

Penny Arcade

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In Frank's own words, "Penny is funny, warm, sexy, erotic, kick-ass, political, subversive, plain talking, nude, up-lifting, real, wise, entertaining, committed, outsider, humane, community-building, rich history ... and a damn good artist!"

Penny had just finished a performance of her *BITCH! DYKE! FAGHAG! WHORE!* in San Francisco and was immediately taxied off to Berkeley by a couple of Frank's students. This was also the second session of the night for Frank who had just completed an hour and a half interview with another guest shortly before Penny arrived. When Frank announced the show, he said that they would be "comparing notes from our lifetimes of cultural subversion!"

Penny Arcade's transformative experimental performance work has been produced all over the world. Like Frank, her resume is rich good reading, and takes you on an amazing journey from leaving home at age 14 to "join the fabulously disenfranchised world of queers, junkies, whores, stars, deviants and geniuses", through Andy Warhol's Superstar Factory, into the European political theater of the 1970s, her art experiments and activism of the 1980s, prolific theatrical productions of the 1990s, and her growing international performance work since 2000. And like Frank, she (with Steve Zehentner) has produced a long-running public access TV show, planting seeds and exposing mainstream culture to the real art and history. This show, *Stemming The Tide of Cultural Amnesia, The Lower Eastside Biography Project*, actually featured the interview below, so it has been seen many times on both coasts.

This interview is "shop talk" between two legendary artists, and a primer for any artist just setting out on the road of art and the experimental life.

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Linda: (in mid-sentence) ... we play it as a repeat all night, so a new episode plays at like one in the morning, because we have like, almost 400 episodes.

Penny: Wow. That's crazy, I love it!

Linda: We've been doing it like ten years.

Penny: Yeah, and we've been doing ours about ten years. So, it's kind of interesting that we're on the same (gestures) ...

Linda: Yeah. Got into cable at the same time.

Frank: I just asked for a 2½ hour time slot.

Linda: Because they didn't have that as an option, but he said, I'd like to do 2½ hours and they said OK. But I think in Berkeley they don't have a lot of people that are doing shows. It's not like very competitive.

Penny: In New York it's really ... everything's a half hour. You know, maybe sometimes you could do an hour special, but I love it!

Frank: How do you fit life into a half hour?

Penny: Yeah, exactly! Total bullshit! But, one of the things that was the most fucking interesting thing was when I went to get that piece of pizza. And I had the books, right? So, I'm waiting for the pizza, and I started to read the NYU lecture [Frank's *Art Of A Shaman* - Ed.]. And I'm a fast reader. I'm the highest comprehensive reader in my ... when I was 12 years old in my age group in the state of Connecticut. So I'm reading and then my eyes fell on this whole ... you and I have to talk, of course a lot about the commodification of art, right? And I was talking with the boyz (Corey and Alexi) about ... I'm like totally an emerging arts fighter. I hate the whole concept of emerging arts, it drives me insane.

Frank: If art is not emerging, it is not art.

Penny: Yeah, but there's a big difference between suddenly saying, after a thousand years, where there were young artists who became old artists and now they have this ... the idea of emerging arts as a class of young people.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: This comes not from the art world. This comes from academia, because parents who are paying 250 fucking thousand dollars to educate their kids to be a performance artist, or a spoken word artist, or an experimental filmmaker, the same amount of money that it costs to educate somebody to be a lawyer (Frank sounds) or a surgeon. The parents want to be assured that there is an entry-level position for their kids. And this is terrible for young people because young artists, there's no two ways. Jack Smith said, you have to apprentice, it's the only way to learn how to make art! And not that people shouldn't also do their own thing, you know.

Frank: Or just do it for years.

Penny: Yeah, absolutely! But you have to be willing to be bad for twenty years in order to be good.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: I was talking to the boyz and I was saying what they've been doing with this emerging arts thing is creating this professionalization of art. And art is not a profession. Art is a vocation. And I was reading in your ...

Linda: *Art Of A Shaman?*

Penny: ... *Art Of A Shaman*. And I was reading this part where you were talking about what they did with performance, into making it into a certain amount of time. Many, many people said about my show ... I invite anybody, you know ... and they say, I didn't know it was going to be so long. (Linda laughing, Frank sounds) And that's not one of my long shows. (Frank sounds, Linda laughing)

Frank: Exactly! They think that 45 minutes is a long show.

Penny: Right.

Frank: And I do 48-hour performances! (Frank sounds)



Frank Moore and Penny Arcade (video capture)

Penny: Yeah, yeah, of course. That's because you're a master. You're a master. But it's so ... it's very empowering for me, because I was very, very tired. I was very sick the whole week. From the first night you came to the Thursday night you came, I was sick that whole week with very bad bronchitis. And I had hepatitis C a few years ago and I went on the interferon treatment and then I got an auto-immune illness called sarcoidosis that settled in my lungs. So it made me weak in my lungs. So when I get bronchitis, which I seem to get now every time I get a cold, I had no energy. So all those shows I'm doing with no energy, which is very hard, you know. And so I was worried about the length. You know what I mean, myself. I was going, fuck, I don't have the energy to ... like, usually the opening of the show when I introduce the dancers, that's like an assault. (Frank sounds)

Frank: Like a wrestling announcer!

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!! Like a wrestling announcer, exactly! It's a very dynamic fighting, very aggressive, you know. And I didn't have quite that much energy, so I was like pushing it uphill all the way. It was very hard for me. So that night when I went to get the pizza then you gave me the book, I was looking at it. And then I read that thing about what they've done with performance. I think you and I are in agreement about a lot of things. For instance, I always say that performance only happens in the performance, right? It doesn't happen ... you don't rehearse performance art. You know what I mean, that's kind of (laughing and gestures) ...

Frank: Or the rehearsal is a performance!

Penny: Yes, absolutely! Perfect! No problem! So then when I was reading it and I fell on these lines where you were talking about how they've taken performance and tried to fit it into this kind of entertainment category, etc., and then if you don't do that, then you're sloppy or you're bad or you're unprofessional or whatever. And my eyes fell on that, and I'm like, oh my God, I was just getting seduced down this road. You know, getting twisted up and feeling bad about myself. And then the other thing was, and also, of course, the most exciting thing that I read at that moment was about how the show goes where the show's going to go. The performance goes where the performance is going to go. (Frank sounds)

Frank: You don't control it.

Penny: No, no, no! It has to go where it's going to go! And the thing is all my work is created improvisationally. And this show is the result of pretty much two years of straight improvisation. And then eventually it becomes kind of a set piece because it was ... my mind works a little like an old time word processor. I kind of scan, and then I cut and paste in my own head as I go along. I think this is something you understand.

Frank: Me too.

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think, I was getting this. I was reading this shit and I was thinking maybe Frank Moore and I are the same person! (laughter)

Frank: Or mates.

Penny: Yes, yes, definitely, for sure. But we even possibly could be the same person! Why couldn't there be a sharing of almost persona, or something that we don't even know exactly what it is.

Frank: I could do your show.

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. I could do yours! I love it!

Linda: He did that. There's a picture up there (gestures) of Frank dressed as Elvis Presley.

Penny: Oh yeah.

Linda: And he did that with an artist who was popular around here that called himself Extreme Elvis.

Penny: Oh yeah.

Linda: He was a big guy and he came out as the big Elvis. That was his outfit. And he'd end up naked real fast. Then he did the peeing and pooping on the audience stuff and just all this going out to the audience and trying to get them to be there with him. And they were mutually admiring each other. So he came up with the idea. He had this big date booked in a club in Oakland. He said, how about you be me? But we won't tell anybody. He didn't tell his band. He told one of his backup singers, that's all. And he played Frank in the audience.

Penny: Wow!

Linda: And so the backup singer wheels Frank in. And the place was packed. (Frank sounds) He's this hot act. And the band, because they know he's always pulling fast ones, they just

kind of go along with it. Oh, OK! And Frank does the whole show as him.

Penny: You have video of that?

Linda: Oh yeah!

Penny: Wow, that sounds so fantastic!

Frank: Freaked the punks out.

Linda: Well, they started ... do you mean when the band had to come to your rescue? No.

Mikee: Gilman Street.

Linda: Oh wow! So what we did was, there's this little all-age punk club down the street, that's been around forever. And they were having this video festival and they contacted us out of the blue. We're not really involved with them. And said to Frank, could you submit something for us to play at this festival. So we had just done this show, and they needed like 15 minutes or something. So he said cut out the 15 minutes where the backup singer pees on me. So we play that. And they're these hardcore baby punks. And they freaked out. Why did they freak out? Because they thought that Frank was not there of his own free will. That he was being forced to be peed on and all this kind of stuff. Which Frank was not! That was the controversy!

Penny: It never ends. The political correctness never ends. Yeah, it's funny, because you're reminding me of ... a number of years ago, I guess it was around 1991, I got a call from Ron Delsener who is the big rock'n'roll promoter in New York City, from his office. And they said that this band ... now what the hell was the band's name ... I can't believe I'm not going to remember the name of the band ... the band is like, they're the superstars of industrial music ... Pig Head? Pig something. And it was like a guy from the Ministry, guys from out here, from the Ministry or whatever it's called ... it was a super hardcore industrial band. It was all the stars of all the different bands. Like a five-star band, they're the super band! And apparently they had requested me. So I go down there, and I'm talking to the guy on the phone from the office. And I said, you know, I don't think so. I said, the audience for this is like 16- to 24-year old guys. I said, I work with like ... you know at that time I was doing a lot of work on rape and sexual abuse and shit like this and I say, my work is about rape and sexual abuse. I said I have like six erotic dancer girls. And I went, and yeah! I think, yes, I should do this! (laughing) The guy's like, huh?! Well, I go there and I start doing this piece. And there's like, I don't know, 400 hardcore boys on the floor and I'm starting this piece and it was some piece about sex. It was a sexual piece. And the girls are grinding and dancing. (Frank sounds) And the boys just kept looking at the ground, you know. And then pretty soon it starts to look like oatmeal, like they're getting annoyed! They wouldn't look up, and it was bubbling like this (gestures). A guy at this point comes running up to me and goes, (screaming) we don't want to hear any more of your sex stories!!! I had the mic and I was like, oooohhh. Is it true what they say about hardcore boys? Is it true what they say about hardcore boys? And it became really, totally ... it was like really intense. And I was just going. And I just didn't stop. And I started talking about that there was a smell of new age order. Of the new world order was in the room. And I just kept going on and more and more. And they were like freaking out. (laughter) And I looked up and there was a guy who was the roadie for the band. And I

yelled, I said, hey, how long do I have to perform to get paid? And the guy goes, 20 minutes. So I said, OK. I ended up on one of the amps in the front and I started talking to them, very quietly. And I said, well, Pig Face, that's the name of the band, well, I said, it's kind of a weird situation. I've got to perform for 20 minutes in order to get paid. I know you guys don't want to see me. And you don't want to hear anything that I'm doing. I said, even though Pig Face wants you to see me. That's why I'm here. And I went on. I did this whole long, very quietly emotional thing. And then I looked up and I said, how much time do I have left? He goes, you just did 20 minutes. And I went, bye! (laughter) And we all walked off the stage. And then I went upstairs and the guy from Pig Face, the main singer, he's this little English guy. He's quite famous, blonde guy. And I said, hey, your audience are assholes. And he goes, yeah, I know. And he's doing push-ups. I said, are you doing push-ups to be pumped when you go on stage? He's doing push-ups and he goes, no! It makes the acid come on faster! And then I watched him, and they were like ... their whole show was these young guys trying to get on stage and them beating them with their guitar and bass. It was like the mosh pit scene, you know. And then afterwards we were ... I was upstairs and all these guys kept coming over and going wow, you're way more hardcore than Pig Face! And you're more hardcore than anybody!

Frank: When I did *The Outrageous Beauty Revue*, we played ... my cast was ...

Linda: ... middle class people and they didn't quite get really what we were doing.

Penny: Yeah.

Linda: We were a community of people, had lived together for years.

Frank: This was in ...

Linda: ... the seventies, the mid-seventies. And so we're doing this show at the Mabuhay Gardens, which was the punk club. And we were the early show, for three and a half years, Saturday nights, sometimes another night.

Frank: I opened ...

Linda: ... Frank opened for all the punk bands. The show itself was kind of like ... the cast, it was just an extension of our lives. So they didn't really get how radical and subversive it was.

Penny: Right!

Linda: They thought it was just us kind of playing. You know, we'd go off on Saturday nights, we'd put make-up on ...

Penny: Right.

Linda: ... we'd play on the stage.

Frank: At a dive.

Linda: And it was a dive, of course.

Penny: Of course, of course.

Linda: So what is the point that they didn't ...

Frank: The punks would ...

Linda: Oh, well particularly, like certain bands, like Black Flag had a very heavy duty, hardcore audience. They'd all be there for the early show. And they'd throw things at our cast and they'd scream and yell. And the cast was like very uncomfortable and didn't quite get that that was OK. And so Frank had the idea of he would just park himself on the stage in the front corner, and he would just scream back at them. (Frank demonstrates screaming) So, the show would be going on and there's Frank doing that! (Frank continues screaming) Well, of course these hardcore guys are like (gestures mouth wide open dumbfounded). They don't know what to make of Frank! So, that would shut them up!

Frank: They were really tame kids.

Penny: Yeah. There's a lot of that. (all laughing) You're so brilliant, you know. Creating this (pointing to Frank's communication board). Such a good designer. I am very impressed. I was looking at your paintings in the other house [the Blue House - Ed.] and I see some here. Your paintings are really fucking phenomenal.

Frank: That is P-a ... (gesturing)

Linda: ... oh that's Patti Smith. Frank put that there for you (gestures to Patti Smith painting right behind them).

Penny: Oh yeah well, hmmm (makes a face). (all laugh) Oh well!

Linda: Uh oh. Nice painting!

Penny: But I would say it has a real Patti thing going on there for sure.

Linda: Yeah. (Frank sounds)

Penny: No, but I think it's amazing, your paintings are amazing. (Frank sounds) Your paintings are completely amazing. Yeah.

Linda: Did you hear how he paints them? He can only ... he would wear a hard hat with a paint brush on it on his head.

Penny: Oh!

Linda: He could only paint that part of the canvas (gestures to lower portion of the canvas), so he'd have to paint it upside down and sideways to fill the whole canvas.

Penny: Right. So he could get the whole thing on there. Yeah. But I mean, isn't that amazing? Because you're so unlinear. Everything's coming from every direction. Inside out, upside down, around around.

Linda: Right.

Penny: And ... actually I was thinking about something about that ... um ... I can't remember what it is now, but it will come back, because it always does with me. (Frank giggles) But I was like very ... oh yeah! Also, I was saying to somebody the other day, because I went on your website and then I saw different things, right? And I was like, look at the fucking paintings! How the fuck does he paint?! Then I was over here in the house looking at the paintings and



Frank Moore and Penny Arcade (video capture)

I said to the boyz, yeah, that's crazy that he can paint like that! I said because when I hug him it's like hugging a dolphin! (Frank and Linda laugh) And I swam with the dolphins, so I know from where I speak! And also when you were in the audience and especially the first night, because you'd never seen me perform. Then you were just having the experience of the performance. And you're like me. You're a great audience! (Frank sounds) You know, a lot of performers are not great audience because they suck! (laughter)

Frank: Yes. I made it my business.

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. But it was so wonderful, especially the first night, because I'd never experienced you either. (Frank sounds) So we were experiencing each other for the first time. And I don't really think there's a difference between the audience and the performer (Frank sounds) at all, right? So what was really incredible, because it was your first experience of it so you were so vocal. (Frank sounds) And I know it was very powerful for me. And it was really powerful for the audience because people can speak. And they could make sounds that people understand. You were making these sounds that were so, not just emotive, but they were so eloquent. (Frank sounds) So we understood the very ... what's the word ... very specifically what you were feeling. We felt when you were expressing your isolation, when you were expressing your joy, when you were expressing your agreement, when you were expressing your pain, when you were expressing your understanding. That was like fucking far out, you know?! I was like really ... it was really intense. It was really an amazing contribution. And then when you came the second time ... because, of course, by then you

were kind of more used to me, you know, just like I was more used to you. You can never have the first experience twice, right? That doesn't happen. But, when ... I want to talk about the difference between the first time you came and my entering the stage because I just started playing "Creep" there, (Frank sounds) before I enter the stage, the Radiohead song. In 2006, in L.A. they asked me to do five performances for Outfest, for their Platinum Center. And I have never ... *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* has never been presented at a gay festival, up until Outfest. And I was really angry, you know. So I didn't know I was angry. But when opening night came, I was in the audience with the dancers and they had these wooden floors, it's a place called Red Cat in L.A. It is part of Cal Arts. And the music's playing of the song, and I was like just wandering around the audience like looking pissed off and just like sullen and the song was playing and I start stomping my feet. (Frank sounds) And it became this very threatening and there was a guy who we brought from New York, Kevin Aviance, who's this black kind of dance music star who had just gotten beaten up within an inch of his life the month before. A terrible, terrible beating. He was fag bashed. They broke his jaw and all kinds of crazy shit. And I went to visit him in the hospital, and I thought well, he wasn't going to come to do the show in L.A. I mean he had a wired-shut jaw, and he was really fucked up. And I went to see him and I said, you know, of course I was so, I felt so bad, you know about what had happened to him. But I was saying to him, I was saying but this is also important because it's you, there was visibility. A lot! I mean it was on CNN and shit, you know. (Frank sounds) And I said I feel bad that you're not going to be able to be in the show. And he said, I'm in the show (says it as if her jaw is wired shut). (laughter) So, when we're in L.A. I stomp my foot and the stage was kind of a wooden hollow thing, so you really heard the sound. (Frank sounds) Then he started stomping his feet. And pretty soon, every, all the dancers were stomping and it was this very threatening, super threatening vibe. And we did it every night. So now we come here. We did five nights there, then a year later I did one performance at the Spiegel tent in New York, where, by the way, they took ... it was a Tuesday night at 10:30pm where unbeknownst to me in the contract hidden, in fine print, which I didn't see, they took the first \$4,000 that came in the door Tuesday night at 10:30pm! (Frank sounds) They did no publicity! No ads! I mean they ... whatever their ad was, they maybe had me in their ad, but they wouldn't allow me to put postcards out in the venue for the month coming before my performance. So I just wanted to add that because it's such an attractive story! (Frank sounds) So we did one night, so we did "Creep" again. And I walked through the audience and I was of course in a rage about that. So then this time, Steve, I said, Steve, I said, he goes I think it's a good idea to use "Creep". And I said it has to be there now, now it has to be there. But I don't know what it's going to mean here. I don't know what it's going to mean here.

Frank: Most people did not know you were you.

Linda: When you first came out. (Frank sounds)

Penny: Yeah, yeah. No they didn't. And they were so mean to me too, a lot of them.

Linda: Wow. (Frank sounds)

Penny: A lot of the people were really mean to me. They wouldn't look at me.

Linda: Right.

Penny: Or they would be like ... (makes a rolling the eyes face) (Frank sounds)

Frank: Even after I gave you a ...

Penny: ... a hug.

Frank: Away.

Linda: ... after you gave her away.

Penny: You mean because I hugged you?

Frank: Yes!

Penny: Yeah, but I don't think they still knew but (Frank sounds) the thing is that in that moment I was coming down and kind of carrying this feeling of not ... it's not nice (Frank sounds) you know when you ... there's a big element of sacrifice in my work. I always have a sacrificial element.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: So you go ... and I'm a weird person because I'm a real person, you know?

Frank: Yes.

Penny: I'm not Patti Smith! (Frank sounds) Which isn't ... not to ... I think Patti's a great artist, but Patti's personhood, she hasn't been involved with that for a long time.

Frank: I freaked her out!

Linda: Frank freaked her out!

Penny: Oh, definitely! (laughter, Frank sounds)

Linda: She didn't know what to make of him.

Penny: No.

Frank: She asked ...

Linda: ... she asked for him to read her future as if this (gestures to Frank's letter board) was an Ouija board. She didn't even get that it was a communication device. (Frank sounds) And when he was still just relating to her and not doing her future, she got mad. (Frank sounds)

Frank: I said, no.

Linda: He said no, I won't read your future. (laughter)

Penny: Well the thing is, of course, because you are an intuitive being, even if you didn't have cerebral palsy you would still be an intuitive being. I mean, this is part of your nature, right?

Linda: Yes, yes.

Penny: But being an intuitive being in this package ...

Frank: Yes.

Penny: ... which immediately, this is what I always say to people ... people always want to say that my work is confrontational ... I always say: I don't agree with you. My work is not confrontational. I said people confront themselves so easily, you don't need ... no artist has to confront anybody because people are so busy confronting themselves! So ...

Frank: Yes. You don't know what pushes people.

Penny: Yeah, no, absolutely! I mean, for me, you are difficult. You are intense. (Frank sounds) Now I know you, you know, but the first day I didn't know. And none of us want to not know! (Frank giggles) Part of ... people don't want to not know how to be at ease in a situation. So you're in a conflict right away between being able to say, oh, I know how to deal with this! When I was in Australia (laughing) and there's a café called Piccolo. And it's like a totally, totally bohemian place. Very tiny, it maybe has like 15 or 20 seats. And it's open until 6 o'clock in the morning, and I always go there. (loud sound of Kittee the cat) And you are a cat! And there was this aboriginal guy in there, and I'm talking with the aboriginal guy. And he's drunk. And he's a poor aboriginal guy. But I'm like talking to him and but then he started to get sexual with me because I was talking with him. And then we started to have a physical fight. And then he got thrown out and I felt really bad because the whole situation was a kind of misunderstanding. And afterwards I was talking to somebody and I said, yeah, I said, I was there thinking, wow, aboriginal people like me! You know, I'm all proud, you know what I mean. (Frank sounds) So, you know, people are going to have their thing. I'm like, oh, I get along with Frank Moore. And he has cerebral palsy. But there is an element, I think, and I don't want to talk ... and I think it's a great portrait of Patti. To me it looks really, and I knew Patti very, very, very, very, very well at one point. She and I were very, very close friends at one point. And then Patti convinced me that I should leave New York and go to Europe 'cause she said, we're just slaves here, man, we're just slaves. And so I believed her and I went. (laughing) And I think that she did become what she really wanted to be which was a rock star. But I'm not ... I don't know how to say it without ... because I don't want to trash her, but I want to say, of course, she couldn't be in that space with you without a construct. And what the fuck does that mean that you're going to tell her fucking future?! (Frank sounds) That's retarded! That's being unwilling to ask a question. Like, OK, OK, you're here, what the fuck is this (gestures to Frank's letter board)? Not like I'm going to get all Tennessee Williams on you and make you like you're this figure, like in one of his plays where he always has some shamanistic, voodoo, black bone and a crow thing! But then, but that's what I think happens to people who believe their own publicity. (Frank sounds) So when I'm saying that for me, because I am a real person, because I have suffered a lot in my life, it doesn't take much for me to be ... like if I'm coming down the stairs and I'm looking at people, I am ambivalent about ... not about being a performer, because I know I'm an entertainer. I'm very clear on that. That that's what I do, I'm an entertainer. But I am ambivalent about taking the attention, of being the center of attention. I like it, but not so much. And I'm not really an exhibitionist, unlike you!

Frank: You are a conductor.

Penny: Yeah, I'm a conductor. And I'm a reformer. (Frank sounds) This just came up. I think you'd be very ... I want to send you the ... it hasn't come out yet but ... there's two essays on my work. And I think you would enjoy reading them. I want to share them with you. One guy is this guy, Ken Bernard, who's an amazing playwright of the ridiculous, but not camp. Like

really dangerous shit. (Frank sounds) And I did his plays when I was just 17, 18, 19. The last one I did I was 20. With the Play-House of the Ridiculous. And he is 80 years old. Because of my background, the immigrant Italian peasant thing, it's really hard for me to ask anybody for anything. It's not in my culture, how I was raised. So I never would invite him or invite anybody to see my work. My whole relationship has been with the general public. So finally, in 2005, I invited him to come and see a performance that I was doing, it was a club work, I wasn't doing a full show. And then I asked him, because (unintelligible) was going to do this book on my work. I asked him, I wrote to him I said, look, I'd like you to see my work. And I sent him about seven or eight scripts. And I said, I don't expect you to write anything about me, but you did know me from when I was this very young performer. And if you felt like you had something to say. He wrote this amazing fucking essay without ever seeing any of the DVDs of the work. Which is important because what I write and how I stage it are very different. And he got it, totally got it! But one of the things he wrote about was about me as a reformer. And it was very interesting because I am a reformer. You're a reformer also!

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Because you see that things could be better. That we are limited. That we could be so much more. There's so much more, so much more to go, and have and be, etc. So when I'm coming down the stairs and these people are looking at me ... and the last night was the worst. Saturday night was the fucking worst because I'm coming down the stairs and hanging on (gestures hanging on a railing) and people are like this (acts like someone looking down, looking away). And some people smiled and were nice, but a lot of people weren't. By the time I get down to the floor I'm feeling like ... what am I doing? So, the first night this was happening, when I got down to you, by that time I was like, wow! I feel like I'm a creep, but Frank's a real creep! (Linda laughing) And that, when we embraced, (Frank sounds) in that communication between the two of us, because it is so easy for you because of your experience, to read the dynamic that was in the room.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: You automatically knew everything that I was doing. (Frank nodding his head yes) I didn't have to explain anything! (Frank sounds) Of course, right?! And then when I was going towards the stage, and then I kept looking back to you, and there was this very taut, the energy was very taut, (gestures and Frank shaking his head) it was like we had this (Frank sounds) elasticky thing.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: 'Cause it was ... we could ... I could move but then I was pulled back like this (gestures). And then without even ... and I didn't know anything about life at all, because I hadn't read the thing yet, and I hadn't gone on your website yet. And then I was having it all. (Frank sounds) And I have to tell you now I realized something I'm going to remember for a long time. When I was in seventh grade my life was really, really horrible. You heard some of it. Everybody said I was fucking everybody and plus I had a horrible home life. My father was in a mental hospital supposedly because he was going to drown me. And, of course, in a southern Italian family, it's not a buried memory because you can't have a buried memory in a southern Italian family. Because as soon as you're five years old they start screaming, (screams)

“And your father was going to drown you!” (laughter) And so, I had all of these things going on, plus all the insane tension and now I found out even more crazy stuff that I didn’t know since my mother died. And I was acting out all of the time because I was like totally under, contents-under-pressure. So I went to seventh grade and this time ... in seventh grade I used to write all over my arms, all over my legs, I’d write all over myself. And I was totally persona non grata. And there was a boy with cerebral palsy. And he was mobile. He was mobile. And I would imitate him. And now I didn’t remember, this is many years later. And at that time, I was saying to the boyz, I said, I didn’t tell them that I imitated, I couldn’t get myself up to that ’til now. But I was saying to the boyz that probably in ... now ... if it would be now, you would get oriented, the teachers would tell you about, here’s this special needs kid, blah blah. Then, they didn’t tell you anything! And he was always in the basement. In some special classes or something. And I almost never saw him. And I wouldn’t imitate him in front of him. But I would do it to make everybody laugh ’cause I felt so fucking rotten. And now I’m thinking, fuck, this probably was this fucking brilliant fucking guy that I was completely even unaware of anything! You know what I mean?! (touches Frank and starts crying) (Frank sounds) I forgive myself, but still ... yeah, so anyway, then the second time when you came I got freaked out because you were on the other side of the room! (Frank sounds)

Frank: Yes!

Linda: Us too, really!

Frank: Because of the steps.

Penny: Right, right, right. But I didn’t think of it, so I come in and I’m like, where the fuck’s Frank?! (Frank sounds) What the fuck! And then I see you on the other side of the stage. (Frank sounds) And I was like, this is not good! (Frank sounds, Linda laughing) ’Cause I was already back in what we did the first time! I liked it!

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Fuck, I want that again! But of course, you know that you can never have the same thing again, right?! (Frank sounds) But that doesn’t stop you from wanting it! (Frank sounds) Maybe not you!

Frank: Don’t hold on.

Penny: I know, I gotcha. (laughing) I’m a fast assimilator. (laughter) And then, but then you’re on the other side. So I said, fuck, OK, what am I going to do?! I’m going to do it different this time. So I went on the other ... I always go down the steps on the side that you were but I said, this isn’t the same because I was going to get your back. But then I said, too bad, just go and do it. Just do what’s in front of you. So I did it. Then when I came back, down, then a whole other thing happened. It was like very exciting. And I think that they videoed that night. I’m not 100% sure.

Frank: Yes.

Linda: Yeah, I think that’s right.

Penny: Yeah. And then that was really interesting that it was also kind of like the inverse

energetically of what happened the other, the first night. So it was kind of very ritualistic that you were there the first time and then the last time in this other place. That kind of algebra of alchemy. And I really loved it when I was going up on the stage and still maintaining this contact with you. And maybe, I might have thought that it might not have worked over such a distance. But I guess because we had already practiced with the shorter distance then it still was ...

Frank: Distance ...

Penny: ... doesn't exist, ha ha ha (Frank laughs) I jumped ya, I jumped ya!! I jumped ya!!! (Linda laughing) Yeah, exactly. That was fucking far out! Ask me some questions!

Frank: We are always the outsiders.

Penny: Yeah.

Frank: Of all the subcultures ...

Linda: That we get involved in.

Frank: We influence but they freak out.

Penny: (nods her head yes) Well, this is what I said to my dancers the other night that we had in the week since I had seen you. This big huge drama happened with the genderqueer kids who were coming to the show and I was talking about the trendiness around certain trans thing and nobody wants to be a lesbian anymore, and everybody wants to be a boy. The prestige that's in being a boy, blah, blah, blah. And while unbeknownst to me, Sunday night, this past Sunday night, I'm talking all this stuff and then I showed the video of my mother and this young man comes over to me and he says, listen, I think you're awesome, but I want to talk to you about the trans, your ideas about the trans men are ... I want to have a conversation with you about it. (Frank giggles) He was very nice and I was like, OK, but I wasn't talking about trans men. He goes back to his seat. I go on stage and I'm thinking, Penny, just do the show and do not veer off into this special-interest thing. (Frank sounds) But, no! (all laugh)

Linda: Didn't take your own advice.

Penny: No. So I start to talk to him and I said, I want to say to this person, this young man came up to me and said X, Y, Z, and I want to say this to him now. He stands up and I'm trying to say what I'm saying and he's saying stuff to me like, you don't know anything about trans men. And I said, I'm not talking about trans men. I've got this one peculiar problem that if I don't think we're talking about the same thing, I won't continue the conversation until we can get that we're both talking about the same thing! Oh my god! Well, he went to leave. And I said, you're going to fucking walk out? I said I just shown you this tremendous respect by stopping the whole show to answer and talk to you about this. I said, sit the fuck down. So he sat down but he still didn't like it and he ended up walking out. Then at the end of the night it turned out that all of my girl dancers were genderqueer-identified and either involved with trans men or very ... not partnering up ... or very involved! And they're all really upset, really upset. And I was trying to talk to them and they're all young. They're all like, you know, Nina's the oldest and she's like 35. So it was really interesting. And then I ... it was

*Penny Arcade (video capture)*

really hard for me because I'm very softhearted. I mean I'm very tough, absolutely, but I'm very, very, very softhearted. (Frank sounds) And it was hard for me to be in this situation with them. And at the same time what I wanted to say to them was like, I'm fucking twice your fucking goddamn fucking age. You're going to get in my face?! Don't get in my face! But then you can't say that to them 'cause I've learned. That's the kind of entitlement generation. And it's different from my generation which was the earning ... you earned the respect as opposed to you're entitled to respect.

Linda: Right.

Penny: But they don't understand that. So you can't even say that because it doesn't mean anything to them. They don't know what you're talking about.

Linda: Wow.

Penny: And also because empathy has been bred out of the culture. (Frank sounds) People have lost one of our great capacities, which is our ability to be empathetic. (Frank sounds) And to empathize. And to be able to empathize with you (gestures to Frank) or with you (gestures to Linda), or with you (gestures to Mikee). You say five sentences and then your empathy gets aroused and you start, you have the capacity to see it from your point of view (gestures to Frank). But that's gone! Anyways, I then, I was really physically sick also. That was the worst part. At my sickest. Very bad bronchitis. So no energy.

Frank: That is always ...

Linda: ... when these things happen.

Penny: Yeah, right. OK, cool. I'm with you. So anyways, I tried to talk to them. And I said, look, I'm going to investigate this. So I got into, I found this guy who's a pagan trans man in Massachusetts with an incredible analysis and he's disabled. But he's doing this wild shit and he's a shaman. I think maybe I got to send you his link. I'll send you the letters he wrote that were very great. I went back, then two more people were writing to me that were either trans identified or genderqueer-identified. And starting right away with you're a fucking, not you're a fucking racist, but it was disgusting to watch you describe your dancers by the color of their skin.

Frank: I don't even know what all of that means.

Linda: Those types. "Trans-identified". He doesn't know what that means.

Penny: The gender types. You don't know what that means? OK, so you know that there's a big movement now because it's 2009 where people can who have body dysmorphia ...

Frank: Yes.

Penny: ... and then they can get sex-reassignment surgery.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Well, then, there's also trans-identified, the genderqueer movement, do you know that?

Frank: No.

Penny: OK, so this is people who don't identify with the, what is that called, binary? Two, male/female culture. So they reject binary, that there is just two sexes. And they're gender fluid. So one day they're girly, and one day they're not or whatever the fuck they are. (Frank sounds)

Frank: Like we all are.

Penny: Right. And this is ... (Frank loud sounds) exactly, but without it being institutionalized.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Well, one of the things I was trying to explain is that in the '60s people fought and worked very hard for the idea that gender and genitalia were not connected. (Frank sounds)

Frank: Yes.

Penny: But now, of course, because it's forty years later, and these kids are young and they don't ... all the people died in the middle, from AIDS or from ODs of drugs. I mean a lot of alternative people are gone. There's not a lot of people in our age group, right? You're the same age as Patti, by the way! In case you didn't know. Everybody's five years older than me! You're 46?

Linda: No, he's 62 ...

Penny: No, no no, he was born in ...

Linda: Oh yeah, 6/25/46

Penny: He was born in '46.

Linda: Yeah.

Penny: I think Patti's either born ... she may be born in '45 because she's five years older than me. I'm born in '50. And you're four years older than me. Don't get too upstart! (laughter) So, a lot of people are gone in the middle generation.

Frank: Baby.

Linda: You're a baby, he said! (laughter)

Penny: I was just saying today to a guy who did my hair. Did you see my hair's a new color? (Frank sounds)

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Mr. Anthony was born in 1968 and I said as he was doing my hair today, I said, you were born in 1968, I said, shit, you were in a crib and I was doing LSD. I said you couldn't even get out of the crib, couldn't talk, I was doing LSD. I was eating pizza, you could only drink milk! (laughter) So that's what was going on with you. You were bigger than me. So anyways, what happened was I said, I entered into a dialogue, I'm sick and I'm writing these people, five, six emails a day! And they're still not coming. I'm writing them and saying first of all, I was in the original genderfuck thing, the Play-House of the Ridiculous. We started genderfuck. And then, don't say I'm racist because I got beaten up on the street from when I was twelve years old for being a nigger lover. So, don't even say that to me because you don't know what you're talking about. Because I live my politics with my body on the street not on a velour couch with six people who took the same Black Studies class as me. (laughter) And then when I went back to work, because I had two days off, Monday and Tuesday, everybody wanted to have a meeting. And I was like, OK, we'll have a short meeting, like a 15-minute meeting. (Frank sounds)

Frank: What is this democracy shit?

Penny: (laughing) Yeah!

Frank: I am the creator!

Penny: Yeah, yeah, but you know, I still understood, because it's still ... my big joke about it in the show is, and I might have said it the night you were there, there's a whole bunch of heterosexuals here who don't know what the fuck I'm talking about. There's a whole bunch of fags here who could fucking care less. And the end result is lesbians, genderqueer girls, and ex-girls who are now men, who care about this, it's not universal. So anyways I went in and I said to them, look, this is what I've been doing. I've been talking to all these people. I'm going to be more articulate, I wasn't articulate enough, have to give more history because people don't know what I'm talking about. And then I said, I almost started crying, but I didn't cry, but almost, and I just said, "All I know is I stick up for everybody and nobody ever fucking sticks up for me!" (Frank sounds)

Frank: Yes. I have the same experience.

Penny: Yes.

Linda: Frank is always talking about loyalty, being loyal.

Penny: Yeah, right! And steadfast! (Frank sounds) And steady. And also the reality is that you can't attain mastery if you don't fucking go through the journey to mastery. (Frank sounds) It's not like, and this is one of the things that's really missing, most young people because they're in a culture of being "experts", they're all "experts"! (Frank sounds) And I don't think ... I don't know if it was the night that you were there, I started ranting about be young! No? One night I just started ranting, you're young for such a short amount of time. And you're old for a really fucking long time, so fucking young up, man! (laughter) You know, be young! Stop with this ... and I understand that someone can be 29 and often people do feel older when they're around 29, 30. Because they feel like they've lived awhile right? Like fifteen years. Since they were 15 they were kind of conscious of being alive in the world. So they think, well, 15 years and they get tired. And they feel like they've really been through something.

Frank: Burnt out.

Penny: (laughing) Burnt out, exactly! (Frank sounds) You're so smart, exactly! So they have that feeling that they're older and then last night I made people mad because this person wrote to me, I'm 29 years old! Yeah, I said, 29, that's like 11. It's the same as 11. 29 years old is like eleven years old. And then somebody got mad at me about saying that. But I just think it's a message of hope.

Frank: They think they are special.

Penny: Yeah. People think they're special. Which is really problematic. (Frank sounds)

Frank: Because everybody goes through the same things.

Penny: Yeah. Well, yes and no, because in my show, *Bad Reputation*, I say there are women who have always been protected and women who have never been protected. And the idea that you can protect yourself is absurd, because protection implies that somebody else is looking out for you. When you're alone the most you can do is defend yourself. Defense and protection are not the same thing. So, you can have people ... if you don't have a rigorous inquiry in what it is to be alive, if you don't have, and not everybody does, not everybody does. We all have our nature. I happen to be a very altruistic person. That's my nature. I'm not like an especially great, nice person. I am compelled to be altruistic because it's my nature. It's not something that I struggle to develop in myself. Yet, I believe that ... I don't know if I believe, I should just say I feel that if you're alive that you have to ... that if you're awake and you're aware, then you're going to have an inquiry into what it is to be alive. Now I also do believe that there's only 10,000 people alive on the planet at any one time, as Ouspensky said, and I amended it to say there's only 10,000 alive on the planet at one time and 6,000 of them are aboriginals. (laughter) I'm a non-elitist and I'm a populist. So for many, many, many years I truly did believe that everybody was equally intelligent. And then I had to realize ...

Frank: In spite of all evidence.

Penny: (laughing) Yeah, right, to the contrary, right! But now as I'm saying this to you, I'm actually coming up with something. (Frank giggles) And that is that while all people do not share the same level of intelligence, all people do have the ability to have the same level of cognizance. Which of course is different from ...

Frank: If they are responsible.

Penny: You have to have some fucking modesty! You have to have some modesty and you have to have some ... what I don't like about the current youth culture is it kind of like wants to fool young people into thinking that they're all that. In my young time was also youth culture, right, the mid-'60s. But we didn't believe it. When they said, oh, the young people are the taste-makers, the young people are the ... we didn't believe it! That's the difference. When I was, like I said last night, nobody who's young is cool. When you're young the most you can do, is you try not to be uncool. So that cool people let you hang out with them. 'Cause you learn how to be cool. Nobody's just inherently cool. Because they're young and that's retarded. That's not possible. But I do believe that we all ... like I just was in Turkey in September. And I was in a lot of markets with these women who were coming down from the mountains and they're ... they don't even speak Turkish. They're so tribal. And I would be having these hour-long conversations with these people just with looking and body language, because they haven't lost the capacity to communicate that way. You can communicate with some quite deftness of emotion like you and I are doing right now. And that's a kind of cognizance that doesn't have to do ... it can be aided by intelligence, but the absolute ability ...

Frank: It is erotic.

Penny: Erotic? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely. It's a property of Eros, absolutely, without a doubt. Yeah. But that's part of our, our guess our animal nature, no? (Frank sounds)

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Ask me a new question.

Frank: I ...

Penny: You can't throw Frank Moore.

Frank: I had a black hip-hop artist say he felt forced to be gay.

Linda: Oh yeah. This is the last time he was on the show, he said now what's cool is being gay and that he feels like it's not ... like now he's being treated as if being straight is not cool, it's not acceptable. He's feeling like there's a pressure on him to be gay.

Penny: That's interesting because the ending story of the story about the genderqueer thing and my dancers was that last night was left in the show and one of my dancers who was the most upset during this altercation last week, came up to me at the closing night party and very serious, and she told me that her lover and her friends came to the show last night and her friends had never seen her in her erotic dancer persona and they said to her that she looked really straight when she was dancing. And that she didn't look queer. And she ended up just sobbing and was being very upset after the show. (Frank sounds) I didn't see this, other people saw this. And then when she told me last night I was looking at her and I said well,

that's full circle, isn't it? And she admitted that she often feels like she's being challenged that she's not queer enough. And this is counter-revolutionary and counter-evolutionary.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: And all of these kinds of identity politics ... the way identity politics hijacked what was going on in the sixties. 'Cause in the sixties I think we can safely say this: people that are our age, we were not racists, we were not homophobic, we were not misogynists because that was part of what we saw, that we called plastic or bad or ... we distanced ourselves, we were, even if we had no experience with homophobia, let's say, or with racism, we still decided to take it on, how do I say it, to just take it on something, that we did not agree with that.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: So I think for our generation things were moving along, moving along, moving along. That's why I say in the mid-seventies then the whole thing was hijacked by these people who came out of the closet and went on committees telling the rest of us who've never been in the closet, what we could ... and they actually hijacked the entire discourse. And along with a lot of other things, including feminism. These things were not allowed to go into the widest margins of society. In my show, *Bad Reputation*, I say, do you actually think it's because of men that feminism hasn't spread to the widest margins of society? No! It's because of women! And the same thing with the gay rights issue. In the mid-'70s it got hijacked in one way. And then after AIDS, AIDS was like, gave the same kind of sympathy to the gay world as 9/11 gave to America. And just like the way America squandered the goodwill of the world's people by going into Iraq and doing all of these criminal acts, the goodwill that came to the "gay world" because of AIDS was squandered because the so-called "gay community" instead of using this as a time to educate and include the public, they just turned it into a marketing strategy, and started selling people shit. And if you want to sell people shit, you've got to keep them in a small group. Quentin Crisp said, do you know Quentin Crisp?

Frank: Yes.

Penny: OK. Quentin Crisp, we did many shows together and at that time I was really an AIDS activist, I still am an AIDS activist, I guess, but at that time I was very busy with it, I was very, very angry. And Quentin would always disagree with activism. He just disagreed with it. And he said it didn't work. Of course, he's an Edwardian, so he's coming from a different time, right. But he said to me, and it was always very intense for me, he said, the so-called gay community says that it wants equality but what it wants is acknowledgment. 'Cause when you say you want equality you say I'm gay and people say, so what? But when you want acknowledgment, you're saying gay and people say, oh, do tell, what was it like for you! (Frank sounds) And so that's that thing about being special. And I've done a lot of stuff on this aspect and also these young people want to be special. Their genderqueer revolution is something that they think is totally new.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: The trans man, his name is Raven, from Massachusetts, wrote and said, look, in ten years these kids are not going to be "genderqueer". He said but maybe it will have softened up their opinions towards trans people, so that it will be easier for the future generations of

people who really do have body dysmorphia and who want to segue into different body types. And then what he was saying, which is quite interesting too because I think the lesbian view on it is protectionist. It's like, oh, here's these young kids and they're taking testosterone and they're cutting off their breasts and they're very young and what if they're just doing it to curry favor or to blah, blah, blah. And that was one of the things that made the guy mad, the trans man mad, because I was trying to explain to him what I was saying. I told him about Quentin Crisp and I going into a leather bar and Quentin Crisp said, (imitating Quentin Crisp) they look marvelous Miss Arcade, but it can't be true about all of them! What do you mean? And he said, when I was young if someone told me that there was a tavern in the town where the beautiful and the cool were gathered, I would have run all the way there. And I would have gone up to the largest and the leatheriest of them and I would have said, if you love me, kill the bartender! (laughter) He said, and they won't do it! They're standing there squeaking with leather, studded with steel and they're talking about the ballet! So, there is this element of people who don't look, or they just want to look like something and they're really not like this. When I see people who are dressed super punk, young people in an elevator at the Chelsea Hotel.

Frank: They always are the ones who have the most inhibitions.

Penny: Ah-ha. It's true. You're right. You're absolutely correct.

Linda: We did a piece, "Erotic Play" for a number of years. Frank would go up to people and ask if he could do a video of them just being who they are. And he said the idea was to show sexy as just normal people as opposed to the like Playboy, Hollywood idea.

Penny: Right.

Linda: And so for three-and-a-half years we were videoing people like eight to ten hours a day, two hours at a time. And every single time, the people that, well we figured this out slowly, but the people that looked really interesting, and really hip, they were so not open. Then he'd get these secretaries from the Art Department or the History Department, they would come on their lunch break, and they would look so straight, and I'm thinking, oh right, Frank! Boom, clothes off, playing with the costumes, just being playful and open. No image to protect. They were just there to be with us and to have fun. It happened like that every time.

Penny: Yeah, I know, absolutely, it's true. It's really funny 'cause I go to certain events and because I have ties in the punk world, and there will be these young people, and I'll go, 'cause I just dress like whatever I'm dressing like. It could be anything. And then you'll be in the elevator with them and they'll be just looking at you and be just like (sighs and rolls her eyes).

Linda: (laughing) How uncool!

Penny: Yeah, how uncool. And then they find out that you're "somebody" and then they're like ... then they really feel like they're really superior to you. I've had a few conversations with people where I'm going, well if you're so fucking cool, why are you dressed the way I used to dress thirty years ago? Why don't you come up with something new? (Frank giggles) Because when I see you in your full punk regalia it looks like Elvis in 1976 to me. (laughter) It looks exactly the same! It doesn't look fresh. It looks like ... you look a little weird. But also the other thing is I do a lot, a lot, a lot of benefits. I've been doing them for quite a while for Mumia.

*Penny Arcade (video capture)*

And these people would come in full fucking heavy duty regalia with ten bucks worth of fucking wax in their hair and \$250 Doc Martens shoes and then you ask them to throw a dollar in the box to get a bus to go to Philadelphia and they wouldn't do it! And I would flip out on them. I would always flip out on them, but it's true. That's very telling.

Frank: Want to hear a classic letter?

Penny: Yeah.

Linda: Is this Linda's letter? (Frank giggles) Oh, say what it is? So, when the group broke up that was doing the show at the Mabuhay Gardens, it was like thirty of us, and that all broke up. And in an effort to hook up with other people doing creative things, Frank came up with this idea, oh, I'll go to art school and get another Master's degree! He already had one Master's degree.

Frank: B-a ...

Linda: It was a bad idea. 'Cause we're thinking this is where all these creative people will be. So we go to the San Francisco Art Institute, and what department? We didn't care. So we picked video, because we thought that would be fun to know how to work video equipment and stuff. This was like in '80, '81, something like that.

Penny: Oh wow.

Linda: But the department was Performance/Video. And so we had been doing stuff for like

15 years and not knowing it was called Performance Art.

Penny: Right, right.

Linda: We were just doing stuff Frank would come up with.

Frank: O ...

Linda: *The Outrageous Beauty Revue*, was very ... got a lot of international press. So it was well known.

Penny: Yes, I know about that.

Linda: So we go to this school and nobody would talk to us, not even the teachers! (Frank sounds) We were just like, as if we were invisible.

Penny: Wow!

Linda: Two years! It was a two-year program. I mean I was ready to quit after a week! Frank was like this (gestures plowing ahead). It was rough. I would be spelling Frank's board and they would pretend it wasn't happening. And then the teachers! There was one class that was the graduate class where everybody goes to each other's performances and you talk about it. That's all the class is. Only one guy would come to Frank's performances. And they would pretend ... they wouldn't even talk about it. And so the very last semester they have this guest teacher, Linda Burnham, who was the founder and publisher of *High Performance* magazine, which because we didn't know anything about performance art, we didn't know the magazine, we didn't know to be impressed by anything. And she, of course, comes right up to Frank and wants to befriend him and know him, and she started coming over to our house and inviting all of her famous artist friends up from L.A. to meet Frank and puts him on the cover of the magazine. (Frank sounds) Well, we don't even still know to be impressed. Because we'd been getting a lot of publicity. But everybody ... but we knew by the way everybody was acting at school: how did he get on the cover?! So, Frank always said this was his revenge! So anyway, we have a friendly relationship with her. We would get together all the time after the school thing. Whenever we were in L.A. we'd get together. Whenever she was up here we'd get together. And she was very supportive of us and Frank and the work we did. Frank was always having run-ins with somebody, and she was always supportive of our end of it.

Penny: Right.

Frank: I was warning artists if they did not stop the P.C. (politically correct), someone like Meese ...

Linda: Meese, who was the Meese Commission on Pornography. It would open the door for somebody like that to come in and clamp down on everybody.

Penny: Yes, absolutely. Right.

Linda: If everybody didn't stop picking at each other.

Penny: Yes, yes right. Absolutely.

Frank: They were pissed ...

Linda: ... at you for talking like that. At the time it seemed like he was pulling it out of the air.

Penny: Right.

Linda: You know, there was no context.

Penny: Right. Yeah, but you're prescient.

Linda: Yes. So, she had not, she had come to one performance that we did in L.A.

Frank: Punk ...

Linda: Oh right, she came to that other thing too, the punk club, right. OK, but, she hadn't come to one of these five-hour things that Frank was doing. So finally we were both going to be in the same city, and she was real excited. We had gotten together with her for lunch and, I can't wait to finally, da da da da! So, she didn't come! And, you know, people always don't come.

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Linda: But we get this ... this is the letter we get a few days later.

Penny: Read it! Read it!

Linda: This was July, 1989.

Linda reads the letter:

Dear Frank and Linda,

I was sorry to disappoint you by not showing up at your performance last weekend. I put myself in the ridiculous position of needing a ride and couldn't get anyone to bring me there.

The real problem, though, is that I was reluctant to go. I think you hit the nail on the head, Linda, when you said it seems to be hard to get people you know to participate. I think I was really afraid to be put in the position of interacting "erotically" in public with friends. I think I learned a lot about erotic play during the '70s, through performance, and it's not fear of the unknown. (Frank screams) It's just sort of abhorrent, the thought of facing decisions about that with friends and in front of friends and readers, etc. I'd rather carry out those experiments in other ways.

I've spoken with a lot of people in San Francisco about your problems there and the way they seem to feel is that your work is therapy, not art. By that they mean that it has a function as an interpersonal exploration (Frank giggles) but it doesn't address the concerns they are honestly interested in as part of the current art dialogue, (laughter) whether it be mainstream or "alternative". I explain that the fact that you have an audience means you are doing work that is valuable, but the general feeling is that even if you are an artist and it's art because you say it is, that doesn't mean everybody has to be interested in it or that curators and presenters are obliged to show it. (Frank giggles)

Most feel it doesn't belong in an art gallery but in your own studio or school, with you taking the responsibility yourself. I do agree that erotic play is not concurrent with what's being looked at in art, (laughter) and for many people ...

Penny: (shouts) What?!

Linda continues reading:

... such performance brings back awful memories of things tried in the '70s that proved to be embarrassing for all concerned. (Frank sounds) The only advantages you gain by showing in a gallery is exposure to their audience and a certain stamp of approval from the space itself. I don't think there's any reason to battle with them if they simply don't want your work in their space. Even if you have them on a technicality, you should just let it go.

I really love you both and feel you are to be congratulated for your courage and determination.

Frank: I hate it when they say they love me.

Penny: Yeah. Truly.

Linda continues reading:

The fact that you have a group of students now and are making something of a living from what you do is phenomenal. (Frank screams) That doesn't mean art presenters and editors are obliged to deal with it, especially if they already have.

Penny: You should get a fucking MacArthur [Grant - Ed.].

Linda continues reading:

It seems this is a time when you are going to have to carry the burden of presenting yourself in your own sphere, or in places you rent, and not try to force others to present you. I think that's the appropriate way for you to go, and, as you said, reduces the problems and disappointments. I know this is a little bit of a reversal on what I had said about the job of art spaces and about charges of "old-fashioned" and fear of nudity, but having examined my own feelings about coming to the piece in L.A., I have a little more insight into some of the reluctance you come up against. (Frank sounds)

The other thing that bothers people about dealing with you, Frank, is that they are very offended by the way you seem to use your handicap as a kind of force to get your way. In some ways it's interesting to consider that a physically disadvantaged person can actually grab power by using psychological force on others, (Frank yells) but in truth it's a bit unfair.

Penny: (screams) What?! This is psychotic! (laughter)

Linda continues reading:

You seem to have a compulsion not to take no for an answer under any circum-

stances, and to use as your weapon other people's reluctance to appear prejudiced. You might want to examine your methods and goals and consider whether your style constitutes undue force, and whether that is acceptable to you.

Penny: Undue force?! Slap her!! (laughter)

Linda continues reading:

A lot of people have said that it does, and force is unacceptable to most of us.

As far as our relationship goes, I would rather go on being your friend than your helper in the art world. I think my magazine and I have both given you a lot of help ...

Frank: I hate when they say that.

Linda continues reading:

... have given you a lot of help and would rather not be put on the spot anymore, so in the future, let's just relate as friends. I'd like to hear about your adventures, but I don't want to be involved in the process any more. It's just not interesting enough to me to deal with the struggle. It creates an awful lot of enemies somehow, and that has just as much to do with your attitude as it does with other people's. I am not a soldier, I am a mediator.

I know that this letter will make you want to fire off a rejoinder and shoot my letter full of holes, but that is really going to endanger our friendship. (laughter)

Penny: Whoa. This woman is fucked up! (laughter) So she wants to stop being involved with you as an art curator creature/power broker and just wants to be friends, but if you write her a letter telling her how you feel it's going to endanger your friendship!

Linda: Exactly.

Penny: You know, these people should all kill themselves. (laughter) That's my only response. I'm sorry, I want you to keep reading, but I just want to say that I have spent my entire career making people angry at me who have jobs in the Arts. And one of the things that used to make them really mad at me was I used to say publicly all the time, if you have a paying job in the Arts and you're not in service to artists, then you should kill yourself.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: That's the beginning and the end of it. You don't have to have more than five brain cells to understand that Frank has developed a tremendous vision in art, first of all under extraordinary circumstances that even somebody who was fully bodily able, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah ... didn't have a million fucking obstacles in their way! (Frank giggles) (laughter) But then, of course this letter was written in '89, now it's 2009, so we're already talking 20 years later, so when somebody consistently makes work over this amount of time ...

Frank: I was doing ...

Linda: ... he started in the late '60s, so he'd already been going 20 years by the time she wrote

this letter.

Penny: I know, I understand that. The problem is that we have people like this who, number one, they haven't been doing it that long. (Frank sounds) See what I mean?

Linda: Right.

Penny: Like I always say, I'm not surprised that I have almost no reviews in America that are even on the level of a first-grade review ... a first grader could give a better review than most of the reviews that I get, because the people don't have the experience and the background to write about my work because my work is grounded in what I was doing in the '60s. And I always say, if you want to look at the work of a, what you call a "sixties artist", then you have to look at their work in the '80s and '90s. You don't look at their work in the sixties. If somebody is a 28-year-old artist right now in 2009, you don't look at their work in 2009, you look at their work in 2029! So what did somebody who is coming into a consciousness of art, right? This arc of development which doesn't exist. I've been talking a lot over the past few years, really calling for a secessionist movement, like the one that was in the 1890s in Vienna, which was the birth of modern art, which was when the artists in Vienna 1895-96 said to academia, we refuse to allow you to say what art is (Frank sounds), and by the way, whatever the fuck your name is ...

Linda: Linda.

Penny: ... there are six different things I could say at once, I'm so pissed off. (laughter) The reality is that, while academia is a reflection of the art world, it is not and never will be the art world. So anybody in that position, they are not artists. They're not the people making the work. And that is not ... (sighs) (laughter) It's like the people, pick up *Vogue Magazine*, I haven't read it for a while, but I can tell you that if we went to a library or something, and you took a *Vogue Magazine* from July '07, it would be talking about wearing boots, even in the summer time. And it would tell you to be wearing gray (Frank sounds) and that you should be ... it's fashion instead of style. Someone like Frank and yourself, you have developed your own vocabulary, your own language. (sighs) Someone like this does not have the right, at all to ... her letter is so stupid! (Frank giggles) It's so dumb, it's so sophomoric.

Frank: What in the fuck is the art dialogue?!

Linda: What in the fuck is the art dialogue, when she talks about the current art dialogue.

Penny: They're retarded. Honest to God, I'll tell you the truth. About almost ten years ago I started talking about appropriation. I used the word as a put down: oh, they're appropriating this, they're appropriating that. Do you remember Raiza Abdul? Do you know him?

Linda: Yeah.

Penny: Raiza Abdul. I'd go and see Raiza Abdul's work when he came to New York. And his work made me furious. Because he was the opposite of me. He was all surface and all imagery and there was no content. What he was doing, it didn't matter. And that was his work, and I think it's always important, it's a gift, when you can see somebody who does what you ... when you see an artist whose work is in opposition to what you believe in. That's a very powerful motivating force. It makes you really go, right. And it also brings out a lot in you.

And Raiza Abdul was that for me. And I would say all the time, oh nobody appropriates more images than Raiza Abdul except Madonna! (laughter) I go and I see a piece and, oh my god, that's from Visconti's *The Devils* and there's the burning book. There's not one original image here. So I talked about appropriation for a long time as a put down, oh this is appropriated, appropriated, appropriated. Oh, I don't want to see one more. Oh, it's like the Wooster group, it's like the junior high school version of the Wooster group doing Richard Foreman. I can't cope. And people would get very mad at me. But I would say, but the art world that I grew up in in the '60s in New York, because there was no money involved, the ability to talk about what you saw was very, was a currency in itself. And people didn't get mad at you when you could read something, and you'd say bop, bop, bop. There was like well what are you going to do, rocks are hard, water's wet, and bop, bop, bop. And then what happened was this academia took over. So after 100 years after the secessionist movement, academia took over again! This letter ... look, all I know is this, I've been performing professionally since 1967 and I'm going to be 59 years old. When I open up an envelope for my Social Security and it tells you how much you're going to get, mine says I'm going to get 280 bucks a month. So, what does that mean? That means that for forty whatever it is, 41 years, that not one not-for-profit venue that I worked in all of these years, not one of them ever threw a buck into my Social Security account. Yet every single one of them have Social Security, health insurance, 401K, paid vacation. Then they want to say to me or to another artist, oh, this is not really currently in the dialogue that we're having with art. (Frank sounds) Or, you know, we can't book you ever! Well, you know, what are you complaining about, you had your chance in the '80s. Whatever! I did a festival last year in New York ...

Frank: You talk to the same people ...

Linda: You talk to the same people that we talk to!

Penny: Right, 'cause they're the only ones that are there and they're all mostly full of shit. But the thing is, artists need ... see this is the thing that's pathetic! The thing that is pathetic is that ... I always say to young artists, there's nowhere to go. You're not going anywhere. There is no there there. There's no money, there's no career. (Frank sounds in agreement) It doesn't exist!

Frank: Yes.

Penny: One of my things about emerging arts is how dare these universities say to these students that there's a profession called Art when there is no profession. There's no profession! Because if there was a profession, and I'd been performing for 41 years, when I open up my Social Security I'm not getting \$260, right! And I've been making ... not only have I been involved in five or six of the biggest movements since 1967, but I'm an adept. People like to see my work. They want to pay to see my work. The public has always wanted to see my work. They have always been in the way of the public getting to see my work.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: You know, it's all about access. They are gatekeepers.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: They provide or do not provide the access.

Frank: Yes!

Penny: So how are you going to have kids ...

Frank: Read “Mainstream Avant-garde”.

Penny: Well, they’re so retarded too. People talk about avant-garde, they talk about ... they use avant-garde as an adjective! Oh your work is so avant-garde! What the fuck does that mean?

Linda: This is a piece that Frank wrote in 1996. (Linda reads)

I suppose this is a review of sorts. Two things evoke this review. First Martha Wilson of Franklin Furnace asked me to comment on the Furnace’s plans. The second event was our going to a Karen Finley reading [which cost \$3 as opposed to \$30 for a Finley performance ... Which I could not afford].

I have to start by saying I consider both Wilson and Finley powerful voices of the avant-garde. When other performance galleries were making artists create “acts” that would fit into “avant-garde” cabarets ... fit in terms of both time and fashionable subject matter ... Wilson at the Furnace was giving both artists and the art absolute freedom to perform magic ... until they shut the Furnace down for “fire violations”. Karen and I were among the artists who enjoyed this freedom.

In other reviews, I have likened Karen’s poetry to Ginsberg’s, and her performances to Lenny Bruce’s in their intensity and laser commentary on the social injustices. Her poetry makes me cry. Her passions within her performances have transported me into very deep states of reality.

So it is always tragic to see figures like these get sucked, seduced, absorbed, tricked, bribed into “the mainstream”. It is tragic not only in personal terms for the individual artists, but in terms of the big picture. When an artist sets herself up as being an artist who goes beyond the normal frame, who tells the hard truths, who explores the unknown ... not to be hip, or controversial, or to be interesting ... but because that is how our tribal human being evolves, so it has to be done ... when that kind of artist then goes after money, personal fame, and/or glamour while still claiming to be doing avant-garde art, it is denying society the real evolutionary function of the real avant-garde. It tells people, audiences and artists alike, that the avant-garde is just a branch of the entertainment complex with the same rules, goals, reality as television, rock music, Hollywood, and sports. This is like telling people a can of Slim Fast is a balanced meal of real food. It is a lie. And the scary dangerous thing is artists are buying/selling this lie.

Why am I on this rant? About a year or two ago, Wilson sent out a mass mailing in which she defended art [maybe to funders] as a profitable industry which pulls money, people, and jobs into cities. [True ... if you want to make a lot of money, buy property where artists live/create now to sell to the yuppies when they discover the area!] This logic is a very steep, slippery slope indeed. The first glaring danger of this commercialized logic is art, according to this logic, which is not profitable or sellable is not and cannot be successful worthwhile art! [Hey, ain’t that the

American way?]) I am sure Wilson does not believe this.

Although another mass mailing I received from her in November [I have been mulling it over until now] makes me wonder if she has fallen down that slope into believing the lie. Avant-garde art is art that tells the truth, explores the taboos, pushes the limits. Obviously this kind of art, if it is honest, cannot be focused outwardly. Historically, often “the people” [who are not the same thing as “the mainstream”] have identified with the avant-garde because it was telling the truth about their lives. The focus of the avant-garde should always be on telling the truth, not on popularity polls and bottom lines. The focus of the avant-garde has been, and should be, on doing art that is as “pure” as possible ... not on mass media entertainment of reaching as many people as possible by shaping “the product” to that goal.

In her letter, Martha refers to the avant-garde art as “once unpopular work ... formerly at the non-profit fringe” ... art that Franklin Furnace, according to the letter, has groomed for 20 years to get it ready for the mainstream ... and now “Franklin Furnace is in a position to lead the avant-garde into the mainstream ...” This hurts my head and heart. It is as if Martha does not see her own historical contribution of giving daring art a home. Instead, she tries to take credit for gravity and decay. The mainstream entertainment, by its sheer mass, has always sucked artists out of the fringe, the underground. That is just gravity. In reality, it takes a lot to enter, and to stay in, the underground. The underground is where the real freedom and the real ability to change society are to be found. This is why artists choose the underground instead of the mainstream. This is also why, when an artist is pulled into the mainstream, this freedom and ability decay. In my own career, I have worked very hard to stay in the underground ... this work has been hard precisely because some of the pieces have turned out to be “popular” [whatever that means!] ... attracting the mainstream sharks.

The mainstream has always tried to create a fake avant-garde with fake controversies, fake taboos, fake “hipness,” etc. to give the marks a controlled fun-ride through a Disneyland to keep them away from the real edge of life. This is because the powers-that-be cannot control or exploit what is in the real avant-garde.

All of this is business as usual ... and doesn’t scare me.

What does scare me is that someone like Martha bought into it and is becoming a producer of it! Her letter read like a bad *Saturday Night Live* skit. She is selling Franklin Furnace to get money to match a \$100,000 N.E.A. Challenge grant. With this money, and by teaming up with the corporate and media America, Franklin Furnace will be a “content provider for new media” that sniffs out “emerging alternative artists”. [Emerging from where to where? Alternative to what?]

Penny: That’s my line: emerging from where to where?!

Linda continues reading:

These artists and their art must be suitable to be packaged as “alternative comedy



Linda Mac, Frank Moore and Penny Arcade (video capture)

[A.K.A. Performance art.]” The letter tells us this new alternative comedy will be “funny, yet provocative”. There will be a half-hour TV show of this. Plus they will produce short pieces to be aired “through” *Saturday Night Live* [as if that show has been cutting edge, or even funny, in the past 15 years] and MTV [with its history of censorship!] Moreover they are seeking other ways of giving “audiences a glimpse of the avant-garde world” [whatever the hell that is!] “in an entertaining and easily consumable fashion” ... like avant-garde artist trading cards ... funded by Philip Morris companies!

Frank: I did not make this up!

Linda continues reading:

The marketing phrase “alternative comedy [A.K.A. performance art]” is very damaging to performance art because it trivializes art. In fact it avoids “art” all together, selling “alternative comedy” as a weird, consumable form of entertainment which will give you a laugh for your buck. This is not what performance art is. Performance art is the performing/doing/experiencing the act of art. It is going on a physical journey into the unlimited realm of art. Sometimes this journey may be funny or entertaining. But these are not the true goals or rewards. The suggestion [promotion] that these are the rewards of art results in denying people, including the artists, the real full freeing experience of art.

All of this is selling the art, the artists, and the audience way short. I am not

questioning Martha's personal commitment to the real avant-garde art. But realistically such art cannot exist in such an environment that she is envisioning. Moreover it is misunderstanding the new media such as the internet and zines. In these media, artists can relate to their audiences directly without middlemen, without compromises, without limiting concepts such as "mainstream" ... all for very little money ... so why sell out?

But this concept of "alternative comedy" is disturbing. I guess the Karen Finley reading was an example of alternative comedy. She read from her parody of Martha Stewart [why bother?] which she obviously wrote just to fulfill a book deal. The reading was empty shtick, a passionless exercise in cleverness with no content or message. The audience responded with reflex laughter, like a laugh track. The problem was Karen was trying to be an entertainer, a comedian. Karen is not a comedian or entertainer. That is not her function. Her function is to inspire, confront, transmute ... to tell the truth with passion. That is why people come to her. When she does not do that, the people are not fulfilled. When she ended her act, the people just sat there numb. Then I asked Karen (Frank shrieks) to read her very deep, very moving poem "Black Sheep" ... I just happened to have a copy of it with me. (Frank laughs) As she read it, magic, life, and power started flowing through her body and out into the audience, uplifting them. When she finished reading, people stood up and clapped ... because this was why they came.

Oh, by the way, do you consider yourself mainstream? Do you want to be?

Penny: When was that written in?

Linda: 1996.

Penny: Well, I mean the thing is that I don't know, one of the nights, I don't know if you were there, I say different stuff different nights, but one of the nights I said, "Any artist that thinks that they're successful because they're talented is deluded."

Frank: Yes.

Penny: Karen got a tremendous amount of access and Karen did a lot of good work, but all people stop developing at the point where they get the juice. That's reality. (Frank sounds) And the best thing that can happen to somebody is that they don't get any attention 'til they get over that desire for the approval. Not that it ever completely goes away, but when you have more loyalty to your work than you have to this other thing. And let's face it, that whole fucking art scene is a popularity contest! They can not handle ... they can't handle anybody original. They can't handle anybody with a point of view. They're terrified by ...

Frank: She always was freaked out because I was not ...

Linda: ... going after fame. It made her very uncomfortable. And she would want to, she'd want to get Frank to explain it to her. But, she ...

Penny: Yeah, but these people are pathetic!! (laughter) They're pathetic! And the thing is I have been ... this is one of the things that I identified so much with when I was reading the broadside of the NYU lecture because they hate me! They hate me! And then they especially

hated me because I did get to do my work in Europe where a few really intelligent reviewers could really write about the work. I have been completely dismissed and my work has been completely scorned. And the fact that I created a lot of work was seen as a sign that ... they always had something to say either that I wasn't a "real artist"...

Frank: Like me.

Penny: ... or that I was ... they had a million things to say about me. I never have gotten a grant. I could never, like even in 1984 when I was 34, I couldn't get an Emerging Arts grant, because they said I wasn't an emerging artist because I was a Warhol superstar. Like I was 19 years old. I wasn't even doing my own work then. And then the N.E.A., people that worked for the N.E.A. told me for years that I needed to get to know the people on the panels (Frank sounds) because they really thought my work deserved to be funded, but the people on the panels had to know me! What does that mean?! What you mean they have to know me?! That's their job to go out and see who the artists are! Now, in New York, I did my work for 20 years at PS 122 always in a kind of opposition with Mark Russell.

Linda: He wouldn't book us, Mark Russell. He would send his flunkies to see Frank perform at Franklin Furnace ...

Penny: Oh, he's too scared, he would never!

Linda: But he wouldn't book us. And Frank talked to him for years, kind of negotiating something.

Penny: Yeah.

Frank: Except in Cleveland.

Linda: Yeah, the guy who booked for Scott somebody, I can't remember his name now. This was like in the '70s and '80s.

Penny: Scott at The Kitchen!

Frank: Yes.

Penny: He's the guy that said that my work had too much content! (laughter)

Linda: Well, he selected Frank to perform at the Cleveland Performance Art Festival, but he's the one, I think we told you that. He said I won't book him at my ... at The Kitchen ... because I'm personally uncomfortable with his work. Even though I think it's very important work and it should be seen. So he booked him in Cleveland because he wasn't going to be there when Frank performed.

Penny: Yeah, but see, I mean, I did a festival last year in New York called the Globesity Festival. That money was given to me by an Australian venture capitalist who had used fasting to control an autoimmune illness that he had and he wanted to do a film about fasting and he wanted to have a B role for the film which would have been ... he gave me a certain amount of money ... where artists would fast for ten days on juice. And then they would make a piece about over-consumption. And I had a panel called "Who is not for Profit, the Artist is not for Profit", and I called Martha from Franklin Furnace and put her on the panel and I did all this

shit on the emerging arts because she's one of the people who was an architect of the emerging art thing! Her and Mark Russell, they were all over that. And now a lot of artists who are my age can't get booked in New York. Mark Russell does his Under The Radar Festival. You can't get booked in it. I have to send you a video of my show, *New York Values*, which is all about fragmentation. The show just falls apart through the whole show. (Frank giggles) And it's a show about failure. Naturally I say to the audience, I said, I ran into Karen Finley at a party and I told her I was doing a show about failure. And she said, you're not a failure, Penny! You're not a failure! You're not a failure! And (laughter) ...

Frank: But I want to be!

Penny: Yeah, well the thing is there's something called ... the Japanese have a concept which is called the nobility of failure. That if your heart is in the right place, and your mind is in the right place, and you fail, it is more powerful than winning.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: But I wanted to say about the avant-garde. In *New York Values*, I say that Gertrude Stein addressed Oxford University in 1917 and she said the avant-garde is in opposition to academia. As soon as academia accepts something, it is no longer avant-garde. Beginning, end of the story.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: And right now what's happened is a lot of these people, first of all they're destroying the audience because the audience ... see Mark Russell wouldn't book you because he thinks that people are not going to come to see a person with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair. He does not allow the audience, he will not allow that to happen. Like, OK, let's say only three people show up. He won't allow that to happen because he's concerned with his own failure. I just think it is something quite remarkable that in the sixties that would never have happened. There was an element ...

Frank: Even when I packed Franklin Furnace.

Linda: And Martha was telling him he should book Frank. She was telling him and Scott. And they still wouldn't do it.

Penny: Yeah. Well I think people ... look, there's a certain shock value that has always been in one corner of the performance art scene. Shock sells, you know. But besides that ... I just have a tremendous resentment towards these people as gatekeepers. The way *Bitch! Dyke! Fagbag! Whore!* came about. I got to tell you this 'cause you'll laugh. Mark Russell booked me in 1985 because Ethel Eichelberger saw me perform and called Mark up and said I was a genius and you have to book her, she's a genius, before anybody else books her. So Mark ... Ethel apparently did a fantastic sales job on me and Mark was all excited. You know, a former Warhol superstar, blah, blah, blah. So I go there. He's offering me two weekends which in 1985 this might as well been a month or two months, because it was a one night stand, right. I go over and he starts asking me about the Factory. He goes, you know, I don't know anything about the Factory ... what was it like being at the Factory with Andy Warhol? (Frank sounds) And I said it was boring! (laughter)

Frank: Notice I never asked you about that.

Penny: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So he's asking me, I told him it was boring and then he started to get very defensive with me. When he started getting defensive, I started getting mad. (Frank giggles) Then he took away, he took one of the weekends off the table. (Frank sounds, laughter) So I went and did the performance, and it was four nights that were all improvised because all my original work was just improvisation, it was just performance, there was no ... I would have like five ideas ...

Linda: That's what Frank does.

Penny: ... and I'd go on stage with the ideas and make something from the ideas. So I put an ad in the paper, you know, a quarter-page ad. Because there were a lot of people who knew me as a performer when I was 17, 18, 19, 20. People don't usually forget the name Penny Arcade. I felt an obligation to have an audience. So we had like about 100 people every night, which was very unusual at that time. Like a full house would be like 40 people or something like that. And at the end of it I said to Mark, I said, well, I'd like to do this show again in the fall. And he goes, well, you've got to do a new show! (Frank sounds) I said, but it was completely improvised. (laughter) And he's like, yeah, you have to do a new show. Then I said to him, I said, did I get any press? And he said, press? You didn't get any press! I said, why not? And he said, people were very offended by your advertising! I was like, they're offended because I advertised?! And he goes, yes! That was '85, then '86, '87, '88, he never would book me. '89 there was a big financial crash and the whole thing with the N.E.A. started to happen. All of a sudden they weren't getting the money, there was no money. (Frank giggles) And it was August and he asked me to do August (Frank sounds) because Eric Bogosian was going on vacation. Because Eric Bogosian would do August to develop his work to do then in the bigger venues. I went and I did the show, also all improvised. And then that was '89. Then, in 1990, I called him up and said, hey, I'd like to work on some new material. He goes, we're completely booked up for two years. I said, wow, you're completely booked up for two years! And what happened was that in '86 Karen Finley had told me there was going to be a big benefit at PS 122, they had them all the time. And that she had been talking to Mark, and Karen at that time was a big fan of mine. (Frank giggles) And she told me that Mark said I was going to be on the benefit. So I ... I didn't hear anything. So I called him up and I said, Karen Finley told me that she was talking to you and that you were going to have me in the benefit. There's 60 people in this benefit! 60! He goes, well, Penny, we discussed having you on the benefit, but we decided against it! And I said, decided against it?! There's 60 people performing, there's no room for me?! (laughter) And he goes, well you know we've done things with you in the past. (Frank sounds) And I said, Mark, I hope that you're saying a novena to Saint Jude that I'm never going to be successful, 'cause I'm going to fuck with you. And he got all freaked out because he's middle class. I'm working class (laughter) and to me this is not a particularly big thing to ... I didn't understand that you can't say something like this to middle class people because they take offense. I was just trying to be direct. And I did not perform there again all those years. So then in '89 he had me there 'cause Annie Hamburger had booked me for her En Garde Arts Festival. And she had come ... I was performing in a venue called the Ballroom that was like where people like Peggy Lee and people like that would perform. And the guy was willing to have me there at 11 o'clock on Thursday nights because I would bring in an



Frank Moore and Penny Arcade (video capture)

audience. And Annie Hamburger came to see me there and she's like, I don't understand why you're performing here. And I said because nobody downtown will book me. And she goes, oh, you're just paranoid!

Linda: They always tell us that ... they always say we're paranoid when we say that!

Penny: No, I said, The Kitchen won't book me. I mean that guy Scott, I ran, after Mark wouldn't let me do the show again, I booked the place ... it's 100 seats above the 7A Café. I ran four days a week for four and a half months. So I called The Kitchen and I said, hi, I'm Penny Arcade and I want to invite you to see my work. And the guy says, well, actually I was there last weekend. I said, really! Silence! I go, oh, I think by your silence must mean you didn't like my show. He goes, it's not my cup of tea. He goes, but you were packed! And I said, yeah, I said, luckily, not everybody has the same taste as you apparently. (laughter) And then another guy who worked at The Kitchen, I was in something that was at The Kitchen, somebody else's work, and I was talking to the guy who was one of the co-people there. And I said, I was in the show, it was a total piece of shit, I said, this is such a piece of shit, but apparently it has no problem getting booked here. And the guy says yeah. And I said, well I called up Scott 'cause I would like to be booked here ... he went, Penny don't bother. He goes, your work has too much content for The Kitchen. And I was like, too much content?! And he goes, yeah, way too much content. And I was like, OK, that is really fascinating. So then in 1990 I called Mark and I said, I've some new stuff I'd like to work on. And he goes, oh we're completely booked for two years. Like, two years?! And he goes, yeah. And I said, oh, that's too bad I have a new show called *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!*. It was completely

made up. I just made it up in the moment. And he went, what?! And I said, yeah, *Bitch! Dyke! Fagbag! Whore!*. And he goes, don't give it to anybody else! (Linda groans) And that's the secret history of where that came from. But the thing is, now I take it as a complete badge of honor because none of these people would really book me. I kept P.S. 122 open in 1992 for the summer they had no money to stay open. They had a 25th anniversary, they didn't even allow me, I was not ... they wanted me to be on the committee, on the committee, where they put your name on the committee. And I had spoken to Lucy Sexton. I wrote her a very long email from Australia. And I said, look, it's imperative that I perform at this benefit, the 25th anniversary. I've done twenty years of work there. I said, I know that I created a substantial part of your audience base. I find it hard to believe that there's no place for me to perform or present or introduce. And in the end it turned out that what they wanted me to do was be on the committee and that meant that I was supposed to sell five tickets for \$250 each! (Frank & Linda groan) It was humiliating. And then that was where I got off the bus. It was very ... it's very interesting but I think that ... and I talk about this, 'cause I lecture at art schools, NYU, and I just tell the truth. The thing is that I will continue to make work because that's what I do. You will continue to make work because that is what you do. And all these people will fade away. They will fade away.

Linda: Right.

Penny: And as Quentin Crisp said to me, "Not to worry Miss Arcade. Time is kind to the non-conformist." And that's what you're up against. The great Jack Smith said, the art world thinks that it loves art but the art world hates art. And its only real response to real art is to destroy it. And the more tragedy that some person with a lot of essence has, the more they dangle that person in front of the public, because it increases the vampire thrill. And that's a reality. And there's a reason why in bohemia ... as a child in the sixth grade, a lot of the stories in my six grade reading book were by people who couldn't pay their rent 100 years before. O'Henry, Edgar Allen Poe, Guy de Maupassant. In *New York Values*, which is an autopsy on the death of bohemia, I question: Why is there always 100 years between the work of bohemia and being able to earn a living? And you will continue. You will ... people are looking for authenticity. Jack Smith said, people pay a lot of money to go to art school and then they find they're not being taught iota by iota how to make art. And then they find out that they're going to have to become apprentices. 'Cause that's the only way. I see people all the time that worked with me, shot video for me, whatever, they work with me for a year or something then they come and go, all my friends think you're a genius, but nobody can figure out why you're not getting a deal. (Frank sounds) And then they go and then they're going to do it.

Frank: We are ...

Linda: We are running out of time for the show, so we have to wrap it. So shall we say ... you are Penny Arcade!

Penny: I'm Penny Arcade, all day long and all night long. (laughter) This is Frank Moore all day long, all night long.

Frank: One of the best!

Linda: Penny is one of the best!

Penny: Thanks, one of the best! (laughter) We have so much in common. I found it very supportive and very something that holds you up, to read what you think. And I hope that you find it also equally supportive.

Frank: Yes.

Penny: And to hold you up to say, we're going to fucking survive. Because we have authenticity.

Frank: I have a funny story about The Kitchen ...

Linda: Oh yeah. So what are we doing? Are we saying goodnight to the audience now? OK. Goodnight!

Penny: Goodnight!