THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**TOM FINKELPEARL (TF)** Former Deputy Director of P.S. 1
INTERVIEWER:	**JEFF WEINSTEIN (JW)** Arts & Culture Journalist / Editor
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JW: I'm Jeff Weinstein and we are sitting in the Architecture and Design conference room at the education and research building of The Museum of Modern Art on Tuesday, 3:30, June 15th, and I'm talking to…

TF: 2010.

JW: 2010. Is it Thomas or Tom?

TF: Tom.

JW: Tom Finkelpearl. And we're going to be talking about his relationship to P.S. 1. Hello. Could you tell me a little background: where you were born, when, something about your growing up and your education?

TF: Okay. Well, I was born in 1956 in Massachusetts. My mom was an artist and my dad was an academic. So, actually, you know, I had this vision of New York City from when I was a kid, which was, going to New York City and seeing, like, abstract expressionist shows. We had a Kline in our front hall. They had a de Kooning on consignment, but they didn't have the three hundred and fifty dollars. And so the trajectory of my early childhood was that I always had this incredible vision of coming to New York City and working in the arts. Then actually, I went undergraduate to Princeton. I was a visual arts and art history major, so I was an artist when I started P.S. 1, and in fact, I was in graduate school at Hunter, going

part-time. And it was back in the days when you could go, for, I think it was maybe $400 a course I was taking, so it was sort of like $800 a semester.

JW: Were you in an MFA program?

TF: Yes, and I was studying with Robert Morris and Alice Aycock, and that was, in fact…okay-I started at P.S. 1 around the same time that I started at Hunter.

JW: Your interest in public art, which was fairly early, develops?

TF: It actually developed out of my work as an artist.

JW: Right.

TF: So, at P.S. 1 I was doing, working out shows, very much inside the museum. There was very little sort of outreach into the community at all. But I started, in my art, you know, I've always had a kind of a political slant to my artistic practice, let's say. And I started doing public artworks on the street. In fact, the reason I left P.S. 1 the first time, after nine years, was to pursue something more public, and that's when I got the public art job [as director of the Percent for Art Program at the City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs].

JW: Was P.S. 1 your first job?

TF: No, actually, I had worked at the Hudson River; right after college I got the job at the Hudson River Museum. I was a PR guy. And I was writing press releases and stuff, and I actually think that was an incredibly valuable experience, because I got to see how people, how the public responded to a very avant-garde program. Richard Koshalek was the director at the time. We had Julia Brown, and Julie Lazar, were curators there. Julie Lazar was not yet a curator; she was in Development. But so, we had a Richard Serra show and people went crazy, and I got to deal with the press.

JW: Could you tell me what year, or years?

TF: Well, I graduated from college in 1979. I believe I started the Hudson River Museum-it was 1980. So, I was there for a bit, and then I got fired, because a

new director, Peter Langlykke came in and fired everybody, including a lot of really incredible curators. And some of them went out to LA to go to MOCA, to work with Richard Koshalek at the new Museum of Contemporary Art out there, as curators. And I got a job delivering flowers in a van, which actually paid more than either the job at the Hudson River Museum or the job at P.S. 1. But yeah, so, I had an intermediary time when I was, you know, just going. That's when I started graduate school, and I went, and I was still delivering flowers. So then, that wasn't that long, and then, actually, what happened is, a woman named Gwen Darien came from the Hudson River Museum and got a job as, she eventually ended up as deputy director [of PS1]. She was sort of administrator and finance person at P.S. 1. And she's still around. She's actually the editor now of a publication about breast cancer. But when the PR person before me at P.S. 1 left, she said, "Oh, you should hire Tom," and Alanna [Heiss] called me up and interviewed me and hired me for it, because Gwen had recommended me.

JW: Well, you've answered a question I was ready to ask.

TF: How did I get my interview.

JW: So, it wasn't a posted job, it was more informal?

TF: No, and actually, what had happened, because there was another woman doing PR at P.S. 1, and Gwen and I are friends, but she also had sort of a high estimate of my abilities in PR, so she said, "Let's get Tom to come in and just go over some PR ideas for P.S. 1." So I sat down and had a long meeting with the program director, who was Ron Lynch at that time.

JW: Yes.

TF: Incredible guy, good friend, long-term, and Robin Wright, who was doing PR at that time. And she was from the Wright family, Bagley Wright, et cetera, great collectors from Seattle. So I had had a long meeting already. It wasn't an interview. It was like, here's what I would do, here are some ideas, PR ideas. So, people at P.S. 1 already knew me.

JW: So, this meeting was about when? Do you remember?

TF: 1980.

JW: 1980 and that, so. . .

TF: Alanna wasn't there.

JW: Alanna wasn't there.

TF: But I had then, so Ron Lynch liked me and Gwen Darien was already a friend, so when Robin Wright decided to leave, I think went back to Seattle, they said, "Let's get Tom here. He already knows P.S. 1 very well." I had been going there for so long. And they brought me in to interview with Alanna. I don't think they posted the job. I think that it was a situation where, because I think that I slipped in within like, a week of when she left, I was there.

JW: I see. And your title was? Did you have a title?

TF: Program Coordinator. And I was doing PR, but it was just part of, I think Program Coordinator was just a generalized title.

JW: Did it apply to P.S. 1 and to the Clocktower?

TF: Yes.

JW: And to whom did you report?

TF: To Ron Lynch. I mean, the thing is, everybody reported to Alanna. And Ron was incredibly…did you ever meet him?

JW: Yes.

TF: Amazing, really good looking, very charismatic, Alanna loved him, everybody loved him. He wasn't an art guy, which is maybe a kind of a good thing. He was just very well organized and he knew enough about the art world to sort of know what to do and what not to do. But he was my boss. But, you know, whenever anything needed to be done, especially- I'd go in and Alanna would have these long discussions about it. So it was, my boss was Ron Lynch.

JW: Do you want to tell me something about how your early time there went, in a day-by-day way?

TF: Sure, I mean, so I, first of all, the first week I got there, my check bounced. It was like, "Oh my god; how am I going to pay the rent?"

JW: I imagine it wasn't a big check.

TF: No, no, it wasn't. I can't remember; I think I was getting paid around $11,000 or $12,000 [a year], something like that. So then there were two things, day to day, one is that I loved it. I completely loved it. I thought, "Oh my god," and the parties were incredible, and the art that was coming in and out was great. And everybody did everything, so I worked on the shows and the shows were these, you know, huge group endeavors, and everybody stayed overnight. But the other thing is that the week that I got there, I worked with a woman who had organized the studio program as an Urban Corp intern, and that's my wife, Eugenie Tsai. And so she, I didn't ask her out until Friday night. I want to say, I did not date an intern, but I mean, you know, whatever. I was 26. It wasn't some kind of thing, in any case, power thing. So that Friday night of my first week-

JW: You met?

TF: No, I met her on Monday, we worked together for five days, I asked her out on Friday, and it was one of these big opening parties, which I believe was the "Space Invaders" opening.

JW: That was 1980?

TF: I think so. And so, we went to the party at Danceteria and everything. So it was all so, part of it was the social side, which was, you know, I was in this romance. Which is still going – we're having our 25th anniversary in the fall.

JW: Congratulations.

TF: And so she's now contemporary curator at the Brooklyn Museum.

JW: Right.

TF: She was at the Whitney for years, et cetera. So, there was a very, very small staff. We had no security at that time. The security was, you were supposed to occasionally walk through the galleries. We had a small building maintenance staff. But we had always this kind of rotating group of curators which was the sort of group around Alanna. So, Richard Flood, who did a bunch of shows, and…

JW: These curators were paid per show…

TF: Yes.

JW: Freelance-

TF: Very little. The thing is, it wasn't, and so you had freelance curators, like Richard Flood, who came in and did shows for probably, I don't know, very small amounts of money. You could ask him. Which were great and really formative, I think, for him, because he wasn't even a curator at that time. He was a writer.

JW: He was a critic, yes.

TF: But also a writer of fiction, a playwright.

JW: He had been a managing editor of *Artforum.*

TF: Right. But nobody thought of him as a curator. And that was one of the things about Alanna, would give somebody a chance, like him, because she thought he was smart and visually acute. So there was that kind of person who just came in and did shows, but we also had these group of, every medium had a curator. So we had a fashion curator, a sound curator, dance curator. There was this whole group, and they did three shows a year, for $1000 I think. And there was a room dedicated to each one of those, so it was the sound room, the video room. And some of those people, I remember, Nic [Nicholas] Collins was one of the sound curators. And some, like Bob Harris, was the video curator. And, you know, they brought in amazing shows. But there was a fashion show, a sound show, an architecture show, et cetera, every season, and there were three seasons.

JW: Did you know of any other institutions that were organized in such a way?

TF: No. I mean, I think it was based on funding, because I think there was this idea that there was a little bit of money available for architecture, film, dance, et cetera, from the state council or other funding sources.

JW: From NYSCA [New York State Council on the Arts], you mean?

TF: Yes, from NYSCA; right. So we had, for example, Glenn Weiss, who's now running public art for Times Square, was the architecture curator for years and brought in people like Neil Denari, who is now a big-shot architect, for no money, no resources, just, you know, sweat equity, et cetera.

JW: Could you give me, again, for the person who will be reading this 50 years from now, how were the shows decided? Do you have any idea? There are so many freelance curators, everything seems to, as you say, have gone through Alanna at some point, but do you know how the process worked?

TF: Sure; of course. There was no formal process at all. But Alanna's attention came and went. There were some times, most of the time, Alanna was deeply involved in every individual decision. So that somebody would come and she'd say basically yes or no to any idea. It was very quick; it was very non-bureaucratic, and decisions were easily made and irreversible. But then there were times, if Alanna was in a kind of a traveling mode, which she would go into every year or two, where she would just kind of show up for the openings. And then the decisions were made much more independently by the curators and by Ron Lynch, who was the Program Director.

JW: But somebody had to decide how the money was spent, and, in fact, to see if there was money.

TF: Yes.

JW: And I can see that she could say yes, and there may not be money to do the show.

TF: Well, I mean, the thing is, again, these shows didn't cost much money. I remember one show that I did. I think that the budget was $500. For the whole

show. Everything. Soup to nuts. And so the program funding streams were set at the beginning of the year. We got the grant from NYSCA. The NYSCA grant was for $1,500. It was for three shows, and they were fashion shows. And so the fashion curator had $500 to spend to do three projects. You know, so, Betsey Johnson was one of those projects. And Betsey Johnson, who, you know, came in and built, did, the whole thing herself. We found some mannequins at Materials for the Arts, which was in the basement, which is a key to a lot of shows. She asked all of the guards, including my wife, who was a guard at the time, to dress up in her fabulous clothes, and did a really cool installation in about three days.

JW: Could you – I'm going to digress – explain what Materials for the Arts is?

TF: Materials for the Arts, P.S. 1 is in a city-owned building.

JW: Yes.

TF: And during my time it became part of the Cultural Institutions Group, which I could talk about also. But as a city building, another part of the Department of Cultural Affairs was a program called Materials for the Arts, which was just a bunch of materials donated and evaluated by staff in this program, that might be valuable for artists to use. So you might get, you know, eight barrels of buttons one week, or 20 mannequins, or a bunch of furniture, actually. Much, all of the furniture in P.S. 1 was from Materials for the Arts. And there's still stuff in the P.S. 1 offices that I remember getting in the early '80s.

JW: These were tax-deductible donations, then, from. . .?

TF: Yes. Donations from, like, a…and some of them were just really straightforward business uses, like file cabinets and office fixtures. And other stuff was like, a huge swordfish that somebody didn't need any longer, mounted on the wall, that was used repeatedly in installations. But that was one that Materials for the Arts required to be brought back. And it was used not just at P.S. 1 but elsewhere. So yeah, there was a store of material in the basement, which wasn't, by any means, limited to P.S. 1 use. I mean, people from all over the city would come.

You'd come with a truck and you'd fill it up with stuff. It was really great. It still is a really great way of supporting the arts.

JW: I'm thinking, that there was very little security at P.S. 1, and I just shudder to think that if anybody had looted the barrels of buttons or lifted the swordfish. . .

TF: Well, the thing is that the idea of P.S. 1 from the beginning was the non-precious installation. And, in fact, there was a big difference between what happened on the first floor and the rest of the building. So when I got there, of course, one wing, the entire wing, was the studio program, and the other wing was the exhibitions. So the south wing, which was the exhibitions, on the second or third floor, there was never insurance on anything. It was meant to be installations that weren't damageable, or there was no economic value to them. So, on the first floor we did have, we borrowed from galleries and occasionally from museums. And depending on the value, occasionally there would be some people there who were designated as, and guards, obviously, became part of the picture as the '80s and into the '90s went on.

JW: I see. So you were, then, ensconced happily, not earning too much, working in an institution that was doing very unusual shows. How do you think P.S. 1 was perceived at the time?

TF: I don't know. You know, there was, P.S. 1 obviously was very hip. There were a lot of fashionable people. The openings were these incredible events, which were free and anybody could come, and they were six hours long. And often it was virtually impossible to move in the stairwells, it was so crowded. By the way, this was before the place actually had a certificate of occupancy, so if there had been a fire or something, it would have been a huge disaster. But there was this question about how seriously people took the shows. And I think that when P.S. 1 opened, which was in 1976 and I sort of knew about it but I wasn't there at their initial shows, it was this, you know, extremely well-respected idea of sort of the beginning of the alternative space movement. But I think that there were also grumblings about it being sort of too quickly done and not – and there was never an idea that there were going to be serious, scholarly shows. The idea was that these were going to be shows of artists people hadn't heard of. And actually, at

that time, which is quite different from now, I mean, all of my friends and my peers and all of the artists that show at P.S. 1, if they had a gallery show, you'd, like, "Oh, isn't it great that Michael Byron's finally getting a show in a gallery." It was, all the artists were pre-gallery. There weren't as many galleries. There was a whole different system in New York City in terms of the structure of the art world. So, I felt like that it was discovering artists constantly, it was giving artists the opportunity to do, to show their work, that didn't have the outlets. I think there might have been just as many artists in New York City at the time, but now there's hundreds of more galleries than there were.

JW: I know that you did a number of the shows that you were responsible for at the Clocktower. How was the decision made as to where to have a show?

TF: [chuckling] There was a time also where I moved to the Clocktower and I actually ran the Clocktower.

JW: Oh, I didn't know that. What time was that? What year, do you remember?

TF: I do. I was, okay, Program Coordinator and Public Relations Coordinator from 1982-1984, acting. So that Ron Lynch left, and for a long time, like a year and a half or 18 months, I was Acting Program Director. And then I was Curator and Clocktower Director from 1985-1990. And then actually, Alanna, at a certain point, called me back around the time that I left, around 1990. So from 1985 on, I actually physically moved to the Clocktower.

JW: To the Clocktower, as the curator and...

TF: And the director. Director of the Clocktower meant I was involved in all of the, well, not necessarily all of the curatorial decisions, but I organized everything. And I was involved in fundraising and everything by that point, also. The thing is, I was an artist at the time, and I asked for a job that I expected was going to have less responsibility, because work at P.S. 1 was such an all-encompassing thing. So in 1985 I asked for, essentially asked for, a demotion to go run the Clocktower, because the person who had been running the Clocktower was kind of pretty much detached and wasn't doing any curatorial work, and worked four days a week, and had time to be an artist. So that's what I wanted to do. Of

course, when I got over there, I was getting paid less but I was working just as many hours, and I was also then working one day a week at P.S. 1. So I'd go back and forth. Generally, a lot of the Clocktower shows, I mean, some of them could have been in either place. We had many more one-person shows at the Clocktower. So, often you'd have one person upstairs and one person downstairs. And there were some really great shows. I remember Kiki Smith and Matt Mullican shared the Clocktower one season. And I organized a bunch of shows. I had more curatorial outlet at the Clocktower, even though it was a less prominent setting.

JW: When I was looking at the list of your shows, I saw toward the end of the period, you were having a big cluster, so I assume that you were basically running the Clocktower.

TF: I was. And I was officially the director and curator, but again, nothing was decided without Alanna and without the Program Director. And there were different program directors: Ed Leffingwell, and Chris Dercon. So, when I was, you know, I was that program director, I didn't want that job permanently. It's not that it was offered to me, but I didn't apply for it. I was Acting Program Director for a year and a half, which was completely all-encompassing. And during that period of time, I was involved in every aspect of every program at every show. Because a program director is sort of like the deputy director, managing director, something like that. And certainly, when Alanna was away, there was a lot of responsibility.

JW: Right. I understand that there is a porousness of the way in which decisions were made ultimately, though Alanna made the decisions. I still am curious about how a show starts: who gets the idea, how it moved, who would say no to a show. You mentioned that Alanna did say yes or no, but do you remember any situations in which you had proposed a show and that it was refused?

TF: You know, the problem at P.S. 1 was not that there were too many ideas, the problem was always filling the place up. It was so big. And actually, I felt like this was one of the great aspects of it, was that everybody has a group of friends, there's conflict of interest, there's your girlfriend, your boyfriend, or whatever, and

people got rid of that very quickly. And then they really had to just go out and find stuff. So I don't think I remember any time there was a show that I wanted to do that I wasn't able to. I was always able to do it. Sometimes it was delayed. Sometimes the idea was simply: we have three more rooms to fill; who can we call to fill them? So the decision-making process was somewhat "Alanna and her group of friends and consult. . ." But I think one of the misunderstandings about P.S. 1 was that it was all emerging artists. The other part of it was Alanna's friends, and as she continued to get older, they got older, and they continued to be showing at P.S. 1. So there was that kind of mixing in of the older generation. When I say older, I mean, people sort of Alanna's age. But, decision-making process. We had program meetings.

JW: Were they at P.S. 1?

TF: Yes, they were at P.S. 1. And program meetings were: "Have you gotten in touch with the fashion curator and has she decided what to do yet? Goddamnit." It's, "We have to do," and the deadlines were always printed material – cards, you know. "The card has to go out." And that was, okay, so, who's in the show? So later, especially when I came back the second time, there were definitely shows that were rejected. I'm talking about the '80s. So then there were people constantly coming from the outside and proposing stuff to us, and a lot of those were rejected. And so there would be a certain person, somebody on the staff, or one of the other outside curators, would come in and say, "I've heard from X, Y and Z, they want to do a show about such-and-such a topic." And a lot of those were rejected. Or somehow the ideas were stolen and done anyway without the person from the outside. That happened very rarely, but it did happen a couple of times. So programming meetings became more and more formal as time went on, to the point where there were actually dates which were set beforehand. One of the annoying things when I came back to P.S. 1 was that at a lot of meetings, Alanna would sort of come in after lunch, almost always, and as the afternoon progressed, she'd realize something needed to get done, and at five o'clock she'd say, "We're going to go to Manducati's and we're going to have a meeting," which would often last until eight o'clock or longer. And so the

programming meetings would either be at P.S. 1 or at Manducati's, which is the Italian restaurant across the street. I'm sure you've heard of it.

JW: I've been to…

TF: I was just there, two weeks ago. But I'm just trying to think. It was very informal, but obviously, decisions got made, and for the most part it was a matter of filling space rather than rejecting ideas.

JW: Now this is a very museum question, but what about records of these things? It's clear that there are few formal records early on, and records about, even checklists of, the works that were in the shows, where they came from, when exactly they were there. Do you have any sense of there being any, or that they wanted to keep records and they weren't kept because there was nobody to do it, or no one thought it was important?[1]

TF: I wonder if – I just thought of something. I wonder if the insurance company has records? And whether P.S. 1 could release that? Because we did do checklists for insurance purposes. And for a long time, we had to insure every show individually. This is only for the shows that had insurance. Of course, a lot of the shows didn't have insurance.

JW: That's what you said; yes.

TF: So I typed many checklists with individual works and specific values and dimensions and everything with the dates of the show, and I presume that those records – a lot of these records, they existed at certain times. I have no idea why they weren't maintained.

JW: Oh, I'm glad to hear that. Maybe…

TF: So, Huntington Block was always the insurance company. And maybe that would be helpful. There was just this basic sense that we were too busy to be

[1] Formal records were indeed kept by P.S. 1 staff in the early years, however, due to budgetary constraints these records were sometimes incomplete. However, a concerted effort was made at P.S. 1 to maintain historical documentation of the institution's events and activities.

thinking about the past, always. And we just had to get on to the next thing. If you look at the number of square footage, the square footage of that building and the number of people and the amount of money we had to spend per staff member, per dollar, whatever, it was unbelievable what was produced.

JW: And you were aiming always toward the opening. The opening was the event at which all of the shows had to be up.

TF: So you had three seasons a year, fall, winter and spring. Actually, when I started at P.S. 1, they simply closed in the summer. Everybody was laid off for two months, no pay. So then you'd reassemble in the fall.

JW: An academic life at P.S. 1.

TF: Right. It was great, except that I had to move home because I had no way to pay the rent. That was just the first year. After that, I think I was able to stay. But, yeah, so it was at three times a year, and those were huge occasions. We always took out a full-page ad in the *Village Voice*. That was our audience, very much the *Village Voice* audience. Because there weren't, *Time Out* wasn't here yet. There was the *East Village Eye*, which was important also, which, we would take ads out in there.

JW: But the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine* were not…

TF: They covered us a lot. We couldn't afford to advertise there. And that was less important in terms of generating audience. When we got a *Times* review, and actually, one of the things, when I started and I was doing PR, I got to know Grace Glueck quite well, and I really liked her. And we would always walk around the shows and she knew a lot. She was completely encyclopedic.

JW: Grace Glueck was an art critic at the *New York Times*.

TF: And also sort of cultural reporter. So that was very helpful for press. And if you look back in the press, I'm very proud, because aside from what I did on the curatorial side, I felt like I was a successful PR director, and part of it was getting

established a kind of profile in the *New York Times* that hadn't been there before. And the other thing that happened was that Michael Brenson came to the *Times*. And I think that he was just sort of emotionally attached to the underdog, anyway. But he is a family friend of mine and his father had been my mother's art teacher in college; I knew him when I was a kid. And so he came. He didn't necessarily give us good reviews, but he did cover P.S. 1. So almost every show, at a certain point, every one of those seasons, the major show would get reviewed in the *Times*. And that helped with fundraising more so than audience. The audience was the *Village Voice* audience. The fundraising audience was the *New York Times* audience.

JW: At what point do you think P.S. 1 had a national profile?

TF: I think it had an international profile before it had a national profile.

JW: Yes, and why is that?

TF: Well, because of the studio program.

JW: Would you explain more about that?

TF: Sure. So the studio program, starting after the first show, after the "Rooms" show, there was this idea, "Oh my God, look at the size of this place. How can we possibly fill it up?" And then Alanna had a huge admiration for what was going on in various European countries. And you have to remember, this is a time when you walk around New York City galleries, a much smaller group of organizations, and there were no European artists showing. I mean it was completely unusual to see a German or a French or an Italian artist.

JW: The triumph of American art had eliminated European art.

TF: Right! But I can't believe, even 15 years later, how that changed. But I think, actually, one of the things that changed was that it was infusing New York with all of these studio artists. So the deal was -- and she started with Germany and France and some other, just sort of wealthy, European countries -- that they would send an artist, and they would pay for their whole, you know, a stipend,

because these were people not able to legally work in the United States. And they would get them an apartment, and they would pay us, I can't remember, $8,000 a year for a studio. And this was always something that I always loved. I worked with the studio program artists a lot. Alanna sort of liked having them there but didn't want to have any trouble at all with them. So we'd give them a show at the end of every year at the Clocktower, and a catalog. And those catalogs all exist. I think those are pretty well-documented. So that was half the building at P.S. 1, and eight studios at the Clocktower.

JW: Now, the countries sponsored the artists?

TF: Yes.

JW: And who chose the artists?

TF: Generally speaking, the country was required through whatever system they had to nominate 10 artists, and then we would put together a panel of New York City experts. Did you ever sit on one of those panels?

JW: No, but I know people who did.

TF: And so that would change all the time. And the idea was to say, we don't want it to be the government, if this is what, you know, the Danish Cultural Council wants to come here. We wanted a range of artists, and Alanna was very strict about that. And sometimes if they didn't have 10 artists, we'd just send it back; we're not having-and it would be a kind of a big to-do, and the ambassador would get embarrassed and everything, or the consul general. We had a very good relationship with all of the consul generals. Some of them, we had to go to the country. Like, in Berlin, we always had to go there. And by the way, it wasn't always a country. Like in Germany, the Berlin senate had a studio, and Düsseldorf had a studio.

JW: Where did the money come from, to go to these countries?

TF: From the country.

JW: So the country paid for you to come over there.

TF: Yeah, it was great; that was my first trip to Berlin. So you'd go over there and you'd sit on a panel, and Alanna was almost always there. And I went to Canada to choose the artists there, and I feel like some other; I can't remember. So yeah, that was a huge number, that was half the building. And when we had the openings, we also had open studios. So all of those artists--and by the way, the studios were maybe half international and half national. But there was kind of a class division because the international studios were all on stipends and were actually more well-known from their country, and the national studio-program was a group of American artists who paid very low rents but actually paid rent to be there. They were paying like $50 a month or something like that, which even back then was very affordable.

JW: That was affordable. And who chose those artists?

TF: That was always a panel of outside people. It changed every year. So I was always involved in those, year after year, and that was really a great group of artists. And generally speaking, it was for two years. Later, and with no notice, Alanna decided it was just going to be one year, and all of the artists were kicked out after their first year.

JW: Do you remember what year that was?

TF: I don't remember. But it was terrible. But so then, and often what you'd do is, you'd have sort of eight studios at the Clocktower pretty much every year all eight artists would move from the Clocktower to P.S. 1 or you'd fill that back up with second-year artists. You didn't usually have two years at the Clocktower, although some people did. And those Clocktower studio artists would often have--the Clocktower had more openings than PS1-- would have six or seven shows a year, and the studio artists would have maybe one or two open studios. And those were always huge additional openings. So one of the things I remember, when I was running the Clocktower, in the mid-'80s on, or even before that, we always would go down the street to a particular liquor store and buy eight cases of wine. We'd actually physically drag that on a…

JW: Carry that, yes. I once helped with one of those.

TF: And then we'd pour as long as we, as quickly as we could, for two hours, get rid of all eight, and then kick everybody out. The thing was that my wife was working partly, Eugenie was there at the Clocktower at certain times, and she was just brutal at the end of the opening. "You're walking the wrong direction. The door's over there. Get out of here." And I felt like the audience kind of liked that. That they were at this incredibly hip event that happened, it didn't matter what the show was, the audience would show up, just because it was the hip thing to do. For years. And we had a lot of wine.

JW: So you were the guy at the velvet ropes.

TF: Yeah. I mean, everybody got in, but kicking people out, treating audiences badly, sometimes, like you're saying, has a kind of advantage to it.

JW: Now, early on, as you say, there was very little security, and sometimes it might have felt a little dicey to be spending late time in a studio on the floor at P.S. 1. Were there any difficulties that you recall?

TF: Not that I know of. I mean, yeah, it was funky out there. There was a lot of prostitution on the streets at that time, and in fact, we were, P.S. 1 was, very not-community-oriented, which is one of the reasons I'm not there now, I'd say. But, because I always kind of fought with Alanna, I felt like we should be having community meetings and teaming up with the community. We had the space; why not give some space for a community center or something? But it was completely anathema to Alanna.

JW: For the record, what community are you talking about?

TF: I'm talking about the folks at the community board, the folks that work and live in Long Island City.

JW: And what kind of a community is that? Profile?

TF: At that time it was mostly Italian. It's kind of changing now.

JW: Is that a middle class or a working class?

TF: A middle combination. The thing about Queens, it's a lot of homeowners and stuff. So there was something called the Long Island City Interblock Association, which was run by a couple of women who, one owned a bar and one owned a grocery store. And that was the kind of people who were in that. And they actually, with our help, led some kind of Take Back the Night walks down Jackson Avenue. There's still prostitution in parts of Long Island City, but not around P.S. 1, and so, yeah, it was not good. But I don't remember any incidents of somebody getting mugged. It may have happened. And I was never -– it felt kind of dicey but not that dangerous. So I mean, of course, if there's prostitution, the industry is invested in the idea that you not get mugged, right? For business, it has to be safe.

JW: Well, but drugs also go with prostitution.

TF: Yeah, that's true. But you know something, and I don't know this for sure. There were drugs, we can get to that, at P.S. 1.

JW: Yes.

TF: But I didn't, it was more, as far as I could tell, kind of prostitution than it was drugs. I'm not sure.

JW: I don't remember exactly, but I do remember telling my critics, I was an editor for many years at the [*Village*] *Voice*, if they had to make a studio visit or see somebody, not to go at night.

TF: Yeah, yeah; that was good advice. But I never heard of, did you ever hear of somebody getting mugged?

JW: I don't recall. Well, you were going to talk about drugs at P.S. 1.

TF: Yes. The main drug at P.S. 1 was alcohol. And there was a lot of alcohol around all the time, even during the day. And during the installation process, was often some kind of big party. There was often a six-pack sitting on the floor. It's just absolutely amazing to me that nobody ever got hurt, and as far as I know, no artwork ever got damaged during the installation period. The other thing, though,

which is kind of actually a very tragic story, was that there was heroin around as well. And there were two people involved in the installation period who were junkies. And one of them was, in fact, also doing live sex acts on Times Square at the same time. She ended up dying of AIDS, I think from her intravenous drug-use. And it was, the other thing is that, around the time that I started at P.S. 1, the AIDS epidemic was just bubbling up, and that was very present. And we did participate very actively in Day Without Art and all of that kind of stuff, but also, you know, we had board members dying, we had a dance curator die, the next year the next dance curator died. We had dancers and…

JW: Can you mention, I mean, I know. . .

TF: Barry Laine was one.

JW: I'd like to mention names, if we can.

TF: I don't remember. Barry Laine was also a critic, a wonderful guy who did a fantastic job. Brought Mark Morris out for a very early performance at P.S. 1. And, oh God, I can't remember the board members.

JW: But P.S. 1 was a place that also did shows that-

TF: Absolutely

JW: In which this was part of the content.

TF: Right. And one of the shows, and one of the artists that I championed--and I got him a special project and who had a one-person show at the Clocktower -- was a guy named Rod Rhodes, who died of AIDS before the opening. I mean, this was not unusual. We had a wonderful… When I left, I recommended a guy named Tony Vasconcellos to take my position, who was a friend who had worked with Mabou Mines; I knew him from there. And he died of AIDS. And it was the kind of tragic, you know, all the memorial services, and we hosted memorial services. Tony's memorial service was one of the most moving. It was kind of weird. You'd sit around and say, "Wow, that was really one of the best I've been to." Best, meaning, you had already lost 15 or 20 friends. And of those 15 or 20 that

you had been to in the last couple of years, this was an amazing one. I remember Min Tanaka came and performed at that. He was a good friend of Alanna's and also Tony's, and in fact, I never knew whether to trust [the details in Alanna's stories-though I trusted her![2]]-but she said Tony was a very, very organized guy. Did you ever meet him? He planned the whole thing, with Alanna, and said, "I'm getting too weak to work but here is what I want. I want Min Tanaka, I want Lee Breuer to do a performance with Mabou Mines," who he had worked with before. So, I mean, that was a complete subtext of that period of time. When I started at P.S. 1, the very earliest, it was already brewing. And in fact, I mentioned jokingly, but it was actually in the flower-arranging world of the – I was driving a van delivering flowers. People knew about AIDS much sooner than they did even in the art world. And they didn't know it was called AIDS, but they knew.

JW: It was called GRID, Gay-Related Immune Deficiency.

TF: But people didn't know exactly what it was yet, but they had just been to meetings that began to spread the word. Anyway, so I got to P.S. 1, but it was just sort of at the end of the party era and the beginning of the sort of deflation of the party era under the weight of AIDS.

JW: You mentioned a lot of dance and performance as you were talking just now. This is a big part of what P.S. 1 did. Do you want to elaborate on that?

TF: Sure. And I actually think that Jane Comfort, who is a dancer and whose husband was a trustee, was, not any more, John Comfort[3], they were very instrumental, or she was. And she wasn't necessarily the dance curator every year, but she was involved and a close friend of Alanna's. And they constantly brought in an amazing group every spring. And I remember doing the mailing. We used to do the mailings ourselves. We didn't have a bulk-mailing house. And those were always, you know, pretty well-attended.

[2] Clarification provided by Tom Finkelpearl, 2010.

[3] At the time of this interview, John Comfort was still on PS1's Board of Trustees as Treasurer.

JW: Was it attended by art world, dance world, combination?

TF: I think there was a big overlap. The other thing is, often there was a kind of visual arts component. We were so terrible at the tech side, the sound, that one year Jane said, "Okay, we're going to do bare-bones. It's going to be called Bare Bones Dancing." And there were no sets and no sound. Just dance. Because we had a beautiful space for it, which was the third-floor auditorium, or I guess, I don't know if it had been a lunchroom/auditorium, whatever. But, yeah, no, it was great. And some of the, John Bernd, I remember, was a friend of mine, who died of AIDS as well. And I was still an artist. Actually I met him at one of those performances and then we did an Art on the Beach project together later.

JW: John was a close friend of mine, too.

TF: Yeah. He was an incredible guy.

JW: I just saw Tim Miller in LA.

TF: Yeah, I got to know him [John] pretty well through that.

JW: But for P.S. 1, then, it was perceived not just visual arts, but more on the Judson Church continuation of having the arts come together in one place.

TF: Yeah. And also then, I mean, performance art was another separate thing. And Ann Magnuson was involved in that as a curator, and we had some amazing. I mean, Eric Bogosian, I remember one of his, before anybody had heard of him, he was performing his routines.

JW: Many of the names you're mentioning are familiar, in many cases, because of their performances or their appearance at P.S. 1 first. Can you think of another space in New York that premiered as many performance artists in the '80s?

TF: I mean obviously, The Kitchen. But my feeling about P.S. 1 always was that there was such quantity of programming. You remember the John Bernd and the Eric Bogosian and all of these incredible highlights, but it was really a mixed bag, also. And I was responsible for some of it; I'm not throwing stones. We did so much. And I really think about, that's a really good model for working with

emerging artists. Just open the doors. Don't be too picky. Don't let the curators have this kind of gate-keeping. Because you don't know yet, and they need opportunity to have a chance to do something and fail.

JW: Now, there's plenty to talk about in the time you were there, but this is a very easy question segueing to now: Do you see any change that goes directly to what you say?

TF: I don't know. Obviously there's this whole question now that MoMA is going to really fully be taking over the situation. I think that Alanna was very careful about putting the situation in place where somebody like Klaus [Biesenbach] would be a good person to take over. And I think Klaus is very similar to Alanna. And, I don't know; I'm going to have to see what happens in the next months. But I think, you know, "Greater New York" is a very P.S. 1 type of show.

JW: But as you say, the gallery situation has changed. The feeling that artists will be showing first at P.S. 1 and at galleries later is different. The art world has basically changed.

TF: I don't know. The art world is completely different. Yes. My criticism of P.S. 1 is a criticism that I have had from the start, which is that I think that they should, you know, it's a very art world place. It always has been. And one of the only times that it really is quite different is during Warm Up, which is a kind of big populist event. But I don't think that they're, you know, P.S. 1 always was in a state of flux. And it didn't always just show emerging artists. And it did a lot of terrible shows. And I don't want to glamorize it, even though I had a great time in the '80s working there. But, you know, I remember when Henry Geldzahler was hired as a curator. He wasn't doing avant-garde shows. He was bringing back people that he'd shown at the Met in the '50s. And that was great. It was interesting. It was kind of intergenerational, at that point.

JW: Well, as you say, there are a lot of artists Alanna brought in, where they should have possibly had shows or retrospectives in some of the larger, more traditional venues, but they weren't having them.

TF: Right, like John Wesley, for example. Which is, you know, and he's really ridden a kind of crest from that, and I think it revived his career. Alan Saret was another, like a huge, like, building-wide Alan Saret show; who's going to do that? And he's a difficult artist to work with, who, I think, brilliant; I love his work. But that was a kind of show where he wasn't an emerging artist. He was already in his fifties, I believe. Although, I'm so much older now, he might have seemed like he was in his fifties; he might have been in his forties. And I think it was always a mixed bag and it was always in flux, and people always wanted it to be something very specific. But if you worked there for a long time, you really realized it was-

JW: It wasn't. Now, from an outsider's point of view, there are a lot of foreign shows. The "Arte Povera" show, Brazilian work, there was African work, later.

TF: Chinese.

JW: Chinese, that were very rarely shown.

TF: Right. I think, the difference, and I worked on "Arte Povera", on Pistiletto, on all of the shows you mentioned except for the Chinese. And I was back for "Short Century." Short Century, the big difference was that it was a really scholarly show. "Arte Povera" was sort of like that, as well.

JW: Yes. "Short Century," would you explain?

TF: "Short Century" was organized by Okwui Enwezor. And it was a show, actually, it wasn't originated at P.S. 1, it was originated in Germany. It came to P.S. 1, expanded, and that was, the "Short Century" is a term that refers to African independence being this sort of cascading series of dates starting in 1948 with the independence of Ghana. So, if you say, how old are all of these African states, they're none of them, at the beginning of the 20th century, there were no African-run African states. So the short century is, you know, independence to the present. So it's a sort of modern and contemporary African show. It was a great show. I loved working on it. And I was actually the coordinator for that show in New York City. It was one of the really gratifying, I got to know Okwui quite well, who, by the way, was extremely easy to work with, if you can believe

it. I don't know a lot of other people who have said that. I loved working with him. He was on his best behavior the whole time. I know he maybe can be a prima donna but he didn't do that to us, and I don't know why. Maybe he knew that Alanna would just kill him or something, that he couldn't get away with anything.

JW: [laughing] Did Alanna have that reputation?

TF: Oh, absolutely. She's incredibly tough, and she'd cancel a show. And she did that. Or she'd just go up to an artist and say, "If you don't do what you said you were going to do, we're just going to close your door now, and lock it, period. And if you want to sue us..." Alanna was never afraid, not that she ever got sued, I don't think. I don't think she was ever afraid of being sued because her husband was going to represent; his firm, not him. Fred Sherman's firm would represent us for free. But that's just also her personality. She was the boss. It was her place. She founded it. So, in any case, but, in terms of the international shows, I mean, I thought "Arte Povera" was a revelation to a lot of people. In France, Italy, and all over Europe, the artists were well-known. It was a great show for which Germano Celant was the curator. It was also the kind of show that we were able to pull off.

JW: Well, these shows were more expensive than many of the other shows, and they were funded generally, how?

TF: I think there was a lot of governmental money. Alanna was very tied in to a lot of European governments. She knew a lot of high-up Italians. And the board was very international also. And a number of times, like, if there was a German Expressionist show, which was Penck and Kiefer and all those guys, which was also a revelation in New York. Those were not well-known artists here. That people were desperate to bring the show to New York. We don't know what the back-story was. Maybe they had presented it to MoMA or something, and it wasn't going to be done by anybody else. And we had the room and the flexibility to take on the shows. But "Arte Povera" was the kind of show we could do because that's the kind of art. So when they said, "We're going to need," whatever, 500 bushels of burlap bags, we could do that. We did that all the time.

JW: And they weren't worried about the security or the lack of temperature control?

TF: Right. Because for a sculpture show like that, it's not a problem. And I don't think there was anything that could be damaged in that. And "Arte Povera" it's *arte povera*, it's like, poor. It's a pile of newspapers, or something.

JW: Well, people worry about that now.

TF: They worry about it now, but it also wasn't meant to be worried about, and we didn't worry about it much. But by that time we had guards. And the guards were-- that's a whole other story in and of itself, obviously. Before the reopening we had gallery-sitters, which is whatever, graduate students sitting around reading Lyotard in the galleries. After the reopening, we -- I wasn't there for this, but, and you can get this story from Alanna -- but basically, that's when they hired the kids from one particular set of housing projects in the Bronx, and that became an education program also. For a while. And then, sort of, the education program got dropped and you just had the kids from the Bronx. But this was, we had the guard-guide program, or the Avant Guard program, it was called. Where they were wearing these beautifully designed T-shirts, and they would give tours. They did unique tours of sort of inner-city kids who had been exposed, often met the artists, and they were pretty original and unusual, not art-historical tours. But the guards took on part of the personality of P.S. 1.

JW: Whose idea was this?

TF: The idea of getting the guards somehow was Alanna's idea. I have no idea how, because I wasn't there for that.

JW: Can you give me a sense of when this was?

TF: That was the reopening, at the time of the expansion, before the MoMA merger. And these are big P.S. 1 T-shirts with the over. . .

JW: I remember the show; I'm just trying to get it for the record.

TF: You have to; what I can't remember what year we reopened. [1997]

JW: Right.

TF: Because again, that was in my hiatus. I was there for the ‘80s, from ’81 to ’90, and I left in ’90 and I was gone until ’99.

JW: You left for both Percent-

TF: Percent for Art I worked six years and Skowhegan I was there for three years. I worked for nine years at P.S. 1 and then left for nine, and returned for three more. And then, my impetus to leave was that I felt like, just sort of the narrowness of the audience of P.S. 1, being too art-world. And I had just done a show with David Hammons and I had done this show with Krzysztof Wodiczko, the Homeless Vehicle project, and I was sort of merging off. I had done a show about community interactive art projects with Mierle Ukeles.

JW: And when did your book on public art…

TF: That came out after; that came out in 2000. It’s coming out in Korean, by the way.

JW: Great. Congratulations.

TF: Thank you.

JW: Why don’t you say what the title of the book is, for the record?

TF: The book is called *Dialogues in Public Art* and it was published by MIT in 2000. But that was, again, that was my conflict with Alanna, always was, that I was kind of publicly oriented. Public-art oriented, community engagement, interactive, relational, which has just now sort of come around back into the art world a little bit. And I think that kind of political art is. . .

JW: Did you feel that Alanna wasn’t interested in the issues that political or community art brought up, or that she was simply more interested in the other?

TF: No, she was hostile to it.

JW: She was hostile. What form did that take?

TF: [chuckling] When I would talk about it, I mean, a quote from her I remember quite distinctly, I was talking about some community-oriented project-but I have problems with a lot of that also-and she said, "There's no such thing as community physics." That artists are specialists. And I understand that argument. But no, she, the only show, there was one show that she cancelled, that I had proposed, and then I absolutely appealed to her and she reinstated it.

JW: What show was that?

TF: It was a show of Wendy Ewald's work. And Wendy Ewald is a MacArthur-winning conceptual photographer who works with kids, for the most part. And she had a retrospective that was a traveling show, that we were going to take at P.S. 1. What ended up happening, she sort of agreed to it, and then didn't agree to it, and then re-agreed to it. So it wasn't cancelled, but what happened was that then I left for the Queens Museum, my second departure, and I took the show with me, and the funding and everything else. We had to go to the funders and say, "Those grants you gave to P.S. 1 are coming to us." Which was fine. But, so, I mean, but that's not surprising that in all those years that I worked there, the one show that she cancelled was that. But then again, it got reinstated. I mean, I did other politically-oriented shows, the Homeless Vehicle Project with Krzysztof Wodiczko, or Dennis Adams did a project at the same time about homelessness. We did, we worked with Group Material, with Tim Rollins. I mean, there was a lot of stuff done just in the broad. . . But she wasn't interested.

JW: I see. Let's take a break for a second.

[Interview Resumes]

TF: We're good?

JW: I think we're good, yes. We're recording again. So, you've said why you were disillusioned a bit with PS1's lack of community engagement. Let's look to maybe toward the present time with P.S. 1. Do you see any way in which there could be more community engagement?

TF: No. By the way, and this is a little bit off of the topic of this.

JW: That's fine.

TF: At the Queens Museum, we have two community organizers on our staff, three art therapists with a dedicated art-therapy classroom. We teach PhotoShop in Mandarin, we're teaching courses in Bangla and Korean and lots of stuff in Spanish. We are the most community activist museum, I think, in America. So, my standards for that are extremely high and way outside the mainstream. We are deeply involved in issues.

END AUDIO FILE PART 1 of 2

BEGIN AUDIO FILE PART 2 of 2

TF: And I'm not blaming Alanna; she's like everybody else, and I don't think PS1's going to change. I don't think any museum in New York City or any museum in America's doing what they should be doing in terms of being an actual, active member of their community. And this is, by the way, done in the context of the Queens Museum, where I believe in art. I'm an artist. I studied as an artist. I believe in beauty. But so I, when I left P.S. 1, the first time, it was to pursue public art, because all the shows I had been doing had kind of led me up to that. And then the second time was to become a museum director and see how those public art ideas could be actually put into practice in a museum. I came back to P.S. 1 for the three years that I came back, you know, my second stint, because I thought it would be really exciting to work in the context of the MoMA merger. It was great, it was a really interesting time to be there.

JW: What exactly did you do?

TF: I was deputy director, so the first time around, I was doing a lot of programs. The second time around it was a bureaucratic position, this really terrible job, because it was trying to bring order to an organization that had no order to it. If you look through the archives, I'm sure you can agree to that. But at the same time, it was negotiating between a very orderly organization and a very non-orderly organization. And not that I was the chief negotiator or anything, but as a

deputy director, what you do is, you work with all of the different curators on this side, and the education people on that side, and security, and maintenance, and everything. And every problem that comes up is your problem, and you have to solve a lot of problems. But the most fun part was things like being involved in the first "Greater New York."

JW: Could you explain what "Greater New York" is?

TF: Yes. So, "Greater New York" is a roundup of mostly young artists. The definition is, artists who have emerged within the five years prior to that, and it's done every five years, the third one has just happened. And I was involved, in fact. Oh, I want to tell this story, because I've heard. . . I think that "Greater New York," the idea for it, came from me and Alanna. I know Jerry Saltz has somehow claimed that it's his idea. But here's my remembrance of this, which is that we were facing a situation in which we had an empty building. This always happened at P.S. 1. It was looming; not in 10 days but in six months or eight months or whatever it was. And I said to Alanna, "Why don't we do a show that's just something we do well, which is just a huge roundup show, and I propose it be from the boroughs. Like, call it BBQ, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Queens. Or Bridge and Tunnel," was another idea. And she kind of thought about it and then went back and forth with Klaus, and the idea was something we could do for very little money, do the whole building. It wasn't billed yet as a recurring show.

JW: What was Klaus's role at that time?

TF: He was, like, the chief curator. And Carolyn [Christov-Bakargiev] [was also a senior curator at the time.] And whatever happened, any idea that was brought to Alanna usually got made bigger. "Let's do a show, some Russian, some Soviet-era propaganda paintings." And she said, "Well, you know, it has to be the whole building. If we're not doing the whole building, we're not doing the show." So we did a whole-building show of Russian propaganda paintings, which was an absolutely insane proposition. So, then it came back to the various meetings, and it gradually, she really didn't like the idea of excluding Manhattan from the proposition. And then, I don't know, but I think…Anyway, I'm not going to take credit for the title, but the original idea came from me, Alanna and Klaus.

Jerry Saltz had nothing to do with it. There was some interaction, I think, on Facebook, where he was claiming, somehow, authorship.

JW: Jerry Saltz is an art critic now at *New York Magazine*.

TF: And he, who is a friend and a great critic and all that stuff, but somehow there was something on some online forum where he was saying, "Klaus, you know that 'Greater New York was my idea.' " It's like, no, it wasn't his idea; it wasn't even Klaus's idea, originally. I think it was my idea. But in any case, the idea was to collect it, and so then Alanna, first of all, said, it should be the whole city; we're going to make it into this big thing. And then she said, "Okay, let's," and it was definitely her idea to make it our first collaboration with MoMA. So it was the first project that was worked together between the institutions, and there was a curatorial team. And I was the organizer of that, not the curator. And that was a large list of curators from MoMA and everybody at P.S. 1. And we had a big open call, and people were then assigned studios to go visit. I think there were 1200 artists who had submitted slides. And it was still slides, at that time. We had marathon slide-viewing sessions here and at P.S. 1. Even Kirk Varnedoe got involved and did studio visits; a couple. And Glenn, I think, Glenn Lowry. Alanna did some. I mean, I did some. But the bulk was done by Jodi Hauptman and Klaus Biesenbach and Carolyn [Christov-Bakargiev]. They were still around at that time. So that then resulted in that show, which became this other kind of P.S. 1 institution. So that was fun. And I worked on shows like that, but I also had to fire people. I mean, deputy director, it's this terrible job where you have to do all the terrible stuff and you don't usually get credit. I have to say, one of Alanna's great attributes was that she gave people credit. I mean, sometimes she would take credit where it wasn't due, but generally speaking, she was very good at crediting staff. And she could torture you during the show, but at the opening and in a public situation, she always made sure that people's name got into the press. And I remember the dinner for the "Short Century" show. She very publicly thanked me for that organization. It was this huge moment; she had me come up; and everybody clapped. And in front of those peers, that was a huge moment for me, to be acknowledged, because I loved the show and I loved working on it. But usually, what happens at a museum is, the person who's not

the curator –- I mean, Okwui was clearly the curator, and I wasn't being presented as that, but to get that kind of credit is unusual.

JW: That's very nice. Could you give me a sense of the difference in budget between the time that P.S. 1 was beginning to work with MoMA and let's say, 10 years before?

TF: Well, I mean, when I started at P.S. 1 in 1980, so this was, P.S. 1 was always on the brink. And I think the budget was maybe $400,000. But then what happened was that we went on a very orchestrated campaign to become part of the Cultural Institutions Group. This wasn't something that just sort of happened by accident. We had so little heat that people had gloves on that they cut out the fingers to type during the winter. So we had pictures of that delivered to the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, and that was Henry Geldzahler, who felt that the "New York New Wave" show, which was just before I started at P.S. 1, had revived him artistically. Basquiat did the labels on the walls and everything. It was a crazy show; a really great moment, at least, socially. So he felt an incredible allegiance to P.S. 1. So we went on this campaign to join the CIG and it was successful. It's very, very hard to do, and it shouldn't be underrated. And Alanna's political acumen is great. She really knows and she was in touch with the political power-structure of the city and understood how to do it. I mean, this is something that happens, in the history of New York City it's happened 34 times. To become part of the Cultural Institutions Group means the city takes responsibility for the building, pays for heat and light, and pays for basic operating. So that was the big moment where our budget went up by, I don't know, several hundred-thousand dollars. And that seemed like a savior at the time. I mean, later, obviously, it was in distress, very serious distress again, after the reopening.

JW: What do you think accounted for that distress?

TF: What happened was, P.S. 1 closed for two years during construction, and there just wasn't enough; I wasn't there at the time. I had left, so I was gone during the time that they were. But I was in touch with people who were there, and I think what happened was that it just, to keep raising money, you have to keep asking people for money. And if you're not asking a foundation year after year after year

after year for money, they'll give it to somebody else and it's hard to get them back. So I felt like P.S. 1 sort of downsized, and it's very hard to "up-size" again, especially when you've doubled the size of the institution. So the reopening of P.S. 1 was a huge success, in terms of audience, and it actually, I think, captured the imagination of MoMA. That's why P.S. 1 and MoMA merged. P.S. 1 all of a sudden had much greater facility.

JW: Did P.S. 1 have a debt because of that expansion?

TF: No. P.S. 1 had a debt when I started. P.S. 1's debt, which is still there, came from one project. Have you heard that story?

JW: No.

TF: Okay.

JW: Even if I had, you're going to tell it, right?

TF: Alanna wanted to do a project with the California Light artists, so there were going to be rooms by [James] Turrell and [Robert] Irwin and Eric Orr, and I think there were five. And this was a situation where it just went completely out of control. It's sort of Alanna's fault because she was the director and she wasn't looking after the money, but they ended up with $250,000.00 worth of debt from that. And that was a lot of money. Already the debt was there. So since that time, they've never paid off the debt. Maybe they have now. Maybe after the final merger. But when I left P.S. 1 to go to the Queens Museum, it was still there; I think it was there for years. They would pay off, you know, $10,000 a year, and the interest, so it was just gradually going down; it was going to be gone 25 years later. So there was always debt. But the situation with P.S. 1 was that it was a cash accounting. Do you know the difference between a cash and accrual account? So it was a cash accounting system, which simply meant that you only paid bills when you had the money. So you weren't able to go into debt. And you based your annual budget on just how much money came in and how much went out that year. And it's an easy way to keep track of money. It's sort of how a lot of people keep track of money.

JW: So there was never anything that resembled an endowment?

TF: No. There was.

JW: When?

TF: What happened was that there was a campaign. And when I got back to P.S. 1, the second time, there was an endowment gift, it was a challenge grant from the NEA, which you had to match it, I think, three to one, or something like that. And I said, "Well, what's going on here? We're not going to come anywhere close." And what happened was, there had been a campaign associated with the reopening, but the money had all been released back to expense money. So it wasn't much money, but it was hundreds of thousands of dollars.

JW: It had been released back to the expense money?

TF: You can do it, yes, it's completely legal. The donor has to release the money.

JW: I see. If the donor releases the money, it's-

TF: So in other words, Trustee X gave $100,000 or $200,000 for the endowment. If the trustee signs a new thing saying it's fine to spend it.

JW: Okay.

TF: So that was the only time I think P.S. 1 ever had an endowment. No, there's no endowment.

JW: Now, P.S. 1 was never technically a museum, was it?

TF: No, though it was called "P.S. 1 Museum" for a while.

JW: That's right. But there were never any works donated to it and it never had a collection?

TF: No.

JW: Okay. I just wanted to clarify.

TF: Well, the idea was that the collection was the Turrell room and sort of architectural features in the building.

JW: Right. I'm going to speak to Mr. Turrell next month.

TF: Yes? Great.

JW: Is there anything that you remember that was, aside from the wonderful praise that you got at the African show, any high points?

TF: Yes. One of the things, I think I was 26 when I started and I had no curatorial experience. I was an artist. And Alanna just really likes young people. So the first time around, she gave me all kinds of opportunities, which she did for a lot of people. So, I don't know what year it was, but, I have it here. So she said, "Why don't you do a show?" And I said, "Fine." So I did this show, it was called "Salvaged: Altered Everyday Objects." Let's see what year that is.

JW: Emerging Objects? Engaging Objects?

TF: No, it was before that.

JW: "Salvaged: Altered Everyday Objects." '84.

TF: So I had been there for kind of three years, doing, you know. And so, that was amazing. And basically there was no money to do it with, and I knew a bunch of artists, and this kind of art that I was doing was a lot of what was sort of found object kind of stuff, installations. And I knew a lot of artists who were sort of my peers who were doing it. And so she just gave me the chance to do it. And if somebody got a chance and took advantage of it, then she gave them other chances. And so that was, I think amazing. I mean, I completely credit Alanna with my curatorial career, and then the curatorial career is what allowed me to get all of the other jobs that I got. So, in a normal museum setting, the PR guy doesn't do shows. That's not a museum kind of idea. But I didn't think of myself as the PR guy. I thought of myself as an artist who was earning a living.

JW: That was your day job.

TF: That was my day job; right. And that actually took over as my primary job. And I stopped making art about 18 years ago. But not unhappily. It was just sort of, that was what was going on.

JW: I'm asking another typical question. Is there anything that you remember that you were very unhappy or disappointed about?

TF: Well, I mean, it was a very, very stressful place to work. And it didn't have to be that stressful. It was also a lot of fun, but the second time, when I came back, it's a much more fun place to work when you're young than when you're, you know. And the other thing was when I came back, I also already had a kid and everything, and I was sort of, the craziness was less acceptable.

JW: There was less drinking?

TF: No, there was a lot of drinking. I mean, I was much less interested in drinking the second time around. The first time around, I was not long out of college and I was still, you know. Not that I ever was that excessive but, it was a drinking environment, absolutely. And there were alcoholics on the staff, for sure; no question about it, and on the board. But that's not that unusual. There are alcoholics everywhere.

JW: So it was stressful, and that was the problem.

TF: Yes, and sort of, and not; yeah, I think that was the main thing.

JW: Do you think P.S. 1 outgrew its feeling of breaking ground?

TF: No. I don't think so. I don't think it was ever as groundbreaking as people credit it with, nor did it lose it that much. I mean, there was stuff going on that was just sort of run of the mill and not that interesting, all the way from the beginning. Because I was going to P.S. 1 before I started there. So I didn't go to "Rooms," but sort of shows after that and as soon as I got, even before I got to New York, I went to Princeton, so I would come into New York a lot and go to Soho and to P.S. 1, during my college years. And I graduated in '79 and moved here and started. I think then I saw <u>every</u> show for 20 years. So I had a <u>very</u> good sense,

and I worked there for 12 of those years. And I just don't buy that argument, which is certainly the Jerry Saltz argument, not to pick on him, because I generally like him.

JW: [Laughing]

TF: Which is, P.S. 1 has to change; its lost its. . . I don't know. I mean, I don't think it was ever as uniformly experimental as people think it might have been.

JW: Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

TF: I guess there's one other thing, which was, that another thing that I think is actually much more true in nonprofits than people think, is that small nonprofits, especially small nonprofits that are teetering on the edge with economics, that money talks. So there were times when we did shows because they kind of came with money. Which, I wasn't crazy about all of the shows, but I actually took advantage of that myself and I got, there was a funder or two who I knew who liked the work that I was doing. There was David Bermant who funded a bunch of shows. He was kind of this crazy guy involved in mechanical and kinetic. So there was show called "Mechanisms" that I organized, and this and that, and I got him to fund the Turrell room, keeping it open because he liked it. And that having some access to money gave me more power.

JW: Well now that you've brought this up, do you think that there were shows that were bought?

TF: I wouldn't put it that bluntly because there were tons of shows that were proposed to us that were funded that we didn't do. But absolutely. It made a huge difference if they came in with funding. I don't think that there was ever like an individual artist show that was bought. But there were sort of these ideas – oh, there's this Japanese show and it's coming with a lot of funding. Then, what would happen, I think quite differently maybe than other places, is that every show at P.S. 1 was completely taken over by the P.S. 1 staff. Because of Alanna. And that happens at MoMA also. MoMA doesn't really take shows; they will work with you. And that was sort of the case at P.S. 1, but they'll work with you more if you have money. And I think that's true everywhere, but that

definitely would happen at P.S. 1. I think I'm getting a call from my office and have to stop.

END AUDIO FILE 2 of 2

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH:	**TOM FINKELPEARL (TF)** Former Deputy Director of P.S. 1
INTERVIEWER:	**JEFF WEINSTEIN (JW)** Arts & Culture Journalist / Editor
LOCATION:	**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
DATE:	**SEPTEMBER 9, 2010**

BEGIN AUDIO FILE PART 1 of 2

TF: There was a line in the previous interview that says that I never trusted Alanna [Heiss], which taken out of context was completely inaccurate.

JW: Let me interrupt you and say that you certainly can even change it there, which you may wish to do.

TF: Maybe I should just say that I never trusted Alanna's *stories* to be accurate. But it reminded me that at Tony [Anthony, managing director of Mabou Mines] Vasconcellos's memorial service, the two people presiding over it were Lee Breuer and Alanna. Those were the two places Tony worked, Mabou Mines and P.S. 1. And there was a certain point at which Alanna said, quite pointedly, "I said when I hired Tony, I will never lie to you," and kind of looked at Lee. And Lee, who's also this kind of out-there [laughing], same generation as Alanna. But she-- you knew exactly where you stood. You knew exactly; she was brutally honest, and she had this incredible memory. So you'd be sitting in a meeting and she'd be saying -- and this is sort of counter to your general impression of Alanna as going to a lot of parties and all of that stuff, which of course, is accurate as well. But she would say, "No, Tom, in the last meeting, you said…" and she would quote you exactly. Oh my God; not even I remembered that. Which would be nailing you on some inconsistency or something that you didn't quite follow up on. So I did trust her, and you completely knew where you stood. That wasn't the problem, in terms of the way the place was run. It was a high-tension place. Places change, but when she changed something, you know, some bosses will say, "No, no, I never meant X." She'd just say, "I changed my

mind." Which is a little bit different. In other words, she was honest and on top of everything. So that's the one major clarification I wanted to make from the other session.

JW: Right. And that does expand out to a sense of who Alanna was. We all know she founded these institutions -– Clocktower, P.S. 1 –-and she did print, in many ways, her own sensibility onto them, but that doesn't necessarily mean that she printed her curatorial tastes on every show. Could you elaborate on that?

TF: Well, I mean, there was so much space. There are very few organizations, I mean small organizations, that have that many voices simultaneously, at least early on. And I brought in [Tom points to a pile of books and catalogs]-- I know I shouldn't be talking about the document people can't see.

JW: Talking about a document is a good thing to do. We just have to spell it out carefully.

TF: Okay. So, at one point, there was a very good idea. I have no idea whose idea it was. To simply say, each season –- there were three seasons per year; fall, winter and spring –- they would print a catalogue that would represent that season. And so I found one, and this is very rare. I think there may be very few in existence.

JW: When do you think that started? What year are we talking about?

TF: It was right around the mid-'80s. I don't know how many of these were actually done. This is the one that I have, so this, Winter 1984, was my first curatorial endeavor. But this paints a direct picture of the number of different voices that were simultaneously at P.S. 1. And in the back, adjunct curators. And this actually continued. So you have architecture, dance, fashion, film, music and sound, performance, photography, poetry, and video--were all separate curators. And they had a pretty good say on exactly what they were going to do. They had a room; they had very little money. But to have, at a small, nonprofit organization, eight to 10 different curators at a time, was very unusual, I think.

JW: Was it considered a badge of honor to be connected to P.S. 1?

TF: Well, I don't know.

JW: Or was it for the love of the work?

TF: Yeah.

JW: A free space to have your tastes shown?

TF: I mean, I think it was different for different people. The sort of more "insider art world" you were, the more you understood the opportunity you were being given. And, like, in this particular season, Marvin Heiferman was the photography curator, and we had Carol Squires, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, all of whom are very distinguished people at this point in the art world. And, at this point too, meaning today, 2010. So, that was a place that they just kind of used to experiment. And sometimes we didn't quite understand what was going on, but Carol Squires would come in with, like, Xeroxed pictures from the Civil Rights movement. And the other was Abigail Solomon-Godeau. The way that they were playing around with the ideas of pictures was very similar, I think, to the Pictures group, which was a bunch of painters who were around at the time. Anyway, so that was just photography. So that was one room. What it allowed was, it was done out of necessity because they had to fill the whole place up, and it just allowed P.S. 1 to have a really open door.

JW: Yes, and that attracted you, too.

TF: Mmm, well, I don't think "attracted" me. What attracted me was that I was driving the flower truck, at the time. [chuckling] And I didn't go to P.S. 1 to be a curator. I mean, I wanted to be a curator. I was an artist, but I went to do PR, and I enjoyed it.

JW: But Alanna used talent wherever she found it.

TF: She did. She was a good attractor of talent. She wasn't necessarily the greatest keeper of talent, because people got fed up sometimes about the difficulty of working there. So then, in the winter of 1984, I had been there since '81, I had been there already for three years, there was an opening on the third floor, and I

guess I said, “I have some ideas.” She said, “Fine.” So actually, I did my first show with the woman who answered the phone at P.S. 1, Rita Sirignano, an artist who was the co-curator. So, I don’t know if she actually ended up doing anything curatorially, but I took the opportunity and put together the show, and the show was very much about what I was doing as an artist at the time, which was that, you know, collage-y

JW: Found material.

TF: Found object stuff. So then, you know, it had major figures like Kienholz and -

JW: Rauschenberg.

TF: Rauschenberg, and Kienholz. We actually drove down. I called the gallery. We drove down to D.C., just me and Ron Lynch. I convinced him to come, in a truck. We drove to the gallery, got the piece, and drove back to New York.

JW: For the record, Ron was, again, at that time?

TF: Ron Lynch was the program director. So this, yeah, can you imagine, the two of us; I was the PR guy. Neither of us were curators. So then that actually got some good press. The thing is, I knew the press really well, so they knew, like, I think Grace Glueck gave that a very good review.

And it wasn’t that I–- by the way, I really tried to keep it separate. In other words, I wasn’t, you know, giving them a tour of another show and saying, “You have to come upstairs and see my show.” It was just that, I had a good relationship with her already, and actually, I think of the review of that show being positive, and it said the show was imaginative or something. I can’t remember the words. But it was a huge thing for me and it also gave me a stamp of approval from Alanna, and I was then able to do other shows after that. And again, that’s very unusual. A mid-20-year-old PR guy at MoMA doesn’t get to start doing shows. And the thing was that it always had to be sort of extra. I still had to do the PR, and then I could also do shows. And I gradually sort of weaned myself. They ended up hiring another PR person. So there were two different lines of what I was doing as a curator. And one line was this sort of kinetic sculpture, mechanical art. And

there was a funder who came in and started funding those shows for me. And that also gave me extra, you know, power I sort of had, like a sugar daddy. And that was David Bermant. So if I had an idea that involved kinetic or projections or moving this or that, David would fund, and I have in my hand a little catalogue called *The Drowned World: Waterworks*, and this was all sculpture that included moving water.

JW: It's *The Drowned World*.

TF: *The Drowned World*, right. Which is actually a J.G. Ballard novel. And this was eight artists, and it was fountains, basically a show of fountains. And it had, Robin Winters had done a fountain, and there were all these, you know, Ted Victoria, DeWain Valentine, et cetera.

JW: Did you bring in David as the funder?

TF: Yes. What happened was, I had done a show. I was already interested in mechanical art just because of the kind of relationship it created with the audience. What I realized was that when you had mechanical, if the art was moving or doing something -– by the way, this was before you had video projections of any size and scale, so if you did a projection, it wasn't a video projection. It was some other kind of projection. So those kind of interactive pieces. So in this show there was, for example, a beautiful, large-scale projection of water pouring into a glass, by an artist named Ted Victoria. And it was just a wall and a projection of a glass which constantly had water pouring; you could hear the water pouring. But it energized the audience. So I felt like that was something interesting. I had become a populist to being with. So that was one line. So I did a show called "Mechanisms," and another show called "Waterworks." There was a show called "Engaging Objects: Participatory Art of Mirrors, Mechanisms and Shelters."

JW: Let's get the years for these shows. "Drowned World" was April to June of 1989, according to the catalogue.

TF: Yep, that sounds right. Earlier than that, in 1986, I did "Engaging Objects." This was May 9 to June 15, 1986. This had a mirror piece by Robert Smithson, but it

also had these sort of interactive sculptural pieces, again with some projections, sound work, everything related to the viewer somehow, and was activated by the viewer. This got a terrible review in *The New York Times*, by the way.

JW: Do you remember by whom?

TF: Yeah, by Michael Brenson.

JW: Oh. [chuckling]

TF: Michael Brenson, who was a family friend. It was really bad. And, you know, that's fine. I completely understand where he was coming from. It was not his kind of work. And it was a pretty big review. But I remember that it said, "This show shows how little imaginative force this kind of work has." Something like that. And that very day, when the review came out, we were doing a studio review, this was in the spring, I guess. And Richard Flood was there. And everybody sitting around had opened up *The New York Times*, and said, "Oh, Tom, congratulations." And I said, "Oh, God," you know, "you haven't read it yet." He said, "No, no, no, no. It's good press. All press is good press." And then he started reading and said, "Uh, okay, not all press is good press." [chuckle] So it was devastating. But nonetheless, it was a line that I was pursuing. And the main thing was, I was interested in interactivity. And that led me to this other set of shows which were very political. And you know this word "engaging," I mean, my idea of engaging the audience is still the main thing I'm interested in artistically as the director of the Queens Museum. But so I would say a watershed, then, for me, was a show that I did in collaboration with Glenn Weiss, who was the curator of architecture at the time; I mean, adjunct, and head of Storefront for Art and Architecture. And so this show was also in 1987. By the way, this show was at a lot of places, and if you do a show in 1986, you're not doing another major show in 1987. So I was working on two or three shows at once. But you didn't work on them for that long. So, you know, I'd work on a show for six months, or a year at the most.

JW: Normally, it can take as long as three or four years for some shows, or even longer.

TF: Yes. And the longest I ever worked on a show was the David Hammons show, which I did actually work on for two years. But there was a reason for that; I'll get to that in a minute. So this show was called "Out of the Studio: Art With Community." And I think of it in terms of the whole idea of relational or interactive or this kind of art that is really coming to the surface now as a major thing. A lot of those ideas, I think, were examined in this show. So Tim Rollins and K.O.S., who is now kind of making a comeback; Mierle Ukeles, who is sort of the godmother in America of relational, interactive political-public art; John Ahern. And so it was, each of them had a room, Buster Simpson from Seattle, and David Hammons. I already knew David Hammons from having worked next to him at Art on the Beach. He was a friend, and he did a fantastic room installation in this show.

JW: Now, Art on the Beach was a program of art that was in Lower Manhattan in Battery Park?

TF: It's what is now Battery Park City.

JW: Yes. I forget what it was called then.

TF: It was what is now Battery Park City, the landfill. I think they were beginning to put the landfill in place to build Battery Park City.

JW: It was sculpture, performance, and dance as well.

TF: Right. The year that I did it, the structure was that you had to collaborate with a dancer. So I collaborated with John Bernd, and he did an absolutely amazing outdoor piece which was "The Odyssey." It was just crazy and funny, and but it was there, and I had built a building which was two sets, in a way. It was Odysseus's home, and Calypso's cave was my sculpture. In any case, it was a great summer! But next door to us was David Hammons, and he was collaborating, or the musician was, you know, Space Is the Place; you know, the whatchamacallit Orchestra [Sun Ra Arkestra]. Anyway, I'll get it in a minute. You know who I'm talking about? The African-American jazz musician. Anyway, they did this absolutely amazing collaborative piece. So that's when I met David. And David then participated in this show *Out of the Studio: Art With Community*

at P.S. 1. And that was a kind of a watershed in my thinking, because I thought, "If I'm interested, truly interested," and this gets back to my sort of conflict with Alanna, if I'm truly interested in political art and interaction, then I have to seek audiences outside of this kind of the very limited, what I felt was limited, audience at P.S. 1.

JW: Now this show that you're talking about now, is what year, what time?

TF: This is winter, 1987.

JW: When the show opened, did it attract a different kind of audience?

TF: It did at the opening. So at the opening you had folks coming, Tim Rollins's cohort from the South Bronx, you had a lot of sanitation workers there for Mierle. David had brought in friends and folks from Harlem. So yeah, but then, after the opening, it fell off. We did special events with sanitation workers and stuff, but not much. And there wasn't a really built-out education program at that point. There were at certain points at P.S. 1. It got very good press, both from the *Voice* and the *Times*, this got great reviews. And in fact, Michael Brenson later turned out to be a real champion for this kind of art. And he wrote a very, very positive review about this kind of work. There was another artist I'd like to mention in this show who became a very close friend of mine, named Bolek Greczynski. I actually dedicated my Public Art book to him. He also died at the age of 45. An incredible imagination. He was the artist in residence at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center, and he did this amazing long-term installation called the *Living Museum*, which Elizabeth Hess [*Village Voice* art critic] actually wrote an article about. And that, by the way, is how I found out about him. It was right at the same time about as this show was going on. I was working on this kind of art, I read the review in the *Voice*, I said, "Oh my God, I'm going out there, like, right now!" So that was, yeah, thank you for that one, that was just when this kind of art was beginning to bubble up to the surface in America. And it's not that it's even bubbled up majorly, until at least 10 or 15 years later. But anyway, I ended up doing a large collaborative project with Bolek…But anyway, this show, and this experience, was yet again a major thing in my life. And one of the things that led to what was sort of my swan song at P.S. 1, which was a couple years

later. This, I think, was actually three years later by the time it happened: a major show of David Hammons, which opened in 1990.

And this show was, by that time, you know, for the first series of shows that I did, pretty much it was something where I was, I was almost like filling in spaces. So I'd go to Alanna and I'd say, not, "Oh, I have a great idea for a show." I'd say, "You know something? There's nothing in the auditorium in six months." She'd say, "Oh no!" And I'd say, "Oh, but I have an idea." [laughter]

JW: So you figured that out. [laughing]

TF: Right. But it was a way instead of saying "I've got a great idea, let's find a space for it," I had already figured out when it could happen. Or the other thing was, "I've got an idea for a show, and I'm pretty sure I know a funder who would fund it, who is David Bermant." I wouldn't come to her and say, "I have the money already." I'd say, "Do I have permission from you, are we going to do this show, and if so, I think I can get money from Bermant to fund it." And, you know, he never gave huge amounts of money, but, fifteen, twenty thousand.

JW: But this is a strategy that seemed to work, because it allowed her to decide. But also you gave her an easy decision.

TF: Right. And the thing is, she trusted me. But with the David Hammons show, it was a little bit different. I went to her. She actually loved David. They're from the same town in Illinois, from Springfield, Illinois. And they didn't know each other growing up, but they had that in common.

So she liked David, and she liked his work. And, you know, David is an incredibly charming and entertaining guy, if you can actually ever track him down. And they kind of hit it off. So I just went to her and I said, "I'd like to do a big show with David Hammons, and actually have enough time to publish a catalogue and to raise money." Actually, I think I left something out.

JW: Okay, we can go back.

TF: Finish the David Hammons story, and then I'll go back. Because actually, now that I'm looking at it, this was not the first time this had happened. This was actually the second or third time. But in any case, so she said, "Yes, fine, let's do it." David was actually about to go off to Rome. He got the Rome Prize. So I approached him prior to his departure for Rome, and I said, because I knew there would be a lot of research to go back to LA and find the work that he had done in LA, and in New York.

So he agreed. And not only did he agree to do the show, he gave me access to all the different folks that he had worked with, and took it on himself to begin to actually recreate some work, because he had a whole year and a studio. And some of the work that's in the show was sort of recreated or re-imagined in one way or another. So then we actually went out and did some traditional fundraising. We went out to the Warhol Foundation, got a grant. We got a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. We approached MIT Press to co-publish the book, which they agreed to do. And we actually got some essays written. That was like a regular show. [laughing] And then this catalogue. I have some of these [Tom holds up one], but it went out of print, and they printed some more. So it may even still be available from MIT. But that was good, because it got the distribution. But anyway, so that was when I left, after I had done the David Hammons show. And it was almost like I felt I couldn't do anything more. I had been there for eight full years, and it was great. I felt fulfilled. Actually, by the time the show opened, I had already left.

JW: You were in your thirties.

TF: Um, yeah; right. [laughing] That's a good time not to be at P.S. 1.

JW: Jaded art-worlder in your thirties.

TF: I didn't realize I was pretty young by today's standards. But what I did was, I said, "I'd like to really investigate what it's like to work in the public sector with public audiences," and I took the job as the director of New York City's Percent for Art Program at the Department of Cultural Affairs. So that was, you know,

working on public art projects at schools and libraries and parks and hospitals, and that was really, really interesting and very frustrating in different ways.

JW: Let me go back just a second. When you left, how did that work?

TF: Well, you mean, how did I tell Alanna and all that kind of stuff?

JW: I assume that you had made the decision to leave.

TF: Yes, oh yes.

JW: And I just… the story of the mood there and the way in which the universe of P.S. 1 worked is interesting.

TF: Well, I mean the thing is that Alanna and I always had a good relationship, even though we argued about the community and education stuff. And she basically said, you know, she didn't approve of where I was going; she thought it was a mistake. She did that the second time that I left, she also thought it was a mistake. So she basically said, if you ever want to come back, no problem, and there's always a job for you at P.S. 1.

JW: That's great.

TF: And so we left on very good terms, and I continued to work on the David Hammons show. I had to finish that. But again, I was going off to do something that was completely foreign to her sensibility. But, you know, there was no acrimony, except that she tried to convince me that I was making a mistake in leaving.

JW: When you went to your new position, did she see any opportunity for P.S. 1 in the public art that you were supporting?

TF: No, not at all. I mean, the Department of Cultural Affairs and P.S. 1 obviously have a strong link, because…

JW: That's the city DCA.

TF: Yes, the city Department of Cultural Affairs. So, we had, I had been working closely with the Department of Cultural Affairs already, and I knew the people over there because I was involved in P.S. 1's capital projects. So I knew the person who hired me at Cultural Affairs, Linda Blumberg. Have you talked to her?

JW: No, we haven't.

TF: Yes. And she was one of the founders of P.S. 1.

JW: Yes. The name has come up.

TF: And I had worked with her when I was at the Hudson River Museum. So it actually wasn't a P.S. 1 connection at all that helped me get the job. It was that she was my boss at Cultural Affairs, and I already just knew her from having worked on a project that she was involved in producing at another museum. But it was like going to a foreign country or foreign pursuit.

JW: You were there for how long?

TF: Cultural Affairs? For six years, yes. And then Skowhegan [Maine] for three years, and then back to P.S. 1.

JW: I see.

TF: But I wanted to just go back. In fact, there was another project where I went to Alanna and said I want to do this long-term project which involved a catalogue and fundraising, et cetera. So the David Hammons was not the first instance, but a couple of years earlier, and this was in 1988. And I was running the Clocktower at that time. I thought it would be helpful. Or no, no, I take that back. Chris Dercon was the program director at that time.

He went on to be the head of the Boijmans Museum and some other major stuff [appointed director of Tate Modern June, 2010]. He's a European [Belgian] guy. So he thought, I want to give him credit, not myself, that the Clocktower would be better situated if, instead of just doing six or eight shows, it focused its energy on a smaller number of shows and did a series. And so I then said, why don't we do

a series based around the idea of Pop, and various different aspects of Pop. So we called it the Pop Project, and we started the year, Brian Wallace -- I had done a piece at the New Museum when Brian Wallace was working there, which was based around Richard Hamilton's collage, which was this, you know, *What Is It About Today's Men That Makes Them So*, whatever. [*Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*]

JW: The famous collage.

TF: The famous collage, which was the first use of the word *Pop*. So Brian, at the opening of that, my show at the New Museum, Brian said, "I've always dreamed of recreating the show that the Independent group did at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956," which was the birth of Pop. It was a time of appropriation and sort of like the rebirth of Pop in American, you know, mainstream art. So a little bit later, a year later, I called him up and I said, "Wow. We're going to do a show, a series at the Clocktower. Would you like to follow through on that fantasy of doing that?" And so this was actually one of my worst experiences at P.S. 1. Which was that the show, which was an incredible show, ended up just being rife with conflict and overruns of budget and people thinking they weren't getting any credit. So, the show was a success.

JW: Now, give me a timeline on this from the time that you were talking with Chris to the opening of the show.

TF: Let me see. This show opened in 1987. So it was the October through June, '87-'88. So about a year before that I was speaking with Chris, and he said, "Next year at the Clocktower," or maybe even a little bit more than a year, because we had already scheduled the year.

JW: So Alanna signed off on this when? '86?

TF: Probably, yeah. So he said, "Let's concentrate." It was all sort of like a publicity but also a programming idea, that it would be more coherent to do a series. So then I approached Brian and actually we then went out and raised money for this. And there was a grant from Jay Chiat, I remember.

And we got an NEA grant. In fact, we got a very nice-size NEA grant for this. And actually David Bermant threw in some money as well; I can't remember what. So this was again another more traditional thing where we had a year to plan it. It actually involved going to England and doing research, actually finding some of the stuff that, you know, people from the Independent group had squirreled away in their barns. We borrowed the famous collage. So it was a really kind of museum-level show, which was, in a way, outside of our expertise to do something like a historical show with that kind of depth to it. So it led to problems. We hired a registrar. I mean, everything worked out okay. It's not like work got damaged or anything like that. But what we found was, recreating an installation is a lot more expensive than creating an installation. And so we had to figure out every surface on every piece, and we built these installations with some degree of accuracy, I have to say. And this is, you know, this famous Robbie the Robot. [Tom points to a picture in the catalogue.] We had that repainted. There was a famous science fiction movie right around when the Independent group built this project. But what they did was they just found stuff.

JW: The movie was?

TF: Something planet.

JW: *Forbidden Planet* with Walter Pidgeon.

TF: What Richard Hamilton did was he found like a mural-sized billboard and just brought it into the gallery, cut it out, and glued it on. We actually then had to find the original image, hire a scenic artist. By the way, we had a fantastic woman named Julie Heffernan who was a studio artist, thank God, right down the hall at the Clocktower. She's, you know, a pretty successful artist at this time. So we hired her and she repainted this whole thing for us. Anyway, it was very expensive, very filled with conflict. If you look at this picture here, this is a picture of the front of the building, you'll see the complexity of the architecture of this building. This is Richard Hamilton's installation. We recreated this. And I'm telling you, it was really good.

JW: It looks like an odd, off-kilter trapezoid shape.

TF: Yes. It was all based on 22 ½-degree angles, we found out. And they found the drawings and everything. And actually we were very lucky because the guy who built the [James] Turrell room, a guy named Craig Baumhofer, was on staff at that time. And Craig came over and showed us how to build the thing. And I actually ended up building this with another artist named Steve Barry; we built the whole thing ourselves. But every single surface of this thing was a research project, like, how to draw this. And as an artist, I did a lot of it myself. But I hired a lot of people and went way over budget. That's the only time I've ever…

JW: Did you take a deep breath and do it, and then report it later?

TF: I didn't realize how far over budget we were going. But when I say "way over budget," I think we had raised, I don't know. We were probably $30,000 over budget. It's not like, you know, going a million dollars over budget or something.

JW: Do you remember about how much the show cost?

TF: Yeah. I mean, it was like maybe $125,000.

JW: And that for P.S. 1 was a lot of money.

TF: Yes, but.

JW: You sound proud of the show, though.

TF: Well, the show was amazing. One of the things that I regret. By the way, we recreated this installation, too, completely.

JW: You're pointing to…

TF: Peter and Alison Smithson, were part of the sort of New Brutalists group.

JW: That's New Brutalists.

TF: Right. The Brutalist architecture, et cetera. And this, I'm telling you, we really recreated these. Well, one of the big arguments I had with Brian Wallace was, why don't we, in this catalogue -- which is the "Modern Dreams" catalogue, which came out after the show opened, after the first part of the show -- why don't we

have pictures of our installations to show what an incredible job we did recreating this stuff? He said, "No, no, no; we're just going to stick with the historical." But I actually have pictures, which I'm also, when we talk to the archivist, I have pictures of all of this stuff. I kept everything. And I'd be willing to give the original pictures to MoMA, if MoMA would scan them and give them back. And so I'll talk to the archivist. But I mean I,… we really,… I was very,… because I was doing PR also,

JW: Yes, you were.

TF: I was very interested in preserving the legacy. So we had pretty good pictures. We hired professional photographers. In fact, some of the professional photographers we hired went on to fairly distinguished careers.

JW: But these pictures are pictures that you've kept that P.S. 1 did not have.

TF: Yes. P.S. 1, listen.

JW: I know; I'm not saying they should. Because there was no place to put them? [laughing]

TF: No, no. They should. They completely should. And I only took copies. You know, if I curated a show, I would take a copy of the pictures. And the original slides are at P.S. 1. I took copies. But what I'm saying is that I have a whole shitload of really good photographs of most of these projects.

JW: Both with this show and the David Hammons show, was there ever a sense that these shows might be able to travel?

TF: Yes, and the David Hammons show did travel, and that was unusual. So that went to San Diego, to the La Jolla Museum [The Art Center in La Jolla], it was called at that point. Now it's the San Diego Museum of Art [Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego]. And to Philadelphia, to the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art] there. And that was very, very well received in both places. That got great press. I have to say, that was the best ever, that I've ever gotten. And this show, the "Pop Projects" show…

JW: Which is a topic that is very art-world oriented.

TF: It is. So, actually, another group, we found out after we started, was working on the same project. And that was a group up at Dartmouth, at the Hood, is it, Museum at Dartmouth? Yeah. And so they actually, after our show, they said, "Oh my God, when are you doing it?" We say, "We're doing it in six months." They say, "Oh my God; we're doing it in three years" or whatever. It was not quite that. But we were obviously doing it much quicker. They bought the installations from us. Just because we had nothing to do with them. I think they paid us $10,000; came and picked them up. So it didn't travel. It was a completely different show.

JW: But they incorporated some of your…

TF: Because we had gone so far over budget, we needed to recoup some money. So that was a little bit of money. But, this could have travelled. We didn't have enough time to work with other museums, because we'd be working on stuff and people would be interested in the project. By the way, oh, this show also travelled. [Tom holds up a catalog.] This is the "Waterworks" show.

JW: The fountain show, "The Drowned World."

TF: It went out to University of Cincinnati. Somebody just saw it and said, "Oh wow, this is fantastic. Let's take it." And I said, "Fine." And we actually drove it out there in a truck. Hey, there's one other thing I wanted to mention, just, and this again circles back to the AIDS life that we were all living at the time. So this is an artist named Rod Rhodes.

He was an artist who actually dealt directly with, he had AIDS and he dealt directly with images like gay images and kind of S&M images, et cetera, in his work. And he did these amazing small-scale environments. And you can see, in this one, for example, some of the imagery came from gay pornography. So anyway, he had AIDS and he died, like, two weeks before the show opened, which was just horrible. But this was a show -- and he did this amazing series of the Stations of the Cross, and each –- it was based on the Stations of the Cross, obviously. [Tom shows photos of the work in a catalog.]

JW: These are cross-shaped boxes that look like Red Cross boxes, too.

TF: Right. It's the, it's not the Christian, it's not the, whatever, the Catholic cross, it's the Greek, the symmetrical cross.

JW: But it's Minimal, as well.

TF: Right. Very Minimal and very, and this was all, if you knew his work, tied to imagery around death and around his own battle with AIDS. But this was at…

JW: This was at the Clocktower?

TF: This was at the Clocktower. It was a one-person show.

JW: And what, the year, again, did we mention?

TF: This was –- and this did travel, also -- 1989. So, you can see I was working on a lot of shows at once. But, so, it opened at the Clocktower. It went to Colorado College and then out to Santa Fe. And I talked to Rod, and I said, "Well, where would you want this show to open?" And he said, well, Colorado Springs is where he grew up, and then he was living in Santa Fe by that time. He was from, I mean, I knew him in New York. He went to Hunter College, where I also got my Masters in Fine Arts. But I mean, then again, that was sort of infused in the entire '80s experience, this ongoing tragedy. We had the memorial service for Rod in the show, because he died just before we opened. It was really intense. I mean, his family, his father was an evangelical minister, and I met him at the opening at Colorado College, and there was kind of a confrontation there.

JW: There was a confrontation there?

TF: Yeah; you know, his father was...I don't know. His father, they kind of wanted to control the legacy of their son, without having supported him at all after he came out. So, and his sister, who was a lesbian, was also there, and was very supportive of Rod. And that was the part of the family that we interacted with. It wasn't that we were closing the family out or didn't invite the family to the opening. But he, you know, yelled at me. And actually, I said, you know, I explained to him, and he said, "Why haven't I been involved in this?" and "How

can you possibly do a show of my son without talking to me?" And I said, "No, listen; we talked to Rod and followed his instructions. We were in touch. We did invite you." And he actually completely calmed down. It was really amazing. Because he came in to the opening to confront me, and ended up just actually calming down. I was very surprised. He was very, kind of, angry looking when he came in. But whatever; it's his son; he still loves his son. So anyway, the show here coincided with the big controversy at Artists Space, which had to do with the NEA funding being withdrawn and all that stuff.

JW: There were beginning to be confrontations about content in art. The Robert Mapplethorpe show is one.

TF: Sure. And this is a show that included gay imagery and gay pornographic imagery. And so when this catalogue came out in the show, and this was during this, I had to go up to Cultural Affairs. Cultural Affairs said, "Look, we're not going to censor you." This is not a Giuliani period in time. They said, "But we need to know exactly what's in this show." Because it was on city property, and it included. So I just went up and they said "Great. Fine, we understand the show, looks good." The woman who I showed the catalogue to was Linda Blumberg who was doing PR for the DCA at the time – one of the founders of P.S. 1 who later hired me at DCA.

JW: This is still when you were at P.S. 1, when you were employed there, it's not the Clocktower?

TF: Yes, not the Clocktower. This is before I left; yes.

JW: But they were interested because it was city property.

TF: A city property. It's like the Brooklyn Museum or the Met or whatever, it's a city-funded institution on city property, and this was a time when this was just.

JW: Did you have to put up a wall notice saying people might be offended?

TF: No, no. I mean, not at the Clocktower. At P.S. 1 we started doing that later. And P.S. 1 would show anything, believe me, anything. But sometimes we'd say,

because by the end of my period there, and certainly now, there's many more families there. But P.S. 1 did a show –- did you see "Into Me/Out of Me?"

JW: Yes, yes.

TF: That's about as far as I've ever seen a museum go. Or anyplace. I don't know. I've never been to, like, an adult bookstore that had more objectionable material. So that was good; I was glad. My wife was working at P.S. 1 by that time, and her job was to walk, to just make sure that there were labels in each room which sort of made it sound like art. And she did a great job. I thought that those labels were really good. I mean, Klaus Biesenbach organized the show. But Eugenie would come home…

JW: Eugenie is your…

TF: Eugenie Tsai is my wife, who was the head of the curatorial department at P.S. 1 during the time of "Into Me/Out of Me." There's this joke which is The Aristocrats, there was a movie about that.

JW: That's right; yes.

TF: Which is, and the basic structure of the joke is, you know, a guy comes into a talent agency and they say, "What's your act?" And they do their act; the family does their act, and the act involves, you know, sodomy and incest and everything. And at the end, they ask, "So, what do you call your act?" And they say, "We call ourselves the aristocrats." Right? So, every day, Eugenie would come home and tell me what's in the show, like, "Oh, Klaus brought in something new, and it's blah… blah… blah… blah… blah." And all I could think of was, "We call ourselves the aristocrats." And I felt like, that was great that P.S. 1 did that. I don't know any other place that would do it. And that's the kind of thing, you know, that kind of free spirit that Alanna brought, that Klaus has, which is just, you know, craziness's. This Rod Rhodes show, by the way, I didn't think of it in any way. This is very Minimal, very thoughtful, very spiritual work, actually, which also included images from pornography.

JW: Do you want to take a break for a moment?

TF: Sure.

[Interview Resumes]

TF: So, anyway, yeah, so I left, and I spent six years at the Department of Cultural Affairs doing, you know, public art projects, and then I was the director of Skowhegan for three years. And then, actually what happened was, let's see, how did it work? I mean, I remember the announcement of the PS1-MoMA merger. It was like, wow, that's really amazing. Actually before, in the interim period, there was a time when P.S. 1 was about to reopen, when Alanna called me up and said, "I want to have lunch with you," and she said, "would you come back to P.S. 1?" And I just wasn't interested or ready to do it at that point.

JW: That was probably around '97, right?

TF: Yes. So, I mean, you know, I had the sense that if I wanted to work at P.S. 1, I could. If there was a job, she would hire me. So then when, oh, it was, I was at Skowhegan for three years. And you know, Skowhegan is an absolutely amazing place. I mean, after six years at Cultural Affairs, I felt like, wow, that's a lot of time. The city government, it's great to work there. I think everybody should consider working in the public sector, but you know, six years was good. So then, Skowhegan, I was there, and I realized that sort of it is an amazing experience for the students and the faculty, but for the administration kind of the same every year. And there are conflicts and there are differences, but in terms of being the age that I was at the time, and contemplating another 10 years of that, it didn't seem like such a good idea. So, I somehow heard that somebody was going in to interview to be the Program Director at P.S. 1. So I just called up Alanna, actually woke her up in the morning, and I said, "Hey, are you hiring a program director?" She said, "Yes, yes." I said, "Can I apply?" She said, "Yes." So later in the day, I was in a meeting at Skowhegan and she called back and she said, "I have to talk to you right now." And I told her, "I'm in a meeting." She said, "Okay. All you're going to have to do is say 'yes', 'no,' 'yes,' 'no'." And I said, "Hold on." And so she just asked me, like, "So when can you start?" And I was like. "You've got to meet this person, you've got to meet." And I said, "Yes, no, yes, no." I was in a meeting with my colleagues at Skowhegan being offered

a job, essentially, by Alanna. So then I had to finish out that summer, which I guess was…

JW: Was this before the merger or after the merger?

TF: It was after the merger was *announced* but before all of the legal work was complete. It was like maybe 1999; I can't remember. Well, that's on my resume. I had to finish out that summer at Skowhegan. I couldn't leave, you know, because I was running the show in Skowhegan. So I said, "I'll go to meetings and everything, but I'll have to come back in the fall." And she said okay, which was great. And I then started, I think it must have been '99, something like that. And so I started, and then it was a very intensive time of PS1-MoMA negotiations. And even though it had already been announced in the paper, there hadn't been kind of a deal worked out. And it was pretty tense back and forth. There were times at which it looked like there was even the possibility the deal might fall through. It never was, okay, we're quitting and this deal's no good.

JW: I have a couple of questions about this because it's a transition for you. She must have made you an offer that made it possible for you to come back, financially.

TF: Yeah, although I never cared about that.

JW: So there was more money at P.S. 1.

TF: Yeah, yeah. And I was obviously making a lot more than when I left P.S. 1.

JW: That's right.

TF: Like, three times, at least. Maybe four times as much.

JW: So that is one way of knowing that it's a different institution. The other thing is when you started attending meetings there, did you attend all of the meetings that you knew were happening about that merger?

TF: Most. I attended every meeting that wasn't a board-level meeting. So the thing is, so the MoMA team of Glenn Lowry and Patty Lipschutz and James Gara and Karen Davidson. So these were not curators, these were administrator types. And when I came back, Alanna was pretty clear, you know, you're going to be an administrator. And I said, "Will I have the occasional opportunity to do a show?" And she said yes. And I did a couple of projects, but not much. But mainly, I was deputy director, and so then there was all kinds of administrative stuff to do at P.S. 1 related to just sort of keeping the place running, and then there was the MoMA negotiations. So I was there. And then Klaus was there some of the time, but Alanna and I were at all of these meetings.

JW: What was Klaus's position then; do you remember?

TF: He was, I don't know, curator, Senior Curator. I mean, Klaus was there. He was very involved in all curatorial matters. And again, there was still kind of an outside group of curators circling around which actually ended up getting cemented a little bit later. But yeah, I was involved in those negotiations, and you know, Glenn Lowry was very intent on the idea that at least for a period of time, that P.S. 1 would maintain a really kind of clear, separate identity, with a separate board which would include some MoMA-appointed board members but also include the core of P.S. 1's board.

JW: And the reason for that being?

TF: I think the thing is that there's this sense that they weren't merging with a building. They were merging with an organization with a sensibility and a kind of excitement and even, just, budget: the idea that P.S. 1 could get stuff done so inexpensively. So, you know, why absorb another organization if you're going to not embrace what the organization stands for and who runs it? And I've read articles about mergers since then and the basic trajectory of mergers is almost always that the larger organization goes into it wanting to embrace the culture of the smaller organization, but in the long run can't do it. So in the long run, Mercedes-Benz and Chrysler, you know, the Chrysler people just get expunged and it's just part of Mercedes-Benz. So, whether or not that's happened or not, I am not around, but the idea certainly, at the beginning, was to keep P.S. 1, P.S.

1. And one of the reasons Alanna wanted me to come back was that I was a P.S. 1 loyalist, in a way, and I had been brought up as a P.S. 1 insider.

JW: She wanted allies.

TF: Not just allies, but people who… The best person was somebody like me who just had it in his bones, the P.S. 1 mentality. So I was an ally in a lot of ways. I mean, of course I had these conflicts and I wanted to be much more publicly open to the community and all that kind of stuff, but I had cut my teeth doing shows at P.S. 1. So I mean that was, and I think, you know,… hiring Eugenie, my wife, later, to be the head of the exhibitions department, again, not curator, but to run the exhibition department, Eugenie had a long, long history with P.S. 1. She had worked there before. She was my wife and therefore had heard about P.S. 1 for those additional 12 years. So there was that, there were three years of that time. The one project actually that I organized, I mean, I organized a lot of stuff and I had a lot of behind-the-scenes discussion and input, but the one thing that had my signature on it was a project with a Thai artist with an impossible-to-spell name, which is Navin Rawanchaikul. And this was a project where we did a café. It was called the Taxi Café. He made the whole thing in Thailand. It was really great. Actually, it was a big success, I thought. And all the seats were made out of rubber from tires. And he went around New York City and interviewed cab drivers. And actually, this was supposed to be a public art project which was going to unfold in taxis, also. And it was "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," through the TLC, Taxi and Limousine Commission, until the final approval, I think from the mayor, which was nixed.

JW: And that was Giuliani?

TF: It was Giuliani. And the idea was, finally, because Giuliani didn't like art, and didn't like taxis. So it was a bad combination. In the long run, it played out as a public art installation in Madison Square Park. This was another collaboration with the Public Art Fund. By that time, Tom Eccles was the director, so this was many moons after. And this took place what year? I don't know. This is in the public record, but I think it was 2001 maybe, or 2000. So, you know, I did a handful of projects. This was the biggest one. I loved that, I loved Navin, a really

fantastic artist. He does taxi-oriented stuff all over the world. He's a kind of a [inaudible]. And he did that comic book which we printed, I think 100,000 of these [Tom hold the comic book]. And the comic book was supposed to be handed out in taxis. We didn't end up doing that. We handed a lot out, *The Taxi Stories*; they're all based on true stories of taxi drivers. And again, that was, by then, my kind of thing: interactive, taxi, working class. We're in Long Island City surrounded by taxi companies. We went out and met taxi drivers. You know that, I loved that kind of project. That's very much the kind of thing we do at the Queens Museum now. But again, it was something Alanna liked. She really liked the café, at least she told me she did. And we kept it up for a long time, and it was very well used

JW: So did you feel that Alanna's sense of what P.S. 1 was was changing?

TF: The thing is that I'm not sure that she had a…that there was a clearly articulated sense of what P.S. 1 was. So I think that what P.S. 1 was, was sort of an ongoing work in progress. And that it was always a work in progress, and it continued to be a work in progress. Again, if you look back into 1984 and you think of it as the emerging-artists place with big group shows, a big Robert Grosvenor show was the main show in that season. He was not an emerging artist. He was, I'm sure, in his 50s.

JW: He was at Paula Cooper at some point.

TF: Yeah, he was in Paula Cooper; he was like an outsider Minimalist.

JW: Not exactly a crowd-drawer.

TF: No, not at all. But a really interesting artist, and I thought it was a great show. And it actually got very good reviews. But the point is, I think, that it's not like she started with an idea that was then changing. The idea, in a way, was it was always changing and flexible and creative and sort of up to the last minute, and she [Alanna] created an environment -- both sort of[4] intentionally, and also just because she couldn't do anything else-- of flux and chaos. Which was a little

[4] **END AUDIO FILE 1 of 2, BEGIN AUDIO FILE 2 of 2**

hard as an administrator, but it was very productive in terms of, you know, being able to do things quickly and inexpensively, which allowed you to do things that were up-to-the-minute. Like if you had to, you know, there were some shows that I worked on where we worked a year or two in advance. There were other shows which were literally, six weeks before the opening, decided what's going to be in that gallery: artist comes in, does a project. And you know, that's, that chaotic nature is almost a signature, I think, of P.S. 1, which was its strength and its weakness. But again, it's not like there was an intellectually spelled-out, you know, program of chaos. It was just chaos. [laughter]

JW: Did you start to perceive any difficulties with the new Modern people and the chaos from the old P.S. 1?

TF: Yes. There were problems which unfolded just because of the lack of organization, and MoMA is, you know, a very organized organization. And actually, one year, we ran a deficit. And we ran a deficit which wasn't an enormous deficit, but it was, you know, obviously something you never want to do. But one of the problems was that one of the parts of the deal, when MoMA took over, was that MoMA would run the finances. Because when MoMA came in to look over our books at P.S. 1, they found all kinds of issues. No fraud or anything, but just sloppiness, and they were uncomfortable. They said, "If we're going to," you know, "we don't want to have a curatorial say," early on, they said this, "but we can't live with this level of sloppiness in your bookkeeping." And so their business office started to be, you know,… checks would run through MoMA.

JW: Do you know what year this was, about?

TF: Well, it was as soon as the merger occurred. So whatever the date of the merger was.

JW: So that was part of the deal, then.

TF: Yes, it was part of the deal from the beginning, which was okay. It's not like -- P.S. 1 never took pride in its bookkeeping. It just was like a necessity, to run a place. And it's not like there was no recordkeeping. There was recordkeeping, and there were bank accounts and ledgers. And it was all on computers, et

cetera. It wasn't just like somebody randomly writing checks out of a checkbook. People kept track of budgets for their shows. And that's why I knew I was over budget, even in the '80s. I had a budget and I didn't meet it. But when we had this budget problem that year, MoMA was already keeping track, and what we realized was that sort of the way MoMA kept track and the way P.S. 1 organized itself and ran projects weren't necessarily that compatible. Because one of the things you have to do to balance a budget is you have to have a very accurate sense, as the year unfolds, as to how much money you have, how much money you've allocated, how much money you have committed to spending. And it just didn't work somehow. It was a complete surprise when we had this deficit. And that was a bit of a shock to me, you know, because I was working with somebody who was a MoMA employee who had been pretty much reassuring me as the year progressed that everything was okay. But it wasn't so much that MoMA was keeping records poorly, it's that there was just a disconnect between how the places organized themselves. So that was a problem. And again, I don't even know if we ended up running a deficit that year. It was not a huge deficit, and it was something where we had, you know, fairly well-heeled trustees who were able to step in and maybe fill the gap. But so, on the administrative end, there were always conflicts. The other thing that I mentioned in the previous interview is that I think there are something like 18 MoMA employees for every one P.S. 1 employee. So I was, you know, the administration, but I wasn't, I didn't have a department working for me. I had an assistant, and there was, you know, a development person and people keeping track of the expenses and this and that. But, you know, MoMA, I was the equivalent of department after department after department, so I couldn't communicate with all of the phone calls and emails. At a certain point I'd get way behind on emails and then people like James Gara, who, by the way, is a friend and we get along great. He's the administrative head of MoMA [was CFO, now called Chief Operating Officer], and still is. And again, he's a friend, and this is not, but I remember one time where he just called and said, "Tom, you've got to answer my emails." I said, "What email? I haven't gotten." I'm, you know, 200 emails behind at this point because I got cc'd on everything MoMA was. And so we had to simplify matters. We got over that and we communicated well. And then after I left, Brett Littman was the next deputy

director, and he took on all the same kind of issues, and it was a complex position to be in, because you want to stay on good terms with MoMA, at the same time as you're trying to run P.S. 1 and to stay clearly in the,... I mean, I was, as I said, an Alanna loyalist and a P.S. 1 loyalist. So my basic underlying interest was in maintaining the P.S. 1-ness of P.S. 1, even if I didn't completely agree with Alanna on what that should be.

JW: A couple of things just to go back and to clarify. You had mentioned a capital campaign. When was that, and what was your role?

TF: Okay, so there was a capital project, not a capital campaign. So that actually might have been the most successful thing I did at P.S. 1 the second time around. I mean, the first time around, I wasn't that involved, because what happened was that P.S. 1 got a fairly good chunk of money from the city to really kind of renovate the place and bring it up to code. And that was beginning at the time that I left P.S. 1 the first time. And that was a situation where there was an architect; they ended up firing the architect, hiring Fred Fisher to do the renovation, and that occurred while I was gone. Actually, thank God, because apparently it was quite chaotic. P.S. 1 had closed for a couple of years, opened up, was broke. So I missed this, I was gone for nine years, but in those nine years there were several years where not much happened at P.S. 1. But the second time around, we realized that there were some issues with the bricks at P.S. 1. And we got a report from the department of design and construction that there were some really pretty serious structural problems at P.S. 1. Not that the building was, you know, in imminent danger of collapsing. But, well, maybe it was not *imminent* danger. Let's say long-term danger of collapsing. So then there were some reinforcements put in, but the basic situation was that if we didn't get the money to really rebuild the walls –- not just repoint the brick but rebuild the walls –- it wasn't viable long-term to have P.S. 1. We would have to eventually just leave. So then there was this whole campaign to get the city to agree to pay –- it's a city building –- for this major rebuilding of all the walls. And that's something I was very involved in. I was the person who went to the capital project meetings. And in fact, I don't know if I told this story in the first session, but on 9/11, 2001, I was in a capital project meeting. And I got to P.S. 1 that day

and a guard told me, “Some idiot flew a plane into the World Trade Center.” And I was like, “Oh my God, what an idiot.” Everybody thought it was a mistake. And then, I went upstairs, and someone said a second plane hit the second tower. We were looking right out the window, and you could see clearly the World Trade Center was burning. So we had a capital project meeting that morning, and I was so in denial. They said, “Should we have the meeting or should we all go home?” And I said, “No, no; let’s have the meeting.” So we’re sitting there, and I remember Rachel Zur running into the meeting and crying, saying a building just collapsed, one of the towers just collapsed. We looked out and there was smoke everywhere, and I said, “Oh, that’s ridiculous.” And she said, “No, no, no; we saw it go down.” And so we were there and we actually sat there and were doing our capital meeting, and people were kind of shaking as they read their little reports. And I said, “Fine.” After 10 minutes we disbanded the meeting, and then I had to get home, and there’s a whole long story about that. I mean, I did eventually get home. I live in lower Manhattan, so my wife, Eugenie, was home and she taped up the windows using gaffer’s tape, just as George Bush said. You know, it’s good to have gaffer’s tape around? It is, by the way, if you’re getting bombed. So, that was just a sidebar to the capital project.

JW: A big sidebar.

TF: Yeah. And by the way, there were a bunch of artists showing up for the international studio program that day, the next day, et cetera. They got delayed. It was really crazy. And that, by the way, that spelled the end of the Clocktower as a viable place to have shows. Because after 9/11, first of all, it was closed. All of Lower Manhattan was just an armed camp. I was living there after, you know, I got bombed out of my house after, we were able to move back in when the electricity went on. And so, the Clocktower, after 9/11, to get into the building, which is a city building, which was always a matter of just going past security, getting on the elevator and going upstairs, it became more like getting into an airport. You had to go through security, you had to have appointments.

JW: You had to be scanned.

TF: You had to be scanned, yeah. And that really changed things over there.

JW: It's hard to have those kinds of parties. [laughter]

TF: Yeah, yeah, random people walking in the door.

JW: Do you think that being employed by the city for a number of years helped with your next stint at P.S. 1? With the capital project?

TF: Absolutely. Of course. Yeah, yeah; no question about it. I mean, my, I was friends with all of the people at DCA. I knew them quite well. So, and you know, I mean, they're city employees, so there weren't special deals or this or that, but if there was ever a conflict or anything I'd just call people up. And I mean, Alanna and Glenn need that.

And I could say, "Look, you can't say that to Susan Chin," who's the head of capital projects. "You have to give her the respect of," this and that. "Let's make sure we mention them" at this, or invite them to our gala and put them in a good place, and, you know, they have to be feeling good about this. And Susan Chin, who was my boss at the DCA, as the head of capital projects for all of the culturals, was a key person -- absolutely brilliant city employee, figured out a lot of ways to get funding for all of her projects.

JW: There's another topic I'd like to bring up, if you care to. The other parts of P.S. 1 were the studios, the international and the national plan. As P.S. 1 rebuilt itself and then became a part of MoMA, what happened with those studios?

TF: Well, in the capital project there was a whole floor put aside for studio artists. It was less than before, but still there was a separate entrance; it was, you know, made with a bathroom. So it no longer was possible to have the whole building open 24/7 for the studio artists, but there was a way, after the rebuilding, that they could get in. So there continues to be a national and an international studio program. Alanna I think, became increasingly frustrated with the kind of demands that some of the artists were putting on P.S. 1. She wasn't crazy about the idea of having shows for these artists. She said that's not a show, it's a collection of artists. They were not selected as a show. So there were various times that we would have the show. Normally, in the old days, we would have the show at the Clocktower every year, and there was a catalog.

JW: This was a show of…

TF: Of the national and international studio programs' artists. Somebody would curate the show, somebody from staff occasionally would bring some people from outside. So we continued to do that, and you know, it got, again, to be more difficult to do that at the Clocktower after 9/11. The other thing is that after the reopening of P.S. 1, P.S. 1 was so much bigger in terms of the exhibition space that it became increasingly difficult to actually do anything at the Clocktower. It was sort of the stepchild. It was always a little bit of a stepchild, but it became even more so. So there was sort of just a gradual cooling of interest on Alanna's part. I always loved the studio program. I was an advocate for it. I always thought that the P.S. 1 studio-artists show should be at P.S. 1, on the first floor, proudly presenting this incredible program of absolutely amazing artists. And if you looked at the roster, I mean, a really amazing group of artists have come through there. But Alanna didn't feel that way, and it sort of gradually cooled down to the point where they cancelled it. And now I've heard rumors that they might re-ignite it. I always thought that it was a great part of what P.S. 1 was.

JW: Well, the funding for the international part had to be done going country to country, hat in hand.

TF: Yeah. There's no problem with that.

JW: And it was a competition, as well.

TF: Yeah; it was great. It was a great structure. There was no problem with it. As long as the artists came back to their countries satisfied with their year at P.S. 1, the countries were happy to participate. I still get emails. For example, I got an email yesterday from an artist named Henk Visch, and he's a really distinguished artist in Holland. He was a studio artist and a great guy. We all -- and the thing is, this is back in the '80s, it was kind of a social circle, and everybody would go out to parties and openings together, and he was part of that. And I'm sure he went back to Holland and said, "Everybody has to apply for this. It's an absolutely incredible year." And he'd got a lot out of it. You think of somebody like Takashi Murakami and how he really had a transformative year. All those

really amazing artists who went through the program profited a lot from their year in New York City. And that did a lot for the art world in Japan, or in Holland, and internationalized everything. But you know, if you treat people like second-class citizens and they go back to their country and say, "We got nothing out of it; they didn't give us a show; we could never ask the office for anything," then they'll cancel it. Or they'll begin to complain, and it would begin a kind of downward spiral. But I loved it and I think they should redo it as part of the history of the place.

JW: Well, it sounds like we're coming to a kind of circle around the end. I've asked you before, is there anything you'd like to end with about the future of P.S. 1? Is there anything surprising that you may have left out?

TF: I can't think of anything. I think that the mistake most people make is that they think they know what P.S. 1 is. And I worked there for 12 years and I don't know what it is. But I learned quickly that it was much more complex than what most people on the outside think it is. So I'm not actually as worried about, "Oh, P.S. 1, the pure P.S. 1 is going to be corrupted by MoMA." It was never pure. It was always a kind of ongoing and changing thing, and it could be, it's just the next chapter of this ongoing fluidity. And I think Klaus is a good choice. And I think it's a choice that Alanna certainly supports. And it's the chance to have another decade or more of craziness. And I do think the worry is, it becomes too bureaucratic. You can still do -– MoMA does good shows, even though it's bureaucratic. So.

JW: Well, it's a pleasure to speak with you, Tom.

TF: Thank you. Likewise.

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END INTERVIEW