

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MX ENIGMA

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Transcribed by Damien Anderson

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva and I will be having a conversation with Mx Enigma for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It's March 3rd, 2018 and its being recorded on Broom Street in Chinatown in my apartment. [whisper] Oh god, 2019. [laughter] Here we are, hi how are you?

Mx Enigma: Hi, I'm good.

Silverman: So, we'll just start with a question. What was New York like for you when you were younger?

Enigma: [sigh] That's a big question. Um, well it was many things. I grew up in a religious household in a modern orthodox Jewish household. So, in some sense I saw New York very much through a religious lens. And there are so many resources and communities and things that I identify with now that I didn't know exist or coexisted in the city, that I wish if I had more awareness of like LGBT programming or different denominations of Judaism... and DGNC folks and people with a more liberal or independent state of mind like people like me. So that was one. Also, New York felt very much as it does still now. It makes me feel like, a number and in many times it makes me feel like not really valued in the city as I would like it to be. Because there's just so many people in the city and people have this false idea that diversity means inclusion. There's a lot of 'isms' in the city and a lot of phobias in the city and seeing through my experiences like even after coming out, the amount of transphobia and homophobia that exists in New York City, alone, it makes you feel like sometimes you want to hide and othered and very, very scared and very unsure of where to connect. And, growing up, not only on the lower east side, but going to New York where it's like everything's so fast paced and there's so many people. And everyone's competing for survival but obviously those with more privileged identities; straight, white, cisgender, or of a certain faith or whatever, so on and so forth, get to succeed more on this latter. It just often feels like, yeah, it just often feels like you're not, you're not valued as much because you're not a certain level of the hierarchy in the city. So it's just very overwhelming to find your place. It's very overwhelming to stand your ground. It's still very stressful when you're not in spaces that affirm you to speak out and identify openly as who you are without having to fear that you're gonna be rejected. I mean, like, I just went to a panel recently and I'm so use to just saying my name and pronouns just so I don't have to be misgendered, but also I mean, I didn't say it that time, but it was an interfaith panel, but because it's also asking a lot of me to always identify, always be open and vulnerable about who I am and sometimes people just don't want to hear, 'Oh there's someone who is gender non-conforming in this space and have their looks and their bigotry in that space' and sometimes you're just like, okay, let me pretend to be like everyone else. So, for me it's been very much of a challenge to be myself and feel that, like, other New Yorker's will respect that. Yeah, I feel there's a lot of pressure on me to often conform for safety from verbal, physical, emotional violence. There's a big part of my, who I am is not shaped by what I desire or how I would like to present, but very much of, like, pressures from- for safety.

Silverman: And what is your relationship to Modern Orthodoxy now?

Enigma: I don't have a relationship at all. Modern Orthodoxy is not an inclusive faith at all. LGBT. It's very one minded about the whole Israeli- Palestinian conflict. And I had my own coming of age experience of being in Israel and coming to realization about my queer identity, coming to realization of my learning disabilities, and my other disabilities and the fact that I always just never fit in, it made me explore outside of the box that I was suppose to subscribe to. Meeting with people of different backgrounds in the country and exploring the country and modern orthodoxy is entirely zionis and entirely, um the religion and the land is so connected, but it's not only the land its the politics that go with it. And if you're even slightly critical of any policy, even like foreign policy or education, you're labeled a 'Self-hating Jew'. So when I came back from studying in Israel after two years, from 2011 to 2013, I was still like one foot in the closet and one foot out. Like, it's what I was use to, but I was also trying to find community, trying to leave, and I think what, but I knew I had to leave and also felt pressure to leave because I wasn't religious anymore and I was being open with my queer identity and I was ostracized for that. And I still feel like I was, being that I still live in the lower east side and still around the same people, I still feel like a stranger in my own neighborhood because a lot of people just dismiss me and my identity because of being queer or not subscribing to a certain faith and people just don't understand there's a lot of worlds within New York City. It's not as liberal and free and as diverse as people always make you think it is. And then especially being openly a part of a minority, I mean you're just, especially in this political climate, you're attacked and you're vulnerable. I'm really scared. There are times that I feel like I want to join political groups and make a change, but I have to internalize that, even in 2019, that people don't want to hear a queer trans person of color. People don't want to hear me and that makes me feel dehumanized, that people don't care what I have to say and people roll their eyes at what they say because they think I'm some alien or, something so stigmatized that they've constructed and yet, I'm trying not only to fight for my survival, but trying to fight for a world that will be more accepting and embracing.

Silverman: Okay.

Enigma: Which is why I wanted to have that other thing deleted a while back, 'cause, um...

[non-dialogue noise]

Silverman: Wait, what other thing?

Enigma: So, um, when I came back from Israel in 2013, um, I started going to a lot of queer spaces and I was exploring my identity, my gender and who I am and I had a lot of pitfalls where some coming outs have hurt me. I was discriminated against a lot by the, both by the orthodox community and by people in general. I thought, I was naive, thinking 'oh secular people are all accepting', but that's not true. There's homophobia and transphobia everywhere. And a way to cope with a lot of my suffering and my pain was to make art about it. And I was, in 2015, in a film making program called, with, Real Works, where, how Hazel became my mentor. I had the option to choose a mentor and one of my mentors happened to be trans. And I was working on

a film about the intersections of gender and religion. And they were perfect for it and they are also of a similar faith upbringing. It was just, we were so compatible, and we made this great little film about, ya know, my experiences of struggling to discover my gender, but also in a religion that segregates it and that got me a lot of attention, both good and bad.

Silverman: What kind of attention? What do you mean attention?

Enigma: So when I- when we produced the film and it was out there, and there was articles written and stuff like that, there were people who...rather than me saying quietly or me being like going up to people and saying out, it was like a very big 'im out' and this is who I am. And I was very much afraid, and I still have internalized a lot that I'm gonna be targeted for that. And I've had people who've, like, made assumptions about my identity and have come up to me without, like, completely crossing boundaries. People who are religious who are like saying like 'so are you transitioning, are you having surgery, are you having this' like all these invasive questions about my identity which really impacted negatively my journey with discovering who I am, internalizing that I am going to be rejected, rejected so much that there isn't a point of being out or there isn't something beautiful that could come out of being out. Then over the years I've done other projects which, over time, I felt more confident of sharing my story as part of healing, and not caring about who rejects it. But I did fear, for a long time, of just being vulnerable has a social stigma attached to it and, yeah I'm very much in a limbo now because sometimes I want to tell my story, oh- [non-dialogue noise]

Silverman: That's fine. [non-dialogue noise]

Enigma: There are times when I want to tell my story of things that I've survived and of things that I've went through and other times I feel afraid and I feel like with just knowing how many trolls out there and how much hate that I've received that, umm I feel like-

Silverman: And is it mostly from the Orthodox community?

Enigma: No, all types of people. All types of people who have, like, sent me a lot of hate for who I am and my stance and I've internalized that and sometimes it makes me feel like the majority of the world is against me. And when you're a part of the queer community and especially the trans community, it's such a small community that is marginalized. I know that there is so much fighting within the community because people are oppressed and it's just natural to let it all off onto other people, um, yeah.

Silverman: When you were younger did you have any conception of transness? Like what was your earliest memory of a trans person or experience?

Enigma: Sure. So, I knew I was different. I knew I... So lower east side I feel like part of it is like the Berlin Wall. The Williamsbrook Bridge very much 'til today, divides the neighborhood. One side is low income and people of color, one side is white, Jewish, upper class. Now my family are Middle-Eastern Jewish descent and we lived in the black and brown side. And my mother always told me that you're people are the other side. And even at a younger age I knew that

wasn't true because I was like, 'those Jews are different, they speak a different language', we speak Arabic and Hebrew, they speak Yiddish and English. They have different culture, different customs, they have different class, they think their better than us, like all these levels of oppression and privilege and my mom was saying, like, we're the same and I knew we weren't. Then, as time went on, I had to be forced to be grouped in certain spaces, I knew I was different from other cisgender boys. I knew I didn't like to do boyish things as much, I liked to do more girly things and I identified more with feminine things and, I wasn't... it was terrifying because, like, you were, um... you are trying to be yourself and your innocent about it and there is no one like you who are visible, at all. And everyone's making fun of you and shaming you and I still have that, those years of trauma of struggling to just be myself and give myself slack for it when it was just boy or girl. You either had to fit all what's attributed to boy or girl and I felt like I was in the middle and the first images of transness, which I've internalized, was obviously the Maury Show and that transphobia and putting trans people as a form of mockery. It also goes back to just both religious and also men around me who are policing my identity and telling me what is a boy or man supposed to be, thinking that was an appropriate label for me or what is 'this and this' and that I'm crossing the boundaries. I feel like I still get that, like, if I'm walking in New York City and I have a purse or I have nail polish on and jewelries, I feel like I internalize when I have both men and women, mostly women, who, like, look at me and are like 'you've crossed the line of gender, you're not, you're not performing gender right' even in New York City. And that makes me feel sometimes afraid that they're gonna dismiss my humanity and see me as a form of mockery because I don't fit in and that means they won't respect and accept me and keep me safe. Like, these are realities that is, it goes from like miniscule like that, to someone who is filled with hate and bigotry who will just see you and say 'you're different, I don't approve' and then will be violent. And I've had many assaults in my life, physically, verbally. I've been sexually harassed, I've been harassed and a lot of that has made me gone to the closet at times and hiding who I am and feeling ashamed of who I am and I never felt right because I didn't feel like I was being myself at all and I still don't know what that means, to be myself and to be safe. But, yeah, it just makes me internalize that I feel pressured to be part of a box in order to be safe and respected in society and especially with all the political hate and the lack of progress for trans rights, for queer rights, for people of color, all these boxes I'm in. It's scary for me to think of like how people in the past even broke glass ceilings or what do I have to do to be respected and break a ceiling and feel safe and not overwhelmed because not everyone can just break a glass ceiling and not everyone wants to and I sure don't because that's a lot to be that person. And I'm very much in a recovery state and still trying to figure myself out so I get to be more vocal in spaces that I know I will be more supported and obviously it's the natural thing to do. I use other platforms, you know, my social media or whatever and build my allies and-

Silverman: What are some places you've connected with that you feel supported by?

Enigma: So, one organization called Footsteps, which works with people who grew up in the Orthodox world and want to leave it. They're very queer friendly and trans competent and they have a lot of queer and trans staff members and there has been a lot of changes they've made by just my presence there of putting signs saying that you could use any bathroom that you

would like, because it use to have a code. So they made that and they're like gender diversity is welcome here and bumper stickers with, all across the office with, of like, gender and sexuality alliance. People using their pronouns in spaces that are not necessarily LGBT support groups. I was very involved with Manhattan Neighbor and Network, a public media channel and there's a lot of young queer and trans people who are producers there. I produced a talk show about human rights. Focusing on queer, trans, and immigrant rights. It was queer justice and it was for one season in summer 2018. I was the first non-binary person on a public TV channel major network to host it. I was very proud of that. I remember, like, right before we aired our first episode or even just part of recording, because part of it was live and part of it was pre-recorded, I had images of my queer ancestors, I had on my right I had Audre Lorde, I had Sylvia and Marsha and then on my left I had, um, um... sorry I'm blanking out, um, sorry there was.. um, oh, um... Feinberg something.

Silverman: Leslie?

Enigma: Leslie Feinberg and Harvey Milk and just looking at them, like, there was like a little whisper inside of my body that said like, they have made it, they've been through it and they're giving you and now it's your responsibility to make more room open for the next generation. And how much they've accomplished and the ceilings they've shattered despite everything they've been through. And, yeah it had a great, great round of great success and we're hopefully gonna have a season two. Other spaces I've been to besides queer spaces, um, well I go a lot to Society For Advancement of Judaism, a reconstruction of Synagogue. I volunteer there, we do a lot of work with battered women about different social issues in New York City. Yeah, but you know what, I'm still, I'm still discovering where I belong. I'm still struggling to find a sense of community because whenever I come to the lower east side, again, I just don't feel like I have a community and there's not really people that I speak to, and not only that, as much as I knew I had to leave the community for the sake of my safety, um-

Silverman: Have you ever- sorry- have you always lived in lower east side?

Enigma: Most of my life, yes. I spent two years in Israel and then, twice in the past few years, because I lived in a toxic home and I still live in a not queer friendly home. I was homeless two times in my life, um, so I just moved back from living in the Bronx for a year and nearly died in the shelter system because-

Silverman: Can you talk more about that, like not maybe that experience with sheltering but maybe just the experience of being in the shelter as...

Enigma: Yeah, so I was, I was once in, 2015, through Ali Forney center, but Ali Forney, because they had such a full capacity, I was never able to be transferred from an emergency shelter, which was in Queens in Astoria. Maybe I shouldn't have said that, but um.., then, like, a transitional housing, which I think would've been great and it would've had other people like me working and growing to be independent. I obviously had, despite the abuse that I experienced and still experience from my mother, my father, and my brother, of my identity

and other parts of who I am now, I still had like a stockholm syndrome where I miss them and I want to be near them and it was so scary to be on my own. It was a very nice place, the one through Ali Forney, there were challenges as well that I wasn't use to like coordinating of who's showering first and dealing with other people's issues, but I was in a crisis. One time in 2016, I didn't have my meds, I was starting a new job, I was still shipping my stuff from lower east side to Queens. The trains don't run at night. It was hot, and I once had a severe seizure at work and I wasn't feeling well at this fellowship that I landed at a big advertising agency and this openly trans person there and that was already stressful, like you're the black sheep in this whole organization and I was severely- one night when I was trying to collect my belongings and stuff, I was, um, the security guard who harassed me denied me entry into the building and I was asking to call 911 because I was about to have a blackout and they instead pushed me on the street and the first time in my life, after an hour or two, I ended up on the floor near the FDR drive. And I was... um, yeah. Everyone looked at me as a piece of junk, that was a junkie. And um, [sigh] that's three years ago and I'm still filing, I'm still waiting for a response from the city of a lawsuit about fired based on disability and discriminated based on gender. You know, my employer took the words of the security guard and said I was violent and said that I was causing a caucus, ruckus, and I lost my job and I was... very disassociated and I had many experiences like that when I was homeless. I was a- maybe something about just being more vulnerable and then also being openly queer and trans that perpetrators pick up on and have taken advantage- physically and verbally, whether on the train. I've been harassed or attacked or in a pop eye and, um... But then this, a year and a half ago- again I went into a shelter, and it was an LGBT shelter, the first of its kind for young adults called Marsha's House, which is DHS and it was hell. It was real hell. There were nights you were waiting to get a bed because someone doesn't want to do their job and someone doesn't want to put you in the system and doesn't know that you have a pass for working. Police coming in and out. Security guards, homophobic and transphobic. Not having the will to keep living or keep going. No one really gives a damn about you and wants you to figure it out on your own to get public assistance and get a job and whatever. Altogether, in, like, one of the most unsafest neighborhoods in the Bronx, like, there was a horrible gang murder that happened a block away that hit all national news and that was where we were situated in. After being there 8 months, I had a severe mental health breakdown and I felt like I couldn't take it anymore and I was gonna be a harm for myself unless I got help. So I went, I've asked to be transferred and I was transferred to a mental health shelter but those shelters are only gendered specific and I went to one in Brooklyn which was for women and at first I thought everything would be okay. It was mostly, it was interesting, the younger people, I guess they just either know about TGNC folks or they just don't care, they were more accepting and embracing, but it was all the older women that were very transphobic and saying all sorts of stuff towards me and it made me question my identity and made me question if I'm valid or not. It's funny, every time I've been homeless I've also been... I had a crisis of going on hormones or not. I just sometimes felt like I had to stop hormones and stop transitioning because I didn't feel safe that, my gender out in the open is gonna keep me safe, physically, emotionally, mentally. So it's been a very confusing journey for me because there were many times I was saying am I sure this is the route I want to go to and there's a lot of obstacles in the way and uh... unfortunately, I mean, it's not the best, but, I tried to... What's it called.. Tried to make amends with my biological family because I just, I felt like it was gonna

take my life so many times in the shelter for just the amount of oppression I was going through and how the system expects you, kind of like prison, once you're out to figure it out on your own. So like prison expects when you leave- the world expects when you leave prison that you're suppose to find some way to be independent without being reliant on the systems and the shelter thinks despite all your oppression and everything that you're gonna somehow get yourself up, work like crazy, and secure a house and everything's gonna be good and you're gonna be reintegrated into society. So I had to go back to my bio family, but with that they've asked me to give up many parts of my identity in order to be accepted- can't be on hormones, can't dress this way, can't act this way, can't be this way. I didn't give in completely, but it just makes me feel closeted and it makes me feel that the world doesn't just want to give me space to be myself and express myself. I don't know what's the harm in expressing yourself and identifying however you want to be. The world just wants you to fit a box and it's made for certain identities and I feel the world needs to be a place where anyone can identify as anything and still thrive. We shouldn't have to be something we're not in order to be accepted in society and that is something I really struggle internally and externally that people should just be accepted and respected and humanized for the sake of just being human. I don't care what they look like, what color, what this, what that- it doesn't matter and we don't- we- that's why it's so- I fuse my identities to promote the idea of intersectionality. How I, regardless of our communities issues and our background issues, as people we need to work as allies and to understand each other and support each other. And not discard each other because you can't win, you can't liberate any community without the hands of others and so often you just see people who are so focused on their own community needs and not the other and the queer community and the trans community needs allies. It cannot be done by just themselves. So, I don't- I'm on a journey of figuring myself out and because of that I've always identified with they/them and non-binary because it just made me feel like to be certain of the uncertainty just like my artist name, Mx Enigma, the Mx is the prefix for non-binary people, mx, and then the Enigma is, like I said, to be certain with the uncertainty and that's how I identify now and my fashion changes, my how I feel changes, how I identify changes. It's not been so white or black for me, for my identity of like how I identify, and I've tried to find comfort in that.

Silverman: [non-dialogue noise] Hi.

Enigma: Hey, um... you made me think of how did I came across my name, and my choosing of my name. So I go [omitted]... Yes! It's not my, close enough to my dead name, besides the last name. I knew that I wasn't close to my soul in how I labeled myself and I was [sighs] in my late teens that I was like, I don't like labels that are being ascribed to me and I felt that I needed to find something that made sense for me. So, [omitted] is a name that I appreciate because I use to go by [omitted]. It's not my dead name, but I went by [omitted] for a while and I didn't have pronouns that I went with and I went on this queer retreat and there was this queer woman who just couldn't box me because she's like, 'you need a pronoun, how do I call you', bah, bah, bah and we were going on this hiking trail and all my butch and femme lesbian friends [laughter], they were like telling this woman, they were like, 'just call them [omitted], just [omitted]'- like what is so hard, like, don't need a pronoun. And then it just clicked to me, [omitted]. How I felt like, yeah I'm not someone who's boxed and I am a kaleidoscope and I am

ever changing and it's beautiful and it felt right for me and then a few years later I made it legal. Obviously there was a lot of challenges to it. Umm, discrimination from my birth parents, still disacknowledgement from people that I grew up with who were like 'No, I knew you so many years by this name', like you are... I don't want to lose that person. I'm like, you're not losing anyone, I just changed my name, like I'm the same person. It's really ridiculous what people come up with when you take one step at trying to embrace something of who you are and its different from what was set for you that people don't want to give you space. I'm not gonna go into how many experiences of how often people have assumed that my name isn't authentic. People who don't know me they're like, 'What's your real name? What did you grow up with? What does it mean? How do you spell it?', blah, blah, blah. I was just like, it hurt after the whole journey of why can't people just embrace and be happy for me that this is my name. So now I don't give people excuses and I don't tell them back story and I don't like being nice for other people's curiosity. And then [omitted], not a Jewish name right? [laughter] I remember I was in fifth grade and I went to a segregated school, boys and girls. And I didn't feel like I was in the right category at all and I didn't fit in. I was always sitting at the end of the boys table, not fitting in, and then whenever I sat at the girls table our bodies split our experiences, like everything about us is the same but couldn't talk about periods, I couldn't even talk about so many things that made me feel like I don't fit with either. I was made fun of a lot for my femininity. A lot and society has this notorious culture of attacking peoples gender and gender expressions if it doesn't fit this archetype of male masculinity, female femininity, or anything other than male or female. I, at the time, when I was a kid and I didn't have queer icons, artists like Sylvester and Divine, um, and, um... who else- there's all sorts of people that I was-am able to look at. Look at drag queens, and artists and writers and activists and people that I could relate to and affirm my queer identity. Not really anyone-I'm non-binary- out there. But I had to look to women for a long time for empowerment. I had to look to women to affirm my sense of femininity. I had to look to women, up to women, for the things that I liked- emotional connection, sensitivity, fashion, art- that the male world did not provide me at all. Obviously I was very discriminated against. My father would be like 'why are you watching America's Next Top Model when you should watch some football game' or whatever. Which is still a conflict that I'm not gonna go into between me and my father. But, so in fifth grade I was watching Austin Powers Gold Member, with Beyonce. And Beyonce's character was Foxy Cleopatra. She said, 'I'm Foxy Cleopatra, I'm a whole lotta woman'. And it just made sense for my gender. I was like I wanna be her-- this is beautiful and she is empowering and she's feminine and gorgeous and sexy and everything and it was, it made my spirit feel good. And I would go into school and go into the boy's class and say, 'I'm Foxy Cleopatra, I'm a whole lotta woman' and the boys kept asking me to do it and perform it, but I was so naive that they were making me do it to make a mockery of me and I've internalized for years that I had to shed my femininity and I still internalize it despite being more open about it. That's just like one huge example of how toxic gender norms and gender policing becomes. It makes people internalize who they are, like, it's like imagine if you like vanilla and your whole society says you're only allowed to like chocolate and that is the world we've constantly lived in where it's said you need to like certain things and that's it and otherwise you're demonized for it and I had to fight a lot through my art, um.. So I got to a point that I felt that I needed to take something that was considered shamed and put love to it and I added [omitted] as my middle name to always

affirm the feminine part of my identity. Now sometimes with the oppression, whether mental health or actual other forms of oppression, it makes me forget of the value behind it. Sometimes I'm like, oh I should just conform like everyone else and I'll be accepted and I'll be embraced or I shouldn't have made that decision because I was so discriminated against for embracing this part of me, but I've kept it. I wish I had avenues where I felt more free to evolve whether it's to present how I'd like or to transition or whatever, openly. But, fear, shame, rejection, which has caused uncertainty has made me not take that step. So, it's where I am now, who knows where I'll be in twenty years from now, hopefully in a more peace of mind and yeah. Even my- once I got the idea that like, hey I can change my name to affirm me, I did the same thing in Hebrew.

Silverman: What's your Hebrew name?

Enigma: My Hebrew name is E****, so if you spell it in English- [omitted]. Because the name I was given as a child had both an English and a Hebrew meaning. And it means someone who pursues peace and is enlightened and is open minded and I felt that made sense for me that it was also not based in religion. It's not a religious term, it's a Hebrew term, but it's nothing to do with religion and as someone who saw my Judaism was separate from religion. Yeah, so...

Silverman: Do you have a connection to any spiritual life?

Enigma: I struggle with that a lot because there's a lot of spiritual face practices that are anti-queer and anti-trans, whether it is part of the text or culturally the community just doesn't make space. There is a small part of me that's connected to Judaism. You know, I appreciate mythologies, and Hinduism, and Buddhism... um, I don't know, I mean for a long time I was really connected to the culture and spirit of Tianos, and I was even gonna minor in Puerto Rican Studies and I felt like, 'oh wow, they had a matriarchal society and they appreciate gender diversity and queerness and they were way more progressive despite all the European colonizers that saw them as part of the past. But then there was even aspects of Tiano culture that I was just like, well I'm not for human sacrificing and [laughter] some other things so... I feel like it's going back to [omitted]. I don't have to box myself, I pick and choose and try to appreciate, but there still is a real sense of belonging and wanting to just feel like I fit, I feel connected, I feel great, I have answers that guide me, I mean that would be the fantasy and ideal and the rest is history because you see so many people who just fit a box and there is comfort with that. That's what I talked about in my first film that, which was also called Mx Enigma, that I, despite criticizing the Orthodox faith as being gender segregated and oppressive to me and other people, I also realize that there is a sense of comfort and power of having a place that you belong and having a community and feeling like oh okay I believe in something and other people believe with me too and support me. And I've always been on a fringe of many communities where I'm like, well in this community might be too much to the left and I just don't- and this is this and this is that. So I think I'm trying to embrace that I can just have my own position and un-internalize that it's not wrong to be in the middle and it's not wrong to go at your own pace and [sigh] I just hate being pressured to believe in something, whether it's people trying to pressure me of- I've had people try to pressure me with my transition, I've had

people who try to pressure me with how I was suppose to identify with, I've had people who are always trying to conform- it's like the world is filled with people who don't want to allow people to live their lives as they are. Everyone finds some sort of sick comfort in trying to control people and make them another form of themselves. When we're all different and we all need to be able to give an avenue ideally to just explore ourselves and unfortunately some people have the energy and power to go out and discover who they are and be who they are and I say unfortunately because many times people have to leave everything they know- I mean I was watching some documentary of this Saudi woman who, like, traveled to Turkey to get to Greece so that she could just be an openly atheist 'cause she would be killed in her country and her family would disown her and she didn't want that. And for queer and trans people there are a lot of people who have to leave everything they know just to be themselves and that was very much of a struggle for me where I felt like, well I'm connected to my past and I want to go on my own, but it just seems sometimes to journey on your own is terrifying. I'm very much lost and in the middle, that's the honest truth.

Silverman: Are you working on anything artistically now?

Enigma: Um, yes. So, queer and trans ri- trans wise- I was working on the TGNC portrait project which is me- it's like Humans of New York, but getting photos of, and stories, of fifty people from across the country, all from a different state, who happen to be TGNC-I and telling their stories and taking a picture of them in a place that they feel the most special with their identity. So there's a transwoman who I took a photo of her in a chef outfit because she wanted to be a chef and that was in, actually in Chinatown. And other places, people who are sex workers, educators, engineers, all types of people, it just made me think with the political climate we're in that people are erasing TGNC stories and are not humanizing them for who they are and how they're very- and we're all the same, like we could all be boring and we're all just figuring ourselves out and we all have oppression and we all are fractured people who are also resilient and I wanted to, it's been like thirteen to fifteen stories I have out of fifty and I'm hoping to then make a map of the United States with black borders to represent the transphobic and the exclusionary politics, but then have photos, colorful photos of resilience within each state. That it's like despite everything, that these people are still rising and I think that's always been true about any marginalized community that they still rise. So, that's something that I need to save more money [laughter] to get more polaroid film because that's expensive unless anyone who's listening has a connection with Polaroid. Um, there's that. There's a place in the West Village that I go to once a week called Art and Acceptance. It's from seven to nine with an Episcopalian church and they have a drop in program for queer and trans youth and non who are at risk or homeless and I've been there for two years and we make art together for two hours. People go to join a different workshop with the artists that are teaching it, writing, visual, even cosmetic, and vocal and performance and it's just a nice place to drop in right by the pier which is a historic queer and trans place. Um, yeah, there's that and then just my own collages and my own writing. There's a lot of things that I try to process through my art that doesn't have a greater acceptance in my society and I think art has always been my friend, always has been a place where I can pour all parts of me and be humanized for it.

Silverman: Is there anything else that you want to share for the interview?

Enigma: God, I'm exhausted [laughter], my voice is like drying out. I hope people are not bored for me talking and talking and talking [laughter].

Silverman: I don't think so.

Enigma: Anything I would like to share... um, I guess I just want people to just see the humanity in others. I just, whatever, if this was a time capsule and this was seen a hundred years from now... there's always going to be some conflict between people and that we're just so much of the same and we just all live on the same planet and regardless of how we identify we all want to breath in peace, want to pee in peace, we want to eat in peace, we want love, we want to nourish our souls, we want to heal, we want to discover ourselves, we want to- whatever it might be. You know, people are tired of oppression and don't be on the side of oppression. Be intersectional, educate yourself... check yourself... and give in order to receive. And, like I've said before, I mean it's harder definitely as a more marginalized identity to be an intersectional activist because if I was of a more privileged identity I'd gain more access to certain spaces and I'm more respected say if I was a cis-male or female or of a certain faith or race or whatever, that's the reality, but I do the best that I can to be an ally to different communities because I know I'm asking for the same. So, I throw myself into women's spaces to understand their issues. I throw myself into communities of color, undocumented, you know, queer, HIV, disabilities- all these communities that some of them I relate to and some of them I'm just coming in as an ally, as a human being. I wish the world would provide for me as I'm trying to provide for them. Like, I try to provide for the world lack of judgement, empathy, intersectionality, respect, and many times I'm throwing myself out there and I'm not, you know. Like, all these queer and trans icons or anyone who we look as that they broke ceilings, that they may change, like we might focus on all their good, but we don't know enough about how much they've suffered and how much they've challenged and we don't humanize that much as the same as their good and their accomplishments and that is so forgotten because it keeps repeating itself in history. So, there is that... and, um...[sigh] yeah, I just, I just don't... I've said I've always wanted three things in life, I wanted to create- to be an artist and have an impact on others with that- so that's kind of like one and two. And have a sense of peace for who I am. And I'm sorry to say but I don't have- I'm not even close to number three. I know I'm only twenty-five, but I have so much trauma that, as much as I know that it's not my fault, it's easy to blame myself for the oppression I went through to feel that it has something to do with my identity, that I deserve or this has happened to me. And really, really for anyone who's listening is to just understand that we're just such fragile human beings and allyship is such a tool for not only empowerment, but of creating change. Because so many people often ask and think, 'well I'm not LGBT so why do I have to be an ally? Why do they want to hear me?' or 'I'm not a this, or I'm not that' and it's actually you're privilege of not being part of that community, not only spreads awareness, but also heals and pushes the community forward. Because, no you're not affected by the issues, but you do have the power to learn and bring it into your spaces and teach others and impact those that are also not part of the community. To be more aware so that we have a more peaceful and healthier world, because.... Oh, I guess this is part

of the three things- I fear, and I still fear that me being visible sometimes is not going to make a healthy impact for someone else. Like, I'm not a RuPaul where I'm like shaking my thing and I'm in drag and I'm like being whoever I want and I say I don't give a fuck about what people think and then everyone feels influenced and happy by me and are like, 'oh yeah I can- I'm an influence and role model for someone'. But I felt for a long time that being visible didn't matter because of how much shit I get for it and I guess I'm hoping that my visibility or my identity or something about me makes it easier for the next generation to not find- to not be isolated, to not go through painful experiences that I did, to not go through trauma, to be able to have an easier way of navigating and identifying who they are in this world and to feel hopeful and not be put down by the world because those are things that I'm struggling now. Now I'm not eighty-five or I'm not in a place where I'm so healed and so strong and... I'm happy with who I am and completely open with who I am. So, yeah I just want other people's journeys to be easier and it doesn't really- I don't want to be like historically famous or anything like that, but like I think it would make- mean something to me if I knew that I was a role model for someone who's like I see myself in the world and that's why I always encourage people when people think that their voice doesn't matter, I'm like, it does because you're giving room to something that wasn't before. I mean, the Me Too movement also came out of nothing, you know, it took a bunch of people over centuries to, like, to put voice to something and then become a movement. And it still needs more and more voices and more and more allies, and I feel like every voice from every community- it's just a human voice, like why is it so hard for people to realize that? We all just want, we're all voicing because we want to be healed, we want to be heard and, um, yeah... I'm hurting and I'm confused, and I'm lost like so many millennials and... I guess coming here is hoping I'd be heard and someone else feels seen and heard. Yeah, so making, making the trajectory of the world to one that's more peaceful.

Silverman: Thank you. Thank you for sharing.

Enigma: Thank you.