

*Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles:
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago*

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #58

GOULD, DEBORAH (1964-) AM 1990 PhD 2000

At U of C: 1987-2004

Interviewed: 2013 (1 session)

Interviewer: Lauren Stokes

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

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Interview August 13, 2013 at Deborah's house in Chicago.

[00:00:00]

LS: Hi, this is Lauren Stokes, and I'm interviewing Deborah Gould on August 13, 2013 in her home. Alright, so we like to start these interviews by asking how you ended up at the University of Chicago.

DG: Let's see. I graduated from college in 1986, and I guess my senior year I applied for graduate schools, and would have started in the fall of 86 but decided to take a year off, and so asked—and Chicago was a place where I got a good package, so I decided to go. I think there were other reasons, probably, I think I wanted to be in an urban environment. I had grown up in the suburbs outside of San Francisco, and had gone to Wesleyan, in Middletown, Connecticut, for college, and I think really unconsciously I was wanting to be in an urban environment, and so of the places that I got in to graduate school, Chicago just seemed appealing to me. I don't think I knew at all what I was getting into in terms of the University of Chicago. I think I knew that it was a very cerebral place, a very brainy place, but I don't think I really knew. So anyway, I took, I ended up taking a year off and asked Chicago to defer my admission and they did, so I started graduate school in 87, and yeah. So I think there was some unconscious desires on my part to be in an urban environment [LS: Sure] but I don't think I realized that at all, I just thought "Oh, it's a good school, I'll go there, they gave me a good package, I'll go there."

LS: Yeah, all good reasons. What were you studying at that point in time?

DG: It's kind of funny, I came in, I was in the Political Science department and I was going to study weapons systems and deterrence and balances of power in international politics, basically. John Mearsheimer was in the department at the time, I don't know if he still is, and I think I kind of came to study with him. Yeah. And then within the first couple of years... Well, then I dropped out in 1990, and by that point my intellectual interests had really transformed dramatically. [LS: Sure], and I kind of, I got involved, I'm trying to think when—I mean, when I came to the graduate program, there was one tenured

woman in the department, and I think there had only ever been one tenured woman [LS: Wow], and that was Susanne Rudolph. There may have been—I don't even think there were other women who were untenured, on the tenure track at that point.

Fairly quickly a number of us formed a group called Shakti, which was a feminist, we called it a feminist study action group, and I'm trying to remember, that was maybe in 1987, maybe 1988, and it included, it was all political science women graduate students, and we were doing a lot of study amongst ourselves and we also were putting pressure on the department to hire more women, do more to get more women graduate students there, and, I don't think I had any idea that the University of Chicago had the reputation that it had, I don't think I realized that it was not the most hospitable place for women.

LS: Did you have, kind of, experiences in your first couple of years that made you realize that it was not the most hospitable place?

DG: Well, I think the fact that there were probably I don't know how many faculty were in the political science department at that point [LS: but one woman, yeah], but it was a large department, and it was certainly over 20 and it was maybe over 30 faculty. [LS: Yeah.] Yeah, one woman, and she had a lot of prestige, actually, and she was close to retirement, I think, at that point, maybe she retired within ten years after that or something, but for me it was a period when I was... so even though I started college in 1982, so I was in high school during the 70s, and kind of, I would say I kind of missed a lot of the feminist agitation that was going on. I wasn't in a consciousness-raising group, I'm just a little bit too young for that, and so I missed a lot of that, and so I arrive at the University of Chicago...

And I went to Wesleyan, very kind of radical place, and I think I had a real response against that, and actually had some slightly conservative—a slightly conservative response to all of that, and did not get involved in a lot of, there was a lot of activism going on at that point, anti-apartheid stuff and other kinds of activism, I didn't get involved in any of that, but as a senior in college I wrote a BA thesis on US foreign policy in Nicaragua and that started to politicize me, so I kind of got politicized in my own little study carrel in a way [LS laughs], and then the summer after college I started doing some political work around Central America, anti-intervention work, and then went to graduate school. So I think I was becoming politicized, and then got to this environment that was kind of conservative, really. [LS: More so than Wesleyan, certainly.] Yes, much more so than Wesleyan, and so I took up with some women who were very anti-racist. There were a number of women from India, from Sri Lanka as well, and some white women kind of coming out of an anti-racist perspective, and I think that became an important—contentious, but an important site for me in beginning to unravel my own kind of liberal views about race, and I started getting much more radicalized. But nothing in particular—I mean, it was maybe something about the environment and being around these women and starting to study, and read, and have reading groups and study groups where we talked about male supremacy and things like that. I think that all started to kind of have an effect on me. But there weren't any, there wasn't any serious harassment. I mean, there was this one guy in my program who I had been very close

friends with, he wanted to be in a relationship, I didn't want to be in a relationship with him, and at a certain point he really did harass me and it became an issue, and I remember actually I went to talk to Susanne Rudolph about it, thinking that she would be an ally, and not a lot happened there, but that wasn't a deeply politicizing event for me or anything like that. [LS: OK.]

Really where I started to realize that the University of Chicago was a pretty conservative place was when we started doing some activism around—and this must have been in 89/90—when, and I'm sure you've heard about this, a group, some students who had been suspected of being involved in a hate group, quote unquote, a white supremacist group, actually. Well, they called themselves the Great White Brotherhood of the Iron Fist [LS: Right], and some students had been suspended from the University for their suspected involvement. And in, I think it was either in 1989 or—yeah, I think in 1989 they were going to be allowed to graduate, or one of them was going to be allowed or something like that, and so a number of people, and at this point I had kind of hooked up with women, lesbians primarily, from other, in other departments, and we did all this activism to try to challenge the administration for allowing these students to graduate. So that's when I started to get really politicized.

And I had also kind of—[laughs] I would say now—*finally* started to act on my desires to be, to get it on with women, so quote unquote, so I was, quote unquote, I had come out by that point although I had already years before realized “I want to be with women,” but I hadn't really known what to do about that. [Laughter] And so that was a very politicizing experience I think, and I started hanging out with women, I don't know if you're interviewing them, but people who were really instrumental for me in this period were like Kate Schechter and Susan Seizer. Susan was in Anthropology and Kate was I think at that point in the Divinity School, and they eventually became lovers, and then there was an undergrad who became my lover, Elizabeth [redacted]. And she was a senior and I was a third-year graduate student or a second-year graduate student maybe. And that relationship didn't last for very long actually, but all of us were involved with other people, like Teri—and I can't remember her last name, but Kate would remember, and she was a graduate student I think in Anthropology maybe, she was studying China, I can't remember, something about Chinese cross-gender theater or something like that, so really interesting stuff she was doing and I'm sure she has published really, I bet really interesting work. All of them were incredibly brilliant, interesting thinkers and at that point I was, I started reading voraciously and then quickly dropped out of Chicago.

[11:36]

LS: OK. Where did you meet other lesbians?

DG: Yeah, so I don't know. [LS laughs] I mean, Regenstein library strikes me as a really important place because there was—for some reason a lot of us, unbeknownst to one another I think, worked in what was then where the Reserves were, and you would get, you would have to check out Reserves, and then there was a room there with some kind of, I don't know what they called them, like cubbies or something that you could study in,

and also some tables and stuff like that, and for some reason I often worked in that room, and this is really interesting cause it actually almost sounds like gay male cruising, and now that I think about it, that's really, that's one way to characterize it except that we were dykes, and there was a lot of checking one another out [LS: In the reserves room!], in the reserves. [LS: Alright!] And so that's how I got, that's how I met Kate, at least I think so, but also that's how I met this undergrad Elizabeth, who then in the reserve room asked me, said, "Do you wanna go," we never had even spoken to one another and she said, "So-and-so is playing up at the Green Mill, do you wanna go?" Or she said "Do you want to get together?" and I said "I was planning to go to the Green Mill tonight, you wanna come?" So somehow that happened, and so the library was actually kind of this... [LS: That's so funny, do you remember what floor it was on?] Yeah, it was on the entry level. [LS: It was on the entry floor, OK.] But they've redesigned the library since then. [LS: They have.] So you would walk in, and it would be, it was this room off to the left, and now that has been, now I think that's where Special Collections or something maybe is? [LS: Yeah, that sounds right.] But yeah, I mean, I hope that you all do interview some of these other people, because my memory, I don't know if I'm remembering this correctly, but that's where I think, that's how I met a lot of these people.

And then—things took off kind of quickly from there, in terms of, I mean, I at that point, so this is like 1989, and Elizabeth and I got together in 1989, and I became very, and she was already friends with Kate and Susan, and I think I had met Kate independently, but anyway, we all then became friends, and that, I think that it was that spring semester that we all started doing, organizing against the graduation of these students, I'm pretty sure. [LS: OK.] And then at the same time in probably about May of that year, I got involved with ACT UP Chicago, actually, and then spent one more year in graduate school but was on my way out.

[14:40]

LS: OK. [DG: Yeah.] Was it just women who were organized in the, who were involved in that organizing...

DG: No, there were some men, too, there were some fabulous fags. I can't remember their names, these two guys who were lovers, two white guys, and I don't remember—and I'm pretty sure they were graduate students and I have no recollection of what department they were in—oh, Teri [redacted], maybe, was that... [LS: That sounds, I have no idea, I don't study China, but...] Yeah, those are the main people that I remember, organizing against the Great White Brotherhood of the Iron Fist and against the University. Hanna Grey was the president at the time, and I don't, yeah, there were other people involved, but I don't really remember them.

LS: Were you successful in getting them not to walk?

DG: No. [LS: No.] No, but it was successful in a lot of other ways. So one of the things that I remember feeling at the time was, how is it possible that this had happened earlier in the eighties and that I had applied to graduate school, talked to people, they had said "Come,"

and no one had told me about this incident, like the University was either really good at suppressing this information, or... and no one thought to tell incoming graduate students "By the way, you should know, there was this incident," [LS: Right], and it was a really orchestrated, it seemed to be a very orchestrated campaign of harassment against queer students and faculty and people perceived to be queer and their allies, and people received death threats, people's parents were sent letters saying "Your daughter," I mean people, it was interesting the kind of interesting confusions here, "Your daughter is an AIDS carrier," things like that and so kind of quote-unquote outing people as if they had AIDS and outing them for being queer, and people were getting death threats. So it was a really serious thing, it created, I think—I wasn't there at the time, I wasn't a student, but I think it created a real climate of intimidation and fear, and they had been suspended, I guess, only for their suspected involvement, but nevertheless, and there was some entrapment, too, where the people doing it were taking out ads in the *Reader* soliciting lovers or something, and...

LS: I think they were actually just looking for a gay roommate in the *Reader*, so it wasn't even, I mean, not that that makes it better, but it was just, like, a gay roommate, and then they were calling your parents.

DG: And then they were harassed, yeah. And from our organizing around that, so one of the things that was very positive about it was it was probably one of the first times in that time period, the late 80s, early 90s, where queer politics was really pronounced on that campus. I'm not sure, I don't know the history, but it seemed like at least an important moment of an eruption, kind of an eruption of queer politics. [LS: Yeah.] And we got all this media attention, and we did kind of theatrical actions, I can't remember them all now, but Susan had been lovers with Jennifer Miller, who was in Circus Amok, and so she had all of these kind of juggling and other circus tactics or something as part of her repertoire, and if I'm recalling correctly I think that stuff kind of entered into our demonstrations, so they were campy and theatrical and I think we... I remember going into the administration building a lot at that point, and maybe taking over Hanna Grey's office, but not for long, and no one was arrested, and it was at those demonstrations that someone, ACT UP Chicago heard about this, and sent someone, or someone who lived in Hyde Park, Sandra Johnson, she ended up at one of the demos and she came up and talked to me and said "Will you come to ACT UP to tell us what's going on, so that maybe we can support you in your actions?" Which I did and then I never left ACT UP. [LS: Yeah.] So then that was a really important moment for me.

But so I remember the guy, or guys, graduated, and I think we protested the graduation, and I also, I remember some moment with TV, I don't know, local TV stations sent cameras and reporters to a meeting that we were holding, and I just remember, and the administration sent their representative, and I remember saying something at one of those meetings about, "This is an important moment and the goal should be, we should embarrass the University for their," and this idea of embarrassment and shaming the University, and I remember this administration person just was furious with me for thinking that it would be OK to embarrass the University of Chicago. [LS: Sure.] And I think I must have felt at the time that the only way to go up against this large institution

was to embarrass them, because they were... and now, in retrospect, I really don't know what I think about the politics around that. I'm not interested in prosecution [LS: Right], given the prison-industrial complex and who typically is prosecuted. I... they had been suspended, so in a way they had quote-unquote 'served their time,' I'm not so sure that it was, I don't really know that today if I understood the, if I looked at the situation again that I would think we should protest their graduation. [LS: Sure.] To be perfectly honest I don't know where I would come down on that, but in terms of, but thinking about politics in a broader sense, where it's about prefiguring the world you want to live in, kind of injecting a queer sensibility into a rather stodgy, conservative environment, meeting one another, trying to build something together, all of that was part of what was going on.

And along with that, not only did I get hooked up with ACT UP at that point, but a woman who was working at the University of Chicago hospitals at that point, named Charlotte Beavers, came to one of the demonstrations and gave me her card and said "We," meaning largely black women who had been working at the U of C hospitals for anywhere from ten to thirty years, were being systematically harassed by the management, and so she approached me and she said "I think we should form a coalition," and they're separate entities, University of Chicago Hospitals and University of Chicago, but they have the same board, or at least at the time they had the same board of trustees I guess, and so we formed a coalition with them, and I ended up getting much more involved, the student part of it kind of stopped as the summer came, that's often how student activism goes, right [LS: Right], and we dispersed as students, we largely dispersed, but prior to that we had formed a coalition with, actually Operation PUSH and these women and the unions representing them at the University of Chicago hospitals, union workers, I mean these workers at the University of Chicago Hospitals, and with someone else, the Woodlawn Organization, because there was a, the University of Chicago hospitals was going to be building an incinerator that was, or they were going to be using an incinerator to get rid of medical waste [LS: OK], and it was an incinerator near a grammar school on 60th or 61st so a black grammar school, and so the Woodlawn Organization, TWO, they opposed that, and Operation PUSH was with them opposing that, and Operation PUSH was with the Hospital workers, and so then we, these largely white lesbian and gay students, we got involved in that—although there were some straight students who were supporting us at the time, as well, now that I think about it—and so it was this really strange, and pretty interesting, coalition. As soon as we formed, the Woodlawn Organization won its demand around the incinerator and hospital waste being incinerated... [LS: Which was not to have the incinerator next to...] They didn't want it next to it, yeah. And so they won that battle and then they left the coalition, I remember [LS: OK], and I remember thinking "Hmm, that's kind of not so solidaristic, man," but I think PUSH stayed with us for a while mostly because they were concerned about the Hospital workers, and then the student side of it kind of dissipated once these students had been allowed to graduate, and we then weren't that organized any longer, but a lot of us remained involved and started doing a lot of work around the Hospitals. [LS: OK.] And just making the connections about who the University of Chicago values and who is devalued [LS: Right] and kind of injecting a slightly queer sensibility in the sense of, I mean, I'm not sure how to think about it now, but in a way, most of the students were queer, and most of the hospital workers weren't self-identified as such, they were self-identified as hetero, but here we were working

together... and also most of us were white and most of them were black, and it was a really interesting coalition. And I ended up doing more with the hospital stuff. [LS: Right.] Yeah.

[26:00]

LS: Was that successful, ultimately, in kind of stopping the harassment that those women had been experiencing?

DG: Well, we really agitated around that. And the kind of harassment was, it was amazing, it was, women had to ask permission—and these were people like in the billing department, and various things like that, who were really running the hospital on some level, they're making sure it can work [LS: Yeah], and they were getting what were called demerits, which made it sound like... they were being treated like children, and if they—so Charlotte Beavers, who was kind of a piece of work, but I adored her, and she would wear some flamboyant something on her head, and her supervisor would tell her that she couldn't wear that at the hospital [LS: Oh wow], and they had to ask permission to go to the bathroom. [LS: OK.] And they got demerits if they took too long, or if they came in five minutes late, or if they took too long at lunch, and various things like that, so it was a real, it too seemed to be a kind of systematic campaign of harassment. [LS: Right.] And the union got very involved, and again in terms of quantifiable victories or successes, I'm not, I don't really recall, but we brought a lot of attention to the issue [LS: Sure], I think we may have gotten some people who had been laid off reinstated but I don't really remember.

But in terms of my own political development, it was a really important moment [LS: It was a really important moment], yeah, really important in making, I think, this is a period where I had been, with Shakti I had been reading a lot about racism, and I had in a very bookish kind of way, really gone through a crisis of sorts, where I realized that my kind of liberal upbringing had disallowed me from a more radical analysis about how white supremacy works, and I hadn't really begun to confront what it means to be white in a white supremacist society, and an ongoingly racist and white supremacist society, and so I think through books, and I really think book learning is very important, I had been learning a ton about that, and then what this activism did was, and then I was also kind of learning a lot about, I was reading stuff about lesbian separatism, I read kind of this whole feminist bibliography [LS: Yeah], to try and come to terms with what I was experiencing and to make sense of the world through that lens, and was making a lot of sense of the world through that lens, and was kind of eating up the debates within feminism about things, but it was just a very self... I was kind of teaching myself a lot, but I was in study groups too [LS: Right], and then to start to do this activism, first the kind of gay activism, and then it really quickly for me, it became anti-racist activism, not that the two can't go together [LS: Right], but they don't always go together, and in this case the thing that became more compelling to me was really the anti-racist activism, and so it was a really, it was just putting into practice things that I was trying to understand and make sense of through books, and readings, and discussions, and it kind of, I think I

got a taste of something that I had been craving. I didn't know it had been my desire until I met it in practice, and so it was a really vibrant, compelling time period for me.

[30:05]

LS: You've used the word queer, and like a queer sensibility [DG: Yeah], a lot around the politics, and was that the word you were using at the time, and what did it mean, I mean, what does that mean to you?

DG: Yeah. Well, I think that I'm being a little bit anachronistic. [LS: OK.] So I mean, by 1990, in 1990 Queer Nation forms, I think it's 1990. [LS: That sounds right.] And yeah, it may have been 89 but I'm pretty sure it's 1990. And so this stuff is all happening in 89, I think, more. And so I actually think that we were using words like dykes, and fags, and gays and lesbians, I think, and I don't know that we were really using queer, but we might have been.

And I mean multiple things I think when I use the term. [LS: Yeah.] Sometimes I just mean LGBT, or LG, or whatever, sometimes I mean a politic that's anti-normative, sometimes I mean a politic that is really oriented towards a fundamental transformation of society, and recognizing all of the intersectional ways in which society, the ways in which power works, and what needs to be therefore transformed, so I think I use it in really different ways.

LS: That's great, yeah. [DG: Yeah.] Do you remember a group called Queer U? Was that... I've like, seen scattered references to it, but was that part of the University in like 1990? [DG: Hmm.] It might have started like as you were [DG: Dropping out] ACTing up.

DG: Right, exactly. I feel like that name is vaguely familiar, but I don't remember. [LS: OK, OK.] And I don't know that the group that organized to oppose the graduation of these guys who had been suspended, I'm not sure that we had a name.

LS: I know the Coalition was called the Coalition of People United for a Responsible University of Chicago [DG: Oh yeah!], which is good. [DG: OH yeah, I do kind of remember that, yeah.] So yeah... OK, OK, I think that was my question, right. So queer, queer politics, where did I want to go next, where were we... Oh right, so you mentioned your last year that you were at the University, you were in ACT UP, and that was taking up more of your energy by that time. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[32:48]

DG: Yeah! So by this point my intellectual interests had really transformed, and in fact I started to think that I—at that point I think I was moving towards what we called a qualifying exam, and I wasn't sure what project I would do for that, and I wanted it to lead into my dissertation, but I was now, I had completely moved away from international politics and weapons systems, and I had, I was more, I would say, political science is a very, in my view, well, it's a very rigid discipline. It has five sub-fields, and they're very

strangely defined, so that American Politics is one of the sub-fields, Comparative Politics is another one of the sub-fields, so most people who are interested in social movements, let's say, if they study social movements in Europe, or Latin America, or Africa, they're a comparativist, but if you study social movements in the United States, you're an Americanist, even though American Politics really is the study of the legislature and the judiciary and the presidency. It's like very institutionally oriented [LS: Sure] and so extra-institutional politics, oddly Political Science doesn't really have a place for that.

Now it maybe does more, but at the time it didn't, and so I was really, I think I had moved away from International Politics, which is one of the five sub-fields, and I was moving more towards Comparative, being a comparativist in a sense, except I was interested in American Politics, in a way, I was interested in the political broadly, capaciously understood as struggles over power, so I was really interested in social movements and other kinds of activism and so for a minute there I thought "Well, what's going on in the University of Chicago Hospitals is pretty interesting, and maybe I will go in that direction," and I actually started interviewing some of the women who were working in the Hospital, and I probably interviewed a few, but then I also, I started doing ACT UP, and... So I started taking classes that were not in Political Science [LS: OK], which was totally allowed, it was not a problem, I took something from Leora, I remember, I mean I had already been doing reading classes with her, but I took some, Europe and its Others, I think, in the History Department, and I started taking courses in Anthro [LS: Sure], but more importantly than all of that, really, I was involved in ACT UP and doing studies with people in ACT UP, where we would read stuff together and then discuss it, and it was amazing, and I was learning much more from being involved in this movement and being in the streets, and from the very queer—and it was queer, at that point—queer politics at that point was really vibrant and interesting and there were debates, and there was a written media, there were all of these magazines that suddenly cropped up, and I was just trying, and all of this interesting theory coming out of the AIDS movement, and I was all up in that, and interested, and that's what was capturing my imagination [LS: Yeah] at that point. And I had no idea what I wanted to do my dissertation on, and I wasn't sure who I would work with in that department, and I wasn't compelled by it at all, and it just didn't...

So I took a leave of absence, as soon as I took the leave of absence I thought "I'm never going back," and I was working at that point at the Seminary Co-Op bookstore, I started as someone working on the register and everything, but fairly quickly had become, I was in charge of the processing of books in the back room, and then I was a buyer, and it was really fun, it was a really fun job, but the most important thing was that I had a lot of flexibility in my hours [LS: OK] and I had convinced my boss, Jack Cella, to give me Fridays off, and I said "Because I have all these other things that I want to be thinking about and working on, and I really can get my work done in a four-day week [LS: Sure], so I would get in to work at 7 AM—and by then I had moved out of Hyde Park, because every night I was going to the North Side for meetings [LS: Yeah], because with ACT UP we had a meeting almost every night.

[38:05]

LS: Was ACT UP centered...

DG: It was up on the North Side. [LS: North, yeah.] And so I was kind of commuting at night, and so I decided this makes no sense, so I moved up there, and so I was commuting down, and I was often, for a good long time I took the L down there, which was kind of this convoluted trip because it was such a, you know, to get from the North Side to the South Side [LS: [laughs] Is still a problem], is still a problem, and that's really because of structural racism [LS: Right], but at any rate, my work life was fun and interesting, I got to see all the books coming in and think about all the new ideas, and I got to read, I had time to read, both on the L getting to work but also because I had convinced Jack that I should only have to work four days a week for the same salary [LS: That sounds great], and so I was working from seven to three so I could avoid rush hour if I was driving, and then I had time to do all of this activism, and Jack also was incredibly supportive of me saying "There's a really important action that's gonna be going on, we're doing a three-day thing, and can I have these days off?" and he said "Sure." So it was one of those jobs that allowed me to support myself, still be around ideas, and be able to do as much activism as I needed to be doing at that point. [LS: That sounds ideal.] Yeah, it was. I know, sometimes I wonder, why am I not doing it still? Why did I go on and get the PhD and now my life is much more constrained, to be perfectly honest. And yeah, I continued working at the bookstore even after I came back to University of Chicago in 1996.

LS: OK, so that was a job that you continued for a really long time.

DG: Yeah, I was there for eight years, from 1990, and then I won't give the details of what happened at the end in 1998, except on a very superficial level, I'll just say that it was hard for me to commit to hours when I was also trying to, I was TAing or teaching at that point maybe, and I was needing to get my work done and stuff like that, so. [LS: Yeah.] So that relationship ended, but Jack and I still get along fine.

So I continued to be kind of in the University of Chicago community [LS: sphere], or sphere, and people coming into the bookstore all the time, but I really had an attitude at that point, I was kind of like "Fuck this place, so conservative, so inside their books [LS: Yeah], they don't know what's happening in the real world, and fuck the academy," and I was kind of, I had a chip on my shoulder, I would say, and really never thought that I would go back. [LS: Yeah.] And the timing of my going back is coincident with the movement, with ACT UP falling apart, actually. I mean, it fell apart in January—in Chicago—in January of 1995, but had been falling apart for 1994, and then... and I didn't go back to graduate school until fall of 1996 [LS: OK], so there was some time there, but it was a time period where I was suffering from what I would now call political depression, and really unclear about where to be putting my political energies. I didn't... ACT UP had been this incredible life-changing, world-changing experience, and so many of my friendships now are from that time period, actually, and I do a little bit date my life before and after [LS: before and after ACT UP, yeah], there's before ACT UP and after ACT UP.

So yeah, I was kind of struggling for a bit and then sometime in the spring of 1996, CLAGS, which is the CUNY Lesbian And Gay Studies group, I guess, I think that's what it stands for, in New York, and they offer fellowships, and even if you're an independent scholar, so you don't have to be affiliated with a university, and so I remember taking a two-week vacation from the Seminary Co-Op and using that time to write up a proposal to try and get some funding so that I could take a longer leave from the Seminary Co-Op and do a project, and I wanted to do a project about the decline of ACT UP, so I was trying to make sense of my own history but also this larger history of a movement, and try to think about what had happened to it, and I wrote up... [LS: What time was that? That you were...] This is 1996, spring of 1996.

LS: So the wound is still very raw, when you're kind of making this proposal.

DG: Yeah, absolutely, and at that point—yeah, it's interesting that I, in that moment, was only focused on the decline. My dissertation and book ended up being about the whole [LS: the whole arc of it, right] the whole arc of it, so that changed, but at that moment I was just, I really wanted, I mean, all of my friends, we would sit around trying to figure out what had happened. Cause certainly what had not happened was that we had succeeded, and therefore there was no need for a movement. That's kind of the lore, is that “Well, you got the drugs, and therefore there was no need for a movement,” but actually when the movement declined, protease inhibitors were not yet on the scene, so the cocktail had not yet come out, people were still dying all around us, from among us, so it wasn't that, and so we were all like “Ughhh,” depressed, and thinking “What has happened, and what can we do, and what do we need to be doing now,” politically, and it was a really hard time period, we kind of couldn't figure it out, and so my comrades, I feel like they were my comrades, that's what we were doing, trying to figure it out. So anyway, I thought “Well, I actually have a book I want to write,” and OK, so I applied for this CLAGS fellowship, I didn't get it, but I loved the process of trying to come up with this proposal, and I remember just spending day and night doing this, and my lover, who at the time, is the same lover I have now, Laurie, and I remember just kind of running it by her and thinking I want to write a book about this movement, and I think why not get a PhD out of it, because when I dropped out, I was basically ABD. [LS: OK. Had you gotten your MA at that point?] I had gotten my Master's, but I hadn't, I actually hadn't done the qualifying exam [LS: Right], and I still had the language requirement, and I may have even had a couple of courses, but I was very close to ABD [LS: Yeah], and so after that experience, and I'm not sure if it was before or after CLAGS rejected the proposal, but I just thought “Ah, I really would like to go back to graduate school.”

So I called up the administrator of the Political Science department, Kathy Anderson, I don't know if she still is, I think she may still be in that position, and I said “What do I...” By that point I had taken, I think in 1990/91 it was considered a leave of absence, 91/92 it was considered a leave of absence, and at a certain point she said “Look.” [LS: “This isn't a leave.”] Yeah, and I said, “OK, I'm done,” and I had already considered myself having dropped out and never going back, so I called Kathy and said “What do I have to do to get back in?” And she said “Just find some faculty who you want to work with who are willing to work with you, and they need to make the case to readmit you and to

reinstate your funding.” And I don’t really know the inner workings, I don’t know how it happened, but I—and so some people suggested, and I wish I could remember who, and maybe it was Kathy, who as the administrator of the entire department really knows the workings of a department, and I’m not sure, but she may have been the one who suggested to me, “Talk to Bill Sewell, talk to Michael Dawson,” I’m not exactly sure how that happened, but anyway, these were people who had been hired since I had left. [LS: OK.] Cathy Cohen wasn’t yet there, she hadn’t yet been hired, but at any rate I’m pretty sure the first person I spoke with was Bill Sewell, who, you know, trained as a historian, read by a lot of sociologists, but had a joint appointment in Political Science and History, and just recently retired. Anyway, I went to talk to him, told him what I wanted to write about, and he said, “I know nothing about what you’re talking about, and I would love to work with you.” And I was like “Cool!” [LS laughs] “Right on, man!” He said “So I’m not gonna be able to give you guidance in terms of the substance of what you’re interested in, but I think you can get that elsewhere,” and I knew I could get a lot from him because intellectually he’s so creative and interesting and a mensch to boot. And so I thought OK, I can definitely work with him, then I went and talked to Michael Dawson, and he also was very supportive, I remember him saying “OK, it sounds to me like you have three dissertation projects here, there’s one about this, there’s one about this, there’s one about this,” anyway, I thought yeah, I can work with this guy, and then I spoke with Leora, and she too was game, and I knew I could work with her, and then...

LS: She was the only one you had known previously, from your previous incarnation as a student.

DG: Yes, exactly. As a weapons, as a student, exactly, she didn’t know me as the weapons person, cause I had done some feminist, we had done some study groups with her, some reading groups with her [LS: OK] as well. And then I got George Chauncey, I talked to George Chauncey and he was also on my committee, and so I started again in the fall of 96 and I quickly got the qualifying paper out of the way which ended up just being I think a draft of the dissertation prospectus or something like that. So it was a strange... and at that point, so I came back in ’96, I mean, I don’t know how interesting this is from a kind of queer history perspective, but it was a very queer experience to come back. [LS: I bet.] I had been on that campus throughout because I had been at the Seminary Co-Op, which is on the campus literally, or basically, and I had walked over to Swift to get lunch almost every day, and to get a donut in the morning, and I had a lot of contact with that place but as someone who worked down there, not as someone who was a student and not as someone who was a intellectual, or...

[00:50:00]

LS: And it sounded like your kind of social life had also moved, North.

DG: And my social life was completely, yeah, it was not connected to the University at all at that point. And I, so I remember the feeling of suddenly being a student again there, which—and of course I had kind of rejected the place in my mind [LS: Yeah], I’m never going back, it’s a stupid university, the academy is stupid, if you really wanna learn

anything you gotta be in the streets, and I had all these attitudes, and then suddenly I had changed my mind and had decided I did wanna go back and get a PhD, and...

LS: Had you ever thought about trying to get a PhD somewhere else, or was like...

DG: Well, my life was so connected [LS: connected to Chicago] to Chicago at that point, and my lover was in Chicago, but more than that my whole friendship network is in Chicago. [LS: Right.] And by then I had already lived in Chicago, well, '87, '96, I had lived in Chicago for almost ten years. God! Almost... only that! [LS: You didn't really want to leave.] Yeah, I didn't really want to leave, and I didn't want to go through the effort of like reapplying, and having to get in some place else [LS: Doing everything again, yeah.] Yeah. It just seemed so easy, and they made it so easy, which I really commend them for. I don't know if it would—I think after I came back they changed the... normative time became a big issue. [LS: Normative time is a big issue now.] It was never a big issue, when I was there it was not a big issue. So if they use normative time for someone like me, I... it took me thirteen years. [LS: Right.] Because there was a six-year hiatus, and then there's seven years of actual—three at the beginning and four the second time around. Normative time, I have a lot of problems with that, I understand it now as the Director of Graduate Studies in my department, but for people who—we don't all take the same trajectory. [LS: Right.]

But anyway it was a very queer return in the sense that I had this bodily experience, it was a very bodily experience of something that I can't even put words to it. One day I was there as a worker at the Seminary Co-Op and I continued working for the first couple of years back, but I suddenly was on that campus as a student again and I felt like I didn't know the campus, I suddenly felt... I don't know, it was very strange. And I remember Norma Field, who teaches in I think East Asian, maybe she's retired by now, but I remember her saying to me—cause there was a, we had started, Shakti had started the Gender and Society Workshop, which I think still goes on. I don't know if it still goes on, but it still went on when I returned to graduate school. [LS: Yeah. It's called Gender Studies now, but yeah.] OK. So the Gender and Society, we had started that, and...

LS: Sorry, can I interrupt you for a second? [DG: Yeah.] I just came up with a question. Why was it called Shakti?

DG: Well, Shakti, if I recall correctly, is a female god in Hinduism that meant something about female energy [LS: OK], or something like that, and the people, some of the people in that were, their ethnicity was Indian and I'm not sure if they were actually from India or their parents were, but, yeah, that was I think why.

LS: OK, yeah, I just was curious, so. [DG: Yeah.] So Gender and Society...

DG: So Gender and Society. So I started to go to that workshop again and the faculty were Leora and Leslie Salzinger who was in Sociology at the time, and Sue Gal who was in Anthropology, and Norma Field, who I think was in East Asian Civilization or whatever that department was called, and so anyway, I do remember Norma at some point saying

to me, I said to her “It feels so weird, this disjuncture between yesterday and today, literally,” and she said “You should be writing that down, you should be keeping track of that.” [Laughter] I don’t think I did, but anyway so on my return I didn’t really, I didn’t have much of a relationship with students at that point, with my fellow graduate students I have no idea, I mean I started going to the Social Theory workshop, which is Bill Sewell and Moishe Postone’s [LS: Right] workshop, and so I kind of knew that crew of people, so there were some people who we all graduated around the same time like Neil Brenner and Manu Goswami... but I didn’t really know them that well. So I wasn’t really...

LS: Well, you didn’t have courses to take, so that’s the time when you...

DG: Right, right, when you meet people, exactly. I was just kind of doing my work at that point, and yeah.

[00:55:10]

LS: Did you get any guff from anyone about having a project that was so personal? Just cause the University of Chicago can be known as a, you know, a theoretical place.

DG: Yeah, yeah. Well, everybody, whether I’m giving a talk at another institution, or, I mean... my committee members had no problems with it at all. [LS: Right.] Well, that’s not entirely true. George at a certain point I think thought that my narrative kind of was valorizing ACT UP and put ACT UP as the telos and the pre-ACT UP AIDS activism, he thought I was diminishing [LS: OK] because it wasn’t ACT UP. And it was a helpful critique. I don’t agree with him, and he ended up changing his mind, but I’m sure I also changed my argument to some degree. So I think he thought that I maybe needed a little bit more analytical distance, and I would say Bill Sewell was very helpful in getting me to make strange what had become my own common sense, which was ACT UP’s common sense, and as a historian, he gave me, he just kept on helping me to, or pushing me, I would say, to denaturalize and defamiliarize what was really familiar to me and make it strange. But I don’t think that—I didn’t catch a lot of flak for that.

There was some, on coming back some faculty who had known me before were a little strange when I returned, and there were some visual things that had changed, when I had been... my first time around as a graduate student, my hair—for one of the first times in my life, cause most of my life my hair has been quite short—but during graduate school the first time around, I had very long, very coily hair. [LS: Very long!] Very long, yeah, and it was kind of a Jew-fro, if I might. And then right around that time I had, for a whole variety of reasons I had cut my hair, and so by the time I came back my hair was maybe a little bit longer than it is now. It’s pretty short right now, but I—so there were certain people who kind of looked at me askance, like [DG presumably makes an expression]. [LS: Mmm-hmm.] And one person needed to talk to me, he said “Well, what do you like to be called now?” and I was like “You can call me Debbie,” and I think he thought that I had transitioned. [LS: OK.] Because he... and he just didn’t know how to read my gender, you know? [LS: Yeah.] And he was a jerk of a professor, to be perfectly honest. Although

I don't have any problem with him asking me point-blank, I think that's a perfectly fine question, but the way he did it was so—kind of gross, that... [LS: Yeah] So that was a little bit of a strange thing and then another thing happened, and this was from a professor who hadn't known me the first time around, but I sat in on his class and so he called roll the first day and he says "Debbie Gould" and I just raised my hand and said "Yeah, that's me," and he said "*Deborah* Gould?" and I said "Yeah," and he said "*You're Deborah* Gould?" and I said "Yeah, Deborah Gould," and he said "OK. Deborah Gould." And I now realize that it was a gender thing for him [LS: Yeah], that he thought he couldn't read my gender, whatever, he had difficulties realizing that my name would be Deborah, but so there were some weird things that I think are maybe specific to the University of Chicago, but probably not. [LS: Probably not, yeah.] It's just living in a two-gender regime.

But at any rate, mostly around my work I didn't really catch a lot of flak because I didn't have to deal with anyone, that's the beauty of being a graduate student, right? [LS laughs] Especially at that point where you've already taken all of your courses, you just have a committee, and if they are all on board... [LS: It sounds like they were a really good committee...] Yeah, they were pretty much on board, so yeah.

[00:59:38]

LS: But yeah, so you kind of were living, I guess, on the North Side—where were you living? The second time around?

DG: Let's see, by then, at that point I was living in Uptown, yeah.

LS: OK. And you mentioned that you've been with your lover since—is she from ACT UP as well, or...

DG: No, although our paths kind of crossed at that point. No, she, we met through—I mean, we kind of saw each other around town and I would say we met through mutual friends. [LS: OK.] Yeah, but not through, I mean, she had come to an ACT UP meeting at some point, she's an artist and her artist collaborative group called Haha was doing a project and they were, that had something to do with hydroponically growing vegetables that they were distributing to people with AIDS and they came to ACT UP to see if we would support the project. My recollection is that I was incredibly rude to her [LS laughs] when she came, but anyway. [Laughter] That's something else.

[01:01:00]

LS: Alright, let's see... did you know other LGBTQ students the second time you were there?

DG: Let's see. Well, I did know, yeah, there was someone in the Political Science department, [redacted], and I really liked her, she's great and I think she's teaching in Canada, but I can't recall, she went to Harvard and then I think maybe Toronto or McGill or something like that. She's great. But I didn't know her really well, we knew each other a bit but not

really well. [LS: OK.] And now that I think about it, I think she's queer, I'm pretty sure. [LS laughs] But no, I didn't really know anyone, or very few.

LS: Yeah, it sounds like you had just re-centered your life and you were doing your work there, your academic work, but the rest of your life had been re-centered in a different place. [DG: Yeah.] Alright, so I don't know if you want to talk [DG: Yeah, let me just think...] about that... what was going on in the wake of ACT UP?

[01:02:05]

DG: There were, I would say, a couple of years of trying to figure out what to do. [LS: Yeah.] Then... oh yeah, there were some dykes down in Hyde Park, in, they were graduate students in the Lit department, I think, Dana [redacted] and her lover Ada at the time, and we created a group called initially Ad Hoc Dykes, or something, and then... yeah, I can't quite remember what our name was, but... I mean, during the time I was in ACT UP I was also part of other groups, including like a group called the Chicago Co-Conspirators, which was a group of queers doing work around political prisoners in this country, which included some University of Chicago people as well, and then another group called QUASH, which was Queers United Against Straight-Acting Homosexuals or something like that. [LS: OK.] And we put out a—and that was in the early 90s, like the '93 March on Washington which was all about the military and marriage, and we, so we did some stuff, and it was in a moment where queer conservatives were really on the rise, so people like Andrew Sullivan, for example. [LS: In like '92?] '92 or '93 [LS: OK], that time period, and so we, and the gay movement had been, was taken over by the issues of the military, gays getting Don't Ask Don't Tell, and so it's the Clinton years, and the movement became obsessed with gays in the military and gay marriage, and so not only was ACT UP kind of declining in that moment, but what I had experienced as the kind of moment of, this queer moment, really, with all of this potential to challenge the way that intimacy is organized in our society and to challenge the ways in which—to challenge all of our social relations in some sense, that queer moment which had felt so open to me, and full of potential, was just being squashed, by in particular, well, the military and the marriage stuff. [LS: Yeah.] And so it was a really sad moment. So we had done, we had put out a broadside called “Why I Hated the March on Washington.” [LS: OK.] Yeah, which just had all of these analyses trying to inject into the gay movement a queer politic that would move things further and further to the left. More of a radical politic. And then a group of us formed this Ad Hoc Dykes or Ad Hoc Dykes and Bisexual Women, or something like that, cause we needed to have the bi women in there too, and we did another broadside that was called “It's Time to End the Gay Rights Movement as We Know It.” [LS: OK.] And that was, that included a bunch of University of Chicago graduate students, and I at that point had now gone back, and so that was '96 maybe.

LS: And so that was also a left, a left progressive group of women?

DG: Yeah. And then pretty quickly that group became, we opened up to men as well, and that group became Queer to the Left.

- LS: Oh, OK. I didn't know Queer to the Left started as a women's group.
- DG: Well, in a way, I would say, at least its forerunner was this Ad Hoc group, or at least that's the way I remember it. Or maybe the way to put it would be that there was a lot of the membership from that Ad Hoc group, a lot of us then transitioned into Queer to the Left. [LS: Sure.] But I have a feeling that we kind of said "Let's just open the group up" and then we became Queer to the Left. [LS: Yeah.] And that had a bunch of University of Chicago people too, actually, graduate students, and at that point I was finishing my dissertation, I think, and I was a Harper-Schmidt Fellow and a postdoc at the University starting in 2000.
- LS: OK. So let's see, where are we? Can you talk a little bit about I guess also the gender kind of dynamics that are going on in all these groups? Did the groups you were in tend to be mostly female identified people, mostly like dykes and bi women, or... cause I know ACT UP, I mean, I've read your book, so I don't wanna be like "Tell me again the thing you wrote on page 200" or whatever, but I'm curious about then in its aftermath, did you still stay friends with all of the guys you had known from the ACT UP days or how, who did you kind of remain friends with after the decline of the political ACT UP community?
- DG: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, ACT UP was really mixed, it was a really mixed group. And actually so was the group at the University of Chicago that was opposing the graduation of these Great White Brother people. It's just for some reason I don't remember the gay men. [LS laughs] I just can't remember their names, but I remember exactly what these two guys looked like. [LS: Yeah.] They were lovers, I just can't remember their names. But yeah, so from ACT UP Chicago, I mean, I'm still in touch with a number of both men and women, I'm trying to remember if there were any trans people, at that point not really. And in Queer to the Left we had a number of trans people in the group and there were a number of gay men in the group, and I'm still friends with them, and I don't, I can't really explain why that initial group of Ad Hoc Dykes, I'm not sure why we were women.
- LS: Yeah, you're not sure why you were Ad Hoc Dykes, but you were. [laughs] [DG: What was that?] Oh, you weren't sure why you were Ad Hoc Dykes, but that's what you were.
- DG: Yeah, I'm not exactly sure, it certainly wasn't like "Ughhh, men," it was more just "Oh, dykes, yeah!" [LS: Yay!] You know, it was a positive attraction towards rather than a we-don't-want, but something was going on where we weren't working with men, and I can't remember. But even during that period I was still friends with a number of gay men who had been involved in ACT UP. And I still am, I mean, some of them have died, but yeah.
- LS: OK, OK. So then you mentioned being a Harper—so then what happened after you graduated?
- DG: Yeah, so... well, let's see. So in terms of kind of queer history stuff, I don't know if there's that much to say. I mean, it was interesting to be at the University of Chicago now as a postdoc rather than as a graduate student.

[01:10:08]

LS: What was that like?

DG: Well, I remember in particular Bill Sewell invited me to a party at his house, and he kind of made something of the fact that I was no longer a graduate student and now I was his colleague, and that was very sweet of him to do. The lovely thing about a postdoc is that no one, you don't have a boss, you don't have a department, no one, you're not on a tenure track [LS: Right], so no one is kind of watching over you like "What are you doing? Are you someone we want to spend the rest of our lives with or not?" None of that's going on so there was very little pressure on that level. There's the pressure of it's a postdoc and it's not a permanent position and you want to get a permanent position if possible, so there's all the pressures of being pre-tenure. The craziness of the academy and the tyranny of productivity and all of that is still going on, but it was, it's kind of a nice, I mean... The Harper-Schmidt is, you get paid very little and you work more than the regular faculty, you teach fully fifty percent more than they do. [LS: How many classes did you have to teach?] Six courses a year. [LS: Oh wow, OK.] And they teach four a year, so... but you're teaching two sections of the same course each quarter, and so it's one prep each quarter, but still two courses, so it's a lot of grading because you're, these are writing-intensive courses because we were teaching the Core, in my case in the Social Science Core, so I was teaching in Power, Identity, Resistance. [LS: OK.] And it's the best teaching I've ever done in the sense that, and also the structure of, the set-up is just fabulous in terms of all of the faculty, all of the instructors teaching, and all of the graduate students who are teaching interns, meeting on a weekly basis to talk about pedagogy as well as the texts themselves, and so it's great, it was a really great experience.

At that point, let's see, 2000... at that point I was doing *Queer to the Left*, and again my social life was not really revolving around the University, I knew some of the other postdocs, and I of course knew people, faculty from the various departments that I had come to know, but I wasn't, I wasn't that involved in the University at that point. And I was still living in Uptown and we were doing all this stuff around low-cost housing at that point and police brutality and the death penalty, that's what *Queer to the Left* was primarily working on. So yeah, I just wasn't really connected to the University of Chicago much.

LS: Yeah, well that's fine. You can talk about *Queer to the Left* as well, it's also interesting... so Harper-Schmidt, teaching... was teaching—I haven't taught in Power Identity Resistance—was that, you said you really enjoyed it.

DG: Yeah, and we could inject, I mean these Core courses are very much teaching the quote-unquote canon, but the canon I realized was a mobile thing, or a fluid entity, and so we would have meetings to talk about what should be taught, and now I know there are Gender Studies, there's a Gender Studies core curriculum or something that brings that in kind of like the Social Science and the Humanities, or maybe it's one of the Humanities

Core or something—which is great—but we did a lot of work to integrate all of that stuff in. [LS: More sexuality and gender stuff.] Yeah, and at that point Gary Herrigel who was teaching in the Political, I think he still teaches in the Political Science Department, and he was the chair of Power, Identity, and Resistance, and he was very open to bringing in, expanding the idea of the Core. And so we, I mean, I remember doing a debate about, like bringing Michael Warner's stuff about gay marriage and Andrew Sullivan's stuff, kind of having that, trying to get the students to think about what does this mean in terms of rights and equality and political potentialities and stuff like that.

LS: Sure. Did you also get involved in Feel Tank Chicago around that time?

DG: Yeah. The Feel Tank... I didn't know Lauren very well, Lauren Berlant very well, I didn't know her at all when I was a graduate student, really. Certainly not the first time around, and then the second time around I knew her a little bit better but not so much. But in 1999, so the year before I graduated, there was a—I think it was 1999, she did a conference, or maybe it was 2000? She did a conference at the University of Chicago that was like Feminism's Unfinished Business or something like that, and it turned out that a lot of people who came to that, we were all interested in feelings, and my whole dissertation had really been about that [LS: Right], but I hadn't been connecting with other people on campus who were working on that, I didn't know that they were working on that, I just didn't—that's where these disciplines don't overlap in certain ways, so I was kind of pulling from the sociology and anthropology of emotions, the history of emotions, those literatures a little bit more, and didn't really—I mean, affect studies wasn't really on the radar at that point, I don't think, at least not as such. And then in 2001 a bunch of us went to New York for another kind of feminism unfinished, the unfinished business of feminism conference, and it was at Barnard, and it was right after September 11th, 2001, but we went to New York [LS: Yeah...] and I remember that really clearly. But anyway, at that conference, which was a small conference, relatively small, but at that conference again, those of us interested in feelings, kind of political feelings, we formed a group, like a National Public Feelings group, we had an e-mail list and stuff like that.

And then the Harper Schmidts, we got funding to do a conference every year, and one year with... well, and then we formed Feel Tank. Lauren, Mary Patten who was a friend of mine from ACT UP, who teaches, she's an artist, a video artist and installation artist and she teaches at the Art Institute of Chicago, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Lauren, Mary, myself, and Vanalyne Green, who also is a video artist and teaches at the, used to teach at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, we formed Feel Tank. In I think probably 2003, or something like that. And that's when we held our first international parade of the politically depressed, was May Day, yeah, May Day of 2003, so this is right after the US had started bombing Iraq, and there were like ten of us, or seven of us at this parade of the politically depressed, and Rebecca Zorach came at that point, she teaches in Art History, and she had been a graduate student there, and she had also been a Harper-Schmidt, and so the year that she was finishing her Harper-Schmidt, or maybe she had already finished and was already starting her job at University of Chicago, her full-time job in Art History, and the Harper-Schmidts, we decided to do a conference called Depressed—Depression, What is it Good For. [LS: OK.] And we

asked—and Feel Tank got involved in that—and so I was kind of wearing two hats, I was a Harper Schmidt and I was Feel Tank, and Rebecca at that point wasn't in Feel Tank but then she quickly became part of Feel Tank. And so that happened—yeah, I think Feel Tank started in 2003, actually. 2002, maybe. Or maybe it's even dated back to 2001 because of the Feminism Unfinished stuff. I'm not sure. But yeah, so that was then this next collective that I was part of, yeah.

LS: Awesome. [laughter] Lots of collectives. [DG: Yeah.] And then when you, you did your Harper Schmidt for all of the four years, and then what happened after that?

[01:19:30]

DG: It took me a long time to get a tenure-track job. I mean, given the climate that is now and was then, I mean I feel like it's just so hard for everyone to get a job and the academy, the whole kind of universe of higher education and the way, the direction that things are going is so fraught and problematic and so I feel for everybody who's trying, getting their PhD now and trying to get a job.

I feel like I had a difficult time because I wasn't, like, I wasn't a good fit for Political Science, even though that's what my degree was in, some Sociology departments were suspicious of somebody who wanted to jump out of Political Science and into Sociology, my work was—people had problems with the fact that it was quote-unquote personal, so... and I think that in that moment, I think, and I'm not sure if it's true any longer, although I think it is, the particular and queer, the particular gets seen as *particular*, and not speaking to universal concerns, and the “universal” masks as the universal when it's really a particular, but it gets cast as a universal, and so I think those of us who do work on particular populations, on what are marginalized populations or whatever, it's seen as, the thing is, “It's not really very generalizable.” [LS: Yeah.] “Only people interested in queer history would be interested in this” [LS: Right, right], that kind of thing, whereas we're all interested in white men, evidently. [LS laughs] So I think that that makes it hard for people who do this sort of work, sometimes to get jobs as well.

And I do remember George saying “Yeah, you are gonna have a hard time getting a job, and it'll have to be a very particular sort of place that is looking precisely for someone who doesn't do what is kind of the orthodoxy.” So it was hard to get a job, and I really needed the four years of the Harper Schmidt, and then I was lucky that in my fourth year, I got a tenure-track gig at the University of Pittsburgh, and so in 2004 I began that job, and then I was there for five years, and not very happy, my department had seemed to be very interesting, and kind of progressive, and turned out to be, in my opinion, a really problematic department, and so I was really itching to get out, and I got really lucky again and got this job at UC Santa Cruz. [LS: OK.] Yeah.

LS: Alright, where should I go next? [LS laughs] So I guess that brings us to right about up to the present. [DG: Yeah.] So now you mentioned that you kind of commute between Chicago and Santa Cruz?

DG: Yeah, right, so Laurie, my lover Laurie and I, have now been commuting for ten years, which is now more than half of our relationship. [LS: OK.] We got together in 1994, and in 2003, 03/04 she was at the Radcliffe Institute, she had a fellowship there, so she was in Cambridge, and then I started my job at Pitt in '04, and then in 2009 got the gig at UC Santa Cruz, and her job is here, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and she has a good gig, and we really like Chicago, and we just haven't been able to get jobs in the same city. [LS: Right.] We've tried multiple times, in multiple ways, and so... yeah, that's pretty hard, it's not ideal. I mean, we're really lucky that it's two places that are... [LS: That you like?] That we like. Pretty good places to live, both places that are totally hospitable to queer people, so we're lucky about all of that, but it is not... I think we both are happier when we get to live in the same place.

LS: I don't know anything about Pittsburgh, was that a weird—was that a different kind of place to be queer, or?

DG: Not so much.

LS: It was your department.

DG: It was my department, the main problem was my department. [LS: OK.] And the university as a whole, it's, I think it's kind of an old-boys network, very non-transparent and...

LS: Well, not just them, but yeah. [Laughter]

DG: Yeah.

[01:24:50]

LS: So we do ask a couple of summing-up questions. [DG: OK.] So were you the one who donated the ACT UP records to...

DG: Other people have asked me that, and I think it says that I was, but I don't think that's true.

LS: You don't—yeah, so how, do you know how they ended up there?

DG: No, I don't, and I feel like I should come down and look at them. [LS: Yeah.] I mean, is my name somehow attached to that? Do you know? You don't know.

LS: I don't know... [DG: Yeah, so I'm not...] Did you know Scott Mendel? [DG: Yeah, I knew Scott, yeah.] It might be, his name is in there, a lot, so maybe it was [DG: Ok, so maybe it was his] him.

DG: OK, yeah, right, cause I...

LS: Were you both in ACT UP at the same time?

DG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was there, that's right, he was part of it, he may have even been part of the... no, I think he got involved a little bit later. Yeah, so we knew each other and we were kind of friends at a certain point, but we've lost touch.

LS: OK, that's funny, then, cause I've definitely looked at those papers quite extensively and use them in my teaching, and... I'm glad they're there.

DG: Yeah, I'm pretty sure... yeah, I'm really glad they're there, it's really great that they're there, but I don't think that it's mine because I still, I have my files and everything.

LS: Do you know—so one of the medium-term goals of this project is in 2015 we want to have an exhibition in Special Collections space, which I guess now has a history... [Laughter]

DG: A very queer history, it turns out!

LS: So that's exciting. [Laughter] Do you have anything, like pictures or clippings or anything that might help us tell the story of that particular time at the U of C?

DG: Oh, from the Great White Brotherhood, and our activism...

LS: Great White Brotherhood, or your activism, anything like that...

DG: Yeah, I don't think I was clipping at that point. [LS: OK. That started later.] Yeah, I think I wasn't maintaining an archive. Unfortunately. I would imagine that in *Grey City Journal* and *The Maroon* they were covering things...

LS: They were covering things, yeah. They never took very many pictures. [LS laughs]

DG: Oh wow, that's interesting. I wonder if we have pictures from that time period. Yeah. I'm not sure.

LS: OK. If you could think about it, that would be great. [DG: Yeah.] And then another question that we like to ask to sum up—and this works differently for people who were there at different times of their lives—but kind of comparing what it was like to be at the University of Chicago between like 89 and 93, you kind of mentioned that you were coming out at the—you know, whatever that meant.

DG: Whatever that means. Putting quotes around it.

LS: For anyone, right. Then and now, what is your sense of what's changed, in any aspect of queerness?

DG: Right, at the University of Chicago.

LS: Right, or more broadly.

DG: Let's see...

LS: I mean, one thing that's so interesting is that I kind of think of that as the moment when queer is born as an affect [DG: Yeah, or reborn] and now so many students identify as queer, like "My name is Kelsey and I'm queer" or whatever, so...

DG: Yeah, yeah. Well one, I mean, I'm not very involved in queer politics, or really just in the queer scene any longer, and some of that is, I'm sure, due to the fact that I live in two places. Some of that is due to the fact that I'm older, I'm 49 now, that shouldn't matter that much, but it probably does. So those two things combined I think make it so that I just, I don't really know what's going on, and I'm not involved. And another factor, but this one I don't feel that I can really substantiate, but my sensing is that the queer scene, it's not as compelling to me anymore. And that's probably because I'm not involved in it and its community—things are compelling when a lot of your people are involved, and other people who you want to become your people are involved, and there's something vibrant kind of going on. So in the moments when I have gone to like queer screenings—those have usually been through the Art Institute, School of the Art Institute—or queer bands, trans bands, queer bands have played and someone has told me about it and I've gone, and I've had a fabulous time, and it's usually much younger people, and I feel like OK, yeah, there is still something really exciting going on, and I'm just not intersecting with it really, so I don't feel like I can, I don't really know what's going on anymore. [LS: Yeah.]

I think I sound like an old fuddy-duddy when I say things like "Oh, the queer movement seems sooo... or the gay movement seems so colonized by marriage," and stuff like that, and I do think there's some truth to that, and I think that the political horizon is so truncated for all of us, and then in the gay movement it became so truncated, like that became our horizon, and what I said earlier about the potentiality of queer as this open, as something where you don't know what it's gonna be, but it's about reorganizing things, it's about the unexpected and the surprising, and that I feel like got left behind a little bit in the race towards marriage. And I don't begrudge people the desire to be treated as equals in a liberal democracy. It's a liberal democracy, of course people should be, but we lost something in that race to equality, and part of what we lost is just the excitement of what queer had to offer this society, what it had to offer in terms of transforming the society... [LS, looking at recording device: I just like making sure it's still going!] I know, I do that too. So that fills me with a lot of sadness, actually. [LS: Sure.]

On the other hand, when I look at activism that's going on these days that's largely populated by younger people, and I'm thinking of queer activism, I feel like it's fantastic, like there's all this great activism around the prison-industrial complex, and it seems that there are a lot of young queers, queers of color, trans queers, who are doing that activism, and it seems really sophisticated and thoughtful and fun and great to me. And I see that out in the Bay Area, in California as well. Yeah, so I don't know—I think that any

thoughts I have about the queer scene now and queer politics now are distorted by the fact that I'm not really involved. [LS: Yeah.] And I'm bad, like I'm not on Facebook, I'm not doing any of that stuff, so I'm really out of it I think [LS: Sure], so actually if there's really interesting queer stuff you should let me know. [LS: OK!] Because I'm so out of it that I just don't know.

I probably have a slightly, yeah, this is a distortion of thinking that the late 80s early 90s were this really amazing, vibrant period where there was no separation between what was happening in activist realms and academic realms. I felt like there was a lot of—well, there was enough of a separation that I dropped out of school! But there was just, there was a vibrancy to that period, and you went into a queer happening and talk about affect, there was a vibration, there was a, something was going on, and it was all very exciting, even though it was also an incredibly horrific time period in terms of the epidemic, and people dying and everything, but it just felt like a really, a different time. So we went to a number of, I remember with Mary Patten, one of my comrades from ACT UP and now from Feel Tank, we went to the Gay Pride March, the Chicago Gay Pride March, the first year that ACT UP didn't march. So that was probably 1995. And we brought a video camera and we interviewed people, including cops, about "What does it feel like that ACT UP isn't in the parade this year?" And I'm sure some people really didn't care at all.

But subsequently I remember kind of looking at the parade and not marching in it, but looking at it, watching it, and feeling like the only politics represented was HRC, and maybe National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and then all these politicians trying to get gay votes, and corporations, banks, shit like that, and I just—it's so depressing to me. So I don't even go to the Gay Pride March anymore, and that used to be such a big moment for us where we would come up with these really creative—well, we thought they were creative—contingents, whether it was with ACT UP and then Queer to the Left always used to march, too, and we would do little actions, we would have stickers, and try to inject some queer politic into this relatively mainstream kind of thing, but now it just seems like it's not just mainstream, it's corporate, and to me it's deadening, like it's not... but maybe there's something new that's emerging, I don't know. Maybe younger activists are really trying to inject something else into it. But I don't go anymore so I don't...

LS: Yeah. Alright, I guess is there anything else I've forgotten to ask you or that needs to go into the record?

DG: I don't think so. No, I think that's it. Thank you.

LS: Well, thank you so much.

DG: Thank you very much for interviewing me.

[01:36:01]

End of Interview