INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

AELITA PARIZEK

Interviewer: Sebastián Castro Niculescu

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Transcribed by Taylor Carson (volunteer)

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**Sebastian Castro Niculescu:** Hello my name is Sebastian Castro Niculescu and I will be having a conversation with Aelita Parizek for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York City public libraries community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It is Friday August 10th, 2018 and this is being recorded at the Montez Press Radio Station in Chinatown. Hi, Aelita.

**Aelita Parizek:** Hey Seb, how's it going?

**Niculescu:** [Laughter] Pretty good, how are you?

**Parizek:** I'm good. Wow, it's fun hearing myself talk. I've been on the radio before in Hawaii, which is where I'm from, and I always imagine that--I've been told that I have a good radio voice just like in, throughout my life for whatever reason and I listen to so many podcasts that I feel like now I just sort of automatically speak with the cadence of, like, every thirty-something year old woman podcaster that I listen to and um, yeah. It's interesting.

**Niculescu:** You just learned to automatically emulate it?

**Parizek:** It just like it's imbued in me because I'm constantly, like I barely listen to music these days, I need two women talking to each other in the background while I'm doing work it's just like a comforting thing. And then the vocal mannerisms just sort of [Laughter] get stuck [Laughter] in my head. Anyway—

**Niculescu:** [Laughter] No, that's funny and I think—it's like this is our first time trying a live radio interview so...

**Parizek:** Really?

**Niculescu:** Yeah, so it's good to be like—

**Parizek:** Geeze, that's a lot of pressure.

**Niculescu:** No, not at all [Laughter].

**Parizek:** [Laughter] I'm like, sweating [Laughter] over here.

**Niculescu:** Um, but it's like, good to like, have someone who's like—radio is a thing that I at least know the format of and like can pretend to be [Inaudible]. [Laughter]

**Parizek:** Yeah, I generally—I'm like, I'm probably going to have a podcast at some point in my life. Doesn't even matter what I talk about as long as I sound good. Right? Cause like, yeah a lot of people just play them in the background to have a soothing voice talking and like, I can be that person, or someone.

**Niculescu:** Oh yeah, definitely.
**Parizek:** Anyway, [Laughter] should I introduce myself?

**Niculescu:** You can introduce yourself if you want, or I can just get started with some questions.

**Parizek:** Okay, just ask me some “Qs”.

**Niculescu:** Okay. So let’s start with the kind of like basic setting up the scene stuff.

**Parizek:** Uh-huh.

**Niculescu:** Where are you from?

**Parizek:** I was born in Manhattan, Kansas, [Laughter] which is fun to tell people. They’re like, “That exists?!” Like, yes, they called it “The Little Apple.”

**Niculescu:** Oh, my God.

**Parizek:** Which is so corny. And then my mom moved me and my family to Oahu, Hawaii when I was ten. And she is a professor of Teacher Education at the University of Hawaii, west Oahu. So, I was there, and I consider myself from there cause those were all my formative years were spent. And moved to New York when I was eighteen to go to Parsons School of Design and I met you at Rhode Island School of Design when I did a brief stint there; brief two year stint, and that was an all around like terrible time—am I allowed to say bad words? [laughter] Someone’s like, “Yes, you can!” It was a shit show, is what I was trying to say. And now I’m back in New York and finishing my degree, my B.F.A. and my focus is literally just called “Fine Arts” [laughter] at Parsons because, I mean, yeah, it’s primarily a design school and obviously people know it for fashion design but then if you want to do any sort of fine arts studio practice you just go into the “fine arts major” which was very intimidating for me as a freshman because—also being you know on a island has its ups and downs. I was like—my—the extent—ugh, what’s a word? —I was not tapped into any sort of art world at all, I thought the art world was Flickr.com and occasionally Tumblr. When I was in high school I wanted to be a photographer—question mark. And so, I came to Parsons just with that in mind and then I was like, “Oh wait, there’s a lot more to making things than just taking surreal selfies in the forest!” which is what I did. And then I got really scared [Laughter] being in this city because it’s very overwhelming. Everyone was like, “Oh, you’re going to love the city. You’re so fashionable and you just seem like a city girl.” I’m not a girl, by the way, but I’m just like, that’s what people were telling me, and I [Laughter] really thought that it would be great. I thought that I would automatically fit in to New York but that’s just not true when you’ve been operating on island time for a decade and –I’m just rambling. Is this chill?

**Niculescu:** Yeah, that’s fine.

**Parizek:** Okay, great.
Niculescu: But what do you mean by “Island Time”?

Parizek: Island? Oh, it's just like what you say to refer to, I don't know, the pace of life. Things are just much slower. I don't know—I just feel like people take in world events and like cultural shifts a lot more slowly in Hawaii. Everyone's generally more relaxed and I am inherently an extremely anxious person, which is great I guess for living in New York. I don't know, I guess you can look at it in multiple ways like if someone is inclined to not be anxious maybe they would be able to deal with being here. But at the same time I think you have to be tapped into your neuroses to know how to thrive here. Does that make sense?

Niculescu: Yeah.

Parizek: Yeah, like I wouldn't want to—I'm probably going to go back to Hawaii at some point and spend some time there. I want to be involved in the art scene on a sort of community outreach level at some point but not for a little bit, but I can't spend a lot of time there because everything's so slow. And I love the beach but I'm just not the person that is content to spend all my time at the beach and just chilling out because I'm not chill at all. And so I need there to be like a million things to do to make me feel like I'm a human and not like, a slug dissolving in the rain. And, okay—what was that? Oh, yeah. And then I left Parsons cause I was freaked out by the city and because the fine arts major freaked me out because it was so broad and I knew that I was not going to get a lot of guidance cause you just don't get that much like, there is rigor in some of the programs, but a lot of—there's just not the same kind of structure at Parsons that there is at other art schools like RISD [Rhode Island School of Design]. And I got there and I did film animation video and definitely learned a lot of just like craft in the two years that I was there but was stifled in other ways and I kept making trips back to the city and realized, “oh, I like to be connected to the world [Laughter] outside of Providence”. And as you know there is not really a bustling queer community in Providence. Not to downplay the queer people that are there. But, you can't find the same kind of support network that you can in New York.

Niculescu: Definitely.

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: Yeah.

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: Yeah. So, what's different about New York this time around?

Parizek: I think that I just grew up. Like, I didn't really know how to make friends [laughter] I think when I first moved here cause I also went to a pretty, like, I guess you could say conservative private school but I guess just like, socially conservative in the sense that I had, like, three friends I was kind of a freak I guess—I don't know, people just thought I was weird. I
wore Hot Topic in most—okay, this is going to be like #notlikeothergirls [hashtag not like other girls] for a second [Laughter] but like, I was the one wearing shitty clothes from Hot Topic and everyone else was wearing Hollister and that was actually like such a faux pas. People just thought that there was something up with me from the beginning. And then I came out as “bisexual” when I was fourteen. And then people started a little bit farther away from me in the hallways [Laughter] and so—where is this going? Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah! Well, basically I had like, very few—I didn't know how to go out and meet people and be sociable really, and not because—I don't know, this sounds depressing but it was really, everything was fine. Like, high school was—okay, it's terrible for every gay kid. It wasn't horrific, but I think especially cause I spent all my time at school doing school. I took the SAT twice. I took an SAT prep class in the summer time. That was the whole thing, so that was so much of socializing was talking about your grades, which is the worst. And so, like, I never went to a single party. Not that they would have been that fun or interesting. I got drunk on the beach with some friends one time and that was the extent of my adventures. Yeah, I got here, I got to New York and was like, “this is, there is—where do I go to have fun?” But what is fun, also? You know? And no experience in drinking or drugs or anything there's just like a lot, like there's a lot to do at once. But then, once I was at RISD I think you're kind of forced to make friends there because there's such a small space and you make friends out of necessity and kind of like a Stockholm syndrome situation. I mean, it was also weirdly sheltering but then, like, I had a few friends that I did keep in touch with in New York and I actually started coming back to do DIY [Do It Yourself] art shows with a friend, his name is Jimi Lucid, you can check him out on SoundCloud he's really cool. And he just invited me to do an installation in his McKibbin Lofts apartment for a show that he was throwing, and I spent like a week just—it was this project that I do not work on anymore that I called “Chrysalis” that was an environment that I made out of—how do I explain this? Not gonna sound cool when I talk about it, but basically quilt batting with like, a lot of pastel paint stuck to it and it made—it was soft but at the same time it was kind of a gross texture and I had just these plastic egg type looking objects that were placed in it and I had lights with iridescent foil, like very cute very—and what I was telling people and this is when my work, what I thought it was primarily was like, work about mental health and mental spaces and what I told people was, “well, when”—I love telling people this because a lot of people don't know—in a chrysalis, like the cocoon or whatever that a butterfly or a moth puts itself into—no, what? It’s a caterpillar and then it goes into the chrysalis and then, okay, you know the whole thing. But like, people I think picture it as the caterpillar goes into the cocoon and then kind of like, grows wings and morphs into the butterfly, but what actually happens is its body completely dissolves into a primordial goo. It’s just like a clear gel full of stem cells.

Niculescu: Wow.

Parizek: Yeah, and then it rebuilds itself. Yeah, Seb’s looking at me like, “really?” It's like cool, bugs are cool. It's like big ‘inspo’ [Inspiration]. And so I was making these spaces and I told people, “Oh, yeah, this is supposed to be a safe space for complete self destruction and reconstruction.” And, that's cute, but I don't think that what I—I was always in this space the whole time and I had this really ugly looking jumpsuit thing that I made that was inspired by this alien demon at the end of Ghostbusters [laughter] called ‘Gozer’ where it just like this fab [Fabulous], actually totally gender non-conforming [David] Bowie inspired demon and she's
wearing like weird cottony, spider webby jumpsuit thing with gems on it. And I got a jumpsuit on Amazon that was kind of like a weird taupe color and it was kind of like skin, but not really, and then I just hot glued a shit ton of quilt batting onto it and tinsel and sewed egg thingies to the shoulders and that was my weird, molted look for sitting in this environment and people would come in and I would talk to them. And I realized that after not doing this project anymore that really all it was me trying to make friends with people. Just like putting together a space that made me happy and inviting people to come chill with me. And, I don't know—it made people very happy to be in that space. It's very simple concept and I don't feel like there's—I'm like being self-deprecating right now but I don't care. This is my past self, this is like nineteen year old me. I'm twenty-two, that wasn't that long ago. [laughter] But it was simple but sometimes making cute relatable art is enough. Sometimes we can get our heads stuck up our asses and institutions like thinking about making art that is completely opaque to people outside of institutions and this was just friends having fun in their apartment. But, you know, it was great engagement and I'm kind of trying to go back to that right now after spending so much time at RISD just feeling so shitty about my practice all the time because I felt like I wasn't—I don't know, I wasn't working hard enough, I wasn't smart enough, I didn't have enough critical references in like, I don't know it's just, everyone has to think about who are you making the work for, you know? And that's something that I'm sort of grappling with, right now. Wow! I was so afraid that I wouldn't be able to talk about anything, [Laughter] I just can't shut up, so that's great!

Niculescu: Yeah, its one thing that I've realized during interviews is that we underestimate how much people like to talk about themselves—

Parizek: [Laughter] Well, great!

Niculescu: --which is not supposed to be a jab, but just to say. Um, but yeah, so how are you trying to deal with that idea in that kind of like, negotiating who art is for now that you're in New York and performing [Cough] in some cool, queer trans spaces?

Parizek: Uhh...yeah...

Niculescu: [Laughter].

Parizek: Well, let's see. I feel like I need to preface what my [Laughter] work actually is or looks like or whatever to whoever's listening right now, I don't know who you are but, I don't know if any of you know who Dr. Pimple Popper is or if you watch any sort of viral video on the internet or on your smartphone involving the extraction of pimples and cysts and stuff. But that has been my biggest inspo for the past year as well as slime videos, if you know what slime is. I feel like—I was talking to a professor last semester and I was showing him these macro-photos that I took of from this video I took of slime and I was like, “do you know what slime is?” and he was like, “I know what slime is” and I was like, “no, but like—this thing like, instagram, like, kids make it” and he was like, “Yeah, I know what slime is” but he totally didn’t. He really didn’t but I just had to let that one go. But yeah, people make beautiful, in my opinion, video based sculpture with slime. And it’s a really interesting economy because there’s so much content of
not just young people, people of all ages making their slime, putting the beads in it, putting the glitter in it, putting all this random shit that makes strange textures and playing with it and making essentially a sound piece and there's so much content and it's so prolific that if you go on Amazon, well I just noticed it first on Amazon but you can see it in craft stores now. There's slime kits that are being sold that directly reference what essentially self made business people started posting on Instagram and the price of Elmer's Glue went up and everything. Okay, I feel like—okay, that's an inso and right now I make fake cysts. Imagine a silicone bubble that looks like it's either usually like—I've been putting them on my skin recently and trying to make realistic looking flesh around it but also put it in fabric or fake fur and then I cut them open and squeeze stuff out of it. And I also make other objects out of silicone that are made with textures that really disturb people. So the word 'trypophobia' isn't actually—it's not a real recognized phobia or anything but people use it to reference a fear or like very intense revulsion to repeated hole patterns. Sometimes bumps, but mostly holes; basically anything that looks like it could be a skin ailment or could be a flesh eating disease and it makes sense that those things would creep people out but, like, it can get to the point to where the classic "are you trypophobia or not?" test is just showing people a photo of a lotus pod which is just a plant. It's also the center or a lotus flower which is an incredibly beautiful flower and when you take away the center of it and let it dry out it's just this disturbing honeycomb type object. I took a cast of one in silicone and made it iridescent green and beautiful and alien and put fake pearls inside of it. And I went to show a friend a photo of it, not even the real thing, and he looked at the photo for .01 seconds and was like, "no no no no, I can't look at that, I can't look at that please take, no, I'm not going to look at that." And I was like, "really?" and he was like, "I'm sorry, I just can't." And I've had people on Instagram unfollow me because they can't look at these textures and I think it's really interesting cause—I don't know, there's just very few things that illicit such a visceral disturbed response from people. When you think about it, like, I feel like we're desensitize to a lot of things: 'violence', 'sex' and whatever stuff that like—I don't know it just feels like you've seen everything sometimes when you're navigating viral images on the internet, but, something about these holes really freaks some people out. And then there's also people that really love it. I feel like it's one or the other. Like, people are really into these holes and it makes them want to pick at their skin in a satisfying way or it makes them want to peel stuff or pop stuff and then the other people that are like, "that makes me want to die." [Laughter] And, I love it! It's interesting in all of that sort of ties into my thoughts on interacting with queer and trans bodies as things that are beautiful and capable of radical intimacies that are difficult to understand and also bodies that are seen as completely abject and inscrutable and horrifying to some people. And so, back to your question [Laughter] it was a long time ago of engaging with other people. Even just like, posting these kinds of videos on Instagram for a minute I wasn't really sure how I wanted to post. I like, took all of my work off of Instagram at the beginning of last school year cause I just kind of felt I needed to reevaluate some things but I'm like, this kind of content can only—not only, but like, it must exist in some form on Instagram that's just where you find this shit and that's how you—it's not that I necessarily am doing it with the goal of 'going viral' or whatever but, just like having something like a green alien slime cyst that actually looks like it's embedded in someone's skin. Like, showing up in your Instagram feed like randomly. Like, it wigs people out and also makes people very happy sometimes. And, okay—wait, I don't know what I'm let me—
Niculescu: No, I mean, but what's interesting about it and I know we've talked about this before and it's worth kind of saying is, like, the ways in which putting this on the body or like, presenting this is always kind of referring to the body in trouble or like the body being not as it's made to be as this kind of Eurocentric idea of the perfect body, right? That is of course [inaudible].

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: And so, presenting a body in trouble or a body abjected is a way to kind of bring us towards transness without necessarily having to speak to identifiers necessarily.

Parizek: Yeah, you know? Yeah. Like, I that makes me think of when I took a class at RISD and presented a video that YOU were in. I excised—I made a lime green top with all these weird bumps on it and I excised a purple cyst from Sebastian for a video two years ago...?

Niculescu: Two years?

Parizek: One?

Niculescu: Two?

Parizek: Like a year?

Niculescu: Like a year and a half.

Parizek: Whatever—I presented this and I was talking about, like—I don't know, identifying queerness on the body and my professor asked me if I was interested in making work that had to do with showing visible trans scars or like, she specifically was like, “oh, yeah like the, you know, the skin graft on the leg or the arm when like, a trans man get phalloplasty, blah, blah, blah.” And at the time I was not out as trans and was not—it was very under the radar at that point and I was like, “I don't feel comfortable making work about that. It's not my experience.” But I'm also like, that's just not what I'm trying to do at all. Like, I'm not—I've moved away from very explicitly talking about queerness through obvious queer identifiers. And it's interesting what you're saying about just the phrase, ‘the body in trouble' because the other part of this work, which for me doesn't really have that much to do with my transness at all is just like, an expression of just pure passion and mania and my relationship to pain and pleasure. And people love picking at their skin and they love popping zits and its not good for you it's not good for your skin. It's imbuing yourself with more bacteria or whatever, but there's just that sweet release that you get and it's like ejaculatory or whatever. Not that I necessarily want to make major “cum-y” references, but it's always going to be there. It's like, for you to be infected with something, whether it's just a cyst your body made or if the implication is that something laid eggs inside of you and for that to be implying that your body is in peril, but then I feel like I'm sort of creating it in myself that I'm sort of using my own agency to then excise it for my own pleasure. I feel like I've been trying to figure out how to talk about this. I don't want to say that this ties into self-harm but it just sort of shows a radical intimacy with the body and intimacy
with abject material on the body that people would normally be afraid to deal with. And I'm talking about the abject and the grotesque mostly without literally working with like shit or piss which is what people would automatically [Laughter] think of. It's like this completely other fluid. It's like; when your body is infected with something it creates strange and completely foreign fluids that you never seen before. Which is, I guess, ties back into transness cause trans bodies are so inscrutable to so many people, like, people literally cannot even imagine what a body can look like if it's suspended between two genders or between sexes. And so, I guess I'm just trying to invent new ways of relating to –just new ways of being intimate with yourself. And all of this—okay—and I borrow a word that you used one time which you may or may not have coined, it's probably been [Laughter].

**Niculescu:** I don’t—I don’t know.

**Parizek:** [Laughter] He's looking at me like, ‘what word?’ “Autodissection” Like everything that I'm doing right now is either I'm cutting something off of my own body or I have sort of a disembodied cyst that's in these like, furry sculptures. I'm still not totally sure how those ones function because they're sort of on a body but not a body that is referencing any particular creature with animacy I have to work that out, but it's important right now for me to only dissect things out of my own body or to ask a close friend to cut something out of me because I'm not really sure what it means for me to, quote on quote, “operate on other people” and I've had a few people be like, ‘why don't you do like a fake Dr. Pimple Popper persona and make a YouTube channel and la-di-dah’. Which would be really fun but like, that's like, even though it's important for me to share this work on instagram I'm not really trying to engage the economy of viral videos with this it's just like, that's the platform that's useful for sharing the work with a lot of people, but it's more about the action and the imagery and the visceral response it illicit. Then like me, putting on this persona of the medical orchestrator of this weird—I don't know, I can’t—words. I don’t know, like Dr. Pimple Popper is like literal Dermatologist and super smart and she's also a personality now like, she just started recording these extractions and other dermatology related procedures on a pretty shitty camera originally and posting them on YouTube and now has like eight million views like within a day of her posting anything. And has her own show now, I forget which channel; I don't have cable, but is literally on television.

**Niculescu:** I didn't know that.

**Parizek:** I need to go bootleg it somewhere because, check that out. But yeah, she's like—I'm just not interested in that because it's more of like a guerilla surgery on yourself that's completely separated from any sort of medical institution. I guess the idea of interacting with your own trans body outside of the systems that are put in place for us. Which I mean, being able to medicalize in whatever way you may choose and having those resources is amazing but it's also kind of scary because you are essentially registered in a database as whatever their binary definition of trans is and it—yeah, so, I'm not interested in going the route of the Doctor persona. And you were going to ask me about my necklace, but you didn’t.

**Niculescu:** Yeah, did you want to talk about that now?
**Parizek:** Yeah, I mean there’s not that much to say. I’ve been on testosterone since—I feel like most people remember the exact day, or, I can’t even tell you the month. I don’t know—

**Niculescu:** It was November 2017. Pretty sure.

**Parizek:** Wow. I love that you know that [Laughter].

**Niculescu:** Because I wrote about it in my piece that I performed, remember? [Laughter].

**Parizek:** [Laughter] We’ve written about each other in our work. We love trans collectivity. Yeah, in November I started T [testosterone] and I try to collect the little bottles that it comes in and it’s kind of—I don’t really know why but like, and it kind of is suspicious to me, like, every time I get T the bottle looks different. And I’m not totally sure if the contents are slightly different but they must be. I don’t know. It reminds me of when I was on birth control like, three years ago and every time I switched doctors they gave me essentially a different birth control and the packaging was different. I thought it was like, the brand was different but those are literally different hormones.

**Niculescu:** Oh, wow.

**Parizek:** And like, oh! People who are so shocked by trans people who want to go on hormones cause they’re like, “Why would you do that to your body? That’s so extreme.” and like, birth control is literally like HRT [hormone replacement therapy]. It’s really major and it affects every part of your body and it can be terrible for you and I’m glad that I stopped taking birth control at a certain point cause I think it was affecting my mental health definitely to like, change those hormones all the time. And also, in talking about pimples and stuff I don’t know if you know Accutane, the terrifying—I mean, I guess it’s subjective, but like, I think it’s terrifying—acne treatment that is shots, like, it’s shots right? No, it’s pills. It’s something you have to get blood tested once a month because it’s essentially vitamin A poisoning and you stop sweating and my friend grew hair in new places from going on Accutane. And it changed her body [Laughter] and like that-

**Niculescu:** I mean like, even Spiro [spironolactone], which is a T blocker, that most trans women go on is sometimes used in cis women as a acne medication. [Laughter].

**Parizek:** Oh! See? People are so [inaudible] of us but like, it’s all fucked up [laughter]. Where was I going with this? Oh, yeah, my necklace. This particular, the point of that was to say that this particular T bottle is just cute in my opinion because it’s clear and not brown which I hate and the label on it is like white and lavender and, I don’t know. I just, I usually don’t. The only jewelry I wear is chain or hardware jewelry. I usually don’t have anything that’s like, looks like a sort of icon or object. I just like to have simple things on my body these days but, I like having this T bottle around my neck it’s just kind of like a fun secret almost. I mean, sometimes people ask about it. Most of the time other trans people clock me and they’re like, “Oh my god that’s such a good idea.” and I’m like, “Yeah, bitch.” And that’s how I found out that people are on
hormones cause they see my necklace and they're like, “Oh, bitch, I want to make that!” and then you talk about it and it's great. But yeah, what else?

Niculescu: Well, this is like not the most related tangent to go down but, do you mind telling me a bit more about hardware jewelry and how that has been a thing for you?

Parizek: [Laughter] Okay, so, ever since I was a little girl I've always made my own jewelry and I just get really finicky about exactly what kind of ornamentation I put on my body and I greatly prefer to make my own stuff, and I use like, chains and rings, and clasps and all the things that basically everyone who makes hardware jewelry makes. I don't think that anything that I'm making is particularly that unique or original. I love it because if I make a piece and a friend likes it, but they can't afford it because I don't want to undersell myself, I usually tell them exactly where I get the parts. And I'm like if you really want to make this just go make it. I don't think that I have any sort of ownership over fetish wear inspired jewelry and most people do, like most of my friends do make their own hardware jewelry and I'm sure it's always been a thing. Every time I go out with friends, all of us have some sort of self made hardware jewelry on and I think that's really—it's just like a cool thing. It's just like, I don't know. Like, truly like a punk sentiment but I do like making beautiful things for other people and mostly like my other queer and trans friends want to support me and buy my necklaces which is really nice. I made a bra, that is sort of a chain bra, recently and it uses so much—I made it for myself and it uses so much chain and I'm selling it on market at the Museum of Sex on August 19th, if anyone's listening and wants to go buy some stuff. I can't really afford to buy more materials to make what I want to make so I think I have to take apart my bra and use it, use that material. But, what I love about what I make and what other people make is that it's all very basic raw parts that you can take apart very easily and recombine into just like, anything that you can think of. You could just tweak things to exactly fit whatever the contours of your outfit that day might be and I think it's just a fun punk body modification thing. Is that cool?

Niculescu: Yeah. Yeah.

Parizek: [Laughter].

Niculescu: No, of course. There's a rich history of DIY [Do It Yourself] that can be carried through stuff like that.

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: Yeah. So, I guess do you want to tell me a bit more about the spaces that you've been performing lately?

Parizek: Yeah, so, the first time that I performed outside of an institution, just school, since high school since I did high school theater [Laughter] was, so it was at a dungeon, the location of which I shant reveal. The show was called “Stigma Unbound” and it was thrown by people that are involved in the fetish, the queer fetish community and also sex worker community and
the show is billed as a performance art event put on by sex workers and their allies, with the “allies” part added in so that no one’s individual status as a sex worker was disclosed. So, I suggested or I submitted a proposal for an excision piece and I had a giant green cyst thingy that I cut open it had like, red velvet cake in the middle of it and I had other objects that I was squeezing and interacting with and there was a sound piece with various squelching and crackling noises happening and I was also reading poetry, which I realized that no one was listening to what I was saying while I was performing, like, they were just really focused on the action so I’m like, not really sure how to format these performances. So the kind of people that show up for those events are just other queer people, other trans people. It’s very much like making work for your own immediate community. It’s nice to get that kind of affirmation from people whose opinions that you respect and care about. Also, mostly these people were not other art students, and a lot of the idea of that was giving a space for sex workers who do make work that—everyone who performs is making work that had something to do with sex, the body, agency over their body, and things that are important to us that we don’t want to perform in an institutionalized sort of context that would probably be a space in which people would be hyper critical in the wrong ways. It’s more about experiencing each other’s affect and just being genuine and transparent about our experiences. I didn’t feel like I was trying, I wasn’t trying to do anything inscrutable with this performance and, again, people told me, I wasn’t looking at the crowd when I was squeezing and eating this stuff but people were so grossed out, people were like, “Ew” and “I loved it, I wanted to get in there with you” and I was like, great. It was nice. People had a pretty visceral response as usual. Then the other, on Tuesday, I performed at the bar Flowers For All Occasions in Bushwick. That was also with basically friends, there were people that I didn’t know there and people that weren’t necessarily queer, just people in the neighborhood that go to Flowers sometimes. That one I live read some poetry before I had people come and cut things out of my, sort of, creature sculpture thing. That was a better format because people were actually listening to what I was saying and it was very intimate. I didn’t expect there to be a big crowd there, maybe like twenty five people, not very many people. I had everyone sit near me and I talked a little bit about transness and I never really thought that doing spoken word was something that would come up in my life and I dabbled in that a little bit in high school, but I found that I really want people to know what I’m talking about and I don’t think that it—I think when you’re making work in art school and in institutions people want you to shy away from literally talking about exactly what you’re talking about.

Niculescu: Yeah, about being too didactic.

Parizek: Yeah, I'm just, I'm not making this work for people to sit down and look at it with a microscope I want people to know what my feelings are and know what I’m talking about and I love writing. I always wanted to go to school for writing. I was a dual degree student for like a year, the I transferred around and it didn't work out but I think that I'm still trying to figure out to merge the two, but I value sharing my love language with people. People responded really well to it. Yeah, it’s kind of touching how many people reach out to me and are like, I really relate to the way that you’re expressing yourself right now. As freaky as this shit might seem to some people, like what I'm doing is I think way more relatable than not. Yeah. So that's—
Niculescu: Okay well, I guess since you mentioned the kind of theme that brought together some of those shows and sex work is something that comes up a lot for the project when we're talking about just the ways in which trans people have learned to support themselves in certain material ways. Would you be comfortable telling us about your relationship to sex work if there is one?

Parizek: Um, yeah, well I was a cam girl; I guess I can still call myself a cam girl but I haven’t done it in a while because I haven’t been in an apartment situation that’s allowed me to do that but, last summer I started camming which was interesting and really fun because I just got super dolled up and I made this corner of my room all pink and definitely had fun with performing sexuality and performing femininity and it doesn't make me any—I never really introduced my pronouns or anything so my pronouns [laughter] are they/them and I am a trans masculine person. I guess that was obvious when I talked about being on T. Anyway, it doesn’t make me feel any type of way to perform being a cis girl or whatever when I’m doing sex work things because I’m like, ‘it’s a job and I’m kind of acting’ and also I’m nonbinary and I don’t necessarily think that there’s no girl in me. So, yeah, camming is interesting because I’m turning my entire body into viral content and when you cam on a website and all this is totally legal, like, that money’s taxed. [Laughter] MyFreeCams.com. My mom got a W-4 in the mail for it. My mom knows about—it’s just interesting. The things she tolerates are strange. She didn’t let me get my ears double pierced until I was eighteen and I tell her I’m masturbating on camera and she’s like, “People pay for that?” [Laughter] She just thought it was so silly and I’m like, “Yeah, ma.” Anyway, MyFreeCams.com supposedly it’s live and not being recorded but of course bots are recording it. Every single session that you do and you can Google—you just Google your account name and MyFreeCams and there’s a bunch of websites that are selling your videos and they all have this weird grid format thumbnails. It’s like a four by four grid of thumbnails from different points in time in the session. It’s like a very strange curation of the content that you made and I don’t really care that that's on the internet. I don’t know what my career path is going to be but, you can’t blackmail me with that shit. I mean, as long as I’m not trying to be like an elementary school teacher I don’t think it matters that there’s videos of me DP-ing [double penetration] myself on the internet [Laughter]. Yeah, so, my favorite thing about camming or doing sex work or fetish work with people in person is just finding out what people are interested in and how they interact with their bodies and how they want other people to interact with their bodies and it's when I think that, sort of like the assumption of when you're engaging with cis men or whatever who are paying for some sort of sex service, is that they are like, straight and normative and not engaged in queerness but then I—originally with camming more so that the people that I interacted with were like, these were probably just guys on the internet that are lonely. You do realize there’s a lot of people that perhaps live their day time hours as cis straight people but, when they engage with sex workers either become gender fluid, or are cross dressing but like the way they talk about themselves is a little more than just cross dressing. I don’t know if I want to talk about specific examples but, it’s just been interesting, my point is, it's been interesting engaging with people that you would, like if you saw on the street you would just make a lot of assumptions about them being normative, but then they actually have so much more going on then you’d think and you can just never assume things about people. I think a lot of sex workers have different kinds of attitudes about interacting with clients and for me, because I have the patients, or the ability, or the
temperament for it. I do like being nice to these people for the most part like, if someone's being disrespectful then fuck them, but I like to sort of take care of people and know exactly what they want out of an interaction and a lot of times people don't know what they want which is more nerve wracking to me than someone who does know exactly what they want. [Laughter] Because, then I feel like there's a specific way that I'm supposed to perform but I enjoy performing in whatever way the other person prefers. I'm very much like a switch in that way even though—I don't know, in my own like, personal sex life there are certain roles I like to play I guess, but I very much like figuring out what other people want and catering to that whether it is like a dominant or a submissive position. Even if I am being a dominant person, I see dominating as—and I guess this is true in people would agree that dominating is servicing because you are giving the person who is submissive what they want cause they want is to have all their agency taken away from them or whatever. It's a very equal exchange. So yeah, a lot of that does tie back into my work—I'm getting a little sleepy so I don't know how to like, tie all those strings together. You can do that if you want. [Laughter].

Niculescu: Okay. No, I think it's interesting we kind of keep returning to is these kind of niches but without the attached kind of value judgment that are spaces for play for you and for others and that evolves specifically in relationship to other people and that seems to be something that occurs in camming or in art spaces or in hardware jewelry [Laughter], and like are things that I think are not specific to transness but like, are definitely just a kind of survival technique for trans people.

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: And there is just a constant need and desire to search out spaces that allow for that even if they're not of trans specific spaces.

Parizek: Yeah.

Niculescu: Yeah. And I think that's what's really interesting about talking with you today is because it is so much about these kind of nuanced, careful negotiations of community that don't necessarily attach to a specific politicized identifier. And I think that can be really productive.

Parizek: Yeah, girl, you said it [Laughter].

Niculescu: Okay. [Laughter].

Parizek: Thanks for that. It makes me feel like I'm doing something.

Niculescu: We're all doing something.

Parizek: [Laughter]. We're all doing something.

Niculescu: Yeah, well thank you so much for sitting down with me.
Parizek: Yeah, that was like an hour.

Niculescu: Yeah, yeah that was good.

Parizek: That was impressive.

Niculescu: [Laughter] How are you feeling?

Parizek: I am chillin’.

Niculescu: Okay.

Parizek: That was great. I was like, all you listeners; I was literally pissing my pants. I don't know why I was like, “I don't want to talk about myself” [Laughter] so I’m like, so into myself. I don't know what I was thinking. Like, I can talk about myself. It’s fine. [Laughter].

Niculescu: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Well, thank you.

Parizek: You’re welcome.