

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

QUITO ZIEGLER

Interviewer: Sebastián Castro Niculescu

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Transcribed by Bill Moyer

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Sebastian Castro Niculescu: Hello my name is Sebastian Castro Niculescu. You and I will be having a conversation with Quito Ziegler for The New York City Trans Oral History project in collaboration with The New York Public Libraries Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is July 17th, 2018 and this is being recorded at the New York Public Library offices in Midtown Manhattan.

Niculescu: Hi Quito.

Quito Ziegler: How are you?

Niculescu: I'm doing well. How are you doing today.?

Ziegler: Very wet, but very good [both laughing]

Niculescu: Yeah...The day this is being recorded there is there is a ...

Ziegler:—completely unexpected explosion of rain from the sky [Castro—Niculescu laughs]; people cowering in the subway doors. I did not cower... I ran... which meant I got drenched. [both laughing]

Ziegler: So, if you were to take a picture of me right now you would see wet pony head. [Castro—Niculescu chuckles] A lot of drip.

Niculescu: Um hmm, um, yeah but hopefully slowly drying.

Ziegler: Yes! [both chuckle]

Niculescu: Um, So yeah. So maybe we'll get started by just asking where you're from.

Ziegler: I am a fourth generation New York Jew.

Niculescu: OK

Ziegler: My mom is from Brooklyn. My dad is from Queens and I was raised on Long Island.

Niculescu: OK.

Ziegler: Yeah well [indecipherable]. I was...uh...I did like... my ...all... of all of my schooling in a town called Jericho.

Niculescu: OK. OK.

Ziegler: That's my county.

Niculescu: um hmm...And... what did your parents do—growing up to... to have financial resources.

Ziegler: They...uh... my dad is an accountant. My mom was. ummm uhm...An agent of capitalism. [both laughing loudly]

Niculescu: OK

Ziegler: Ha! Yeah, that's what I feel better about... She made... She, like, designs and sells all of those kinds of promotional giveaways that you can put your name on

Niculescu: oh... I see...

Ziegler: ...and, like...bat-mitzvah invitations and, like, kind of printed materials. That's her-her deal. Yeah-yeah. ... they both grew up working class and they were the first in their families to go to college and they both got master's degrees and they sort of did all the things that one was supposed to do, which was sort of—and you know, to give me the childhood that I had—which is kind of funny because I sort of reversed it both, like, economically... I went back to Brooklyn... I live a mile from where my mother and grandmother were both born.um, like, in some ways I've regressed too... but not... Yeah. Yes. Yeah.

Niculescu: Hmm...And do you have an earliest memory?

Ziegler: Yeah!! Dancing to the Bee Gees and spinning around until I fell down. [both laughing] ...um hum.

Niculescu: That's a great earliest memory....

Ziegler: It's not bad. Yeah, I remember dancing in the kitchen to the Bee Gees.

Niculescu: Hmm...And so what were you like as a child then?

Ziegler: Ummmmmmmm...I was I was a weird kid you know. But, I mean it's the question and not the reflection on the question, but the reflection on the question is, you know,—if I had grown up—if I were—if I were me now as a five-year-old or something like that, I think that it would be real obvious exactly how queer I was. But we didn't have that kind of language. This is the '80s in Long Island. You know?

Like, there was the internet yet there wasn't a whole lot of information. So, I was just a weird kid who was pretty individualistic and kind of did my own thing. I grew up in a town that was very — 'conformist' was the word that I used in high school when I was really mad at it. So, I was kind of a loner, but kind of not, like umm... yeah...I was a weirdo. They voted me in the class individualist when I graduated high school. Like, you just you know—kind of the magical—I started when—a big strain that actually is still true of my life is that I was raised around Holocaust survivors and I

was raised with like a really deep.... 'Never again' kind of philosophy. And the summer camp that I went to was actually a socialist summer camp...

Niculescu: WOW

Ziegler: ...the Workman's Circle. Like... twenty years later I went to Purim Schpiel in this building with pictures of my summer camp growing up. But I didn't really know that. But what I didn't know is that we shared space with people who—who were survivors-and every summer they would tell the stories and I would always act out in the—or not act out—just—'perform' is the word I'm looking for—the Holocaust Memorial Service. So, like, I was reading Elie Wiesel when I was 8 and I started reading Gandhi when I was eleven and then like got really interested in, like, Martin Luther King—used to make me cry—and, like, all of the....— I got really interested in social movements and—hard wired from a very formative age about,—like, about justice in the world and the things that you see and the things that you do. The other sort of important bit about my childhood too, that is has-has-become a lot more relevant in the last decade, is that I have one older sibling so my parents both worked... they had to, you know,—to give us this education that they had so valued and wanted to give to us...and, so, when my mom went back to work—she had stayed home for, like, a few years when I was born—But she went back to work full time—by the time I was maybe, like, third grade or something like that—and one older sibling, my older brother—and he is—is, was and always could be a sociopath. So, uh... I grew up in the shadow of this very dark figure in my house—And too—You know, you know its interesting sort of, like, thinking about concepts of peace and—and nonviolence and, like... like, watching my—having to endure watching my brother torture our cats or torturing me or locked me out of the house or, like, you know, sort of ...a sense of empathy, I think, is rooted in that, but also some habits and some things and I experienced some trauma when I was nine that was pretty intense with my brother and his friends—and repressed it for a really long time. So, like, I spent a lot of—And it came out, like, in queer space, like, much, much, later in life...and... uh...has caused a lot of reflections about that time, I guess... and sort of,—I don't know—working through that kind of stuff—there are a lot of ways that I experienced a ton of privilege and I'm very grateful for... In terms of the education that I got and...the relative calmness of the circumstances that I grew up in. [short laugh] Except, there was also this other narrative that was happening at the same time... which is my brother being a severely emotionally disturbed human and my parents being sort of, like, not necessarily turning a blind eye to it but just not really having a lot of resources. They didn't know how to deal with it—and—you know, later in life they're like, -" Yeah we took him to therapy for a year, but nothing really changed. So, we thought maybe, you know, he'd outgrow it." He never outgrew it. Now he's also a pedophile. Like we don't have a relationship but...um...but I think that growing..., like, growing up in the shadow of that was—was—an important factor in my development in some way, in terms of, like, being the glue that holds a family together and developing a sense of empathy; developing a strong, like, really deep interest in nonviolence...um, yeah...you know the need later in life to develop a chosen family doesn't you know because of complications within my own. Um—Yeah. Stuff like that. I think that is a lot of weird radical songs in Yiddish that are embedded inside of my brain. [both laughing]

Niculescu: OK...OK... [chuckles]

Ziegler: I think that's the take away from childhood. [laughing]

Niculescu: OK...Ok-umm-I guess I'm just wondering, then, the kind of question of where you start to encounter some of the resources that, like, led you to-like you mentioned reading Ellie Wiesel and Gandhi-and just like,—what were the spaces, like, where you kind of first encountered a kind of vocabulary of non-violence and of justice?

Ziegler: Umm...It was definitely, like, growing up in a conservative Jewish community ...because another thing is, like, I was raised in a temple. My parents were very community-oriented people ...or very temple-oriented people. My dad was the president of the synagogue for, like, 10 terms in a row and my mom did the Sisterhood-and I grew for the first 14 years of my life or so,—I spent five days a week in the temple ...

Niculescu: WOW

Ziegler: ...and... Zionist Judaism... Conservative Judaism... like, very, uhm... 'find your husband'...and 'we can't wait to meet the grandkids' kind of culture...and I always knew that there was something, like, a little bit... that ... that there was something like—a little bit that I wasn't going to fit in that. But I also didn't really have language for queerness then either because the other thing that was happening—as I was growing up—because I was born in '76—I graduated high school in '94—which is, I think, the year before—or the year that they discovered AZT. Right? So, I grew up in the shadow of the AIDS crisis. So, everything was, like, um... Safe sex, condoms, [indecipherable]... like, death...there was a lot of death...uh... being gay was a death sentence ...that was very, very clear. There was zero 'out' people in my high school. There was no GSA... there was no... I don't think I even understood what the word trans meant until I was in my 30s. It was just not something I was exposed to at all. Um...I had one cousin who was gay and his partner and they both passed away around my Bar Mitzvah time or so...ummm hmm... but I didn't even really fully understand. I remember like being, like, "I don't know any gay people." My mom was like "Yes you do! Your cousin Ira...and Marvin"... and I was, like, "Woah...WHAT?! They're gay? OK." I didn't know what that meant—and you know—and all of the complexities that we have all this language for now about, like, you know, homosexuality and gender and, the difference between those things—but then.... it was, you know LGBT, I don't even think was even a thing—like, it was just... a little... like, WE were the same. We have always been here...but, like, the ...the language and the structures that I could... that I could connect with were really different. I remember in the '90s.... I was in high school. I was old enough that my parents were very embarrassing to me... and we were like in Manhattan together. We'd come into the city to do things and, for whatever reason, we happened to be in the West Village on the day of Wigstock...

Niculescu: Oh.... OK...

Ziegler: ...and it was FLOOOODED with drag queens... like, everywhere...and I remember being sooo—like, I'd never seen a drag queen before and I... never—I was just...totally fascinated by it.

And my parents were, like, gawking and being very 'judgey' and ...being the long island Jews that they are-and I love my parents-but they are who they are...and I remember this feeling—is very distinct—like, “This is a different part of my life”. Or like that-there was a separateness here—there—like, I was different from-from where I—I always knew that I was different from—from—like, ‘different’ was what we used,—you know. Um... that was the word that described me... like, "different... oh she's ...different." But that -that was what we had...you know... um, but there was an affinity that I felt towards this ...thing... that I didn't fully understand. Yeah... So ...yeah...that was the '90s. And, like, meanwhile ..., Riot Girl is raging across the country and I'm listening to my Pearl Jam tapes. You know, it's kind of funny to have had lots of conversations with people of my generation around... about stuff like this. Like, what culture reached you and what didn't you know. Like, now I listen to a whole bunch of stuff that I wish I had listened to in the 90s. You know, like KEENEY kill (?) and all sorts of cool shit. And then I was-I had my Nirvana tapes and I was sort of, like, into dude bands and would stare at girls in high school, but didn't really understand that and, like, dated boys... because I thought that's what I was supposed to do-but [pause]...oh there's also a funny moment too when I [pause] started to, like, hit puberty or something (?) that I was, like, into hair-metal and long haired boys who strutted around with all the makeup and, like, their crazy outfits and shit like that...SUPER into that-which felt kind of—you know—which is both hyper masculine and extremely feminized at the same time...and, like, my—I had my entire walls of my bedroom covered in these very pretty boys with a lot of makeup on...you know, like, "what IS that?" [both laughing] Now we have WORDS. I was QUEER as FUCK...But, like, at the time it was just sort of a strange thing-you know?—I don't know—where it was treated as strange...

Niculescu: Yeah...yeah...

Ziegler: -and treat it as something that was sort of... that made me different from everyone else who is, like, trying to, uh, just navigate high school—I don't know—I kind of also realized very early on that, because I grew up where I was raised, the school district that I was in -we were, like, sort of the,—I don't know,—like, class,—class is a funny thing... and...uh..You know,—I lived in this bubble-which is situated over here in this bubble, right?...but, like,... here I was,—here.... like, class-wise, we were at the bottom... like not on the bottom edge of it... but let's say in the second quartile, or something, of the segment that I was raised in and the top half of it were extremely wealthy people from the outlying districts around my school district...so, I always felt like we didn't have enough or that my parents, you know,—because of their values or whatever, would not help me participate in the popularity contest which often involves spending a shit-ton of money on, like, fashion—you know-... like, that was just not my parents style. They were hardworking people that were-... they were just, like, kind of-they didn't buy into those games-but most of the people that I was raised with did... and so, I kind of figured out really early on that I was not going to win at that game... and that the way to get through it was to just not give a shit about that game and be like, “Fuck all that”...and that is-.,is-I guess who I still am (?) [both laughing]That started pretty early...(laughing)...

Niculescu: Yeah.

Ziegler: Yeah

Niculescu: Hmm...and so... like, the kind of feelings of being different...What were the ways in which those were dealt with or coalesced ...um...without really having a vocabulary for being 'queer as fuck?'

Ziegler: Well...umm... I left New York when it was time for me to go to college. There was no question that I'd... like—like, going to college was never a question or not(?)...like, that was the path that I was on. [taps on hard surface] ...And, um, you know, I chose to go to—I went to McAllister College ...with Michelle... actually... in a former lifetime for both of us [both laughing]...but I chose to, like, LEAVE New York... leave the East Coast... leave, like, the Ivy League circuit... leave all of that and go to, like, a liberal arts college but in a city—that felt like a good combination for me...um... but I left, and I remember as soon as I got there I started making out with everybody... boys, girls, whatever. I started throwing parties that you could probably classify as, like, sex parties now or, like, you would see as an early sign of that kind of stuff. They were, like, make out parties... we'd drag out me and my...like, gay best friend who I still deal with, who lives out on the West Coast—like, we would pull our mattresses down and invite all the friends over and everybody would make out, like—"WHAT!?" {both laughing} We were sooo queer [laughs]...and I went to all the queer meetings, but I didn't... I thought that I was straight. I had a boyfriend...um, like halfway through my first year of school who I really loved for a long time and so I assumed that I was straight, even though I was also making out with girls and sort of kind of open to whatever possibilities life had ...for me and it wasn't until—But, yeah, there was, like, some real queerness there and...uh...I don't think it was until [pause] after I graduated and moved with my...my make out party friend. [both laughing] We moved together to San Francisco... That, and I like fell HARD for an older woman... who haunted my dreams for a long time and that was what I was first, like -...ummmmm(?) "I THINK I'm straight (?)"-...and that was at about twenty-one ...—mmnnn-... to twenty-twoish (?)—is when I , like, came out to my parents and then I moved out as bisexual... and, they're,— like,—like, "You have a choice,... you should choose men." And I was like "OK, let's start this over... MOM... I'm a LESBIAN!... Get over it I'm a DYKE." They're like..." OK" -but they were not happy about that. They tried to convince me for a really long time. And then, also, like... that was a huge thing for a lot of my early to mid-twenties [pause] ...definitely, like, the first few years of... kind of coming out... was...uh..."Am I gay or am I straight? What does it mean?" I loved—like, I had a boyfriend who I really loved-and we broke up because of things that happen when you're 20.... but there was nothing bad about that relationship.... It was sort of... I felt like I had to choose... and if I had to choose one, then I was gonna choose women... but, uh... I went back and forth like, "Why do I have to choose?"—and I get my straight—like, it was one or the other-... was very, very, binary and I had, like, really agonized over that... and I thought about that a long time... But it was, like,—it really plagued me that I had to pick. And I remember—I was in San Francisco—I was so wrapped up in this older dyke and her world that I didn't even, like, go around the corner to the Lexington Club and like... like, I just missed things that were happening under my nose. I could have figured my shit out a whole lot sooner... if I had just turned left instead of right one day when I got to Valencia Street, -um... or you know what I mean—I just made the decisions that sort of kept me quite—a little bit out of you-(?).-ummm—And I had—and still have—like, a very wonderful group of straight

friends who come from college... so, you know, my queerness I was navigating on my own for a lot of my twenties, because my community was very hetero and it wasn't until about two thousand. ...Five—sixish—or so in Minneapolis and then two thousand nineish—eight or nine here... [knocking sound]-.... in New York City, that I actually found queer people and was like...[pause] “Oh this is really cool.” It was really not until I got-...So, ... chronologically speaking... yeah... went from New York to Minnesota for school—to San Francisco—for us, though, I had to break up with the sugar momma—leave the city in order to, like, deal with myself as a twenty-two... twenty-three-year-old or something(?)... move back to Minnesota, worked on some public art stuff. I got a weird insurance settlement from smashing my car and went around the world for the better part of a year... traveled around.... Was, like, really into photography—trying to be a photographer... trying to learn things about people and how people work,....umm... started—by college I picked up a camera and started interning at this photo gallery in Minneapolis and sort of fell into, like, community art... not FELL into it...But what... like, walked into that world and started learning about ... and thinking about the overlap between being an artist and community organizing and... and the social movements as well... it was, like,..those themes just continue throughout my life. Yeah—because it's very formative stuff when I was younger. But, yeah—the minute I picked up a camera I knew I was a photographer—that was when I was 20—and then it became like a passport almost for entering a lot of different social universes than what I was raised in... because also I was raised in this bubble. Like I said, I went to Temple five days a week for my entire young life until I was old enough and, like, ... bad ass enough because of my heavy metal ...to be like “Fuck you I go to [unintelligible] (?) school anymore” ... Like, “I don't want to go to Temple on Friday nights....’

Like, ... “I wanna hang out with my friends instead.” They still, maybe, see the rabbi once a week but, like, I got more of a pass for later in high school to kind of do my own thing. And then when my... My... Older brother went off to college, then I had the house to myself after school for a couple of years and that was when I feel like I sort of came into myself a little bit more... because I was Nola(?) and they're living with this threat...and reacting to it. And that was when I started getting more into ideas of philosophy and movement stuff ...uhm...kind of understanding that the world was bigger than the one that I was raised in...and that was also when I started cutting school and taking trains into the city and being, like, “Someday New York...Someday I will live in...”—you know—the Empire State Building is one block away from where-from Penn Station where the Long Island railroad lets you out... so cut school... I would take the train and by myself... I would buy the ticket and go up to the top of the Empire State Building and just stare at the city for hours and so ... umm, here we are now. (laughing) Imagine this life, which I could never have imagined. But I knew that something more was out there. And when I started taking pictures it was a way for me to, like, enter a lot of different people's lives. I had a photography mentor and... kind of immediately after college... who—His name is Yueng Young Huey {?}. We're still close. He's amazing-and he is a documentary photographer who spent years in a dozen different neighborhoods connected by one street called Lake Street in Minneapolis...and it was the most diverse corridor in the city. And so, I would just, like, meet up with him when we go wandering around into, like, lots of people's homes and we talk to different people and it was just very eye opening for me. We go to, like, you know, a Mung church or a Native Healing Center or...uhm...you know, we'd go hang out with a black family ...just... like...Not what I was raised with at all... And I LIKED it and I loved all the people that I met, and I loved understanding that

the world was a bigger place than this very narrow thing that I could never live up to because I was always so different. And I didn't want what other people wanted. I needed to, like, get the fuck out of there... you know? I think a thing a lot of queer people can relate to you... you know... Yeah. So, after I worked with that photographer on a really big project for a couple of years-and you know, like I said, he had gone into, like, a really—just incredibly diverse range of human beings is who he connected with for a number of years. And I helped him mount a huge public art exhibition of that—It was, like, six miles long... It was almost a thousand photographs.—We put them all on the streets. I was running up and down and, like, I knew every single business owner on the entire block.... we put pictures in windows and a hundred and fifty stores up and down this block it was, like, a massive public art exhibition. In fact, that was when I first encountered Andrea Jenkins who is now the first black trans woman elected official in America...or something...She is on the Minneapolis City Council this fall, and she was—I remember meeting her and being, like, there's something interesting about that woman... you know?... I didn't know, but I remember being drawn to her then. So..yeaeeh...you know, you don't—like we are who we are-but-...even before there's language for it. Yeah...so, I don't know... I know there's a whole, like, trajectory... like, I spent most of my 20s trying to be a dyke and sort of failing at it and feeling like something was wrong and...got really involved in movement stuff—like, when I finished the project in Minneapolis, I hit the road and traveled,—the car accident thing happened—that I got the money to travel the world for more or less a year and spent a lot of time in Bangladesh, in India, Nepal... I went to Southeast Asia. I met a lot of people... I met a lot of photographers... I took a lot of pictures. I had some reeeally deep experiences in Bangladesh...umm... just sort of fell into a very good, amazing group of people there... some of 'em. I'm still I'm in touch with and sort of gave me a different perspective too—like, you know,—I felt like, after working on the Lake Street Project in Minneapolis, that I had some sense of class, race and experience perspective in the United States...Like, I understood our context here a little bit better. And I wanted to try to have the same kind of understanding globally, I guess... And so, I was twenty-four -and there was something about like spending time in Bangladesh and the places that my friends took me to and what I learned. I traveled on my own for a while. I didn't speak for four months... I just wrote in my journal every day. It was really—because I was in places where I didn't really speak the language very much, but I connected with people and came back to New York-. uuuummm...9/11 hit-so, it was 2001 ...umm... -I had to get a job...the money ran out... and that was the moment that I got hired by the Open Society Foundations and to work on a project that was supporting the Burmese Democracy Movement,—because Burma was at the time—and they still are-really being run by a military junta that had taken over in the '60s and it was very, very, very, repressed there and, again, like, that theme of social movements and sort... of I don't know—I'd just come back from that part of the world, and I had a real affinity for it...And yeah... so I spent two years as an assistant in supporting the Burmese Democracy Movement out of the Open Society Foundations—which I don't know if you know anything about it, but it's—you've heard of George Soros—he's, like, the most progressive zillionaire out there. He's like number 30.... or 30 something... in terms of wealth in the world. He's extremely hated by Trump and Trump people... they, like, single him out he's, like, ...like, 'the Jew'... It was always, like...uurrrggg!... where he was a Holocaust survivor also who was also a hedge fund dude and a speculator... kind of fucked up the Asian markets at some point... I don't—like, you know,—like, nobody gets that rich by being nice to everyone they've ever met... but-has definitely, a really

unique—he's kind of a really high class pirate, in some ways, because he's all about, like, trying to get as much money as possible and then funneling it into different like sex worker movements and trans movements around the world and a lot of democracy stuff a lot of free media, umm... civil society, public health issues, HIV Justice.... deep justice stuff... Truth and Reconciliation process... it's, like, yeah... they've done some good stuff in the world and it was a really interesting place to land at twenty-four and try to understand how the world works and how movements work because also when you're sitting in the seat of being a funder—you're approached by everybody out there and I got to sort of understand all of the different pieces that make a movement up... So, like, you know, for the Burmese Democracy Movement, we had to be, like, supporting people who were the refugees in Thailand and we had to be supporting, like, Aung San Suu Kyi(?) individually and the government in exile—who were stuck in Washington—but we also had to hire a really high end lobbyist who was going to work Congress for us. We had to figure out secret ways of funneling money inside the country where everything was shut down to actually provide support for people. You had to think about healthcare, but you also had to think about justice and the newspaper that they read or the radio program that people are going to get information from... so it was really interesting to understand all of the different pieces that make up something... And it gave me this perspective... And then also working at a place that is, you know... the Open Society Foundations is one of the big foundations in the world and it operates in, like, ... I don't know,—like, over a hundred countries all over the place and so, ... also understanding how big the world was—and it just—it's given me a really interesting perspective that I've carried for a long time and setup a lot of things in motion because I lasted about two years that job.—I'm not really cut out to be an administrator of a foundation program and I love the Burmese people but I wanted to, like, do something that felt more immediate and administering stuff that's happening half a world away is just, like, a little disconnected. So, I wanted to feel more connected—and towards the end of that, I had gotten myself into, like, a really fucked up relationship with a coworker—who was so hot—oh my God!—She was such a babe! (both laughing)...but... we were in our 20s... we didn't know the things that we—like, did not treat each other as well as we could have—...and our breakup was really devastating and I was having another, like, 'I got to get out of here' moment and I left again, and I got a call to—from the photographer I had worked with in Minneapolis—and he was, like, “So let's do this gig..... you should take my gig'... it's on”... It's you know—you gotta, like,—it's the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride—which was about two years after 9/11 hit—where the immigrant rights movement was—that was—they were...having to deal with, like, you know, people that were pushing for immigration reform since Clinton passed bad lawsbut, Clinton passed bad laws because there was other things that they were trying to do -things that—there was—but, a massive change in it—that sort of coincided with NAFTA and a bunch of bad policies in the 90s that started to cause like the... the way that we understand undocumented immigration now and particularly from Mexico and Latin America and all of that. ...and they were really trying to get immigration reform passed for a long time. And then 9/11 hit and suddenly the debate about immigration became about homeland security and terrorists and people from the Middle East and, like, the ways that—that dialogue was so perverted and fucked up by—that government—by our government at the time. And so, everything got stalled and a couple of years after that it was 2003—it was the fall of 2003 and the labor movement—and some other people who care about immigrants groups decided it was time to reframe the dialogue around that... so they organized a massive

national thing called The Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride—... 10 or 12 different cities, like, sent caravans of buses simultaneously to Washington but made hundreds of stops along the way together. And everywhere you stopped there was, like, a big gathering and a rally in the local community would host the bus. So, Freedom Riders came from all around the country and I was on the Minnesota buses. I flew -like, I took a couple of weeks off of my job in New York and I flew to Minnesota. I got on the bus and I rode the bus all the way to Washington and back to New York City with them and it completely changed my life because again it was in this moment where I started to feel really trapped in a job that felt distant. I felt like I wasn't helping enough, or it just didn't feel immediate enough. And. Yeah, but—you know, immigrants were all around me and how was I not aware of, like, how fucked up things were and, like, I needed to do something... plus, I had just, like, spent nine days on a bus with 90 immigrants from around the state of Minnesota and who came from around the world and, like, really connected with this group of people. We had this really deep experience together. So, I quit my job when I got back from that and I moved back to Minnesota for the third time or something like that. and, someone gave me a station wagon and I drove it across the country and sorta started... fell really, really deep into the immigrant rights movement in Minnesota and—which was not-cohesive in any way whatsoever. It wasn't—it wasn't even a thing. -and so, we were the people, but we were, like, this group of activists that had just had this experience together and uhm...we made shit happen... like we...somebody was like, “Oh, we should do something about it.” ... You know there's the Dream Act... like, the whole movement that we're in now was not a thing then. And when I got there in 2013 there were four undocumented kids in the entire state of Minnesota that were in college and we knew all four of them. And by the time I left three years later we had—there were hundreds because it was just -we just—we were in that moment where no one was talking about it and we—like, -someone put a bug in our ear and then we made it happen. And I started doing these big public art projects and all of them... I was photographing the immigrants that I was friends with. But then we were doing these exhibitions and I was putting them on buses and trucks, and we drove around the state. We organized a freedom ride across the state of Minnesota. We're going to—we organized the next summer—we....—I took a truck around and we went to 30 county fairs and we talked about immigration and we talked about the DREAM Act and we really... we worked really hard with local high school students. We started clubs in 20 something different high schools. We were working with not just undocumented young people, but, like, Chicano people and then their friends. You know, (both chuckle)—in college they were—they were managing this—all of these—they were the ones going into the high school-so, we just-you know-....thousands of young people would show up...like, by our second year for our lobby days and things like that... and we—we passed policies in the state of Minnesota. We traveled around a lot and—and tried to link up conversations that were happening in different communities. We built a statewide network of—that was supportive of immigrant rights. I used to, like, facilitate a coalition... like, faith, labor and community groups that sort of was working together. When I left in 2006, there was this massive wave of immigrant rights things that were happening around the country, because they finally started talking about it. Bush was like, “Oh let's change it.” ...and you know there's a million people in Chicago and a million people in L.A. and like seven zillion people in New York City. But we had 40,000 in Minneapolis and we were pretty proud of that. So, that was, like, my (indecipherable and laughing)—I was ...working really hard on that shit...and somewhere in the middle of there a queer person crossed my path... like,

there was a set of—like,—a friend of mine that I met that was in a band called Gay Beast. They were amazing and I started going to Gay Beast parties and being, like, 'Who are these people? ... These people are amazing!' and they're like "Let's fuck up Pride!" and I'm like "Yeah let's fuck up Pride!" ...so we were the Revolting Queers, which is—in Minneapolis—is like, -a little—is, like, a negative queer history there because it's sort of-Revolting Queers were a thing... and then they turned into, like—then they got into a space and then that space turned into a thing and then there's just-there was, like-.... things were so formative then ...that's what it felt like. But I know that-it's not even what it felt like—it was true. Like, things were formative then and now there is a huge scene. And, like, those are some of the roots of it...it was, like, us carrying coffins of people slain by the state through, like, Pride in 2006. So, it was, like, this little nugget, like, there's this other, like,—“Who are these radical queer people? ... I like them.”,—but I had to go and come back to New York, and because I was the co-director of an immigrant rights organization in Minnesota—but I'm a New Yorker—and I loved it there—but I wanted to come home.—And, also, I was doing all this community organizing, but I was a photographer. I couldn't carve out enough space to do my art amidst, like, the 'politicalness'—the urgency of everything—but everything that I had learned in working on the Burmese Democracy Movement immediately got filtered into, like, helping sculpt and build a movement in Minnesota. And... a... lot of—I mean there's still reverberations of the work that we did that... like,—my intern is on the city council now and the first thing she did was change Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. There's some cool shit that's happening as a result of the work that we did there and.—Yeah.—And I learned a lot from that. So, when I came back to New York to go to grad school and... like—be a better photographer. Except that I kind of stopped taking pictures and started writing a lot instead of—when I got back... and grad school happened... I put myself in a bubble... I didn't—I was kind of burnt out. I just needed to focus for a little bit. But when I emerged from that, I joined the board of Jews For Racial and Economic Justice and JFREJ is where I met the queers and JFREJ were the Jews who are working on the right stuff. I was like "OK this is where I belong. Yeah, I will."—"You will be my community work. I get it. That's fine." And that was when I started falling into...like, that was when I met Daniel Rosa and Aria(?) and, like, people who thought of themselves as gender fuckers and immediately I was like, I have found my people and immediately all of these experiences that I had had along the way and of thinking about things like movements and thinking about how cultural work contributes to a movement and how you can be strategic about cultural work in terms of who are you reaching?—Who were you talking to?—Whereas, you know, I was never the kind of artist that wanted to be in a museum... it's just not really-like a gallery—I don't care about that stuff—like, I just—it's just-it's not how I operate.... but cultural work that is movement based is what I care about, and it was really clear to me I felt like I could see things—like, I should send you something that I wrote in 2011 or so when I was trying to convince open society to have a trans program before that was the thing that they even cared about... like,—or they cared about it on a global level, but they thought in the US everybody was fine.—And I was like..."No... there's something happening here."...—I realized there was no institutional support for it-that I was connected with at least—I felt like I was just going to do all of the work on my own. And that brings us to this piece of paper.

Niculescu: Yes. (giggling) So you brought a decent sized piece of paper I would say about twenty—four inches (giggling again) it's kind of it has-So I'm just going to describe it so the people

listening... (Yup)...have an image to conjure up. So, it has every year from 2010 to 2016—Not-kind of—What is this.?

Ziegler: This the tablecloth that-at the Ethiopian place we went to after Brynn Kelly's(?) memorial service...innnn... January 2016 ...maybe February—But it was early.

Niculescu: And so, has these—(clears throat) ... excuse me—has these years written kind of, like, diagonally across the paper. -And then just lists of kind of, like, Queer History. I'm presuming mostly in New York. Yeah. Since all of it between those years. (Yeah. Yeah.) So, do you want to start getting to those stories or anything you want to mention before we start talking about this piece of paper? (both laughing)

Ziegler: I don't know what to say. I think—yeah—all of that was the, like,—and then I met the queers..." Ta Da!" It was like the before and after...But now that 'after' feels like a 'before'—because before—it started for me really like this... this tracks us from 2010 -which was the year that I photographed our community -or my community—because no one was listening to us, like— yeah I wasn't like... maybe it's harder. 2008 is when I was like really starting...getting involved in stuff. 2010 was when I started organizing things. ...and...thinking a lot about networks of people because networks are the basis of power like you know and just like when I came up I became politicized and I learned about community organizing with black and brown people who were more immigrants in Minnesota and the Midwest...and like really deeply like that it just shaped how I think about things... And, you know, probably, like, a little bit Alinsky model(?) I don't know... But, uh... building power.... is built... like, networks of power built on people and...meeting people where they're at-which, for queer people, is in dance clubs and gay bars and, like, secret spaces where people come together.—Yeah... (car alarm goes off in background) So I don't know; There's... Yeah, there's a big trajectory of queer history here... New York City—Radical queer history of-one spoke of a much larger wheel. This is one wedge of it. But I think that has had some pretty strong cultural influence. Plus, like, I remember when I was, like, you know, early anti-racism training and shit like that. Thinking about—a lot about structural racism and thinking a lot about the history and cultural pieces of it,—like history, language, culture, as, you know, places where racism is embedded, right?... and you can't really shift that stuff until you—can't-... You have to shift culture in order to address some of it. It's interesting what we're living through now on a larger scale...Like, I feel like I wrote a whole piece about it that's going to be in McSweeney's(?) next year... but-about transitions and, you know, it feels really messy right now and it feels so horrible but actually we're just, like, unearthing the trauma.—And this is a really good part of the process, you know? Like, you got to get the shit out! We have to be having the right conversations in order to be able to address what's really wrong. Which, you know, starts in 1492 and continues to now, right? And all of the layers of things that have happened along the way—And I'm really grateful to be living through what we are now because people are talking about that shit. When we were-when it was 2003 or 2005, and I'm, like, in a 'white' state, like, trying to talk to people about race and how race is a factor in how people feel about the brown and black immigrants that are coming to their state(?)... like, no one was able to even have that kind of a conversation... and you know, like,—that we needed to be talking about that they still lived there you know. But now that's a conversation that people are having and trying to put

that on the map was just like shocking to people then ...yeah... And I think about this stuff. I mean, like, I don't know. -I don't know how to get into this, because it's so much... you should ask me questions that'll help you.

Niculescu: So, I guess you mentioned.—So just to get kind of like a timeline preceding this timeline—so you go to grad school.

Ziegler: Yeah.

Niculescu: Where was it?

Ziegler: At the International Center of Photography.

Niculescu: Oh, not so far from here.

Ziegler: No. Like right across the street there.

Niculescu: So, you do that—and you mentioned that—that's where you kind of are in your own space... right?

Ziegler: Right...Yeah... And then, I was, like, wrestling with photography... and I really—the history of documentary and what that means and how fucked up that was. And that was when I was, like, “I am not a documentary photographer anymore.”—I never, like, I don't know—all of you know objectivity and subjectivity... and then,—but I also, like who am I as an artist? Also, the head of my program is Blake(?) who is this extremely queer artist who is, like, “You're not a photographer you're an artist.” That was lesson one for all of us, right? And that we could use whatever tools we wanted to...They all counted... everything mattered. It wasn't just about the thing that we did right here it was...you know...—So I start taking pictures for a while and I started making crafty shit and, like, recycling trash into weird sculptures and just trying a lot of different things. So, it was a really—and my heart hurt a lot—like-I had, in Minnesota, like, my three full years where I probably did not ever take more than 24 hours off. Carrying, along with my, like,—my partner in crime and all of that...like, we... we... we... carried a really heavy weight for a while and it worked. And it was amazing—but it was a lot-And also, like, being a deeply politicized being, like, deeply engaged in the actual lives of black people...um, taking our lives together collectively on the road. That summer that—we went to—we went to like 30 county fairs, right?—because we wanted to be in the places where people were at. We didn't want to try to be like “Oh, come to this event”...No, it was like, “No, we need to go where they're at in order to have... the—and bring this conversation there”..., and people wouldn't talk to us, because we were this group of random black people plus me, right?—...And our intern and... or... our volunteers, or whatever. It was just fucked up.—So I was really processing a lot of that and taking space and just kind of putting a lot of things together in my head and I—can see that as sort of a thing that happens to me over time, like...You know there are holes that come up in this timeline to where, like, I once I got a van... like, sort of vanishing in the van for months at a time sometimes ...so just, like,—try to figure out what the fuck is going on in my head.Um, and so at-halfway

through that I started—in my several years away from the open society foundations—They had gone and started a documentary photography project... where they were supporting photographers who were documenting social justice, human rights issues all around the world. All of the issues that the foundation cares about... So, I wound up getting an internship or part... like, work for them halfway through grad school and then I just sort of continued and when I got out of school, they gave me a job. So, I started producing exhibitions and thinking of grad programs and figure I'd, like, -meeting with a ton of photographers and looking at it... like, that became my job, for the next few years. And it felt really clean and contained for me it was the place where I could continue wrestling with the idea of documentary... like, I want the documentary to die... And I almost took that job to kill it, you know, and to...—But, because I was being invited into the conversation about it,—and that was a good place to be.—and also, it was a job that gave me a salary that I did not have to fundraise for myself. They were, like,—I showed up at ten and I left at six and the rest of my life was my own... And I wasn't trying to make money off of my art,—which I felt really deeply conflicted about. It gave me a lot of space to actually go play with queer people all the time...In fact that is sort of what happened. I don't know. That was— it coincided so I was, like, "Oh yeah, and I can take this board position for JFREJ and like, met all these gender fuckers and started going to queer dance parties and being like "What is this world!?"—I love seeing people go through that transition now were—they, like,—living their lives and stressing about things and then you take them to, like, a queer party and they're like...—And then you start introducing people to people and they realize, like, it's a whole community of people .And then there is a place for them in it and ,like, you know, they've always wanted to dance ...and here is this radical dance troupe, like,—“Go for it... You found your people—go—”, you know... And that was my moment was like 2008—2009 with the people who are now known as the Purim Schpiel spectacle committee the people who put together the Purim Schpiel every year which is, like, a very large, like... a community art endeavor that creates theatrical spectacle every spring-winter—spring. -Yeah. -So, I don't I know... queers-.and then I was like, "Oh"...and then. -or... showing up for my job every day but things were getting weirder and weirder at night. And then a couple of years into, it I realized that, like, -and meanwhile I'm reviewing portfolios for the exhibition that I was coordinating at An Open Society and people would invariably send in images of transgender people from brothels, from Brazil to Bangladesh, and, like, really exploitative kind of bullshit stuff or really just one-dimensional portrayal... And so it was, like," reject... reject... reject... reject" ... or "reject—oh, by the way, you guys, I'm trans."... and they're like, "Yeah, we kind of figured... OK."...So, I was the first trans person in the Open Society Foundations that—which has a thousand people who were working around the world. That was like sort of landmark at that moment... And eventually I went on to start the Queer Salon there with a couple of friends—or three or four of us that started that together-And then kind of organize that—You know, I'm like, the kind of person who, when people are, like, "Oh, we should do this thing." I'm, like, "OK cool."—Then I send an email out to the people the next day...and then I'm, like, "Let's do it... What do you need?" I'm, like,—this just my personality-like, when I started doing the organizing work in Minnesota, I didn't even know what it meant to be a community organizer and they're like, "You just need to do what you do..We'll give you some better language for it."...-Kind of, like, with the queers too.. like, "you just do what you do; here's the language for what you're already doing. -Yeah... And, so I guess I like em weird, like... -because I have this training as a community organizer...But it's not totally what I do... but it's just who I

am... and crossed with... like,-... learning how to curate group exhibitions and on a higher level at my Open Society job and making these really fancy photo exhibitions is, like,—really disturbing imagery, shit like that...And,—Sometimes empowering and uplifting and getting angry and having these debates about documentary and what does photography mean... And somewhere in there, I kind of looked around and I was, like, “I think we're beautiful. Like, no one is photographing us in the way that I see it.” ...And, for the first time since I left the state of Minnesota, I picked up my camera... It wasn't for a grad school assignment... It was, like, like I wanted to...like, I felt like my people were beautiful. There was a performance that a friend of mine that I met through JFREJ did. —Their name is [inaudible]. Now our killer—we called them killers—a killer made this show and it's called *Between Two Worlds: He Loved You Before You Were Mine*. Brynn Kelly was in it... Rosa was in it... my friend Zachary was in it. There...—it was—it was a really beautiful theatrical...—kind of, like, meditation on the people-... like, have we...—whose souls are we inheriting?—like, reflecting on the AIDS crisis—but then also just, like,—beautiful. And, you know, it's in the warehouse in the middle of the night, in the middle of winter, and I'm looking at my friends on stage—and I'm, like,—So that was when I started taking pictures—and it was the full year of 2010. I took a fuck-ton of pictures and every weekend I would go out and they're the ones that look kind of like this.—They're black and white—the night I won the AMO...Ha-ha! Yeah! -.... So, some of them—yeah... So, these are from different events... they're different people—you know?—Like us out in front of the club... you know...Hey Queen, was the thing. [inaudible] ... this is a party at the Castle... we're a bunch of drag queens that sort of predated Bushwick...Um... Yeah, that was like in the Pride parade that's REO Speedwagon. [inaudible] (presumably sounds of photos being shown) ...Bunch of other friends... Christy Roade who draws a bunch of stuff and ... she's super rad.

Niculescu: So, what are the kind of, like— just in terms of—your kind of historical look?—Like, what are the kind of historical parameters around this... locations here?

Ziegler: In Brooklyn. Really Brooklyn—centric, circa. 2010... Those are the dirty bathrooms at Sugarland ...and there's a lot of Sugarland, because it was where Hey Queen was, but then a bunch of other little parties would happen along the way too... Rebel Cupcakes started around then... Princess Tiny in the Meat said Silas Hauer No. Yeah. That's Silas who is now, like, directing things... Hollywood—I was in Tribe 8 and the Super Rad...

Niculescu: In Dixon Place...

Ziegler: Yeah right... there. [inaudible] probably ... that might even be Brynn...

Niculescu: We're looking at a stack of photographs, like, you brought over... they're all black and white photographs...that they've taken of the community at the time.

Ziegler: I'll send you I'll send you images. Yeah, it was ... [inaudible]. Yeah. Fire escape at a party...

Niculescu: So, what is it like to reflect on these images... Like, right now?

Ziegler: (long pause) ... You know, I was thinking a lot about accountability and about community. It's interesting to see the relationships that have changed within them. And I feel like we're looking at these beautiful days of youth, in a way... where, like, everything is so fresh and wonderful and magic—just full of magic. And then you learn eventually that, like, you know, some of these people are not accountable for some of the bullshit that they bring to the world... And what do you do about that? What do you do, and those people then move on to adjacent circles of people or, like, you know, this is the moment where we were all connected with each other... But everybody keeps moving.... And when we talk about queer community what does that even mean... You know,—like, and—um... yeah! I see a little bit of carnage in the pictures. When I took them, I felt like I was, like,—like putting messages in a bottle for the future. —Or that—Yeah, they didn't look like anything I'd ever shot before. It was just sort of, like, you know—that—that's one of my favorites. —And, you know,—there's a couple that is broken up in there that was really devastating. Here we are having this beautiful thing with that person was being super abusive to that person behind the scenes and we weren't really talking about that... you know...um... yet, what a beautiful photograph. (laughs)... You know I'd, like,—and it felt that way.—You know? It felt like we were living this magical life. We were—we still are—I mean, life is a magical thing, right? I also think about how underground it felt... and how secret it was... and how., you know,—like, I feel like there are certain sets of people and legacies that I participate in... you know, like the legacy laid by the Mix Festival or by Act Up.... um.... Jews for Racial and Economic Justice has been around for 34 years by this point...ummm... —What other legacy... is eventually...—the legacy you start to overlap with people who knew Sylvia Rivera. Like, my collective that I'm a part of now is part of her lineage because I met a lot of people through Sylvia's play, so we are the connected—connector of other things. You know... the downtown performance kinds of legacies. There's a little bit of the Bushwig thing... or not Bushwig... Wigstock... you know, like, drag.... drag legacies—they go back to Flawless Sabrina, like, one of my—my dear ones has Flawless's last name. You know it was very close to her starting from the 70s like it's you know Jack and Peter who had this garden Downtown, Eastside and have been doing amazing things forever. You know... so it's all these different legacies that other people have built that—we were the ones in 2010 who followed that—and who is the 'we?'-.... I don't even know it's so broad. If you show up to a party once, are you part of the we? Yeah. You kind of are, right? ...And how many hundreds of thousands of people is that? and how many of those people, you know—how did those connections turn into where we are now. Like I think about them,—period. Condé Nast publication—which is like pumping some pretty cool queer thought into a mass cultural audience, right? And where are those ideas coming from. Like, is all this... You know, we were doing this shit what it was ...—when we were the ones... that was it. But we weren't only ever the ones. Like sometimes it feels that way. And I worked really hard to not be, not, like, “It was us!” We were a part of that it ...it was us and it wasn't.... there's the movement thinking again. You know... Each of us—when you think about movements, you think about the collection of millions of different thoughts, ideas, actions behaviors, actions... actions..., you know?... all come together towards a somewhat common vision, right? And there are so many of us... like, part of what's beautiful about the last few years is realizing how many different pockets of this were happening underground and that,—because another thing that's happening across this timeline that we're looking at that stretches from 2010 to 2016 is Facebook... before Facebook was Myspace. Right? Before Myspace was LiveJournal. [inaudible], before LiveJournal there were AOL

chat rooms but before that there was silence. Right? So, like the rise of the internet, and particularly Facebook... like, I think I feel like this is a documentation in some ways of the Facebook era or the Facebook queer area like there are pictures here of people who like helped start the Queer Exchange or... like, we were the ones, right? Like, you were just on there doing the things and being like "oh, let's start a group...oh, OK... That's a good idea... let's do that." And now it is amazing how many people are DIYing so much shit, you know. But I compare that to like growing up...-like, coming of age in the '90s... Where I didn't even know that Riot Girl was a thing, you know? But it was happening right in front of me, like—Facebook would have fixed that in four seconds. (snapping fingers) And, you know, as a photographer, during this year, that was close with the people who were putting the parties together and with the artists and the personalities—and because it wasn't hard to be close to people because we were the ones -you know. -Like, you know... But it was a way also of becoming known in that community I guess ..you know the... tag people in pictures... like, that was a new thing that was not a part of Myspace... was tagging people in pictures, so that, you know,—I was a community photographer, I guess... and I met a lot of people that way. And. ...all of this whole [inaudible] really started from... I guess it was 'the artist is absent'... like, my kind of role as a cultural producer/community organizer—No... I can't really—There's not really a good word for who I am and what I do... it—I'm just a person doing what I do in the world. That's it. But the artist is absent. So. Rosa—Daniel—you should interview for this, if you haven't yet. Because she's—she's got a lot of stories for you... that go back a long way longer than mine (sirens in background) and we somehow met while we were in our early 20s and then didn't see each other for a long time and, like...Yeah. Again, like the information you get and the information you don't...like, it just sculpts your experience. So, she had—there was a Marina Abramovich exhibition. At the MOMA. There were a couple of career performers in it but there was, like, a lot of feelings that they weren't, like...-they were like institutionalizing-....engaging this very bold work and they're performing these things but they're not letting people push into their boundaries and, you know, we were a part of, like, BDSM circles and queer circles and, like,—different kinds of bodies—and, like, you know—these perfect model bodies that were doing it for the MOMA. You know?—we needed to DIY this, and we needed to do it our own way. And I happened to have some friends that had, like, a space that was on Central Park West and 62nd street. Like, this giant gallery state that we can borrow for a couple hundred bucks. So, we're like, "OK, let's do a day... let's—let's restage 17 of her performances and reperform them." But unlike Fat Bodies, Queer Bodies... like, Diverse Bodies... like... and media and people from the BDSM scene who are going to really push the boundaries of Marina's work. So, we did that. Like a thousand people showed up. We had, like, 50 performers. I met a ton of people... we pulled that together pretty fast and it was Rosa Ariel Speedwagon...and I co-curated that and just sort of made it happen. And then organizing group shows became a thing that I did after that. So, a few months later, like, you know,—I've been taking all these pictures and I want to do this thing—or something—out (?) and, like, figure out, like, where they get them as prints or something...—like do something with them. I didn't know what. So, I called a few other people who were also photographers and it's like, I'm like, "Come over" ... we're like, "Let's maybe—we should do a photo show—we could do it in somebody's living room. It's no big deal. Like, whatever—but let's do a show—that we have a deadline—and we'll get shit done and we'll have a cute party and, you know, like, a queer thing", right? And.... Somewhere in that time, like, someone introduced me to a person who [inaudible] ...which like

rents out his waiting spaces to artists to do things in and I was, like—And so I met with this person who was a friend of a friend and I was like, "Oh yeah, well you know my friends were talking about doing this photography thing or an art show of some sort." And he's like, "Cool. "... and gave us this gigantic empty gallery space in Chelsea for three weeks. So, it's like, "OK"—.... called a bunch of people-.... we're like, "Now we have a huge space—Like, who else wants to do shit." And so, we threw the show and it was called Into the Neon. That was January 2011—And, like, 400 career people showed up in the middle of a blizzard and like, and like, there were 12 to 15 artists in it. It was a really cool show... but also like, a microcosm for certain debates within queer art circles... you know? Like, some people are more gallery oriented and some people are more, like "We'll just hang out and have parties in it." and that doesn't -no—and both perspectives are totally fair—but that was the thing... I remember saying "I'm going to nail it! "...and then afterwards be like, "I don't know what happened," and He's like "Oh... welcome to being queer in the art world. You will be dealing with this for the rest of your life" ... OK. So, it just grew you know and that turned into... We started a collective called the Department of Transformation... We put on a bunch of—there's so much stuff in here—and it was like jumping ahead—because there... Because Queer House Field Day was a really big deal and Queer House Field Day was us organizing people who knew each other through dance party spaces and nighttime spaces coming together on an afternoon in Prospect Park to have a field day and you could have a team. And so, people showed up with their crew and everybody was like dressed for it. Playing stupid field games that were really hilarious and, like, you know with an NC you know—all of that.... It was amazing—and so a couple of hundred people showed up and we're like, "Wow, check that out." There's a bunch of us. We don't know that that's really cool. How many of us we are like, "How fucking cute we are!" And so that turned into something called Quorum Forum which was in that winter. Where it was a couple of weeks of people hosting, like, cute things and workshops and skittle shares and stuff in their living rooms... but it was hosted by the queer houses. So, you know, you're going to like, a consent workshop in one place—a fisting demo and somebody else's... like, kitchen... You know? The Castle had a drag party... people put on drag for the first time... like—or like, you know,—that was really amazing too—and so, that built up—they did another field day that second year—that was 2011—and that time-like, I think over six hundred people showed up for it.. and—and there were so many more of us, you know, and everybody was still a whole lot cuter in life than they were at night... or they were cute both ways... You know, they were like—a lot of it—we were just like, "Wow, that's cool... Wow, okay... what's next." Then they organized another Quorum Forum but it sort of—that next winter-but it fell apart, because that was when people started arguing a lot-No....it started—that was when that thread reared its head in this circle of people of trying to come up with language about safe spaces and who belongs in a place. I don't know... it felt like there was just a lot of, -like, I stayed out of the organizing of the Quorum Forums because it was just like... it is very, very, 'processey'...like, meetings and not a lot of—And, so, it's sort of—that kind of crashed and burned a little bit.—.... that was the end of Quorum Forum. But there was this moment where that was, like, a big thing that was bringing people together who were coming from different walks and different circles of people—and sort of -not just understanding that you're part of something bigger, but like, actually seeing it... you know?... in a way that you could say that Pride...ugggh..not Pride..—Like the Drag March or the Dyke March or the Trans Day Of Action are sets of people who—there you are—you're like suddenly visible ... and there is everybody around you. Maybe

this was it for the cultural community or 'a' cultural community or one spoke of a much larger cultural community... we all, you know,—it's like, we are a set of people: who knows what kind of damage still we're going to do to this planet... in a good way... not damage. That's the wrong word. Yeah. So, things just continue to evolve. I got my first van in 2011. I lost my house. This is when I remember childhood shit and sort of fell into a turbulence—a hole of turbulence—and became transient and lived out of my van for a couple of years—left my job at my job full time at the foundation—started consulting for them in my tiny bits ...like,—Do a gig—pocket some money—get in the van and leave again—I'll start a couple of Queer houses during this time—and things like running away and my van started spending more time in places like Tennessee and Vermont radical theory sanctuaries .. like...West Coast... [inaudible] By this point I spend a lot of time outside of the city when I can. Yeah. Yeah. Is this this set of time—went to Berlin for a while— things were still happening here. -Quite a bit.—Things were very turbulent for me personally during this time. But—but interesting. And through it I just kept organizing stuff, you know, because it's just what I do. It makes—Festival started to grow it is get turned into these like large 'warehousy', -autonomous, temporary autonomous zones, which were really fun... but then there were problems that would come up and that eventually crashed and burned also. I held my first my beach party in 2012. Because my van broke down and I needed money to pay for it and those became a beautiful thing for a couple of years to a point where, like, I think the biggest one was, like, maybe four hundred people hundred people showing up in the middle of the night, like, following a super—secret treasure map to, like, where it was safe for us to be down on the beach. I started driving down to the beach a lot. Spending a lot of time—not just—at risk—but, up until then I'd go at night a lot. Part of my -Like reasons—gotten so wall to wall packed and it's not my fault. But I definitely did bring a lot of people down to the beach. Sri Lanka oh the spectrum opened in 2011. That was right after the Mix Festival.... Occupy Wall Street and Spectrum opened the same week, and I was curated this thing the Exploratorium, which was right next door to Mix, the week after we had this gallery space for a couple of weeks and people would come.—Go back and forth between Occupy and this gallery space where we would bake cookies and have potlucks do cute shit and another big group show with a bunch of people in it. Computer did a huge installation for that. Gentrification of the Mind came out in 2012. We all talked about that a lot. This was also—I organized with LJ Roberts and Ted Ker with Visual AIDS early 2012. You did a series of storytelling of past present and future of AIDS -....and Gentrification of Mind came out also like this. We talked about AIDS a lot in 2012. I remember—Yeah—One of our sisters from the Castle, Sharon Needles won Drag Race here and then Sharon—I mean Alaska. We were closer with—Alaska is like the queen of Drag Race. But I have pictures of Alaska at the Castle, -you know? -now. Pictures of, like, actually, I think Alaska lighting Sharon Needles bowl (Both laughing) at Castle. -So, I'll find that for you. (CN: OK) —Yeah —, see,—Operation Sandy, -that was when Hurricane Sandy hit. The first Bushwig was that fall—that was 2012—and then that sort of (CN: ...took off...)took off the thing... but really like some of the roots of that are at the Castle... which was over in that neighborhood.-The Bureau opens in 2013. I was the first vote.—These are the first. -This was the first photography exhibit—or the first art exhibit at the Bureau—decided to start doing that—oh the force of the future—huh.—Yeah—God there's so many things. -Sorry this is all queer history.

Niculescu: Yeah. No. it is.

Ziegler: How are we doing on time though. I don't know. I can keep wandering through all of this but ...

Niculescu: I mean it's totally up to you. -You said you might have to go around five.

Ziegler: So, I should go around at five ...At five.

Niculescu: Okay so we should start maybe—quicken up -wrapping up a little bit

Ziegler: Yeah. I can get lost in this stuff.

Niculescu: I mean we're—yeah, we're gonna document this and make sure...

Ziegler: Yeah—Forest of the Future was really amazing—Forest of the Future was—we got a warehouse in Greenpoint. I'd been having all these dreams. -And about the future and whatever- So we started. - So, I decided to get a warehouse and bring these dreams to life with a bunch of artists and all the materials through the arts that you could possibly throw in a space.... (laughing) like, it was totally underground. It was all word of mouth. We kept it open for a month—probably about a thousand people came through. We thought a lot about the future there was, like, storytelling—they were, like, “We have held a summit of stories.” -There were people.—Donald Gallagher had just lost his partner. Donald Gallagher—with—that is another person you should interview.—He was at Stonewall—and his partner since 1964 passed and he came to the Forest a week later—I'll send you the video of it. And just, like, told the story of this romance I just like spellbinding wonderful Sugarland closed—we did this thing in the Whitney. I organize an underground psychic -uh, psychic chamber underneath the Whitney during the Whitney Biennial was sort of uncredited but also, like,—OK—like a couple hundred people showed up in their best art prom drag. -It was quite a night.—We went to the beach-. After that we had a huge party and then that summer Aslan Nettles was killed. And that's a real—for me—that was, like, a really big turning point in all of this. There's like—that's another before and after moment. So, in the summer of 2013, I was invited to, like run the Craft Shack.—One-week summer retreat for queer homeless youth and I was living out of my van at the time and was like “Okay, that sounds like a good gig. I'll go do that.”... even though, you know I get really like cunt about things that are like, “we're going to fix queer homeless youth in a week. “.. like, by—you know—I was just like, “I don't I don't actually believe in the philosophy of this.” but also like, “I can do that, you know, that's fine.” And it changed all of our lives. That was the week that Aslan Nettles was killed and some of the young people knew her and it just changed a lot of things for me and—and, for a lot of us. So it was like this cross of, like,—let's say this network of people—sort of like nightlife, artists, underground kind of people, dance party kinds of people, drag queen kinds of people,—that sort of people, -crossed with Sylvia's Place...and trans women of color, sex workers, people who were living in the streets, in a different way.-And yet there was a lot of connection and love between us too...right?... and something about supporting them through the loss of, like, yet another trans girl... they'd seen it before—it was happening again. But there we would—we could like, light a bonfire and throw it into the fire you know. And we realized that we had work

to do together... that there was, like, support -you know—it was like, a two-way street. There was.... there was something in that dialogue. And also, we were all stoners.(both laughing) —We just became friends, you know... there was, like, a really—so that ended and I started driving the 'Pony' -which is my van—over to Sylvia's place every week—and which eventually turned into something called the 'Family Dinners—where we started cooking dinner there once a week and it was more of like bringing this network of people—you know -this network of artists and whoever into, like, literally, physically into the space. Like, the only queer emergency queer shelter in the city and the shittiest shelter in the city that is being really horribly run by kind of horrible people. And then you've got your like your staff who have been there for a long time some of whom have lived through that people who live that life—holding it together, because this is where young people come to crash when they don't have anywhere else to go and none of the other fancy programs have room for them. It's really important. And yet it's like it is not a nice place. So, we were like, "Oh, we want to like artistically mentor the young people." We're like, "No, we need to cook dinner."...Like, we just—“Let's get the basic needs taking care of first.” So, we all started coming through. Once a week—it lasted for a couple of years—where once a week we would go in and we would cook dinner together and these relationships got formed that were really strong. And that is where the Work Collective begins and that's the collective that I have now and we're now organizing our sixth summer together. You know we knew too that. And the second year by the second year like the people who had started it thinking that one week in the woods was a good idea. We're like, "No, this is a year-round process. This is, like, a light. This is—this is different—this is transformative work.” So, we took over the camp by the third summer... I have been organizing it ever since and that's where the Work Collective comes from. It's a big mishmash of people who have passed through all of these different projects and things that we've made... a lot of young people who have survived a lot of things... trans women of color who are, like—have survived a lot of things. But we're all, like,—“We want to make movies. “.. you know?— And do cool art shit. We make a lot of protest art like marching banners into the streets... the next year a place called—we started a thing called the Workshop. At the Joan Mitchell Foundation they were like, “Oh you should just.— It'll be like the Craft Shack—that we run in the summertime every week the young people can come through.” So, we did that for a year. That was a good experiment.-We made some cool stuff.-We did a lot of cool, like, community collaboration things but ultimately there were other uses for our time that we're better—MIX the big one—again,—and then the Mix Festival was growing to like every year it was just more and more and more people-And then it got a little more chaotic.-Silas film, The Golden Age of Hustlers,-JUSTIN VIVIAN BOND—And that actually, like, if you look at the video for the Golden Age of Hustlers, that's a lot of—a lot of friends are in that—and people who are from these worlds that we're talking about—Dan Fisk (?) started.... the Squirts (?) thing—that was 2013...that Squirts (?) continued. We started working on Wild Ponies, which is our movie that we finally finished this summer that started in 2014.That was like, Art in The Woods people.... We're all like, “Let's make a movie.” So, we are making a movie. We filmed it that summer and it was about a conversation between it started the opening scene as a conversation between a black trans woman and a white gender nonconforming artist who are both living with HIV down in hostel housing in the Rockaways and their friends and it starts with their friendship and then, like, they—takes place over the course of one night and we sort of see what happens to them the way that we've edited it and now it's really about Brockie, one of the characters, because

that's what we have filmed and that's what we could edit and that's like as far as we got with it.—But you know it was really about—about the ways that our worlds were colliding with each other. And, like, this really beautiful queer magic that we were making through all of these art things that we do... like, all of these spaces that we kept—that we kept—that I know I had a hand in helping hold open for people to come through and cross with this like really deep survival network that has been operating for generations. Right? ...And what do we—what do we learn from each other and, like, how do we interact with each other and how much fucking fun can we have together to ...Queer planet. We did a huge thing—we marched in the People's Climate March. We had a couple hundred people come through and build giant drag queen puppets and the—we marched all day just to give you bonking.—That was really cute.—But yeah we had a couple hundred people in like elemental drag and then that fall like Black Lives Matter started to really burst out and became really intense or in the streets a lot. We made a lot of street banners... a lot of street banners... and like marched a lot... also Queen ended around then Elizabeth Taylor goes to Hollywood... Justin Sayer who is now in Hollywood writing all sorts of stuff ...(?) used to live in the castle. Yes to 2015—uhgg... the Family Dinners and in the film, like, the Way in which is this music video that you'll—you will finally get to see Wild Ponies comes out. We made a music video at Art in the Woods that year...that's the last big Mix Festival before they went through a deep accountability process and everything changed. —That was 2015—HA! the Stonewall movie debacle—what a debacle—but my sisters Kristen—Kristen Level and Elisabeth Marie Rivera were like REAALLY vocal online about that shit. They're two of the central members of the work collectives...so they kinda pushed that really hard.—And then the Spectrum closed at the end of 2015. So— that's this piece of history.—There's more... in the last few years it just continues to evolve.

Niculescu: Yeah— I guess maybe, to make sure we don't take up too much of your time,—but I guess it would be fitting, if you're comfortable, to end with Brynn... because that was the thing that kind of brought this paper into being. So, what are your, kind of, like, last comments about that. Like what happened with Brynn Kelly.

Ziegler: Brynn was here for all of us— and you know Brynn was being failed by the state and her attempts to help herself.... Brynn was a poor transwoman who couldn't afford to get all of the care that a person should get when they're going through the kinds of shit that she was going through. And Brynn did something that made a lot of people angry. Which is end her life—I wish she could live to see where we're at right now. —And, like, you know —this still feels like backstory for something that's yet to come and is always unfolding all around us. Right? Queer Magic is everywhere. Queerness I always think of—like, especially when I was transient. For these couple of years, when I was living in the van and I didn't really have a place to be except for this tiny space that I could take with me—like, I thought of queer as a home that you carry in your heart. It's a badge that you wear under your skin. It's like a meditation and it's like a thing that you take with you. So, I guess it's all around us—But I wish—I wish she was around for more of it because she—she helps. —She helped craft this cultural moment that we're in. —Like, what is the value of cultural work, you know, and back to those ideas about how does change happen...What is structural racism or what is structural genderism or social transphobia or like, just all of the shit... the structure is fucked like the structure was created by people who suck... we are aware of that

we know that that is our collective lived experience right.-And, you know, and even having like climb to the top of the non-profit ladder and sit in this place is like giving the money away...You know—it doesn't -work...And—this does... you know?... creating magic with and for each other does. But we're not there yet as a community... like— when we think about what community is and what community means and what it's supposed to be and what it's supposed to do... You know, I guess there's—get an image of a safety net. Right? And I try to throw out all the trauma images of community (laughs) you know like what it's what the beauty of what it's supposed to be is like what interdependence actually means.—Oh by the way—the Bluelight beach party was -the first one -was where we started calling it Interdependence Day...um, which I think has stuck. I don't think that was used before. So, what. Yeah...But what does true interdependence actually mean and where are we actually failing... like, how do we critically look at those holes and figure out how to stitch them up. I think we're having deep conversations right now about meth,—and how many people's lives are getting, like, really devastated by it. And again, it's not— It's in it's in my like fairy circles, it's in my artist circles, it's with the young people that I know and it's— it's with the trans women of color that I know... it's like in these different circles of people that are part of my life and it's destroying us... But like what do we do? Like, two young people who I've known since 2013 who I really care about are, like,—are—have been on the streets since then and I guess were spotted last week and they're like losing their facial features and you know they're just devastated by this drug. Do we take them to Camp with us? Like, do I let them go because I can't help them?... Is there some way?—Like, is there something we can develop to help people who are in that situation like...Like queer specific care?... Like, I love that the movement has grown to a point where we're able to consider these questions more than just like, "Hey...cute, let's have a field day...WOW, we're a community!"... you know? OK. What does it—mean you know? And... and the accountability question -especially,—talking about this when we're looking at this picture, where I'm looking at a person who I was close with who was very abusive to another person in this photograph and has never been held accountable for that and continues to throw sex parties in our community...You know when they have been abusive to every friend that they've dated.. like, why is that okay?—And I think that, in this larger... I guess, lifelong project of building communities between and across different conversations—and umm...seeing those communities as deeply connected to movement building until like building power to change the shit that is actually fucked up about the world right through cultural work.... Through, like, changing our culture... like,—that is the thing that is the project of the queer community in a lot of ways. At least that's what I'm involved—that's what I'm interested in.-We're not there yet... And so, to me,—like Brynn... thinking about Brynn in the context of all of this, she is a person that we lost because we weren't there yet-I carry her with me—you know—in the hopes that—you know-Never again! — Except that it will. So... it will...And it will continue to be that way... like, kind of forever.—Like, some—in some ways, that's the of the nature of the world ...But, I don't accept that. I think we can do better. And I think that we're—we're getting there. It's palpable. You know... again, I have this funny time capsule document from 2011 where I was like trying to push the Foundation to support trans movement building and so, you know, I know—like I have a marker in time—or I know the before and after that I've lived through... Like, you know, I started using 'They' pronouns in twenty ten or eleven. Somewhere around here...And now it's a thing like it's legal to do that on a driver's license in Oregon... You know what I mean? I don't like... that was not where we were at.—And yet, that's not that long ago you know. So,

it's—it's funny. We're living through something really profound.-But we're not all gonna make it to...to, —like, be more in the light or -I don't know—to like this beautiful promise of what—what we can be and what we have become... And...um, while that is just truth that death is part of life... I don't accept her death (Long pause) We can do better (softly)... whew... and so we soldier on... (laughs heartily) ...you know... soldiers of love... you know? whew...Yeah, I guess that's it.

Niculescu: Yeah...well, thank you so much.

Ziegler: You're welcome.