

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

HAZEL KATZ

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Transcribed by Sydney Cross

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Aviva Silverman: Hello, my name is Aviva and I will be having a conversation with Hazel for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's communal history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experience of trans-identifying people. It is January 4th, 2018 and this is being recorded on Broome street in Chinatown in my apartment. Hi Hazel.

Hazel Katz: Hi.

Silverman: So, we're just going to jump into asking you how you want to explain your childhood or talk about your childhood and where you were born. Just any kind of like... beginnings.

Katz: Ok. Yeah, I was born in Philadelphia and I grew up in the suburbs of Philly and New Jersey. South Jersey. I have three older brothers who are all a lot older than me. So, they were always kind of like other adults in my family and I had my mom and dad.

Silverman: And who are your parents? And if you wanted to go into a little more of your class or religious background and kind of like. Way to situate that. Yeah, my parents are both Ashkenazim Jews. And they were a little older when they had me because of my siblings. They were both activists and they were actually in the Malice Collective when they were my age: were 20s and 30s. And they basically were put in factories. And then they like... My mom worked at the Nabisco factory and my dad worked at the General Motors factory in New Jersey and they tried to organize unions and then they would have to report back to their collective where they were reading the red [inaudible]. They don't love to talk about it, but I'm obviously really fascinated with it. They like... I think some time in the 80s when the RCP split up, they kind of fell out of... They got caught up with them and my mom went to medical school and my dad became a therapist eventually. And I think that's how they thought of continuing their activism: was through those service things. Or like taking-care-of-people jobs. But they both grew up with plenty of money. Upper middle class. And my Mom I guess. I imagine that's something that they were dealing with when they were doing the activism.

Silverman: What was the name of the Malice Group?

Katz: Now it's changed names, but I believe it was the Revolutionary Communist Party. The RCP. So if you know like... see the people with yellow signs at rallies, that's the legacy of their group. They're really dogmatic. Like really intense organizers. I've seen them at really small protests like all over the country. They're always there with their yellow signs. And there's this guy, Bob Avakian, who's kind of famous for being kind of like a goofy leader and he was involved. He's been involved the whole time.

Silverman: And did draw a specific demographic... like Jewish? How is it composited?

Katz: I don't totally know. I think it was a lot of people like my parents. Like white, highly educated people. I imagine there was some crossover with SDS: Students for Democratic Society. My parents had done a lot of anti-draft organizing in college. And had... My dad had done all this stuff to escape the draft and stuff. So, I think there were connections through that. But they also

worked with a lot of working class people and people of color. I know they were involved in the postal worker strike in Newark, and I believe New York. Or they were in solidarity with that or supporting them.

[Overlapping speech]

Silverman: Oh, sorry.

Katz: I think that was in the late 70s, early...

Silverman: And when you say they came into the factory work, how... what was the decision making behind that?

Katz: So, what they told me was that they would go to the meetings and they would be like "Ok you like..." Is it recording? Ok. "Ok you John, you are going to general motors." So like he would get a job on the factory line, on the assembly line and then basically become a union member and then basically try to get elected to shop steward and then try to change the conditions because a lot of the unions at that time had gotten liked watched and stuff like they were actually advocating for the workers or something. I don't know. My mom was interested in medical school so they had her organizing hospitals at one point. But I know that they would literally just take orders from the Malice people. The like, head leaders. And it was really hierarchical and really sexist and it was really homophobic and it was really racist. And I think that was kind of why they left. And I think they also, because this was before the internet, like no one actually knew what the cultural revolution was like. Cause there wasn't that much news coming from it. So, I think they eventually found out that things in China were really complicated and not just an amazing communist revolution and I think they felt bad about supporting that.

Silverman: And how did those politics shape your family life?

Katz: So, by the time I was born, my parents weren't doing that or anything, but we would always go to rally's and my dad went to a Quaker school and I went to a Quaker school. And so we would always like I remember standing on the corner in January with like five really old Quakers protesting the Iraq war which started in 2003. Stuff like that, like being in a bus to Washington DC to go on a big march. But I think my parents just gave me intense intense ethics about right and wrong and about like... I don't know. I guess I just inherited this huge amount of... I think a lot of it is shame or some kind of oversensitivity of suffering and even me projecting that someone's suffering if they're not. It was so ... I mean, it would be everything from like this sour cream is expired and mom would bring it back to the supermarket. And to like "Hazel, you don't make fun of so-and-so in school. Bullying is wrong. Don't ever do that again," and then I would go into a shame spiral. So, it's just like making sure everything is good and right.

Silverman: And how did the Quaker school shape some of those experiences also in terms of the way that they framed certain community work or the way you relate to each other.

Katz: I think the Quaker thing is funny because both of my parents are extremely atheist and they hate god and they think god is a bad man and no one should believe in him. I think that's even their most leftover stuff from their malice times. I think more was just like they spent so much time organizing with a cross-difference basically in their lives. And my dad worked in a Latinx community in Philly and would take me into work to meet his patients who... I remember he gave... they bought me a guinea pig for my birthday and I didn't like it anymore and he gave it to his patient. And I met his patient and stuff. This was somebody I would have never met or talked to otherwise. And then we were always going to Latin America to do poverty tours, but I think that the other spin on it was that my parents just wanted me to know that most people in the world didn't look like me or have the same experience as me. And then my mom worked in a black, a really poor black neighborhood being a pediatrician, and I think around like, for diner they would just both talk about their patients and the lives of their patients. Those are some of my most distinct memories from childhood: just hearing these really really intense stories about basically poverty in America and racisms and classism in America and just like... my parents would tell the story and be like "and that's fucked up" or like "that happened because of racism" and I'd be like "uh ok". And I think I have a deep... and it was basically just me for a lot of it because my brothers would be at college, so I would just hear these stories about "so-and-so's kid overdosed on heroin. This is why we need to do a needle exchange thing" or like "so-and-so's public housing project is on super fun site full of lead blah blah blah". Like that kind of stuff. It was intense.

Silverman: And how did it feel interacting with these intense subjects as a child? How did you feel like it brought you into the public space: having to protest or be present or be in person with people at certain different vulnerable states?

Katz: Yeah. That's a good question. I think I was kind of socially anxious and awkward, and I don't know how much of that had to do with being uncomfortable being called a boy. So I wouldn't ever – I would always want to hide and stuff. I didn't want to ever sing their hippie songs with them. And no one in our town – our town was very waspy and I didn't even know many Jewish people, let alone hippies. And so – or like liberal wealthy Jewish hippies. I don't know it was just – I don't know so I was like "um our house is messy. Like my parents never throw anything away. They have weird posters from like Peru on the wall." And my friends would be like "why is that". We would have these people they know come stay with us for a while from Peru who basically needed a sponsor for their visa. And so, my friends would come over and they would be like really racist towards the Peruvians and wouldn't understand why they were there. I didn't really understand why they were there, but I knew that my friends were being fucked up, but I still felt embarrassed. I was like "mom and dad, why do you always have to make something weird happen at our house?" I just wanted to eat Lunchables and I wanted my dad to be good at sports and stuff. And then I think there's another piece about not realizing about my class privilege, and I think feeling confused because my parents were always hanging out with working class people and that's what their work was. And our house was different from my white upper middle-class friends' houses, so I didn't get that we were also extremely privileged and that I would inherit a lot of money when I got older. And so, I think – and my parents would never talk about that ever, ever, ever. Still can't talk about that. So, I think that part was really confusing for me.

Silverman: Yeah, I can see growing up or having a sense of politics that's about the working class and class distinctions and then not being to reconcile one's own. Or have that be a transparent be extremely confusing. I guess I'd also like to know within that, when was the first time you heard the world trans or how that started to trigger an emotional state.

Katz: I don't even know. It's funny because I work with trans youth now.

Silverman: Can you name the organization?

Katz: Yeah, global action project which is like a youth media new development organization in New York. And we often do exercises about like "what's the first time you saw a trans person on tv or read about them?" and people usually know now, but I have no idea. I don't remember – I never knew a trans person and I think I knew what the word meant, and I mean I saw movies. I saw the Crying Game. But I don't think that stuff registered me in my mind at all.

And did you feel like – I don't know – from either leaving the house or from a certain point your own kind of political consciousness divorced from what you grew up within or do you feel like you are still an extension of all the ways that you were imbued with a sense of politics?

I think I inherited a lot from my parents. And I have different stuff now, that really crystalized when I came out because of my mother's radical feminism. Like "why would anyone want to be a woman? It's horrible." I definitely brushed up against that a lot and stuff about changing your body to be a woman, like she thinks it wrong to shave or wear makeup and stuff. That hasn't really been updated. But kind of besides that, I mean – my parents moved to Vermont and are now two local organizing with immigration stuff and also against Donald Trump or something, I don't really know what that is. But we talk, like I was talking to my dad last night on the phone about the prison abolition work I'm doing and he was comparing it to like he was working with kids who are in the system. We can talk about a lot of stuff and they get it and I appreciate it. I just think some things, a lot having to do with gender, but I think also... emotional stuff like mental health stuff. And I don't know – I think stuff about race, they just, I don't know, I feel like they stopped reading books or something or stopped hanging out with people who were different from them. I don't know.

Silverman: Could you talk more about the prison abolition work that you're doing.

Katz: Yeah, I work for – I volunteer for an organization called Parole Prep project. So, volunteers get matched with applications who are incarcerated who are ready for their Parole Hearing. In New York state, people who get indeterminate sentences, which are often for violent crimes, like 20-to-life, 25-to-life, after that number, you're eligible for parole which is a 5 minutes interview with former law enforcement people. Basically, it's very hard to make your board and if you don't pass your interview, which you can't have legal representation for either, you have to wait two years. So, people get denied over and over and over and over. So, we support people before their parole hearing. I'm working with a trans woman now, who's in a men's prison and I'm helping her with her parole stuff but also just helping her navigate trans health basically. Which has been really intense and hard but really amazing and she's probably the only trans elder that

I'm friends with. So, we've become close and we have a lot in common like she really likes baseball and we both have a lot of stick and poke tattoos. So it's like stuff to talk about besides business, I guess.

Silverman: I lied when I was like "I have no specific questions for you" in just that I saw your Instagram story today and I wrote down the statement you said and it kind of relates to what you just said. I guess I'll just saw it and maybe if you have more of a follow up to explain it. You wrote "free everyone incarcerated for violent crimes, even if", oh god "their first" I forgot, sorry. Something "even if something about" *laughs* "even if it's something about self-defense. Even if the crimes are a man doing violence to a woman." Sorry, I messed that one up.

Katz: That's ok.

Silverman: But just think yeah in terms of prison abolitionist work and the ways in which you emote those stories and share thoughts so I was wondering if you could speak more about that botched statement that I just read.

Katz: Yeah, I think like, I don't know, sometimes I go on rants on social media. It's some way of processing but I'm not totally... I'm a little skeptical of my own thing with it. But I'm like... yeah. I'm never – before I started working doing this work like 3, 4 years ago, I thought that people who did a murder were bad and should be locked up and they were scary and bad. And I think that's been a big point of my politicization. But yeah, I think I see a lot of people being still in that, still being like "oh if you raped a kid or if you killed your wife then you shouldn't get – then you need to be cancelled and all abusers need to be kicked out of the community. This is a safe space." And I think that has to do with identity politics and "this is a safe space". And I think that stuff's really important but I also feel like, for me, especially prison abolition work is about forgiveness and that's why... forgiveness and also some understanding of the positions that people are put in that makes violence almost normal and necessary. I feel weird saying that and also I feel weird doing this work as someone who hasn't even been in that situation. I mean, I guess I have on very small occasions. I think I see a lot of people being like "free the people who smoked weed" and like "free the drug dealers" and like "prison's bad if you weren't a bad abuser or if you didn't rape a child" and I have never been – I was never raped as a child so I don't know what that's like and I could never speak to how awful and traumatizing and triggering that would be. But I also feel like I've met people in prison who have done crimes like that and they didn't get rehabilitated in prison, they just got cut off. And I don't know – it's just obviously a horrible way to deal with that. If you think of it like a societal issue. So, I think it's also changed – it changes me. It's like some organizing work that changes me as a person and realizes that people get locked up to protect people exactly like me. And to keep me free. I think examining my own ability to – like forgiveness and to re-understanding what violence is and what aggression is very important. Yeah.

Silverman: That was really beautiful. I saw this meme a while ago that was like in "2040 when the CIA created identity politics to destroy the left" and it resonated with me, I guess because we're talking about identity politics and how they play such a strong role in these structures. Like

how you relate to that. And how you function within the matrix of that right now and us in this post-with-Trump moment.

Katz: Yeah I think – I feel like before I came out I had a lot of feelings about identity politics and now it's like “oh but I just can't say any of this stuff because I'm a man. I'm a cis man.” And now that I'm trans, identity politics basically lets me say stuff and I feel like just having gone through that process – I'm talking about my specific subcultural community, which I guess I should... I'm so invalid and in a bubble with –

Silverman: Can you just name what that is?

Katz: I guess it's like queer and trans people who live in New York who are usually highly educated and have some connection to, I guess money. Like they either work for a thing that has money or they were born with money. But also, I don't know, also social media. I don't totally get it. I guess I just know that when I go to a Walmart in Florida no one cares about me and everyone wants to kill me. But I never really go to that. I'm rarely in that. But in my tiny community, that is whatever, I guess. I just feel like sometimes there's these parties and they'll be like \$75 for cis-men and free for trans women and that shit make me so mad because it thinks that trans-ness is a thing that – it's basically like a cis-understanding of trans-ness and something that – like my - when I came out it was like “hey do you need any clothes?” I was like “bitch, I didn't just wake up today and decide I was a girl. I have girl's clothes. Who are you?” It just ignores the reality and it's also extremely violent and it's basically policing people and it's definitely that kind of sentiment that kept me closeted for so many years and I'm really bitter about it. So, I'm kind of like... but I also know how hard it can be to hang out with cis-men. So, I'm really only friends with one cis-man so I feel a little bit hypocritical about that stuff but I definitely feel like identity politics is violent, like state violence and policing refracted back and internalized back into communities that have been victims of it. That's clearly what it is and I'm sure that the CIA is part of that and the FBI is part of that. It's just weird and gross and I think it's maybe it's at a cultural moment when it's coming to an end which is good.

Silverman: I guess because of... yeah. In the ways in which you just talked about certain communities cultivating this culture that then refracts this ugly part of a violent structure and then also where you would be kind of unsafe or vulnerable to the greater culture of America or whatever that's outside the bubble of New York. Are there spaces in New York where being trans and being in some sort of collective, I don't know... space feels good or feels better than something that's triggering like that? Or, I don't know.

Katz: Feels better than being in that community?

Silverman: Being at a part where there's a sign up front that triggers some sort of response and you be like “actually this feels authored by people” but isn't, but also is reflecting some sort of woke politic that's actually backwards.

Katz: I think in the beginning, like a year or two ago of coming out, those spaces were really important for me. And I think at this point, I'm a little bit more like “wait what about people who

don't have access to this community" and stuff. I think right now I'm still searching for that. I really like the community at GAP where I was working.

Silverman: Can you break that down? What is that again?

Katz: The Youth Media Organization. It's kind of like a drop-in center also for queer and trans and undocumented youth. And I think being around those people has felt really good because... I don't know, I think I just feel like that community isn't steeped and has a critique about that type of policing and violence. And also, I think when people are younger, they're allowed to be more unprocessed about their gender and I think it's a shame that we, as a culture, don't allow people to be in process about their gender for their whole life. And I think it's an ongoing thing. I think it's related to - like I'm looking for re-entry services for the women I'm working with. If she is to make her board in march, and there's only transitional housing for trans people 24 - if you're 24 years or younger. So, it's being like "Oh, you have until you're 24 to figure your shit out" and if you do it after that, you're deviant and psychotic, and basically you're bad. And you're an abuser and you're trying to invade someone's - so I think it's all this fake timelines stuff, but I don't know, I want to start hanging out with cis-people again. I think I'm done with my separatist thing. And I don't know. I think I've also found that other trans women aren't - I think in the beginning I was like "oh, I'm going to be all friends with trans-femme and it's gonna be amazing." And I'm like "well, most of them are just kind of annoying and I don't want to be friends with them." Not because they're trans women, just cause they're like.... I don't know. I just need to be [Unintelligible] my friends.

Silverman: I think one of the questions, which now I'm just like makes me feel like I don't want to ask it, but I think in terms of in the state of wherever you're at, how would you describe your gender? Or where you're at in connecting to describing.

Katz: Yeah, I still feel weird saying I'm a woman. For some reason, I don't feel weird saying I'm a girl. I don't really know right now. I know that I don't want to go by they and I never really wanted to. I think that I wanted so long desperately the past that now that's happening more and more, I am realizing that I haven't updated my gender until in that time. It's like I was just extreme - be a woman, be a woman, be a woman. And now it's like "did I even want that?" I know I didn't want to be a man, but like, is there another one I can be? I don't know. It's weird - I think it's the thing about being trans-femme that you kinda have to be just one or the other right now. It's hard to be a non-binary person that was assigned male at birth because that category is just, I don't know, it just feels smaller and it feels like those boundaries are placed way more. But yeah, this is way - it's already just way better than my full life, so I'm just sinking into it, I think. It's good.

Silverman: And do you have models or mentors or ways of figuring stuff out as you elect to do thing? I don't know if they're like medicalized or whatever in any way that you've been learning from.

Katz: It's a good question. Not really. I really wanted to get surgery on my face. To make certain things look more like a quote-unquote female. But I actually just delayed my surgery 8 months

so I can think about whether I actually want it. I think that was a big step in being like “I’m fine the way I am.” And that was through a lot of conversations with trans friends, most of whom are trans-mask, but it still was really helpful. I think – I’m just gonna call her “X” – the woman I work with in prison. She’s like a big mentor, just because she’s lived this for so long, in the most dire of circumstances. And I talk about my body a lot with her and see what she thinks about everything. I think she was really like “hey, you don’t really need to get a nose job” and stuff, so I don’t know.

Silverman: And I guess even thinking about her access to any kind of healthcare and then you on the outside having access to healthcare differentiates other space of being able to see yourself. One of the question here is asking about also ways that you can approach your own mental or just that through access to healthcare or care or your family in terms of having a parent that’s a therapist or how you utilize that.

Katz: I mean, I think I would be dead if I didn’t have access to therapy, definitely. And basically if I had to support myself, I don’t know how I would be alive. I’ve been in therapy for basically 15 years straight. From when I was 15, so it’s helped me a lot. And I like – it’s just huge. It’s just a really big part of my life and it saved me and really helped me. And I’m also not better and I still think sometimes I want to die and things get bad, and I still can’t keep a job. I don’t understand how trans women who don’t have that survive. Just because it’s so weird. It’s a weird life to have. Everything is so weird and it doesn’t make sense and it feels like you’re an alien. Or, I feel like I’m an alien half the time, so I don’t know other people do it without someone who’s been trained to listen to you, basically.

Silverman: Let’s take a little break.

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Silverman: This might be repetitive, but it could produce something else. It asks “how do you see yourself in this moment of increased trans-visibility?”

Katz: It’s weird. It makes me – I think it makes me feel more real sometimes and more fake other times. I think a lot of cis-normativity or cis-people say the thing about trans-trenders like trans people who are only trans cause of increased trans visibility and cause of the work of trans activists for the last 100 years. And that somehow that makes you not actually trans. But I feel that a lot. And then I’m like “wow.” I mean one of the biggest things for my coming out was Julia Serano’s book. Her second book. And I just read it all in two days and I was like “Oh fuck. I guess I have to do this thing now.” I think as an - also, sorry this is kind of gumbled - and like as an artist, being like “does art actually get people to do stuff or change the world?” and that book basically was the straw that broke the camel’s back, but also it really moved me and really changed me and it allowed me to be – do organizing with others. You know, it’s like keeping the ball moving. I think that’s really interesting and makes me feel real and connected to a lineage, but also I’m like “being trans is weird.” Like everyone now just gets their jury because that’s what trans people do. Which just makes me feel like being trans is a fashion choice, honestly. A lot of the trans people I know are also in fashion and very fashionable. And I think there’s this hope –

and everyone hooks up with each other and is very... I think especially trans women because, they're so unemployable, are often DJs and fashion people. It's just this weird spiral and vortex of... I don't even know. It deep. It's also really about surfaces and it's really about clothes and it's really about how – what your tits look like and where you got your makeup and stuff. That's like - I think I'm still kind of figuring that out.

Silverman: Do you feel like that would be the case if you weren't in New York? Like how specific is all of those components to this city?

Katz: I used to live in Philly when I was more questioning my gender and before I started HRT and it definitely was different but it's still felt like the queer community there was... I didn't know that if you were trans-femme that you wore less makeup and... I don't know. I feel like I'm generalizing. I feel like it would be different if I didn't go to fancy college and was from a rural area. But I don't know what that experience would be like. I know a lot of trans teenagers from Instagram, like 16 year old trans girls who I sometimes DM and they're like "I live in central Pennsylvania." And that's crazy. But they're also, I think 'cause of social media, also like things for people like that are more... I don't want to – I feel – I don't want to generalize. I was going to say that they're like more accessible, certain things are more accessible, but I don't like that's true, so I want to take that back.

Silverman: And I guess in terms of speaking about desirability, since a lot of this is aesthetically connected, and thinking about the queer community and the ways in which things are connected romantically or emotionally, how do you feel like things like polyamory fit into the constellation of how you operate or connect with people or hold the community. I don't know how to ask that question. If that's a side of desire that feels generative and good and positive or how that's evolved for you too.

Katz: I think that's complicated because of sexism and me not having experienced that my whole life, basically. SO being like "I'm a woman now" and people just stare at me and want to fuck me and random guys just want to fuck me. And that feels really good to me but it also doesn't always feel good. If I'm assaulted by a random guy, that starts to feel bad. So I think that if I started experiencing that at a younger age, it would be more shitty and if I wasn't still happy when people thought I was a woman, it would just suck to have my gender – to have my pass-ability go along with someone wanting to fuck me. And then I think in my small queer community here, everyone wanted to fuck me when I first came out and I had so much sex and I dated a lot of people and that was really good for me and my own growth, personal growth, because I had never – I basically never had fulfilling sex before that until I started having sex like a gay person. I've been going along with that as I mostly only have sex with other trans people now. It's also opened my own desires up... I kind of lost my – Oh, poly stuff. I don't know how that fits in. I think that a lot of – I think it feels like more connected to identity politics and it's something like when I talk to people of color who I've dated and they'll be like "oh, people only want to date me because it give me extra points in the identity – in the oppression Olympics thing." And then I'm like "yeah I feel that too." I feel like people just want to be seen with me sometimes. And I think – and maybe – and I'm curious whether when I start looking just like a cis woman whether that will

stop because then it will just be me being seen – then it would just be people being seen with somebody who is invisibly trans like us, and how many points could you really get from that? So, I don't know. But I think I've been trying to date other people who have an experience of, I guess that, which is honestly most people in the world, so that I don't feel that weird feeling.

Silverman: I mean, I guess because of expansiveness of who you are, what other aspects of your identity are important to you?

Katz: I think my Jewishness has always been something that's really important to me, but also feels deeply connected to my trans-ness. That one's hard to put into words, but all I will say is that it's deeply spiritual and almost like this kind of feeling I'll get sometimes where I just feel the energy, the like wind of my ancestors breathing on my neck sometimes, like this one's real and this one's really crazy. And I think mostly manifests in me just being friends with other Jewish people – other queer Jewish people. And I think the way I communicate with them feels really healing and really next-level in this way, but I think I'm wanting to get more interested in more organized aspects of that spirituality. And some other stuff is I like working with young people. I really like sports. I like baseball and I really like basketball. I watch a lot of games on TV. I have my teams and stuff.

Silverman: Can you tell me your teams?

Katz: Yeah, I love the Phillies. That's the baseball team from Philadelphia. And I love the 6ers. That's the baseball team from Philadelphia. I follow them and I'm always reading articles about them. That's a cool thing that... I don't know. If I have been born a girl, I don't know if that kind of fandom would have been encouraged in the way it was since I was called a boy, but it's really cool to get to have that. I wouldn't trade that for anything because it's really fun.

Silverman: I guess we can ask a few more broad questions and then we'll just see if that feels good. This question asks... well, I don't know if we already answered this, but how do you think trans issues or politics have changed over the years?

Katz: I don't really know because I haven't been trans for that long and I didn't care about trans people until I basically knew that there was something wrong with me. I mean that I maybe had that disease. Just kidding.

Silverman: And can you tell us the timeline of, yeah, how that came to be. Not the disease, but where you are right now.

Katz: I started HRT almost two years ago and that was when I came out to basically my friends. Well, like my immediate friends. And I had come out to myself a year before that but basically hadn't done anything about that. And for the three or four years before that, I was going by he but dressing kind of weird. Like not dressing like a boy and didn't feel like a boy, but just feeling like I wasn't allowed to be trans because I didn't try on my mother's dresses when I was little. That's the basic timeline.

Silverman: And then, something that we missed for some reason are your artistic projects, like you also create things.

Katz: I make videos and movies and I do some painting. I really like doing that. One thing I was - I'm working on - I've been working on trans-centric projects and I think part of that is I don't want to be but I felt like I had to because if you're trans and you want to make work, artwork, and it's not about your identity, you basically - no one wants to hear about it. SO that's kind of like a crappy thing, or a depressing thing. I think people with other identities have that pigeonholing too, or constraint. But I'm working on one thing which is kind of like a supercut of trans women in Hollywood movies. I actually watched this one movie last night called Letting Me Die a Woman, which is like - on the Wikipedia, it says it's a sexploitation movie but it's not. It's kind of like a pseudo-documentary about trans people from the 70s and it's kind of like starring this old school trans doctor who's kind of like... I don't know. The movie's from 1970 but it feels like it's so long ago and it's so much. I think that a lot of my project is basically about penises and how intensely symbolic they are. And how being trans for me has almost nothing to do with that, or that feels like so extraneous and so weird, but also why I felt like I wasn't trans for so long because I didn't want to cut my penis off. I think that's one area where trans visibility in politics, in the way it's changing, is really amazing that you can have any type of trans experience. That you can love your penis and be a beautiful woman and fuck people with your penis, you know. Or you can hate your penis and not feel like a woman until you get it cut off. Most of the trans women I know don't - like most of them feel like women even if they still have a penis and that is not the narrative has never been that way. There's this one movie called Normal where this trans woman's wife won't call her her new name until she gets her bottom surgery. And that's from 10 years ago, so it's very body - it's very weird like body part specific and it feels really - that part feels like it's maybe changing in a good way.

Silverman: Are there other movies in mainstream culture that resonate with you or feel like a positive depiction of a trans experience right now?

Katz: I haven't seen Pose, I think because I'm worried about being disappointed again. I think there's one movie that's really obscure that's called Layer that was made by a trans woman in Kazakhstan. It's about how - spoiler alert - it's about how this trans woman gives birth by laying eggs and she's really ostracized for it. So it kind of does a metaphor about her being marginal because she lays eggs and stuff and how she has to accept that she's an egg-layer. I liked that movie because it's not so literal. Basically every movie about a trans - where there's a trans person in it, that I've seen, they have to talk about being trans and I'm just like OK, can't it be that they just happen to be trans but they have any other aspect of their life like they like sports or they like cooking or they're a big fisher person. No, it has to be about how their penis - there has to be a dick shot in there. And I'm just like - I think that's hard for me and what this movie I'm making is about.

Silverman: And what would be an ideal way or place to show it, or like an ideal audience. Who are you making it for or like... I don't know.

Katz: I don't know. I think I've had a hard time getting my work shown in general because I'm not a big networker. But I would like anyone to see it, honestly. Probably – it would probably have to be in an art gallery though, if I'm being honest. Because that's how these things work. But eventually I'll put it on YouTube. Yeah.

Silverman: Yeah. I guess I want to ask you if there's other things that feel important to talk about or are on your mind.

Katz: Mmm. I think I want to talk a little bit more about my childhood and how like of the trans narrative of being like "if you didn't try on your mom's dresses, you're not actually trans." And like how I used to feel so ashamed that I didn't do that, that I would just – that I didn't even want to think about any part of my childhood. I think now that I'm a little more "it's ok – if you didn't do that, you're still trans." I think I've been thinking a lot about what it's like to be – what it was like for me to be a little boy and how little boys are treated. I think a lot of – I think it's like depressing and dark the way a lot of children are treated no matter what gender identity they have, or assigned. But my boyhood was so confusing and parts of it were really beautiful and I loved being a boy, and parts of it were just so... I think having a lack of embodiment and not having any way to know that's what that feeling is because of – because little kids aren't asked to talk about their bodies or their feelings. I think that's damaging for a lot of young people. I think seeing trans children makes me so happy because I'm in some way somehow that young person – like what even was conscious of what their bodies feels like or what there – where is gender in their body, like I don't know. It's a combination of your mind and your body. But I was just not even aware that that was a thing that you could even think about. It's hard to talk about, I think, but I'm interested in it and I want to... I think a lot of my memories are gone from that period, but I want to try to excavate more.

Silverman: And do you feel like the separation of childhood to some sense of becoming is through language? Or do you have some sort of visual understanding or what differentiates not knowing from knowing?

Katz: That's a good question. The day I came out to myself, I got really high. I got really high on ketamine and acid and I was really high, just alone. And I remember just feeling my body in a way that I had never felt it before and where it wasn't being policed by my mind anymore. And maybe there's something about me going to fancy education my whole life where it's like everything is getting directed towards my mind. They're like "read this, read that" and it's so disembodied that I needed some kind of other substance to bring me back into the house that I live in, which is my body. I think if I had any regrets about my life, it's like just not doing that for a year. I don't know like... I think that's why so many – part of why so many trans people do a lot of drugs is to recover that kind of sense. But yeah, I think going to college and being – studying comparative literature had to – that definitely brought me way out of my – no amount of reading Judith Butler helped me at all. The only things that would help me were memoirs written by trans – the only books that would help me would be a memoir, a very simple memoir by trans women like... I don't... I think it's a little bit yucky that young people have to read those books sometimes.

Silverman: Yeah. And when you spoke of the book before that helped you call out a different sense of understanding, can you remember some of the things that you were reading or felt when you read that book?

Katz: Yeah, I think it dispelled some of this really basic narrative that when you're trans, you always – for trans women, you always feel like a girl and you cry every day because you're not a woman and you wear your mom's dresses and your mom's dresses and your mom walks in and you're wearing her makeup AHHHH and then everyone realizes it and then you get re-closeted and blah blah blah. So I think just hearing about that that's not how it has to be - just hearing details of people's lives being trans-moving like the Juliet Jock book, her memoir, where she's like "yeah I loved soccer and I just played soccer every day and then I was transitioned and then I was on the girls soccer team and it was weird but fun." And I think I was like "oh" like no one had ever said that. I had never even explored my shit enough to know that liking sports was an OK thing for a woman to do or a trans woman to do.

Silverman: Is there – sorry – is there anything else?

Katz: I think there's something weird about having – growing up in a family like the one I grew up in that's really – has really specific politics and is really politicized. Like, my mom was a radical feminist and we had three copies of our bodies or selves... You know, just like – and then being like "and I'm trans." That feels like the most trans-trender thing to do. I'm like – that makes me be like "oh, this would be the natural thing for somebody who had parents like that to just realize that gender – that most people probably aren't cis and that gender is really expansive and it's cool to try out different genders and that you are – you determine what happens to your body and you should explore." And so I think – my parents were definitely not chill about me coming out and it's been really hard in certain ways and also it's been fine and I still talk to them and I love them.

Silverman: What does it make you feel to talk about being some sort of natural evolution in the home in which you grew up? Is there shame or like... yeah, how does that make you –

Katz: Yeah, I think I have some shame about it. I think I feel like when I see friends who didn't come from that or who have just really been in really unfamiliar situations their whole lives, I just have a lot of respect for that and I can't imagine what that would be like. It makes me feel like my life isn't real because I've never pushed back against anything. But it's – this is also very self-critical lined thinking, probably not that helpful.

Silverman: Because when you say something intense about being in a Walmart in Florida and would probably be killed, there is tons of vulnerability in the ways in which you are visibly alternatively not part of the whatever mainstream paradigm of what people should be. So it's an interesting kind of oscillation between how I fell in line with how I was born into this radical politic, highly aware family and then the actuality of what it means to live in a world that isn't.

Katz: And also like when I came out to my mom, she cried and she said didn't think that I'm actually trans. But like, you guys made it so that it was ok for me to do this and still be loved by

you. And that felt so like whatever kind of like the apple doesn't fall far from the tree thing. I think that was somehow destabilizing for me to have to come out and then be like it just be weird, really weird to be in my family now.

Silverman: What do you think they were scared of?

Katz: I wonder if they felt guilt that they had given me access to communities and reading material that expedited my gender exploration. I think my mom felt like she had been a bad mother having not seen it. She kind of said that to me. She was like "I didn't notice anything." And I was like "you did great. It's fine." And I think that part of that's about the narrative of transness being a disease, or like a bad thing to happen to someone, rather than beautiful that you get to live your life in many different genders. Yeah.

Silverman: Do you feel like... yeah, do you feel like, because of their reaction, you're tethered to – you have this feeling of it being a disease or being shameful or hidden? I guess what I'm thinking about what also makes you feel like it's this beautiful other act of exploration or self-fulfillment and what that feels like and what tethers you to the other pole.

Katz: That's really interesting. I don't know. It's kind of like elusive feelings. It's not words. It's not through words. It's through feelings in my body that make me know that how magical it is, I think, to have my body change, like literally change, to feel those changes... is like, it's really empowering. It's really, really empowering to be like "this thing isn't working. I'm going to just change it." But the thing is like – the thing I want to change is like the crust and like the skeleton of my entire reality. So it's like building a new house while you're still in the house, without having to take the house down or something. It just feels weird. It feels like magic. It really does.

Silverman: That's really gorgeous. I feel like we should leave it there unless there is another thing. I mean there's many, many, many multiple things, but I think for this time period it was really beautiful. Thank you.

Katz: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explore stuff and share.

Silverman: Of course.