

Douglas Crimp interviewed by Kristin Poor, April 25, 2019

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<http://artistarchives.hosting.nyu.edu/JKB/douglas-crimp-interview-april-2019/>

- Kristin Poor: Today is April 25, 2019. This is Kristin Poor, and I'm here with Douglas Crimp. Douglas, thank you for sitting down for another interview with us for the Knowledge Base. I listened to the first interview, which was really such a valuable resource I think. The thing that resonated the most for me was how vehemently you believe in the power of Joan's work. Your passion for and deep knowledge of her work is really so moving. That really comes across in the first interview.
- Douglas Crimp: I'm glad it does. I wasn't so sure.
- Kristin Poor: Oh no, it does. It's great. Re-reading your writing about Joan, which is really quite early, it's clear how you perceived the impact and importance of her work very quickly from the beginning. I wonder if we could start by having you take us back to when you first saw *Choreomania* and what struck you in the work that has stayed with you?
- Douglas Crimp: One of the problems about speaking about one's memory of something—at least my problem, I would say that my memory's not good—is that with something like *Choreomania* for example, it is the first work of Joan's that I saw. It was memorable to me. In other words, it was something that stuck. I can clearly say it's different from anything that I had seen in art up to that point.
- Douglas Crimp: It may be the first work of performance art that I ever saw. By that I mean something that is not coming out of a tradition of theater. Mind you, it's also around the first time that I would have been seeing anything like that, whether it be dance or Richard Foreman or Jack Smith or whatever, all of those encounters would have been—the Grand Union—around that. 1970 would be early for a beginning date for me.
- Douglas Crimp: But in so far as it stuck and in so far as I then came to do more work with Joan early on, it's something that I've returned to, so I wrote about *Choreomania* in the 1982 catalogue.
- Kristin Poor: 1983.
- Douglas Crimp: 1983 catalogue. I returned to it again in my memoir [*Before Pictures*, 2016] and the text that was published in *Mixed Use*,

Manhattan, which is part of the memoir. By now my memory has solidified into what little I said along the way. To go beyond that would be very hard. I remember it in relation to something that I did during that period of time, which was to go to people's lofts to see performance works. Musical works I remember particularly, like Phil Glass.

Douglas Crimp:

It was a beginning period of alternative spaces, so a new set of practices was arising just at that moment. It was very, very new, and I was very new to New York, so I was still imbibing everything from Abstract Expressionism forward and trying to take it all in, which meant encountering ... I wouldn't get the dates right, but the context would make some sort of sense, like Robert Morris's Castelli Warehouse show, which is, I don't know, do you remember the date? [9 at *Leo Castelli*, 1968]

Kristin Poor:

I don't, no.

Douglas Crimp:

It's early 1970s I think, probably not as early as *Choreomania*. So where I would have first seen Richard Serra's *Splash Piece* [*Splashing*, 1968], which also had an enormous impact on me. You can imagine even someone who was around and seeing the developments that led to *Choreomania* or the *Splash Piece*, they're shocking. They're startlingly reinventions of what the work of art can be. Enough so that you can build a whole thesis off of it, so when it came to writing about or testifying about *Tilted Arc*, *Splash Piece* was an essential reference because if you removed it, you destroyed it. That was like Richard's main defense of *Tilted Arc*.

Douglas Crimp:

Anyway, so, I think that the whole way that memory works in relation to experiences that are that strong and that challenging and that unusual but also on some level something that you didn't reject, something that you thought was interesting enough that you wanted to think more about ... I don't know whether my images of *Choreomania* are those images, the photographs that exist. Certainly they are, but I suppose I have a general memory of what the crowds of people looked like and who they were. I was younger then, by four years or something, which mattered maybe then, also new to the art world. I wasn't as much an insider as Joan was, for example. I was nevertheless a lucky insider: I saw *Choreomania*. I was one of not very many people who saw that work. So many of those works that are now so canonical and that we think so much about them, twenty people saw them. In some cases I was one of the lucky people.

Douglas Crimp:

Who knows? I don't remember who it was who told me about it or whether Joan gave me an invitation. She very well may have. I

can't even remember how and when I first met Joan. I know that I saw that work, and I know that I counted Joan as someone who at least I knew at that time. I'm not even remembering what you asked me.

Kristin Poor: Oh I was just wanting to get back in that world of the first moment that you saw *Choreomania* and the things that struck you about it, which you definitely spoke about just now.

Douglas Crimp: Right. A very vivid memory of it is the sound of it because the props swung.

Kristin Poor: Swung, yes.

Douglas Crimp: I want to say that because it sang, because it made the music of the piece.

Kristin Poor: What was that sound?

Douglas Crimp: It was this creaking. It was like a ship. It was like the whole construction, because it was hanging from beams. So as it moved and people moved about it, but mostly as it simply moved back and forth, it would make this rhythmic—really like being at sea, like being inside of a boat. Inside of a boat that was resonant enough to make sound. It was like the wood ... I don't know, expanding and contracting or something like that. That's a vivid memory, actually.

Kristin Poor: It's so interesting.

Douglas Crimp: It's interesting how your sense of the performance itself was that it was very largely invisible. It made a visibility around the edges, but you couldn't actually see how figures got there. There were all these people on the back of the prop, but you never saw them, except when they came over the top or down to the sides or hung a leg underneath or something like that. Unlike Trisha Brown's *Planes* [1968], where you have the dancers actually on the front of the prop, Joan's were hidden. *Planes* is around the same date I would think too, that's an interesting reference for it. I didn't see *Planes* though until much later, I saw it reconstructed, but it's a very ... Yeah, I didn't think of it until now, but it's a very interesting point of reference because it's people climbing on a wall, basically. I'm sure Joan would have known *Planes*. I'm not sure Trisha would have known *Choreomania*.

- Kristin Poor: Right, that's interesting, yeah. Thank you. I'd love to hear more—you've spoken a bit about it now—but I'd love to hear more about your thoughts on the artistic context within which Joan developed her work in downtown New York in the early 1970s. I'll ask more specific questions but wonder if you might just speak generally about the downtown scene at that moment?
- Douglas Crimp: Yeah. I was experiencing it in a complicated way as you know from reading my memoir because I was equally committed to finding my way to a queer world. There was—as I write about in the very beginning of the memoir—there was conflict involved in this. Joan's world, Richard Serra's world, Phil Glass's world, the art world, the cultural world, the Grand Union world, those were kind of straight-identified worlds to me, even if on some level they weren't entirely that.
- Douglas Crimp: Then on the other hand there was the back room at Max's, and there were the drag queens. It's interesting to think about the other theater formation that I was actually seeing at the time, which was the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, and to imagine your John Vaccaro and that kind of theater in conjunction with performance art. It couldn't have been more different. The one couldn't have been more queer, and you could say the other couldn't have been more straight. I don't know that straight or gay or straight or queer or whatever has any definition or relation to what Joan was doing at all.
- Douglas Crimp: She was using the body, which was very vivid at that moment and very unusual. I think she was using the body in a way but not a dancing body. Yet, the way she used the body I think had a lot to do with the way Judson people used the body, which was an anti-dancing way of using it anyway. But the bodies were much more fully sexualized in the world of the Playhouse of the Ridiculous, although comically so, generally.
- Douglas Crimp: Sometimes I think when we talk about the milieu of the alternative spaces and so on that we tend to not realize that they were more multiple, and the sensibilities were wider. They were different from venue to venue. I felt more comfortable in some of them than others. Maybe it had to do with people that I knew that were connected with them. Eventually Artists Space was much more of a habitable home for me, but that's a little bit later.
- Douglas Crimp: All of this is really to say that I was really finding my way. I was at the very beginning of figuring out who I was in relation to all of this stuff that was going on around me. I was at the Guggenheim

though, so I was really involved. I was really working in this world. By 1970 we would have been working on the *Guggenheim International* that Daniel Buren was removed from. It was a very important event in my life, but the show itself—before that happened, before the trauma of that—there was just working on the show itself and encountering a lot of that conceptual work for the first time and certainly institutional critical work.

Douglas Crimp:

I had a very firm base that I was operating from, but I think in order for me to talk about my experience I have to also put it in relation to this other thing that I was doing because it was around the same time that I was working on the *Guggenheim International*. Holly Woodlawn was living with me, and she was shooting *Trash*. Those two worlds came together in my life. Inevitably they must have tainted each other or bled into each other or something, or maybe they just became a sure function of my own confusion or ambivalence or whatever. But I was compelled by them equally I think, which is confusing enough. I hadn't really thought about that, because there's something much more controlled or—I don't know—neutral in some ways, in the performance art venue than in the theater, which was so over the top.

Douglas Crimp:

I'm not sure, other than an early Jack Smith performance, I was seeing a lot of stuff at La MaMa. I don't really have a very strong memory of it, but I had friends who were from university who came to New York the same time as I did, who were actors. There was a very interesting theater department at Tulane, where I went to school. That department en masse left and came to NYU. Richard Schechner, for example, was at Tulane as a faculty member when I was there. He's still teaching at NYU. *The Drama Review* was originally *The Tulane Drama Review*. It was active when I was an undergraduate student, doing issues on Jean Genet and even on happenings and things like that. It was very, very up to date. They really knew what they were doing.

Douglas Crimp:

That was part of the world that I knew at Tulane because of some friendships, people who were interested in theater. Richard Schechner brought Ellen Stewart to New Orleans. I remember being at a party with her and talking to her. Then she was one of the people that I knew in New York, so I went to La MaMa. I was a little bit more clued into the world of theater actually then than I am now.

Kristin Poor:

That's such a good reminder because of course, with time, we compress these more distant time periods into—not

monolithic—but we have this singular idea. It's important to be reminded how multivalent really it was.

Douglas Crimp: Right, absolutely.

Kristin Poor: How there were all these different spaces and so many things happening.

Douglas Crimp: When you're trying to find your own way and who you are.

Kristin Poor: As a young person.

Douglas Crimp: It's a total immersion course or something.

Kristin Poor: It's so interesting. You mentioned Jack Smith, who was an important influence for Joan. Of course you've written about him in your book on Warhol's films [*"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol*, 1992]. Did you see some of those performances?

Douglas Crimp: I only saw one performance that I can remember, and it's one that Joan remembers seeing too because I was at some kind of an event where Joan was speaking about it. I think it was actually when they showed the Jack Smith films at Metrograph in conjunction with the Artists Space show last summer. Joan spoke, and it's when they showed some of the performance footage and so on. It was an early work at The Plaster Foundation. Her memories of it struck a chord: they were similar to mine.

Kristin Poor: To yours.

Douglas Crimp: There is some footage of it in the show, and they showed it at the theater as well.

Kristin Poor: Do you remember talking about Jack Smith with Joan at the time?

Douglas Crimp: I don't, no.

Kristin Poor: Or general conversations around his work?

Douglas Crimp: I'm not sure that I did, no. In fact, I would be surprised if I had. I don't think that I would have made a connection.

Kristin Poor: That's interesting.

Douglas Crimp: I would have thought of Jack Smith as a crazy theatrical genius, as this theater artist that did these very weird late night performances. In fact, I went to see him—as far as I can remember—with Stephen Varble. Stephen came from the world of theater really as well. I wouldn't have associated that so fully with the kind of performance that Joan was doing. That may just be me trying to parse things, to say this is not that or this is that or this is related to that, just to try to get things in perspective for myself.

Douglas Crimp: I was still mostly thinking about painting during that period of time, so a lot of the reviewing that I was doing and so on was really ... The questions were all questions that came from painting. Then suddenly in the midst of that, painting is not really what's at issue in the 1970s: it's sculpture first of all, the continuation of Minimalism through Post-Minimalism. There are a few painters that are crucial to that moment, like [Robert] Ryman or [Agnes] Martin, but not so much. I mean not as much as the minimal sculptures, for example. Then there's performance, which comes up in the midst of that. There's no ground for performance art: it just happens. It's one of the things that's so interesting about Joan is that she just invented an art form, essentially.

Kristin Poor: That's so interesting. I want to come back to some of those questions, but maybe first we could talk about the exhibition that you and Lynne Cooke did, *Mixed Use, Manhattan*. Joan's work seemed so exemplary of the arguments that you put forward in that show. I wondered if you would speak a bit about her work in relation to those ideas.

Douglas Crimp: Yeah. It has to do really with the fact that I had begun writing my memoir. I'd written two chapters, or the beginnings of two chapters. The first and the second ones actually. The book was not written in chronological order, but the first two chapters were. Then I wrote "Action Around the Edges." By then I had this armature for the memoir, which was about taking something that I had done, some text that I had written, some exhibition that I had organized and making that the subject of the chapter. The armature around which I then not only returned to something that I had done to reflect on it, but also to think about what else was going on in my life at the time. The anecdotal material about my sex life, for example, just comes up chronologically in relation to these other things that I was doing.

Douglas Crimp: I had a list. I knew what the subjects of the chapters were, and the subject of that chapter was Joan Jonas. It was really *Songdelay*. I had not seen *Delay Delay*, but *Songdelay* is a film

that I've really loved and that, for me, really came to represent a use of the city that is exactly the subject I wanted to take up in that chapter. Of course, in writing the chapter, something else totally erupts in the middle of it, which is the [Alvin] Baltrop photographs, which the juxtaposition of Baltrop and Gordon Matta-Clark, of gay cruising and *Day's End*. I didn't know. I discovered it in working on the chapter.

Douglas Crimp:

That affected something of a displacement so that Joan was no longer *the* subject of the chapter: she became *a* subject of the chapter. But she's the genesis of that chapter and so for me remains the center, in a way, of it. That show was done, as you know well, very quickly. Lynne had come to me with a pretty small idea of Peter Hujar, Zoe Leonard, and David Wojnarowicz and then knowing of my interest in Baltrop, adding that in and thinking about these artists that are working in the city.

Douglas Crimp:

We quickly evolved this super ambitious list and tracked down various works and did a quick period of discovery. But Joan was always there. From the beginning I was interested in, particularly, uses of the piers, for example, even not knowing the importance of those images and how they brought my project together. I published that chapter of the memoir in *Mixed Use, Manhattan*. It worked perfectly there.

Kristin Poor:

It did, yes.

Douglas Crimp:

It was a place where the memoir and the exhibition were really in sync, completely. In general, I suppose you could say the city figures very largely in my memoir as well.

Kristin Poor:

Oh yes.

Douglas Crimp:

The geography of the city and the use of the city.

Kristin Poor:

In terms of Joan's work and her using these de-industrialized spaces—the artist's loft or the space of *Delay Delay* and *Songdelay* and also the way all those spaces then become really part of the content—the subject of her work and those spaces in particular become also mediated by the photographic then. These are the big themes of that exhibition.

Douglas Crimp:

Yeah or the film.

Kristin Poor:

Or the film.

- Douglas Crimp: It's interesting how that in Joan's work also translates back and forth between—in terms of questions of context and space and environment and so on—between landscape work. Early on—because she's very soon working in Nova Scotia—but with *Wind*, for example, the film which is late 1960s, isn't it? It's before *Choreomania*.
- Kristin Poor: I think so, yeah.
- Douglas Crimp: She was equally interested in a non-urban environment. She used them. They're so different actually, the ways she used them, I think. I haven't really thought that much about it.
- Kristin Poor: In terms of your own memories of the different spaces, this week I had the distinct pleasure of re-reading the memoir that you've been referencing, *Before Pictures*. The descriptions of disco convey that sensory and material quality of the spaces that the discos were in so vividly. You also mentioned some details about your memories of the artists' loft spaces as spaces of performance, in relation to *Choreomania*. Could you speak more about that? About your memories of those spaces in particular?
- Douglas Crimp: I'm trying to think, what would be the ... I think probably what would be relevant to that would be that ... What made these spaces so congenial was that they were the same kind of spaces that I was living in. In 1969, yeah, I think 1969 or 1970, I moved into half of Jack Tworkov's studio on 23rd Street. His daughter Helen had the front half. It was the top floor of a medium-sized loft building on 23rd Street. It was basically two square spaces attached by a hallway. He had both of those spaces, and we each had one.
- Douglas Crimp: They were skylit, north, very high skylights, so they were beautiful spaces. They were run-down loft spaces, reclaimed as we did in those days with the simplest of stove, refrigerator, shower, toilet ... You know, just makeshift. That sense of, I don't know, playing house in a place that wasn't meant to be a house, I think it gives you a different sense of where pleasures can be sought out.
- Douglas Crimp: At the same time, you're going to performances in people's ... like Jack Smith's crazy loft or to discos. On the one hand there were these discos that I went to during that whole period too that I never mention in my disco chapter because they were commercial. They were not a downtown, queer, underground-ish world. They were very much a commercial world, and I went occasionally to those places as well, to all kinds of places. But the ones that I felt an ownership of were the ones that were a little

bit more edgy and reclaimed from something else and not fully redone.

Douglas Crimp: Flamingo was pretty fixed up but 12 West, less so. The Garage was really a garage; it was really just spatially itself. Just the proportions of it were so enormous. The fact that when you went to The Garage it was an old truck garage in a building, so you actually walked up a street inside of the building, so it was very not like a fancy, commercial dance club. Although, it was like *the* great dance club.

Kristin Poor: The spaces where you were hearing music or seeing performances felt connected to that, and where you were living yourself.

Douglas Crimp: Yeah. They were really mostly people's lofts. Places where people lived. I don't actually literally know. I would be hard-pressed to find where the Phil Glass performance of *Music With Changing Parts* that I heard was. Some good researcher would be able to track that. I'm sure Phil Glass has a perfectly good archive and knows exactly where that took place. I don't have a picture of it in my mind, except for people sitting on the floor. There was a lot of sitting on the floor in those days. I guess there is now too.

Kristin Poor: That's what you said too about *Choreomania*.

Douglas Crimp: Mm?

Kristin Poor: That's what you said too about *Choreomania*—

Douglas Crimp: Yeah.

Kristin Poor: ... it's a jumble of people on the floor.

Douglas Crimp: Yeah. Nobody got seating for those things.

Kristin Poor: It's true. There's still a lot of sitting on the floor.

Douglas Crimp: There is, yeah. It's just that I'm not actually sitting on the floor.

Kristin Poor: You're not doing it, you get a chair now. In terms of other spaces for performance, I'm curious to hear more about your memories of Anthology Film Archives. You write about seeing films there, and of course you saw Joan's performance of *Twilight* there. Did you see other performances at Anthology?

- Douglas Crimp: There were two different Anthologies that I went to. There was the Invisible Cinema, which I write about in the memoir, which had fixed seating and which was not used for any of these performances: it was in the Public Theater. There was for a long period of time a small repertoire cinema in the Public Theater. For that period of time, when Anthology first opened, it opened with Peter Kubelka's Invisible Cinema, which was a truly extraordinary, unusual place.
- Douglas Crimp: But then they lost that space—I don't know how exactly—and moved to Mercer Street. That's where Joan's performances were. That was a more makeshift ... It wasn't like a real movie theater, nor was it a special movie theater like the Kubelka. I don't remember it very well. I don't remember what the seating was like. I don't know whether it even had raked seating. I don't have a vivid memory of it at all actually. The Kubelka theater was so extraordinary, so unusual. I really regretted the loss of it. I think a lot of people did.
- Douglas Crimp: The Mercer Street space was just so much more of an ordinary space. But it was one of many similar kinds of spaces that could be used by someone like Joan in that period of time. She also performed at The Kitchen. They all run together in a way, they all become internal to her performances or something for me. You see her lighting, her camera setups with Babette walking around and all of that.
- Kristin Poor: Right. They're just containers for what you remember best, which is Joan's piece of work. You don't remember other performances that were specifically at Anthology by other people?
- Douglas Crimp: I don't, no. I just remember Joan's.
- Kristin Poor: Did you know Shigeko Kubota?
- Douglas Crimp: No.
- Kristin Poor: She curated the two series that Joan was a part of at Anthology.
- Douglas Crimp: Okay. I may have met her at the time.
- Kristin Poor: Right. I wanted to ask you how you ended up photographing *Twilight* at Anthology.
- Douglas Crimp: I can't imagine. I don't even remember having a camera. I did obviously. It was more useful to actually have a camera I

suppose in those days because you didn't have your cell phone. I have some photographs that I took, not many. I have no idea. I wouldn't have known it except that it was credited in that book. I don't know, I guess I was maybe taking photographs to jog my own memory because maybe by then ... I think maybe when I saw ... [Looking at a photograph] Is this—

Kristin Poor: This is one of them.

Douglas Crimp: Right. Maybe when I saw *Twilight* I knew that I was going to write about it or maybe the person who asked me to write about it asked me to take photographs. But I'd have to get the *Studio International* article to find out if there are pictures of it.

Kristin Poor: Oh yeah.

Douglas Crimp: You have it?

Kristin Poor: I actually have it.

Douglas Crimp: Are any of my photographs in that?

Kristin Poor: [Looks at article] It's interesting: there are photographs but not any of those.

Douglas Crimp: Okay. These are just things that Joan would have provided, that are much more ... [Looks at article] No, well in fact I didn't write about ... It looks like I wrote about *Twilight* and *Funnel*, but I didn't write about ... I don't know how I came to—

Kristin Poor: No, you did. You wrote about *Twilight*. That's this one [shows article].

Douglas Crimp: I wrote about *Twilight*?

Kristin Poor: Yes.

Douglas Crimp: But I didn't write about ... so wait, is this *Twilight*?

Kristin Poor: This is *Twilight*, yeah. Four of them are—

Douglas Crimp: Oh okay, this is ... ?

Kristin Poor: Also *Twilight*.

Douglas Crimp: Okay, then I'm confusing which are which now. Okay.

- Kristin Poor: You wrote about it and you photographed it, but the photographs are not in the article in the end.
- Douglas Crimp: Okay. I was thinking that I photographed ... What's the one after *Twilight*?
- Kristin Poor: *Mirage*.
- Douglas Crimp: *Mirage*.
- Kristin Poor: I suppose it's possible you did, although the ones we have are by Babette Mangolte.
- Douglas Crimp: Yeah, I know. No, I just confused which one ... okay.
- Kristin Poor: I don't suppose you remember photographing any other of her—
- Douglas Crimp: No.
- Kristin Poor: Is there anything that stands out to you from the *Twilight* performance?
- Douglas Crimp: No, those are really very vague for me. I guess the most vivid, the thing that I made something of that seemed very emblematic and definitional of those performances, was the simultaneity of the live and the videotaped images and how the image that you needed to see was in the video. The video image superseded in meaning the construction of it in real life. The differentiation between the two and the looking back and forth between the two and all of that was central to the comprehension of the performance in spatial, conceptual, and actual image-construction terms, so that something would be meaningless, except in a vertical roll, for example, or something like that. It would render a discernible shape or image only through the technology or something like that.
- Kristin Poor: That you couldn't see live. You could only see it on the screen.
- Douglas Crimp: Right.
- Kristin Poor: Yeah. That's interesting. Yeah, thank you. Do you remember ... [Phone starts ringing] Do you want to get that?
- Douglas Crimp: No, it's spam.

- Kristin Poor: That's spam. Do you remember attending any events at 112 Greene Street?
- Douglas Crimp: No. Wait, no, I do. I saw ... Not Joan. Was Joan there?
- Kristin Poor: Yeah, she did this improvisation with James Nares there.
- Douglas Crimp: Oh. No, I didn't see that. No, I saw a Vito Acconci there, I think. I saw a Richard Serra one there. Which Richard Serra would that have been? Was there a Richard Serra ... I could be wrong.
- Kristin Poor: I'll look. [Most likely Richard Serra and Robert Bell's *Prisoner's Dilemma*, performed at 112 Greene Street in 1974].
- Douglas Crimp: But I definitely saw something, maybe more than one thing there. It's not as vivid. I think if I wasn't actually having to make something of it, like for writing or something, it didn't stick with me in the same way.
- Kristin Poor: That makes sense.
- Douglas Crimp: I remember it was interesting. Richard actually was toying with film, video, like *Television Delivers People* [1973]. That was done live, right? Originally at a certain point?
- Kristin Poor: That's a good question.
- Douglas Crimp: Some version of it? I can't remember. I'm sure I did see things there actually.
- Kristin Poor: Also the space itself is not that vivid, and you didn't get to see Joan's things.
- Douglas Crimp: Yeah.
- Kristin Poor: I wonder if you would speak a bit about your friendship with Pat Steir. I've heard you speak before about the influence she had on you in terms of pointing you towards feminist texts. Were you also aware at the time of Pat's participation in Joan's film—
- Douglas Crimp: No.
- Kristin Poor: ... that she shot?
- Douglas Crimp: No, which film?

- Kristin Poor: It was something she didn't come back to until later, but there's this footage of them using the cones in Lower Manhattan—
- Douglas Crimp: Oh right, okay.
- Kristin Poor: ... I think around City Hall [*Street Scene With Chalk*, 1976/2008/2010].
- Douglas Crimp: I didn't realize. It makes sense that they would have come back to it later, okay. I knew Pat through Hermine Tworok Moskowitz and Bob Moskowitz, who I met the first summer I was in New York as I sublet their apartment for the summer. They were people who became friends. Through them I met various segments of the art world—Pat being one of them. I got to be quite close friends with Pat for a period of time in the 1970s.
- Douglas Crimp: Then we drifted apart later, and then we drifted back together again. So we're quite attached to each other now. Joan of course is close to Pat as well, so we see each other in each other's company a lot now. But I don't, honestly, much associate Pat and Joan back in that period, oddly. I'm just trying to think. There was a summer that I actually also sublet for some reason, or housesat, Pat's place on Mulberry Street. It's pretty vague. It's really a long time ago, so unless I have some anecdote that I've held on to through the years and told again and again, it's pretty vague.
- Kristin Poor: Well, thank you for that.
- Douglas Crimp: Every now and then someone will remind me of something, and it will come back.
- Kristin Poor: Pat pointed you to some of these second-wave feminist—
- Douglas Crimp: Yeah. When second-wave feminism was first emerging I just bought into a certain kind of dismissiveness toward it, which Pat talked me out of right away. Then in fact I started reading, on her recommendation. I read Kate Millett, and it resonated a lot for me. It was an easy conversion I would say.
- Douglas Crimp: Then there was even—I think Pat might have been part of a milieu that involved ... There was some attempt to form men's consciousness-raising groups and things like that, that I participated in for a period of time. Then eventually I did have a gay men's consciousness-raising group.

- Kristin Poor: Oh interesting.
- Douglas Crimp: Really an imitation of feminist stuff.
- Kristin Poor: Was that something that went on for a long time? Were there a lot of people involved?
- Douglas Crimp: A couple of years. There was a group of us that met, I can't remember how often, but it was around 1971, 1972, 1973, something like that.
- Kristin Poor: It was mostly gay men?
- Douglas Crimp: It was gay men. There were some straight and gay men ones that were ... I think Pat's then boyfriend, Jimmy Starrett, who was a painter, was involved. It's a really vague memory. Somehow I associate Marcia Tucker with this, but that might have been a different group of people. There was a period of time when I had a flirtation with men's groups that were in dialogue with feminism and inspired by feminism.
- Kristin Poor: Do you have any memories of conversations with Joan or any associations with Joan around conversations about feminism or any of these texts or reading or activities you were participating in?
- Douglas Crimp: I don't think so. I think it fed much more into my ... I was also reading, because at that point, after Stonewall, a lot of the early gay liberation texts are coming out, so it was I think much more an association ... It wasn't an art world association. Feminism doesn't have an impact in the art world so much until later in the 1970s. It's more of the essentialist feminist work that first emerges, I think. The kind of feminist work that was informed by film theory and so on that I became interested in is early 1980s. For me, I think my interest in feminism had more to do with my interest in queer stuff more than the art world.
- Kristin Poor: At that moment.
- Douglas Crimp: The way it manifested itself in the art world was not of such interest to me.
- Kristin Poor: Okay, thanks. We talked a bit about Jack Smith already: I wondered if you remember other people or things or ideas that came up as being influential for Joan from that time? Or things that you saw in relation to her?

- Douglas Crimp: I'm trying to think if, for example when I was first seeing Richard Foreman, whether I would have associated that with Joan and I think not, although I don't know why that would be. I don't know what would separate the two of them for me. But I think I really did have a sense that there was something called "performance art" that was going on in the art world that was different from the work that was really "theater," however unusual or experimental. Of course now it seems like Richard Foreman and Joan Jonas are pretty close to each other.
- Kristin Poor: Right, yes.
- Douglas Crimp: Maybe I thought of them as being close to each other, I don't know. But I don't remember thinking that and certainly, because the other theater that I was seeing is a continuation of that other tradition, I saw a lot of [Charles] Ludlam and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. That was a real consistent pleasure of theater-going throughout the 1970s for me. Of course that was very different from the other things. I somehow maintained—I don't know why, and I'm only realizing it now—but I maintained some kind of distinction, like category distinction almost, between theater as theater, theater that comes out of theater. Richard Foreman was understood as someone who was a theater director, right?
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Douglas Crimp: He directed actors; Joan didn't do that. They were different in that regard. Joan, she did have performers performing with her, but they weren't actors. Maybe some of them were actors, I don't know, but they didn't do what actors did. They didn't have lines, did they?
- Kristin Poor: There were some read texts.
- Douglas Crimp: There were some lines, yeah.
- Kristin Poor: Read texts.
- Douglas Crimp: There certainly weren't characters.
- Kristin Poor: Right, except for *Organic Honey*, but that was Joan herself.
- Douglas Crimp: That was her. That was Joan's alter ego. I don't know how interesting a question it even is, generically where something belongs. But except for the fact that I do think that Joan is sui generis. I think it's something that maybe accounts for the fact

that her work was not as taken up as it should have been or as it deserves to have been. I don't know.

Kristin Poor:

This question of this moment of the emergence of performance and Joan's association with that for you is interesting. I wanted to ask you a bit more about that. Your first piece that you wrote about performance was your text on Joan in *Studio International*, is that right?

Douglas Crimp:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kristin Poor:

So in 1976. How did that commission come about? Did you pitch Joan to the magazine or did they ask you?

Douglas Crimp:

No. I had a very good friend at the Guggenheim, she was a secretary to the director, and we were—when we were both at the Guggenheim—very close to each other. Her name is Lucinda Hawkins. Lucinda at a certain point moved to Europe and eventually ended up in London. She ended up working for *Studio International* which decided to do a special issue on performance. It might have been one of the very earliest ones actually.

Douglas Crimp:

I can't remember whether Lucinda asked me to write about Joan or what I might want to write about. I think she may have asked me to write about Joan because she knew that I was interested in her work. My interest in Joan's work would have coincided with when we were friends in New York, so I suspect that she commissioned an essay on Joan. But I'm not a hundred percent sure. I might have proposed it.

Douglas Crimp:

Anyway, that's how that came about. It was a time when I was pretty much floundering around trying to think about what I was doing as a writer. I was working on this project with Helene Winer on this art slide distribution thing [Art Information Distribution]. It was an entrepreneurial thing but actually had real ambitions, textually. That actually had been the main piece of writing that I was doing. It was important for me because it's something that I actually—when I was trying to settle down and do writing and become more serious about becoming a critic—that was a piece of writing that I was able to do, that I felt good about. It was right after that that I went to graduate school and ended up at *October* and did the *Pictures* show. Joan played a role in the *Pictures* show.

Kristin Poor:

Yes. Would you speak a bit about that? About what Joan's work has meant for you, in terms of how it's influenced your ideas?

Douglas Crimp: Yeah. On the one hand I think it's just the way that she represents a centrality of performance for the thinking about art during that period—performance in a wide sense that included her work, as somebody who was really an inventor of artist video and someone who was making important films, someone who was making performances, saw a performance as a work of art, in a way that it didn't really have a tradition. I've always thought, for example, that RoseLee Goldberg's notion that there's this twentieth-century history in performance art, I find that wrong. Performance emerges from time to time in various aspects, but to try to make it into a kind of lineage doesn't for me work at all. It doesn't really then also allow for the innovation of somebody like Joan. She's just not like anyone else. She doesn't come out of anything. It's a true invention.

Douglas Crimp: I came to understand eventually—as I think I write about in the little framing of my text in the Joan Simon book [*In the Shadow of a Shadow: The Work of Joan Jonas*, 2015]—I came to understand the notion of performance as being central to what the people in the *Pictures* show were doing. Maybe gave it more of a centrality than ... I don't know, because I think there was a moment when performance was very generative for that group of people, like when Robert Longo was actually doing performances and so on.

Douglas Crimp: I don't know how much that's persisted, although there certainly are connections to music, for example, and to dance that are strong amongst those people. But it's a very different generation, it's a different sensibility. There may be overlaps—I think they're probably are—but I can imagine Joan being equally interested in [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder as Cindy Sherman.

Kristin Poor: Yes. Overlapping interests.

Douglas Crimp: Yeah.

Kristin Poor: Would you talk a bit more about how you see or saw Joan transforming event into image through the video camera? It seems connected to this *Pictures* idea that you're talking about here.

Douglas Crimp: Yeah, I don't know how much I can say about it.

Kristin Poor: It's okay. What do you think about the promise that Joan's work holds for future artists and critics? You've positioned it and really teased out the ways that it was generative at the time and has continued to be. I just wonder if you have any thoughts about that.

- Douglas Crimp: Yeah. It's hard. I think that Joan's work is so "Joan."
- Kristin Poor: Yes.
- Douglas Crimp: Maybe that's true of ... It's just that you can take somebody like Jack Smith: it's a sensibility that resonates across a very wide range of queer thinking. There's a desire to be Jack Smith or desire to encounter Jack Smith or a regret of not having or just luxuriating in the sheer gorgeousness of *Normal Love*. Joan has such a unique sensibility. It's one that you can really give yourself over to, I think. But I don't know how it translates into a future, or if it does, except insofar as it seems to be such pure, childlike invention. That seems to me so at the core of what at least certain kinds of great art can be, that you can actually experience that in a very raw, first-hand way when you see Joan's work, because it's just Joan being Joan in some weird way. Although of course it's not, it feels that way.
- Kristin Poor: That it conveys that immediacy of creating in this mode.
- Douglas Crimp: Yeah, and the playfulness and the joy of it.
- Kristin Poor: Yeah.
- Douglas Crimp: In addition to the real brilliance of it, the vigor.
- Kristin Poor: Yes. Yeah, that's very interesting, thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or that you think is important to keep in mind?
- Douglas Crimp: I don't think so. I feel like I'm pretty talked out.
- Kristin Poor: Yes. Well, thank you again. I really appreciate it.
- Douglas Crimp: Sure, yeah.

This transcript is intended to provide an accessible form of audio content. It has been edited for factual accuracy and clarity. Any alterations are noted with brackets.