone conference calls to people in other places, I think to about five or six other locations. To Vancouver, to Image Bank in Vancouver, to somebody in LA, somebody in New York, somebody in Amsterdam, somebody in London, and so on. And then the piece would be after the event was over—oh, all those people by

the way were also sitting having cocktails and playing Canasta in their respective cities. And then the idea was to edit together some sort of a document of that whole project after the fact, which would then play on radio. And of course this also involved something that went through the mail, an invitation to participate and so on, and something they should send back. And so there's all these kind of mail elements first and then it turns into a radio based—telephone and radio based project. And in fact in the end it was never broadcast because of course when you're speaking on the phone to somebody you haven't seen or spoken to for a long time, in the days when there was no internet, the first thing you want to say is "Hey, how are you?" And so there was, you know, a huge quantity of "hey, how are you" going on and the amount of interesting material was fairly slim.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: But that project came out of trying to make visible in a sense, or audible I suppose, this kind of networking that was at the heart of everything we were doing. And of course *File* magazine then is the clearest representation of that because then the idea of *File* was that we would reproduce the things that people were sending us in the mail and send it all back out again. And primarily *File* went internationally. It's interesting how small the sales in Canada were and how big they were in, you know, major American cities and in Europe especially. New York was always the biggest place for sales for us but also London and Paris were good. And we had subscribers all over the place. So it was—when the internet came along, really—I really, it isn't until after Jorge and Felix died in 1994 that that really started to get going. And then it became much more clear what we had been doing because the internet became like a kind of a description of the projects that we had been doing especially in the early '70s.

THEODORE KERR: Did—when you were first making work or creating ideas, did clarity matter to you?

AA BRONSON: Clarity? Because I said it became clear?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Well maybe clear is the wrong word. It's more like, suddenly what we had been doing became framed by a different set of ideas than it had been originally. I think it's also things like—I never remember the expression—social, we were talking about it before—

THEODORE KERR: Oh yeah, Social Practice.

AA BRONSON: Social Practice. The whole idea of Social Practice is I mean that's a term that's very accurately describes everything that we were doing pretty much from '69 up until maybe '77 or so. Or actually even later, into the '80s; right through to the mid-'80s "Social Practice" described what we were doing. And then there was the whole interest in the art world in consumerism that comes into play in the '80s and we were working on that also since, well since '69 really. So when the language comes along to look at something, then your idea of it changes. Similarly in '86—'86 was the first time that anybody wrote about our work in terms of queer theory, let's say, because queer theory really didn't exist before that. And when queer theory comes along it completely reframes and re-pictures what we had been doing. So there were many examples of that and I think a lot of what we did comes along well ahead of the language to describe it.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah and I guess to work backwards a bit, I guess I'm curious about like, did you all need to understand what you were doing in order to keep doing it?

AA BRONSON: Well we did understand it—[laughs]—but we didn't understand it in those—I mean, we understood it conceptually.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We knew what we were doing.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think you were always on the same page about things?

AA BRONSON: Well we talked so much. You know, like, when we all woke up in the morning, which was often pretty late—it tended, when the mailman came we all woke up. I mean it was kind of like that. [Laughs.] And we would sit and drink coffee and look at the mail and talk, and talk and talk and talk. So everything got talked through over and over and over again through many different, you know, prisms and lenses so I think we really did have a kind of deep understanding of everything we did.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But we didn't—of course couldn't predict the language of the future. But yeah, we knew what we were doing.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want to talk a little bit about the early moments of *File* and the way that started or Art Metropole or are there certain projects that you want to make sure that we get on to this record?

AA BRONSON: Well *File*—*File* I've said a few words about.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I mean *File* in part it started in '72 but really we started planning it in '71. Maybe I was feeling homesick for the underground newspaper and hadn't had a real—well I had been working at *Coach House Press* and working with books, and there was something called Snore Comix but I didn't have a real meaty kind of community-based project. So *File* I think came out of that. And it came out of the enormous volume of mail art that was coming in the door and going out the door and wanting to somehow turn that into something that one could, you know, peruse and share and so on. And *File* was also—you know, we were really like a community hub in a way. We were like the perpetual open house. The coffee pot was always on and there were always people dropping by and there was a kind of scene circulating around us. And maybe that's important to mention that we were very conscious, right from the beginning, of wanting to be kind of a center of a scene—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —because to our minds there was no scene in Toronto that was worth being a part of. And so we decided to make our own. And we saw the—we did see Warhol's Factory as kind of model that way, although what we did was quite different. And I don't know to what extent we were conscious of Jack Smith at that point. We knew about him for sure because I had shown his films in university. Jack Smith also worked out of a store front and all his projects utilized his friends and he was also the kind of middle of this informal social group that rotated around him. It's said that Warhol basically copied him and managed to institutionalize it more than he had. Anyway that was the kind of the model we were following. And *File* came out of that and because it was also a way of generating money for people's pockets and creating work for people, you know, while we're hanging out and having coffee we might as well be doing something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And we raised the money through a new program that Pierre Trudeau had brought in called Local Initiatives. And the idea of the grant was that mainly young people would come up with the ideas for projects that would help their communities, community-based projects. And they would have to get all the materials donated, and the location if it was required, you know everything donated, and then the grant would only pay their salaries, minimal salaries. Of course we cheated. We put about half of our money—we got—well we—first of all let me say we based our idea on the fact that we represented a non-geographical community, which I'm sure was the only grant they gave out to a community that was, you know, not an inner-city group or something like that. We sneakily put a lot of our money back into printing costs.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But that's how we began it. So the language in which we developed, both on a grant application basis but also within our selves, was it's this kind of a community service. Only we saw it as international, and for the purposes of the grant we had to talk about it as national.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: As Canadian.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And one of the ways of doing that for example, was, there was an ongoing theme that became kind of crystalized at one point: a kind of semi-fictional party that we were all at and became a column called *Buz Buz Buz*, a kind of photo spread of people at parties. And people would send us photos of themselves at parties and we would, to begin with, just lay them next to either other as if they were at the same party and then we started collaging them to create the impression of conversations between people who had in fact never met, and so on. So there was this sense of trying to pull people together, not only through like actually connecting them, but metaphorically picturing them as being part of a bigger scene.

THEODORE KERR: Which gets to a point that you wanted to make yesterday about like the influence of the international on you three.

AA BRONSON: Yes, well through *File*—first of all through the mail art we came in contact with a lot of people from different places. To me its at this moment I'm really struck by how many South Americans who were living, you know, under dictatorships at that time, how many South Americans and how many Eastern Europeans we

contacted. But also people, as I mentioned people who are now famous like Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, or Gilbert & George. And so that network of the mail art became in a way our art scene. This was important because it led eventually to us, really quite early in our careers, traveling to Europe and having exhibitions. By the late '70s we were really spending a good part of the year in Europe traveling around and having exhibitions. And it seemed to vary which countries, but the early—the first exhibition we had there—the first solo exhibition we had was in Switzerland. But actually the first institutional exhibition we were ever in was in Berlin. And our first at the DAAD, where I'm supposed to have an exhibition now, maybe this year, it was the same gallery in 19—I don't know—73, I think. We were in a group show that was curated by Robert Filliou. Our first solo institutional show, museum show, was in Stedelijk Museum in 1979. Which I always think is amazing that our first show was not in Canada—our first museum show was not in Canada—and we didn't have a museum show in Canada until '84, that was in Vancouver.

THEODORE KERR: Did you all crave or value recognition from Canada and the U.S.?

AA BRONSON: Well it's funny you know, our connection to the U.S. was very, very weak through the '70s, other than just New York City. And we did have—I started going to New York in '73 and we lived in New York for six months in '77, but the connections to Europe were always stronger and we got pulled over there more frequently to do exhibitions and so on. Really from starting in about '76-'77 we were kind of non-stop in Europe for the next 10 years.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And like basically there was our six months in New York in, I think it was over the '76-'77 winter, and then we went from there to Bologna to the Bologna Art Fair. We had to stand for *File* magazine. And then from then on until 1986 we seemed to be spending all our time in Europe. And we began to think that maybe we should be in Europe since we're like going back and forth across the ocean so much. And we tried to think of where we could be, but in those days the European countries were not really connected to each other. You know, if you were in Amsterdam you would never see anybody from Paris. If you were in Paris, you would never see anybody from Milan. If you were in Milan you would never see anybody from Cologne, and so on and so forth. And in '85 I was in New York and my friend Chrysanne Stathacos arranged for me to see a supposedly famous psychic.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: [I –AB] did this a number of times with other psychics, but this was interesting because almost the first thing he said was, you know, "Where are you living, because you were supposed to move to New York last year." [Laughs.] He said, "You're supposed to be in this city." And afterwards I phoned Jorge and Felix and it seemed evident that New York is where everybody came, you know, like—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —the curators and gallery people and artists from Amsterdam all came through New York, from Paris all came through New York, from Milan, from Cologne, they all came to New York. And if you were in New York, you could really carry on a European career quite nicely.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Although as Lawrence Weiner pointed out to me at the time, you know, don't expect the Americans to pay any attention to you. [Laughs.] He was kind of in the same boat, right, as an American and a lot of American artists—somebody like Joan Jonas for example, they were constantly busy in Europe and they had absolutely nothing at all in the U.S. going on for them.

THEODORE KERR: I mean this seems like also a Canadian thing, like Canadians recognize Canadians once they leave?

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes this is true. There's also that. We had at that point, too, by '85-'86 we had actually sold maybe one work to each major institution. And there—you know, at that time, no collectors in Canada so we knew in a way there was no reason to stay in Canada anymore from a financial point of view. And geographically it was just very far away from everywhere where we were actually working. So in '86 we moved to New York.

THEODORE KERR: Before we get there, it seems to me that you all had again a prescient understanding of the art world as also an art market.

AA BRONSON: Yes, we were quite pragmatic about all of that, actually, when I look back on it. And I remember, you know when we started doing like little publications, *File* magazines, cheap editions and things like that, I mean they didn't make much money but we were aware that our audience was mostly young people and a lot of

our audience was students. And that we needed to have from both a financial view and just from an art-making view, if we wanted our art to travel out into the world we needed to make art for people who didn't have much money. And we also knew that could bring in—that would create a certain flow of money towards us even if it's little tiny dribbles, you know. So we were very conscious of "diversifying" I would call it now, right, from an early age, right, we had editions, we had a magazine, we started doing a certain amount of higher cost print editions by the mid-'70s. And then of course we were doing performances where we would get certain kinds of fees and video where we would get some rental income and then gallery works that could potentially sell. Although I don't—we had one sale in 1971 and I think the next sale was not until 1977. So art work as a way of making money was not as strong as all the other bits and pieces. But by '79, I think, we were basically living on a very, very meager level, but we were managing to survive on our income as artists by about 1979. Which means it took 10 years to just get to the point where you could survive without having to have another job.

THEODORE KERR: And was it tiered? Like was it like first Jorge stopped working a day job and then Felix started —

AA BRONSON: Well in a way I was the first one who—because I was kind of managing the business aspects of General Idea, so I really ran Art Metropole which opened in '74 and I really ran the business side of *File* magazine and so on. Also I had a lot of layout and design experience with publications so I sort of oversaw *File*. So I was really the first one to not have jobs, other than our own jobs. And they really continued to do it up until about I guess around '79. But always the kind of jobs that you could walk away from because we were always traveling for shows and things. Another thing was that when we did travel for a show of course we would be basically looked after for the duration and we were—you know somebody would be buying our food and paying our travel and taking us places and paying the taxi driver, you know. So we were also aware of that as a form of income when we went to another city for an exhibition. It wasn't usually—there weren't usually any fees it was usually just the cost of living but that was a big thing for us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It seems to me also that this kind of sophisticated understanding of the art world and how you could exist in it financially is also pushback against the idea of artist as genius. Like it was also—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, that's true. We tried to make it more, well, business-like in a kind of metaphorical way. But it was more business-like, but I'm sure it didn't look like it was more business minded—[laughs]—to anyone who came from the real business world. But I think people were surprised at how together we were in a sense and how—you know like we—when did we start doing consignment forms? Well that's another subject, but, I guess not until the '80s—we were quite sophisticated about things like contracts and so on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I think that was exceptionally unusual.

THEODORE KERR: And you saw that as part of the work of General Idea?

AA BRONSON: Well yes. We in the very early days we did works that were kind of like contracts or—what do I want to say? We did a piece which was in the form of like a bond or—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Or even the notecards, the idea of being paid for labor.

AA BRONSON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: I think that's very sophisticated as well.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. So should I talk about Art Metropole for a minute?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: So *File* started in '72, and that if anything increased the volume of stuff from the mail art scene coming our way. And not only the mail art, but people started sending us their publications and there were a lot of artists' books happening in the early '70s. And we were kind of turning into a library, just all this stuff pouring in the door. And we would produce not exactly reviews, but we would post in *File* magazine—we would post pictures of the publications of what came to us and you know, publish the address of where they came from and that kind of thing. And of course that just increased the volume even more because really nobody knew how to get artists' books around. A lot of artists were publishing themselves but also galleries were publishing them. So we ended up in this kind of network of artists' books and then people were asking us for advice, like, "Where can

I sell these? Where do you sell *File*? Maybe I can sell my book where you sell *File*," and so on and so forth.

[. . . –AB] so we began our own institution, Art Metropole, which we saw as a kind of work, right. We really conceived of it as an artwork, but it was the same way that *File* was an artwork, we created an institution that was 50 percent distribution, like a distributor for these kinds of materials, and 50 percent an archive for these kind of materials. And that allowed us to basically raise money to be able to look after all these things that were flowing in the door. You know we just had boxes everywhere and we had no way to look at—to even buy shelving. So we opened Art Metropole in '74. I can't actually remember where the initial money came from.

THEODORE KERR: Was it government grants or anything?

AA BRONSON: It must have been, I can't think what it was. I don't think we were eligible for Canada Counsel money until we had been open for a certain length of time, so I wonder what it was. I can't think what it was. I mean basically we just opened it in the front half of our studio, and that's the period we've talked about before when we had to leave 87 Young Street and had moved further up the street across from the Eaton Center.

Anyway, we saw Art Metropole as kind of—if you imagine the globe has a kind of spider web cast around it of connections between artists. We saw ourselves as being like a major node on that point, in that information could flow in and out and through Art Metropole. So we didn't see it as what it is today, which is a book shop for art stuff. That's not what it was. It was a kind of communication node. We did a lot of work also with video.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I think we were the first real video distributor in Canada.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Although Video Inn I think came around the same time, maybe slightly after because it was originally—the predecessor to Video Inn in Vancouver was a kind of—more like a sharing institution of artists sharing video, and then they set up a distribution component called Video Inn, I think just after Art Metropole. And then gradually other places—there was a video distributor opened in Montreal and in Winnipeg and then Vtape opened in Toronto, of basically artists from Art Metropole who split off and wanted their own. I think because they suddenly realized that they were part of General Idea's artwork, right, that we had what we conceived as an artwork, and they were within it being distributed. And it kind of freaked them out.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they broke away and formed their own organization. But I should talk just briefly of the concept of Miss General Idea Pageant because it comes into all of this as well. It was probably the central motif from '69 through till '86. And in 1970 we did a performance as pat of the Festival of Underground Theater called the 1970 Miss General Idea Pageant. And our idea was the beauty pageant, which was essentially a media project, right—a beauty pageant is something that really happens on television. It's not really a real event, it's a kind of fake event for television. And like it—we saw it as a kind of parallel world to the world of art. You know, there were talent contests, and judges, and prizes, and a kind of media spectacle built around it. And so we had our kind of fake beauty pageant structure. In '71 we did the 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant. Again it was a kind of format that could use all the people swirling around us. They could all be given roles and if we did performances they could all get a little bit of money from it, and so on and so forth. I realize while we're talking that a lot of this is about creating money for people as we go along. [Laughs.] Little tiny bits of money here and there that all helped keep us alive and connected.

THEODORE KERR: Which has to do with sustaining. You can say it's about money, that's true, but it's also about —

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yes, yes it is, you're right. Yeah, certainly not about anything more than that. [Laughs.] Anyway, the pageant became a kind of way, a of kind of lens for looking at the world and we created this kind of conceptual structure let's call it, in five categories. And we started to develop our work through this system of categories which was—now am I going to remember the five in the right order?—let me just look this up. Well it's—the first category is called "the Search for the Spirit of Miss General Idea." And this is really about inspiration, the idea of the inspiration plays in artwork. I don't think this catalogue is going to give me this information. Okay, the Search for the Spirit, Miss General Idea, General Idea. Oh, the Miss General Idea Pavilion and the Frame of Reference. Those were the five categories. So General Idea is the artist, Miss General Idea is, in a sense, the Muse but also the artwork. And you know in both the '69 and '70 Miss General Idea Pageants, despite the names were ungendered, I mean there was no, there was no—it didn't really matter what gender you were, or whether you were any gender. And there was a—what would now be called I guess a trans performer for the '71 pageant who played the part of the public entertainment Pascal who was kind of halfway through a sex change and had a remarkable voice and was kind of the chanteuse for the project.

Anyway these five categories, to continue. The Miss General Idea Pavilion was our idea of the museum. It was like we were constructing our own museum. And the frame of reference was the media, the public media, which in our case was *File* magazine, but also included the whole, you know, worldwide referential system. And so the Pavilion started to become more and more important. Because of course the Pavilion holds things like—as well as the galleries, it has the archive, it has the museum shop, and so on. And we were beginning to build these different parts of the pavilion as kind of actual entities within our lives. So Art Metropole was both the archive on one hand, and the—well actually we saw it as more of the publishing and distribution arm of the museum, but also it was the gallery shop. And we played with all of those ideas. By 1980, when we had had our first museum exhibition, at the Stedelijk Museum in '79, just a small exhibition and, you know, having this enormous output of low-cost books and multiples and so on, none of which the Stedelijk shop would carry. They didn't want them. You know, they were too weird for them. And we knew they would sell, you know. So then we began to realize that we really needed our own boutique, like a free-standing boutique like you might see these days in an airport. To kind of travel around with our exhibitions and sell our products. So in 1980 we made The Miss General Idea Boutique which was another chunk of the Pavilion.

With that first show at the Stedelijk we began to realize as we had exhibitions at different institutions in different parts of the world that we could claim each of those intuitions as being part of the Pavilion. So we built the Pavilion as a kind of additive structure that included everywhere where we had an exhibition. They were like wings of the Pavilion. And the Pavilion became a kind of metaphorical superstructure.

THEODORE KERR: Right, which, like—it makes it obvious to see how actually architecture was still a huge part of your brain and part of the process.

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes and we made—I don't think it was anything we displayed in galleries at the time but we would work on kind of these elaborate drawings of the Pavilion, showing—you know, there would be—it always had to have a performance space. So the floor plan—what's it called? [*The Seating Arrangement* –AB]. Well we did a whole series of architectural drawing—I guess that's in the mid-'70s—that was like proposals for the building.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then by 1977 we were building gallery installations that are actually rooms from the Pavilion. And again, our idea was that if any of those rooms got purchased by museums, which they eventually did, then we had on our hands a decentralized museum. All the rooms from the museum would be dispersed around the world in different collections—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: —as well. So again, that's a kind of—different kind of network idea.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We saw ourselves as living kind of decentralized lives, as being kind of reaching out around the globe.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And we didn't place so much importance on where we were at any given moment. We didn't place so much importance on being in Toronto or being in Canada, and perhaps that was our downfall locally, because I think we were seen as being kind of snobs that, you know, Toronto wasn't good enough for us or something. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah but that also seems like part of the performance of General Idea, too, this kind of, like, conversation around glamour, this conversation—

AA BRONSON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: —of what is an artist.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah that's true.

THEODORE KERR: There's a beautiful video that's online of you—I think it's from '74—and it's you with censor over your eyes like a black bar—

AA BRONSON: Right.

THEODORE KERR: —and you're talking about glamour. And watching it I can't help but wonder how were you

experiencing coming—increasingly coming into your own as a human being while also feeling a part of this thruple?

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: You know, a word that maybe didn't exist at the time.

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, like how were you—how did you—how were you coming into yourself as an adult—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —at the same time as coming into this?

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. On that I'm not really sure. I feel like I didn't become an adult until Jorge and Felix died. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's funny watching the video, you pass through many different experiences of being self conscious at first you start a little defensive and then there's' a period where you can tell that you have the audience and you start to smile—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —and then almost you get ahead of yourself.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And I think you do it—you must have lost the words in your head or something and you must have been mad at yourself for a second because then you get serious again.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And kind of, the good boy returns, you know.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] Right, right. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: But then you end kind of knowing that—I mean the confidence is always there but you end on confidence.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

THEODORE KERR: I wondered if it was—you know in a romantic sense if there was negotiation on "how do I become who I am while I'm becoming this larger structure."

AA BRONSON: Yeah, well I think you're right. That is something that is always going on, because I always felt so kind of insignificant and frail in a way and it was the kind of the superstructure of my identity as AA Bronson and also as General Idea which kind of gave me the protection to allow me to grow within it. It's true. And those were—you know that's something that most people don't have the luxury of being able to create, a persona—[laughs]—and inhabit it as a kind of protection, you know, while you allow yourself to stabilize and grow within it. I'm sure I would have been in a mental institution—[laughs]—if I hadn't been an artist.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I mean, not to get us off track but that's what social media does.

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes. That's true. Yes.

THEODORE KERR: But let's go back to you. Do you want to talk about the birth of AA Bronson?

AA BRONSON: Well, again it goes back to the period immediately before General Idea. I mean how I got the name does. I lived briefly with a group of friends. The scene that was kind of around the *Coach House Press* and kind of around the Theater Passe Muraille and so on. And we—there was a book, a porn book, got a lot of publicity around then. This would be about ['68 –AB]. It had been written by—I think a group of students from Harvard or something like that had gotten together and they had written a chapter each and they had sold it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it was a huge success, and it got a lot of press because of this funny way that it was put together almost as a joke. And we thought, "well we could do that" and we needed money. We were all, again,

perpetually poor. And a group of I think about eight of us got together and we started working on a plot, a script, that would allow us to break it up and each person write a chapter. But in the end there were only two of us who actually did any work and that was Susan Harrison and myself, and we ended up alternating chapters, that we each took every second chapter. And then once we had written them we passed them back and forth and kind of did a little editing on each other's chapters to try and create some continuity. And that we sold to a publisher—in '69, just as General Idea was beginning—to Taurus, something called Taurus Press, which really was like an outpost of an American porn publisher. And probably an outpost of American crime, trying to see if they could get a little foothold in Canada.

And we sold it with copyright, outright. And the book came out. They didn't even bother sending us a copy but we found it in the bookshops, in the porn shops on Yonge Street in Toronto. And it was called—I mean our title for it was *Lena* and they changed the title to *Lena [Cries]* with "Cries" in brackets. It was a totally politically incorrect story about a 14 year old black girl, and each chapter puts her through a completely different kind of sexual scenario. It's like her sexual education in a way. In a way it's kind of a hilarious book, but it was almost immediately banned in Canada. And mainly I think this was—this publishing was acting as a way for organized crime to come and to set up outposts in Canada. And probably the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] wanted to immediately shut them down, and the books from all these small publishers across Canada were seized and burned, including *Lena*.

The name on the cover, that first volume, had been actually A.L. Bronson. But because we never really—somehow it was all verbal, like many people never even saw the book—everybody remembered it as AA Bronson. And I think it was because of some joke that came along about being first in the phone book. Although with your first name as AA you wouldn't be, of course. The people started to call me AA Bronson and I thought well if AA Bronson wrote pornography and was, like, that bold, maybe I can kind of use the AA Bronson persona as a protection. And we did—Susan and I did readings in an art context from the book and made appearances, and this AA Bronson persona took over as a cover in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: As a way to be something a little bit different. Especially when I first went to New York for example, and visited Warhol and people like that, I could kind of insert myself into this bigger persona of AA Bronson, who was full of self-confidence and you know, very bold—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —not shy—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and so on and so forth. And so AA Bronson was born.

THEODORE KERR: And did Michael Tims survive or did like—where does he go?

AA BRONSON: Well Michael Tims is still around—

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: —I guess.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Your mother still called you that.

AA BRONSON: Pardon?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Your mother still called you Michael.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, well my parents still called me Michael, my brother still called me Michael, and a couple of people that I had known in school still called me Michael. But it wasn't so much that as the Michael Tims personality was, like, extremely fragile and shy, so you know it was still there inside. But it was very convenient to be able to split myself in two parts and to have a kind of public part and a private part. And I don't know—you know I—since I read so much psychology over the years, I often wondered about the idea of, you know, integration of the personality. And then I decided at certain that I was just a multiple personality and that the trick was like in any kind of community development is to get your internal community to make friends with each other and to work together—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and not to be having fights all the time. And that then I could move forward and life was not so

difficult. So I began to think of it more like that. So as well as AA Bronson and Michael Tims there are other beings that, you know, are not so easily seen.

THEODORE KERR: There's also the idea of: the creation of the false self helps work through shame.

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: It's interesting to think about it in relationship to the storefronts, like—

AA BRONSON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: —like the store front—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: More coffee?

AA BRONSON: I would love a coffee with milk actually.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Okay, your cup.

AA BRONSON: Thank you.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Give me your old cup.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, and not only that but AA Bronson could be shameless—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —when I was actually full of shame all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Those come through in those other videos, in the General Idea videos—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —like *Shut the Fuck Up* is—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

THEODORE KERR: —I don't see Michael Tims, maybe in there.

AA BRONSON: No, no Michael Tims is not in there.

THEODORE KERR: No. And it seems—it's interesting that you mentioned the video distribution along with—because it seems like part of General Idea's M.O. is like, "We're going to make this thing and that's not the end of our process. Our process is it has to get out of us."

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yes. It had to travel. It had to travel worldwide—[laughs]—right away!

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Does the word "ambition," like—?

AA BRONSON: Well we were very ambitious but in a funny sort of way. Like we didn't worry about—we didn't—at the time, let's say in the '70s when this was really revving up, we just wanted to spread what we were doing around the world, but through our own generation and people like us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It wasn't like we wanted institutions to take note of us or like we wanted *Time* magazine to write about us or even *Art Forum*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was—we really operated in this alternative universe, and that's what concerned us. And you know, about alternative universe, then gradually as we all grew older, turned into the real thing. So no, when I first met Warhol, *Interview* magazine had really just begun. You know now *Interview* is a big thing but back then it was just a little paper. But you know by '70—was it '76? By '76 we were already showing videos at MoMA.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, I'm not quite sure how that happened but somehow it did. We did the performance at the AGO in Toronto, in '75, which was *Going Thru the Motions*—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —which was a public performance for the 1984 Miss General—a public rehearsal of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant, our kind of idea of the ultimate Miss General Idea Pageant. And the video of that showed at MoMA in '76.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I think that was the first time we ever showed anything at MoMA. And from that moment on we had this kind of relationship to MoMA, mostly through videos for the video curator, Barbara London but then it developed through the library, and then gradually it crept up to the departments of prints and illustrated books. And, you know, things kind of shift and change over time. But, yes, we were very ambitious but not in the conventional sense of the word ambitious.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, it seemed, I mean a word—I think a phrase that didn't exist then was the idea of cultural capital. You wanted to have sway within your own generation.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Or a certain kind of—not purchase in economic sense, but purchase in the cultural sense.

AA BRONSON: But at the same time we wanted to carry everyone along with us. And that's why things like Art Metropole and *File*, what we really wanted to—and I think—thank you—I think that's still true today, you know the way that I work now.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Like I'm going to this little book fair on Wednesday in Paris and taking along books by a number of friends. I'm not just taking my own stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

AA BRONSON: I sort of take along my bubble with me.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah and that goes back ideas that you all were having around the idea of the ego and the idea of—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah,

THEODORE KERR: —the individual versus the collective.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: There's a few places we could go. I guess one thing that I'm interested in is, kind of like maybe 20 or 30 minutes ago you were trying to think through—no actually I want to save that question. The other thing I want to talk about before we leave here is to think about the role of imaging of the three of you and how—

AA BRONSON: Oh, yes.

THEODORE KERR: —that changes. How it's read, changes over time.

AA BRONSON: Well, in '77 when we lost our place on Yonge Street—the actual physical loss of that physical space sets off so much and the various people who lived with us sort of started to move away, and then at the same moment, we started showing in Europe. So our first [European –AB] show was in '76, a little show, and then in '77 it's really beginning to spark and there's a lot of interest. And then we realize—okay, up until then we had always kept it very ambiguous who was in the group and who wasn't, what the group consisted of. Who did what, all of that we were very mysterious about. And then we decided, well, maybe it was time to just clarify that it's just the three of us, the three of us who now are left, that General Idea was the three of us. And its an interesting image: the three of us, the three men, because in you know this *Huey, Dewey and Louie*, *The Three Blind Mice,* and *Three Men in a Boat*. There's countless, countless references to a triumvirate of three men, *The Three Musketeers*, and it goes on and on and on, in popular culture, in literature—

THEODORE KERR: In myth.

AA BRONSON: —in myth. There's so much, right, such rich territory. And then also we noticed—we were very, at that point, very into kind of postwar magazine culture. We spent a lot of time in second hand bookstores and

thrift shops and so on. And if you look at—*Fortune* magazine was perhaps the clearest window into the postwar period. And if you look at the advertising—and that's, you know, when this concept first—two concepts, one was success, and the other concept was kind of, I guess I would call it, like, rebuilding or development—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —the post war rebuilding. And in one ad after another, there would be, like, three architects at a drafting table, three business men around a desk, or three business men around a globe looking at the world. You know, these kinds of images: three men, three men, three men. So we began to also appropriate those images and use them as images of ourself.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I think also in the past you've spoken about this, like, kind of—I don't think you use the word queering but this blurring of the—or playing with the idea of the technician. Like who is the technician, or what is the technician?

AA BRONSON: How do you mean?

THEODORE KERR: Like the expert. Like these—

[Crosstalk.]

AA BRONSON: Oh, like who does what?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, but also the idea that these three people being illustrated are like the ones who are going to do the work, even though they're shown with the trappings of work but doing no work.

AA BRONSON: Yes, right.

THEODORE KERR: The way the artist—

AA BRONSON: We posed in photos as architects, the three of us over a drafting table. That kind of thing. We posed with hard hats on, the three of us with hard hats on.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: We weren't actually doing "the work" but we were posing as different kinds of workers.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and its interesting to think about that in the idea of, like, the specific form of ambition you had versus how those could get read now if someone isn't reading with irony, or reading with camp, or reading with historical ideas. You could just look like people who are self-serious or something.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. Actually it's interesting that you mentioned camp because, you know, Susan Sontag's essay on camp is from the 60's

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I don't remember what year. Do you know what year?

THEODORE KERR: '67 or '69?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: A little earlier.

AA BRONSON: I think it's earlier. '63, maybe?

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: And it's something that we talked about over and over again in all our talking over the years, that there was no response. It was like nobody was taking off from her, where she got to, right. There was no—and I think it isn't, I can't think of anything offhand anyway. I don't think it's really until '86 that camp starts to get readdressed through, you know, the idea of queer theory then starts to go back to that and makes things like—you know, suddenly it becomes possible to read Jack Smith and to read Warhol, so in a different way and so on and so forth. So camp was such—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: '64.

AA BRONSON: '64. So camp was such a key, key idea for us that we kept coming back to.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: As this kind of touchstone and that we were always clear that we embraced camp.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That we did not see it as a problem, you know, we did not see it as a contradiction or something like that.

THEODORE KERR: Just now and even earlier in this conversation, '86 has come up as this like this pivotal turning point. I'm wondering if you want to talk about that little bit—give us a little bit of life before '86 happens so we understand why '86 is such a shift.

AA BRONSON: Well for one thing, I mean I mentioned in passing we—after the '71 Pageant—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —we decided that our ultimate goal would be the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant. '84 because of George Orwell, but also it was a convenient—it was something so way in the future to us that if we actually managed to stay together until 1984 it would be a miracle, you know. So it was this depiction of the future, so all of our performances became rehearsals for 1984—and a lot of the art, it became—the 1984 Pavilion became this kind of goal to carry out certain kinds of work by 1984. And again all these things were kind of fragmented. The idea of time was fragmented. So for example the 1984 Pageant, we actually started to record parts of it t well in advance because our idea was that we could collage it together under various performances. We didn't actually have to have a 1984 Pageant. We could knit it together from previous performances. And the same with—you know we already talked about the Pavilion. The 1984 Pavilion wouldn't be an actual building but would be kind of knit together conceptually by different installations and other museums.

And when 1984 actually came, there was a kind of little explosion of museum shows. I don't totally know whether this was because '84 was our kind of destination year, but we had a kind of retrospective which started the Kunsthalle Basel, went to the Van Abbemuseum and them came back to Canada and was at the AGO and at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal. And at the same time we had a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, in Belgium, we had a show at the Vancouver Art Gallery. So suddenly there was this explosion of stuff happening, and by the time we got through all of that I think we had been working together for so long that even though we had reached our destination year and kind of done this whole bunch of stuff, we didn't know how to do anything except work together. That's the only skill we had and there didn't seem to be any real reason to break up, although we had always imagined that at that point General Idea would cease to exist. So by '86 we were kind of treading water.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We were still—in fact we produced a huge amount of work when I look back over that period '85, '86, but in our minds we were just kind of treading water. We were continuing to do the things that we had done while we waited to see what would unfold.

THEODORE KERR: Sorry, when you say when you continued to see what would unfold, does that mean within?

AA BRONSON: Yes. I guess like, "What's this going to become?" Because we have no idea. You know, it's like we've done everything we've planned to do. Now what?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's in that period that we did, for example, paintings of copyright symbols. We started to play with consumerist imagery in a more pure kind of way. We did paintings of logos, but made them out of pasta for example—out of macaroni. We did these kind of, what at the time felt like very weird like make-work projects while we were trying to figure out what we would do next and that's also the moment at which we decided to move to New York. And of course—so we moved to New York in '86 and Felix almost immediately—well, he was immediately—he freaked out. We had an exhibition open—our first show at a commercial gallery—was in, you know, like 10 years after our first show in Europe, was at a place called International with Monument in '86. And so we went—we moved to New York to be there for that exhibition and then to stay, and then Felix totally freaked out and got on a plane the night before the opening and went back to Toronto. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: What was the freak out? Do you know?

AA BRONSON: Not really, no.

THEODORE KERR: Like overwhelmed by stimulus? Like—

AA BRONSON: Maybe. Maybe something like that. And we had this big loft in Toronto, which allowed us to live

and work in a certain kind of way. And in New York—New York was so much more expensive and we were going to have to like shrink our expectations enormously. So he ended up pretty much staying in Toronto. He would come to New York frequently and we would go to Toronto—Jorge and I would go to Toronto frequently, but—and then we would travel the three of us together a lot. So it became this more, again, decentralized way of working. We worked by fax a lot back then.

So we moved to New York. We had our first exhibition in '96, which was—well, basically the work that we were working on at that point. And then in '87 we were invited to be in the first fundraiser for amfAR, for the American Foundation for AIDS Research. And the idea of that exhibition was that galleries, various galleries, commercial galleries, participated, and they had an exhibition in June of '87, and any work that sold from that exhibition in those galleries, 50 percent or something would go to amfAR. And for that exhibition we made our first *AIDS* painting, which we had thought about for at least a year prior. In Toronto, we had come up with the idea of taking Robert Indiana's *LOVE* painting and making it an emblem for the '80s by changing it to AIDS. And it seemed just too, like almost cruel to do that, and then—I mean it was this idea of camp. It was like you have to embrace the most evil side of yourself—[laughs]—in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The most evil and provocative part of yourself, and we did that by deciding to do that *AIDS* painting. And it—and that kind of like then began a completely new era and a completely new way of working. That was that kickstart. We had realized that all the skills we had developed, not only working together, but working in various kinds of media, networking in different kinds of ways, all those skills—we were like a little—like a Madison Avenue advertising company, you know. We were—we had a lot of international contacts at that point, so we decided to go on this kind of campaign to, as it were, publicize a disease that was not being talked about as—in New York anyway, in the U.S. You know, the President of the U.S. had not mentioned the word AIDS yet, and so on. All the things we all know. And the lack of research, the lack of funding, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And we had a close friend from the Canadian Embassy who was seriously ill and who died in fact in '87 and we were the primary caregivers—Jorge and I. And so this became—this more or less took over our lives at that point. And oddly enough, we had moved into a ground floor in a townhouse that was on the same block as St. Vincent's Hospital, which of all the hospitals in the New York was the primary hospital for AIDS care. And we were living in Chelsea, which was, you know, the epicenter of the AIDS—other than the Castro in San Francisco was the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic at that time. And you know, things developed very, very fast. And because we were there really illegally. I mean, we didn't have visas to be there, we were just—we just kind of went—it didn't even occur to us to try and be legal. It's funny.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We didn't—like we didn't get involved with ACT UP at all. So ACT UP was a different generation. It was a generation younger than us. We were at that point—I mean, in '86 when we moved to New York, I was 40 years old. So we were actually much older than—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —than the whole generation in their 20s: the activist generation. And so we were our own little bubble. And the other thing was that—in relation to AIDS—and the other thing was that because we had all these international contacts and were constantly doing exhibitions internationally, that we had to come up with—what our work had to be—it had to be possible to show it outside of the U.S., you know. Like we couldn't do the kind of things that ACT UP were doing because those could only be really read in an American context. So the AIDS logo was kind of perfect because the Robert Indiana image had long ago escaped into the mainstream. You know, like, even a teenager in Cologne knew that our AIDS logo should say LOVE, even if they'd never heard of Robert Indiana.

And so we began—we started by doing poster projects. We did a silk-screen poster, which we plastered Lower Manhattan with. And then San Francisco.

THEODORE KERR: And did you guys put it up or did you guys work with—

AA BRONSON: No, we couldn't really. Like the way those things work, it's really a fiefdom, right. There's like only certain people—you're going to be in deep shit—[laughs]—if you trample on their territory, right? So we had to [work through –AB] an art gallery, which by then was no longer International with Monument. It was the same gallery, but it had changed names. It was Koury Wingate by then, and they supported the project and put up the posters or paid for the printing of the posters and the posting of the posters. They were very generous. And in San Francisco, just a few months later in early '88, we had an exhibition at a place called Art Space, which is a kind of alternative gallery. And we did an installation in the gallery where we basically wallpapered the space, but with posters, and then we put the posters on the street and there was also a billboard near the gallery that we were able to take over, and so on and so forth. We did a lot of projects there.

So there was this sudden explosion of activity and then by '88 we had another exhibition of AIDS paintings. We did six paintings that were eight feet square and 12 paintings that were two feet square, running through different kinds of color combinations and then I think what really happened after that was it exploded into the territory of temporary public artworks. So doing animation for the Spectacolor board in Times Square, doing signage for the outside of trams in both Amsterdam and Seattle, doing exterior projections in Rotterdam. And so there was this—we did a big *AIDS* sculpture, like a typical plop sculpture, for the City of Hamburg. That was a sculpture that was supposed—we basically knew people would write on it and deface it and that was the idea of it. That it was there to accept defacing and to create a kind of public conversation that you could actually see on the surface of the piece.

So we began to do more and more projects like that and it's like all our skills with all these different kinds of ways of using media and networking all came into play and we began doing all these projects. And I think we did over 75 public art projects of those sorts over the next few years.

THEODORE KERR: Before we talk about that a bit more, do you remember the first time you heard anything about HIV, even before those three letters were associated with it?

AA BRONSON: Well, I know we were in Toronto because that's when we came up with the *AIDS* painting—we were still in Toronto. But I don't actually. I can't quite—I've tried to put it together like—it must have come in a little bit gradually, right? Like news stories about infections and so on. And I know that when we moved to New York we were not worried about it at all, even though by then New York would have been a kind of epicenter.

THEODORE KERR: But I think it would have been a quiet epicenter—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, it was quite quiet.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah.

AA BRONSON: But still, within the gay world especially, it was known. And then we had our friend Robert—I guess it was only after we had moved to New York that we found out that he was HIV-positive and then very quickly had AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then the whole—well, when we first started doing our projects, a lot of the younger people were quite accusatory and accused us of being on the—of just jumping on the bandwagon and that we weren't really—we were, you know, just being opportunist. And I remember we had an exhibition in Atlanta at an alternative space and there was an ACT UP person, traveled down, especially to be able to confront us about that. And we gave a talk and—oh no, he gave a talk. He got a—while we were there, he also had a talk. And at a certain point he asked everybody who knew somebody with AIDS to put their hand up, which we all did. And then anybody who had taken care of somebody with AIDS and there was very few hands, but mine was one of them. And he looked horrified that my hand was up. Like the idea was to reveal the fact that General Idea had no relationship to the disease—[laughs]—but it failed.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember who it was?

AA BRONSON: I don't actually. No.

THEODORE KERR: Was he an artist and an activist?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was an—one of the—not—he wasn't one of the Gran Fury guys. He was somebody—I think he probably came on his own steam. He was just—and we would get gossip on the network that—how much they hated us and how awful we were because we created this, you know, joyful looking image instead of something that looked grim.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And there was no—and we wasted money by not having any safe sex information on the posters and blah, blah, blah.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember seeing *RIOT* for the first time? The image?

AA BRONSON: Well, the first time that was done was for an exhibition in Berlin. Frank Wagner was the curator and it was at nGbK. And for that project we did AIDS posters on the streets here in Berlin and we did—they managed to get an unused—I guess this is before the Wall came down, but they managed to get an unused S-Bahn station—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —as the venue for the exhibition. So we did posters kind of on the train platforms as if—you know, there's those round kiosks for receiving posters and we postered those.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So we created this kind of fake advertising as if it was still a train station. And then Gran Fury exhibited their *RIOT* painting. Which in a way, I was curious that they used such a conventional means as a painting. You know, like—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but I guess it was—they knew our painting, so it was kind of a rebuttal to us. And we didn't really—I think it was supposed to be like an agressive act against us in a way at the time, but we didn't really experience in that way. We just thought, "Oh, great." You know. [Laughs.] "What a great piece."

THEODORE KERR: Right, because you were building on—upon *LOVE* so did it seem like they were building upon *AIDS*?

AA BRONSON: Well, they—it was definitely a reference to our painting, right?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Didn't—it didn't come out *LOVE*. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: It came out of *AIDS*.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: And then Marlene McCarty did—what did she do? She did something just shortly after that as well. She did another one as well.

THEODORE KERR: I don't know why I don't know that.

AA BRONSON: What is it?

THEODORE KERR: It was another four-letter word?

AA BRONSON: Yes. It was after *RIOT*. It was—

THEODORE KERR: I don't know. That's—

AA BRONSON: Well, it's hardly ever mentioned. It's funny.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: But she did do something. [Marlene McCarty's painting said "FUCK" –AB].

THEODORE KERR: Okay, I'll look it up for next time. I didn't—that's—

AA BRONSON: And again, referencing back to us—and again, being critical of—essentially, it was about being critical of General Idea, but—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But you guys didn't take it as a form of—

AA BRONSON: We didn't care really. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like we are—always came from this idea of adding.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, we were never trying to purify, which is what the Left so infamously always does, right?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We were always to just add layers and so to add the *RIOT* layer on top of our layer—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —on top of the *LOVE* layer, was great as far as we were concerned. To add anything that's a provocation has more—gets more conversation going. And then that, of course, was the idea of our image was that it creates a conversation about what the image means because it's not—it's ambiguous what it means. And some people read it as opportunism. I mean, the whole thing that revealed itself then was the difference being Canadian and American. Because Canadians at that time when they saw the *LOVE* image saw it as being about, you know, universal love or about—well, it was once called brotherly love. And Americans when they saw it thought it was about free love, about sex.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So when they saw our piece, they saw it as saying that, you know, free love will get you AIDS.

THEODORE KERR: Ah [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Which is such a narrow interpretation, but that's the—initially that's how they saw it.

THEODORE KERR: Like a cause and effect—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, like if you have sex you'll get AIDS, but they thought that was our message.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it wasn't. And then as they got used to the image, everything completely changed. It was the weirdest thing. They embraced it and you know, Gregg Bordowitz wrote his book about it, which he had been very critical before and then suddenly he writes a book about it and he's completely—

THEODORE KERR: But that took a long time.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, it took a long time, but still it was very interesting that it—you know, our idea was that it should seep into the culture, that it should become part of the culture and I think it was successful that way. It did do that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. This is a small clarification. You were talking about the first time it was in San Francisco and it was in the gallery and you were careful—or I don't know if you were being careful, but you said something like you used the posters to wallpaper the gallery. And is that to distinguish between—the difference between postering? Yeah, wallpapering with posters and making a wallpaper?

AA BRONSON: Yes, because I think two years later we actually made a wallpaper and there's a reason for the wallpaper and that is that, you know, it used to be that museums were pretty much empty places where academics went and art historians and it was—they were not places that were for the general public on the whole. Maybe school groups or something. And then the idea of the blockbuster comes along in the early '80s and by the mid-'80s a museum is a public place. And we began to realize that the same way we were doing these interventions in, you know, within the urban landscape, we could also do interventions within the museum that could act like advertising campaigns as well. So we made the AIDS wallpaper so that the—specifically for using in a museum context.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then we started exhibiting the AIDS paintings on top of the AIDS wallpaper and so on and so forth. And then we—you know, and then came up with the idea that the AIDS wallpaper could just be the environment and anything could be exhibited on top of it, you know. Other artists's work could be exhibited on top of the wallpaper and so on. And it's a pretty accurate representation of the culture of the time.

THEODORE KERR: Do you have favorite examples of pairings that have happened?

AA BRONSON: I should have, shouldn't I? There was—well, the—it's not that long ago, but MoMA wallpapered. They actually own the AIDS wallpaper installation and they showed one of Warhol's huge—what did they call—what do you call it? Rorestack?

THEODORE KERR: Rorschach.

AA BRONSON: Rorschach test images, one of his big images, on top of it. And they also showed some Mapplethorpe photographs. Like they showed basically like gay art on top of the—like kind of iconically gay art, on the decorative end of gay.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: On top of the wallpaper.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: I have pictures if you want to see.

AA BRONSON: Oh, you have pictures of that?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yeah. I have pictures, yeah.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I think that was not that long ago. That was 2012?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yeah, it was 2010.

THEODORE KERR: 2010.

AA BRONSON: Yeah. And then there was another exhibition that again, might even be more recent now, that traveled to a number of museums and they changed it in each museum, but it was very—it was like—it was very interesting to see in each institution, which works from the exhibition they chose to put on top of the AIDS wallpaper, you know. It was very revealing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, and in that way the conversation continues and—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: You enlarge the physical reality and make it—you help it go viral and replicate, which is—

AA BRONSON: Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: You know. These are important metaphors.

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Yeah, and most recently—well, it's up—that wallpaper is up right now at Tate Britain oddly enough. It's an exhibition of their permanent collection and they bought the AIDS wallpaper, but it's all British artists and all the PR is talked about in terms of British artists, but then they do have a wall wallpapered with the AIDS wallpaper. It's the funniest thing. I forget what they put on top of it now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But something that's British. Anyway, that's the current—that's where it is currently. The Tate Britain. I like—I kind of like how it infiltrates in every country. Like in Germany, we designed the logo for the AIDS Foundation.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Just using the AIDS logo and the colors of the German flag. And in Switzerland, we did the AIDS postage stamps that were included in *Parkett*. But the original idea was to get the Swiss government to actually publish them as a real postage stamp.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they considered it, but they turned it down in the end. So to get—kind of—to get under the skin of different countries in a way, and getting under the skin literally with the wallpaper, you know, having all this stuff on top.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, which obviously again, echoes what the virus was doing and the experience of it.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And in the same way that General Idea would sit around a round table or a breakfast and talk about theory or camp, did you all—do you remember after this point talking about HIV?

AA BRONSON: Well, I'm sure it was a constant topic. I mean, obviously we had worked with the idea of images as virus. I think we first used that term in around '71. And then when AIDS came along it was too perfect. It was bizarre, you know. Bizarre that a disease came along that just sat in our laps as being the perfect illustration of the kind of theories we were working with. So we talked about it, you know, to a certain extent from that point of view and then on a pragmatic point of view from—especially in relation to our—the hospital on the corner and our friend who was dying there and everything going on around us, but then more on like a strategic level. Like how do we—what can we give to that situation through our particular skills and talents and our opportunities, the kind of opportunities that come our way. How can those opportunities be transformed into something that, you know, potentially helps this situation? And helps our community.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then once Jorge and Felix were diagnosed, I think in '89 and '90. And then our homes, Toronto and New York, filled up in pills and then it's like another whole scenario unfolds of different kinds of imagery and tactics.

THEODORE KERR: But before diagnosis, was there talk about it being in your personal lives?

AA BRONSON: How do you mean? Like—

THEODORE KERR: Like were you guys—did you guys like—were there—did you say, "Oh, bring condoms home?" Like, "Make sure you have a condom with you if you're going to go out." Like were there any like strategies or talks about how—about your own lives and about how HIV could be, you know, part of your personal lives?

AA BRONSON: Well, we were aware of it as much as anybody. But well, maybe because we were in our 40s, we didn't think about it the same way. I mean, we were aware of that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But no, I don't think we did talk about it much really.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Not as a—not like how to protect ourselves or whatever. I mean, we read—we would probably point out to each other that the condom thing or whatever, but it wasn't—we followed all the latest developments. My doctor was an immunologist by specialty, so he was always filling me in on the latest things that were going on from that perspective. I'm not totally sure what you mean, but no, in terms of kind of practical ways of looking after ourselves, I think we kind of had it covered, but—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Well, obviously not if they both died, you know. I don't know quite what to say to that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I mean, another way we can approach talking about it is like, did you notice a difference while you all were traveling between Canada and U.S.? Was there different conversations being had?

AA BRONSON: Well, in Canada it was a public health conversation.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: In the U.S., it was an activist conversation. So they were very different.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: And ACT UP did try to set up a group in both Montreal and Toronto, but they were never very—they were never all that active, but there wasn't—there were things to be accomplished, but it wasn't—there wasn't the same sort of desperation, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So they didn't have the same—they couldn't really get their heels in the ground in the same kind of way that they could in the U.S. It was a very, very different atmosphere. And also once they were diagnosed and then seeing doctors in Canada, I mean, it was just such a supportive, and kind, kind of environment where they were as quickly as possible trying to figure out what the health system could do for people, you know. How could they support them? Or how could they—if they were going to die, how could they make their life as pleasant as possible until that point, you know? So, I mean, it was very clear from the time they were diagnosed that—from the different medical experience that Felix was having in Toronto versus Jorge in New York, that at

some point we would have to move back to Toronto.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because the medical system was too awful in the U.S.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was too little support and too little being done and too much reliance on volunteers. And we didn't want to have to be part of that when it got that far.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But we held out as long as we could. So we held out until '93, the summer—the end of the summer of '93. We spent the summer of '93 on Fire Island as a kind of like a gift to Jorge. And then we went back to Toronto.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was that a decision that you talked about for years?

AA BRONSON: Well, in a way—I don't know about years, but—yeah, well, it's something that unraveled over time, right? Or something that revealed itself over time. We knew we would have to go back. We certainly talked about it. We didn't know exactly what we could do because we were nervous about the loft. It was on a fourth-floor walkup.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And by the time Jorge went back, he couldn't possibly have walked up those stairs—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Felix had moved into an apartment in The Colonnade about a year earlier and we kept the loft as a workplace, but he was living—to be able to have a more—a cleaner, more manageable environment—he was living in an apartment in The Colonnade and I think The Colonnade because our friend Fern lived there and could keep an eye on him and help him out.

And then it was funny because there was the—there was a financial crisis, which came in '91, '92 in the U.S. and like half the galleries in Manhattan closed their doors. It was like huge art scene crisis. But that didn't really hit Canada for another couple of years so the point where we moved back in '93 was just the point at where the financial crisis was hitting and in The Colonnade, there was—there were these very fancy penthouses on the top and suddenly they were empty because the businessmen who would normally live in them were, you know, getting rid of any expenses they could and they moved out of those apartments and they were sitting empty. And then, well, Felix used to talk about—he would kiss the elevator to the penthouse every day.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: He would kiss the button, you know, the penthouse button on the elevator every time he got in it.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And then we managed to actually rent one of those penthouses at, you know, what to us was a lot of money, but it was extremely affordable.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it had, you know, three bedrooms and four bathrooms. It had a private swimming pool and all these terraces. And we knew we weren't going to have to live there very long, right? That they were both dying.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So we knew that we could afford—and the National Gallery of Canada bought a big installation right at that moment.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We thought, "Okay, we've got enough money. Let's spend the money on them—[laughs]—while they're alive."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And were these frank—like you're speaking about it—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —completely and frankly.

AA BRONSON: We spoke totally frankly to each other about it and then Ydessa Hendeles, who at that time had a—what point was she in her life at that point? Did she have—was she a commercial gallerist or did she have her own foundation? Anyway, very wealthy lady who was a friend, sent us to her lawyer for advice and in about one hour of very frank conversation around this situation, he helped us put together a kind of strategy for dealing with our estate planning, dealing—when they die what happens with their families, and with all the artwork and blah, blah, blah. And I guess having to deal with him really pushed us into having to be totally frank.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And just having to be completely open about it, with each other at least.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I mean we were any way open about it, just like—things that were unpleasant to talk about we just had to discuss them frankly in order to be able to—and we put together—we—that's the point at which we made General Idea a corporation—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —that the three of us owned together, and it was set up so that so when they died, I took over ownership of their shares is how it worked.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So it separated the private life from the art life.

THEODORE KERR: Which is on a meta level, like, so fascinating for the three of you, I can imagine.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was very interesting. And we moved into the penthouse, which was great because the other thing about the Ontario health care system at that time was that if you had a terminal illness, you could choose to die at home. You had to like sign a paper that said you wanted to die at home.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then the health care would all come to you. You no longer went to the hospital. The doctors came to you, the nurses came to you, unless there was something very severe that required—like if you needed a surgery or something that was different. But for most of the care, it all happened in the home. And as it turns out the doctors and nurses that are involved in home care are a very different breed than the ones that are in hospitals. Much, much more empathetic and much, much—I guess they're probably not any kinder, but they seemed to be kinder. [Laughs.] You know, the—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: They're more—so from then on we were sharing our apartment with—they managed to set it up so we had the same doctor for both Jorge and Felix, so we only had one doctor coming and going, but we had multiple nurses and then as they became more sick, then homecare workers and so on and so forth. And it became a little bit of another institution in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And because it was so big, we could set it up in a way that—and it—you know, it was an apartment that was really designed for catering and in a way this was perfect because friends could come and cook meals.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We could—in a way things could happen in a much—there was a much more open door kind of thing that—you know, and Fern was coming and going all the time because she was in the building, but also a lot of friends would come and go and feel free to come and go because the place was big enough. [Jorge and Felix] could find privacy in their bedrooms if they wanted it and if they were out in the open space, they were like in socializing space.

THEODORE KERR: Mode.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, space. Socializing mode. And it worked bizarrely well in a way, you know. It was like the perfect place for them to be.

THEODORE KERR: Well, and a return to your collaborative Toronto life with people coming and going.

AA BRONSON: Yes. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. And then also the feeling that they had kind of like knew they were being rewarded on some level for their accomplishments in life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And we were given the City of Toronto Lifetime Achievement Award around that point.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So on and so forth. So they felt acknowledged for what they had done in life.

THEODORE KERR: And you're saying "they." And how about you?

AA BRONSON: Well, I felt—well, I was definitely the primary caregiver, so yeah, I was included in all of that, but it was more like I was carried along for the ride, but I wasn't—I don't know whether I felt I was being—I couldn't feel I was being rewarded because they were dying. [Laughs.] You know, I couldn't see it in the same way. And then when they died, I also—I stayed there as long as I possibly could because in a way their spirits were there, you know. I didn't want to leave them behind. And I managed to stay for several years before I just—we just—financially, absolutely impossible.

THEODORE KERR: And were they—if I remember correctly, Felix learned—he was H—he was living with HIV because of the motorcycle accident. Like ramifications after the motorcycle—

AA BRONSON: Oh yeah, that's true. That was true. I had forgotten about that. Yeah, we went—we spent a summer in Italy. Like a month only, but we spent a month in Lucca. And he had a—not a motorcycle, but a motorbike accident, and broke his shoulder and had to be shipped back to Canada. And it somehow came out of that. Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, I mean, it's in the beautiful book *Negative Thoughts*. It's—he—

AA BRONSON: Oh, I had completely forgotten. It's funny.

THEODORE KERR: As it's written, he thought he was on painkillers, but they were not painkillers and then when he was back in Toronto, I think he was getting a checkup and he had to—there was maybe a battery of tests and HIV was included.

AA BRONSON: Right. Right. Right. Yeah, because he—they didn't do anything except bandage him up in Italy. And then sent him home to New York. He probably was just in so much pain that he was—all the endorphins.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know. Jumped in and he thought he was on painkillers. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And like would medical professionals treat you as one unit, too? Like if—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, they did. That was the interesting thing that they were all aware that the system is set up to not allow them to do that at the time, but they were going to do it anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they figured out how to do it. You know, like they had to—Jorge had to be assigned a doctor through one system and Felix through another, but they managed to organize it so it could all be—so their appointments would always be back to back with the same doctor and things like that, you know. They went to a lot of trouble to keep us together as a family.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And was there lots of—like how was communication working when Felix was still in Toronto around the HIV—like, now we would Skype. Like if I had to tell you something important, we would Skype and maybe you would have a—but you know Skype didn't exist so like was it a crucial moment when Felix told you guys that he was living with HIV or when Jorge shared—?

AA BRONSON: Well, Felix would have been first. And how did that happen? I think he must have actually come to New York to tell us.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because we did go back and forth a lot. Oh, I know. I mean, he was—he began to drink very heavily.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And essentially he—I think he always had been an alcoholic, but at this point it really took over his life. He was constantly falling down flights of stairs and things, and having to be sent off to clinics. And at a certain point, he—you know, and really the reason for it was that he was HIV-positive and he wasn't—or maybe even had AIDS at that point, and he wasn't able to tell anybody.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So he would go on these drinking binges. So telling us came out of a drinking binge somehow. But I don't quite remember at what point—I know he had already been positive for a year—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —by the time we heard about it. But I don't really remember. I have the feeling that he came to New York and told us, but I'm not absolutely sure that's correct.

THEODORE KERR: And with Jorge was it similar? Was it something that he lived with for a while and then shared?

AA BRONSON: No, it was more instant. He went off for a holiday in San Francisco and had kind of like a wild weekend in San Francisco that he immediately regretted.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then he came back and got tested and was positive.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was just boom, boom. It happened very fast.

THEODORE KERR: And like, told you?

AA BRONSON: And told me immediately, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And then did you call for Felix to come to New York to tell him?

AA BRONSON: We would have told him on the phone I think.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And did you get tested during this time?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I must have, I suppose. Yeah. Well, I had that doctor who was an immunologist. I don't know how I found that doctor. I don't specifically remember, you know, at what point I first got tested, but I certainly was tested multiple times through that whole period.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Always negative.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was there—did—with—how did it first—did it change the dynamic right away? And I don't want to even use that sentence—I don't want to assume that it changed the dynamic. That's not—

AA BRONSON: It actually kind of didn't.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: I mean—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: It maybe took down some barriers that were beginning to build up by being in different cities and so on. It maybe brought us closer together again. But—and especially, I mean, physically brought us back together again when we all moved into the—this penthouse together. But also it emotionally brought us closer together once Felix had first revealed to us that he was positive. Because it was kind of—all this drinking was very mysterious up until that point.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Until we knew what was going on.

THEODORE KERR: And maybe this wasn't something you all were aware of, but starting in 1987 there was the travel ban on people living with HIV, so I—was there times where Felix couldn't get into the U.S.?

AA BRONSON: No. No.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I think, you know, between Canada and the U.S. at that time, they weren't like asking somebody if they were—it's only if you happened to have your luggage searched and they found pills or something, you know, but it didn't manifest itself in our lives at all.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Also, not in terms of like traveling to Europe and back. I mean, Jorge was—Jorge came to Berlin for that exhibition where the *RIOT* painting was first shown, and he was quite sick by then, but he didn't have any trouble going in and out.

THEODORE KERR: Good. That's wonderful.

AA BRONSON: Especially given that we weren't even living in the U.S. legally, right? I mean, that made it particularly weird, but—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was it hard—this sounds like a stupid question, but was it hard for you to see the physical manifestation of the illness?

AA BRONSON: Well, of course, but I have to say that—I mean, we had the rehearsal with—first of all, with just people in the neighborhood, but also our friend Robert from the embassy—from the Consulate, and we saw him go through so many stages of illness and then, you know, I was with him when he died. And the—and then being in hospital during that period when there were so many other people—actually much worse condition than Robert, and then friends in Toronto, actually, who—I mean—what's it called? Kaposi for example. I mean, neither Felix nor Jorge had that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But people who had that—it was really like, you know, being branded or something. It was really like a—it was such a visible—and there was our friend Billy who was—who is the Nazi milk boy in the General Idea videos and so on, and he had Kaposi quite badly. He was really—I mean, he was still quite able to function, but visually looked—like so much like an untouchable, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: But Jorge and Felix were luckily relatively unscathed that way. I mean, Felix never actually had an opportunistic infection.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: He just died of—basically he just wasted away.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was kind of a miracle that he never had to go into a hospital.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Really never had anything except the HIV itself as a problem. And then Jorge, his primary problem was he went blind. I forget what the condition was called, but—

THEODORE KERR: Retinitis? CMV Retinitis?

AA BRONSON: No, it was one that was quite rare.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was a relatively uncommon one.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It took them some time to figure it out. I can't remember now. But otherwise, also, I mean he got thinner and thinner. But with his clothes on, he looked a little bit of a sad sack.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: But he looked normal in a way, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. I like that phrase. Sad sack.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, because he was, you know,—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Like droopy.

AA BRONSON: Droopy. You know, his clothes were all too big for him suddenly. He looked a bit like a homeless person.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But still like bright eyes? Is that true?

AA BRONSON: Maybe not Jorge. Jorge never had bright eyes.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: That's cute. [Laughs.] One of the powers of this—or I hope a power of these interviews can be is to like—we can talk about all this stuff, it's important, but it's also—oh, your beard went right into the mic. It's interesting to think about like, as visual artists, how were you experiencing the visuals of HIV? That's something that surprisingly doesn't get discussed.

AA BRONSON: You know, this is not quite answering that question, but one of the things was interesting because of the way we were able to do it compared to people in New York, because we able to be in this big apartment and we could have assistance, we could do projects, we could have meetings, even if they could only manage a half hour meeting, we could have meetings and make decisions and then the assistants could go and do the work. We were able to really work as artists with Jorge really up to the day of his death—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and with Felix, up until three days before he died, he was still being productive.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And this was an enormous gift to them, too, to be able to be productive. And consequently, that period in that penthouse, which is like less than year, like it's only about six months, was incredibly productive. The amount of work we produced because we knew we were like working against the clock, so all our energy was really into, "Let's get all these things done while we can." Let's send them out into the world while we still have the opportunity to do so. So that—our experience was more rooted in the sense of urgency around completing—so we had so many projects that we wanted to do, and it's like we had to go into high speed to get as many done as possible before they died.

And then visually, I'm not totally sure what you're asking. I think, you know, visually, it's a little bit like we became doctors in a sense. Like you learn to recognize all the only barely visible signs of this and that. You know, you start to recognize symptoms visually and to intervene when you see something coming along, you know, so it's like—sort of became—especially with the doctors and nurses coming to the apartment all the times —

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —everything was about—I mean, a lot it was about training me as much as anything to be able to look after them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So it's constantly giving me information about what this means, what that means, how to do something for this, how to do something for that. I was kind of having, I guess, this kind of informal medical training during that whole period.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so there was this—for me, this visual—not only visual, but kind of tactile and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Or just sensing—trying to—you know, it's funny because at a certain point, Jorge couldn't talk anymore. When he opened, gibberish would come out.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

AA BRONSON: And they—you know, it was some sort of neurological problem they couldn't figure—they had—the doctor had no idea what it was. And when we told Jorge what he had just said, he was like amazed. Like he couldn't—he would get big eyes. "I said that?" You know, it was like—and his writing was the same. When he tried to write something, it would come out as just all mixed up kind of symbols that you couldn't—you sometimes could see parts of words. And then during that period I realized that if I just like kind of like mentally got into his head, if I just kind of like really focused on Jorge, I could about 50 or 60 percent of the time, I could make out what he was saying.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, it was like I could kind of get into the scramble with him. So you know. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And figure it out. And then we had had a friend, Rob Flack, who had had pretty bad dementia as a side effect of AIDS, and at a certain point, they discovered that he was dehydrated and they like gave him really a lot of hydration, and the dementia disappeared.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I suddenly thought to myself that this was the same thing and I said to the doctor, you know, "I think he needs to be hydrated. I think there's something going on with that." And he said, "Well, I've never heard of such a thing before, but let's try it."

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: So in came the I.V. unit and the I.V. nurse and we hydrated him for like 24 hours and then he could talk again.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: It was just like a miracle. So I became very involved in this—in my kind of—my artist perception of the medical process, as opposed to the—their perception of it and they kind of embraced my part of it and went along with it and were quite willing to go along with it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was the shutting down of the home in New York hard or—like it would just like—everything seemed to be happening so quickly and—

AA BRONSON: It was very hard, yeah. I mean, we kept it briefly and then I went down with our friend Doug Stone, who had a truck and drove art back and forth quite a bit. And he helped me pack it up and bring everything back and I know he said, you know, he would—we would pack for half an hour—[laughs]—and then he would have to stop while I would cry for a while. [Laughs.] But we had a studio there by then and I kept the studio. I wanted to keep the apartment but Felix wouldn't let me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because it seemed—

AA BRONSON: Because it would be for my benefit and not for theirs. [Laughs.] But we did keep the studio because it was very cheap and I stored a lot of stuff there. I stored enough stuff there that if I came back I would have enough to furnish a small apartment, you know. And that's eventually what happened. And that was at—the studio was shared with Chrysanne Stathacos, who I mentioned before.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And she kind of took over the studio while I think we found another studio-mate and I just had a corner where I stored everything. But yeah, that was very difficult moving stuff back to Toronto. Very difficult.

THEODORE KERR: Because it felt like this—it felt like the future was changing?

AA BRONSON: Not so much about the future, but about the present. It was like—it was such a physical acknowledgement of their impending deaths.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So it was hard. Well, I'm just trying to remember, at what point did we actually shut that down? I mean, maybe Jorge had even already died by the time I got down there to—I don't remember exactly at what point we shut the apartment and moved the stuff. We must have done it right away because we couldn't have afforded that penthouse if we were paying the rent in Manhattan.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: We must've done it right away. And you know, in my memory, I don't remember having to constantly stop and have little cries, but—[laughs]—Doug described the process to me later and it was funny because in my mind we had just packed up the apartment and moved it to Toronto. [Laughs.] But he said there was this like—every 20 minutes, half an hour, it would be like a 10 minute cry break. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think that that's true when you were in the penthouse as well? Do you think had to save away for a little bit and kind of—

AA BRONSON: Well, I—you know, I had the maid's quarters, which is where I lived.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And so I was in behind the kitchen and like the smallest bedroom with the smallest bathroom in the back, but with the laundry machine.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And it was kind of perfect in a way because I was—like there was—I had to go through the kitchen and then there was the, you know, the big living room and then they were behind that. So it gave me some physical separation and also, there was a back—there was a service entrance.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So I could come and go without having to go out there, and I knew from the last period in New York—I mean, the strategy I had developed to deal with it was to go out at night, to go to bars and things, which I had never done—ever done before.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And—well, I'd only done it once before and that was when we lived in Amsterdam for three months in '79, and there I went out virtually every night, but otherwise in New York I didn't really until Jorge was diagnosed and then it was him who said, "You know you need social life away from me." And then I started going out at night. And then having this maid's quarters—[laughs]—and this apartment I could also leave through the service entrance and I had a social life that was outside of General Idea, which kind of kept me sane.

THEODORE KERR: Was that hard to hear when he said that? That you needed a social life?

AA BRONSON: I guess it was hard, but it was—also, I immediately recognized that it was true.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I hadn't thought about it at all.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, because it would have meant a huge shift.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. Well, by going out at night.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So then I took to going out. Like I would go out at midnight and not come home until dawn maybe two nights a week or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I was in my 40s at that—I was like 45, 46 at that point, so looking back on it I'm amazed I could stay out until dawn—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —two nights a week, but I did. And I enjoyed it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And were they nightclubs or bars or bathhouses or friends' houses?

AA BRONSON: I would normally go to the Spike and the Eagle, which were on the west side. And then usually one and then the other. I think I would usually start at the Eagle and then go to the Spike. And then there was a kind of a weird sex club. I can't remember what it was called. It was on 21st Street I think. Let me think now. The Eagle was at the corner of—you must have talked to lots of people that had to remember where the Eagle was.

THEODORE KERR: In New York or in—

AA BRONSON: In New York. It was on the corner of—[. . . -AB].

THEODORE KERR: So like 21st and 9th?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: No, on the Westside Highway. So 11th at—I'm trying to remember what was on—the Dia had already moved in on 22nd.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And it was the only thing like that in the neighborhood.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the homeless people would all collect outside across the street from the Dia Center.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then the—that was 22nd, so the Eagle was on the corner of 21st and the Spike was on the corner of 20th, right?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So on 21st sort of halfway down that block there was a sex club, which was straight—I don't remember what it was called, but it was a straight sex club, but it was an S-and-M sex club.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: A straight S-and-M sex club, but starting at one, they would allow gay guys in.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Before that, men were only allowed if they had a woman with them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then by two, it was entirely gay and it would keep going till dawn, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But there was this one-hour overlap where it was gay and straight.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And you could go and watch beautiful dominatrixes whipping ugly guys from New Jersey. That kind of thing, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: It was a very peculiar scene.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, amazing.

AA BRONSON: And you could always tell who was gay and who was straight because the cute ones were all gay.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: It was such a weird scene. And I liked to go there quite often. I mean, it was just totally entertaining.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I guess I discovered the world of sex clubs during that period. There was another club on—that I occasionally went to, on—it was very basic. Christopher Street. It was like a private club.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Nobody was supposed to know about it, and you had to ring a bell that had nothing written around it. So you had to be brought by somebody who was already a member and become a member. And it was a weird two-story space where there was a mezzanine on the—around the—at the—it was a mezzanine and then it was very high ceiling with the mezzanine at the halfway point, and the sex all happened on the mezzanine and down below was like a social space. Everybody knew each other. They were all kind of hanging out there all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they only played opera.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Very loud. All this exuberant opera going on. And again, it was kind of S—very S-and-M-y. That sort of crowd, but in a very kind of like sociable, friendly—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —kind of way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Not the kind of like role-acting kind of idea one can get in a S-and-M community, but much more of a—it was very much a community service in a weird way, this place.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And probably a lot of people there were living with HIV. Probably most of them. And there were other places too, but there was the—in the triangle building where there was—what was the name of the—it was a bar on one—[. . . –AB].

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yes, it's on the southern extension of Ninth Avenue.

AA BRONSON: And the—I was basically across the street from our studio because our studio was on the corner of—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Ninth and 14th.

AA BRONSON: Ninth and 14th.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: You know the big Apple Store that's there now?

AA BRONSON: Yes.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: He's the very top floor.

AA BRONSON: We were the top floor of the Apple Store. And then across the street, diagonally across the street was that triangular building, and it had a gay bar on the east side and on the west side there was an underground entrance that went into a space that was under that gay bar. And on certain days of the week it was, again, a straight S-and-M club and other days it was just a gay sex club. And I often went there as well, again, a kind of sociable space where you would often see the same people over and over again.

THEODORE KERR: And did it seem like a big shift in like your sexual education or like your relationship to—?

AA BRONSON: Well I guess I had gone to gay saunas starting in my late 20s in Toronto and then in Europe. I never really did very much in New York. And once I moved to New York I didn't at all because already the gay saunas in New York were like a site of danger and also they got closed down fairly quickly, other than the one in the—the Wall Street one and there was one on the Upper East Side which I never, ever went to. I went to the Wall Street one I think once or twice. But somehow, they felt like places of danger, and so I changed my habits from saunas.

And in sex clubs, it's somehow much more—what's the word?—it's much more, you can have more distance in a way in a sex club and you can become as involved or not involved as you want. You know, it just felt more manageable. Even though the sex club normally doesn't have as good facilities in terms of hot water and soap, still it was more manageable in a way. And you can kind of judge the situation and make decisions, you know, kind of make kind of informed decisions in a different kind of way. I don't know why, it's funny.

THEODORE KERR: Well do you think it's about the role of like viewership or spectacle?

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes, it's more like spectacle, it's true. There's more voyeurism.

THEODORE KERR: That's the word.

AA BRONSON: Definitely more into watching, but also I wasn't just watching. It's more—it was just a very different way of having sex. I guess in the saunas one tended to go into cubicles and have a one on one kind of —more, in fact much more intimate kind of situation. In the sex club it's more public and more performative, and it's somehow different.

THEODORE KERR: Right, and so there's a sexual—it's less about looking for someone to have sex with and like you're kind of participating in sex—

AA BRONSON: Yes, in a sexual energy that fills the space. Yes, and you can see. The other thing about saunas—back then when they have their, you know, their little sex mazes and things like that, they were always dark. And in the sex clubs there was this thing that you could always see. There were never dark corners, you didn't need dark corners.

THEODORE KERR: And then it would be returning to the apartment. As the sun is rising you're going home.

AA BRONSON: Yes, and I also got into a leather a lot during that period so I would be completely done up in leather out on the street from midnight until you know six or seven in the morning.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing. And we're talking like jacket, pants, hat?

AA BRONSON: Yes, usually. I had a hat. I didn't usually wear the hat for some reason but now and then I did. But yes, complete—the complete look.

THEODORE KERR: And with like, kind of the t-shirts of the day? Like—?

AA BRONSON: I think I always tended towards like nothing printed on my t-shirt. I think I tended towards just white t-shirts in that time, I would think. I'm trying to remember. I mean I did have t-shirts with things on them.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: But I don't think I wore them with the leather.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Yes, kind of a purity of leather look.

AA BRONSON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And then was this similar when you were in Toronto, the same types of places?

AA BRONSON: Yes, but I only went to one place in Toronto really, which was the—what was it called? Well there were two places.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: The Barracks.

AA BRONSON: The Barracks on Widmer Street—the sauna—which was the, you know the cheesiest and most disreputable sauna. Because in a way it's just more open there, it's like everybody—what you're into is what you're into and everybody is very open about it. And there's not—most of the Toronto saunas are kind of like

good boy saunas, you know everybody's kind of parading around showing off their muscles and it's—but at the Barracks it was just about sex and that unfortunately closed. But when I came back I think it was still open for a while anyway. And then I went to, the bar I would go to was on the other side of the Don Valley. What was that bar called, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: The Toolbox.

AA BRONSON: The Toolbox, yes. Which again was a kind of more leathery—see, I would wear my leather. It was a kind of leather scene, and they would have naked nights and all that kind of stuff, which I enjoyed participating in at the time.

THEODORE KERR: Did Jorge and Felix want to hear about your nights out?

AA BRONSON: Not really, I don't think, no. I don't think we talked about it much. Maybe a little bit but maybe if there was a funny story to tell—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —like seeing somebody who we would never imagine in that situation on his knees giving a blow job—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: —or something like that. I have a particular story in mind, but other than that—

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: —catching somebody in an embarrassing situation that you wouldn't expect to find there, you know. But otherwise, no.

THEODORE KERR: And when—what's interesting to me too is, you talked a little bit about General Idea's relationship with New York activists around HIV/AIDS, and I wonder when you all went back to Toronto was there—what was—was there any relationship with people responding to HIV/AIDS in Toronto, besides the care—

AA BRONSON: Well there weren't really activists, per se. You know, we had relationships to—I mean if there were people you would look back now and think they were maybe in a way they were activist, like I don't know, John Grayson, or I don't know who.

THEODORE KERR: Well I guess I'm thinking about *The Body Politic* people, and then maybe the AIDS Action Now people.

AA BRONSON: Well *The Body Politic* people always hated us right from the beginning, because—I don't know what it was about. We didn't—I think it was something to do with camp. Like they were very political—intellectual, political, academic kind of group and then we were doing all these crazy things with beauty pageants. What could be more politically incorrect than three men doing a beauty pageant, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Right, there isn't an earnest to it.

AA BRONSON: Yes, they were very earnest and we were definitely on the camp side. And they very rarely published anything about us or mentioned us and they didn't approve of us. And that's right from, you know, right from the mid-'70s whenever they started it. It's immediately evident. So we knew them vaguely. In the same scene we would cross paths a lot, but we didn't really ever socialize or anything.

And then the other group you mentioned was—

THEODORE KERR: Aids Action Now. So like—

AA BRONSON: I've actually—I don't know who those people are and I've never come across them. I mean I've heard of them but that's all.

THEODORE KERR: Yes, yes.

AA BRONSON: So I think, again, probably generational, that we were so much older. Because when Jorge and Felix died I was 48. And I suspect those people were in their 20s at that point, but I'm not really sure.

THEODORE KERR: Yes, they would have been, like, in their 20s and 30s. And also—I mean, if I'm wrong—it also seems when you went to Toronto it was this compact time of caregiving and so it—

AA BRONSON: Yes, I didn't have any life outside of that. It was just—plus making art. You know making art, caregiving, and you know, one or two nights a week going out.

THEODORE KERR: Right, which is, I mean not to be cheesy, but that's also caregiving.

AA BRONSON: Yes, I had to look after myself.

THEODORE KERR: It was a prescription from Jorge.

AA BRONSON: That's true.

THEODORE KERR: And then I love the fact that you said, once pills started getting involved, all of a sudden—you didn't say your aesthetics changed but there was this new ingredient you could—

AA BRONSON: Yes, well we became very conscious of the pills in our life so then we started doing these sculptures and installations using the capsule pill as like, as a kind of sculptural motif. And so the most well-known being the *One Year* and *One Day of AZT*, which was based on—Felix was taking AZT at the time and it was based on his prescription which was five a day. Some people were taking more than that probably. We made it kind of a one-year calendar of oversized AZT pills, using a five a day grid kind of thing, which is now at the National Gallery of Canada.

THEODORE KERR: And was it falling on you and assistants to do, like, the work of getting the work made? Like, how did—

AA BRONSON: Yes, well we were very lucky. We got—Barr Gilmore, who had been working at Art Metropole, became our assistant, oh, maybe a year before we moved into this penthouse, so he was working entirely with Felix at that point. And he was—he's now basically—he's the head of the design department in a community college and he's an independent book designer. He designed all of Gagosian's books for ages as well. I mean he's a hyper-enthusiastic, competent producer. He just gets things done.

And so we were lucky he came on board as our assistant around that time, in that last period. Maybe actually even as early as '91, because all the pill pieces, he tracked down the companies that could produce them and worked out all the production, so we were very lucky to have him during that period. Yes, so, yes, so that took all the pressure off of Jorge and Felix or for that matter off of me, to physically get things done.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I need to take a break, do you need to?

AA BRONSON: Sure.

[Audio break.]

AA BRONSON: One of the things about being with Jorge and Felix during that period is that they died in such different ways. So Jorge through the whole process really embraced everything as it went along. He died in a very gracious way. He allowed himself to be carried along by the whole process of, you know, becoming more and more ill and then eventually dying. Whereas Felix was the opposite. He was fighting it all the way. Felix basically was refusing to die. Felix was filled with anger all the time and Jorge was kind of, I would say—yes, he was very loving and he also was able to accept love. Felix was trying as hard as he could to keep his independence. He had his own little private studio he insisted on keeping as well. We gave him an extra room so that he could keep up the pretense that he was independent. And when Felix finally died it was just because there wasn't enough flesh left on the bone to support life.

So in a way, I think I was very lucky to have these two models, you know, so clearly demonstrated to me on a daily basis. And I realize that if Felix had been able to let go a little bit he would have been so much happier in his last days and it would have been so much easier for him, much less of a struggle.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so I think that as I get older too, I'm conscious in relation to my age, of trying to find, trying to locate, like what's it like to be the person I am at this age and not be trying to hang on to being younger than I am, you know. Like trying to—I'm probably hyperconscious of it consciously, which is maybe a bad thing, because then I talk about it all the time. But I think that it was a good preparation for getting older.

THEODORE KERR: Before Jorge died you did portraits—you did a portrait series with him, and I wonder if you want to talk about—.

AA BRONSON: Jorge's father had been a survivor from Auschwitz, and Jorge himself had been born in a kind of low level concentration camp. Not exactly concentration camp. It was like the Jewish families who were seized in

Italy—they were actually on holiday in Italy when they were seized—Jorge's mother was pregnant with him and the families with pregnant women were put in a small town where they were kind of registered with the police until the women gave birth. I mean it was a typical Italian thing about babies, right, babies are sacred, and this newcoming baby was more important than the fact that they were Jews to the Italians.

And so they were in this town and there was a whole bunch of them. Anyway, to make a long story short, they managed to escape on smugglers paths. But the men of the families stayed behind to keep the police at bay and in the end Jorge's father was transferred to Auschwitz as a result of that. But he magically survived.

THEODORE KERR: Jorge's father did?

AA BRONSON: Jorge's father was one of the survivors, which he did by making himself as useful as possible so that he was indispensable. He worked in the hospital of Auschwitz, and by eating—his secret to longevity was that he ate every piece of moldy bread he could find because he knew that bread mold was penicillin, the stuff nobody else would touch.

So Jorge's father died, not that long before Jorge really, like maybe around '91 or so, '90 or '91, and Jorge was very conscious of looking as his father looked when he came out of Auschwitz, and his father would have been about that age probably, I'm guessing. And so he wanted me to take these photographs of him to document it. So he's blind when I'm taking the photos but wants to look like he's not blind. So there was a big thing about, you know, "Are my eyes too open? Are they open enough?" [Laughs.] Trying to moderate the height of the eyelids so that he would look natural. And so the three of those portraits are then produced later on as large-scale photos. And I printed them on velum with, what do you call it—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Sepia.

AA BRONSON: Sepia prints a velum, which are old fashioned architectural technology for archival prints. So they have longevity. And also, made them for an exhibition I did at the Secession in Vienna. We also there printed them as posters and put them up in the street with almost no identifying information as to what they were about and so on. And so the idea being to make a kind of conversation around HIV and AIDS. But also it—especially when you print it in sepia, it's quite ambiguous whether it's about concentration camps or HIV. You know, the two kind of weirdly visually merge.

THEODORE KERR: Did people pick up on that?

AA BRONSON: Oh yes, absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

THEODORE KERR: And was there—was that something—

AA BRONSON: Interestingly, you know, if it had been in New York there would have been all sorts of people complaining about that. But in Europe, it was like a touchstone. It was a point of discussion, you know. There are similarities, like for example both communities—in both cases it was, you know, something that hit a particular community in the midst of a larger community that was not hit, you know. There was like, ongoing—in both cases there was ongoing trauma over a period of years, which was hitting a small community while the people around them were not being hit in the same kind of way. And also this thing of like, if you have an airplane crash then all the relatives of all the people who are killed, who then probably gather at the site of the crash, all having trauma kind of like in sync with each other. But the situation both with HIV and the concentration camps was this kind of ongoing levels of trauma, was, you know, this people die and somebody else has just been diagnosed, somebody else is in the hospital. [Cries.] Excuse me.

THEODORE KERR: I'm sorry.

AA BRONSON: And that pattern of—[cries]—it's actually very similar. And those—after Jorge and Felix died I began to think about those kinds of traumas, public traumatic events in a way and communities. And the only other one I could find was, you know, the Cambodian boat people basically. Other than that, it's a very rare thing. There's been no medical studies on this at all, on the effects of this kind of ongoing trauma. Nothing.

There's all sorts of studies done on things like airplane crashes and trauma that can be kind of focused on and identified but the kind of trauma that happens in this repeating ongoing way is not—there's no literature on it at all.

THEODORE KERR: For you sitting here in 2017, do you—to me I think the trauma is still here, and is that true for you?

AA BRONSON: I'm not quite sure how you mean the statement.

THEODORE KERR: Like, I think that the trauma of HIV/AIDS is ongoing, not only because there's new cases but

also like, you know, I love you and I care about you and I think the traumas of their lives and deaths are still with you.

AA BRONSON: Oh absolutely, yes absolutely. And it's kind of like from my parents' generation and from Jorge's parents' generation for example, the effects of the war lived with them in their lives until they died and live on in me. You know to a certain extent, I carry, you know the effects of my mother having to leave behind her life in London, her artsy fartsy life in London, and go on and become a middle class pilot's wife in Canada. I carry, you know, I carry all the side effects of that for her in a sense, still today. And I think it will be the same for the HIV stuff, that the effects are going to travel generationally for quite some time.

THEODORE KERR: For you what was the—actually, in that household, what was the period like in between the deaths? That must have been very hard.

AA BRONSON: Well it was hard, very particularly to us, to our dynamics. Like Felix hated the fact that Jorge was getting so much attention—[laughs]—because he was going to die first. Just hated it! He was so jealous, had all these temper tantrums. And Jorge's 50th birthday was on January 28 and we knew he wasn't going to live much past that, so we organized a big 50th birthday party for him. And people came from—you know, people came from Europe, a lot of people came from New York, and we had this big party and Felix was just like fuming through the whole thing—[laughs]—because it wasn't for him.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And then Jorge died like within a week after that. And Felix I think at that point kind of gave up. It was like something hit him. You know it was like he went quiet in a way after that. And we still continued—we had projects that we had be working on with Jorge, and we continued to work on them. We had two assistants and at that point. We had Barr [Gilmore] as our assistant, but also we had a young student who was like a—came to us as like a summer intern. Poor thing, he had to live through all of this. So we continued to work and produce but the energy was very different. It got very quiet.

THEODORE KERR: Do you remember the intern's name?

AA BRONSON: No. I should though. Fern remembers it I'm sure, but I don't.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did you and Felix talk about Jorge's death and like what it was to work as—like did you conceptualize that you're still working, the three of you together?

AA BRONSON: Well probably we still—on a practical level, yes. Like, do we continue working on these projects or do we stop—like at what point do we stop? And before Jorge died we made a kind of list of projects also that I would be allowed to complete if they both died before those projects were complete, that could still be called General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: I guess I'm thinking of the chair pieces. Is the chair piece one of those?

AA BRONSON: That's not a General Idea work, that's an AA Bronson piece. That's kind of like the fulcrum in a way because it looks like a General Idea work and it feels like a General Idea work but it's actually by me, although me when I'm embodying still General Idea in a way. Still working in a kind of General Idea way.

THEODORE KERR: So even Felix continued; you were working.

AA BRONSON: Yes we continued to work, mostly we did during that period quite small, some editions, and things like that. The bigger projects had mostly been wrapped up at that point. And then he died in early June. And the poor intern had to sit painting while the guys with the stretcher came and removed the body and all of that. Well actually we left Felix in bed for 24 hours after he died and his friends came. We planned it with the doctor and the doctor said, "Well don't call 411, you know, don't call me," he said, "You know, take your 24 hours with the body. It's not going to be a problem. And then, you know, give yourself time and then call."

THEODORE KERR: And why was that important to you?

AA BRONSON: I had always wanted to do that. It's kind of a typical thing to do in Europe. It's a traditional thing to do when somebody dies, is to keep them at home and people sit with the body.

THEODORE KERR: Did friends come and sit with you?

AA BRONSON: Yes.

THEODORE KERR: And you've talked about that powerful photo that you took that day. So you don't have to rehearse that, you don't have to talk about that if you don't want to.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] No I don't mind. I mean towards his death Felix surrounded himself with more and more color and pattern. I mean really, over quite—not just after Jorge died but even before that, he started—he had a little—one of the great things about where we were living was he had a little motorized cart and he could go down in the elevator and go shopping at—you know like all the fancy shops were just downstairs from us in that location. So he could go and shop and buy mostly extremely patterned clothes, not really practical on the whole.

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

AA BRONSON: And so when he died we, you know, we cleaned the body and we dressed him in kind of his favorite shirt. And his sheets already were there, were these Missoni sheets and brightly colored pillows and all this. And you know, I looked down at him and I thought, "I have to record this." And it's kind of like the hair on the nape of my neck, I can still remember, stood up as I took the picture. And I knew I would have to do something with the photo at some time but I didn't know what.

THEODORE KERR: Did you even wait to get that roll developed? Like was it—I'm assuming it's a camera with film.

AA BRONSON: Yes, it was film. I don't remember. Yes, there wasn't really—digital photography was extremely primitive at that time. I don't remember whether I used the rest of the roll before I printed or whether I just printed it, but I just printed it like at a drugstore print—you know like these—

THEODORE KERR: Like Shoppers Drug Mart or something.

AA BRONSON: Yes, like Shoppers Drug Mart or something. Probably was Shoppers Drug Mart—[laughs]—and got the film back and the horrible little prints they provide. And I lost the negatives almost immediately. I lost—they vanished.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: I still had the prints, but I lost the negative. And I don't know, like there's two things that might have happened. One is I might have subconsciously just—because in fact I did that a lot for the next few years, I would just constantly losing—like almost purposely losing things that were, that had emotional content. Or it might be that Fern or somebody like that was just too horrified and wanted to destroy it. You know, that's also—[laughs]—a possibility I kept in mind. Which I don't really know which it was, more likely me. But I don't know what I would have done with them.

But I was doing weird things during that period, like I threw my camera down the garbage chute—[laughs]—at one point without realizing I was doing that.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, like not in a rage, but in like a—

AA BRONSON: Not in a rage, but I was like, I had my camera in one hand and some garbage in the other and I threw the camera down the—[laughs]—chute instead of the garbage. I was very discombobulated during that period. So, it's possible that I somehow threw the negatives away. But then Barr, bless his soul said, "You know, I think I can save it from the—" Because he was getting into digital editing and he scanned the image. And then we had the sheets, we had the pillows, we knew the colors, and we like coaxed it back to life, like pixel by pixel.

THEODORE KERR: Oh wow.

AA BRONSON: You know, and if you look at the actual, the actual digital file, it's extremely primitive. It's extremely low resolution by today's standards, you know, it's like 72 DPI or something for the big print, for this giant print. Maybe less.

THEODORE KERR: And when you first saw it enlarged—I can't—like I don't know what that experience would be like.

AA BRONSON: It still took me some years before I could think what to do with it. And the woman who had been the Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery when we had our exhibition there, Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, was at this point now the Director of a museum in Munich. And she would come in through town and she came to visit me and I showed her this image and said, "I want to do something with it and I don't know what." And she said, "Well what would you do if you could do anything you want with the image, what would you do?" And I said, "Well I feel like it should be a billboard out on the street. You know, it should be—it's like the kind of semi-public life we led or this kind of semi-fictional media base. I feel like I need to complete the story with that somehow."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Just to add a couple of things to that, maybe you were going to get to them, but don't forget that you proposed that image to at least two other people. One was at *Parkett* and one was another one and they all were just so horrified and could not deal with that.

AA BRONSON: That's funny I don't remember that at all.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: This was the third one.

AA BRONSON: I don't remember that at all.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Finally somebody said, "Okay we can deal with this." And don't also forget that this is just at the time where there was also that infamous Benetton ad of the guy dying of AIDS in bed.

THEODORE KERR: [David] Kirby.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: This was not too much longer after that.

AA BRONSON: Yes, it was just after that. So it was kind of weird because it felt like a reference to the Benetton ad, which it wasn't at all. But she said, "Okay let's do it." And we printed—there were five billboards went on the ring road around Munich. And then a sixth one was presented in the museum itself. And in the end we presented in a very small room, which was almost the same—not much longer than the image itself, so we put it on the long wall, so when you came into the room you were coming in, like, about as far as I am now from this wall, that's—you came into the room and there was that huge image. And so you were confronted first of all with this kind of riot of color. And I really liked that it had this kind of Klimpt-like effect because of all the pattern on the sheets. And this being in Munich, it's—Munich is that kind of decorative, Germanic culture and it's not that far from Vienna and that kind of decorative aspect came through loud and clear.

And so when people came in they would first of all smile because of all of this pattern and color and then go—[gasps]—immediately after, so there was this complicated response. And then the other thing is, again, the original concentration camps were in the area around Munich, the first ones, and Hitler was from Munich. So this again touched off this whole discussion around HIV and the concentration camps.

THEODORE KERR: And did you see it as part of a work with the photos with Jorge? Like did you understand—

AA BRONSON: Well I hadn't done Jorge—I hadn't done anything with Jorge's photos yet. Felix's was the first one I did.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

AA BRONSON: I did that first. And then I think I did—I actually got to printing Jorge's—what year were they?—then Jorge's I did for the exhibition of the Secession whenever that was. So that was I think—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: You didn't do Jorge's until we were in New York.

AA BRONSON: Yes, we were in New York when I did Jorge's. I think it was '99 that I did Felix's, so around the time we moved to New York I guess.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then it would have been, I think it was 2000. I think it was only the following year that I did Jorge's for the show at the Secession, and then Felix's portrait was also at the Secession. And then I also did—the third death portrait was the portrait of the part of me that died with them. That was the idea, and I did a kind of coffin, a sarcophagus kind of thing, a black ebonized wood coffin with a life-size photograph of me on the top of it. A naked photo of me, which was based on tombstones from Northern Germany in the late Renaissance. There was a period where important people instead of being presented in all their finery were being presented as corpses and with worms crawling out of their eyes, or whatever. It got very gruesome for a while there in Germany, and I kind of—I went in that direction. So that was very difficult because basically I sent the photograph to—I sent the construction drawings and photograph to Vienna and they made it without me seeing anything at all. I said "I can't deal with this, you make it to my instructions," and then I didn't see it until the night before the opening. It was very, also very traumatic to see that portrait of myself, because for me it was a part of myself that had died.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yes. You think that was around 2000 or later, that third portrait?

AA BRONSON: I can tell you.

So I'm looking at the catalogue from the show at the Secession. It was in October/November 2000. So that's when I made the coffin. And the photos of Jorge I made immediately—well let's see, here they are, what date is on them here? I think I made them the same year, also 2000. Well I've got 1994/2000. Yes I took the photos in '94, printed them in 2000, and then the portrait of Felix was done in '69—I mean in '99—for the show in Munich.

THEODORE KERR: So it's interesting to think about that period of time between their deaths in 2000. That seems like a—

AA BRONSON: Yes, it's a long time. I mean from '94—[. . . –AB]—I met Mark at my birthday, my 50th birthday, so that was in '96, two years after they died. But from '94—we moved to New York when? '99?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: March 25th, 1998.

AA BRONSON: March 25th, 1998. So it was good that we moved to New York, because the time they died to the time we moved to New York, it's really quite a blur for me. I really have trouble. And actually I went back to Art Metropole, and they needed a Director and I became the Director for two years, kind of Interim Director, something I hadn't done since the early '80s, to keep me kind of—kept me busy. And I can remember projects I did there but between that period after they did is just kind of a blank to me, a blur. It's hard to put it together in my mind. So.

THEODORE KERR: And you were doing Art Metropole work. Do you think you were making art at that time? Do you think you were—

AA BRONSON: I didn't make—the only piece I made during that period was this one piece with the three chairs ["Untitled (for General Ideal)"]. I probably completed the couple of General Idea things, but probably in '94. This has got what year on it here? I've got it, the three chairs are from—it says '94/'98. Oh that's interesting, '94/'98. So I must have come up with the idea already in '94 and then executed it in '98. And I did it for an exhibition in Art Metropole, actually, that's right.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then did the idea of moving to New York kind of give you—I mean I'm making some guesses here.

AA BRONSON: I still had the studio so I still went back and forth a little bit, but not much. I mean, just to visit. And it was in my head to go back. And then Mark and I began living together I guess about a year after we met.

THEODORE KERR: In the penthouse?

AA BRONSON: Did you live in the penthouse at all?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: You moved out of the penthouse and were in a one-bedroom upstairs.

AA BRONSON: Yes, I moved in a tiny apartment at first. It was ridiculous.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Well not tiny, but you know.

AA BRONSON: No, but it was tiny given the amount of stuff I had. [Laughs.]

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: You were there less than a year.

AA BRONSON: Yes, then I found a bigger place and then another place, right? We sort of gradually moved up.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yes, so we moved in together in like October 1997.

AA BRONSON: '97 you moved in with me, into a smaller apartment in the same building. [. . . –AB]. It was a three-bedroom and then we moved into a two-bedroom that was the same, same footprint but less walls.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] And then the idea to move to New York just—?

AA BRONSON: Well it had been in my head all along and I think Mark was delighted at the idea of—I mean, I had always assumed I would move back once they were dead but I couldn't bring myself to do it. It would have been like abandoning them to move back to New York, even after they were dead, so it took quite a few years before I was able to do that. But Mark I think was thrilled at the idea of being able to move to New York. Maybe a little bit of a dream come true. Is that—? I could also do it for his sake and not only my only sake and that probably helped make it possible to move there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Because I mean again I'm guessing—the idea of working now or living was probably abstract to say the least.

AA BRONSON: Yes, and I was trying my best to start making art again and I began with those three pieces we've talked about. But it was very difficult to figure out to how to move forward. What to do next, how to put one foot in front of the other.

THEODORE KERR: And then it seems like 2000 is just like this explosion of creative output, or the fruition of work.

AA BRONSON: Well I guess there were things that had been developing in my head for some time that all came together in 2000 because there was the show in Vienna. Which was, other than those three pieces is—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Well, you did the piece with Matthias Herrmann, those photos.

AA BRONSON: I met Matthias Herrmann at an art fair in '90—I don't know probably '96 or something like that, and by 2000 he was actually the Director of the Vienna Secession. We produced a little zine together in the '90s, then he brought me to Vienna to do this exhibition. And that was a big deal for me because it was—I guess it was the first solo exhibition I had had, right, was the one at the Secession, so it was a big—I mean it was emotionally and psychologically a big deal to be able to have a solo exhibition.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Let me say, it was hard for you because you only knew how to collaborate, and here you were on your own.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's true, I only knew how to collaborate. But to some degree I was collaborating because it's Matthias who then took it upon himself to produce the coffin piece for me. And the exhibition was emotionally very difficult for me, but it was very—it was like being reborn in a sense. It was like my identity as an independent artist sort of starts from that exhibition. It was very important for me.

And then there was—quickly after that there was an exhibition at the Power Plant in Toronto and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at the—at MIT at the List Visual Art, whatever it's called, the Gallery at MIT. So suddenly, boom, boom, boom, boom—I had three more biggish exhibitions which were kind of elaborations on the one at the Secession.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And it seemed to kind of push you or tease out some of the emotional work you had to do or some of the—

AA BRONSON: Yes, I guess so. I guess so. Like again in my brain I can hardly remember, I don't really remember very much of that. Obviously I was frantically busy if I did those four exhibitions inside of about two years, but I hardly remember them.

THEODORE KERR: Also the work of managing General Idea in its new form. You know, like—

AA BRONSON: Yes, I had to figure out how to manage General Idea. Well I already was in a way, you see like, especially once they were sick and once the three of us were living together, I was really the administrator for General Idea and I was the one talking to the dealers and I was the one talking to the museums, and I was the one talking to—so I had a kind of one-year rehearsal of doing it by myself even though they were still alive. So I had to keep on doing that, but I could do it almost on automatic pilot. It's funny, because there was still a lot of General Idea activity in that period after they died. I had to do a big installation in Paris like two weeks after Jorge died, which was excruciating, but I did it. I'm just actually looking to see here what happened in that.

THEODORE KERR: Do you want this one, or does that one have a past—

AA BRONSON: No this one is fine actually for that information. This only goes up to '97, that's interesting. Yes, because the *One Day of AZT* and *One Year of AZT* showed at MoMA in 1996. [. . . –AB]. Yes, and there was a big exhibition at something called the World Wide Video Center in The Hague. There were several commercial galleries—several shows, three shows at commercial galleries in '94 after they died. I mean, you know—one of them was like opened the day after Felix died, in Zurich. I had to cancel my flights to Zurich because he was clearly going to be gone. But, you know, it was ridiculously busy during that period.

And then there was, you know, there was a couple of years where it was very busy and where there was actually quite a lot of sales that kept all this going. And then suddenly that was over. It was like interest plummeted.

THEODORE KERR: When do you think that interest plummeted?

AA BRONSON: Well, let me see that book—[laughs]—it shows more of the history. Well I had to move out of the penthouse because the money stopped coming in. That was when—Mark, about '96, I moved out of the penthouse?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yes.

AA BRONSON: So—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Well it was really '97, because when we started dating you were still living in the penthouse. 1997.

AA BRONSON: I'm just looking here at the exhibition history. So '96-'97 was still busy. '98 there was a show at the Camden Art Center in London and Robert Prime Gallery in London. And then there's nothing in 1999, no solo shows. So yes, by—I think it was dropping off by the end of '96 and then by '97 it was kind of over for the time being. And there was still interest in terms of—well I did the show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in 2001, but that's not General Idea. You know, it's like General Idea was suddenly over and I was running the estate but there wasn't so much going on. And during that period and before leaving Toronto—I think it was before I was leaving Toronto—I pulled together the thing with putting the General Idea archive at the National Gallery, placing it at the National Gallery of Canada. I think probably before I moved out of the penthouse they came and hauled everything away to Ottawa, where it still is.

THEODORE KERR: Was that something that you had initiated, or they had initiated?

AA BRONSON: Yes, I initiated it actually because you know we talked about Art Metropole being kind of half-distribution center and half-archive and at a certain point again in the late '90s the archive became too much for Art Metropole to handle. It was just suddenly worth so much money, things that had been bought for a few dollars were suddenly worth thousands of dollars and so on.

We couldn't insure it or anything and so we worked out a strategy to kind of discontinue the archive aspect of Art Metropole and transfer that to the National Gallery of Canada as the Art Metropole collection where it still exhibits and they did a big exhibition from the collection and published a catalogue. Everything is very well taken care of. It was like a fantastic experience of doing that so I thought, "Okay I'll do something similar for General Idea." And for the archive to be in the National Institution felt like the right place. So I'm not exactly sure at what point that transfer was made but anyway they cataloged it in Ottawa and there it is today.

THEODORE KERR: And then the other thing that comes out in 2000, that you know, I think I've let it be known that I'm really attached to, is *Negative Thoughts*, this book.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's when I did the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. And they didn't want to do a book. I had this experience twice in that time. Like American institutions are so weird some times. So both the show at MIT and the show at the MCA in Chicago, they didn't want to do a book. And I did want to do a book. And in both cases I just put down my foot and said, "If you're not doing a book, I'm not doing a show." Because to me—you know, why go to all this work just so a handful of people can see this for a month? You know? It doesn't make any sense to go to so much work and expense for something that a few people are going to see for one month and then it's gone. You know, like if you don't have a book, why bother doing it at all? And in both cases, of course, they had to back down at that point. And I said, "You know I can organize it, and I can do it for a fraction of the cost that you can do it." And in both cases Barr Gilmore who might have still been our assistant for one of those, but anyway I think we had to hire Barr to do *Negative Thoughts*, and he was able to produce it in Canada at fraction the cost of what it would have cost them to do it in Chicago.

THEODORE KERR: This is a bit of an aside but do you want to talk a bit about how you see the relationship between an exhibition and a book. You said a little bit, but I think there might be more there.

AA BRONSON: Well this I get from—I learned so much in my life from Jean-Christophe Ammann, when I first meet him was the Director of the Kunsthalle Basel, and I first met him in I think '76. And in '78 he did an exhibition about Canadian art where we showed a big installation, *Reconstructing Futures*, and the whole *Showcard Series*, which is vast—worked very closely with him and he did a book. And he had a whole philosophy, he had a staff of a full-time secretary and a part-time secretary and himself, and then a super who lived in the building, and that was it. And the super also sold the tickets at the front door. And he did two exhibitions every six weeks I think. Like one upstairs and one downstairs, I think. And major, major exhibitions by major artists. Just incredible exhibitions. And then there was always a catalogue.

And his idea about a catalogue was that he saw it as something that would carry value like 20 years later and that would provide the kind of information that one wanted in relation to the show. So for him the most important thing was to document the works. And he said, "I don't care about essays," He said he would write an introduction, but he would hardly ever put essays in his catalogues. It was just photos. And his wife was a graphic designer, and they would kind of pound at these catalogues. And you know, they're extremely collectable and everybody wants them now, you know, so many decades later. And they're fantastic catalogues. And he had started that kind of philosophy of how to do it when he was at Lucerne. He was the Director at the Museum in Lucerne before he went to Basal and such a little place, a little itty bitty place, and he was working a lot with young artists. And he thought to himself, "Okay, the reason I'm doing this exhibition is because I believe in this artist, I want them to be known in the world and I'm not going to make them known in the world by

showing them in Lucerne. It's only by publishing a book that I can make them known, but I have no money so I'll do these kind of bare bones books that are basically just illustrations and very, very simple layouts." And he became known for those catalogues.

So I've always carried this idea of the importance of books in relation to art from my conversations with him. And that kind of came up when it was time to do these exhibitions both at MIT and at the MCA. I thought, just, "Don't do the exhibition, don't even bother doing the show. You know, like if that's how committed you are to the work, forget it." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: In this respect do you use catalogue and book interchangeably?

AA BRONSON: Well yes, I mean, of the books that Jean-Christophe did, some of them would now be called artists' books and some of them would now be called catalogues. But the—you know, the edge between them, it's hard sometimes to define which they are, but I think especially because there's no critical writing in them at all they often get perceived as artists' books. Especially if somebody was working with sequential photography and then these photos just plop into the book as a sequence then it becomes an artists' book. But it's, you know—it wasn't really—that kind of definition wasn't so important at that point. They didn't really know whether they we redoing a catalogue or artist's book, they were just presenting the work.

And so that's kind of how I've always thought too. Like General Idea we always had a big hand in our catalogues and they're not normally thought of as artists' books. But they could be, because we were such a big part of how they were put together.

THEODORE KERR: In *Negative Thoughts*—I mean there's two, for me, standout quotes that I think are helpful to kind of help us shape today, or help us shape into tomorrow. One is, "I aged quickly and thankfully fell into the role of a Saturnian man." Am I saying it—? Like a Saturn? [. . . –AB]. Saturnian man, yes.

Yes, I mean the Saturnian figure is the—that brings in so much stuff. [Laughs.] I mean in let's say medieval times the idea of the Saturnian man—it's the kind of grumpy—like a man aging into the grumpy man. But it's also the melancholic, and consequently it's associated always with the poet. So there's the poetic side and the grumpy side are kind of intertwined. And it's—you know, it tends to be like a quiet surface running deep or something. It's about things going on beneath the surface that don't have to be expressed on the surface necessarily. And it's interesting because now it's referred to as depression, and your given drugs to stop it. But I was very aware that I would very easily be diagnosed as being depressed and I didn't want to be given drugs and I didn't want to be diagnosed as depressed. I wanted to be allowed to go through the grieving process and to also find some solace as it were in the—you know, in the melancholic side of a major life experience. And I think that was important for me, and I think it's a shame that so many people are prevented from experiencing some part of their life during which that takes over, you know.

THEODORE KERR: And with that line I can't tell if this is that beginning of that period for you or the middle part of that period for you.

AA BRONSON: This was, what, 2000?

THEODORE KERR: 2000, yes.

AA BRONSON: It's kind of like the middle period. And it's kind of like embracing adulthood a bit, too. You know, I was always very boyish. I was really boyish until they died, and to give up being boyish was very difficult, even at the age of 48. And I think that's true for a lot of—especially for gay men—because being young is associated with being, you know, attractive and desirable and all of that. And it's very important to be young, supposedly. But I kind of let go of that after they died. Not even entirely after they died, but also in the period before, I started to become very aware of that. Jorge was always very melancholic and felt things deeply and thought about things deeply and so I always in a way had him as a role model as to, you know, the plus side of all of that as opposed to the negative side.

THEODORE KERR: Also, there was a physical transformation of you during that time too. Like you do start to look like a different adult too.

AA BRONSON: Yes. And for one thing when I met Mark, both of us started growing beards. And that felt good. I felt like I needed to a certain extent cover up the suffering, you know, which I felt was so present on my face. At that time it was useful to just have a mask to look through. And that was comforting somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Did you experience the stigma of being so deeply associated with HIV?

AA BRONSON: Well, I suppose I must have, and I wasn't totally aware of it. But I remember, for example, working at Art Metropole for a couple of years after they died. At one point we had a Board meeting, and we had

it at my apartment.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I thought, "Okay, you know, it's kind of lunchtime." It's going to be lunchtime. I said, "Well, I'll provide lunch." And I just made sandwiches myself. I made a lot of sandwiches and put them kind of in baskets and covered them with cloths and tried to make them look as nice as possible. And then the Board members all arrived, and one of them said—almost the first words out of her mouth—"Did you make the sandwiches?" And I said, "Yes." And then nobody touched a single sandwich.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Nobody would eat them. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: There's a lot there. I can't tell where their stigma is coming from. Is it that they assume that you were living with HIV?

AA BRONSON: They assumed I was living with HIV, and I wasn't actually. But they assumed I was.

THEODORE KERR: And that's why they didn't want to eat—

AA BRONSON: And that's why they didn't want to eat the sandwiches.

THEODORE KERR: And was this just a common assumption, and was this something you felt you had to communicate with people?

AA BRONSON: Well, again, I didn't really think about it at the time. I think I was kind of oblivious. I knew I was negative, but it didn't actually occur to me that everybody would assume I was positive.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But I think they did.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And did that shift when the solo show started? Did it shift around 2000? Did people start to understand that you weren't living with HIV and that—?

AA BRONSON: I don't know, to tell you the truth. I don't really know. I just—I really didn't care, frankly.

THEODORE KERR: Yes.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Somehow, you know, like all that kind of stuff just felt small and unimportant.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I really didn't care what they thought. I really just—you know, the fact of their deaths was the important thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And trying to discern some sort of future for myself.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And everything, you know—I more or less disassociated myself from Art Metropole once I left Toronto. Well, actually, a little bit later because I was invited to be on the Board of Printed Matter, which was an equivalent organization in New York, and then I was invited to be the Director which was in 2004. So, by then I had cut my ties with Art Metropole. But somehow it all felt like a Toronto thing to me, too. Like Toronto's small-mindedness or something. Like, people treated me weirdly in Toronto, and I was actually quite happy to leave when we left.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And a lot of it probably was people assuming that I was HIV-positive and me being oblivious to the fact that that was going on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Maybe the last thing we can talk about today is another quote from the book. It was, "I was condemned to manage the past."

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Well, looking after General Idea—you know, for example, pulling together the archive. Deciding: what is the archive? What's in the archive, and what do I need to keep?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I put way too much in the archive as it turned out. Sending it all off to Ottawa, the negotiations with National Gallery. I had a very important meeting with Ealan Wingate, who had been our dealer and by then was working for Gagosian. I asked him to just advise me on what to do because I didn't know how to run an estate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I had a long meeting with him where we went through all sorts of stuff, and as a result of that meeting—because one of the things he said, "Well, you have to start by making an inventory of everything you got. You've got to start there." And he said, "If I were you, I would ask for everything back from all the dealers, and start from scratch."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I did that. I asked for everything. The dealers were incredibly offended. [Laughs.] Everybody returned everything. I did an inventory. I set up a—I mean, it's a period I can hardly remember, but I'm sure it was very, very heavy on administration for those first few years. Plus all the exhibitions that were going on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And all the exhibitions were essentially about looking at the past. And even now, you know—well, I guess the work on the catalogue raisonné would have started in the early 2000s. And even now working on the catalogue raisonné, which is, you know, now beginning to have some shape. I'm aware that everybody deals with me as the executor of the estate, not as one of the artists of General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: Oof.

AA BRONSON: So my identity totally shifted to the executor of the estate, and I wasn't even aware of it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, to me I was still one of the artists of General Idea, but to everybody else I was now the executor of the estate. I think for the dealers—and I think that's probably the most difficult thing for me, because what it ends up communicating is that I must have been the least important of the artists because I'm no longer the artist.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know. It took quite a while to—in fact, I think it's only just maybe in the last few weeks that I feel like I'm reclaiming my identity as General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that I can make decisions about the catalogue raisonné based on the fact that I'm one of the artists.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Not on the basis that I'm the executory of the estate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And with so many things you saw yourself as—so anyways you propelled yourself forward in General Idea as, like, the organizer or as like, "I have a project and let's do this."

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And is there a way in which—and I don't want this to come across wrong—but does managing the estate also feel like maybe a work, like an artwork within?

AA BRONSON: No, actually. It doesn't—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: —frankly. I don't think. I might have to think about that one overnight. My immediate reaction is to say no it doesn't feel like that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And almost the first thing I had to do was to find how to distance myself from General Idea and how to work in a completely different way. In the end, you know, after however many years, I realized that really I'm working in exactly the same way as I always worked. Only visually it looks completely different.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it just has a completely different air to it, but all the basically the strategies and methods and everything I learned in General Idea is all put to work in what I do now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, and still with the same heart connection and the same—

AA BRONSON: Yeah. And I think that's—I mean, that's something that people don't realize about the work of General Idea, is how much emotion and connection there is all the way through it. I mean, it looks kind of corporate in a way, right? But, there's all this deep connection between the three of us, and then with the subject matters that we undertook. And then we were so involved in community-building for the first however many years, you know, the first almost 20 years. So, people tend to think of what I do now as very different, but it's actually very much the same.

THEODORE KERR: Do you—I mean, I think some people might think of it as different. But I have to be honest, I don't think of it as different.

AA BRONSON: Well, good.

THEODORE KERR: And what we'll talk about tomorrow is, like, the projects that you do to build community now are also part of the—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —same, you know.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: You are working similar muscles.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: In different ways maybe.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. One thing that struck me recently is that the early works of General Idea that bring in ideas about the occult or about—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —you know, those kinds of things have been pretty much ignored.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It's maybe time to try and get those works documented and exhibited more.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because there are some major works that just basically—just fallen into nowhere, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: They're lost.

THEODORE KERR: Because people don't know how to activate them.

AA BRONSON: I think, just, they don't fit people's—they think of General Idea as being kind of media artists.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's kind of like post-McLuhan and media artists—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: And it doesn't fit in that comfortably.

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: So, it gets ignored.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. It's Mark's birthday and we are three hours in. What are some things you want to end with?

AA BRONSON: Oh. I mean, I think that's kind of an okay ending.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Yeah. I'm comfortable stopping there.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Thank you.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Is there anything that we should think about—this doesn't have to be in here—

AA BRONSON: —for tomorrow?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

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THEODORE KERR: This is Theodore Kerr interviewing AA Bronson in his home and workplace in Berlin on March 06, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Good morning, AA

AA BRONSON: Good morning. So, I was remembering last night that you had asked about—whether General Idea—whether we talked about HIV and AIDS, you know, in a conversational, information-sharing kind of way at home. And I had felt kind of puzzled. I thought "Oh, we must have." But I don't really specifically remember anything. And then I remembered the thing that interested us more, because we traveled to so many different countries doing these AIDS projects—it was the comparison of how HIV and AIDS set within the general culture, in each place. Like Canada, obviously was very, very, different than the U.S. But then Germany was different again. And I guess around then we were, in the late '80s, we were showing quite a lot in Cologne. And then there was the group show we talked about here in Berlin where Gran Fury unveiled their *RIOT* painting. Oh, and by the way, the other thing that came along just after that by Marlene McCarty, was a painting that said, "Fuck."

THEODORE KERR: Ah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the interesting thing about the *Fuck* painting—that I don't know if she knew that or not—is that Robert Indiana—I did some research into it, and Robert Indiana originally wanted to do a painting that said "Fuck." And Jasper Johns talked him out of it.

THEODORE KERR: Really?

AA BRONSON: And talked him into doing "Love" instead [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing.

AA BRONSON: So funny. So, I don't know whether Marlene knew that. I don't think she did. I think it was more like an emotional response. So, I mean the German thing was interesting because of the way they embraced all our logo projects tremendously.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the German AIDS Foundation had us make their logo for them. But then on top of that they commissioned us to do a silk scarf—[laughs]—of the AIDS logo in the German—oh, no, I think they're in the red, green, blue. And then there was this fundraising party in Cologne, where the scarfs were for sale and they sold like in 30 seconds. They were all gone. And there were all these kind of upper class ladies of a certain age all

with little AIDS scarfs tied around their necks. [Laughs.] It was—and they were so pleased with themselves for supporting the foundation and you know. But it was a completely different atmosphere than New York, which felt so embattled.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I think Germany, really, the healthcare system swung into action very, very, quickly.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And also, the public did as well, so it was a very different kind of thing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and Germany actually reached out to communities they understood would be impacted right away.

AA BRONSON: Right, right.

THEODORE KERR: Just a huge difference.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. So, we did talk about that a lot. We couldn't help but compare all the different—and especially I think because the U.S. was so wretched in that regard. Just the ignorance and homophobia and so on was just so extreme. It was just—and then as soon as you crossed the border it kind of vanishes. It was kind of weird.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, yeah. Today I was wondering if you wanted to start by talking about—I mean, healing in general. And then we could also talk about how healing comes into your art practice.

AA BRONSON: Sure. Well, you know I've always been interested in all aspects of healing, starting from a child. When I was rummaging through libraries as a kid I would always read everything I could find on, you know, anything like laying on of hands—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —or anything like that. And also, things which to me were connected. Things like palmistry or reading the bumps on your head, or whatever. And I always felt like I had some sort of—you know, some sort of intuition for people. Like I could—and I mentioned before, I think I always felt like I was fooling myself, maybe. But in the '80s—in the late '80s, I think '89 was the first time I heard about a workshop run by something called Body Electric. A school out of Oakland, California. And it was a—I can't remember how they sold that first workshop. As it turned out it was only the second workshop they had ever done in this kind of a way. But it was about essentially men having sex with men, I suppose. But it was about tantric sex. The idea was that, you know, with mindful touching, with approaching both—well, it was sold as a kind of a massage workshop, a tantric massage workshop, so there was a sexual component.

And it was a two-day workshop, and it was in New York. And I went. And I met a few people there that I still know today. It was surprising. And I guess because it was very, very, early for this kind of thing, it was attracting the people who were the most adventurous in terms of going there. So, I did this workshop and was very struck by how thoughtful—Joseph Kramer was the person who had devised it. And he had purchased this massage school and then was trying to convert it into something different. And what it came out of was, he was a Jesuit priest who had left the priesthood and he had somehow become a massage therapist. And he did this thing where he went—as part of a kind of I think HIV and AIDS outreach he had set up a massage—just a massage table in a steam bath, in a gay steam bath, in San Francisco. And he was offering basically free five-minute massages. Extremely short. And the idea of them was just to create a kind of mindfulness and awareness upon one's body before everyone went into the sexual fray, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like to—and to just to make people conscious of their health and welfare, also. Without it being specifically preachy or—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —talking about what's safe and what's not safe. Just to somehow take you there in a more subtle way. And the thing that surprised him was, not only did it do that, but it also increased people's sexual energy. I mean, it just kind of like—[laughs]—revved them up and they were ready to go. So, he decided to turn it into more of a workshop situation. And this two-day workshop was the result of it. And then a little bit later he started these one-week workshops that were like, so-called intensives. Where I think, it was 40 men were brought together in—it was actually a location in Russian River which had originally had been a gay—an infamous gay

holiday vacation spot.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like with cabins in the woods, and tents in the woods, and so on. And then when AIDS had come along that all fell apart.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And for a while it was just used as set by Colt Studios.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then it started being used for retreats. Various kinds of, you know, wellness retreats or whatever. So, he was basically renting this very gorgeous location and doing these one-week retreats where 40 people would come together, and live there, and not leave the compound basically, be provided with meals, and do these intensive workshops. And the first thing he did was to teach a kind of basic massage workshop which also involved what they called tantric massage. Meaning that the entire body was incorporated including the cock. And there was a whole thing about not ejaculating and about holding the energy in the body and moving the energy around in the body and so on and so forth. So, I went to that. That one-week workshop. And it turned out to be—I think that was the first one he had done of those one-week workshops.

THEODORE KERR: Did you say like what time in your life this was? Or when this was? Like was it in the 2000's?

AA BRONSON: Well '89 was the first weekend thing. It was 1990 or '91, that summer.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's in the book *Negative Thoughts*, the description—the story I'm about to tell [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So he [Joseph –AB] had a group of people who worked for him at the massage—you know, people who played the roles of teachers in this situation. And there were some very, very, interesting people had come to participate, it being the first workshop. So, Keith Hennessey for example, a performance artist from San Francisco. And quite a few other—like people of some substance, you know, not just your normal run of the mill people who would come to a workshop. And they had come up with this idea that each evening they would do a ritual that would be to enhance somebody's life. Somebody who was having some sort of major problems in their life could make a request, and they would devise some sort of ritual to deal with whatever that person's problem was.

And so, we all arrived in mid-afternoon and they decided they were going to do the first ritual that very evening. And the men on the whole were in their 40s I would say and early 50s, including me I guess. But there were two men in their late 20s. Which was, you know—as it turned out in later workshops, too, extremely unusual for men that young to come. So, this young guy stood up, he was the one who was going to ask for his ritual. And he said that he had been abused by his father as a boy. Which turned out to be quite common in guys that went to these workshops. And that he had, you know, come to think of himself as just available to men to do what they pleased. And he had run away from home at some point and then he worked as a sex worker to make money. And within the sex work he did the same—he did whatever anybody wanted and he had basically no boundaries. And in the process, he had become HIV-positive and now he had AIDS. Although he looked perfectly healthy, but—and he wanted to claim his manhood. He didn't want to be the boy anymore. You know he wanted to reclaim control over his own body.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And, so, it was very emotional.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then another guy stood up, quite a bit older, like a man in his late 40s.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And said you know that basically his life story was identical. And that he wanted to also participate in this [ritual –AB]. So, there were the two of them, and then we were standing—we were in this gathering—this building, this, like a—I don' know what to call it exactly. It was like originally probably some sort of activity center for parties—or a party room or something, originally, right, in the woods. And it had windows

on three sides looking into the woods, and the windows were all open. I was near the door and the windows went around from me, around three sides. And the young guy who was talking was in the middle of the room. And at the very far side there were two black guys. And one of them—oh, and behind me, I should mention, the natural rock of the hill as it went up came into the room behind me and made a kind of, almost like a table along that wall behind me. And people had been invited to put objects there that they had brought with them that they wanted to gather the energy of the—or the intention or whatever of what was going on there.

And these two black guys were at the far side and one of them came running across the room in a very peculiar way. Like his limbs weren't moving in a normal human way. It was really weird. And everybody was like, what's going on here? And then he ran and he got a huge pink feathered fan, which was his, off the table. And he ran into the center where the young boy was, still in this very weird way. With his arms and legs not moving in a normal human way. And he started fanning around the boy. And as he did that, it was like boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—a whole series of guys just collapsed on the floor. Sort of fell backwards with their—literally their eyes kind of rolling around in their heads. [Laughs.] And then there was another young guy at the back I suddenly saw was on his stomach and he thought he was flying.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he was laughing and laughing and flying. And then another guy ran and sat on his back and it was kind of like he was taking him for a ride somewhere [Laughs.] And Joseph Kramer who had started this whole thing was standing next to me. And he just looked terrified. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Terrified! He saw lawsuits, you know. [Laughs.] Like, "What have I unleashed?" And he grabbed my hand. [Laughs.] And then you know without thinking what I was doing I went like this.

THEODORE KERR: You're putting your hands up.

AA BRONSON: I put my hands up. I just—like, there was just like there was this ball of energy.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I could see colored fog coming in the windows.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then there were a whole ring of us. There were like seven or eight of us around the outer edge all doing that at once.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was the weirdest thing—[laughs]—because there was no decision to do it. It was just like an instinctual thing. And at that point the two black guys, it turned out that they both belonged to a Santeria church which is, you know, full of spirit manifestations all the time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And Keith Hennessey also had some experience with spirit manifestations through Wiccan stuff and all that kind of thing. They sort of flew into action and they got sheets out of the storage and they put sheets—oh, no, they got buckets of water from the swimming pool which was just outside. They sprinkled water over the guys who were on the floor and then put white sheets over them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And told them to just be quiet. And the same with the guy who was flying basically, they disentangled the two and sprinkled them with water. And the guys in the middle, sprinkled with water, put sheets over them, and they closed all the windows. And then everything kind of quieted down. And then they got everyone to just like—everybody was just like, "Ahh!" [Laughs.] Of course, I mean, some people were almost hysterical with fear, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because they had never considered even the possibility of something like this, let alone experiencing it. And then they quieted everyone down. And then they gave us—well they gave us a short little speech right then and then later that evening they gave us an informal kind of lecture about all this stuff. Like, "Okay Spirit Manifestation 101, you know." [Laughs.] And they warned us to watch for our feet for the next few

days. That's something I specifically remember. And they explained that it was a spirit manifestation, that Russian River was a place where a lot of people came to die.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that there were these, you know, spirts with essentially unfinished business who had died of AIDS. And this was their topic, you know, this being abused by their fathers, et cetera et cetera, that whole narrative. The way they explained it was, those spirits also needed this ritual in the evening. You know, they needed to go through the ritual too and they had flooded into the room and were moving into people's bodies. And we needed to keep that under control somehow. So, it was very interesting.

Then there was a whole series of spirit manifestations for the next few days, of various kinds. Totally different than that first one. And of course, two people had to go off to the hospital with damage to their feet. One stepped on a nail that went right through his foot and one did something else, I don't know what. But, people were being—[laughs]—carted off to the hospital for their feet. I don't know why the feet. Maybe it was just suggestibility, you know. [. . . –AB]. I don't know. But, so, the whole subject of healing and ritual and—became quite—well, I mean, it had always been interesting to me, but it took over from the massage workshop in a way. You know we're still doing the massage workshop in the day and then these rituals at night. But the massage was very—became almost a minor piece of the puzzle in a way, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And this—first of all this realization of the, you know, this kind of density of spirit life not ready to leave human reality. And then also the presence of emotion. I mean this surge of emotion within the room—it was—also was very—you know, I was used to being in situations where everybody's got their emotions—[laughs]—under control.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Or suppressed?

AA BRONSON: Or suppressed—[laughs]—yeah. And everybody was feeling very deeply, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And especially being out in the woods and there's no one else around, and just very likeminded people. People were very able to kind of open their hearts in a different way.

THEODORE KERR: What brought you—I think you kind of mentioned it but I don't quite understand what brought you to go in the first place?

AA BRONSON: Well, I think one of Joseph Kramer's ideas was that one of the skills that he was teaching is to be a midwife to the dying.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that was something that there was an enormous need for.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: To have people who were comfortable with the process of people dying. And could see them through it. And the massage—one of the teachers he brought in was a woman who specialized in massage—she had developed a technique for massaging people with terminal illnesses.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And people who were in a very you know extreme state of distress. Like how do you give them human contact and, you know, also get their energy moving in a very noninvasive way?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: She was very interesting. And I think that was that same weekend, that same first weekend. It was like he had pulled out all the stops for this first time.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then he realized he had to break it down and do it more slowly. And eventually had a whole series of seven or eight different workshops. Well, no 12. Because I did them all. I have actually 13 certificates. I have one of them twice. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And because the school was recognized by the State of California, the certificates we got were actually state certificates. They're recognized by the insurance system in the State of California.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: Because we got enough hours within that two weeks, and so—you know, a certificate in rebirthing and it's all very California. All these different things I went there to study.

THEODORE KERR: Did you—were these things that you used with Felix and Jorge?

AA BRONSON: Well, not so much. I think it's more like, it gave me the experience to be able to—just to be able to be completely present with them—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —even when times got very rough, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Maybe I would have been fine anyway. But this—I went there with the idea that I needed some—as much as anything I think almost counselling about being able to see them through to their deaths.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And in the end, I think like most of the guys were probably there because of the tantric sex part of it, because, you know, they saw it as a big orgy or something. But they were not stupid. I mean it wasn't—the two-day workshop often—which I did several times, often attracted people who just thought it would be sexy and fun.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But they're not going to go for a week where they can't see anybody—

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: —for sexy fun, they had to be more serious to do that.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: And it was interesting there were quite a lot of people who were either massage therapists already, or who were doctors—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who came to those workshops. Anyway, so, that's how I got started with that. And I did through until about—I can't remember when the—the '90s anyway. Through the early '90s anyway I did a lot of workshops. I would go and stay for like three weeks and do three workshops back to back.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: One week each and things like that. And I think I stopped doing that around, I don't know—I think I went the year they died. I think I went in '94 and maybe again in '95 and then I stopped. And then in, what—Mark, what year was that workshop after we moved to New York?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: It's really hard to say. I'm just guessing '99.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, that sounds right. So, in '99, Mark and I—I had met Mark at my 50th birthday in '96. And we moved to New York in, what, '98?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: '98, March '98.

AA BRONSON: March '98. And then I think it was probably '99, the Body Electric School sent out an announcement that they had started a new workshop which was for working healers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was basically as much as anything to get the people who had already more or less graduated from the school and were actually doing that as a profession to come back for a kind of refresher course. And the way it was sit up was there were 20—they took on 20 people who were so-called professional healers and 20 people who would be clients.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the two communities were kept totally separate. We ate in separate buildings and we didn't socialize at all. And we were broken down into small groups of—I think there were four groups of five healers. And then we would see two clients a day, each of us. And we would have a group meeting twice a day with our little five people. And the clients would sort of travel, you know, through a sequence of healers.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And there were notes kept on every session that you could review—before you saw your next client you got to review all the notes from all the previous people who had seen him.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, it was a kind of controlled thing. And we were—and then basically it was like a self-help group in a way that we were teaching each other, and advising each other, and sharing skills that we had learned in the process. But I was the only one there who wasn't actually a professional healer.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I applied and I said, "Well, I've got 13 certificates." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: "But I've actually never worked professionally. I've never—you know, I've never done anything with it. I've just taken the workshops." And they—I think I have the most certificates from the school that anybody's ever done. [Laughs.] So, they accepted me into the course. And it was really, really, interesting. And over the course of a workshop I realized that I could really be teaching it. I was probably one of the best two or three people there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Including the teachers.

THEODORE KERR: So, you went as a client?

AA BRONSON: No, no, I went as a healer.

THEODORE KERR: You went as a healer? Okay.

AA BRONSON: I went as a healer. And I convinced myself that I just had to put aside my self-doubt—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and just act as if I knew I was really good at it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so, I would do that. And I would just—if I felt called to—like for example in one case, my client, I put my hand on his abdomen. And I thought my hand just has to stay here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I did the entire like one-hour session without moving my hand at all. I only kept it in the one place. And I could feel—under my hand I could feel like a marble. As if there was a glass marble in there that I could roll around if I moved my palm just a little bit I could feel this little marble. And we talked, and talked, and talked, and he told me all these stories, you know, about being abused by a doctor and blah, blah, blah. You know, all this stuff came pouring out of him. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: All these stories and as it went—and then the marble was getting smaller and smaller, and smaller.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And when the marble disappeared he stopped talking. [Laughs.] It was the strangest thing. But I had a number of experiences like that—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —in that particular workshop. And he was going around telling everybody what a genius I was, which was very nice of him.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: Do you think—

AA BRONSON: Because he had a pain there that he always carried in that spot.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, but medically they could never find anything.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the pain was gone. When the marble disappeared, the pain was gone.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That's what it was. So, then I came back to New York and I found three people who were friends of friends, who I didn't personally know, who were willing to come to me regularly. Like either every week or every second week for six months—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —was my idea. And then at the end of six months I felt confident enough to say, "Okay I'm—you know, I'm a professional healer."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Kind of hang up my shingle.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I wasn't really making art at that point. I really didn't know what I was doing. And so, that kind of took over my life.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But it was funny because at that point I had Terence Koh and his partner Garrick Gott, working as my assistants—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —on the art stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Anyway, they were in New York, and the editor of this new magazine, *Butt* magazine was in town —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who they knew and they said, "Oh, you should meet, you know, you should meet Jop. You'll love Jop and let's do a lunch." And so, they got all the food and Garrick cooked a big lunch and Jop came for lunch. And so, the four of us had lunch together. Mark was at work. And then Jop was very taken by—I had to tell my whole healer story. And Jop was very taken by it and so he asked if he could like—he would do a session with me and then he would publish an interview in *Butt* magazine. Which he did. He published—and quite early for *Butt* magazine, its issue number seven or something. This interview came out telling the whole story of Body Electric and so on and so forth. And instantly, I had like clients lining up. I was busy 40 hours a week.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Way too much for that kind of intense work. And next thing I knew I had thrown my back out and began to have problems. I had a series of weird kind of spirit manifestation things happen within the [sessions –AB]. Which were too dangerous.

THEODORE KERR: Within the sessions with individuals or—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, within the sessions with individuals. Like for example, I had—well the most extreme client I ever had, he couldn't actually bear to take off his clothes. And so, I did on him the method I had learned from this woman at the workshop on how to give a massage to somebody who is terminally ill. Because he was so—he wanted to do it but he was so terrified—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —that I just gave him the extremely you know noninvasive, extremely gentle touch.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he just—and it was kind of like the guy with the marble. He just started telling stories. His father had tried to kill him.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was a whole horror story of his childhood. And then he left looking actually quite happy. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the next morning I was sitting at breakfast with Mark, and Mark said, "What are those marks on your arms?" And I had like big yellow circles, like big, huge bruises.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Up my arm. As if somebody with—well I realized what it was. One of the stories was about how he had gone to his grandfather's house when he was, I don't know eight, nine, years old. His grandfather had done this play wrestling thing with him. And it seems like his grandfather was actually quite sadistic and had pinned him to the ground very painfully. And he had started to cry and the grandfather wouldn't release him. And this was like a big memory for him. And I realized—or Mark realized, it's like the—it was like fingerprints down my arm from like a giant—two giant hands—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —on my arms. And I thought, "Oh, my God. [It's the grandfather." –AB] [Laughs.] I went in the kitchen, I was heating up some oil for the first client and I spilled the oil onto my—I think it was my left hand. But anyway, it spilled. My hand started to blister and then I—and then a knife that was on the kitchen counter just seemed to like leap in the air and go point down into the floor right next to my foot.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And there was a third thing. There were three things happen. I don't remember what the third was. And I thought, "Ahh!" [Laughs.] I canceled everyone for the day.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And went and took a shower, lots of water over me. And got sage and smudged the whole house.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then realized that if I was going to do it [this healing work –AB] at all, I had to do it in a very measured kind of way. A more thoughtful way, and allowing myself lots and lots of time and space between clients. So, anyway, I did do that for a while. And then I was offered the job to run Printed Matter. And I still did a little bit while running Printed Matter but mostly then I really brought it down to an extremely quiet level, you know.

THEODORE KERR: And at the time it seemed like people were just talking about the butt massage. But it seems like it was a more holistic practice then—

AA BRONSON: Yes. I mean the butt—I called it a butt massage because of *Butt* magazine and because of calling it a butt massage they wrote about it and they wouldn't have otherwise—[laughs]—you know.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And, but the truth is, also that when I was in training at Body Electric I had made particularly good friends with one of their teachers named Chester. And his specialty was anal massage.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he kind of took me under his wing and through a couple of weeks of workshops at one point he had used me as his assistant when he was doing one-on-one massages on people. And I learned an enormous amount from him. And the whole—you know the whole idea that the sphincter holds the parts of ourself that we don't want to see, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like it's the one most invisible place on your own body, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that we hide not only trauma and pain there, but also silly things. Just silly things about ourself that we can't cope with, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so, I—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Can I just add?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: You've also said that—well also, I've heard people say that you can hide a lot of power in there as well.

AA BRONSON: Yes, you can hide good things in the sphincter as well. You can hide anything you're not comfortable with.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And power can be one of them, yeah. And you know it's kind of like where the shadow side is.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like the shadow side. It exactly fits the, you know, Jung's description of the shadow. It is a very powerful spot. And so, that became my specialty, was dealing with that part of the body.

THEODORE KERR: So, this was the late '90s, early 2000s, right?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That seems right.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah. It was into the 2000s—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —before I started actually doing this professionally, you know. And my—you know, there were a lot of people of course who imagined I was doing fisting or something or who wanted to just have a sexual massage or something. But it was very easy to get rid of them because I always said that, "I'm very busy I can't see you for two weeks." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Immediately got rid of all the people who just wanted—you know because they always want it right now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so, I got very, very, interesting clients on the whole. Very serious about wanting some help, and mostly smart. A lot of—mostly people from the arts. Like—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —artists, dancers. I think there was a make-up artist. [Laughs.] You know there were a few [famous –AB] people like that too. A fashion designer. But all creative people. That was interesting.

THEODORE KERR: And mainly men?

AA BRONSON: It was all men.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: There were two—I saw two people who were trans—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who were FTM.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And for them—I think the most healing thing for them was just to be accepted.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Because I only saw men.

THEODORE KERR: Right, Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Or people who identified as men. But to be accepted—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and taken seriously as a—that was very gratifying for them. I found that very difficult actually. I needed to have a few more trans clients so that I could—I needed like a whole individualized approach. A little different than I was doing with other people and I was maybe a little overly cautious because I was on new territory.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And the—you know, the body experience was different, for them and for you.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And were they all queer? Gay?

AA BRONSON: Well, the three people I had originally that I was working on when I was—you know, when I got the three—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —one was straight and two were gay.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But in terms of clients—I got a couple of closeted clients. But I don't—I think they were pretty much all gay.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: At that point. Queer or gay.

THEODORE KERR: I feel a bit like a lawyer, like I'm building toward something, and the question I'm building towards is, it seems to me that you were like—people were coming to you and you suddenly became this repository of queer male pain and—

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: —and healing. And—

AA BRONSON: It was all about suffering, right? And that's what I experienced in that first one-week workshop with the spirit manifestation, was just the incredible volume of suffering.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, like this big ball of suffering. And—one thing we didn't talk about and it's kind of amazing that we didn't, because it kind of feeds into this now, is my whole involvement with the Tibetans.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And with Tibetan Buddhism—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —over the years. And the Tibetans have a kind of meditation where you take into yourself the pain of the world.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I suppose it's kind of like what Christ did.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, it—yeah it has something to do with that.

THEODORE KERR: And how much of people's—like if you can just think collectively or you can even think of individual people. Like how much of it was around HIV/AIDS? Or how did HIV kind of factor into people's trauma, and suffering, and healing?

AA BRONSON: Well, I don't know if I can think of specific stories. But, I mean, it was always present of course.

THEODORE KERR: What does that mean?

AA BRONSON: It was always a layer of fear, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Whether they were positive, or not positive yet, or whatever. There was always that layer of fear. And that fear is one thing of course that would be held in the sphincter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, I don't know whether I can verbalize that exactly.

THEODORE KERR: I know, I—do you think it was just like an all day, everyday fear of HIV?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I do in a way. Yeah. It was like a constant—you know, this constant undertow to everything else. Like traumatic events were already sitting on top of this layer of fear.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That was ongoing.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. This is a bit editorializing of me, so push back, but, was AIDS the trauma or was trauma being worked through HIV/AIDS? Does that make sense? Like—

AA BRONSON: No, first of all, the trauma was in most cases not HIV itself.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: There were a couple—I mean I can think of some people who came to the workshops where that was the case.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Where the fact that they had become HIV-positive was the trauma that they were working through.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But the clients who came to me—you know, it was always present but it wasn't—well in some cases, you know, probably in most cases, they didn't really know what the problem was.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And part of the process was trying to let the pain speak in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like let it—let the body speak back to the person. Like create a kind of conversation between the person and their body. And try to clarify what the pain and the trauma was.

THEODORE KERR: This is getting to what I was wondering. I think a lot of times in—for gay men or queer men, HIV/AIDS isn't really the thing that they're afraid of. But it's the thing that they can articulate or it's the thing they can gravitate towards that they can actually have conversations about.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: Do you think that people—did people understand your relationship to HIV? When they came to you?

AA BRONSON: I don't really know. Probably they did. They probably knew about Jorge and Felix.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: They probably did. And probably most of them did and about all the AIDS projects and everything that we had done. Probably, as I'm sitting here thinking about it. Probably in fact I was very much associated with AIDS activism and so on. So, they would see me through that lens. That's true. I hadn't even thought of that. But yeah, they would see me through that window in a way.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And would AIDS always be mentioned explicitly?

AA BRONSON: No, not necessarily. No.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: It just depended what happened.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Most people I would see—I mean the most common thing was I would see somebody three or four, five times.

THEODORE KERR: Ah.

AA BRONSON: So—because there's always this narrative element.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's very enhanced by coming back for a series of visits. Some people would come only once. And there was the occasional person who came over a very long period of time. Or would come for a while and then drift away and then come back again. And then drift away and come again. So, there was many different ways that people related to [my work –AB].

THEODORE KERR: And this was at—would you do it at the London Terrace apartment?

AA BRONSON: Well at first, we were in the Archive building on Christopher Street.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay. Oh, wow.

AA BRONSON: And I did it there, initially. And then yeah then in the London Terrace, once we moved there. But by that time, I was already working at Printed Matter, I think.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: When we moved there.

THEODORE KERR: And how did it move from seeing clients to being in exhibitions?

AA BRONSON: Oh, well, that happened—well, already while—let me think. What's the sequence of events? Well, anyway the "AA Bronson Healer" kind of took over my life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it was so—it became my identidy for a while. And I thought, "Okay, you know, in a way I've been without identity," because General Idea was gone, or over. I was no longer AA Bronson of General Idea. "And this is clearly my new identify so I should roll it into my art persona as well."

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I did a series of exhibitions where I tried to play with that. So, for example, there was one in Paris, where the gallery show was essentially advertising for the healer practice. Very General Idea. And then I was set up in an apartment nearby and we took appointments for clients to come and receive sessions. And then as a result of the sessions, they would receive a certificate.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Which was really a print—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —verifying that they had done it. But the problem was that the people who wanted the sessions didn't really care about the print. And the people who wanted the print didn't really care about the sessions.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, it wasn't actually the right way to do it. And it was kind of difficult because of language too. Because I mean the people who were coming spoke some English but their English wasn't necessarily good enough to explore in a very subtle kind of way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, it was problematic. So, then, I did this show at John Connelly Presents in New York.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Where I changed a little bit. Where I made the gallery the spa.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And there was still the advertising material around the outside. And the idea was that I would do a session there every morning and at the end of every day. And that the energy would kind of gather in the space. But then I threw my back out completely just before the show opened.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, wow.

AA BRONSON: And so, I wasn't actually able to do it. So, it was just this kind of fake spa.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, the fake massage table and everything all set up. Towels and oils and what have you—[laughs]—candles. But nothing ever happened there.

THEODORE KERR: And there was a soundtrack, right?

AA BRONSON: Yes, there's a soundtrack that Andrew Zealley made for me, from Toronto. And the way we did that soundtrack was that he recorded a session that I did, with the permission of the person who was doing the session. And then he used a very sensitive microphone. He tried to get, you know, the sound of my hand on the skin—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —And then he used those elements. He pulled them apart and restructured them to make them into music.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Into a kind of ambient music. And we also made a CD of that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: A little CD edition, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: This is during like another prolific exhibition time for you. So, I have that the *Healer* exhibitions were around 2003?

AA BRONSON: Right, right.

THEODORE KERR: And that's also like the Power Plant show, *The Quick and the Dead*?

AA BRONSON: Right.

THEODORE KERR: And also, the year earlier is the release of that work, *The Hanged Man*?

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And I wonder if you want to—let's start by talking about *The Hanged Man*.

AA BRONSON: Okay. Well, why did I make *The Hanged Man*? I found myself—I had been doing this healing stuff —

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but I found myself at a point in my life where I didn't really know what the future held. I felt like something was happening. I was doing this healing stuff, we had moved to New York, I was doing a lot of exhibitions. But I still felt like I was treading water. I felt suspended. When I looked into the future I saw nothing. Nothing at all. And I somehow came up with this piece. I wanted to be hung naked by my feet from a ceiling and photographed that way. And Matthias Hermann was in town for some reason. This was in Toronto. Why did we do it in Toronto? I guess I could never have done it in New York.

THEODORE KERR: Because of space?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. [. . . –AB].

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: We were living in New York but you were working in Toronto for some reason when you did that.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I must have gone to Toronto to work on the show for the Power Plant, I think. And why was Matthias there? I don't remember that either. And Matthias took the photographs. Barr Gilmore, who had been my assistant, organized the whole thing for me. And we hung me—and then it was only after we had done the photographs that I realized that it was the hanged man from the Tarot deck.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the significance of the hanged man is—when you pull the hanged man—you're at a point in your life where indeed something is cooking under the surface. But you have no idea where you're at. And you—it's a time of waiting. You have to wait for things—you know, things take their own time and will reveal themselves eventually. That's the meaning of the card. So, it was kind of perfect. And we did these three—initially a smaller image and then I realized they needed to be life sized. And so I did the three-big life sized prints.

THEODORE KERR: What was cooking underneath the surface?

AA BRONSON: God, what was cooking—[laughs]—underneath it? I'm not totally sure. [Laughs.] Well I feel like I've passed that point.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I'm not sure when I passed it. That was, what, 2003? Is that what you said?

THEODORE KERR: The images—at least it says it's 2002. I don't know when it was taken.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, so that's before I started working at Printed Matter.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And you know there's the—the psychic who had told us to move to New York. I was seeing him through that period usually once a year, or a year and a half or so. And I had been to see him. And he said to me, "Oh, my God," he said, "something really big is going to happen in your life. Something really big." And he said, "It's—normally I would tell you to run the other way from this thing that's going to happen because it's going to involve the devil. You're going to meet the devil. And the devil is going to be very good for you and you're going to work with the devil." [Laughs.] And he was very excited—

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and very, like, you know, "For most people this couldn't possibly work but for you it's going to be perfect," and blah, blah, blah. And then sometime after that, Printed Matter—I was on the Printed Matter Board already. And at one of the meetings, obviously having had discussions with the other people on the Board, Phil Aarons who was the President of the Board, asked me if I would consider being the—working as the Director for six months. To try and figure out whether the institution should close or whether it could be somehow remade, and made relevant and economically viable.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I said yes. So, then I worked—then I went to work at Printed Matter. That was 2004, the end of 2004. And by—and I didn't stay for six months, I stayed for seven years.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And every week he said, "I should quit that place."

AA BRONSON: Yes—[laughs]—every week I said should quit that place.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: Yeah, that's true. I found it extremely irritating having to do this project. And yet I loved doing it at the same time. And I don't know whether I should also talk about how we went about transforming it? I mean —

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: When I first went, I was convinced that the secret—the knowledge was already in place of how it [Printed Matter] could be transformed. That it wasn't that I had to really do anything. I had to just discover something that was already there.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it very quickly became evident [that was true –AB]. I had no experience working there and I was relying on the staff. And there was Max. Max had worked there since '89 I think.

THEODORE KERR: Max Schumann?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, Max Schumann. And I relied on him a lot. He was kind of the manager. He was the one below me. And he started coming to me and saying, "Oh, there's this like nice young people doing their zine and they asked if—you know, it would mean so much to them if we would let them launch their zine here." And this was the kind of thing that Printed Matter was not doing at the time. It was mostly working with well-known artists, and all the books that we were focused on were by famous artists, pretty much, at that point. Because the idea in the air was that unless it was by a famous artist nobody would buy it.

And so, we began to do these events for emerging artists, for young people. And very quickly—people heard, more people came. We started doing like—it felt sometimes like we were doing an event every night. But I just said, you know, just keep saying yes. And these people started to come in and hang out there more and look at things. And then—and of course they wanted to see each other's stuff. And I started putting the well-known stuff aside.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: In fact, I just stopped buying it, frankly. Because it was mostly from publishers. And started buying from artists instead. And then we set it up so that the obscure stuff which was getting lost in the shelves was more visible. And we were trying to focus more on the obscure stuff. And then everything—it was like a new audience was coming in and there was a new energy. And it started to change. Then I moved to—we knew we

needed a storefront and Phil, the President of the Board, was completely focused on this store on 10th Avenue around the corner. And I thought it was too small but he—basically he forced the issue and we got it. Mark designed it for us. And we had one extremely long wall of shelving where everything was by artists alphabetically and nothing was focused on over anything else. Everything was equal. And people would spend hours on those shelves. Looking—poking through you know pamphlet by pamphlet, finding strange and wonderful things that they hadn't known existed.

And so, the role of the place completely shifted. It was much more of a supporter of a broader community. Not necessarily local either. People would then come from other—they were going to be in town from L.A. and they have their new publication and can they launch it. But launches became a big, big, deal. Then we had been involved for some years in a fair called the Artists' Books and Editions Fair. Which was mostly a fair of galleries that sold prints.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was mostly prints. It was like 90 percent prints.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then there was us, Printed Matter was like the kind of focus of the fair because the opening of the fair was always a benefit for Printed Matter.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But there wasn't a lot of—there were a few artists, book publishers also, but they tended to be the kind that have like $500 books, you know. In editions of three or something. [. . . –AB].

Anyway, it was a fairly high end event and we always had like some sort of a performance for the opening, some sort of music or something. And we invited—because, you know, we were kind of heading into this new younger idea of Printed Matter. And Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth had come by in the store, and he had offered if we ever needed him to play at something, he would play as a benefit for us. And we thought, "Thurston Moore, well who is Thurston Moore?"

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Well Thurston Moore played for us at this book fair and, you know, it was just a wall of sound. It was just a wall a sound. It was like no one in the entire fair could talk to anyone else while he was playing. And the dealers were all freaking out like crazy, and I had to go and ask Thurston to stop. It was very embarrassing, and then it was all very awkward, and everybody hated us, and then they threw us out of the fair. And we thought, "Okay, what are we going to do? Let's do our own fair."

And so in 2006 we started very gradually. We hired a woman for one month to investigate whether it was possible to do our own fair. Like: What would it cost us? Where would we do it? Would anybody be interested in exhibiting? What kind of people? What could we charge them for being in the fair? You know. And she worked on it for one month and at the end of the month she had like at least 30 people who were interested in participating. She had got the Dia Foundation to offer to donate their building on 22nd Street that they still owned at that time, but it was sitting empty. And anyway, she really got it together, and we talked and Phil said, "Well let's do it, you know, if it loses money, fine, I'll make up the difference. I'll cover any loss."

So we went ahead and by the time we opened we had 70 exhibitors. And Max came up with this idea to have a section for young politically involved, socially involved publishers who probably wouldn't have any money, and we gave them—I think we gave them tables for free, but it was a limited number of tables, and it was like a curated selection of exhibitors, and Max was the curator. So we called it "Friendly Fire," that section. And that was upstairs. And then the paying exhibitors were downstairs, and we also devised a lecture program, and an exhibition of Sol LeWitt books, because Sol—I think that was just after Sol died, so we did an exhibition of Sol LeWitt books, which came almost entirely from Phil Aarons' collection. And Josh Smith did a print edition—well kind of edition for us, but was also a poster. And we wallpapered a whole wall of the Friendly Fire section with his poster, and then sold the whole edition for $10,000 or something, as a fundraiser.

THEODORE KERR: You mean sold the posters?

AA BRONSON: The posters—you see, in Josh's mind the posters, although there was enough of them to completely cover an enormous wall, they were to his mind one piece.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: They were one work.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: He said, "You can do what you want with them; you can sell them as posters, you can sell them as a work." And he took the table that he had done the silk-screening on and he cut it up and made it into a wooden box and put the posters in this box made of the table they had been silk-screened on, right, so it was a beautiful thing. So we thought we can't break that up, it's too nice with this wooden box, so we sold it—maybe Phil bought it actually. We sold this—and everybody loved the fair.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: People came from—quite a few exhibitors came from Europe, which surprised us. Our prices were—we kept our prices as low as we could manage and just break even, and I think we got 5,000 people maybe came through which is way more than we expected.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And sales were good and everybody was happy, and then, so we were off and running. So then we began doing the NY Art Book Fair every year and that eventually got too big for Dia—we moved it to—I think it was one year—oh, one year we were at the Phillips Auction House; that was also too tight. And then we moved to PS1, where it's been ever since. And now it's a gigantic thing. I think 35,000 people came through the last time and there were 350 exhibitors from 26 countries or something. So, it's become a gigantic gathering place, and the bread and butter of it is these same young people who wanted to do their zine launches at the very beginning, right?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The fabric of it, well it's very multi-generational, and we tried to appeal—we were really community-building, we realized at a certain point, "Okay, this fair is about community-building. We're building an international community that already exists—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but they don't have any opportunity or way to spend time with each other and mix. And as much as anything it's a kind of gathering of the tribes, and a kind of social mix and so on."

And then—so, to backtrack a little bit with the story, at a certain point I realized that Phil Aarons, the President of the Board, was the devil.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: I mean, he is this very high powered business man, real estate developer doing enormous projects, who, you know, loves artists' books, and is completely, you know, involved in a very supportive way, in a totally appropriate way with Printed Matter. And—but he was also like, he was somehow always pushing me forward, you know, like very energetically. You know, insisting that I had to move to this new store for example, which gave us a chance to rethink the whole way the store works, and working with Mark to design that. And in a way there were many different areas in the store for different kinds of things and different kinds of people gravitate to different kind of aspects—and then the fair again, he was really pushing me to make it bigger. He's always pushing me to do more.

And then L.A. MOCA—Jeffrey Deitch was the Director. He approached us about doing an LA Art Book Fair and—and Phil was totally pushing me to go ahead with that. And I went and spent a couple of weeks in L.A. and thought about it and realized that, "Well, this is a different community, even though it'll be an international community. First of all, it's on the Pacific Rim, so I think we should reach out to all the countries on this Pacific Rim particularly. And then secondly I need to know what's the California—what are the California communities?"

And we had a lot of exhibitors from LA, so I visited them all and I put together a little kind of—I called it a committee, but it was more like a group. They were all individual advisors who all advised me separately, and they came from different communities within L.A. And somebody said something very wise to me at the very beginning, was that, "Well, you know, people in L.A., there's nowhere where everybody goes, and each community has its own kind of place that it goes and they very rarely cross paths. And probably what you need to do is to just deal with each community separately. Rather than trying to dream up one thing that's going to please a whole bunch of people, you know, dream up a bunch of things and just put them all in the building. Situate them all next to each other and see what happens." And that's what we did.

And I remember when they were dealing with—they had to deal with the fire department. They had to tell them in advance how many people were likely to come through, and L.A. MOCA thought 1,000 people maybe would

come through. Because they're used to having like three people in there at a time—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —and I said, "If there's only 1,000 people I will slit my wrists."

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And they said, "Well how many?" And I said, "I'm sure it'll be 7,000 or 8,000." And they said, "We'll say 3,000, we can't go any higher than 3,000." And then the fair happened, was an enormous success and 15,000—[laughs]—people came to that first fair, and this year it was in its fifth time we'd done it in the same building and there were—and I went for my first visit since the first time and there were 38,000 people went through. Just, a crazy amount of people.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And somebody said that was like the first time that they did see the whole, like everybody in L.A. together in one place.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that is what has become normal. It's the one event where all the communities from L.A. converge on this one thing, and there is no other event in L.A. where that happens. So it's interesting to demonstrate that it can happen. The other thing that everybody said was that it would never work because nobody would buy anything, because people in L.A. don't buy anything. And the first year the sales—they were enough that people came back.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But they weren't great. And then this year, talking to the dealers they said, "Well the first year people had to get used to the fact that anything was even for sale." They would come in and say, "Oh, can you buy that?" You know—and then the second year they had to get used to the fact that things maybe were going to disappear, like—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —they would look at something and say, "Well maybe I'll come back for that," and by the time they came back and it was already gone, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then by the third year, they started to buy. [Laughs.] And by this year they are buying quite seriously.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: People were very, very pleased with the sales this year, so the whole idea about L.A. and books—because everybody told me, you know, "L.A., nobody reads in L.A."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But at the same time there's a huge number of little publishers in L.A.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So, you know, L.A. is a difficult slippery thing to get your hands on, to get the shape of, but if you just let it take its own shape in a way, it does it for you. So it's turned into—and again it's been really a community-building project, I think that's what it's been all about.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And one little funny thing about the New York one, is that if you think about what it's like, what the atmosphere is like, if you go an art fair, you know, the Armory fair or something, it's not—it's pretty tense, like, because there's a lot of money at stake, and somebody is, as Matthias Herrmann says, like, "I can't believe at the NY Art Book Fair, everybody is smiling and happy and having a good time!" I've never seen anything remotely like it at a commercial art fair.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: It's true, there is so much good will, so many smiling faces. It's amazing.

But I wanted to then roll back a bit. Like right from the beginning with his Friendly Fire, Max included quite a few queer groups, like LTTR for example. And then in 2008, the fourth NY Art Book Fair I guess, the fourth? No, the

third, which was at—that's the one that was at Phillips—Phil came to me and with his wife Shelley and said, "You know, I would like to do an exhibition of my collection of queer zines." And so we decided to do that. And we very quickly also put together a book, which he funded, which was a catalogue of the entire zine collection. And we exhibited it wherever we could. We had things on tables that you could handle, and the other things were in glass cases if they were not replaceable, and then we also tried to group—we tried to focus on bringing together a group of queer exhibitors.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Mostly zines but also some magazines, and putting them around the perimeter of the exhibit, so we ended up with this big queer section in the fair. And that has now stayed, you know, it's like that every year. There's a queer section that isn't necessarily defined as that—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but it's there. If you look, you'll realize there's a whole area with like 10 or 12 queer exhibitors together. And in L.A. it's been particularly ritualized, I think maybe more than New York. And it was nice to visit the whole queer area again this year. Because of the political and social aspects of the fair, of course HIV and AIDS is always—it's true the whole queer section is always this kind of rhythm of stuff that relates to that.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then this year in L.A., what was very interesting was the number of exhibitors that were selling anti-Trump paraphernalia. It was like—you know, there were even antiquarians. All the antiquarians brought out their materials from the '60s of, you know, the Vietnam War, and all this kind of stuff. It was all about—what's the word I want? About—what's the word everybody's using right now?

THEODORE KERR: Fascism? Antiauthoritarian?

AA BRONSON: No, about—not demonstrations, but about resist.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, resistance.

AA BRONSON: It was all about resistance. And there were maybe three of the antiquarians had brought out all this material on—from the '60s about resistance—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —to various political issues. And then they had made their own posters. They had gotten artists from their community to make anti-Trump posters, and they had them up very high and you could buy—they had stacks behind the counter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And you could buy those very cheaply and take away anti-Trump posters. And then there was another thing. There was a young guy who always makes pins—I never can get a handle on what he's doing exactly, but it's always pins with funny faces and he does these tiny little zines that are—I never know quite what they're about, but he's very consistent and they're always a huge success. You know, he sells hundreds and hundreds of pins.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And then suddenly his stand was full of, you know, "Fuck Trump" pins—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and things like this. And then James Morrison who usually has these kind of queer hoMOCAts—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —this queer cats thing, had his "Trump is Over If You Want It" t-shirts. And the whole fair was kind of alive with this anti-Trump paraphernalia, which was very interesting because it demonstrates the mindset of, well, partially California I think, but also the mindset of the kinds of people who go to these book fairs.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think that—during earlier book fairs did you see anti-Bush stuff?

AA BRONSON: No, I don't remember anything—well, it would have been—

THEODORE KERR: It was early, though, like, 2006, right?

AA BRONSON: 2006. No I don't particularly remember anything like that before. They had a tiny bit—in the Friendly Fsection there would be things but not through the—

THEODORE KERR: Not the antiquarians.

AA BRONSON: Not the antiquarians, for sure. This is the first time the antiquarians did anything like that.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: There's a couple of buttons that say, like, "Lick my Bush" and stuff.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] So this kind of good dealing with the devil, what did it mean for you both like professionally and personally and spiritually?

AA BRONSON: Well, for one thing, one thing I was a little worried about was all my energy was going into Printed Matter—but then when I look back I still did a lot of exhibitions and projects in that whole period, in that seven years. I don't know how I did it all, but—and he and—Phil and Shelley Aarons were big supporters of every aspect of what I did, so they came to my exhibitions, they came to my performances, they bought my work, they kind of were always like, you know, saying, "Yay!" on the sidelines, you know, and encouraging me to go on. And seemed completely able to embrace whatever the subject matter might be. The whole healing subject matter for example. And Shelley is a—Shelley is by training a psychiatrist. Psychiatrist, or psychologist?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: I don't remember.

AA BRONSON: Anyway, you know, so she kind of rolls her eyes at all the healing stuff—[laughs]—but she's still, she's still there. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Yes, and it seems to me, and like maybe not as directly related to Phil and Shelley, but the work, that it's—it re-established and established you in all these communities that you were already a part of, but in a new way or in a more—even a more accessible way. People, you know—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I mean one of the things that happened was, because I was working at Printed Matter, specifically we designed the new store, I wanted to be completely accessible.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So I'm sitting in the middle of the store, no private office or anything, and so that was very interesting because I mean a lot of what I did is talking to people—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who came into the store, and talking to them about whatever. So it made me accessible especially to young artists who just wanted to meet me, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It made me totally accessible, and that's something I miss, being here in Berlin now.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think it also like, as an extension of work that you had done earlier is, like, with General Idea it wasn't enough for you all to make the work, you wanted to get the work out.

AA BRONSON: Yes, exactly, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And in this weird way, all these younger artists wanted to make work in the same vein as the General Idea or AA Bronson.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And also Printed Matter was the way they could get that out into the world.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In a way Printed Matter was—in a way what I did with Printed Matter was make it ideal for what we would have wanted—[laughs]—when we first started as General Idea.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Try to introduce as much diversity and variety into it as we could manage.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, and I think it was, you know, just also like you said, like good to be in that space, like or else you would have been, you know, maybe doing a few healing clients in your house, but it [Printed Matter –AB] would have brought you into the front of the world.

AA BRONSON: Well the other thing that started happening was that, you know, somebody would come from out of town and they would want to meet me, and they would come by the store and I would go and have a coffee with them. So there began to be this other rhythm of having a coffee with people, having a tea with people, and at a certain point I realized that the healing practice was moving into the tea and coffee—[laughs]—breaks.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It was like the tea or coffee might be something to do with art or books or whatever, but it might as easily move in the direction of the healing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I keep thinking of that, you know, the Indian Saint woman who does the hugging. The hugging saint. I think maybe I should become a hugging saint.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: I think also it's interesting because maybe you can narrate the connections, but around 2008 is when the *School for Young Shamans* starts to be—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right, right, right, true, there's that.

THEODORE KERR: —you know, out into the world. And do you see a connection between—like, did the *School for Young Shamans* come from meeting all these younger artists? Did it come from just like this need in you to get back in—

AA BRONSON: Oh, well, one of the—I had another life during this whole period which is that I would be brought into universities to do studio visits with grad students and with MFA students, and to give talks and so on. And there was always in every school—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And you taught at Yale.

AA BRONSON: —oh yeah, and I was teaching at Yale during—my God how did I do all these things? I was teaching at Yale as well, and there was always one or two students who would come to me and say, you know, "I really would like to introduce ideas about the spiritual into my work, but I don't know how to do it."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Or, "There's no support here," you know, people look down on it or whatever. And so I started to build up these relationships, and in the day of the Internet it's very easy to keep chatting with people. Relationships with young artists scattered over the U.S. who were thinking about work that was more about sexuality, spirituality, and queerness—and for that matter HIV stuff—and those people when they came to New York would come to see me, and we would go and have a coffee. So there's a whole kind of other thing building up, this kind of like my students, as it were. But they're—it's a decentralized thing, and they're also a somewhat different generation because, you know, I'm getting older and as I get older the number of people who are younger than me is getting bigger, you know.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And so when I did the show, the *School for Young Shamans*, at John Connelly—I'm not exactly sure why I took that approach. So it's like a group show in a way, in which a lot of the work was either by me or collaborations with me, but a lot of the other work was just work by other people. But it all came together in a kind of—some sort of strange thematic way, because of the combination of sexuality and spirituality.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So that was—when was that show at John Connelly?

THEODORE KERR: 2008, I have.

AA BRONSON: 2008? Yeah, that makes sense. And that's the same year that the Queer Zines exhibition happened at the Book Fair. Yeah, so I had this idea that well, the original *School for Young Shamans* idea was the Banff Centre in the Canadian Rockies which is a—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —the fine arts part of it is—what do you call it, a retreat? A residency program for artists. And they always have an artist who leads each residency and they asked me to make a proposal for a residency around the theme of collaboration. And so I proposed something called AA Bronson School for Young Shamans, and my description is rather atmospheric and not very specific about what it would be. And then when the applications came in and I was working with the school on choosing applications, the ones that interested me were people who were working on projects that were about the fact that there were a group of us gathering, right? So there is somebody who wanted to do a weekly, like a newspaper that he would do once a week that would document what had happened in each week—and would do this in the printmaking facility. And then there was somebody who wanted to do a kind of womb, a giant womb environment—

THEODORE KERR: When you say womb, W-O—

AA BRONSON: —O-M-B, yeah, like a hangout space.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That way we would have our—where we would have our daily conversations, would be in this structure that he would build. And these were all the people I was interested in. And then the school came back to me and said, "No, I'm sorry, we can't do that because we have technicians who are experts in film and we have a technician who is an expert in textiles and we have a technician who does this and a technician who does —and we have to match it up so that we have, you know, one person in each area."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And, you know—and anyway, [they said, –AB] "When they get here they're not going to be thinking about you and your project anymore, they'll just have some project of their own that they'll want to carry out while they're here." And there were in fact a lot of applications that were that kind of thing where somebody was halfway through [making a film –AB] and they wanted to complete the editing, or—but I was ignoring all of those.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then in the end there was a woman who had applied who had identified as a witch, and in her performance folder she had sent she was always naked. And somehow I got copied on an email chain to the person who handled the program saying to the staff, you know, we are going to have to read her the riot act about no nudity.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And because they had a management training course that's in the same facility, that is how they really make their money.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they are a very conservative clientele. And I said, "This is ridiculous, you know, if we can't—I mean artists come into the woods, they want to be naked in the woods, you know—[laughs]—you are not going to be able to stop them." And I cancelled the program.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so the whole idea of the School for Young Shamans has been floating around ever since in kind of a metaphorical way. Plug In, the gallery in Winnipeg, tried to revive it and wanted me to do it in the wilderness north of Winnipeg, and then I backed out of that when I realized that the black fly population in the summer was going to be like—for people who live there they're used to it, but anyone coming out from somewhere else does not want blood dribbling out their ears, you know. [Laughs.]

[. . . –AB].

But anyway, all these connections have been built up with people in different countries as well of similar interests. And then I decided that I should go and study at Union Theological Seminary. That if I was interested in the spiritual, the one aspect of the spiritual that I had never spent any time with was Christianity.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And as I said, I had a long history with Tibetan Buddhism that we didn't talk about, and I have a

feeling that we don't have time and maybe it's not necessary.

THEODORE KERR: I mean, we can think about how it fits. Like I can imagine that—I mean, one of the most famous texts for dealing with HIV/AIDS healing is the *Tibetan Book of The Dead*.

AA BRONSON: Well yes, and there's also the *Tibetan Book of Death and Dying*.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, this is it, yes.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I went—and when that was released I went to the kind of workshop, like two days with I forget who it was, Rinpoche somebody or other, who wrote the book—who taught the book and that was very interesting. But I had already been involved for quite a while. And of course, that is—it's like totally appropriate and it's just like—in a way like another version of the Body Electric school stuff. It's like a different version of it. And I still—you know, I'm a great admirer of the Tibetans and all of their doing. But anyway, I decided—I got involved initially with Tibetans in '83—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and it ended when Jorge and Felix died in 1994, and I just—it was like I had been doing these, you know, quite intensive visualizations as meditation. And when they died it was just like—it was almost just like turning on a movie. I would sit down to meditate and the movie would just start up, and after they died it was like the movie just faded away. I could force myself to do it, I could bring the movie up, but it just wasn't happening the same kind of way. And I talked to a few people about that from the Tibetan community, and they all said the same thing, which was it was a sign that I needed a one-on-one teacher, and that that teacher would appear. But no teacher appeared. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then I thought, well maybe the teacher is not Tibetan.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, maybe I need to move myself into a different kind of environment. And I had met, when I was teaching at Yale, I had met Serene Jones, who was at the Divinity School at Yale, headed queer studies, black theology, and I don't know, indigenous or something, you know, she—basically all the marginalized groups were all under her care. And she had been really encouraging to me that I should consider going to seminary and spending two or three years and getting that under my belt. And so I thought maybe—I didn't think, "Maybe I'll go to Union." It was, "Maybe I'll go to General Seminary," which is across the street from Printed Matter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I had this idea that I could run over there from Printed Matter, like work half-time at Printed Matter, run across the street, do a workshop, have lunch in the, you know, in the lunch room at the seminary—I had this whole scenario in my head about how I was going to combine Printed Matter and the seminary across the street [Laughs.] And they have a kind of open house, where you can go—you pay $50 and you can go with your partner, which I thought was encouraging language, and spend a day there and meet professors and so on. So Mark and I went. And it turned out that they assumed that if you came it's because you intended to study there and so there was a series of three interviews were planned for the end of the day.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: One with a professor, one with a graduating student from the Master's program, and one with the intake person, basically. And so we discovered this halfway through the day, you know, like, "Oh, in your interviews, at such and such and such times." I said, "What interviews?" I thought, "Okay, let's do the interviews." So we did the interviews, and they were all very taken aback that I had all this involvement with Tibetan Buddhism, and—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and that I didn't go to church. [Laughs.] And then, you know, I was waiting, and waiting, for the results, and they kept asking for more information, and it was clear they didn't really want me, but there was no real reason to say no either. And then they finally said "Well, we've passed the deadline now, so you'll have to apply next semester."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I said what are you talking about? I applied ages ago. My application was definitely in in time, you just keep asking for more stuff.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they said, "Well, no, no, sorry, you will have to come back to us." And so I was quite disappointed, and I somehow—I phoned Serene Jones to tell her this story. So guess what, you know—oh, it was before they refused me, after I applied—I said, "Guess what happened, you know, by accident I have applied to go study at General." And she said, "Don't study at General!" She said, "You know, I know it's across the street from Printed Matter, but you have to come to Union because they just hired me as the new President." So in the meantime I put in an application at Union as well, and of course I was accepted at Union, so the next thing I knew, there I was, a part-time student at Union.

And Union has a big queer contingent studying there, and because it accepts women, because it's intended to accept the people who are not accepted in other schools, it has for example a lot of Roman Catholic women studying there. It has a lot of people who aren't necessarily going to be able to be clergy or even want to be clergy, and a lot of people who go to various kinds of social justice institutions after they graduate, and the interest in social justice I would say is like the predominant theme running through the institution. So that was a very interesting place to be, and actually you came there. How did that happen?

THEODORE KERR: I was one of the people that applied to go to Banff and then I got a grant.

AA BRONSON: Oh, right, you applied to be in Banff.

THEODORE KERR: And then I got a grant from the government of Canada and I—it was specific to work with you —

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's right.

THEODORE KERR: —so we worked out a way that I did a residency at Union with you.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's right, I got Serene Jones to sign off on it so that you could work with me when my life was so wrapped up with Printed Matter and Union, and you ended up being in a residency at Union.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: With me. That was interesting.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and Keith Murray.

AA BRONSON: Keith Murray as well, the two of you. Well, anyway, I loved and hated Union. There were many things I liked. I learned a tremendous amount there.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And in my third year there, I was—I wanted to start a series of lectures for artists but I wanted to be able to pay the artists, and I thought that I could apply to the Warhol Foundation and they would probably give money for that—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —because they're social justice oriented. And I talked to the Warhol and they said we can't give money to educational institutions, but if there was an institute at Union, an appropriate institute, we could give money to the institute—so you know, if there's an institute there. And I went back to Serene and Serene said "Okay, we have a new institute: The Institute for Art, Religion, and Social Justice headed by AA Bronson." [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the Institute was born. We applied for money and we got—I think we got $20,000. We got a substantial amount of money and we were able to do two years of programming with artists. And because I knew so many artists, and because they were so intrigued by the idea of speaking at a seminary, we got some very big name artists coming who I was really amazed that they we willing to do it. People like Marina Abramovic was probably the biggest name we got, but Alfredo Jaar, and—

THEODORE KERR: Kara Walker.

AA BRONSON: Kara Walker was a big one. The Gorilla Girls—

THEODORE KERR: Yes. Well, you did a year of programming of just women, you and Catherine—

AA BRONSON: —yes, one year was just women, the second year I guess. And Gregg Bordowitz came in the first year, and Paul Chan—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And what was interesting was that the way they would talk about their work was very, very different than they would have talked in an art school.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: They just came at it from a completely different direction, and they themselves were surprised. And I remember when Gregg Bordowitz talked, a lot of artists from downtown came to hear his talk, and then at the end of the talk one of them piped up and said, "Gregg we never heard you talk about your work like this before, where did this come from?" You know? Because he had actually intended to be a rabbi when he was very young—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and he had a very theological bent to his thinking and this theological bent sort of blossomed in this talk—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and everyone was very surprised. So I think the interesting thing was that spirituality and art and social justice are all intricately related.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And sex. And that it becomes really clear when you get these artists into this situation.

THEODORE KERR: Well, it allows them to be more multi-dimensional with people.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's right.

THEODORE KERR: Especially when they're at a certain point in their career where they have to—people want them to be a bit boring.

AA BRONSON: Yes, that's true, that's true. And then the other thing I tried to do there but was unsuccessful at, was to start a Master's Program for visual artists. They say that they already allow that, that, you know, you can come in and do your M.A. as a visual artist and you can have the studio and make art, but in the end you're judged on a written thesis, not on the artwork, and—it's a kind of slightly silly program to my mind. The people who are coming into it are not high-level people and not interesting people.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And there was not the support for them. There was no like—there was a dearth of people with any ability to talk about art—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, there was nobody there. And so, I thought, well, you know, seminaries are always places that are getting smaller and smaller—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —less and less students. And I thought, well, we could easily add eight or 16 students who are visual artists, and have them doing 50 percent academic, 50 percent studio—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and it would be a very interesting program, but the head of the faculty committee that would approve this, happens to be the woman who teaches theology and the arts, and that kind of killed it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I have to take a break.

AA BRONSON: Yes, go ahead.

[Audio break.]

AA BRONSON: So now we are going to backtrack for a moment to that hanged man period. I was in Amsterdam—I don't remember why I was there. Why was I in Amsterdam? Anyway, I was in Amsterdam, and after Jorge and Felix died—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Before you met me.

AA BRONSON: Oh, and before I met you, that's true.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Must be 1995.

AA BRONSON: Must have been right after they died. So I was quite—I still would have been in quite a shattered state. Would have been totally written on my face what a shattered state I was in. We lived in Amsterdam in 1979 for three months making the video *Test Tube*, and so I always feel at home when I'm in Amsterdam. So there I was again anyway, in 1995, and I went into this leather store, like a gay leather store called Rob, and I knew the original Rob, because when he first opened the store it was when I was living there, and I kind of made friends with him. So I had a special spot in my heart for that particular leather store. Anyway I was in there, and there was a young man who was a salesman, and he—at a certain point nobody else was in the store and he suddenly said, "Excuse me," like, "I have something I feel I need to say to you, but I hope you don't mind," you know. And he said that I had just gone through a very hard time—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and—but that I should hang on because I had very important work left to do in my life.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And do you remember what else Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: That was mostly it. I mean, the only thing I remember is that—

AA BRONSON: I think that's the kernel of it.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: That's the kernel of it. What he said, like, "What you did was important but what is coming next is even more important."

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And then he burst into tears.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, and then he started crying. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: And Mark, do you feel like sharing a little bit of why that story is important? Like what's—it is important, but why was it important for you?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Well it struck me because, you know, I met AA after, you know, '96, two years after his partners had died, and he had lost everything, you know, lost his domestic life, his professional life. And I am nowhere near Jorge and Felix, I am not them at all, I'm not—you know a collaborator in the same way, so there is no way he could have this sort of General Idea phase two with me—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: —and so, you know I was just sort of in a state of wondering, what is this man going to do with the rest of his life, and I heard his story and I thought "Oh, okay well who knows?" And so then I thought, "Well, I'm interested to hear, like, how this story is going to play out." And it probably took about 10 years, but then we thought, "Oh, there is something new happening."

THEODORE KERR: And what did you think was the important work that came after?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: I still feel like there is more to come.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well on a related subject, in my mid-30s—let's see, 1980, oh, no, probably around—around the time I moved to New York, '86, a Dutch friend, Louwrien Wijers, who was the person who first introduced me to the Tibetans, and to the Dalai Lama in fact—she was in India and she went to the most famous astrologer in India, and she got my chart done.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's a most remarkable chart. It goes on for pages and pages. It's all handwritten, and it

outlines what will happen in each segment of my life.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And for the segment from I guess 42 to 49, from the ages of—it's all in seven-year segments—from 42 to 49, he didn't know what would happen, but he saw that I was surrounded by death and that it was possible that I would die in that period, but he thought maybe not, and that I should come back at the age of 42 and he would do a new chart especially for that period. I never did go back, but it was very interesting because that's Jorge and Felix—I mean that's the whole period of the AIDS project, that's when first our friend Robert died and then many friends died, then Jorge and Felix died, when I was 48, and then, you know, 49 somehow I'm standing on the brink of a new something, and I don't know what.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But, you know—and then there's funny things like talking about how I will have something to do with being acknowledged by politicians and governments, and then I got my Order of Canada, and I got the Chevalier from the—[laughs]—French government. It's all these things are in this funny astrological forecast.

THEODORE KERR: Do you still look at it?

AA BRONSON: I have it here actually.

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing, and so you do look at it.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, occasionally. I don't—like, maybe once every 10 years, but I brought it here because I thought maybe I can—I had this idea of maybe doing something with it, like making it into a piece somehow.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: But I'm not sure what that would entail, but I've got it here. I haven't even read it again. Last time I went to Toronto I brought it back with me, so that I could think about it and just have it present. So that was kind of a similar thing, because it says in there that—you know, it points to the latter part of my life as being the important part and it talks about having kind of like—you know, I don't even remember now, it's so long since I read it. My impression is, that it's about having influence, and influence on younger people, on people in different places, and I don't know what. So somehow, you know, being in L.A. recently, I really felt like that Book Fair with the 38,000 people going through, so many young people, and I was being constantly stopped by people thanking me for having started the Fair because it brought so much to them personally and introduced them to so much, and it's like a vast educational project. But I think more than that is this community-building aspect, and I somehow feel that community-building is an important part of this latter part of my life, you know, since I started at Printed Matter.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think that's maybe what the psychic saw, like that the deal with the devil is going to be fine for everyone. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes.

THEODORE KERR: I want to go back to before the community-building started because I think in order for this phase of your life to have been possible, you had to do that work, and you had to figure out who you were as an individual. And there was a lot of work, like art work and obviously spiritual work, that went into that and I wonder if we want to go back a little bit and talk about those early exhibitions like in—you know, between 2000 and 2003, because those are also underdiscussed often I think.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They tend to get kind of overlooked. So which exhibitions are you thinking in particular, like the ones of John Connelly, like the first one of John Connelly?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, we talked about *Healer* a bit, but I'm interested in like *The Quick and The Dead*, and I'm interested in *Mirror Mirror*, and actually maybe a good place to start is with a work. I think one of your, one of the more—I think one of the earliest works I saw by you that I thought that was really powerful was the photo, it's called *Mark and Anna*.

AA BRONSON: Right.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

THEODORE KERR: Sorry, say that again?

AA BRONSON: And also, *Arbeit Macht Frei*.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that photo of Anna and Mark February 3rd, to me, the way I saw it—I saw it right after I saw the Felix photo and to me those were—I saw those as a pair.

AA BRONSON: Well, at MIT, we exhibited those two side by side, and they're roughly the same—I mean they're both seven feet tall. They're both huge images. The big image of Felix is a bit longer, it's a bit bigger, but they're more or less on the same scale. And, you know, one is an image of death and the other is an image of life, new life, and that's the reason I made it at that time. It's an image of Mark with his daughter who at that point is what—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: 10 days old.

AA BRONSON: —10 days old, yes, and she was prematurely born, so she's really like a bright red ball, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I think also it's an image of new life that's not the image that people are used to seeing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, it's with a father who is I think given the nipple rings—[laughs]—and the beard is probably clearly queer, or gay, and the—you know, images of little babies like that are always with their mothers, not with their fathers, so it's kind of an unusual image on some level.

THEODORE KERR: Well, and also unusual if people go thinking that they're going to see a queer artist's show—

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes, and then see a baby. Yeah, that's true, yeah. So, you know, it's funny that piece hasn't been—I don't think it's—has it ever been exhibited again?

THEODORE KERR: In Tokyo, I think.

AA BRONSON: [. . . –AB].

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: They bought it in Tokyo.

AA BRONSON: They bought it in Tokyo. [inaudible], yes it was exhibited in Tokyo, the Metropolitan Tokyo Museum of Photography, and they bought it for their collection, that's right. That's right. And they didn't feel they could show the Felix piece. It was too tough for them. They couldn't show the Felix piece.

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

AA BRONSON: And they chose this instead. And it was an exhibition that was particularly looking at the kind of, like, what happens after AIDS. Not after AIDS but after that intense period of death, what's next. And it included a lot of artists associated with being AIDS-related in different countries, and tried to look at what are they doing now. In most cases now—in a couple of cases like David Wojnarowicz, he was dead already so they couldn't do that. But like Sunil Gupta, for example. And it was interesting because also in his case, he was doing portraits of queer people. Like every day portraits of queer people. And it was again kind of new life idea, like: this is—you know, these are the living, and we need to give them proper attention, like we can't let this happen again.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes. There's a really sweet review of that Tokyo show that says, you know—it's a blog, and it's like, "I've seen that photo by David Wojnarowicz with the buffalo running off. They should stop using that. I want to see *Mark and Anna* more." It's really sweet.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: How funny.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, and it really is. It seems to be a celebration of life, or just like the—

AA BRONSON: But it's about, in a weird way, queer life. I mean it's like making space for queer life somehow. That's what I felt that exhibition was about. Under—you know, in the shadow of AIDS, and HIV, and so on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is that a term that works for you? Like do you feel you are living in a shadow of HIV/AIDS?

AA BRONSON: Well here in Berlin, you know, it's so present.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I mean, and Berlin being what it is, people are, you know, totally embrace sexuality in a joyful kind of way I think, and—but they don't ignore the fact that HIV is always present. I mean it's a very pragmatic kind of place. Everybody talks. I mean, it's acknowledged. Not like the pretending it isn't here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And, you know, Lab, which is the big sex club, you're always aware that you're present in a room full of HIV, you know, like you're—to go into that space is to go into the space dominated by HIV.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And still, you know, celebrate sexuality. And I think that's very important, you know, and it gives a dark side to Berlin, the fact that is this is all embraced so openly. But I—you know, that's what I like about it, that all these various aspects of life can all co-exist and be acknowledged as being real and not hidden.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. With those early shows, this was the first time you're working as AA Bronson, without Felix and Jorge, and I wonder, like, how did you do it? What was the experience like working as an individual artist?

AA BRONSON: Well, I guess I already had the healer thing going, right, by the time of those shows. Not with the show at the Seccession, because that's a little earlier, but by [. . . –AB] the time I got to the Toronto show I was definitely AA Bronson Healer. But in the shows immediately before that I was still struggling to find my place.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The mirror motif seems really huge.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, okay, the mirror motif, right, of course. When I was—you know, before General Idea, just immediately before General Idea, I was really in a—I really didn't know who I was or what I was, I dropped out of architecture school, I'd done all that communal stuff, I really had—that was a point where I could see no future for myself. I had no idea what I was going to be doing, and I started doing all those self-portraits and mirrors, in particular in these convex mirrors in the late '60s.

And then in—you know, after Jorge and Felix died I—those mirrors were still sitting there and I started to do pictures again. I was travelling doing General Idea shows quite frequently and I started doing self-portraits in the mirrors in hotel rooms, and things like that. And so there's all this mirror imagery, which essentially was a kind of like "who am I?" picture, like a kind of meditation on who I am, and not really knowing who I am. So that—I think that show MIT was very much about that. There was a big emphasis on those kinds of questions. That's true, I had forgotten about that.

THEODORE KERR: Well and the mirrors—I think you have a beautiful piece that's a Tibetan mirror.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay, so the Tibetan mirror is—goes into the healer realm more than the spiritual realm. It's—each Dalai Lama has an oracle, the State Oracle who advises them, and the State Oracle—there's a kind of ritual. They're wearing a very, very heavy headdress and a kind of breastplate and a mirror on their chest and they dance. A spirit moves into them, which is the spirit who really advises the Dalai Lama, not the person themselves, and then the Oracle speaks in kind of oracular pronouncements which have to be then interpreted by the group of Lamas. And it's the State Oracle who at first advised the Dalai Lama when to flee the country, and they fled because of the State Oracle. When I met the Tibetan community in 1983, in India, in Dharamsala, at one point I had dinner—I was very honored to have dinner with the State Oracle. Such a strange thing, and his way of explaining it was, "Well, I'm not the State Oracle when I'm not in trance. Like I'm only the State Oracle when I'm in trance, otherwise I'm just another guy." He said, you know, he's well educated, he had studied at Oxford in England in political science or something like that. And very, very articulate about political issues and so on, but at the same—you could feel in him, he had these really wild eyes, like, really, like, crazed sort of eyes. And you could feel that he was a right-brain, left-brain person. That both brains were operating at full capacity, you know? The intellectual side was clearly very developed, and then the—what shall we call it? The—?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Intuitive?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, the intuitive side was equally, you know, like, super strong. And in a way he was a model for me. Like, I thought—well, I felt that to some degree I had these two sides in me. And I had always thought you had to be one or the other, but with him it was clear that you could be both. So the mirror that they use when they go into trance—I found that mirror. I found a mirror in a Tibetan antiquities store, like, a very well-regarded one, in New York at one point. And this would have been after Jorge and Felix died, I think, but before we moved back to New York.

Did I already have that mirror when we first met, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: I think you did. Yes, I'm pretty sure you did.

AA BRONSON: Yes. Anyway, I didn't buy the mirror at that point. But then there was a fundraiser. The Gagosian Gallery did a fundraiser for the Tibetan Center in New York, and suddenly there that mirror appeared for sale in that fundraiser, and I bought it there. And it was the time, you know, just around the time they died. Probably just after. And I had money at that point, and I could afford it, and I bought it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And that's I think when I started then doing all these mirror pieces. And similar to my mirrors from 1969, this mirror was a convex mirror. And it's—you know, it's a scrying mirror, we'd call it, I guess. His assistant—the State Oracle's assistant—would hold a mirror, and the Oracle would look into the mirror. From that mirror it reflected into the mirror on his chest, and then he would make his pronouncements based on what he saw in that reflected vision.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Into this convex mirror. So, anyway, I have the mirror, still. I have it here.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I think it acted as a kind of reminder of this dinner with the State Oracle. And I know that Shelley, Phil's wife, has said on a number of occasions, you know, that what's special about me is my left-brain and my right-brain are equally developed. So it's funny. I'm not sure whether they always were, or whether that came about as a result of this inspiration of the State Oracle.

THEODORE KERR: It also seems that the mirror is a through-line for you, too. Like, so as much as it reminds you of 1983, it also seems as like a line in the sand that you were a person before General Idea, too.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's true, yes.

THEODORE KERR: And then, if I'm correct, the mirror sometimes makes an appearance in tabletop photographs, in your work. Is it that mirror?

AA BRONSON: That mirror, or mirrors in general?

THEODORE KERR: I think mirrors in general, but—

AA BRONSON: Yes, not that mirror, usually.

THEODORE KERR: Not that mirror, okay.

AA BRONSON: No, because it's too specific, with its decoration and so-and-so. I usually use those cheap plastic convex mirrors. Those original five mirrors that I still have.

THEODORE KERR: And how do you see those tabletop—I'm calling them the right name, tabletops?

AA BRONSON: Well, I did those photos—I think you're referring to the photos that are like self-portraits, taken from my own eyes looking down, and there's my computer, and all the piles of books, and the mirrors, and some crystals. My feet under the table. I think of them as kind of like feminist self-portraits.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like the description of, "Here I am, this is me sitting at this table and this place, with these books." And the books kind of describe my range of interests, and what I'm thinking about at that moment. And at the same time, it is physically me, my feet on the ground, in the picture. But also then my reflection in the mirror.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Yeah, those are the pieces that you're thinking of?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And you called them what I was wondering were self-portraits?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, they're self-portraits. They're kind of—I think of them as kind of feminist self-portraits. And I always get mixed up between First Wave and Second Wave feminism.

THEODORE KERR: You don't want in the debate. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I think it's like '60s feminism, let's call it.

THEODORE KERR: Also, those works seem to me to be examples of how you often will toggle between individual exploration, and then group exploration. And those always seem like both grounded works, but also, like, the grounded works come at a time when you're maybe a little bit out to sea.

AA BRONSON: Yes, right, right. Yes, that's true.

THEODORE KERR: Which is interesting. And then Mark smartly reminded us to—we should talk about *Work Will Set You Free*, that work. I think it was part of the Power Plant show.

AA BRONSON: *Arbeit Macht Frei* was first shown, I guess, at the Power Plant show. And it's made up of those same convex mirrors, the plastic mirrors. I bought them from the, you know, the infamous plastic supply shop on Canal Street. And I bought enough, I forget, it's like 155 mirrors or something. It's enough to form the words "Arbeit Macht Frei" out of mirrors. I think it's five or six mirrors tall to each letter. And I present them on a kind of dark terracotta wall, like an earth-colored wall is how I think of it. And I don't light the work, I light the space in front of the work. I light the audience. And so when an audience is looking at that piece, what they see is themselves reflected in the mirrors. And I suppose it came out of a reflection on the similarities between—which we talked about yesterday, I think—between the, you know, the queer community with HIV and AIDS, and the Jewish community with the Holocaust, and this kind of extended trauma. And in particular, related to the concentration camps. And maybe it's a little bit of an homage to Jorge, and Jorge's father in there, too. So *Arbeit Macht Frei* is the statement that was written over the top of the entrance to Auschwitz. And it was made into a kind of fake work camp. Supposedly people were working, although actually they were mostly being gassed.

I went through a period of studying Auschwitz a lot. I had wanted to do some sort of work on Auschwitz at one point, but it crystallized into this one piece, and then that seemed to be enough at that point.

THEODORE KERR: That's funny, I always read it also as a meditation on how to work through grief, or how—

AA BRONSON: Work will set us free, yeah, it is that in a sense, yes, it's true.

THEODORE KERR: Like a very dark exploration of that.

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: And I guess I understood the connection between the Holocaust and HIV. But because that period after Jorge and Felix died, there's a little bit of downtime, but then you're so productive, and I wondered if the work was how you were getting to know yourself.

AA BRONSON: Well, yes, in part. I mean, there's through the—when did it start? It started in the late '80s, in New York. I started going to a massage therapist, a Polish woman named Joan—she was a healer, really, I mean literally a healer.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And she really influenced my life in big ways. And just as an example of why I see her as a healer, when my friend Robert was dying at St. Vincent's Hospital, she came to see him. His feet had swollen up into big balls, you know. And the doctors couldn't do anything about it anymore. It was like, there was just—like he was just that far along, the feet were like that. And she came in, and she stood at the foot of his bed, and she laid her hands on his feet. You know, there were sheets and blankets and things, but she just put her hands on top, which I didn't even really notice, and she was just chatting to him about this and that. And then she left. And when she left, the nurses—like, a little cluster of nurses rushed into the room. They're all, of course, Latina.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: "I tell you, I tell you, she's a healer!" They ripped off the blankets, and his feet—[laughs]—were back to normal size.

THEODORE KERR: That's amazing.

AA BRONSON: "I told you, I told you." The nurses were all—

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And it's interesting, because it shows you what nurses know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Like, nurses know some totally different reality than doctors know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it's very interesting. And nurses in Canada, for example, are trained in laying on of hands, whereas the doctors in Canada are not—[laughs]—you know. Anyway, so she [Joan –AB]—one of the things that she would always say to me, especially when it got into this, you know, around the time of when it got really tough, she would say to me, you know, "The important thing, AA, is to do whatever is in front of you. Whatever it is, do it and do it well. Put yourself into it, no matter what it is, no matter how unimportant it seems. Put yourself into that thing, and the future will unfold."

THEODORE KERR: Wow. And did that echo something that you had already—was that a mantra you already lived with?

AA BRONSON: Well, I suppose I did. But when I thought about their deaths, I could only think about things being over. I couldn't think about there being—you know, I couldn't think about there being any continuity.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And where she was saying, "No matter what it is that you have to—you know, just really focus on what it is that's right there in front of you. Like, don't go looking for some grand scheme that you're going to start a new business, or like, go back to school and do this and that." Although I did go back to school, but not quite in that way.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And you know—she is a very wise woman.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think—you spoke a little earlier about how during your visits to universities, you would meet artists, and they would want to talk to you. But also—and through the *Butt* magazine, a whole bunch of people wanted to meet with you, too. But also just through the Internet and your availability online. Like, we first met through Myspace.

AA BRONSON: That's right, yes.

THEODORE KERR: And I wonder, like, do you want to—do you feel like talking a little bit about—since so much of your life and work is about building community and finding—I mean, what's the role, and what has been the impact of the Internet on your process?

AA BRONSON: Well, it's funny, you know, I've tried to be as accessible as possible on the Internet. So you know, I have a little website which doesn't have much on it, but it does have my email address on it. And I'm on, you know, the usual assortment of sex sites, but in most of them I use my real name.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: I'm not sure whether that's good or not, so a couple of them more recently I've put "Queer Spirits" instead. But that's also a name that's associated with my name, because of my book *Queer Spirits*. So—and what I found—and now I'm just talking about the present, not how I came to this—but what I found is that those kind of sexualized spaces are spaces where people feel free to talk. And they don't feel intimidated by me in those spaces. Like, even the email, if somebody emails me, they always apologize first, if it's somebody I've never heard from before. They start with an apology. But, you know, on a sex site, they don't apologize. They just: "Hey, how are you?" You know, it's like—[laughs]—and then it comes out, you know, there's usually something they want to chat about, and it's not about getting together to have sex. You know, it's something else.

THEODORE KERR: Is it about art?

AA BRONSON: No. I mean, sometimes art plays a role in it, but it's usually they want to tell me something about themselves. Usually, in a way, even as artists, if they do talk about—if they talk about art, it'll be about their art. And in both cases, in a way, it's the same thing that they want to be acknowledged as individuals, you know, that have some importance.

[. . . –AB].

The desire is to be acknowledged as an—that they are as important—you know, [. . . –AB], that they are a human being and that they matter, and they can be acknowledged as somebody with real problems and real talents and a real point of view. So it tends to be like it was for the healing, people who are in some sort of a creative endeavor. And it tends to be people who are smart, and sensitive.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And there's a lot of people—in a way, it's the same people who came to me for healing, it's what they're doing. But they're doing it through, you know, chat, through a chat process. It's quite interesting, and—it's interesting, the power of chat, because I realized at a certain point that I can say, you know, "I'm sending you a cyber hug." [Laughs.] And this has real impact, you know. Much more than one would ever think. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The laying on of digital hands?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, the laying on of digital hands is important, so I try to remember to use that, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: That digital representation of human contact.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, because that's what we say brings us to these sites, right, is the desire to be bawdy with somebody?

AA BRONSON: Yes, yeah, yeah. That's right.

THEODORE KERR: And do you think that—so the same audience that was coming as clients is the same type of people that you're having these meaningful chats with? And are they the same people that are artists that you're collaborating with or working with?

AA BRONSON: They can be, yeah, they are sometimes. I think there are certain people, though, that aren't so comfortable with words, and that the collaboration is where the healing happens—in the collaboration. But I mean, the collaboration, it's usually somebody who also interests me as an artist. So it's a different—but I often feel it's like a—it is another form of healing, and acknowledgment.

THEODORE KERR: Collaboration is another form of healing?

AA BRONSON: Yeah.

THEODORE KERR: Can you say more about that?

AA BRONSON: Well, I think it's the intergenerational thing, you know. People who decide they want to do a collaboration—they're always collaborating with people they already know, who are the same age as them, and in the same social structure as them. And I tend to collaborate with people who are of a different generation. And it's a funny position to be in, because in a way I'm in a position of power. Because I'm the one with the reputation, I'm the one with an existing career. They kind of see me as maybe I can do something for their career. I mean, if it's too much that way, then I'm not interested, but there's all that unevenness. So the way that I've always tried to do it is that I try to see over the shoulder of the other person, what it is they're trying to do, and what is the work that they are currently doing, and then try to project myself into that, to work with them on my project. So the work usually ends up more in their style, you know, more in their context than mine in terms of what it looks like. Although in retrospect I have to say that some of that work, looking back on it years later, really looks like AA Bronson work. And it takes me by surprise, because at the time I thought of it as looking like their work.

THEODORE KERR: Are you thinking of something specific?

AA BRONSON: Well, for example, the pieces I did with Ryan Brewer, the portraits in *The Magic Forest*. We called it the meat rack, between the towns of Pines and Cherry Grove. We did a series—well in the end, two portraits of him and one portrait of me. They were originally big prints, but then they needed light somehow, and then I made them into light boxes. So they're like, I don't know—they're fairly big, not lifesize, but fairly big light boxes of the human figure, our human figures in the forest. [. . . –AB]. Maybe it's the light box format, because I've used that quite a bit. But somehow the collaboration—you know, the collaboration came out of some kind of ritual that we did together in the forest. And you know, those three photos, one of them is by Ryan and two are by me. But the piece—it really hangs together as a piece, I think. I'm really very happy with it, you know, whatever it is, 10 years later. But I no longer feel like it looks just like a piece—like I've inhabited their artwork. Maybe it's that they've had an influence on me, I don't know. Anyway, the feeling of it has changed.

THEODORE KERR: I'm also wondering—for me, I think about the structures that you made with Terence Koh.

AA BRONSON: Yes, right, right, right.

I need to pee, actually. Can I take a break for one second?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, of course.

[Audio break.]

AA BRONSON: I'm trying to remember if that was—Terence Koh, when he first arrived—that's a longer story, but anyway, he went off to art school in Vancouver, at Emily Carr [University of Art + Design]. Such an amazing guy. And he came back and had no money, and starting working—him and his partner Garrick Gott worked for me as assistants. And actually we didn't talk about the piece for Harlem, the flag—

THEODORE KERR: *Tick Tock*.

AA BRONSON: Let's talk about *Tick Tock* first—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: —and then the other one. And I was very much in this traumatized state where I couldn't work. And there was a little gallery in Harlem called Gallery M, and it was run as kind of—on the community services budget rather than coming out of the art scene, it's kind of odd. But the guy who ran it, [Tod Roulette –AB], knew people in the art world, and was kind of peripherally involved in the art world, and came to me through the art world. And he asked me to do a project for them. It's a little storefront on, a hundred and—I don't know, well up into Harlem, anyway.

THEODORE KERR: Like, past 125th?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, not too far past [West 138th Street –AB]. So I agreed. I thought, "Okay." And the reason he asked me was because of my history with the HIV and AIDS stuff. And he wanted—he said, "It's not talked about in Harlem, nobody discusses AIDS or HIV, it's like a hidden thing. You know, the male-to-male sex is a hidden thing, nothing's talked about." And he said, "I want to create discussion, I want there to be some open discussion about all of this." So I didn't know what to do. And Terence is such a sweetie pie, you know. He was really trying his best. He was a terrible assistant, but he was really trying his best to encourage me to work. So he got me to go on—we went together on day trips to Harlem, you know, like we would go up in the morning, and just walk along 125th, and look at what was going on. And since it was a storefront, you know, with my old experience from the early days of General Idea, I thought about something that would feel a little bit like a store, but I couldn't get any further than that. And then of course what happens on 125th is all the people selling on the street, which is much more interesting than any of the stores. And I realized that there were, like, a huge number of people who just seemed to be selling—they would cut pictures out of magazines and then put them into frames and sell them. It was just, like, the most bizarre thing from my point of view, but there was a lot of that.

And then I saw somebody who had done that, but they put a clock mechanism on top, so you could buy like a photo under Plexi, probably, with a cheap clock mechanism on top, so you had a clock with the picture. And it was just some magazine they had found, and they were surprisingly slick looking, but at the same time very clearly homemade. And it sort of stuck with me, and I had been reading a lot at that point about—I was reading the statistics on the—it kind of went along with Auschwitz—it was like reading reams and reams of statistics. And I was reading the United Nations annual reports, with HIV statistics, which were just, like, overwhelming, you know, especially for sub-Saharan Africa. And I began to think, you know, in these conversations with Terence, about the fact that all of these people, all of the black people in Harlem, you know, 99 percent of them, their genetic background is sub-Saharan Africa, which was such an AIDS epicenter at that time.

And I don't even remember how it came about, but we decided to do these clocks, but using the flags of the various countries. And eventually we set the gallery up as a clock shop, so it was a shop that sold these cheap clocks. The original idea was actually that I would sit on the sidewalk outside, and have them for sale at least during the opening and maybe for on the weekends at a table, and there would be more clocks on the walls inside. And I did, I think, three of each country, and there's something, like, I don't know, 56 countries? Just a lot of clocks, it's really a lot of clocks. And they're, like, I don't know, 9x12 inches or something. And then we made a little book, and each page of the book had one of the flags, and then underneath—in the original book underneath was the HIV statistics for that country, which included, for example, how many orphans because of HIV. And what was scary, because I kept following those statistics afterwards—I mean, the orphans thing was just unbelievable numbers of orphans because of HIV. And in the two or three years that followed, those numbers fell very—they just plummeted. And of course it's because all those children died. That's, like, so scary.

And the infection rate was just miraculously high, you know, like, 40 percent.

So we did that. And it was bitterly cold, when the show opened, and I had the flu, so I did not sit outside.

THEODORE KERR: Was it for December 1st?

AA BRONSON: Yes, it opened on December 1st, that's true. And so in the end I sat inside at a table of flag clocks. And it was interesting because what's his name—Holland?

THEODORE KERR: Holland Cotter?

AA BRONSON: Holland Cotter wrote a review of the show. He came to the opening. It was a handful—you know, there was a few people who had made the trek uptown for the opening, and then the rest were local people.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then Holland Cotter wrote about the exhibition, and then for the duration of the show, it was equally locals and art scene people. It was like, white people from downtown, and black people from locally, mostly, right. And they started buying the clocks, and it sold out. All the clocks sold, and they told me that, like, half of them went to, like, mostly artists, not so much curators and so on, but artists from downtown, and the other half went to local people. And they said people would come along and they'd say, "Oh, look, there's the flag, you know, my people come from that country," and they would come in. And then the staff, who I think were all people with some sort of—well, they had disabilities of some sort.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Not physical disabilities, but I think mental disabilities, but nevertheless they were able to carry on informed conversations, informed enough conversations about the work. And they would talk about the clocks, and they would show them the little books and the statistics. And then all these conversations, and then somebody else would come in the door, and the conversation would grow. And all these conversations started to happen about HIV and AIDS. But in relation to Africa, weirdly enough, but still it got the—it acted as the jumpstart to get everything going.

And then one of the flags was the flag that Marcus Garvey had designed, when—I think it was after World War I. He came up with this idea for Angola—which was a German colony I think—to be made into the homeland for black people, and that all the American blacks should go back to Africa. And he was a black activist living in Harlem. He was actually, I think, Jamaican, but he was an activist from that neighborhood also. So I included his flag as the first flag in the book, I think. And I used the statistics for the U.S. [with his flag –AB], but the statistics for the black population of the U.S., which were also at that time quite alarming. And so then that gave the opportunity for the conversation to move in that direction as well. And that was really—that was great. And then shortly after that, a Belgian publisher came along and wanted to republish the book, but with,you know—putting a fair amount of money behind it so we could have the flags in full color. And then we set it up so that the pages were—you know how before you cut the pages, they could be closed, right? There's hidden pages, invisible pages. So we set it up so the statistics were inside, but you couldn't see them at first, and you would have to split the page open in order to read the statistics. And we put a latex wrapper on it.

So that was the *Tick Tock* project, which I was really, really pleased with. I would really like to do it again, actually. I would like to do it again, but with big clocks.

THEODORE KERR: Like how big?

AA BRONSON: Like, like, you know, three feet across or something.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Kind of so like they go in a big space and just fill the space. And I would like the clocks to make noise, so they go tick-tock, tick-tock.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then it's shortly after that, that I was approached by the Museum of Sex, in New York, which is a kind of trashy museum, as you might expect. They wanted to get the art world in—you know, the art world was staying clear of them, and they wanted to somehow bring in the art world. So they decided to do a big group show of New York City artists doing works about sex.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And you know, they invited me and they invited Terence, and we went and we had a look, and we thought, "Well, let's do a collaboration." And we came up with this idea of doing a booth, like a booth that you might find in a video store, you know, in a porn video store. In fact, a double booth, a booth for me and a booth for Terence and a gloryhole between them was the idea. And then we would each decorate our booth in our own way, and there would be two doors, and they would each have a lock. And this booth would sit in the exhibition, and people could go in and lock the door behind them if they wanted. Could conceivably have sex through the gloryhole, if they wanted. And the museum, weirdly enough for a Museum of Sex, they came up with all these excuses. There wasn't the right place to put it, it was going to be too big, it was blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. They basically refused to show it. So that was the end. And then—when did I do it? Was it the *School for Young Shamans* that I did it in the end?

THEODORE KERR: For the John Connelly show? I think so.

AA BRONSON: I think in the end I built it for the John Connelly show then, because then it was in my head that this had to happen. And so it's a, you know, a kind of simple plywood structure with a gloryhole between. It's a funny thing, Terence had found this zine called—oh, God, what's it called? It's actually a zine by Paul P. and Joel Gibb. But it's faked—maybe you know it—it's faked, as if it's a zine by teenagers.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And they do it under fake names, right? And so it's *Gay Goth,* it's called *Gay Goth*. *Gay Goth* number one. And Terence found this thing, and thought that it was a real—

THEODORE KERR: Teenager creation?

AA BRONSON: —teenager creation, right. And he photocopied hundreds of copies of these images, and then he wallpapered the inside of it with these images. And it was only when I saw them, after that was installed, I was like, "That's *Gay Goth* by two Canadian artists."

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: So funny. And in my side, I made a little book that one could, you know—the whole idea was sitting on the toilet and reading porn.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And my book was a collection of images taken from the Internet of people showing their butts. Like, basically, kind of "fuck me" photos from sex sites, with no other—no text or anything—

THEODORE KERR: Right.

AA BRONSON: —just the images. And I did at one point on a Tumblr blog find a photo of a hard-on coming through the hole in that—through the gloryhole in that piece.

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

AA BRONSON: That apparently was taken at the opening of the show at John Connelly, but—[laughs]—

THEODORE KERR: Amazing.

AA BRONSON: But other than that, I was never aware of anybody using it. And then I showed it again at my gallery in Paris, along with a couple of other things from Terence. And it was so funny, because the dealer told me afterwards that the women—when people came in, the women would all go inside and laugh and like look at each other through the hole, and you know, like, really explore it. And the men would refuse to go inside, whether they were straight or gay. And he said if they were gay, it was even worse, they really didn't want to go inside. [Laughs.] They were totally embarrassed.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's like when everybody's quiet at a stripper.

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.] Yeah, right.

THEODORE KERR: It's like, "We're supposed to be having fun, but everyone's kind of ashamed of their own desire."

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: That work—a few years ago I got to see the ["Tent for Healing" –AB], the beginnings of it

here. And to me, the Terence work and the ["Tent for Healing" –AB] are related, but are they related for you?

AA BRONSON: Yes, yes, they are in a way, yeah. Yeah, the *Tent*—well, it's funny that, you know, *Gay Goth* was done by Paul P., and his partner is Scott Treleaven. And I did my first *Tent* as a collaboration with Scott Treleaven. And the idea was to do something that's a cross between, you know, a changing booth on the Lido—changing tent on the Lido, outside Venice. We called it *Cabine*, which is the French word for a private room, like in a gay sauna, the cabine is the private room in the sauna. And it's a little bit like a fortune teller's tent in a Renaissance fair or something. So there's all these different images that combine in this tent. And I had it made by a friend in New York who specialized in very fancy draperies and things for, you know, Upper East Side ladies. And that was also in the show at John Connelly. So they were happening—I guess they were both being fabricated at the same time, those two pieces. Although the piece with Terence was conceived earlier.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And we have an understanding of what could happen in the Terence Koh and AA Bronson piece. What did you—what were some of the imaginings of what could happen in the *Tent*?

AA BRONSON: Well, the thing is that we—did Michael Dudeck perform—

THEODORE KERR: That first one? Yeah, I think so.

AA BRONSON: Did he already perform there?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Yeah, okay. So, I mean originally it was just going to be empty, with the idea that somebody could sit in there. And you can close the curtains, it can be private. And I thought of it as kind of a little bit akin to the—although it's really only big enough for one person, but the openings of the curtains—I thought of it a little bit akin to the piece with Terence. But then in the end, I had invited Michael Dudeck, a performance artist originally from Winnipeg, who is very interested in all things shamanic. And he proposed to do a performance sitting in the tent, which seemed perfect to me because it completed the piece. And he did a piece where he's naked, but he's—how does it go? He's wearing boots. Oh, and a wig, right?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And painted?

AA BRONSON: Painted, somehow.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And holding a fish.

AA BRONSON: And he's holding a giant, dead fish, a real one. And he was doing—I think he was chanting what I think is a Jewish death thing, like a funeral thing or something, something like that. And very, very intense, like incredibly intense. And he's done that for me three times. We showed the piece at Witte de Witte in Rotterdam, and again at the Kunstverein in [Graz –AB], and each time he's come and performed a variation of the same performance. And it really just completes the piece for me, and I don't know what to think about that as an artist. Like, the piece is supposedly for sale without him in it.

[They laugh.]

AA BRONSON: And I don't know what the definition of the piece is, you know? I don't know—does the piece require the performance to be complete? I mean, I would never say that, of course. The dealer would freak out. But part of me thinks that it is a performative piece. And it's like *The Boutique,* the General Idea *Boutique.* It needs the person sitting selling the stuff, and it needs the people buying the stuff, to complete the piece. And this is similar, it needs the—let's call it the fortune teller or whatever, the shaman sitting in the tent, and it also needs the audience seeing that going on for the piece to be complete.

THEODORE KERR: How are these collaborations with all these artists different than your collaboration with General Idea?

AA BRONSON: Well, for one thing, they're not ongoing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And for another thing, they are, or they tend to be, radically different generations. Sometimes not so much. Like, I did a collaboration with Nayland Blake, who's, I guess, probably 15, 20 years younger than me, but still much younger. And again with Keith Boadwee, who's I think 20 years younger than me—who considers himself an old man, but you know, I'm older.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: So they're not necessarily young artists, but they are artists who are significantly younger than me. How else is it different? I think somehow, like, the fact that it's a collaboration becomes highlighted by the fact that—like with General Idea, it had to be a collaboration because there were three of us, you know? But with these collaborations, it's more focused on the act of collaboration, and I think the fact that it's collaboration has more power in these works. They're like role models, somehow, also.

THEODORE KERR: Is it interesting for you to think about how these collaborations, either individual or as a group, do relate to the practice that you've created with General Idea?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I've thought about that a lot. And of course it all comes back to collaboration. And it's also a way of undoing this, you know, the myth of the individual genius kind of thing. It's like, by collaborating, you undo that approach, although apparently I'm now becoming legendary, so it's—[laughs]—still—

THEODORE KERR: What do you mean by that?

AA BRONSON: I have, you know, this kind of reputation as somebody who does these collaborations, so the fact that I'm present—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —already gives it a certain aura, like the aura of the individual genius. Even though I'm trying to avoid that. That I'm old enough and have been doing it long enough that that aura is still getting attached to it.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And how do you push back? Like, how—this is a real open question, not a strategy question—but how do you push back against it?

AA BRONSON: Well, I don't know, really. I mean, maybe by mixing it up. So the last few things I've done—it started with the exhibition at Witte de Witte, in 2013, called *The Temptation of AA Bronson*. And that was a show where there were works by me, there were collaborations of me with other artists, and there were works by other artists, that were all woven together into a kind of narrative. And there were two floors, and one floor was like the white cube, and very open, and the other floor was very dark and atmospheric, with spotlights and lots of special effects. So one was environmental and one was apparently at first view objective, and the other was completely subjective. And so within all three types of work, they appeared on both floors. Plus there was a whole kind of corridor of ancestors, where I put vitrines with mainly books by, you know, William Burroughs, or just inspirational figures from the past. It was mainly a display of books, but it colored everything as well. So it was an attempt to kind of just mix it up as much as possible. And the queer zines exhibition also takes place within that larger exhibition, so there's an exhibition within the exhibition. So it becomes very complicated to untangle the whole thing, and figure out.

And then I did versions of that in Salzburg, and also in Graz. And in the one in Salzburg, which—the one in Graz was more like highlights from Witte de Witte. But the one in Salzburg was new work by me and new collaborations, but it was built like a Japanese—I thought of it as a Japanese garden, in which there was a mixture of found objects, and there was a big red and white striped tent that Mark made for me, that was kind of the centerpiece for the installation. There was a family of stuffed deer. There were two big antique ceramic, Chinese ceramics, on very complicated stands, which were done by Adrian Hermanides. And then there was a performance within this whole space. Oh, no, I'm missing something. It was—the ground in the garden was filled with herbs, with mugwort, except for one part, which was a big mandala of rose petals made by Chrysanne Stathocos. And there were some other—there was two photographs by Matthias Herrmann, which were both photographs of jockstraps. And there was a hammer hanging on one wall, which was by my alter ego J.X. Williams; I have another body of work under J.X. Williams. And all of these things came together also with a soundtrack by—in a way it harked back to the Power Plant exhibition with the soundtrack by Andrew Zealley. This was a soundtrack by—[. . . –AB]—Ebe Oke.

And Ebe also came for the opening and did a live performance—he performed to his own music. He sang, as it were, to his own music in this space. So kind of created a kind of total environment, where it's unclear who did what, and who's responsible for what or what was just found already like that, and just, you know, placed. And I think—we took that a little bit further and did the same piece again at the Basel Art Fair last year, in the Art Unlimited section, and there kind of brought it up another level, but it's essentially the same things again. And I like that, I like the ambiguity of it, you know, that's it hard to know what anything is, or who did what. In a way it's back to General Idea that way, it's very—it becomes a very immersive kind of installation.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. Yesterday, you said there was a point where the museum interest in sales of General Idea dropped. And I'm wondering maybe, as we start to wrap up today, when did that—I'm making an assumption out of my own experience, but when did it come back?

AA BRONSON: Let me think. Quite recently. I think since we've moved to Berlin.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, that's funny. I thought you were going to say, like, around the AGO retrospective.

AA BRONSON: Maybe I'm wrong. Do you have an opinion on this, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: It seemed pretty slow, but the main uptake has been since we came here, when we sold the pieces to François Pinot.

AA BRONSON: Oh, right. Well, there was—there's three groups of sales. I mean, Ringier, the Ringier Collection in Geneva started to buy things. That was the first. So that already started—I guess that already started—that started quite a while ago. That started before we came here, yeah. And then—what's the second? I had three things in my head, what's the second part? Oh, well, you know what there is one thing, and that is the Museum of Modern Art bought a large group of editions. And a collector donated a big installation to them, and Mark donated a piece to them. And that happened maybe not so long ago, right, Mark?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: That was maybe—after 2010, anyway, right?

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: So that would have been the first real feeling that there was some institutional interest again.

THEODORE KERR: Why do you think that happened at that time?

AA BRONSON: I don't really—I mean, part of it is that General Idea has always been of more interest to Europeans than to Americans. And the head of the—it was the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books that made these purchases, and the head of the department is Swiss. And the Swiss have always been quite big supporters of General Idea, as Ringier and Zurich. And you know, we had our—one of our earliest big exhibitions was at the Kunsthalle in Basel, and there's always been a lot of support there. And Ringier is an amazing fount of knowledge on General Idea, so he came to me and wanted to know if he could put together, like, a biggish collection of editions that would somehow act like a kind of little mini-survey of the work of General Idea, but through the editions. And that ended up being quite a substantial group of stuff. And actually Phil and Shelley donated part of the money to buy that. So their support also came in there.

And then after that, then the Ringier Collection starts. And the Ringier's been buying things on a regular basis. Not necessarily from me, sometimes buying things on the secondary market. And then Pinot bought three big white *AIDS* paintings, and that kind of jumpstarted the market, I think, because he did an exhibition in Venice which featured those three paintings.

THEODORE KERR: Do you know that year?

AA BRONSON: When is that, Mark? That's not very long ago.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Yes, that was either 2013 or '14.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, 2013, or 2014. Not long ago, anyway. And then he also bought one of my—Pinot also bought one of my *White Flags*. And that's when it suddenly became clear that what I was doing and what General Idea was doing were much more closely related to each other than I had come to realize. Suddenly, "Oh, of course, you would buy those two things and put them together." And then the Stedelijk Museum started to buy stuff.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: 2013.

AA BRONSON: Right. The Stedelijk Museum started to buy stuff, and then the Tate Museum bought the *AIDS* wallpaper installation. And that's all been, you know, in the last two years.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you think—I know you can't understand why they're buying it, but do you think it's related to your presence as an artist, General Idea, just being a part of the canon about interest in HIV work, or interest in work from that time period?

AA BRONSON: Well, for sure the *AIDS* work. The *AIDS* logo stuff is what sells first, always—[laughs]—if there's anything available.

THEODORE KERR: Really?

AA BRONSON: Yes.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [Inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Yeah, if I could just continue, you know, churning out *AIDS* paintings, they would sell. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Really? How do you make sense of that? That's so interesting.

AA BRONSON: That's so weird, right?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Just because it's recognizable.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, it's like they're literally a logo, not only for AIDS but for General Idea. They're recognizable. And I think because Pinot bought three *AIDS* paintings, that's part of it. But they were—even before that, they were the easiest—I mean, they were the things that people would ask about, and they always want the colored ones. And so the white ones and black ones were the last to sell. The white ones are gone, I've still got one black one, you know. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: It's like that.

THEODORE KERR: That's fascinating. Yeah, I really thought it was about that retrospective that happened in Toronto, but it had nothing that really—

AA BRONSON: Toronto, you know, there haven't been that many sales [in Canada –AB], and the exhibition was also in Paris. I think Paris had a biggish impact, because you know, they had the second-highest attendance they had ever had, it was for that show. And it was a huge number of young people, though—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Lineups down the block.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, lineups down the block. And it wasn't for—it was students, you know it was young people. It wasn't, you know, that so many collectors and curators were coming as that it was young people, which it always has been and probably always will be for General Idea, you know.

THEODORE KERR: Because of the things that you all were exploring and representing?

AA BRONSON: I guess somehow it's still like that today. I mean, at the time we were doing them, our biggest audience was always students and young people and it still is today. It's a completely different generation, but it's still the students who are most interested.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: And in terms of sales, what he said to me is, "It's very common to take like 25 years—"

AA BRONSON: Yeah, I think for anybody who's breaking new ground. I mean, Buckminster Fuller always said, and it still sticks in my head, you know, from hearing him speak in the late '60s, "It takes 25 years from the time"—well, in his case—"from the time something is invented until it can actually be incorporated into the culture in an economically feasible way." And it seems to me that that's also true of artwork, that if it's really groundbreaking, it's going to be 25 years at least before people start to recognize its value.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

AA BRONSON: Yeah. And if it sells right away, it's probably not very interesting. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Right, right, right, right, right. If people can absorb it that quick.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, yeah, if it can be absorbed.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: [inaudible]

THEODORE KERR: And then it would be remiss if we didn't talk about what happened with the Smithsonian. It would be—

AA BRONSON: Oh, right.

[They laugh.]

THEODORE KERR: And so, do you want a prompt for that, or do you want to just go?

AA BRONSON: No, I can talk about that. So there was the exhibition—what's it called again?

THEODORE KERR: *Hide/Seek.*

AA BRONSON: *Hide/Seek.*

THEODORE KERR: *Same-Sex Desire in American Portraiture*.

AA BRONSON: Right. And created by—

THEODORE KERR: Jonathan Katz.

AA BRONSON: Jonathan Katz, together with somebody from the Institution, whose name I forget.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: And they wanted to include—they asked to include ["Felix, June 5, 1994"], which I was fine with. And I remember there was some discussion of whether it should be—that portrait exists in a very small version like a normal photograph, and then the one that is the real piece in my mind, which is the big version, which is a digital print on vinyl. And Jonathan decided he wanted the big one. At first he wanted the small one, and then when they started planning the installation, he decided he wanted the big one, which is the one I wanted them to have. I never saw the show in Washington, but it opened. And then, you know, the shit hit the fan about the Wojnarowicz video, that I think maybe they had—I'm trying to remember, it was so long ago now. They had three videos in the show? Anyway, the Wojnarowicz video was a piece that was—do you remember the title of the video?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, *Fire in [My] Belly*.

AA BRONSON: *Fire in [My] Belly*, was a piece that he'd originally made as a piece about Mexico.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, it was incomplete.

AA BRONSON: It was incomplete, yeah. And he had put together two versions of it, and then I think that Jonathan, together with the other curator, put together his own version—right?—in which he had added AIDS demonstrations and things into the mix, or he added a soundtrack.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, he added a soundtrack.

AA BRONSON: Right. And anyway they got a complaint from some right-wing religious leader, threatening to, you know, to report them to their member of Parliament or whatever. And they backed down immediately and removed the video from the show. And there was a huge uproar over it. The main result was that that video got shown in almost every nonprofit in North America—[laughs]—in the following weeks. And I was—the whole story to me was just so bizarre. And I thought, "I don't want to be in this exhibition," and I asked them to withdraw my piece. Well, what I hadn't realized is it was the only big piece in the show, and everything else is quite small, and it was being used as somehow the finale, I guess. So to remove the piece would have been really actually probably quite devastating for them. Even better, as far as I'm concerned. And they refused, on the basis that the piece didn't belong to me, it belonged to the National Gallery of Canada. And it's interesting that they thought that was reason enough that they thought the artist's desires, you know, the artist's wishes don't count for anything. And then I asked the Director of the National Gallery of Canada to intercede on my behalf, and he said he would be happy to do so. But what he actually did was wrote a very conciliatory sort of letter saying, you know, "AA Bronson's understandably upset by all of this, and please, you know, listen to him," or something to this effect—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —you know, but it didn't say "remove the piece from the show."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so they refused again and again I asked Marc [Mayer], at the National Gallery, to just remove it and we got into this battle and he said—he said basically, you know, "I can't do that"—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and I said, "Why not?" And he never would answer that, you know? Like, legally—I had a lawyer

look into it. Legally the National Gallery could have removed it from the show, but it probably would have soured relationships—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —between the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Canada, and maybe that was reason enough for not doing it? I don't know. Marc would never tell me and never has told me.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: He said, "It's obvious; I don't have to say it; it's absolutely obvious why I can't do that." But I don't know.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And then I really offended him. I said, "Well, is it because you'd like to," you know—he has a history of being a museum director in both the U.S. and Canada and I said, "Well, I guess from the National Gallery of Canada, the only way you can move up is to go to the Smithsonian. Is that what you're thinking about?" [Laughs.] He was terribly offended that I thought it was for personal reasons. So then when the show went—by then the show was almost over. I mean—my lawyer said that he could get the piece removed after looking—and he was a Canadian lawyer, but that the way that he devised—I'm trying to think what it was. It was something that kind of came in under some other excuse. It wasn't the real reason—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but he could get it removed under the veil of some other—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —thing, which missed the point for me. Like it wasn't—it had to be for the real reason, not for some other reason. And then the show was almost over so I said, "Forget it." And then the Brooklyn Museum I think was taking the show next and they contacted me and said, "Don't worry, you know, we're going to include the Wojnarowicz video. Not only that, we're going to show every version of the—[laughs]—Wojnarowicz video."

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And so that was fine. From then on it was okay.

THEODORE KERR: Why was it important for you—why did you want your work out of the show?

AA BRONSON: Well, I—also I had seen the catalogue at this point and it just seemed to be such a kind of wishy-washy, namby-pamby sort of stupid show, just pictures of people who turn out to be gay, who maybe you didn't know were gay, sometimes taken by—done by other artists who maybe were gay, who maybe you didn't know were gay. I mean, what kind of show is that? That was one thing. And then the other was to bend to the will of one, right-wing, Christian person—the whole government institution of the Smithsonian—to bend to the will of one stupid, right-wing guy, this to me was outrageous.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Just totally outrageous. I just couldn't believe that they were doing it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I couldn't stomach it and I just did not want to be in that show.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And what's-his-name, the curator whose name I always manage to block out of my head ever since that—what's his name again? [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Jonathan.

AA BRONSON: Jonathan Katz. I followed him quite closely and I had some conversations with him and when it was convenient to come on my side, he came on my side, and when it was convenient to go be on the museum's side, he was on the museum's side.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he would—you know, he was milking that controversy for all it was worth, talking everywhere, doing all these lectures about the show. And he was not—he was not really taking a position at all, as far as I was concerned. And that—I felt some disgust about all of that, so. I mean he was more interested in his career than in the ethics around that particular show.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah. I guess I wonder too if it was something about like—it's a very intense image for you—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —and I wondered if it was also about like protecting General Idea, protecting Felix, protecting —

AA BRONSON: Yeah, it's very, very personal, that's true. It's not like it's an objective piece. I mean if it were a different portrait maybe I would have reacted differently, but with that portrait it's true, it's true. It's deeply personal and very—yeah, it's a very different thing than if it had been like a portrait of General Idea from 1975 or something.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

AA BRONSON: That's true.

THEODORE KERR: And—yeah, and not for nothing, like David Wojnarowicz—like he lived with HIV, he died—

AA BRONSON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THEODORE KERR: —to be censored after he was—

AA BRONSON: Yes, exactly. Yes, exactly, yeah.

THEODORE KERR: And to be censored after he died and then to have Felix, on some level, having to witness that.

AA BRONSON: Yeah, and there was nothing Wojnarowicz himself could do, you know? Like there was nothing he could say, nothing he could do, he wasn't there anymore, and I forget—there was one other person who withdrew a piece from the show. It was a collector who had lent a piece—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but then—but then he backtracked and after talking to the museum he allowed them to continue showing it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I don't know—don't remember why.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: He never said—never said why. He emailed me and he just said that after further conversations with the curators he felt that it was better to support them.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he advised me to do the same.

THEODORE KERR: That's intense. Yeah. So how would you like us to wrap up this—

AA BRONSON: [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: —three-day, amazing conversation?

AA BRONSON: Yeah. Good question. Is there anything I need to say about the future?

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: Do I know anything about the future?

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Do you want to talk about your Canada Council for the Arts [ph] applications?

AA BRONSON: Oh, yeah, that's interesting.

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: Do you have like your—

AA BRONSON: Yeah, there's—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: —"A Public Apology to the Siksika Nation"? [ph]

AA BRONSON: Maybe if we have enough time.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Do we have enough time that I can describe another project?

THEODORE KERR: Absolutely.

AA BRONSON: A project that I've proposed but haven't done yet—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and it brings in my own personal history and maybe explains a lot of the other things along the way consequently. So my great-grandfather, in 1883, came to Canada as a newly ordained priest—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —Anglican priest from London, England came to Canada to the Siksika reserve, the Blackfoot tribe about 80 miles outside of Calgary, east of Calgary. And there he built a church, built a house for himself, he built a school which would have been the first residential school in that area. I mean, he was the first—I believe he was the first missionary in Alberta—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and certainly for the Siksika [. . . –AB]—and he was made—you know, he was welcomed by the native peoples, he was made an honorary chief, he was given his own headdress, his own ritual tipi, decorated tipi, all that kind of thing, which I don't think he paid much attention to, but he received them. And then—and then he started to go through this process of taking the children away from their families, putting them into this residential school—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —not allowing them to speak their own language. At the same time, weirdly enough, he learned the language—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —he wrote a grammar book and a dictionary—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

AA BRONSON: —for the Siksika language and he devised the written form of the language, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The syllabarium, is that what you would call it? Anyway, the written form of the language. So it's all very bizarre. He definitely thought of himself as a very good person, you know. And he was also very much opposed to the Sun Dance—

THEODORE KERR: Oh.

AA BRONSON: —which maybe you know a little bit about.

THEODORE KERR: Uh-huh [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Which was a Blackfoot—it was the Blackfoot ritual by which boys became men—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and he lobbied I think intensively to have it outlawed both in Canada and the U.S. I think even the border between Canada and the U.S. wasn't completely firm at that point—and was successful and in 18—I think it's 1895. I think I've got it right. 1895 I think was when they outlawed—they at least, in Canada—I think in the U.S. they outlawed the whole thing and in Canada they outlawed the piercing aspect of it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, that the young guys are pierced all over their bodies with—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —with pieces of wood which are tied to leather thongs that go to the top of a tree or tall pole and they dance around the pole until the—until they're going fast enough that they're lifted off—they lift off the ground from their own momentum and of course the endorphins set in, they go into—they go into some sort of altered state.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: The blood flows and so on.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they're men instead of boys. And basically by outlawing this ritual, he prevented the boys from becoming men.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So the day that it was outlawed, as my own grandfather tells the story, who was born just before that—a friendly Indian came to the kitchen door. [Laughs.] It's so weird that he came to the kitchen door, you know, and—it's like the servants' entrance—and warned them that they should leave immediately—

THEODORE KERR: Oof.

AA BRONSON: —and they did, they fled to Calgary and the church, the house, and the school were all burned to the ground—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and he was transferred to a more peaceful reservation [the Sarcee Reserve –AB]. Well, that's all within my family oral history—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and when you look at the written history they do say that he transferred to the other tribe, but they don't say why—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and they don't mention the burning of the school or anything, just that there was some trouble on the reserve and he left and was transferred to the Sarcees who were not Blackfoot and they were a more peaceful tribe. So—and the other thing is, the medicine man was kind of his archenemy. And the medicine man refused to study this written language—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but then one day appeared and knew the whole thing and said it had come to him in a dream in the night—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and he now knew it.

So the project I want to do—it's so bizarre the way it's unrolled—is a public apology to the Siksika people. I want to do it as a performance on the reserve.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I want to do a book, which is the text of the apology that would be given to all the Siksika families.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And I want to do a book of all the early photographs from the 1800s from the Siksika reserve that are in—there's an archive at the Glenbow Museum in—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: My great-grandfather's archive is at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. And there's a lot of—there's like 250 photos or something, you know. And probably a significant number of them are actually from the Sarcee reserve—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —but there are ones from the Siksikas as well. So I want to do a book of photos and then I had a third book I wanted to do and I wasn't sure what I wanted it to be. And then when I—this was to apply for money from this 150th anniversary of Canada grant—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —that was made available.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: A large pot of money. And I put this up on Facebook—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —you know, and then I got a message from what's-her-name—she's an indigenous curator from Vancouver, who was at the Western Front for some time.

THEODORE KERR: Oh, okay.

AA BRONSON: And she's now one of the curators at Documenta—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —interestingly and doing projects with indigenous people from around the world.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and—Melanie, is that her name? Anyway she contacted me and said, "Oh, well you have to meet Adrian Stimson because he's Siksika and he's just right now moving back to the reserve from Saskatoon," I think, where he'd been living.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: And so I contacted Adrian and turns out he's gay, he's a performance artist—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and it turns out—we realized after—I mean, he was very touched by the project. He said it made him cry when he read the description and then I came up with the idea that the third book should be a response, should be a book by him—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —should be a response. And then—and then it turned out that he was being asked to run for chief—

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: —which actually gave it another resonance and that he was from a family of chiefs and then it turned out that it was his great-grandfather—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who had been the chief when my great-grandfather was the missionary. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow, yeah.

AA BRONSON: Just to make things more complicated. And he has information about the medicine man and so on that I don't really understand. I need to meet with him in person and talk about it in more detail, because he was saying, "Well, is that—is that one of the Buffalo People, are you talking about?" [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: You know, it's like—[laughs]—I don't know, what's a Buffalo People?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I have no idea. So there apparently are different like clans—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and they each have their own medicine man within the clan, but the clan—you know, people within in the same tribe can be from different clans—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and I don't quite understand how the clan structure works—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —within the—I have no idea how all that works—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —so I need to investigate that further. [. . . –AB]. And then in the meantime, you know, there's this other story, this other family story, which is how this British lord came and borrowed stuff from my great-grandfather for an exhibition at the British Museum.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And the stuff was never returned. So the tipi, the headdress, and a bunch of other stuff—all this native stuff that he had been given as a gift when he first arrived, 22 items or something—they took them all and never returned them. So I was thinking to myself, well, I wonder—I've thought for years—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —I've wondered if the British Museum still has this stuff. And then recently I was thinking, well, so many museums are putting their collections online now, I should check online.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: So I looked online. Sure enough there's 22 Siksika items—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —purchased from the Marquess of Lorne—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —in 1894, which is the year before—the year before the burning of—

THEODORE KERR: Okay.

AA BRONSON: —the house, right, and then I—so I start investigating the Marquess of Lorne. The Marquess of Lorne was a British lord who married the prettiest daughter of Queen Victoria, so that made him royalty in a sense, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And they—and he was made the Governor General of Canada—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —in around 1890.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And it was—for all intents and purposes, everybody assumes he was gay—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —that there's no sense of him ever having had sex with his wife.

THEODORE KERR: Because they had no kids?

AA BRONSON: I don't think they had kids—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and also they had a—they had a—his circle of friends was a fairly infamous circle of homosexual lords—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —who then were apparently wrapped up with the theft of the Irish crown jewels—

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: —and his name was kept out of it, you know, because his wife was the daughter of Queen Victoria.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And he left—and then he left his post as Governor General a year early, nobody really knows why. It isn't—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —documented why he left a year early, but what he did—because the Smithsonian at that point existed—the Smithsonian had sent out a troupe of people to collect native artifacts—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —for the Smithsonian collection, and he was aware that they had also gone through Alberta—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —doing that, and that Canada or Britain didn't have an equivalent. And so he put together a group that was 77 men and 96 horses—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —and they traveled through western Canada collecting artifacts, and they visited the Siksika reserve.

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: So in the online document, they have 22 items that they purchased from him that are Siksika. My great-grandfather was told that they were borrowing—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —items and in there is a chief's headdress—

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: —that I think was my great-grandfather's. And then the follow-up to this—

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: —even more bizarre, even more bizarre, they recently purchased—the British Museum purchased pieces by Adrian Stimson—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —to update their Siksika collection—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —which is mostly stuff, as I can see, from my great-grandfather.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah.

AA BRONSON: So he was there, and there was some reason I couldn't go. Was I sick? I was supposed to go and meet him there and—

MARK JAN KRAYENHOFF VAN DE LEUR: I think it was—

AA BRONSON: I think I was sick, yeah, and that—but anyway he, you know, texted me a photo of him with the—with the chief's headdress. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: So funny! [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: Wow.

AA BRONSON: He got into the archives and managed to look at these Siksika things.

THEODORE KERR: And so do you—is that another project?

AA BRONSON: So another part of the project is to do an exhibition which is somehow about this whole narrative—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and brings together some of those artifacts—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —from the 1880s, 1890s together, and maybe the photos from the—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —archive and the apology and somehow, I don't know quite how—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —bring that together into an exhibition. And I'd like to do it—I'd like to do it at the Siksika reserve, but that's probably impossible with the artifacts.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Unless I can get them repatriated, which is also in my head.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: And then—

THEODORE KERR: Repatriated back to the Siksika?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, back to the Siksika. And there is a museum—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —which is the—what's it called? I mean it's not specifically Siksika but it is Blackfoot.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Which is closer to Lethbridge, it's further south—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —from there, but it's that jumping rock thing.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: What is that? That like—

THEODORE KERR: The Buffalo Jump?

AA BRONSON: Yeah, there, there's a museum there at Buffalo—whatever it's called.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, Buffalo—Running Jump?

AA BRONSON: Something like that. A long, complicated name.

THEODORE KERR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AA BRONSON: There's a museum there that has like a professional curator and staff and they do have some old things that they have to take proper—I mean they—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —it is a place that could potentially be a good location for it.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: I haven't—of course I haven't told any of this to the British Museum.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

AA BRONSON: So that's my big project that's kind of—and you can see, you know, my family had this history as a family of A: priests, B: adventurers, you know?

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: And when—I have this little piece of paper from my great-grandfather's childhood, and it's a piece of paper from a phrenologist who read the bumps on the head—

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: —and when he was eight, read his bumps, and said that he was either going to be an adventurer or a holy man.

THEODORE KERR: [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: One of the two and that his parents should give him lots of room and not be too strict with him, because if they were strict he would turn into a criminal.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: This is the—[laughs]—yeah. So I think this—also this relationship to fortune—this connection to fortune telling and then religion and shamanism and—

THEODORE KERR: Totally.

AA BRONSON: —you know, all these different—all these different ingredients of that story and that project are very interesting in light of my life of working as an artist.

THEODORE KERR: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AA BRONSON: Maybe that's a good place to stop. [Laughs.]

THEODORE KERR: I think so. It's beautiful. I like that the vision into the future is a deep look back into the past. [Laughs.]

AA BRONSON: Yes, right [Laughs.] That's right, that's true.

THEODORE KERR: Okay. Thank you, AA

AA BRONSON: Thank you, Ted.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]