



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with A.L. Steiner,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with A.L. Steiner on June 18, 2024 and June 25, 2024. The interview took place over Zoom and was conducted by Ann Cvetkovich of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

A.L. Steiner and Ann Cvetkovich have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[00:00:00.08] ANN CVETKOVICH: Zoom makes everything so easy. Okay, recording is on. Um, yeah. Do you feel ready? Do you have any other preliminaries?

[00:00:14.47] A.L. STEINER: Nope. Feel good. Ready.

[00:00:16.63] ANN CVETKOVICH: Cool. Okay, I'll just say, this is Ann Cvetkovich coming to you live from Algonquin territory, AKA, Ottawa, Canada. It is today, June 18, 2024. And I am interviewing A.L. Steiner for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. Do you want to say where you are?

[00:00:43.27] A.L. STEINER: Yes. I'm on the land of the Lenapehoking, known as now Brooklyn now, Brooklyn New York.

[00:00:50.85] ANN CVETKOVICH: Perfect. Okay, let's dive in. Steiner. Let's just start by talking about your early life. How did you get to be who you are?

[00:01:07.95] A.L. STEINER: Cvetkovich. Okay, let's roll. Thank you for meeting with me upon this occasion to speak to each other. I was born in Miami, Florida in 1967. December 5th, 1967, to Bernice and Samuel, Eli Steiner and was given a name. I currently use my initials, A.L. Steiner. But I was named, born, and raised in Florida on Miccosukee land, otherwise known as generalized Miccosukee land.

[00:01:53.54] And I grew up there. Stayed there till I was 17 when I left for undergraduate studies. But in between there I spent a lot of time with my mother, who gave birth to me at the age of 40. So I was not necessarily planned. And she had already decided to take art classes. And I think at the point where I was born, from what I understand from speaking with her about her personal history, she had decided that she wasn't really—she didn't feel confident as an artist. But she met a lot of artists at her art classes, and she decided to try and sell artwork.

[00:02:43.13] And she opened a kind of roving gallery at the time in Miami. By the time I was three, she was kind of doing this full time. So I was kind of trailing along with her. And she eventually opened up a gallery called Steiner Gallery. So I was influenced a lot by her and her taking me traveling and her learning from artists and about art autodidactically on her own.

[00:03:08.05] And she had that business for 35 years. So I became very close with her. So yeah, she was a big influence on my life. As well as my father, who ended up working for her in the gallery. He retired from car finance sales—selling cars, essentially, and worked for my mother in the art gallery.

[00:03:27.79] ANN CVETKOVICH: What kind of art did she like or sell?

[00:03:32.59] A.L. STEINER: This is really—yeah. It's such an interesting question. So she had met these local artists in her art classes, and she sold their artwork first. And then she started traveling and also seeing art. There was the Bass Art Museum in Miami at the time. There wasn't a contemporary art museum. There weren't the museums that are there now, which are smaller contemporary art museums like ICA and some other—the Perez Art Museum—PAM. Otherwise known as PAM.

[00:04:03.32] But she traveled and took me with her internationally as well to see museums in Europe, which at the time, there was a lot of ab ex [abstract expressionist] art being exhibited, actually. And I remember seeing some of that. And I saw a bunch of work with her in Washington, DC. She used to go to the Smithsonian. [Laughs.] I'm not plugging the Smithsonian, but she did.

[00:04:25.24] She did visit the National Gallery with me a bunch. I remember seeing Barnett Newman's work there, and Franz Kline. And I don't know. And then she became interested in Milton Avery's work. Peter Max. She was selling Peter Max and Milton Avery in her gallery at a certain point. And she started buying Picasso pottery in Vallauris in France, where she took me also—at the point where he was producing work there and selling it.

[00:04:57.74] And that was really memorable, of course. I mean, being on a different continent when I was four was pretty memorable. And five years old was when we went there.

[00:05:08.75] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow. And you remember being five years old?

[00:05:11.81] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, well—

[00:05:13.32] ANN CVETKOVICH: I guess if you're seeing Picasso, maybe it would stick. [Laughs.]

[00:05:16.25] A.L. STEINER: Well, I don't know. Yeah, I mean, it was helpful, actually, because I used to look at the photo albums that my father put together over and over and over. I looked at them probably almost every—if not every couple days, every week I would open up the album and look at it and see myself in these places. Which, you know, the pictures were all right. But it was memorable.

[00:05:36.68] I went with my sisters. And my sisters [except for Dale -ALS] had left. They were 15, 13, and 10 years older than me, so two of them had left by the time I was really turning that age. But they came—there were different configurations of my family that went on these two European trips when I was four and five. And so for me, it was actually one of the only times that my family was together—um kind of doing something together pretty impactful. So I think that's why it stuck with me.

[00:06:07.32] And then, yeah, my mother took me to artist studios in Miami. Some of the people that she sold the art of—Mike Barkin was a sculptor who taught me how to polish stone in his—he had a little trailer, and it was his house and his studio. And he used to work outside. And these were all people working in Miami.

[00:06:30.02] There's another sculptor, Manuel Carbonell, who my mother used to hang out with. A painter and drawer. This really close friend of hers, Edna Glaubman—I mean, I was always with her. She was always hanging out with people that were really incredible for me and very memorable, I think, to be around. And so, yeah, she sold their work. And then she sold some international artists' work.

[00:06:57.44] But now our house is filled with—she bought some from the *Ladies and Gentlemen* Warhol series that are huge pieces on her wall. I mean, she bought Keith Haring. She bought Joan Miró. Jean Cocteau. I'm walking through her house—

[00:07:14.27] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm [nods head].

[00:07:15.29] A.L. STEINER: —apartment—She has an apartment in Miami now. The Picasso work. Augustus John drawings. I mean, she has a really beautiful, small collection of work that I love to see. So I don't know. It obviously had a major impression on me. Yeah.

[00:07:31.27] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. You mentioned the Smithsonian in DC, and then going to Europe. But did you also go to New York as a young person?

[00:07:45.25] A.L. STEINER: Eventually we got to New York when I was, like, a young teen.

[00:07:52.53] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay.

[00:07:52.55] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, my parents were from Philly, and they came back to New York. And my mother's family—both of their families had also had members in New York. I never met any of my grandparents. They all passed away before I was born.

[00:08:10.94] ANN CVETKOVICH: Hm.

[00:08:11.39] A.L. STEINER: And so we didn't come to New York a bunch.

[00:08:16.01] But I did eventually. I remember being in New York around, I think, when I was 12 or 13. Actually, my mother took me to a bookstore and one of the first thing—one of the things I remember seeing is Nan Goldin's *Ballad*.

[00:08:30.14] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm [nods head].

[00:08:30.26] A.L. STEINER: The book in a bookstore. And I don't remember what age I was, but at that point I was completely—yeah. Yeah, mesmerized by that.

[00:08:41.72] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:08:42.32] A.L. STEINER: when I finally did come to New York, I think I had a real connection with it. But I didn't get back here until I was in my 20s.

[00:08:49.39] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. So we'll get to that. I just thought it was interesting because we started with Miami and then you were talking about Europe. And so just thinking about these coordinates of art towns and how they shape us. So I do think—

[00:09:05.25] A.L. STEINER: I should ask her when she first took me to New York because I don't remember. But I remember, of course, going to museums here with my mom and dad.

[00:09:15.22] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. And then I did want to make sure we talk about your Jewish identity, because I think of it as something that you do present publicly as part of your current identity. And as someone who's lived in the South, I'm always interested in how Jews got to be in the South or what the culture is. You know, there's Jewish culture everywhere. But sometimes from New York, people don't realize that. So, just in what way that also is a component of what it means for specifically you to grow up in Miami, Florida?

[00:09:54.86] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, Miami, Florida. Well, I don't know. Yeah, I mean, Miamians don't consider Miami the South in a funny way, because it's more of an international city. I mean, I'm reading—

[00:10:11.15] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, true.

[00:10:12.12] A.L. STEINER: Alexandra Vazquez's *The Florida Room* literally right now. It's such an amazing book. And I've been thinking a lot about not only Florida identity, but—which is one thing. And then there's the Miami identity.

[00:10:21.31] But yeah—

[00:10:21.66] ANN CVETKOVICH: Right.

[00:10:21.72] A.L. STEINER: I mean, it's an outpost, of course, of the life that—many people in the East Coast went South during the '50s and '60s for new life. My parents had a diner, a little diner in Philly. And then they sold it, and then they decided to move. After their honeymoon, they had thought a lot about Miami. They came to Miami on their honeymoon and, kind of, fell, I think, in love with it and really wanted to detach, I think, from their families. A lot of issues with their personal lives in Philly.

[00:10:56.17] And so they came down, as did, I think a lot of Jewish families did in the '50s and '60s. And I was the only one in my family born there in '67. I forget what year they moved. But yeah, I mean, growing up essentially in a Jewish neighborhood which was supported by the GI Bill. My father purchased a house because he used the GI Bill to purchase, I think, our house—I think he once told me—I think it was 10 grand for our house. It was one of the first houses built on these tracks in North Miami Beach.

[00:11:32.01] So I grew up, you know, in a neighborhood with a lot of other Jewish families. And that was really formative culturally and, yeah, identity wise. And I went to Hebrew school. And, yeah, I always had a, kind of, fraught relationship, I think, with my identity as a queer Jewish person.

[00:11:55.32] And I remember just feeling like a lot of the—yeah, a lot of the maybe questioning about the kind of how the parsing of the Holocaust and the erasure of—when I

later learned that there was a homosexual contingent included in the genocide of the Holocaust. I felt kind of alienated from the story that I was basically given.

[00:12:31.59] But I essentially went through that education, got bat mitzvahed [ph]. Had my party with a theme of A—no, *A Chorus Line*. Sorry. *Puttin' on the Ritz*. My partner's bat mitzvah theme with *A Chorus Line*. Mine was *Puttin' on the Ritz*, yeah. And I also have some photos, of course. An official album of that.

[00:12:55.83] And then, yeah, I think I thought a lot over the years about my relationship to organized religion and the kind of—yeah, the kind of historical relationships we build off of those. And I've had a fraught relationship with it. More so now, of course, in this moment in time. But for sure, it impacted me greatly.

[00:13:24.10] I think one of the impacts is actually the cultural identity of like, for instance, having rhinoplasty. Being coerced to have a nose job. [Laughs.] And the kind of cultural, historical, sociocultural and historical relationships we build on things ranging from, you know, genocide to conformity and assimilation.

[00:13:52.14] And I think I've always had a really, really vast, wide, fraught relationship with what Jewish identity was like. Was part of my the conformity and the assimilation relationships I've had that I've really pushed against in my life. So on one hand, yeah, formative. On the other hand, kind of fraught.

[00:14:12.17] ANN CVETKOVICH: That's great. I love that spectrum from conformity to assimilation, which is very meaningful, I think, in the context of Jewish identity. But then we could connect it to identities as queers and identities as artists. Cool.

[00:14:34.24] Where do you want to go from there if we're thinking about young Steiner on their way to becoming an artist? Do you want to talk more about your formative Miami years? We could also move ahead to think about where and how you went to college. We talked about that a little bit in our preliminary discussion.

[00:14:59.26] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, I wanted to leave Miami. And so I don't know if there's not much more to say about it. Yeah, it's very focused on beauty and, you know, superficial culture. And it was pretty intense for me. So, yeah, I don't know how much more there

[00:15:17.99] ANN CVETKOVICH: So you wanted to leave? I mean, the fact that you wanted to leave says quite a bit.

[00:15:22.87] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I knew I really wanted to leave. I mean, a lot of family members did not leave and still live there. And I love them and they're amazing. And I felt a lot—I felt different. And it was really a culture of conformity and an intense focus on conformity.

[00:15:49.79] And I think one thing I'll say is, by the time in the '80s—I graduated from high school in '86. By the early '80s, there was new wave, and new romantic, and expansion of youth culture in a way that I was really excited about—and dipped in a little bit to that before I left. Hanging out in coconut Grove and like places in Miami.

[00:16:22.22] I was going out to Backstreets and the Copa, which were, you know, gay bars. And I wasn't out, but I was hanging out there because that was counterculture in Miami at that time. I saw *Liquid Sky* at the movie theater in coconut Grove because they had art films at night. You know, midnight movie kind of things. And we saw *Rocky Horror* and that kind of thing.

[00:16:45.08] So it was like I knew there was something more. And it was kind of bleeding a little bit into Miami culture in the early '80s. And I just knew I wanted to go find out, like, where that stuff was originating from and not just get it on the tail end. So I was devising a way to go to art school.

[00:17:04.37] And then my father was saying to me, practically, he wouldn't support me going to art school. That I would have to get a liberal arts education. And so I acquiesced and figured that out. And yeah, that was the plan to get out.

[00:17:20.50] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay. But there was a little bit of a wrinkle in so far as you

would have preferred to go to art school rather than liberal arts college?

[00:17:28.30] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, I was interested in that. I was making collage in my room. My mother, of course, was really supportive of it. I think she has one or two of those collages. And yeah, I talked to them about what I wanted, and my dad was pretty adamant that he wouldn't financially support me going solely to an arts program.

[00:17:55.84] And so I think that was one of the fights we might have had. And I didn't win that one because I went with the other plan. So yeah, I applied to some pretty mainstream liberal arts schools. And I got into, I think, one or two. And so one of them was—I went to George Washington University in DC because my sister, the one who's 13 years my elder—my sister Marianne lived there with her husband [Robert, who gave me my first camera, a Nikon 35mm -ALS]. And so I decided to go hang out there and go to that school and be near her.

[00:18:34.99] ANN CVETKOVICH: And that was—if you graduated high school in '82, did you go directly to college?

[00:18:41.64] A.L. STEINER: So I graduated—Sorry. In the '80s, I was hanging out in Miami, but I graduated—sorry—high school was done in '85. And then I went to—

[00:18:55.47] ANN CVETKOVICH: Oh.

[00:18:55.67] A.L. STEINER: Sorry, That was my mistake. Correction I graduated officially in '85, and then I went to DC.

[00:19:02.87] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay. The reason I ask is I'm partly tracking, like, the '80s as an important decade for queer culture. HIV/AIDS. So I'm just trying to think about where you were as a baby queer. Proto-queer. You know, both the high school period and then your college period. Yeah.

[00:19:25.91] Okay, so you get to DC in '85?

[00:19:31.35] A.L. STEINER: Yep.

[00:19:32.08] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay. Excellent. So tell me about that period of time. How did that shape you as a person? As an eventually to become artist?

[00:19:49.40] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I had gone to London the summer—a couple of summers right before that. So my other sister, my oldest sister, Robyn, lived in London. So I went and I stayed with her for—I think in '83 to '85 I was visiting her in the summers, maybe two of those years. I can't remember which ones.

[00:20:11.72] But those were really formative because that's when I was starting to connect with this larger culture of kind of a new romantic culture and music culture in the UK, which was super proto-queer. I mean, the Smiths and the Cure. And I was freaking out, like, loving this thing I was experiencing—having the privilege to go, kind of, hang out with her for a couple of weeks every summer in London.

[00:20:39.89] And then, yeah, by the summer of 85, right before I was going to college, I believe—or it was the first year of college. Anyway, I can't remember. I met—So I wasn't out yet, but I went to London, went to a bar called Martina's. Which I looked up in *Time Out*. of course, named after Martina Navratilova.

[00:21:05.99] It was in Brixton. And I met my first girl who became—a woman there who became my first girlfriend. This woman, Alison. And then I was going to college, so I said, I'm going to college. You should come visit me. So I was not out yet, but I was moving and kind of coming out of the closet.

[00:21:24.78] And she came and visited. And then that kind of, you know, whatever. Fizzled out after—I don't know. I was so young. She was a little bit older. And then, yeah, I kind of started figuring shit out in DC, and going to Posers. Going to Tracks. Those were the new wave or alternative clubs. And Tracks was the huge gay club. It was kind of like Backstreet in Fort Lauderdale.

[00:21:54.09] And so I was used to these, kind of like, multi-tiered queer nightclubs when it was like, yeah, it was the beginning of—it was the midst of gay liberation. But also, yeah, the

beginning of the AIDS crisis. So it was like a really intense time, but like, incredibly still vibrant.

[00:22:17.80] And by the time I got to DC, it was, it was pretty much the middle of the crisis and—at least of the kind of crisis of silence, and the pushback against that, and people fighting for their lives. So, yeah, I was coming out of the closet. I was joining some college queer, stuff. Gay stuff. It was GLBT-ish stuff.

[00:22:55.82] And I was living right near the Corcoran. And there was a lot of protests around the Corcoran because they had just canceled—they had—I don't know. All this stuff was happening towards the end of my time in school. The canceling of his [Mapplethorpe's] show at the Corcoran and the yeah—the congressional, you know, fighting about HIV/AIDS funding and research. And also cultural backlash against gay artists.

[00:23:27.76] So, you know, Tim Miller and all these people—like, I didn't know who these people were. I knew Mapplethorpe. I, of course, knew him much more—I understood his work much more clearly after the controversies in Congress. But I was learning about all these performance artists. I mean, Annie Sprinkle and—So, yeah. Karen Finley, who now—it's like I still see her work.

[00:24:01.21] So anyway, yeah, a lot of a lot of stuff was going on. I was just in this weird school that was fairly conservative. And I was barely interested in school, but I took a lot of art classes and that was good.

[00:24:13.50] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay, so you were able to do that at GW?

[00:24:16.69] A.L. STEINER: I mean, yeah. A tiny—But I did.

[00:24:19.00] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:24:20.86] A.L. STEINER: I minored in art, I think. Maybe unofficially. I can't remember. But I majored in Mass Communications, which at the time was radio and television. And I had one amazing professor, Joan Thiel. And she taught me about Nam June Paik. And I don't know, you know? Just these people that would come into one's life.

[00:24:38.77] And, yeah, I didn't like the school, but then I found some things that were really super interesting. And I feel really thankful I got that education. It helped me even though I was you know, maybe a bit insular in that space. In that place.

[00:24:56.23] ANN CVETKOVICH: But it sounds like you were getting an education, as it were, just culturally in the surround. And also that, yeah, art school can mean many different things. So getting to go to cultural events and so on. All of that is, I think, can be really formative.

[00:25:15.29] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it was formative, too. I said, like in Miami, my prom date was my—basically my gay boyfriend, Laz. In college, my gay boyfriend was Luca. Going to these clubs with them, and making art, and hanging out and being able—having access to—and having a vernacular for going to see art from my mom. I mean, all these things coalesced. I mean, it was slow going. But one has to have time, right?

[00:25:48.93] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, yeah. Okay what happened next in this story?

[00:25:58.40] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I graduated, I think, thankfully. And I dated more women. And then, I think in my last year—in my first year of college, I was with my first girlfriend ever. My last year of college, I was now in a relationship. I had gone to Miami in the summers, and that summer, third year of school, I think—my junior year, I met one of my long-term partners, Audrey Jensen.

[00:26:33.06] And then she ended up moving to DC. So my last year of school, I was living with a partner already. So I was pretty young. Coupled up, I had the role model of, I guess, my parents. My parents ended up—at my father's death—I think my parents were together for 68 years. But yeah, they modeled a fairly decent relationship. Good parents. And they had an up and down relationship, but they made it through. [Laughs.]

[00:27:02.85] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah yeah.

[00:27:03.03] A.L. STEINER: They really loved each other.

[00:27:04.30] And so, yeah, I was suddenly—I was coupled up with this person I still keep in touch with who I really love. And we became close, and we had this group of friends. And yeah, and I remained—I stayed there for about three-ish more years after I graduated.

[00:27:29.78] I worked at Whitman-Walker Clinic for many years. I was hired—well, I needed work. I needed full-time work, so I applied for a job there and got a job in the accounting department. [Laughs.]

[00:27:43.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow.

[00:27:45.17] A.L. STEINER: And Whitman-Walker was the first the first organization in DC essentially managing the AIDS crisis medically for patients. And so I think my introduction to some of the activism that I saw, and some of the protests I saw and some of the art and artists that were, of course, getting National attention at the time, especially with the NEA.

[00:28:12.99] What was that called again? I'm blanking on what the NEA thing was called. It had a name.

[00:28:17.69] ANN CVETKOVICH: Well, the NEA Four is one.

[00:28:20.34] A.L. STEINER: NEA Four. Right. Yeah, I was—so, yeah, I was learning about all that. And then, yeah, I—

[00:28:29.75] ANN CVETKOVICH: And I assume, even if you had an entry-level job at the Walker Clinic, I assume one attraction would be getting to be professionally gay. Or you're in an environment that's super gay at work, which wouldn't be possible everywhere.

[00:28:47.17] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[00:28:47.88] ANN CVETKOVICH: Although more possible at that time than, I guess, previously.

[00:28:50.28] A.L. STEINER: I think your read of that is spot on. I mean, I wanted to be in a queer community. And at the time, it was like—yeah, not a lot of necessarily options to be imbued within a community that felt really connected to and cared for—or cared about. So I got that entry level—the ho-hum job.

[00:29:15.33] And then I soon transferred into the patient center. And I was advising people on how to obtain health care. So that kind of became my job to do. Because accounts payable wasn't so—I wasn't so thrilled by it. And so I was meeting with patients every day. So that was around 1990-ish. And helping them figure out how to manage getting their care covered.

[00:29:50.88] So it was, like, advising, and that was an intense. I became close with several people, of course, at the clinic. And also, talking with people pretty much on a daily basis that were that were dealing with a lot. And some of them didn't make it. I couldn't—it wasn't—I didn't become friends with the patients that I was seeing and helping. But it was a really formative couple years. I was there for, I think two-ish years.

[00:30:27.13] And I recently did a show with a curator there that—she was—I got contacted to be in a show, and it happened to be at a gallery space at the clinic. The clinic is still there. And that was a really amazing, full-circle thing.

[00:30:43.72] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow.

[00:30:44.52] A.L. STEINER: But I worked at Whitman-Walker and then I decided I needed to leave DC. So I left in '92. Well, I left after Clinton got—I mean, Reagan and Bush were there and then it was all those years of being in that. And then the election in November '91st, he got elected.

[00:31:08.35] I had already decided to leave. And I was really just—I needed to get out of that town, I have to say. But riot girl—I mean, there were so many interesting things about DC. It's such a fucking—

[00:31:21.09] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, it was a riot girl center, wasn't it?

[00:31:25.16] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I was kind of—I was not in that scene, but—and that was a bit after I left. But Miami and DC are two really—they're very particular places. And I think I got a lot from both of them in such different ways. And their particularities and peculiarities—I can't say that, peculiarities.

[00:31:55.40] And then I decided to leave in '92. So my roommate at the time—I had broken up with Audrey, and I decided to move to San Francisco and live with a friend of mine. My one friend from GW who lived in San Francisco, Kari Albert. And she said, come live with me. It's fine. I got in a truck, went there with my roommate, Gwynne Gauntlett. We drove to San Francisco kind of separated from each other. And there was another guy with us. I can't remember his name.

[00:32:35.01] And then I hung out with Kari for six months. Kind of freelanced around. Liked it a lot, but really just wanted to go to New York. So I called my friend Mike, who was part of my friend group in DC. He had moved to New York. Mike Pernice. And he said, You can move in with me. I have an extra room.

[00:32:57.41] So I left San Francisco in June of '92. And finally, finally got to New York.

[00:33:08.08] ANN CVETKOVICH: [Laughs.]

[00:33:08.26] A.L. STEINER: It was circuitous.

[00:33:08.82] ANN CVETKOVICH: Just in time for gay pride.

[00:33:11.03] A.L. STEINER: I got there the day before gay pride. And I hooked up with somebody on gay pride.

[00:33:20.79] ANN CVETKOVICH: [Laughs.] Welcome to New York.

[00:33:22.50] A.L. STEINER: I wasn't wasting any time.

[00:33:25.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: So the San Francisco piece was just a tiny moment, is that right? Or barely?

[00:33:30.56] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. Sorry, I kind of skipped over that. But yeah, it was a time—Okay, but you know what? There's something so important about San Francisco. Yeah, I went there. I don't know why it all ended up that way. But San Francisco's—it was such a cool town at that time, too, but also going through so much. But I joined WAC—the Women's Action Coalition.

[00:33:56.44] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay.

[00:33:56.62] A.L. STEINER: And that was an incredibly formative experience—

[00:33:59.29] ANN CVETKOVICH: In San Francisco or in New York?

[00:34:01.49] A.L. STEINER: In San Francisco.

[00:34:02.37] ANN CVETKOVICH: In San Fran. Okay.

[00:34:03.47] A.L. STEINER: That's where I first started going to WAC meetings. I did end up also going to WAC meetings in New York. But I went to the ones in San Francisco and I met Carol Leigh, the sex work activist, and general activist and general amazing human. And I met some other people, of course, too.

[00:34:24.44] But Carol—so I kind of collaborated with—Carol was like, I'm going to make some films. Do you want to help me? And I was like, yeah, sure. I have a degree in radio or something. I don't know. In some, like, weird thing. And I forgot to mention that in DC, before I left, I had collaborated for two years with my friend Tim McCarthy. And Tim had cable access show in DC that I worked on with him.

[00:34:54.87] It was a news show that we were producing. And he was HIV positive, so he was the one who I learned so much from about journalism and activism.

[00:35:05.88] ANN CVETKOVICH: And cable access also is a really important genre, I think, for underground culture of various kinds in that period.

[00:35:14.86] A.L. STEINER: I mean, it was critical. I mean, it was like Robin Byrd versus, this news program. Whatever. There was so much shit happening in New York and DC and the cities that actually had a vibrant community cable access production program. It was like, incredible.

[00:35:34.11] So Tim taught me the ropes. Got me a press pass. And we produced this stuff together. It probably exists somewhere. He probably has an archive. He passed away. Sadly, he passed away a couple of years ago. Not from HIV. He was killed in a car accident. But he lived in Provincetown for the end of his life. And I had seen him there, too.

[00:35:57.18] So Tim taught me a whole bunch of stuff. And then I learned how to produce and make stuff with him. And then I got to San Francisco, and I met Carol through WAC. And then she said, Make some stuff with me. And I said, well, I have a degree, and I have some like cable access experience. But she taught me how to use film. Like, the Super 8 stuff.

[00:36:18.81] And I did a little bit of that in school. But I learned a lot about art basically from these people, like, didactically through just my friend group. And it was through activism essentially. So it was like, I think that's still—is the residue in my work, of course. So Carol was an incredible teacher.

[00:36:43.09] So I left San Francisco after six months. Said goodbye to my—whatever had happened there. And I just really wanted to settle down. And I moved in with Mike. And then everything—the world opened up. I mean, because I had this journalism experience and film and media experience, I basically went to *Out* magazine and asked for an internship, which I got.

[00:37:17.58] I had interned for—what's that production company? Ang Lee. The production company that Ang Lee was doing his stuff with. I was doing PA work, and then eventually asked for an internship at *Out* magazine. So for pay, I was doing PA work, and angled to get into the kind of queer—again, you know, you're probably right. I was looking for a job with, like, a whole bunch of—where I could—like Whitman-Walker where I could hang out with my community all day. All day and all night. 24/7.

[00:37:56.83] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. And also at a time that's quite fertile in terms of queer media, both with the focus on visibility and then new infrastructures. And then I'm just thinking. Just collecting a bit here. I like that you've talked about Miami and DC as particular places. And then you've mentioned San Francisco, which, of course, is very important for histories of queer culture in the US.

[00:38:27.84] A.L. STEINER: Very particular place, yes.

[00:38:30.30] ANN CVETKOVICH: And also that, in terms of this spectrum of the assimilationist versus counterculture nonconformity, I think each of those cities has its own story of where you find that stuff. So it seems like that was part of what you were doing as your young self in formation.

[00:38:55.85] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. Young self needing to be in a bubble. A queer bubble.

[00:39:01.41] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. So, yeah, New York. New York and the *Out* magazine. I mean, I think it's interesting that you had some kind of, I don't know, entitlement or cultural savvy to know about internships and asking for internships. [Laughs.] That's always a good way in the door.

[00:39:27.29] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, it's really—I can't remember. Okay, so let's just say what happened was I was going to WAC meetings at the center. Literally, I got to New York, I went to gay pride, and then started going to the center to go to meetings. I went to WAC meetings and I went to Lesbian Avengers meetings.

[00:39:50.85] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, Okay.

[00:39:52.39] A.L. STEINER: At Lesbian Avengers meetings and probably at WAC, I met some people and they—like Anne d'Adesky. Elise Harris. so the people that were working at *Out*, I met some of them at these meetings. And I think that's how—I can't remember exactly, but that's eventually how I got the idea, or however it happened, to try to get into *Out* magazine to get a job.

[00:40:23.74] So I had that internship. And then my internship ended, and I think it was like—all I remember about that was, I heard after I left the internship that they were looking for a full-time person. So I called James Conrad, who I had been interning for, who's the art director, and I said, Hey, is there a job? Because the whole reason I interned was so that I would get a job. And if there's a job, can I interview for it?

[00:40:50.39] And he said, We already interviewed everyone, and I think we're pretty good. But, all right, if you want to come by, yeah, we can talk about it. And I went by and he ended up hiring me. I don't know. I mean, knock on wood that that happened. James was an incredible mentor to me.

[00:41:10.89] So he gave me the job. I was hired as the photo assistant, but I wasn't assisting anyone. So I asked him if I could just be the photo director after a couple of months. And I called—I picked up the phone at the time. There was an email and I called some photographers that I wanted to work with. Like, in my imagination, who would I call? And it was Nan Goldin, Dan Winters, Philip-Lorca diCorcia. I don't know. I mean, I called—some of the people that I contacted were from portfolio drop-offs. And it was a whole world that opened up essentially. And researching.

[00:42:03.09] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, I'm just wanting to get a sense of this as a site of culture-making. Because I do think the photography in those magazines was very important. And also, sometimes it was a crossroads for people who might be more art based photographers versus commercial photographers, or kind of a blurring of the boundaries. So when you say you reached out to photographers you were interested in, was that like you had the power to commission them to do particular projects?

[00:42:35.05] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, I had to learn quickly what I was doing. So the magazine needed images, so I knew that I had to research through photo archives. The ones that are commercial stock images or whatever it may be. But then we were going to produce, like all editorial-based magazines that were formulating its own—in its inception, I was working with Michael Goff and Sarah Pettit.

[00:43:03.56] And so James as the art director was really open to working with photographers. And art and commerce is—the lines were blurred at that point. So I was able to propose—essentially, I would propose who we would hire for editorial work. And then also, I was doing the research for the archival pieces or finding stock images. So we were creating illustration, too. And so I was doing all of those things for all the content of the magazine. And it was—it was so crazy and incredible. I mean, I would formulate what I thought were some good ideas, and James and I would collaborate on deciding.

[00:43:52.97] But, yeah, I met Alexis Duarte-Rodriguez that way. We became really close friends. And I met Eve Fowler, who's still one of my closest friends. Some of the people were editorial photographers. Some were dropping off their portfolios. Some, like Exum—they did our monthly—one of our columns. And I was really interested in their darkroom experimentation. I was interested in people that were strictly editorial. I was interested in people that were blurring the lines between art and commerce.

[00:44:30.33] And yeah, so I think it opened up like an—yeah, it opened up a practice for me that then, of course, eventually led into what now I work on more full-time, which is my artistic practice. But I learned from producing, and I learned from researching, and I learned from engaging in this kind of editorial world.

[00:45:03.27] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Did you—from WAC and Lesbian Avengers—Act Up, too, would be in here. I do think of all of those groups as having a very particular visual aesthetic and being aware of ways to use both graphic design and photographic imagery to get messages across.

[00:45:25.01] A.L. STEINER: Right.

[00:45:25.69] ANN CVETKOVICH: So I'm just wondering if that was an influence for you in thinking about how you were working with images?

[00:45:32.56] A.L. STEINER: That's such an interesting question. I mean, one of the books I got, I remember early on after more of the work was archived and coalesced into book publishing was AIDS Demo Graphics, which, you know, Douglas [Crimp] worked on. I mean, it was definitely like, yeah. We were definitely all in conversation with each other and how

things work in the—I mean, I met Maxine Wolfe at I think the Avengers or WAC meetings. She was working on the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* at that time.

[00:46:09.76] How activism and art were intersecting and even coming from like, the protest during the Mapplethorpe controversy. Just thinking about how I collected images, or how one commemorates their engagement with how many images one sees. At the time, of course, we saw a lot less images per day. So anything that we saw, I think—anything that I saw, you know, was pretty impactful.

[00:46:41.38] And I was working with people that, of course were—and we had utilized material from archives or from events that had occurred as well. But so much of *Out* was about mainstreaming gay life. And it was so much about—

[00:47:06.61] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:47:06.96] A.L. STEINER: —let's just say, making all the pain that had been experienced much more glossy.

[00:47:14.52] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:47:14.64] A.L. STEINER: And so I think there was a little bit of a break in this idea of mainstreaming and American Express-izing. [Laughs.] American Expression-izing.

[00:47:26.64] I'll call it not Abstract Expressionism, but American Expressionism—

[00:47:31.08] ANN CVETKOVICH: [Laughs.]

[00:47:32.10] A.L. STEINER: —because all these advertisers—there was so much talk in even in the press about *Out* magazine. There was such a curiosity about how the visuality of gay life would translate in this product.

[00:47:49.87] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:47:51.79] A.L. STEINER: so this wasn't something consciously I was thinking about when I was engaged in all this. But I think subconsciously there was so much going on for me as someone who was heavily—and also for James and other people working in the—there were, like, three of us in the art department, essentially, and then some other people. Interns and some other people.

[00:48:12.57] But yeah, I think it's just a big question about what was happening at that time visually. Something as mainstream, or hoping its mainstream ability was changing the perception of gay life.

[00:48:28.16] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:48:28.40] A.L. STEINER: I don't know. That probably doesn't answer your question, but—

[00:48:30.29] ANN CVETKOVICH: No, no. It does.

[00:48:31.09] A.L. STEINER: It's a really interesting question. JEB is someone I contacted who then ended up being part of the book, *A Day in the Life of America*, or whatever.

[00:48:43.74] ANN CVETKOVICH: Do you want to talk about that project?

[00:48:47.31] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, what was it called again? *Gay in America*? What is it?

[00:48:54.61] ANN CVETKOVICH: I should look at your CV.

[00:48:57.40] A.L. STEINER: It's probably not there. I should put it on my CV. It was a *Day in the Life* series. Let me see what it was called. I don't know if we can pause. Well, I guess. I don't know why I'm blanking. I have the book somewhere. It's just. I don't know.

[00:49:36.28] ANN CVETKOVICH: I know. I was—

[00:49:39.90] A.L. STEINER: Sorry.

[00:49:40.85] ANN CVETKOVICH: I don't think I have it on my shelf. I actually wanted to

study up on looking at it, because I think it is an interesting document of the moment, and including the range of photographers that I think you gathered together for it.

[00:49:55.74] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, JEB was—I'll have to look. Well, this is weird because we're doing this audio recording.

[00:50:09.02] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. I mean, they can add it later to the notes. But yeah, it's funny, because I just interviewed JEB. And I bet it's on her CV, because she documented everything because for her, very it's very important what publications her work has appeared in.

[00:50:27.46] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. Was it *Out* in America maybe because of *Out* magazine?

[00:50:32.35] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. That sounds right to me.

[00:50:35.50] A.L. STEINER: [Laughs.] I don't know.

[00:50:36.76] ANN CVETKOVICH: All right. I'll google that while you keep talking, but just—yeah, we'll find the title. But we both know what the project is, so maybe just talk about it as —

[00:50:50.49] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I can talk a bit. So it's *Out* in America. All right, let's start from here. So 1994, *Out in America, Portrait of Gay and Lesbian Life*. So, yeah. Michael and Sarah, who were running *Out*, were asked to do this book and went to James. And everyone decided we would do it, which I was really excited about. I hadn't worked on a book.

[00:51:15.37] But yeah, JEB became a part of it, thinking about whose archives one could kind of pilfer through. And it was at the time, of course, this mainstreaming effort. It was also about monumentalizing what queer life is and what—it wasn't a historical book, but what queer life looks like in the 20th century, which was the last century from now. And now it's the past.

[00:51:45.04] But I think it was a really incredible project, but also so heavy to decide that one group of people, which were all pictured on the dust jacket—and I always, like, I don't have it. And when I look at it, when I see it, if I take it off my bookshelf, which doesn't—I think it happened recently, where I was like, yeah, I should try to remember what that whole period meant.

[00:52:12.43] For me, it is kind of the culmination of my years at *Out*, which was four years. And for me, it was just an incredible project. But also, I think thinking about our culture now, it'd be so hard to do something casually with a fairly, I don't know, I would say with a fairly limited scope and a non-diverse staff. Because at the time, the staff at *Out* was predominantly white.

[00:52:58.36] And then the book was a freelance project. But I think it's a lot to—basically that project, *Out in America*, needs work because it actually needs something now, because it's pretty limited in its scope. But at the time it was, I think, a groundbreaking project because it was representing the diversity of gay life and trying to do that. And that effort needs to continually be, you know, activated and energized.

[00:53:35.94] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:53:36.37] A.L. STEINER: It's kind of a weird thing to do that once and publish a book like that and say, this is gay life. Because it's really just like gay life in 1994. And with JEB and with some other archives that we utilized—and my favorite project that I did at *Out* was my the pre-Stonewall project I shot with Val Shaff, where I basically assigned myself to find a diverse group of representatives of people who were activists before Stonewall.

[00:54:05.74] So we did that together, and I think we photographed 12 or 14 people. And that was also quite limited. But it was a really wonderful project where we really—we went through from the Harlem Renaissance to Sylvia, who—Rivera. And we photographed—and the formation of MCC. And we went through a lot of queer culture that was historical by choosing one subject from pre-Stonewall periods from different communities. So, yeah.

[00:54:47.40] ANN CVETKOVICH: And I think this is an important part of your evolution because what you're talking about also sounds to me like the work of curation, where you're

where you're thinking about how you want to put together a collection and then having to think about these issues of, is it comprehensive, is it diverse, et cetera? And what are we missing?

[00:55:12.77] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. And it's always limited. And definitely—I mean, definitely this was my moment when I was in that magazine world—was my moment of realizing, yeah, the limitations of the scope of this type of work.

[00:55:30.08] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay.

[00:55:30.32] A.L. STEINER: And I freelanced for another—after I left *Out*, I freelanced for another six, seven years. But for me, that was at a time, I think, when my artistic practice started forming.

[00:55:48.79] And it was—well, yeah, I eventually decided I wanted to leave *Out*. I quit amicably. They asked me to stay. Then Sarah fired me after they hired me back. So that was just very Sarah. And then we ended up working together at *Newsweek* when I was freelancing for many—I freelanced at *Newsweek* for a pretty long period. I think I was at *Newsweek* during 9/11, so by 2001 I was at *Newsweek*.

[00:56:25.91] I had been at Condé Nast and the *New Yorker*. I worked at the *New Yorker* with Elisabeth Biondi. And I was at *Vogue*. I'd worked with Ivan Shaw. I was at various magazines. I ended up at *Newsweek* for a good while. And Sarah and I became close again, and she—yeah. And then we lost Sarah not too long after that.

[00:56:55.23] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:56:55.59] A.L. STEINER: So I had a real—yeah, a real socio-political growing up in publications.

[00:57:06.81] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:57:07.15] A.L. STEINER: The world of publication, and especially magazines. And it was truly formative and truly mind-blowing—all the people I met and got to work with.

[00:57:23.19] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:57:24.16] A. L. STEINER: And I have some of the photography from that. I worked with Wolfgang Tillmans. Yeah, and some of the kind of experiences that were challenging and also really educational, for sure.

[00:57:50.43] ANN CVETKOVICH: I just want to follow up on a couple of things you said to just delve a bit further into this question of your work with magazines. I just want to make sure I understand you what you mean by freelance. Is that you putting together photo projects, or actually taking photographs?

[00:58:11.39] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, no, just freelance photo editing.

[00:58:14.94] ANN CVETKOVICH: Photo editing. Okay.

[00:58:16.98] A.L. STEINER: I was basically researching. I wasn't doing hardly any production anymore. I wasn't producing images with other photographers. I was researching for these publications.

[00:58:27.67] ANN CVETKOVICH: So you would source images for them that were already made?

[00:58:32.54] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[00:58:33.86] ANN CVETKOVICH: Interesting. Okay. Fascinating. And then when you said, "I realized the limits of this kind of work," you said that kind of in relation to your work at *Out* magazine. Can you say a little bit more about that, particularly if we're anticipating your work as an artist or starting to develop a creative or a solo practice? Just want to hear about whether that dissatisfaction with the work you could do in magazine world was how that pushed you maybe more in the direction of what you could do under the rubric of art.

[00:59:20.08] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, working for other people in magazines, I could—I

could see that I could either stay in that world or I'd have to leave at some point. I wasn't going to freelance through eternity. So the editorial limitations—the kind of perspectives that are these, running these institutions that—the institutions on their own are historically pretty—I mean, like all industry in the US, it's changing. It changed fairly slowly.

[01:00:07.26] It's ramping up now, and there's all kinds of, obviously, technology that have changed the relationships to what so-called the magazine publishing world is. But books and magazines, at this moment in time, are kind of going to be—there's a precipice heading—we're hurtling towards some sort of precipice.

[01:00:28.95] I, of course, couldn't know on my own what that was, but I just felt the limitations. I felt the limitations of the culture in publishing. You know, the superficiality. It reminded me a lot of things that I experienced that I didn't like about the culture in Miami. It's very much focused on look-ist [ph] and look-isms [ph].

[01:00:52.57] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. But it was—I mean, this would probably have to be a sidebar when we're not recording because I'm really interested in magazine culture of the late '80s and early '90s for my own reasons. But it was a really exciting time where I think we thought there could be a glossy magazine like *Out*, that would be the queer equivalent and/or fusion of *Vogue* magazine on one end and *OutWeek* or *Village Voice* or alternative publication on the other—that it was going to be possible to fuse in order to further the LGBTQ cause where culture and visibility and aesthetics was very important to that.

[01:01:43.79] So there's kind of like a dream there. And it just interesting to me that you were in the center of a dream I think a lot of us had—you know, pulling the levers, or trying to. And then also maybe experiencing the frustrations and the limits of what that was. I'm going to throw in here also something like *Interview* magazine and all of its pros and cons of something that can be super arty and queer and yes, also superficial or part of the party life.

[01:02:20.86] ANN CVETKOVICH: But, I don't know. There's just a lot to say about what a magazine could be. And again, I think this anticipates your interest in zine culture that also exists at a crossroads of counterculture, DIY punk, but also very much an awareness of big, mainstream glossy culture and how to engage with that and turn it in your own direction. So I just think this is a really important crucible for you.

[01:02:56.88] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, it's such an important question. So on one hand, Out we—And my friend crew was like Ray Rogers from *Interview* magazine. We became really close and had a whole friend group from *Paper* magazine. There was this—there was a real—and now, I literally—just the other day I was at Palais de Tokyo. And I walked into their bookstore and there's literally 10,000 gorgeous magazines. And I'm like, this is so crazy. Who is buying? There are so many.

[01:03:38.56] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:03:40.90] A.L. STEINER: I sometimes, like, turn myself off and then you turn yourself on and you're like, wait, what's happening? But I guess the easiest way to answer this question is, I believe—I believe and I believe very much in the value of image culture in so many ways. And also information and the dissemination of information and these things that I've kind of participated in for basically all my life, I feel like. Or whatever this life is that I'm at this point.

[01:04:17.71] But my last magazine gig—I think it was at *Entertainment Weekly*. And I was sitting in office doing something late, and I suddenly I emailed the Rainforest Action Network and was like, Is there anything the magazine industry can do to, like, stop making disposable products out of virgin pulp? Paper pulp? [Laughs.] I had turned a corner into some other place, you know what I mean?

[01:04:52.87] It was 10 years I was doing this thing. I really liked it. There were so many, like I described, incredible things that happened. And at a certain point, I was like, this is disposable culture. This industry is part of a world that I'm seeing unfolding that is just basically suicidal. And so my work in this industry became really interconnected with my big picture realizations about how industry is something to tackle.

[01:05:30.54] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:05:30.93] A.L. STEINER: Like how we use, how we consume, and what we're producing, and what these things mean.

[01:05:38.71] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:05:40.54] A.L. STEINER: And I couldn't detach myself from what I was meant to do, which was detach myself from making that part of the work meaningless. It's devaluing the value of what we're making, because it's just a disposable product. Even though it's meant to inform. It's meant to do this. You know, the internet does the same things, and it's sucking up energy and sucking up server farm real estate in order to power itself. And we're all saving this and clouding that.

[01:06:13.64] And at a certain point with magazines, I just got to a point where I was engaging the manifestation of cultural imagery. And that was an incredible feat for me, or a privilege for me to experience, too. But I really needed to channel what I saw as my upcoming path to try to figure out what it means to be human on this planet. And it wasn't going to involve that work anymore. And it was a moral crisis or whatever that I'm still inside of. I mean, I'm still experiencing that.

[01:06:57.76] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow. Okay, well, then let's—this may involve also continuing to work inside of that period of your work with magazine culture. But yeah, maybe now we could shift tracks, and you could talk a bit about your evolving practice as an artist. In what way did you begin making work that you might call your own? Through what networks?

[01:07:29.97] Also, I think it would be interesting to hear about ways in which you were involved with the art world. Because we started with talking about you going to museums with your mom as a young kid. So in New York, were you going to galleries regularly? You know, were you seeing all the big museum shows? How was that part of your cultural experience or consumption also important for your work also within these more commercial realms?

[01:08:05.37] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, I think it was more my social life.

[01:08:08.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:08:10.31] A.L. STEINER: And yeah, like when you have the energy to go to a million openings when you're younger, that kind of thing.

[01:08:15.64] ANN CVETKOVICH: But was that a fun thing for you—that was part of your party circuit?

[01:08:20.09] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I lived on Avenue D in these lofts that—there were—and I still—I recently saw—you see people from the beginning of your time here. You always keep kind of running into each other somehow, even after 20, 30 years. But well I—

[01:08:40.44] ANN CVETKOVICH: It's special who your first friends were.

[01:08:43.04] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I know. Well, I mentioned—yeah, I worked with Exum, who is now going by Cash, I believe. Cash was living with Nicole. Nicole I met because we photographed Nicole Eisenman for *Out* magazine. And then we became friends. I was hanging out with, you know, Eve. Eventually, I just met people. You know, [inaudible]. I don't know. It's like, you just kind of—yeah, you're just kind of hanging out.

[01:09:14.45] Avenue D was formative in that because we had a big space, and we would either have parties—there were parties in the building, and it was either someone else's loft or our loft. I was going to a lot of stuff. You know, going to performance all the time. I mean, my thing—I've loved exhibition work since my mom hopelessly dragged me through these museums. And I love exhibition work.

[01:09:44.38] But my other long-term relationship with was with Layla Childs. Layla and I met when I was at *Out*. Was it? Yeah. We met in '95, I believe. So I was at *Out*. We were together for over a decade. And so my life was—our lives were integrated into our a lot of different spaces. But she was a dancer, so I was seeing a lot of performance. And I have a special place in my heart for dance and performance.

[01:10:20.81] My first, I think, finished video in undergrad was—I made a video of dancers, which is so funny to think about. But I didn't really know dance very well. But anyway—performance. And the one of the first performance art pieces I saw was *DANCENOISE* when I came to New York when I was an undergrad.

[01:10:44.17] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:10:44.29] A.L. STEINER: I came to New York on a road trip when I was probably 20, and somebody took me to a performance, and it was *DANCENOISE*. I mean, whoever did that—I didn't know how that happened, but whoever did that, that 1,000 percent changed my life. Thanks to Lucy Sexton and Anne lobst.

[01:11:01.26] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:11:03.98] A.L. STEINER: So I saw two performers running around naked, pouring blood over each other. You know, there's certain things that happen that, again, just knocking on wood. *Pyramid* was still going when I was in school. I don't know. There was so much shit going on.

[01:11:22.47] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:11:22.57] A.L. STEINER: I mean, there still is so much going on. But me wanting to be here is why I'm still—all the stuff I was doing then is—I can't go to as many openings, I think, now. But—

[01:11:36.73] ANN CVETKOVICH: But I think it's interesting in terms of what we were saying earlier about the queer bubble. Right? And this certain bubble world of New York—the type of media or art—it's all blends together. So you're going to go to a dance show one night. And you're going to go to art opening. And then there's something with the magazine. I mean, magazine culture is also about being at these crossroads. So yeah, those distinctions between types of art aren't so important.

[01:12:09.47] A.L. STEINER: No, yeah.

[01:12:09.91] ANN CVETKOVICH: In fact, what's great is the way that they all inform each other.

[01:12:14.18] And again, I think this is relevant for the way in which it's hard to classify your work by genre. Like even your bio lists a whole bunch of different forms of production, as though there isn't one painting or film video. Like, they all are part of your practice.

[01:12:37.58] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I feel like that's part of the blood, too—to absorb all these energies, you know what I mean? Originally, I wanted to study fashion design. That was a great interest. And I never even took a stab at that. But there were so many people working, for instance, in that industry that I met two that became part of my life.

[01:13:06.97] And just like all of it intersecting is like—for me, culture is this Petri dish. This thing growing inside of a Petri dish. I mean, you never know what is injecting itself into what other liquid form. Solid form. It's all just a gel.

[01:13:26.97] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:13:30.15] A.L. STEINER: Ben Cho is someone we lost. Also, In the fashion world, he was someone I met early on. And it was like the first fashion show I went to. I mean, there's just—yeah, there's just so many things that are about encounter and that spontaneity.

[01:13:45.94] And that's why I had a hard time in LA, to be honest—when I eventually moved to LA, I couldn't—and I know a lot of people. It's cliché to even mention it, but it is truly the spontaneity that informed my practice. But also my life. My social life isn't—it doesn't feel separate from work life. Sometimes you just get tired of both and you have to take a break. But it's not like there's one thing or another

[01:14:13.49] I don't feel—I don't know. You probably feel the same way. I mean, I don't want to speak for you, but I don't feel whole unless I have this infusion. And sometimes it feels a little bit like you're a junkie in that way where you're kind of like, I need. And you go see something. And I don't mean to—

[01:14:32.03] ANN CVETKOVICH: I call it vitamin Q. And then sometimes it's vitamin L. [Laughs.]

[01:14:38.91] A.L. STEINER: Exactly. Exactly. I just saw a performance, and I reached out to the performers and was like, the thing you did was so incredible. And I had seen, like, 20 things that were like, whatever. And I saw this one thing and I was like, whoa.

[01:14:53.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Boom. Yeah, Okay. But let's still try to pull out the thread of solo practice, even though, again, there's a reason why we've kind of talked around it. Because I think one of the themes is going to be the indistinguishability of media, the blur between social life and work life, and then the blur between solo practice and collective or collaborative work.

[01:15:19.83] But nonetheless, like if I look at your CV, I think your first show that you list is 1997 under your own stuff.

[01:15:33.48] A.L. STEINER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[01:15:34.50] ANN CVETKOVICH: And I'm trying to think—

[01:15:35.30] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, around then.

[01:15:36.41] ANN CVETKOVICH: If you want to just get specific about that.

[01:15:40.72] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, I had set up darkrooms in two of—well, the loft on Avenue D. And then I met Zoe Leonard, who was working on *Watermelon Woman*. Because I had been PA-ing for that company I don't remember the name of [Good Machine -ALS].

[01:15:58.22] And so Cheryl Dunye was making *Watermelon Woman*. I had a darkroom in my house in DC. I had an apartment in DC where I had a basement, and so I used the basement as a darkroom. Just to say, I was always making work. And I didn't have any ideas [...] even though my mother had an art gallery in Miami, I didn't have any ideas about—I would be an exhibiting artist. I just was kind of like I loved making photo work.

[01:16:27.29] And then when we moved to Avenue D, when I left Mike, when Mike and I—Mike and I actually got evicted because the guy we were subletting from wasn't paying. We were paying him, and he wasn't paying the rent. So I got evicted, and I moved. I found this place on Avenue D with my friend Gwynne, and I set up a darkroom there.

[01:16:47.70] And then I met Zoe and I said I would print some of the stuff for *Watermelon*. Because she was asking people to print the archive for the narrative that Cheryl was directing. So I did that, and I was also PA-ing on *Watermelon*.

[01:17:07.60] ANN CVETKOVICH: I love this. So speaking of, like who did you meet? What happened? The crossroads, yeah. [Laughs.]

[01:17:12.52] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, that was a major thing that happened in a way, because it opened my mind a lot about, what is this whole thing with photo?

[01:17:23.67] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:17:24.10] A.L. STEINER: And Zoe and I, of course, are still close. And so that relationship was—and Cheryl was just honored at Yale, where I work. So that was incredible. And we've all remained friends. And so the community that was developing at that point became pretty formative.

[01:17:45.44] I met Shu Lea there, with whom I just did a project. I met Shu Lea Cheang in the loft on Avenue D. And now in 2023, we did a series at the Munich International Film Festival together where she was honored. But I hadn't talked to Shu Lea since 1995. Yeah.

[01:18:05.56] So anyway, I was developing this work. I had my darkroom. Working full time, doing my thing. And what happened was Layla and I—Layla, my ex, who I mentioned, were on the street one night. Nan walked by, said, Do you want to come upstairs to my apartment? Nan Goldin.

[01:18:24.35] And I knew who she was. She didn't have any idea who we were, but she was like, You look interesting. So we went upstairs, had some drinks, and then we kind of stayed

in touch. It ended up that I was close with Nicholas Pages, who was her assistant at that time. And I said, Nicholas, this weird thing happened. And he said, that's so funny. And so we hung out.

[01:18:48.95] Nan then invited me into a show she curated at Exit Art with Papo Colo. Jeanette and Papo Colo were running Exit Art, which was also a formative space for New York art. And it was a show called *The Choice*. And it would be photography. It would be sorry, artists who were bringing in younger artists to show. The choice was they would pick an artist to show.

[01:19:16.30] And Nan asked me to be in this. And so I don't know how much more I have to say about that. But I will add that. My other first small gallery exhibit was at Nicole Klagsbrun, and that was because Layla and I were together at another party, and her closest friend, Alex Auder, was Cindy Sherman's stepdaughter.

[01:19:46.16] And Cindy was looking at some of my photos at this cocktail party because I had just gotten back from the lab because that's how—I used to drop my snapshot roll—35mm, 36 images—off at a lab and then get the pack back with proof prints. And we were looking at them, and Cindy saw some, and Nicole and Klagsbrun asked what we were looking at. And then I had a show with Nicole.

[01:20:13.37] So, again, this incredible—I'll never forget these moments, of course, and um —

[01:20:22.25] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:20:22.67] A.L. STEINER: —the support from other artists like those two artists plus Michel—actually Alex's father, Michel Auder was a mentor to me.

[01:20:34.31] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:20:37.19] A.L. STEINER: And just people that—and then when I teach and people ask, what do—younger people ask, how do you a participant in a world that seems so elitist and exclusive and really hard to penetrate?

[01:20:51.99] And I said, yeah, it's true in all those ways. And it really is about helping each other. Because it's not—if it was a meritocracy, I would tell people it was a meritocracy. But it's not.

[01:21:08.00] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:21:08.15] A.L. STEINER: It's about people helping each other.

[01:21:10.16] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. I don't know if you know the book that's more about creative writing called *MFA versus NYC*, but it seems like you went to the School of NYC. [Laughs.]

[01:21:28.49] A.L. STEINER: I mean, it does. My school of NYC, I don't know that it applies like we were talking about earlier. I mean, now MFA, you know, overrides some of the NYC stuff.

[01:21:39.47] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. It just has to do with also thinking about networking, both in some elitist and maybe bad ways. But also some good ways, like friends supporting each other—are what both arguably provide—

[01:21:53.67] A.L. STEINER: No, or supporting each other. I mean, I was a complete stranger. Nan had no clue. Knew nothing.

[01:22:01.25] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:22:02.24] A.L. STEINER: But I don't know, the way she is—and maybe that's a complex proposal, even in her mind, like how openness, you know, can lead to—

[01:22:15.09] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:22:15.45] A.L. STEINER: —success or ruin, of course.

[01:22:16.97] ANN CVETKOVICH: Well, yeah. You would be rubbing shoulders with each other. Like, walking the same mean streets late night. [Laughs.] Responding to somebody who looks interesting.

[01:22:28.85] A.L. STEINER: Yeah exactly. Responding to someone who looks [inaudible].

[01:22:30.91] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. So, let's see. How to track through this? Because there's so many strands. I like what you said about just even your memory taking you to some of these amazing moments of people helping you or recognizing you or giving you a hand—that you don't forget those.

[01:22:55.44] So while we're on the subject of what I'm going to call solo practice, but it's always a little bit in quotation marks for me when I'm talking about your work.

[01:23:07.30] A.L. STEINER: I really, really appreciated that you put that in quotation marks in the outline.

[01:23:13.75] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Because I think—I don't know, I think your work really resists that for the reason we just described of people supporting each other or artists produced in this social environment. That means we're not just individuals. We're part of a collective, especially the queer bubble collective.

[01:23:35.05] But yeah, if we look at the timeline, what stands out? Like, are there particular shows that are especially meaningful to you, whether because of the work you were able to produce or because of the significance of the venue or the other people or whatever? I don't know. How do you want to talk about that?

[01:24:07.51] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. Well, Okay. Wait. So—

[01:24:16.51] ANN CVETKOVICH: I mean, maybe we'll just sketch it out here. Because I'm looking at the clock and we want to try to end maybe within the next 30 minutes.

[01:24:25.29] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[01:24:25.77] ANN CVETKOVICH: So we could do like a bit of a, you know, fast pass that we could fill in later. But yeah, maybe you could, if you want to, sketch some highlights. Again, it doesn't have to be in any kind of logical or chronological order.

[01:24:46.47] A.L. STEINER: Of stuff that I've done, or other people that influenced me? Or which—

[01:24:53.90] ANN CVETKOVICH: I think stuff that you've done. How you would narrate that in a more impressionistic or associative way. Like, not having to do it in a logical way, but just what stands out for you.

[01:25:11.04] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean—Like shows?

[01:25:18.89] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. I mean, if it doesn't manifest for you that way, that's fine. The other way we could do it is in relation to important projects.

[01:25:33.38] A.L. STEINER: I see. Yeah. I know. This is always like—I'm like, Okay. I mean, I'm always reticent to [coughs]—it's not like I've never had to write, like, what are the highlights of your career? No, and I should probably just reference—but I don't want to reference something. But, you know, sometimes it's hard to, especially under—when you're trying too hard, sometimes it comes off as—

[01:26:12.55] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:26:15.46] A.L. STEINER: But, yeah, I think—well, it was funny. I'll just mention the first thing—and I mentioned some things that happened like with at Exit Art and with Klagsbrun. One funny thing that happened was—so you have to start this thing where you do studio visits. So I was doing that.

[01:26:41.78] I remember when I started that in the loft on Avenue D, too. Because I would just have a box of prints, and I was printing in this black and white darkroom that I set up. And then I shut that down and I started printing at a lab called—where I met a lot of other photographers, also. It was like a commercial space called Print Space.

[01:27:04.27] And I met Donnie Cervantes, who is someone I've worked with a long time. And he's printed a lot of my work. He moved to Hawaii. We both moved to LA together and worked at USC together. And then he moved to O'ahu and I moved back to New York. But Print Space was a huge social space. And I taught myself how to color print there because I didn't know how.

[01:27:27.65] But long story short about that was, one of my first studio visits was with Paul Ha, who was running White Columns at the time. And he came over and he offered me a show. And White Columns does this unrepresented artist thing called White Room. And so I did a white room in '97, I believe. And I think maybe that's one of the first things that's on—

[01:27:53.16] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, it is.

[01:27:54.45] A.L. STEINER: So Paul was someone who—yeah. Didn't know me, came over. Forget exactly how and why that happened. And that was, like, very meaningful because it was this whole formal process of showing work. And then after that, in 2010, I was in greater New York in their triennial at PS1. And I had been in some other gallery—I did some solo and group shows, and did some stuff overseas.

[01:28:32.23] Which, I just re-showed some work I did in London around 2001, 2002. And I just re-showed some of it in Munich because it had been lost for a while by—well, let's not get into that. But it had been lost and it was found after a long time. And I re-presented it, and now it's part of a collectors show in Munich.

[01:29:00.80] And so, yeah, I think just this learning how to exhibit and being included in biennial or triennials or what. I wasn't in the Whitney biennial until 2014, which also I feel very thankful for. But ultimately, there was just a lot of amazing things that happened.

[01:29:22.78] But also it's like a kind of new work. A new full time job. And you're trying to figure out how to survive within that economy, and then that's what led to some of my work formulating W.A.G.E., otherwise known as Working Artists in the Greater Economy around 2008.

[01:29:41.63] But I think just this kind of manifestation of the knowledge I might have had and had from my mother's work, understanding the art and performance and writing worlds of New York, learning on the job essentially in a business like publishing—it was all formulated to allow me the kind of breadth and scope.

[01:30:06.71] I always wonder if Paul [Ha]—I was dating someone at the time that Paul came to my studio that morning. And I was wearing a Yale T-shirt, which—I did not go to Yale. I do teach at Yale now, but I did not go to Yale. But at the time, there were a bunch of women who were in the Yale photo program that were getting a lot of attention.

[01:30:25.17] And I afterwards thought, I was wearing that shirt. I wonder if that helped. But truly, Paul was an amazing curator to work with. And I think he was not interested in what my T-shirt said. But, listen, I can't know.

[01:30:46.25] But I think there's a lot to be said about the many galleries that I worked with. Some really amazing experiences. Some kind of questionable, but everything really of steamrolled into the next thing.

[01:31:01.14] And I think raising my voice eventually about how artists survive in the economy that's created or presented to them, for me, felt like maybe this ultimate revisitation and manifestation of all the activist stuff and working in the clinic and working at—like, what had been most important to me about the work I was doing as an artist. Obviously, it was not only about exhibiting. It was about a lot of the other parts of it that I think are important.

[01:31:35.10] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Okay, actually, that's really helpful, what you just said. Because I'm thinking that it's a reminder of how hard it is to separate the threads of the solo and the collective. So I'm glad you mentioned W.A.G.E., because I think that is an important reference point for some of the reasons you've just stated.

[01:32:02.86] And I was thinking, yeah, if we don't want to track this by individual projects, then I think I'd want a cluster W.A.G.E., the beginnings of Ridyekeulous, which would be before that, right? It's like 2005, 2006?

[01:32:19.19] A.L. STEINER: 2005. Well, unknown, because it probably started when Nicole and I met in '96 or '7. Everything was the culmination of our—yeah. Around 2005.

[01:32:34.40] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay. So there's that. And then I think, too, for me, *Community Action Center* is really important. Maybe just because it's like one of the pieces of yours I know and love. But it also says a lot about, I think, your practice and the folks you work with and so on. And that's around 2010, right?

[01:33:00.49] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, I'll add a couple things from—those are important markers.

[01:33:08.42] ANN CVETKOVICH: And they're kind of clustered in maybe a five year zone.

[01:33:13.41] A.L. STEINER: Well, and I think New York was changing so drastically in the turn of the century—

[01:33:19.05] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:33:19.26] A.L. STEINER: —as I like to call it. Because yeah, the wealth inequity was like increasing exponentially.

[01:33:26.92] ANN CVETKOVICH: Right. Right.

[01:33:28.56] A.L. STEINER: And there was a lot—yeah, there's a lot of things shifting and changing socio-economically. And expansion and diversity. The insularity and racism and whiteness of the art world was essentially breaking open. [And I made a zine with José Muñoz and my friend Jemma Nelson called *OLD -ALS*]

[01:33:54.63] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:33:55.42] A.L. STEINER: I think, too—as far as important moments of either singularity or collaborative work, the work with robbinschilds, my partner at the time, Layla, and her partner in her dance project, Sonya Robbins—when we made *C.L.U.E.* together. We finished it in 2007, but we started talking about it and making it around 2005, 2006.

[01:34:23.03] It was the same time also Nicole and I were creating the zine of the first project of Ridykeulous. All these things were happening. And a little bit before that, I had done a project with John Connelly. It was one of the exhibitions that I did in a gallery in New York. And for me, that was super important because it was a large-scale collage. I was finally able to not show like a couple of photos in a show.

[01:34:55.60] I had done some solo shows, too, but they were more predicated on grids, which I was also really interested in formulating at the time. And that work is some of the work that I mentioned I just showed last year after 20 years of not looking at it. But one thing that happened with John Connelly was, I did a large-scale room that was a whole entire collage. And that was super mind-blowing as far as my own practice for me to open it up.

[01:35:34.12] And I think I did a talk in there where Nicole and I did a—maybe we did a live flowchart that we made together. Anyway, that show was super important for me. And Roberta Smith wrote about it. And so, you know, all these things kind of came together. And she wrote a really generous, helpful thing for me career wise.

[01:36:05.82] And then Nicole and I worked on Ridykeulous, the zine. We laid it out for probably the good part of a year. I remember one night she said, It's my birthday tonight. We were doing layouts, and I said, what? This is your birthday? She's like, Yeah. She hadn't told me. We were just plugging through this thing.

[01:36:25.71] And we finally just figured out how we wanted to do it. I wanted to publish it with soy-based inks. I was finally—I had left publishing and I was like, I'm not ever going to publish anything that's disposable, and it's not going to destroy the planet, you know? I was going through my idealist publishing moments. So the zine for me was like my first self-publication.

[01:36:47.08] And I had decided after leaving magazines that I would never publish a book because of just my fraught relationship with the planet. I haven't done that, but I'm working on my first large-scale book. But we'll see if it ever happens.

[01:37:08.08] But back to formative moments. It was John. And then I made *C.L.U.E.* with Sonya and Layla. And that was just an incredible experience because we filmed on the road. It was similar to Ridyeulous of this long journey through this making the zine. We went on a road trip to make the project. We had organized it, but we went on our own road trip. Self-funded. Made this piece with the vocabulary of movement, the vernacular of basically the road trip.

[01:37:42.05] And I had no offer to show anything. We just made it for us. And then I did show it. I showed it to Pascal Spengemann, who then I showed with for several years. And he [and Kelly Taxter -ALS] showed that work. And David actually—Velasco was the person who wrote the review. Which at the time he was writing for *Artforum*. He wasn't the editor in chief.

[01:38:06.40] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:38:08.20] A.L. STEINER: So there's lots of people who kind of came through this work. These particular works. And then A.K. Burns and I had met, of course, and had been hanging out a lot. And we ostensibly met—A.K. was a designer at that moment and we had ostensibly met because I was thinking about breaking my rule and making a book, but I never did that. But we met to talk about doing a book together and then we didn't.

[01:38:35.40] But we made *Community Action Center* together. And we started that in 2007. So that was that whole early 2000s period. And then W.A.G.E. formed in 2008 when the crash happened. The so-called "economic crash." I put that in quotes like you put "solo artists." So—

[01:38:54.53] ANN CVETKOVICH: You were busy. That's a lot of overlapping projects.

[01:38:59.63] A.L. STEINER: I also broke—Layla and I broke up around that time also after over a decade. Like, 11 years. So that was big. I went to LA and started teaching at UCLA. So that was crazy. I was commuting from New York to LA and doing all of those things. So it was a crazy time, but reflective maybe of that turn of the century kind of thing.

[01:39:24.85] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Maybe this is also just a personal reference point for me. But in terms of this turn of the century time and some of these print publications that you maybe got involved with against your vows not to, was *LTTR* significant?

[01:39:50.40] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. So that—Okay—happened.

[01:39:55.36] ANN CVETKOVICH: Inspiration? Like, yeah.

[01:39:57.28] A.L. STEINER: Okay, so the way that happened—so important in my life, which was I went to Sunny A. Smith's Muster that was at Mildred's Lane where Morgan—

[01:40:12.10] ANN CVETKOVICH: Was she—Oh.

[01:40:14.59] A.L. STEINER: Morgan Puett hosted the Muster that—Sunny had developed this idea of the Muster. I don't know if you know anything about—

[01:40:30.36] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:40:30.93] A.L. STEINER: Okay. So I met a ton of important people in my life there. Most importantly, K8 Hardy. And also met—I knew Sunny, I think, a bit. I forget. We had ended up there because of a kind of invite that had happened. It was a small group.

[01:40:52.67] Sunny then did a larger Muster on Governors Island as a public art project. But this one was a her first group projects or whatever it was. And K8 I met, and we became close after that. And then I met Ginger through K8 and Ginger Brooks Takahashi and Every Ocean Hughes and Ulrike Muller. And I mean everyone that is essentially, you know, a part of my life now as well.

[01:41:21.14] *LTTR* was—So they had done their explosion. And Art in General had kind of started that project, released some stuff. Then they were doing this next issue called, *Do You Wish to Direct Me?* based on Lynda Benglis' video, and for asked for submissions. And so Nicole and I talked about this premise that they were asking people to submit, and that we would possibly not make it into their journal.

[01:41:50.16] So we were really irked by this. To be perfectly honest, we wrote a letter titled, *Who Do You Think You LTTR?*

[01:41:59.63] ANN CVETKOVICH: [Laughs.]

[01:42:00.08] A.L. STEINER: And we made it into their journal with our submission. And Nicole and I had had a practice at that point of writing angry letters. We had published the zine, the one and only zine, *Ridykeulous*. And then we had decided that the next part of our practice was writing angry letters to everyone and anything.

[01:42:21.21] We wrote one to Camille Paglia, which she hasn't acknowledged that she received, but hopefully she kept it. Because it was angry, but also extremely—it's extremely valuable, that letter. We had seen her in a documentary about Yoko Ono that we were sitting around Nicole's house watching, and we became enraged at her comments about Yoko Ono. Enraged.

[01:42:43.09] I mean, anything Camille seems to say is enraging, I guess. But we wrote her a letter. We wrote the New York Times letter, we wrote John Kenson—I call him—a letter, *Who is Ken Johnson?* But whatever. I fail to mention that name properly, if I can avoid it.

[01:43:01.30] But anyway, long story short, we wrote our letter to *LTTR*. And then we all, of course, were giddy with joy to be friendly and friends with each other. I met Lanka [Tattersall] who joined their collaborative project. Lanka and I are still close and just saw each other, like, two weeks ago. So these were such crucial moments, formulations also, again, in my life.

[01:43:34.04] And *LTTR* and *Ridykeulous* did a show at Bard. Amy Mackie was a curatorial grad student and her final project was called *Hot Topic*, and it was with *LTTR* and *Ridykeulous*. And so also another memorable moment that—

[01:43:49.70] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. The poster for it is in the *Ridykeulous* book. I was really happy to see that because it's a beautiful evidence of your collaboration together.

[01:44:02.66] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, the comings together have not ceased since that wonderful, fortuitous thing. And I can thank Sunny Smith, who didn't know that all of this would come out of maybe that moment. But yeah, a lot did.

[01:44:18.32] ANN CVETKOVICH: I'm thinking, too, that *LTTR* is important to me because it was the kind of moment at the time of trying to think actively about collectives, and then to create this work that's collaboratively produced that then further seeds the networks. So that was a particular exciting moment for me. Or it's like you would read *LTTR* because every single person in there is someone you would want to know or track. So it was kind of also a way of getting to know who's doing interesting stuff or who you would want to meet.

[01:45:01.75] And then, the this idea of the cross between a zine and an artist book, I think, is interesting too, that I was thinking of in connection to with *Ridykeulous* having that first print publication. *Community Action Center* has the *Cliff Notes*. These print publications that do have an important status as part of the work. And it's interesting that you mention your ambivalence about print publication and then kind of finding your way to it in a different way, perhaps.

[01:45:42.11] A.L. STEINER: Well, I was mostly adverse and still grappling with more so the kind of inane obsession with everyone publishing an artist book constantly. Like the fact that people began to say, I'm publishing in Canada or I'm publishing in China. It's like you're publishing where they're felling the forests for that product. It's not—yeah. Anyway, for me it was it's more of an ecological question. Book publishing.

[01:46:20.19] Print on demand is one thing, but I grapple more with the print a random number of books that no one knows if they'll be bought. It's kind of the same with all industry that are doing supply and demand. They're using supply and demand without an equation, right? So speculative economies are the things that—it led me into W.A.G.E., thinking about these things.

[01:46:46.30] As far as collectives, I mean, I think it's so interesting the way you mentioned it. Because now we see, of course, in all kinds of international exhibition work collectives are included now. At the time, I think there were so many collectives before *LTTR*, and there's

been so many after.

[01:47:10.10] I mean, I would say, I would identify Ridykeulous more as a collaborative project. And it's more of a project that involves Nicole and I. It's less collectivist-oriented. We even try to notate that we cur-hate with the iron fist of our own particular minds. But, you know, it's not democratic in that way.

[01:47:41.04] And I don't think a lot of collaborative or collective work necessarily is. I mean, I think the overlord principle of cur-hating is super valuable. And I think that's where I've come out from, because it's a specialized—if it's historical, if it's history based, it's one thing. Most programs don't actually do curatorial programs that are connected with art history.

[01:48:12.94] Usually curatorial studies are this thing about, yeah, let's say like collecting people. It's not necessarily historical. And then some curatorial work is really predicated on academic art history. So I see the kind of idea of friends and spheres of influence and sociality is really embedded in these practices. And that's what binds me to them.

[01:48:48.93] I'm not well schooled, but I know how to organize. And I think how we use those skills is super fascinating to me. I mean, *LTTR* used a really interesting, I think, set of strategies and formulas. And they would be able to speak to what those are.

[01:49:12.17] But it was an important moment because I think the idea of collaboration, applying to a program as a collaborative team now is something that can happen. Being curated into something as a collaborative project is commonplace, and that that is really an incredible transformation, I think.

[01:49:32.42] I think it speaks to multiplicity. I think something that I'm very connected to in my mind of thinking through things. And transition and trans history as—or trans historiography as something that's actually material.

[01:49:51.38] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Cool. I love that. I feel like that could be a good spot to end for today. That would also be a good spot to end for today. [Laughs.]

[01:50:10.81] A.L. STEINER: That's my Teddy bear. I've been away from them for two weeks.

[01:50:17.00] ANN CVETKOVICH: Have they been with you the whole time while we've been talking, or?

[01:50:20.18] A.L. STEINER: No, he was down there. But now it's like—If we're done—

[01:50:23.24] ANN CVETKOVICH: As a special companion? Yeah, are you cool with me stopping the recording there?

[01:50:29.81] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[01:50:32.76] ANN CVETKOVICH: I feel like we've stirred the pot in a good way. And then we can kind of—

[01:50:39.17] A.L. STEINER: The cauldron.

[01:50:40.11] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, the cauldron has many things in it simultaneously, which I think is appropriate. Yeah.

[01:50:48.09] A.L. STEINER: Okay. Yeah how'd that go? Do we get to edit out weird stuff, like when I was like, what is the name of that one?

[01:50:53.41] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

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[00:00:00.20] ANN CVETKOVICH: Apple. All right, we're back for session two with A.L. Steiner. This is Ann Cvetkovich. It is Tuesday, June 25 just before gay pride.

[00:00:17.68] A.L. STEINER: Woo-hoo.

[00:00:19.30] ANN CVETKOVICH: Appropriate timing. We're having our own little queer

moment here. [Laughs.]

[00:00:23.86] A.L. STEINER: Together. Yes, small, queer moments. They still matter.

[00:00:28.34] ANN CVETKOVICH: The high holy days between summer solstice and gay pride. [Laughs.]

[00:00:34.81] A.L. STEINER: Beautiful yeah. It was beautiful solstice. The sunset was a trans flag. I'll send you the photo. It was so pretty.

[00:00:41.99] ANN CVETKOVICH: Oh, great.

[00:00:42.82] A.L. STEINER: The sunset was suddenly blue and pink and through this beautiful vignette of trees. Yeah, I'll send it to you.

[00:00:51.58] ANN CVETKOVICH: Cool. Yeah, we've just been having a little bit of preamble about your location west of Hudson and about summer and country houses and their role in an artist's life and career, including who your neighbors are. So just noting the background.

[00:01:11.75] A.L. STEINER: 100 percent Well, I did a gay pride in the stream once where it was just me and I think two other friends just walked down our stream, which is now pretty much dried out, dried up. But we walked through to the bridge in our little hamlet, and that was our gay pride parade. [Laughs.]

[00:01:30.92] ANN CVETKOVICH: Nice. Very nice. So yeah—Okay. I'm just looking for the record button. So when we left off, we were kind of tracking through a bunch of different projects that are in the period of the aughts, or the naughties, or whatever we like to call that decade. And I realized it didn't make sense to try to talk about them individually because it seemed like they just mashed together.

[00:02:02.53] So I thought I would start by having us just return to that moment. I'm calling it convergence where there's a series of projects in a very short space of time. C.L.U.E, which is your project with your—one of your lovers, a dancer. [Laughs.]

[00:02:25.67] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, that's Layla Childs and Sonya Robbins, her dance partner.

[00:02:30.26] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, I'll just name them, and then you can kind of put them together, unpack them as you wish. W.A.G.E. Is another one that I think we should mention, and you can spell out the acronym. Ridykeulous starts in 2005 or 2006—your ongoing and still very lively collaboration with Nicole Eisenman. Community Action Center, the film that was also a zine that you did with A.K. Burns that I think first came out in 2010 but also has had kind of a long and varied life.

[00:03:09.26] And then also Chicks on Speed, your collaborations or appearances with them that also, I think, start in 2004 and continues for quite some time. So what does it mean for all of those things to be happening?

[00:03:27.60] A.L. STEINER: In a nutshell—

[00:03:28.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: Not totally simultaneously.

[00:03:29.85] A.L. STEINER: Just like—

[00:03:31.58] ANN CVETKOVICH: Welcome to my life. [Laughs.] You're good at multitasking.

[00:03:36.11] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I think as an artist coming into one's own, and especially someone, for instance, like Amy Sillman, who said to me when I was in my 30s—your 40s are going to be the best. And this all is happening. I mean, yeah, as I matured as an artist, as I understood the field better, as I became what I now kind of try to call a serial collaborator—and I'm somewhat of a serial monogamist.

[00:04:17.09] But I think there's a coalescing of culture and thoughts and ideas and people around that really lead to these different kind of nodes and threads. And I'm really—I think openness is one of my main materials or tools. I'm trying to be open rather than determined and predetermined. And I think even as a pedagogue I generally tend to want to learn from—teach and learn.

[00:04:46.98] The word learning comes from the old English lore—storytelling. And I think that I see these nodes as intersecting and also part of the striving towards openness—which leads to things like collaboration, like activism, like a lot of the other terms that people might put to this kind of work. So I think, I mean, I met Chicks on Speed, for instance, as a fan.

[00:05:14.77] I saw them play at Art Basel. I forget which years. I think it was after the 9/11—the 2001 one was canceled, I believe, and I think I saw them in 2002 or so. I can double check that, but—and I saw them play.

[00:05:33.73] Jeffrey Deitch had brought them to Art Basel to play, and then I just hung out with them. And then we ended up keeping in touch. I did some photos while they were making a video at—after their performance in Miami, where I'm from. So I was hanging out pretty much and then from groupie to collaborator. W.A.G.E. came later—around 2007 or 2008. And then we—a bunch of us started talking in 2008.

[00:06:01.27] As mentioned in our previous time, the economic—what was framed as the economic crash happened. And we were kind of—people were saying, It's not a good time to talk about artist's payment and artist fees. And we said, Well, when things were good before the crash, nobody was speaking about these things. So it really doesn't seem to matter.

[00:06:20.60] So I think that took a lot of perseverance and persistence amongst a group of people who had been experiencing something for a long time. And then collaborating with Layla and Sonya was a kind of more—I would say grassroots, organic kind of situation where we self-funded this exploration and made a work without any determined exhibition or goal or deadline.

[00:06:50.40] And it really was an incredible, magical project and really gave me my footing in video work—which I had been mostly focused on photography up until that point. And then Ridyekeulous, again, a kind of natural growth from a longer term—around 1996 or so, Nicole Eisenman and I met through Out magazine. I had photographs—I had arranged the photographing of her for an article because I was the photo editor at the magazine.

[00:07:23.91] And then we kind of became friends from that. And then by 2005, we were like, It's time to maybe do something together. The symbiotic—the symbiosis and the unraveling absurdity of this country and our world and the kind of dire seriousness and—fused with humor that we kind of both have—had a kind of cultural perspective, perhaps, both being Reformed Jews, both being artists. And I don't know, yeah, So those—I don't know.

[00:08:02.15] All of these—and all of these interconnections were, again, from this kind of ground up place of the early years of meeting through our work and through community.

[00:08:16.47] ANN CVETKOVICH: I love it. I love—

[00:08:17.25] A.L. STEINER: In all of those interconnections.

[00:08:19.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, I love the idea of openness as a tool, a material, and the way that then makes relationship, a way that things happen, too.

[00:08:34.28] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, intimacy and spheres of—well, I don't know. This idea of spheres of influence, but yeah, for me, it was his friendships or the desire for the friendship. [Laughs.] Or breakups, I don't know.

[00:08:52.59] ANN CVETKOVICH: Well, also, your comment about from groupie to collaborator, which is a little tongue in cheek, but I've long thought that is actually a good trajectory. And for me groupie is sometimes been used pejoratively, but actually it often—for sexist reasons. So if you embrace it along with fandom, then admiring somebody's work can be a great way to build a relationship with them, right?

[00:09:19.90] A.L. STEINER: Right.

[00:09:20.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: Which doesn't mean you're subordinate because you're the admirer or the groupie.

[00:09:25.21] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, and I won't say this negated the fact that, yes, I was

having sex with some of these people. [Laughs.] So that's also—but if you take out the sex—misog and you take out the—kind of the gender role, then, yeah, sex and intimacy and sociality like Elizabeth—like sadly, the late Elizabeth Freeman, whose work I really love in *Time Binds* when she speaks about historiography in terms of intimacy and sex and sociality. I kind of love that line of thinking.

[00:10:04.90] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and it also—that—the sex and sociality and making work to be—looks different from a queer perspective, too, where it's no longer freighted with potentially heterosexual—heterosexist relations between men and their lady lovers.

[00:10:27.60] A.L. STEINER: Or men and their instruments.

[00:10:29.11] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:10:29.21] A.L. STEINER: I mean, I think like the love, or crush, or like desire you feel for someone may shift and change and not be so clear—or lust libidinal desires. It takes a while for things to sort themselves out, but nonetheless, depends on how one comes to these places and people. Yeah.

[00:10:55.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: And sometimes it's—in my family, we talk about how sometimes if you have a crush on somebody, it's better to just make work with them rather than actually— [Laughs.]

[00:11:02.60] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, totally—than move in with them.

[00:11:05.10] ANN CVETKOVICH: Have sex with them.

[00:11:06.71] A.L. STEINER: Have sex with them. Sometimes you want to think for a moment, have that space.

[00:11:14.36] ANN CVETKOVICH: And making work together can be so exciting. I mean, it's right up there with sex for me. [Laughs.]

[00:11:19.31] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, it's transformative, like, physiologically, psychologically. It's all the things. They just kind of like—they mesh and kind of conglomerate in all these different forms. And yeah—for instance, just thinking even about W.A.G.E., it was like we were all hanging out a lot. Same with Community Action Center, A.K. and I—or with W.A.G.E.—K8 Hardie and A.K. Burns and I—we're all hanging out.

[00:11:55.70] And these different kind of formulations happen, like A.K. and I kind of broke off and decided to do an art project together. K8 and I had also done work together. I worked with her on *Fashion Fashion*. Then W.A.G.E. kind of coalesced and came out of that with many other people joining.

[00:12:16.13] So, yeah, I think it's about having the time and the space and the connection and the interconnection and interest in each other and trust and kind of—yeah, like building relationships where you feel the strength to do these things—like make something without a lot of support or start a group without anyone thinking it's a good idea or whatever. [Laughs.] Like, you can be as crazy and careless or smart or stupid—whatever.

[00:12:54.43] It's like you just have to have the space to be able to fail, essentially—which is what LTTR is—when you mentioned LTTR, I thought a lot about that work then and how important the ideas around success and failure became in that moment, too, in the early aughts.

[00:13:12.03] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, right, which feeds—now I'm wanting to talk about all of these different projects simultaneously, but that's a sign of how they're connected. But yeah, I think that—not fear of failure or Ridyekeulous and humor and ridiculousness—very connected—

[00:13:35.94] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[00:13:36.39] ANN CVETKOVICH: —that sensibility.

[00:13:40.69] And I wonder, I'm interested about the way that something like Ridyekeulous—like thinking about it in relation to Nicole's work, for example, that can be very funny, her solo stuff, and also very serious because of her relation to painting—serious painting

traditions. But it sometimes can be nice to have the side projects where you don't have to be so accountable or responsible. [Laughs.]

[00:14:19.75] A.L. STEINER: I mean, how do you see that as someone looking at that from afar?

[00:14:30.97] ANN CVETKOVICH: Well, maybe it's also—this could take us also to W.A.G.E., because I wanted to also be thinking about commodification, and the market, and what happens when you have something to sell or don't have something to sell. And so I'm wondering also about W.A.G.E. and this idea of artists' fees and so on and how that might, in your case, be informed by working across a lot of media that aren't necessarily producing objects for galleries to sell.

[00:15:15.82] A.L. STEINER: Yeah. I mean, I can't say that the media I work in aren't saleable. I mean, I'm not working in social practice or dematerialized practice. But I think the conditions under how we work together and what we produce, and the kind of, I think, unattributed personal ways of survival. For instance, someone could have—could be financially secure. And it's not something that's necessarily shared with even with a close group of people until the years go by, and there might be an understanding—oh you don't have to work.

[00:15:59.55] Or have income, or you have some financial security, whereas other people really don't or somewhere in the middle. I mean I've worked through my career in sales, and my commercial success hasn't supported me. And to be honest, W.A.G.E. itself, which came from a swath of people who had really varied financial conditions but were either concerned personally or concerned about the kind of bigger picture of how exploitation had kind of become de rigueur within the community that we were all a part of.

[00:16:46.07] And so I think it was a lot about understanding and seeing and having empathy. And that's just a kind of condition that has shifted and changed just in a general way in our country—like a huge way where being non empathetic or even like verging on being violent is like acceptable behavior. Whereas, like in the early aughts, it was—there was definitely a clear concern. Late capitalism was kind of maybe like being grappled with a bit more, and there was more awareness.

[00:17:21.46] Whereas, now I find it to be less and less. So I find awareness to be—or empathy to be, especially since the advent of social media, to be like a debatable topic. Like, No, I don't have to be empathetic, or yes, I should be. Whereas, in this time, without this kind of barrage of voices and input, there was just certain traditions, I think—and sentiments within the arts community that allowed for empathy to be a driving force in a small form of activism around exploitation and self-exploitation.

[00:18:00.80] And the self-exploitation part really was the determining factor. I mean, of course, we know that large institutions or large corporations have a kind of implicit mandate that—to get to the bottom line, to like do—get the most from the people or the clients or the workers, whatever it is. It's kind of just a condition of late capitalism.

[00:18:23.06] But I think the self-exploitation—continually doing something where your own economic survival was precarious or at risk in a city that is—especially in New York, where our work was centered in New York through W.A.G.E. Especially trying to live in New York, it was just very clear that there was no way around these issues. Whereas, now I think there were some people at the time who expressed, well, if you don't financially make it as an artist, you're just not a good artist. That kind of sentiment, which is like a kind of pseudo meritocracy or belief in the meritocracy—which many artists do know is not the case, and know is not real and true, and needed a voice to kind of speak out about it.

[00:19:14.18] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. That makes sense to me. We could talk more about that, but maybe it'll come back. I wanted to also, as we were talking about sort of tongue in cheek about sex, and intimacy, and collaboration—I was thinking it'd be worth saying a little bit about *Community Action Center* and kind of how that got made out of collaborations because it—I haven't seen it for a while.

[00:19:48.11] But my memory of it is of a series of kind of shoots that were probably produced under these circumstances of kind of collaborating with different people and then assembling it as a thing. And there's something really interesting about its experiments with sex, intimacy, erotics.

[00:20:14.54] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, of a community. Yeah, like on a community level.

[00:20:18.45] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:20:20.79] A.L. STEINER: Whatever that means. I mean, it's true. It meant something. I mean, we called it a sociosexual film that we released in 2010, but we worked on it from 2007 to 2010. So it was a couple of years. And it was really singularly motivated by seeing this amazing performative community around us and asking people if they'd be interested to make something that was sexually explicit, erotic—kind of exploring queer sexual—putting the—we called it putting the homo—putting—sorry. Putting the sexual back in homosexuality.

[00:20:58.87] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay, yeah.

[00:20:59.43] A.L. STEINER: Similarly to what happened at USC, which I said was putting the human back in the humanities. It's been a useful kind of dissection of language—which, again, yeah, also the dissection of language being a crucial tool—part of the avant garde toolbox that I think I have utilized for my whole entire, whatever, 30-something year career.

[00:21:23.05] But yeah—I think—yeah, back to just the base—the kind of basic bitch part of *Community Action Center* was saying we have to kind of reach out to these—our—these people that we love so much, and we love their work so much. So those are two different things. That was two different things for us, developed over kind of a couple drinking evenings, coming home and saying there's nothing fun to watch.

[00:21:54.82] Like, we want to make that thing that's fun to watch, that's fucking crazy, and cool, and wild and celebrates like, yeah, queer joy. Or at the time we probably said lesbian joy as well because—or dyke joy, I don't know. These words were all kind of becoming convoluted and beautifully confused in our vernacular. And we saw it as, yeah, kind of lesbian—lesbian culturally centric in a way.

[00:22:26.32] And we also worked with all people of all identities and genders. So it wasn't specifically one thing. And I will say that oftentimes in my photo work, I think viewers would say my work is about lesbians. And that negates so many of the people and identities in my work.

[00:22:47.66] But I think when you use this kind of predominant cultural vernacular or visual or linguistic or semantic that people get kind of caught up in the language. And I—on one hand, I really love that. On the other hand, sometimes it's a little limiting. But for us, it was really about expanding the language of erotic and sexual representation.

[00:23:15.51] And so that's what we set out to do. We didn't know if we could do it, but I think we did in the end make something. And, and when we presented it, we said if—we were inspired by Annie Sprinkle's advice that if you don't see the things you like, then you have to make them. And we had the privilege to kind of see this through for three years. Having to make something or being able to make something or two different things, but we did feel motivated like it was urgent.

[00:23:45.59] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and it's interesting that you mentioned Annie Sprinkle because I was going to ask. This would be also a perfect place to talk about feminism, like feminist influences reaching back to pro-sex feminisms of the '80s. Last time we talked about what was going on in the queer '90s with representation of various kinds in publications like *Out* magazine. We talked about feminism in relation to LTTR.

[00:24:14.28] So yeah, I'm just thinking about this evolution of like, why are—by the aughts, we're still trying to figure out how to make representation that's like sexy and fun.

[00:24:26.77] A.L. STEINER: And still—and now even.

[00:24:29.27] ANN CVETKOVICH: But also I think what you're suggesting, too—or the way in which by then feminism and queer is a big umbrella—which also includes an increasing number of genders, which also then lead to do sexualities as well. So yeah, how are you part of a lineage that also is expressing itself in a particular way in that aughts period, building on previous generations?

[00:25:01.11] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I think—well, it's the feminisms. It's the kind of trajectory

of going from the Lavender Menace to the politics of trans feminism and trans humanism and understanding all the possibilities within what is kind of often this—yeah, like you said, giant umbrella of feminism. I mean, I didn't learn.

[00:25:36.73] I mean, as I think I mentioned in the first session, I learned a lot from this passive form of understanding feminism through my mother who didn't have language or academic knowledge—only had lived experience of understanding liberation through a feminist lens from the constrictions of gender roles and heteropatriarchy. But no language, no concepts, no words—just living that and having three sisters.

[00:26:12.80] So our family was very like cis gendered, female, heavy. And then learning through people like Carol Leigh and people I mentioned like through activism—understanding feminism through that lens. I didn't really—I didn't take any courses in my undergraduate studies and never studied and got a master's. So all of it was like autodidactic learning from a community and learning from—and seeing work. Essentially, seeing work like Annie's and eventually also collaborating with her when we did the tour in the US for *Community Action Center* and asking her to present it with us in San Francisco.

[00:27:02.23] And hearing—listening to her, seeing her work—seeing her, for instance, in some of Michel Auder's work as well. Some people that were mentors that weren't necessarily like feminist identified artists but this kind of larger expression and understanding of a world like the art world. There's kind of terrible things about it and magical things about it, as there is in any so-called world.

[00:27:31.52] And learning so much through the people in it, and learning and speaking with each other and—so I think, yeah. I mean, my formulation of my own personal form of feminism or queer feminism comes from, well, I guess—And one anecdote would be I was asked if I was an angry feminist in—when I did an installation in Germany. By a journalist, I was asked first if my work was feminist.

[00:28:07.04] And I said, well, yeah. I mean, I don't know, what are the options kind of thing? [Laughs.] I don't know. I never understood—like, I'm not—like, I don't want to be—understand my own agency? I don't want to understand my own liberation. I don't know what that perspective is.

[00:28:25.64] I choose oppression! But I said yes. This work, I guess—yeah, what are the options? And then the journalist said, are you an angry feminist? To kind of like be more intellectual, I assume. [Laughs.] I was like, Well, what else? What are the options?

[00:28:47.62] Like, look at the world. Yeah, I mean, it's hard not to be angry, but I mean, I don't know. I think—so like this form of—kind of this—the absurdity of like the position to be explaining oneself and the privilege of other artists to not have to explain or to negate that identity and say, No, I'm not a blah, blah, blah. No, I'm not a gay artist, which also happens, or I'm not a feminist, which happens a lot.

[00:29:16.62] These negations are really not about explaining anything. They're about dismissing or shirking having to take a kind of—to kind of have a conscious relationship. So they're meaningless when someone says, I'm not a this. It's more like, Well, what actually are we? What are—what am I?

[00:29:38.74] And I'm kind of—I think I'm eternally struggling in a good way with that. Like that's—that is something that I want to focus on.

[00:29:51.72] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and I think, too, as you're talking—I'm realizing part of what distinguishes your work, I think, is not so much feminism or no feminism. But there are often disputes or debates within feminism and within queer politics. So a lot of your projects, I would say, are against a respectability politics. So that's where the Ridyeulous comes in.

[00:30:19.58] That's where explicit sexuality comes in. And I wonder if that would be particularly relevant for you—for me as well—coming out of the gay '90s. And you mentioned last time that struggle you had or your decision to ultimately leave commercial magazine production because you felt limited in what you could do there. So it seems to me one of the hallmarks of your work across many projects is wanting that space where you can be as queer or as freaky deaky as you need to be.

[00:30:53.87] [Laughs.]

[00:30:54.74] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, want to have an outlet. Want to have a legitimate outlet, a legitimized kind of like conduit. I mean, I was just listening to Sleater-Kinney, a little like live concert thing. And they were talking about like the band being this incredible tool for their entire adult lives to deal with shit. And I mean, yeah, I'm looking for that.

[00:31:21.93] I'm not looking. I mean, again, it's not—there's not really a financial exchange for this—the types of projects that I'm engaged in. There is, there is like support and kind of cultural capital. And really the motivation is not necessarily the—I'm joking, tongue in cheek—but it's not the cultural legitimacy. It's the actual like being able to do it in a sustained manner—like that it can work.

[00:31:55.71] Somebody will listen. Somebody will allow us to kind of have the space to figure some stuff out. And that's all one can ask—hope for in terms of like feminisms and the yes and the nos and like the whys and the why nots. Yeah, it's kind of like there—like I mentioned, *Lavender Menace*. Like the idea that feminism is inclusive is not—has never been a reality personally for me.

[00:32:21.57] It's more about what is it that it allows me to have language and space to say yes and no to the world and kind of define and have language. I mean, one of the things that I think—and I thought about this when I was making that book long ago with *Out* that we talked about—the kind of compendium of like what gay life is and then thinking about what feminism is and all of these things. It's like the language partially developed.

[00:32:57.42] It partially relates. It's partial ideas. To expect that ideological positions, or like something that's been developed by our ancestors, or the people that have come before us—they can only do so much. People can only do so much in their time in the space in which they're kind of generating ideas and positions.

[00:33:22.48] And so we have to take that for what it is, and the expectation that there's answers is clearly completely fallible. I mean, we're in a time machine now where—I was just reading this morning some new right wing ideas are out around eliminating no fault divorce. It's like—I mean, we're just going to be grappling with this kind of churning of human infallibility and ideas eternally.

[00:33:53.00] So it's like how we're going to use something, use a tool that's been partially or like kind of put out there, is like our mandate. There's a book that just came out by Emma Heaney, *Feminism Against Cisness*, and it's like. Yeah. That's what we have to talk about. What are we grappling with?

[00:34:17.28] What's our plan for the eternal force of perpetuating our liberation for those who don't want to live under oppressive circumstances? We have to keep figuring it out. And we don't really get a break.

[00:34:36.71] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. No, not right now, for sure. But yeah, you're right. It's maybe already—I mean, we are in a very different moment now but not far enough away from the aughts, maybe, to fully historicize. But I'm just—we are in a moment of huge backlash right now.

[00:34:52.09] A.L. STEINER: Right.

[00:34:52.46] ANN CVETKOVICH: But as we're talking, I'm realizing—oh, yeah, one thing to maybe mention for posterity is that in that aughts period, leading up to the Supreme Court decision that legalizes gay marriage in 2015, is that a lot of us were concerned about the narrowing of LGBTQ movement to just getting marriage legalized. So I do feel like a lot of your work was holding space for these other ways of being, like keeping it queer.

[00:35:25.59] And I know for me, that is a very important aspect of a lot of your projects is just feeling like, yes. Thank you for—[Laughs.]

[00:35:33.83] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, thank you. Thank you for saying that. Thank you for—

[00:35:37.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: Keeping it queer.

[00:35:37.25] A.L. STEINER: Putting the homo back—the sexual back in the homosexual. Or

the homo. I mean, yeah. I just, like I said, fighting for—like when I started working for *Out*, thinking about fighting for what we want to be and not what we have to be. That was super crucial.

[00:35:50.96] I mean—and fixed identities, fixed roles, fixed—the idea of like kind of formulation and like a big influence on me was Jonathan Ned Katz's book, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, and I try to use that—his writing in my queer seminar—

[00:36:12.00] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:36:12.48] A.L. STEINER: —currently at Yale. But the invention of the fixed identity or the kind of requirement, compulsory—or like Adrienne Rich's ideas around compulsory heterosexuality and even, again—and Butler's work on gender roles and how disruptive the right wing sees all of this work around gender.

[00:36:35.90] Yeah, it's about like pushing back against like the fixedness. And if my work does that—and thank you for like, feeling it or saying it. But if I can reach that space with what I'm making, then, yeah. Then that's—that feels really significant. And, again, it's kind of like a never-ending pursuit. It's not like one figures it out even in the form or in the media.

[00:37:04.14] Or is it through activism rather than passivity? Is it about speaking out? Is it about which place we want to show this film? Is it about how I can use the archive—an archive to explode the notion of the fixed singular image? I mean, there's a lot of things I'm pushing back against.

[00:37:29.28] And it was even simply, in the early days of showing my photo work, saying to galleries, I didn't want to have space between the images. And it was like I had to legitimize, like, why? It's like—but they can't see the artwork because they're all mashed. They're all mixed together. It's all like—it becomes like confusing.

[00:37:52.00] And I'm like, Yeah. It's—I want it maybe I'm seeking confusion. Maybe I don't want it to be—I don't want clarity, necessarily. I don't know. It's like I have to—you learn—I think you learn by, of course, by doing these things. But you also learn by the conversations.

[00:38:08.29] I mean, the zine for *Community Action Center*, A.K. and I made, came out of talking with the wonderful friends and the gallery. We were working with Kelly Taxter and Pascal Spengemann, and they were—we were like, Yeah, that person is holding a labrys. And they're like, A what?

[00:38:25.03] And we were like, a labrys. And they're like, Huh? And we're like, Yeah, we can't put this out in the world without doing a CliffsNotes because I used CliffsNotes to get through high school. So somebody needs to use this CliffsNotes to get through this film. So we did. We did that.

[00:38:43.48] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, that's actually a great way into the area I wanted to explore next, which is some of your individual in photo shows. I love what you're saying about being against the fixed singular image, how that led you to forms of display where there's a lot of photos without any white space between them. So I'm thinking—I wanted to ask you about the Whitney Biennial in 2014.

[00:39:11.29] But I also was realizing I wanted to ask you about the Puppies and Babies show from 2012 because I think—I didn't get to see that show. But I think of it as a precursor to the Whitney installation and others that I have seen that feature a wall of photos, which last time you talked about as kind of a go-to for you with some of your individual work. So yeah, can you just talk about those shows, your photo practice, approach to installation? Yeah, anything you want to say about them.

[00:39:50.84] A.L. STEINER: And I've had a lot of coffee at this point, so just stop me when we have to move on to the next thing. Thanks for bringing those two work—those two shows up, which were super, super crucial to my development as—in kind of the exhibition world. I mean, nobody probably—not many people saw the *Puppies and Babies* installation because it was in a hallway in the school I was teaching at. [Laughs.]

[00:40:17.15] I mean, we called it—Sharon Lockhart had started this gallery that was a hallway. She's—and I worked with her for the five years that I was there and adore her. And

she's so amazing as an artist and thinker and pedagogue. That group I worked with—Frances Stark, Sharon, Charlie White, Tala Madani—I mean, we just had an incredible time.

[00:40:40.13] But Sharon had started this small little hallway gallery. And so, yeah, when I started teaching there we were like, I'll do something. People did things every once in a while, and they're faculty and students. So I did. I just said, Okay, well, I'll do the show that I've been thinking about because puppies and babies are two genres of photos that you're not supposed to show.

[00:41:02.19] And I have to deal with that because I have a fuck load of photos of puppies and babies. [Laughs.] So it was like a very kind of simplistic premise and in a very like kind of non-celebratory gallery. It was not somewhere like where I'd—that it was like it was basically kind of de-legitimate—non legitimate gallery space almost because it wasn't really known about or seen by the public. But I really wanted to explore it.

[00:41:32.71] So I mounted the show with—again, my collaborator at the time was Donnie Cervantes, who printed my work. And he was the—we had both gotten jobs at USC. So he was working on managing the lab, and I was teaching as faculty. So we mounted the show of my photographs.

[00:41:54.67] And at the time, of course, Maggie Nelson, and I, and Harry were friends in LA. And I asked Maggie if she'd be interested to write an essay for a small zine I was going to publish with this kind of—again, kind of almost illegitimate show. It's like a secret show in a school hallway.

[00:42:17.01] But she was totally—yeah, totally game for it. And so it was super important for me to explore this kind of like delegitimate genre of photo in this weird unknown space that not many people were going to see. And with someone who's like writing work that I was very inspired by because I really want—she had—she was going through getting pregnant and the childbirth process.

[00:42:43.42] And I really wanted to kind of know her perspective on these pictures to help me understand how we can see them differently than the kind of rote ways that pictures of dogs or babies might be received. So that was an incredible project. And then I printed a poster of it in the zine and—after the show came down and sold it at my partner, Rachel Berks's store, Otherwild, which she had started when we got to LA as well—so her whole life around this idea of building community through retail and through the craftspeople in our community and the makers and artists.

[00:43:22.14] I, of course, was one of those artists. So I sold it there for the years that she was open. But nonetheless, yeah. And I think—I forget what year that was. We can look at it and add it.

[00:43:35.93] ANN CVETKOVICH: It's 2012.

[00:43:37.28] A.L. STEINER: 2012, so—and then, yeah. And then, basically, around that time or a little bit after that time, Stuart Comer approached me about being a part of, of the Whitney Biennial in 2014. So I had started—and *Puppies and Babies* was part of a trajectory of large scale collage work that I had done starting at John Connelly Presents, which I mentioned last time

[00:44:04.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, yeah.

[00:44:04.21] A.L. STEINER: —when we talked and had done iterations.

[00:44:07.46] But, of course, the biennial has a—it's not like the gallery. And I forget that, actually, we have to look at the notes of what that gallery was called [inaudible] because Sharon gave it a name, actually. But whatever that gallery—

[00:44:22.23] ANN CVETKOVICH: I think it's 3001 Gallery is what it—

[00:44:24.88] A.L. STEINER: It was like—it was the address. It was the address of the building. So doing something at 3001 versus the Whitney was going to be a huge scale—scaling up. And so, Stuart and I talked for a while, and I proposed to do a two-part piece, which was a multichannel video within a—within the collage. So that's what I ended up doing.

[00:44:50.87] And it was a kind of breakthrough moment for me. I had done—with Every Ocean Hughes, I had done a multimedia install with her at Grand Arts in her show *Ecstatic Resistance*. That was a slide show within a photo collage. And that was also really important in the scope of like developing the work.

[00:45:12.43] But—and then this was a—yeah, was a jump from that because I had completed *C.L.U.E.* And I was ready to kind of do another feature—well, even—so *C.L.U.E.* was 10 minutes in total for the first channel, and then expanded to 14 channels eventually in different—in live versions. But what ended up being a piece called *More Real Than Reality Itself* was my first feature after *Community Action Center*.

[00:45:44.83] *Community Action Center* was 69 minutes, which was released in 2010. And then *More Real Than Reality Itself* was 2014. And that was my first solo—let's just say "solo" in scare quotes because it wasn't. I worked with five incredible people with—for the actual content of the film, but that was 54 minutes.

[00:46:08.98] And it was three channels, and then the large scale collage around it at the Whitney was called *Cost/Benefit Analysis*, which relates to my relationship to *W.A.G.E.*, to late capitalism, to this idea of like what's valuable, what do we kind of revere? And what's discarded?

[00:46:32.78] Kind of dealt with this idea of radicality as far as the video work, like the etymology of radical, which means the root. And so I dealt with that—with all the work in one kind of go.

[00:46:49.68] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, that's funny. It's funny getting to hear the backstory on *Puppies and Babies*. And I realize, of course, the reason a lot of us maybe even know about it is because of Maggie writing about it. And in addition to, I think, the original catalog is available for download on your website. So I appreciate—

[00:47:12.84] A.L. STEINER: It's nice. It's generous to call it a catalog. It's a zine.

[00:47:16.32] ANN CVETKOVICH: The publication, the whatever it was. I mean, it's really useful. Obviously, I'm a bit of a nerd about these things that other people may not be. But to get to see that starting point for a mode of exhibition, we see larger scale at the Whitney, and then the collaboration with Maggie, which is another interesting one, given the fame that she's gone on to.

[00:47:44.19] Not that she wasn't already, but *The Argonauts* really took her to another level. And it's interesting that the *Puppies and Babies* piece appears in there. So her writing about your work becomes a part of her art practice as well.

[00:48:00.72] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, the exchange was really magical. And *The Argonauts* was—is an incredible book.

[00:48:06.76] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[00:48:07.44] A.L. STEINER: And I'm—I was honored to be a part of it but also like in the background honored to be a collaborator in the production of some of that writing.

[00:48:21.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and it gives people—I'm sure I would because I think *Argonauts* came out in 2014, so probably me and others would have been reading it at the same time as maybe we were seeing the installation at the Whitney. So then they kind of converge because even though, again, somewhat tongue in cheek—you're saying no one ever just displays photos of puppies and babies. So I was going to be transgressive and do that in another version of like the clash of low and high that I think is a part of your sensibility.

[00:48:53.06] But I guess I see it in that tradition of, say, going back to Nan Goldin, who we talked about last time, of you're just kind of documenting your community or living in your community. And because you carry a camera around or can set up video shoots, then this stuff emerges from the lived experience of hanging out together. And in this queer way that also can include puppies and babies but is about also queer family and queer sociality.

[00:49:28.43] So that's how I see the Whitney installation. And for me, there's a thrill about seeing so many people I know on the walls of the Whitney. That always feels like a score. So

yeah, I kind of also wanted to hear about what it meant for you to be selected for the Whitney Biennial. Even as you have a critique of institutions, it's very meaningful to be invited to participate in them.

[00:50:00.46] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, with the work, for instance, with W.A.G.E., it was always about the, the institutions are part of us. We are part of them. So it was never that like—I never saw it as a distinctive relationship that I was pushing against. It was more about we have to treat each other equitably. And that also bleeds into our own studio practices and how we work inside of our own studios, for instance, with other workers and artists.

[00:50:31.21] So yeah, there's a mutuality and respect quotient that I'm striving towards in my life and don't want to be—and want to try to apply that to my external relationships, too. But yeah, I mean, Maggie and I did a—I did an interview—well, we did an interview around that time also in *BOMB* together. So there was a kind of perpetuating of this conversation that had been going on since 2012. So that was really fruitful.

[00:51:01.21] But seeing the—well, the work being at the Whitney and Stuart's support in that particular biennial—it was the last biennial at the Breuer building. And so it was super special. I mean, that building was so formative for me in my life growing up seeing art—even when I was younger and, of course, visiting the Whitney at some point and then going there, of course, as a young adult and as I moved into being an artist. And then finally showing there and then putting up—I mean, I wouldn't say that the photos I take are of a queer community.

[00:51:34.87] But everyone's queer in my pictures because sometimes people are whatever they are. They're not—they may not identify as queer, but it queers them, the work, I think. And for me that's super important. And I think heard one comment from someone who was at the Whitney looking at my work and heard somebody over—overheard someone say, I don't know what this lesbian thing is when they were standing in front of my work. I don't get it.

[00:52:04.45] And they—and I forget who it was that told me this, but I was like, kind of thrilled in this way. Of course, you're always interested in what people are saying. And I was like, huh, it's so interesting that people are like this is—this is something I don't get. It's like that kind of double or triple or quadruple consciousness, as Malik, my friend—my friend who I did the catalog entry with was Malik Gaines.

[00:52:28.43] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:52:29.30] A.L. STEINER: I asked Malik to do the catalog entry for the Whitney Biennial, and he had done the show and written this essay called *Quadruple Consciousness*. And it was just a coincidence that someone overheard someone else saying this, and I got this message because for me, it's like, yeah. I want people to be in this world and wonder what it is.

[00:52:51.54] I mean, when I see it—when I get finished with a large scale collage I'm also like, whoa. What's been going on for the past couple of years? Like these—I'm also like, trying to trace these memories and these—and the life. It's kind of like traceable past that suddenly materializes before me. And when somebody maybe hasn't seen something that they have heard is a queer world or a queer life, it gives viscosity and materiality to something that is very real.

[00:53:30.77] And whether each person or how each person identifies no longer matters because of the conglomeration, because of the lack of distinction between the images. It's like it is a creation of a world, and it's not real or fictional. It's just—it's a new formulation. And as queer as that can be received is what I feel does the work.

[00:53:56.31] And yeah, it's fun to think that people are like, what is this? I don't get it. And it's like, yeah, well, maybe you don't get it, but that's okay also. You don't have to get it. You just have to look.

[00:54:09.99] ANN CVETKOVICH: Right. And that's—yeah, that's something that can come into view, as it were, through being on display at the Whitney Biennial, which has—is supposed to be like the whole art world and for everybody.

[00:54:28.01] A.L. STEINER: Well, I remember seeing Cathy Opie's retrospective at the

Guggenheim and people staring at large scale images of dykes. And I was like, this is cool to watch people staring because one, they're—you're not supposed to stare at people, especially when you feel like they're different. And even though people do and even go to the point of interrupting people that they perceive as queer—speaking to each other. But in a museological setting, it's super interesting to see people stare.

[00:54:58.67] And I think that's—yeah, it's kind of a gift. I mean, they can't—there's—it's kind of looked down upon otherwise. But in these contexts, I think we are presenting queer life, and it—and it's terrible. [Laughs.] It's watchable.

[00:55:18.43] ANN CVETKOVICH: Did—what sort of impact did it have for you just to sort of demystify the professional process to appear in the Whitney Biennial? Is it like a career watershed for you, or do we want to critique that?

[00:55:40.25] A.L. STEINER: Well, no, I'm very thankful. And there's always—again, there's always kind of background conversations or critiques one could have. But no, ultimately, I mean, it's—it was a milestone, for sure. And even Greater New York, when I was—in 2010 with Connie Butler and Klaus Biesenbach and Neville Wakefield—was super important for me. Just the recognition is important and crucial.

[00:56:13.89] Are my—is my—has my career been impacted by speaking out or being perceived as an activist? Sure. And that's kind of—I think that's kind of—that's not really what you're asking. But do—there's just so many ways and reasons why these shows especially—surveys, they're kind of this formulaic industry.

[00:56:57.47] Like the art industrial complex is really reliant on art fairs and these surveys. The art world, kind of—that's how—in MFA programs, there's a kind of systemic—systematic relationship to this how you're legitimized through recognition. But, yeah, it's—generally, it's important to have this legitimacy.

[00:57:26.31] Is it foolproof? Does it carry you through to somewhere else? No, it's not like I became—my life became a magical carpet ride after that. But—

[00:57:38.79] ANN CVETKOVICH: Right, yeah. No, that's a good answer. And that's what I was looking for in part. I'm also thinking about the fact that some of these interviews for the Smithsonian have come out of expanding the criteria for inclusion, where one thing I learned is that, typically, the Smithsonian only interviewed artists who had a major career retrospective. And they realized, well, that already kind of stacks the deck because underrepresented artists may not have reached that milestone.

[00:58:19.26] A.L. STEINER: Interesting.

[00:58:19.95] ANN CVETKOVICH: And yeah, so I'm wanting to have these interviews also reflect the way in which different artists engage with those more conventional milestones for what constitutes a career as an artist.

[00:58:39.55] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, a kind of like mini retrospective that Kristen Kennedy mounted with PICA at PSU. I forget what year that was, but that was super important for me because it was the first time to show the kind of multiplicity of my practice. And again, it wasn't a kind of nationally recognized show or like recognized in a large scale museum institution, let's just say.

[00:59:11.23] It was more university gallery, and Howie Chen mounted a recent—the largest show I've done in New York at 80 Washington Square East called *Irthebound*. I mean, I think these things happen, and they happen on scales differently for different people. There's a plethora of artists. There's a limit to institutions and budgets.

[00:59:36.46] And there's a kind of repetition of certain tropes of art world or like the success that gets replicated through the gallery system and then kind of through the not-for-profit or nonprofit arts organizations. I mean, there's all these intersections, and a lot of that, of course, also I understood through work with W.A.G.E. and the boards of museums and what they collect.

[01:00:05.98] And if you're not collected on a kind of massive scale, the idea of having a retrospective in a museum is limited. So I think, yeah, there's different prohibitions and limitations, but we—for me, it's always important to think about the people who are able and

consciously think about how to feature the work that's important to them and where they do it and how and when they do it.

[01:00:39.06] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, I mean, the other piece I would throw in here is the curators. And I'm thinking about the fact that you have an important identity as a curator, and then I'm thinking about the names that you've mentioned as we've talked about some of these shows. So Stuart Comer I think of as having been someone who's done important work promoting queer and feminist artists.

[01:01:00.52] You mentioned Connie Butler. We haven't mentioned Helen Molesworth, but—

[01:01:04.74] A.L. STEINER: Helen, yeah—has been incredible. Yeah.

[01:01:05.37] ANN CVETKOVICH: I suspect she's also behind some of the things you've done.

[01:01:11.64] A.L. STEINER: Yeah.

[01:01:13.77] ANN CVETKOVICH: And Klaus Biesenbach, you mentioned. Also, if we think about some of the group shows like Every Ocean Hughes and Ecstatic Resistance where it's, again, an example of an artist functioning as a curator.

[01:01:32.28] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean—

[01:01:33.51] ANN CVETKOVICH: Significant—again, I think it's really important if we're trying to demystify or just tell the story of how shows get made—it's really important to see the work that certain kinds of curators have done in making inroads towards different kinds of museum shows.

[01:01:52.64] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, and Dean Dederko has been—

[01:01:56.14] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yes.

[01:01:56.35] A.L. STEINER: —so important in this—with my work and so many other people's works—showing people way before they're recognized or considered—

[01:02:07.54] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:02:08.08] A.L. STEINER: —deemed collectible or significant in the field—like having the insight to be really an artist curator in a way, rather than a kind of institutional curator. I mean, for instance—and also I met Barbara Hammer through *Community Action Center* because she went to see it at Taxter and Spengemann and had a critique of it and reached out to us.

[01:02:27.83] ANN CVETKOVICH: Really?

[01:02:28.27] A.L. STEINER: She asked the gallery if she could reach out to us, and, of course, they were like, Sure. And she did, and we became friends after that. Yeah, she—well, the press release hadn't mentioned her work, and so she contacted us to tell us.

[01:02:40.45] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay, yeah.

[01:02:40.57] A.L. STEINER: Barbara said, You mentioned, Fred Halsted, but like—hello. And we were like learning, and you do learn through your community and also through critique—which is important.

[01:02:53.81] Not to take critique as like some sort of like insult or fight but like to listen to people. And Barbara was also championed by Stuart—

[01:03:03.44] ANN CVETKOVICH: Stuart, yeah.

[01:03:03.59] A.L. STEINER: —and Stuart invited us to come speak at the Tate with—to show *Community Action Center*. When we went on our EU tour, he was our first stop and got us there essentially and invited Elisabeth Lebovici, who's also been incredible and supportive. I just saw her a week—two weeks ago when I was in Paris after a residency I did because a friend who was organizing a residency invited me during COVID.

[01:03:30.21] And I finally did it. And when my students ask me, how does this all work, essentially? Which the undergrads always are—need to know because it's so obfuscated and obtrusive. I said the community is—my community of friends and people and vice versa, we all are the ones perpetuating each other's work. And that's not the same for every artist.

[01:03:58.33] But for me particularly, it's been the way that I've survived making work—

[01:04:04.29] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:04:04.68] A.L. STEINER: —survived as a teacher pedagogue, having a job so that I can support myself to continue to make work and academia. It's all through the kind of support of people, actual people. And Howie, for instance, who mounted the 80 Washington Square East show that I mentioned that I just completed, I worked with—through W.A.G.E. for almost eight years.

[01:04:32.75] We were on the board together for that amount of time. So it's not really mysterious. Nicole and I have curated, our—I don't know how many are on that CV that I have, but we've curated more than half a dozen shows together. And it includes—it's included over—I think over almost probably nearly 80 or more artists that we've worked with.

[01:05:07.97] And I've written for my friends for their catalogs—Anna Sew Hoy. I wrote an essay for Miranda Lichtenstein. I just saw Linda Norton, who said, I read your essay that you wrote for Miranda. And she loved it. And like, it was so important for me to hear that.

[01:05:26.57] I don't know who reads something I wrote until they tell me. And to know that that is meaningful is also incredible. And so, yeah, I mean, without the symbiotic and support relationships, I would not still be making work. I can 100 percent attest to that because I haven't had a ton of—I don't have a huge amount of collectors.

[01:05:54.43] I have a good amount of institutions I've been collected by and some private collections. But ultimately, it's the support of a community that has kept my work like happening.

[01:06:08.52] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned, because I had wanted to ask you about them, both the recent Ridykeulous show and then the NYU one as two really major exhibitions from recent years which show that your work is going strong.

[01:06:34.65] A.L. STEINER: Well, it's still here.

[01:06:36.72] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, with—yeah, with Irthebound, do you want to say anything about your kind of relation to environmentalism, ecofeminism, to sort of climate justice? Obviously, of the moment, but—

[01:06:58.83] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, I'll start off by saying—unexpectedly, I got diagnosed with stage three colon cancer in 2022. And it was the same time that Howie asked me to do a show in the entirety of the gallery. So that was a huge moment for me. I was not symptomatic, but luckily, I had had a checkup, my first—

[01:07:24.39] And if anyone reads this transcript, please make sure you get your colonoscopy at 45 because I had no idea. No one—I don't have a history in my family of this, but—and so that was a life changing moment for me, literally, like confronting my mortality in a very palpable way. That was completely unexpected.

[01:07:47.97] And so the show was essentially a gift. Although, at the time, I wasn't sure I could do it. And Howie had, obviously, either naive or like confidence—naïveté or confidence—that I would be able to do it. So it was super important to keep me kind of making work and getting through this like really kind of terrible situation and, luckily, with the help of an incredible medical team and really good insurance through my university job.

[01:08:22.82] So all to say that I've survived that and with—also with the support of incredible friends like Guadalupe Maravilla, who also experienced having the same ailment and helped me so much. And I've been really thankful for the friendships and the experiences of also a community that can help outside of our practices with just support at moments when we need information and understanding of these difficult situations.

[01:08:58.13] So yeah, I mounted the show. And also Nicole and I—Eisenman and I had been talking to Nicole Yip, the curator at Nottingham Contemporary, since—when the pandemic—kind of shortly after the pandemic started. And Nicole and Nicole actually had their own conversation. And then Nicole Eisenman brought me in to say that a Ridykeulous show was what they were kind of like formulating.

[01:09:30.32] And it—and they were both projects that kind of went on for pretty much like, years—well, the Nottingham show for longer. And it was an offshoot of the first gay pride show that Hauser and Wirth had launched because they had asked Nicole to do something gay. And she was like, What do you mean?

[01:09:57.09] And then we kind of took over surreptitiously with the Ridykeulous project—which was a lot smaller than what we ended up doing at Nottingham. But that was the kind of seed or the egg—the ovarial idea—formulated to do a large-scale video show that took over Nottingham Contemporary. And it was our—Ridykeulous's first international project, and it will be our first catalog that's coming out in the fall with MIT Press.

[01:10:29.43] So they were both groundbreaking projects that were kind of insane to take on. I also ended up publishing a book of a presentation I did with Dia called *Textdemic* that was a request that they asked me to do before the pandemic—before the COVID pandemic broke out. But I had chosen Jenny Holzer's *Laments* from 1989 about the AIDS crisis. And coincidentally, then a pandemic broke out, and they canceled my talk.

[01:11:01.36] But we eventually did it when they relaunched in 2021. And it was the first Artists on Artists lecture that I—I also broke the ground rules there. And I invited eight other artists to speak with me about the both pandemic—epidemic—the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the COVID pandemic. And so there was a lot.

[01:11:23.61] Again, it was kind of like those early aughts. Like, suddenly in the 2020 through 2024 phase, I was dealing with a whole bunch of crazy shit—

[01:11:33.40] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:11:36.07] A.L. STEINER: —and managed to kind of do it all, especially under chemotherapy treatment.

[01:11:41.86] ANN CVETKOVICH: And the pandemic. So those two things were entwined.

[01:11:44.26] A.L. STEINER: And the pandemic. And I never contracted COVID. [Laughs.] So that was less of a concern for me. Did you? I don't know if you got COVID.

[01:11:52.15] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, it took a while, though. I was leading a pretty lockdown life, but I didn't have cancer. I mean, the stakes were higher.

[01:12:03.04] A.L. STEINER: I mean, it's either one thing or another, as they say.

[01:12:08.29] ANN CVETKOVICH: And so it sounds like both of those shows—was *Irthebound* also conceived—it's funny to use that language, conceived.

[01:12:21.69] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, just the Luce Irigaray language.

[01:12:23.94] ANN CVETKOVICH: Or alongside of pandemic and cancer treatment.

[01:12:29.14] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean—so it was because—and you talked about ecofeminism. You asked me about ecofeminism and how it kind of made what it's unfurling from my relationship to various ideas, conceptual and practical and lived experience through feminism. I mean, I—so the pandemic broke out. We holed up with our friends in Margaretville because we went for a weekend dinner at our friends', Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Reiner, who are dancers and choreographers.

[01:13:09.03] We went there for—me and my partner, Rachel Berks, and I went there for a dinner early March and never left—didn't leave for two months because the lockdown happened that weekend. So I found out while I was living with them in their house because our house was under reno—renovation—by my former student and friend, Felix Davey, another artist. He was living here in February 2020, had moved in to renovate our house.

[01:13:36.36] And so we went for dinner at Silas and Rashaun's, stayed there for two

months. And in that time, I had—I received word that I received the Guggenheim. So I received the Guggenheim to research—

[01:13:49.98] ANN CVETKOVICH: We should talk about another major mark of—

[01:13:54.40] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, it was a major mark.

[01:13:56.05] ANN CVETKOVICH: —success, conventionally.

[01:13:57.55] A.L. STEINER: And weirdly, nobody heard about us. Those received the—those that received the Guggenheim in March 2020 kind of fell by the wayside. And I'm not on social media, and I haven't been since 2016, since the 2016 election, because of the insanity of what I saw was happening on social media. So I—anyway, I received this news. It was great.

[01:14:21.02] And I received basically the award to—for my proposal to research Francoise d'Eaubonne's work. She wrote a book in 1974 called *Feminism or Death* that had never been translated to English by any feminist scholars in the US. So I was looking to work with that material and figure it out. Then I found out soon after that that Verso was translating it.

[01:14:45.25] So I didn't have to actually translate it, but I was still committed to working with that text. And also I was—I had worked with Laurie Weeks, my good friend, in my Whitney piece, *More Real Than Reality Itself*, along with Ericka Huggins from the Black Panther Party, Miya Masaoka, a colleague and activist—a colleague from Bard, a composer. Laurie Weeks was part of that and Bo Brown, an activist who was imprisoned as being part of the George Jackson Brigade.

[01:15:21.98] This was all part of that exploration of radicality. And the final subject in that piece was Carla Cloer, who was an activist—Sequoia activist in Porterville, California. So I had also proposed in the Guggenheim to kind of take off from that piece and do a second chapter working with Francoise d'Eaubonne's work and Laurie Weeks's work from *Zipper Mouth*. And I kind of ended up focusing—so from there, I received that word.

[01:15:54.19] And then for two years, of course, you figure out what you're doing with your Guggenheim. And so I worked on that, which essentially became the work that I worked on for the exhibition at—for Irthebound at 80 Washington Square East. So there was a bunch of work. It was like six or so rooms of work. But one of them was the culmination of this two channel video called *To Chnge Evrythng*, which focuses on some of—well focuses on the text of d'Eaubonne's work with some collaborators, including Noura Weddell, who was part of the effort and Eileen Myles -ALS].

[01:16:40.79] She was my USC colleague, and she was part of—she has a PhD in French literature, so she was helping me with the French version of the text before the Verso translation came out in 2022. But anyway, so yeah, it was a long process. And it eventually kind of culminated in that show. And Catherine Taft is doing a show at The Brick, which was formerly LAXART, in September that I'm working on with her to show that piece again and creating a new work from that and a collage in that work.

[01:17:14.06] And Catherine's show is about ecofeminism, and my relationship really to it was essentially having that word in my bio for 10 years. And eventually, I had to hire a lawyer because of some things that occurred at my former workplace known as USC. And my lawyer's legal assistant contacted me one day out of the blue and said, Hi. I want to talk to you about some stuff.

[01:17:44.74] And then he said at the end of the conversation—So I saw that you used the word ecofeminism in your bio. Do you know the origin of that? And I said, No, I don't. And he said, Well, I'm a lawyer now, but I also have a PhD in French literature. Francoise d'Eaubonne's coined that term in a book she wrote. And did you know—do you know her work?

[01:18:04.87] And said, no. So I learned through my lawyer.

[01:18:08.67] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow.

[01:18:09.15] A.L. STEINER: Because of a workplace thing that this woman who had not been translated hardly at all by—into the English language had coined that term. That was in

2015 that I talked to him. And so it took until 2023 to figure out that work. But, yeah.
[Laughs.]

[01:18:33.92] ANN CVETKOVICH: Wow.

[01:18:34.76] A.L. STEINER: Long story—long story long, sorry.

[01:18:41.09] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, I'm thinking as we're talking about the genesis of these recent exhibitions, I want to ask if you think your work has taken some kind of a shift in the context of these life transforming moments like getting cancer and the pandemic. Or if it seems continuous, if we're—maybe it's too close to be able to know. But I'm just curious. what you would have to say about that right now.

[01:19:18.02] A.L. STEINER: I mean, the other Smithsonian transcript I reviewed, of course, was Nancy Brooks Brody's who passed from cancer last year—at the end of last year in December. I had seen them, Brody at my birthday after my diagnosis when I had started chemo and after their diagnosis.

[01:19:50.32] They had been fighting at that point for two years or about two years. And yeah, I think losing Brody had an impact on me. And if people have time and they're reading this, please also read Brody's transcript—such an important person and artist within the community and in the world.

[01:20:15.74] And Elisabeth Lebovici, who had curated the last show that Brody participated in overseas, the Fierce Pussy work that was included at the Palais de Tokyo that Elisabeth mounted in a show she did based on her book. And—anyway, yeah, I mean, of course, the impacts—and that's what *Textdemic* also was very cathartic for me to organize in that moment where Dia was like an artist on artist lecture is usually just one person talking about one person's work.

[01:20:51.47] That's how we've done it. And I said, Well, in this moment, I feel like I have to—I'm compelled to do a collective kind of literal and figurative reading of Holzer's work, *Laments*, because it's such moving work. I mean, and even to think about the lament was so, of course, integral for me in that moment and also because of all these events and the trajectory of our lives in—through the HIV/AIDS crisis. What I experienced and knew of it, losing my friend who got me to move to New York City the week that I was going to press with *Textdemic* with GenderFail press and my publisher, Be Oakley.

[01:21:36.41] I got a call that my friend Mike Pernice, who was the one who asked me to move here, and I moved in with him, and we got evicted. That story I told you last session. He died the week that *Textdemic* went to press of complications—long term complications from his HIV medicine and just the, I guess wearing of his body over those years. And I lost him.

[01:22:03.69] So the book is dedicated to him, and we added that dedication page literally the day that Be started printing—Be Oakley prints in his home. He prints all of his editions in his home. So he's such a wonderful person to work with and understood that this was such a circular, crazy loop moment of my friend passing from HIV the week that I was pressing this, kind of, exploration of the feelings and textures from the recent pandemic and from the past.

[01:22:39.53] So yeah, these things are—keep impacting me. And I just did a talk with the curator at Dia, who I worked with, Matilde Guidelli-Guidi. And we did a talk at Printed Matter, finally, to release the book because our book release was also—Be and I were participating in a book release event with Jenny Holzer outside at this incredible space, the cemetery in the East Village, that Printed Matter had organized during what happened to be the wildfires in Canada that we—they had to cancel the event not because of the pandemic, because Holzer requested to do an outdoor event.

[01:23:24.40] But then it was canceled because the wildfire smoke was the—it was the day that the wildfire smoke shut down the whole city. And so we never did that release. I mean, it was like one thing after—if it wasn't a fucking worldwide pandemic, it was like wildfire. The world is on fire. I mean, so I don't know how is the environmental ecological crisis affecting—that's everyday affect—effect and affect—for me.

[01:23:54.16] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:23:54.37] A.L. STEINER: I don't not think about that every day. I sign and make calls every day. I have a time I set aside to do that based on the ecological crises, but we're—humans aren't really responding to yet on a large scale level. [Laughs.] So it's just a kind of coping mechanism of how to get through each day. And then there's the kind of unexpected crises, and then there's the racism and basically everyday hate and kind of push back and, like you said, backlash.

[01:24:34.48] I don't know. So we have to have a lot of—yeah, we have to have a lot of coping mechanisms. But it's daily on my mind. And there's not a day I don't forget about some crisis or another.

[01:24:46.01] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. And I realize that's why maybe I was a little bit hesitant about how to formulate the question about the pandemic or illness or encounter with mortality because, as you've suggested, it's very present for you already. So I'm with you on wanting to, for example, link up the COVID-19 pandemic with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which you were doing through the *Textdemic* project.

[01:25:18.83] And it's another reason why in queer time world we are—and it's interesting, too. We've talked about Nancy Brody's death, and Fierce Pussy has done a lot of work around the ongoing recurrence and presence of both loss and epidemic in our lives. Beth Freeman, who you mentioned, is someone who's worked on queer temporalities and taught us to think about time as not linear and things connect up. So that's why—

[01:25:49.96] A.L. STEINER: Erotohistoriography.

[01:25:51.82] ANN CVETKOVICH: Hmm?

[01:25:52.57] A.L. STEINER: Erotohistoriography.

[01:25:53.51] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah.

[01:25:53.68] A.L. STEINER: She gave us that language.

[01:25:56.98] ANN CVETKOVICH: And here, we're also trying to interrupt received narratives about what an artist's life has to look like. Is exhibition in the Whitney Biennial necessarily the peak moment, or are there other things? So I think we've covered that base. I did actually want to—I want to ask you about teaching and university life, but I want to go back to one more show that I would like to hear your thoughts on to cluster with what we've had to say about the Whitney and also some of these recent shows that you've done.

[01:26:32.72] And that's the *Trigger* show at the New Museum because I think of that as another type of show that has foregrounds feminism and queer stuff, brings a bunch of people together, is in a major institution. The New Museum does have benefit of curators who are trying to think about underrepresented artists. And in fact, many people that you've worked with were also in that show. So I'm just wondering what it's like to be part of that kind of exhibition.

[01:27:11.14] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I mean, unfortunately, I was living in LA during that. So I had—A.K. dealt with the bulk of participation in that show.

[01:27:21.54] ANN CVETKOVICH: Okay.

[01:27:21.84] A.L. STEINER: We reprinted the zine, and I believe she—like we kind of mounted a kind of collage-y thing that was based on a smaller collage-y thing we did in Berlin when we released the film in around 2011 and did a tour overseas. But yeah, I had—and I asked Paul Sepuya to—I think A.K. and Paul kind of spoke maybe at some point at the museum about the work.

[01:27:49.06] And I had featured—we had—yeah, I was—I had featured a work, a video work, that he had done—*Nico*, *Smelling*—which I love. And Paul's more kind of known for his photo work, but some—yeah, his video work is amazing. And we've been friends for a long time as well.

[01:28:13.89] And then we collaborated on his participation in the Whitney Biennial during the Tear Gas Biennial, the one that Nicole was in and Paul was in. So I was in that as well with Paul at the new Whitney building. And that was a whole W.A.G.E. thing, too, because—

anyway. A lot of shit went down during that biennial. But [Warren] Kanders did resign, mostly due to the work of the artists who perpetuated their request for his resignation from the board.

[01:28:48.78] But to go back to the New Museum, yeah, I mean, I think that was an important show in terms of like what you described, its scope and kind of understanding of presenting a kind of perspective on queer work to a larger audience. And for that reason, yeah, I was glad I was included, for sure. And *Community Action Center* was the work that was included. So it was a collaborative work that A.K. and I did that was featured.

[01:29:21.69] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. Cool, Okay. Great. I'm trying to think what I want to ask.

[01:29:28.86] A.L. STEINER: I don't know.

[01:29:30.30] ANN CVETKOVICH: I'm just thinking of that show in a lineage that goes back to the shows, actually, at the New Museum in the '80s or something like the *WACK!* show that Connie Butler did where these large shows that showcase gender, sexuality.

[01:29:47.69] A.L. STEINER: I mean, *WACK!* was important for me. When I saw *WACK!* in LA, I saw—I was teaching on and off in LA then, and that was like an incredible show to see. I'm so glad I saw that show.

[01:30:00.18] ANN CVETKOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:30:00.60] A.L. STEINER: And then expanded my understanding of the feminisms that exist within the—like greatly expanded my—it was basically like a—better than a class, maybe—or as good as a class. And I thank Connie for that so, so deeply.

[01:30:18.96] Yeah, I mean, when I saw—yeah, I mean, so many friends were in—like you said, so many in that show and Gregg's [Bordowitz] work. And Gregg, who was part *Textdemic*. and I just did a session at the—he's now running the Whitney ISP. And like, yeah, just kind of this circular—like this kind of unending, amazing loop of our circularity and circulation with each other in the work.

[01:30:46.84] And Liz [Collins], who I think was in that show, too, and she just was featured in the Times and did the Venice Biennale. And our friendship has—we've known each other since the Muster. I think that's where I met her. Yeah, just like, I don't know. The incredible—kind of like life lived stories that we all have now and intersecting with our work and in our lives.

[01:31:16.74] And all the people that were at Brody's memorial—I mean, just like, hearing Zoe talk about her days, early days, in New York, which I didn't know every detail about. Now I know much more. And Zoe—Zoe's work that I saw, I saw *Analog*, I think, at Orchard, a small gallery that was artist run. Jason Simon, who now I'm going to be renting Jason and Moyra's house in Provincetown this summer, and blah, blah, blah.

[01:31:50.12] I don't know. And Andrea Fraser, who was a board member also for eight years, who I begged to be on the board of W.A.G.E. And then we worked together on that project for all those years. And she was so incredible, so inspiring, and such a good colleague and such an amazing person and friend and artist. And our worlds are just incredibly expansive, and—

[01:32:15.25] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and I think—I'm glad—yeah, I think the reason I wanted to ask about the *Trigger* show and then we're both very affected by *WACK!* just because that is also an important part of pushing the envelope on art institutions is those big shows that include a lot of people. Again, I think we could link it to the work you're doing with Ridyeulous in being able to cure-hate different collections of that—that work is so important to being able to create worlds and create space and create conceptual frameworks for people.

[01:32:59.75] And that's a bit different than a Whitney Biennial that—well, people—Whitney Biennials do sometimes have those agendas. And then people get mad when they have those agendas. [They Laugh.]

[01:33:11.59] A.L. STEINER: Right.

[01:33:12.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: —because somehow it's supposed to be more comprehensive.

[01:33:13.99] A.L. STEINER: People get mad no matter what—

[01:33:15.45] ANN CVETKOVICH: I know.

[01:33:15.71] A.L. STEINER: —about the Whitney Biennial. It just doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter.

[01:33:18.91] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, but that's where it could be advantageous to just be able to say we're doing a show about gender and sexuality, and here's how we're going to do it. Or we're doing a show about feminism. And so the fact that you've been in a variety of different registers or types of shows at different types of institutions and also taken up the work of curatorial practice yourself, I think is significant as work trying to push forward not only your own agenda—your own queer agenda. Yes, we do have one.

[01:33:57.46] A.L. STEINER: Yes, 100 percent. I have more than an agenda.

[01:34:01.21] ANN CVETKOVICH: But also make space for other people.

[01:34:02.62] A.L. STEINER: World takeover.

[01:34:03.83] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah. [Laughs.]

[01:34:05.86] A.L. STEINER: It might not happen.

[01:34:07.01] ANN CVETKOVICH: Your own pyramid scheme.

[01:34:09.07] A.L. STEINER: My own—very own pyramid scheme. Yeah, and thank you for mentioning that. Yeah, the *Patriarchy Is a Pyramid Scheme*, which comes out of Dean and I collaborating on a phrase. His—he wanted—he vied for the Patriarchy Is a Pyramid Scam. Mine was scheme, but—and I went out in my own work. But I think—there's a difference.

[01:34:34.42] And I think—all the—I don't know how you see this, but all of my professional life curator people and then also artist curator people—like there is a difference between an artist curated project, which is actually the name of my—one of my best, closest friends, Eve Fowler's project that she's been working on for 15 years. It's called A.C.P. or artist curated projects.

[01:34:56.71] It's a different effort, and it's maybe more flexible. It gives us kind of leeway, like you said. Kind of what are these containers that provide us with the tools that we can utilize how we see the formulation of like the meshing and musings of putting work together and putting people together—and how a kind of professionalized curatorial effort sees that? They're slightly different, and then there's overlap.

[01:35:30.79] But in our new in our new catalog—not to plug our new catalog, but I will. In our new catalog, Ridykeulous Cavern of Inverted Wine and Deviant Videos or whatever it's called—something like. I can't even remember the—it's such a long mouthful.

[01:35:43.89] ANN CVETKOVICH: It's great.

[01:35:44.44] A.L. STEINER: But Nicole Yip, who was the curator, official curator, on this project—she wrote an introduction. And she wrote it—really beautiful, short, brief introduction as to how she saw this—of working with two artists, curating this and as the official museum curator. And I think it explains a lot about these kind of perspectives, and what can be done, and what these visions do—or how they differentiate from each other and the importance of those.

[01:36:19.43] And so I think, yeah, just two examples is Eve's project—which she focuses in the way that she sees artists or herself in the curatorial framework. And then also Nicole Yip's essay, kind of putting words to that, those kinds of specificities, I think, has been helpful. But yeah, I mean, for me, it's like a way to formulate outside of making an actual work.

[01:36:48.68] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, great.

[01:36:50.31] A.L. STEINER: As are the Ridykeulous Letters or the Ridykeulous Panels. Like we built a panel. We built a panel table to do our panel. I mean—yeah, we just do whatever we need to do to make that Ridykeulous.

[01:37:02.66] ANN CVETKOVICH: Building infrastructure.

[01:37:04.46] A.L. STEINER: [Laughs.] Building infrastructure, exactly.

[01:37:07.10] ANN CVETKOVICH: With your own—with your bare hands.

[01:37:09.96] A.L. STEINER: Hammer and nail.

[01:37:13.79] ANN CVETKOVICH: Well, good. That's actually a perfect segue into ask—wanting to ask you a bit about your work as a teacher and university professor. Just, obviously, it earns you a living, so we want to demystify that piece of the process of why someone would seek out a university job. But yeah, what's your mission there as a teacher and as an institutional rabble rouser?

[01:37:46.69] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I'm glad we have the last few minutes only to—then we can. No, I'll—not in jest, but yeah, I—again, I didn't have continuing Ed into a master's degree, but nonetheless, I have what's called equivalent. Somehow I've developed an equivalent intelligence quotient in order to be able to tell experience.

[01:38:17.63] ANN CVETKOVICH: Life experience—LE.

[01:38:18.44] A.L. STEINER: Lived experience to—which is more important, of course, than anything on—in—that the world could offer us, right—to have the fortune and privilege to live on this crazy planet and do something, get somewhere within institutional structures. And I've navigated that through learning on the job and also being given opportunities from people that have believed in the same thing—the same thing in terms of what I was saying about the perpetuation of our art making and our other efforts—writing, and having a chance to publish, and having a chance to exhibit other people's work and curating and performance and meeting people that allow—*Chicks on Speed* were—the first time I actually played drums to a large audience, for instance.

[01:39:16.32] I had a couple of bands when I was younger—one with Mike Iveson and one with some other—I had some experience in music but then also meeting Peaches—Peaches reaching out through Lex Vaughn and asking me to work on—I'm making a Peaches video. I mean, this learning experience, learning on the job—I mean, an incredible opportunity and having the faith of people. When Peaches and I had lunch, I was like, I've done small time kind of independent music videos with *Chicks on Speed* but not a high production with a cinematographer and a whole crew and actors.

[01:40:04.25] And we did that. And so, yeah, Peaches has been an important learning experience, as *Chicks on Speed* was, making work fast. I mean, that's what their moniker was about. Although, people think it was about taking speed. It wasn't. It was about making work really quickly when they were in—getting their education in Munich and left the academy.

[01:40:26.44] They wanted to make work faster than was allowable under different conditions. But yeah, I think I've learned—I've been given opportunities. And my mission or kind of anti-mission has been to teach and learn from and with the people that are there—to understand what their interests and capabilities and goals are, and to work with that. And that's what I was given.

[01:41:02.04] I was given a grassroots education, essentially. And I think so many people that I've read and that I know have given me the groundwork for learning. And so I try to share that. But yeah—I've been at—I'm the MFA whore, as I called myself, because I've taught in, I think—yeah, I've taught at over, I think, seven or eight institutions. And Bard I taught at for 10 years in their summer MFA low residency program, which was the longest. And Yale, which has been about eight years in both grad and undergrad.

[01:41:48.81] And I was given the opportunity at USC to teach there for five years by Charlie White who hired me full time after doing a stint as a guest faculty member. So that was—and Jim Welling and Cathy Opie at UCLA, who gave me my first long-term contract. I think it was three years that I taught at UCLA. And then they kind of have a limit where you have to

leave if you're not tenured full time or full time.

[01:42:23.31] And so yeah, it's been again, through, my peers and colleagues and friends who—Stephen Frailey was—who hired me to SVA when I was leaving magazines into—in 1999. So I started teaching around 2000. And I was at SVA when the—when—on 9/11. So I was there that morning after I heard some strange noises, went to work, and then realized what had happened.

[01:42:51.89] So, yes, teaching has been an incredible experience, being in academia, all of my friends and colleagues. And I stay in it—one, because of—yeah, because of the support it allows me to make my work and two, because it keeps me on my toes. I'm learning eternally from the students and from the work that I have to do to be relevant and keep things interesting. [Laughs.]

[01:43:24.76] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, and my sense from other conversations we've had is that you're not just phoning it in or just teaching your classes and nothing else but that, at least at Yale, you've been quite active with the infrastructure of the MFA program there and potentially its relation to other parts of the campus as well.

[01:43:47.84] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, it's an incredible place with a crazy amount of resources, and I don't take that for granted at all. And a long history of also looking at their own issues and problems, and it's slow going. And also MFA programs being two years and being fairly short, just the sheer number of people, grads—especially in undergrads, obviously, who are there for a little bit longer. But just an incredible community of people that are coming from places and perspectives that I learned from and then bringing people in.

[01:44:31.36] I mean, organizing and curating, have a lot to do with also teaching, of course, and programming. And so, I've tried to like limit myself on how much art organizing I do these days because I have to say that those offers are more common than exhibiting. I'll get a call or outreach to like organize this and do that and do this program. Do you want to speak here and do this program?

[01:45:01.90] And it's always an honor. But at the same time, I have to put a lot of that energy actually into my teaching work. And I have to think about how I spend my energy. It's been a little bit of time recovering from my treatment and building up my energy levels again. And I have to kind of use my time and efforts wisely.

[01:45:23.56] And if you—yeah, when you ask me how is how is the past couple of years of stuff in the world affected you? And, yeah, some of it just on a very personal level, I've had to prioritize and expand my understanding—trying to understand patience better because it's hard to be in a world that's accelerating on such a vast, expansive, not sane level, and to keep track, and to survive in an economy that's also not realistic, and to understand how to use our personal resources, and how we can be most productive.

[01:46:07.01] And yeah, I'm very excited to work with an artist from Gaza who has gotten out, and he's coming—working with me to come and teach with us. And that's been really meaningful for me. And to think about my relationship to—yeah, my place of birth, Miami, and the complications and—not ever yet exhibiting in my hometown on a meaningful scale level. I've had great opportunities, for instance, with my friend Naomi Fisher, who runs Bas Fisher Invitational, Naomi has been a supporter and did a public art project there for the first time.

[01:46:54.62] But it's like, yeah—like, sorry. Just being like—thinking about our legacies and our histories and how that leads up to the current moment.

[01:47:07.35] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, that's interesting that we circled back around to Miami and possibly some unfinished business for you there. And yeah, what you say about the circumstances we find ourselves in now, raising the stakes even further of these questions of how do we allocate the limited time that's available to us inside of a day, inside of a week, inside of a lifetime? And part of what I'm hoping to capture in these interviews is the way in which the. lesbian, feminist, queer artists that I have been interviewing have interesting things to say about the choice to spend time on not just their own solo practice but on making space for other people.

[01:47:52.85] And that as, yes, going back to the W.A.G.E. stuff that you've done there, one has to be careful about being exploited. But also there are ways in which we want to do that

material labor and affect labor for the collective and for a community larger than just us as individuals.

[01:48:20.06] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, it's a hard call. I'm looking for the next generation of incredible artists, some who I feel I've met in my teaching work, and see what they want and where they're at. And now that I look forward to being a senior citizen one day and retiring, to leave—to work. I mean, my mom's 97. She's still kind of so deeply engaged in the art scene in Miami and loves hearing from artists.

[01:48:54.16] And it's such an incredible support. And yeah, I just—I look forward to a life where I learn—keep learning from you, others, reading your books, *Feelings from A to Z*.

[01:49:08.68] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yes. But also where we get to be queer elders.

[01:49:11.69] A.L. STEINER: Queer elders, I know. Looking—

[01:49:13.66] ANN CVETKOVICH: I'm looking forward to assuming my status as a queer elder.

[01:49:17.00] A.L. STEINER: Are we there yet? Can we say—I mean, what—at what point? But yeah, let's make sure we take that—walk on that road together, hand in hand in the woods here.

[01:49:27.89] ANN CVETKOVICH: And with feelings of generosity and excitement about the young folk coming up who need all the help they can get because, oh, my gosh, the world we're giving to them.

[01:49:40.94] A.L. STEINER: Yeah, I don't—yeah, lots of feelings about that. But that would be a whole other four-hour Smithsonian interview. Thank you—yeah, and thanks for all your time and thoughts and—

[01:49:51.44] ANN CVETKOVICH: It was great.

[01:49:52.61] A.L. STEINER: Direction in this process.

[01:49:55.20] ANN CVETKOVICH: Yeah, it's been a good collaboration. It's been fun to think about things to ask you about. Do you want—yeah, we're wrapping up here, I think. But let me just ask, is there anything I haven't asked you that I should have asked you or that you would like to say?

[01:50:20.27] A.L. STEINER: No, I mean, off the record, I guess—if there's anything we want to enhance or figure out that isn't clear or that is missing, like hopefully we can kind of work those editing skills. I'm, an avid, enthusiastic editor. So don't ever feel like it's a burden to say can you look at—can you—because I'm going to be that person who's obsessed.

[01:50:48.13] ANN CVETKOVICH: Right. Yeah, and then—yeah, we can edit out. But then also if there needs to be an addendum, we can figure that out, too.

[01:50:56.12] A.L. STEINER: Okay, cool.

[01:50:56.81] ANN CVETKOVICH: But we're good for now. Okay, so with your permission, I am going to press stop.

[01:51:05.90] A.L. STEINER: Oh, good.

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