

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ARI BROSTOFF

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Transcribed by Jaime Wild

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Aviva Silverman: Hi my name is Aviva Silverman and I will be having a conversation with Ari Brostoff for the New York City Trans Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centred on experiences of tran-identifying people. It's January 2nd, 2023 and it's being recorded in Ridgewood.

Ari Brostoff: Hi! Thank you for having me.

Silverman: Umm thank you for coming. Could you introduce yourself?

Brostoff: Sure, I'm Ari Brostoff and uhh

Silverman: And where you coming from tonight?

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I live in Crown Heights and I'm coming from therapy in Williamsburg.

Silverman: Wow, OK therapy to the interview. Did you process or talk about what it would be like to be interviewed?

Brostoff: Actually no, umm no, but maybe I'll do that later this week.

Silverman: Have you been interviewed? A lot in your past.

Brostoff: Somewhat, umm I had a book that came out earlier this year, umm so yeah, I've done interviews around that and but I also am a journalist and so I'm I'm more used to being on the other side. So this is. This is interesting. Makes me anxious in a in a good way I think.

Silverman: And could you tell us about your book since? You mentioned it.

Brostoff: Oh sure, yeah, it's an essay collection. It's called missing time. It's a series of essays that were. That are kind of loosely framed by the the years that they were written, which is like during the time of the Trump administration about kind of reflecting on the threat of fascism and the kind of return of uhh the left in the United States. In light of kind of reflections, on growing up with the so-called end of history of the 1990s.

Silverman: And can you go into that, that that feeling of the End of history in the 1990s?

Brostoff: Sure! Yeah I mean I think so I'm 37 and I think when I was growing up the kind of narrative that was being very widely circulated was that umm you know the in the post Cold War period there was essentially [pause] that we were in a time of umm kind of liberal American global hegemony that would last forever and that the kinds of contestation of

that global order were kind of over and done for and could only be talked about in like more memorialized form. And yeah, and I think that that consensus kind of, you know, has gradually given way over the past 20 years or so. But then I think. It really really started giving way like. Maybe you know five or six years ago.

Silverman: And who also influenced you to think about these things?

Brostoff: Oh, like as a kid?! That's a good question. Well I mean well, One of the the so the title essay of the book. Is about the TV show The X-Files which was really huge for me when I was in middle school and the conceit of that essay was that that was that that show sort of gave me a very strange kind of political education and I think yeah, that kind of world world of. Conspiracy and that sense that you know there was actually something, that there were kind of historical secrets that were lying underneath the world that we lived in, I think was very uuh kind of uhh enticing for me and an educational and again in like a funny way. But yeah, I don't know I read a lot of this comes up also briefly in one of the essays, but I read a alot of like Jewish historical fiction. As a kid that. That included kind of umm glimpses of like the the kind of Jewish Socialist tradition like in Eastern Europe, in Eastern Europe and and and in New York mostly and I was very taken with all of that.

Silverman: Could you cite any titles or pieces?

Brostoff: Yeah uhh, there's, there's a. Book called Shosha by Isaac Bashevis Singer that I loved as a kid. That's about like a Communist young woman in Poland. There's a book called Davita's Harp by Chaim Potok, but I also just was obsessed with what I was about 10 umm about a Communist girl growing up in Brooklyn. Umm? Yeah, what are some of the others?

Silverman: I'm sorry were these books given to you by your parents. Or how did they?

Brostoff: Yeah, they were just kind of like lying around, like my family is not political but they are very Jewish and you know, Sometimes there's just politics that kind of seep through and actually like pretty. mainstream canonical like middlebrow Jewish 20th century literature that I really grabbed onto, much to much to their confusion.

Silverman: Right? And when you. Say very Jewish. What makes them very Jewish?

Brostoff: Their community, is extremely Jewish. They're I mean, They belong to a conservative shul, or they they did belong to one until it was my dad was the music director there and then got sort of downsized out of a job and after that they, they've you know, been kind of wandering from synagogue to synagogue ever since. But yeah, but they're conservative. They don't think of themselves as religious because to them only orthodox people are religious. But I think a secular person would think of them as religious, like their lives are very very much organized around the Jewish calendar and life cycle events and you know and the and the community.

Silverman: And to go. Back a little further, where was all this?

Brostoff: This this is umm the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, a neighborhood called West Hills. It's like kind of the far the far West Valley.

Silverman: And how did that influence you as a child? To be brought up in a home like that?

Brostoff: I was think alternately into really to my Jewish education and and and Jewish upbringing and and felt totally alienated and rebelled against it. You know I took it umm I was, you know, kind of nerdy precocious kid, and I-I actually, you know, took it very seriously. I would like you know I would I-I went through a phase when I was in like late elementary school where I would go to synagogue with my dad on Friday nights when he was playing the piano there and I would, you know, want to go and like debate the rabbi about his sermons afterward, so I, you know, and I, I yeah, I really wanted to think about all these questions. And I think it really shaped kind of an ethical framework, but it also was not a particularly intellectual environment, and definitely a pretty Zionist environment, which I kind of reacted against, like fairly fairly early on. And I think I you know it was not an environment where it was particularly possible to be a queer kid. And yeah, I kind of dropped out of like organized Jewish life to the extent that I felt able to by the time I was in probably like late Middle School, although I did keep going to this like kind of Hebrew intensive Hebrew school like after school program like all the way through high school but you know I would just complain about it.

Silverman: And when you say it helped form an ethical framework. Could you speak more about that?

Brostoff: Yeah, I think I think my mom in particular is for better and for worse, somebody who think a lot and has very strong opinions on what it means to be a good person. I think she very much understands herself as a good person and as a kind of community hub, and I think she is a community hub in a lot of ways. We have a huge extended family and my parents have like a tonne of friends and my mom is very much at the centre of many many people's lives and I think you know her own ideas about how people should be in the world and treat each other. I think she sees us very much rooted in kind of like Jewish values and I think I picked up a lot of that from her though again, also really rebelled against a lot of her reading of, you know actually like how to live one's life.

Silverman: And when you said that it was hard to be a queer kid, can you? Can you speak more about that?

Brostoff: I mean I you know it was just like a very suburban kind of [small pause] I don't know parochial like environment that you know that I went to Hebrew school and or you know, like briefly, like summer camp or youth group or whatever and which actually was fairly different than like where I I like I always went to public school and my friends had predominantly Jewish friends even at school, and you know and and it's not like I wasn't around a ton of jews there

too. But school was definitely more diverse and less less wealthy. There was like more room for you know, kind of personal and cultural experimentation. So you know by middle school. I don't know, I spent a lot of time in middle school announcing that I was Bisexual and you know like trying out different ways of expressing that and that felt like it was allowed at school and like it was not allowed, it was just weird at Hebrew school, and so I think I just, you know, it just made me not want to be in. That space really, right?

Silverman: Right. And what was your first encounter with like a the idea of a trans community? Or trans people?

Brostoff: That's a great question. [Mid length pause] I think I think the first people that made Transness kind of real to me were like one kid that I didn't go to high school with, but some of my friends did who was a trans masc kid who came out really young and really got like socially punished for it and then also? A small handful of kids, also mostly trans mask that I met like at the very beginning of college and. Other than that, I think my. Images of transness world like extremely I don't know like both limited and just kind of sensationalized. You know like I think I don't I think I had any concept of I don't think I had a concept really. I mean, I think you know I like I certainly had an idea of like drag queens, but I think the idea that. I don't think I really had any. Any idea of like what kind of umm like like what trans life actually looked like, it was like. I mean just back to like 90s cultural objects it was you know it was like Nathan Lane in the birdcage or something. You know what I mean? Like it just yeah it was. I think it was. I think I think queerness was like very it, it wasn't. Queers wasn't not necessarily considered like it wasn't totally like domesticated or like considered normal or something. I think it was it was the way it was or was not. The way the way queerness did or didn't feel available, I think was really complicated, but transness I think just almost didn't exist.

Silverman: Hi, we're just talking about the lack of trans visibility. Many forms. I was wondering. How you would describe your gender?

Brostoff: Yeah, awesome, great question. I would say I think I would say identify as as as trans masculine and depending on what day you got me, I would say that I'm non binary or I would not say that if I'm feeling. irritable about that particular turn of phrase, and I think I also really still see it as being in motion. I've been I started transitioning three years ago, is that right? 2023 I started transitioning at the beginning of 2019 GOD four years? It's crazy. But yeah, I mean it's it it definitely still feels like a like a process and and so I think it is actually possible that I will wind up being um a little bit more in the middle of the gender spectrum and a little bit less on on the umm transmasc side of things at some point, like I, I feel like in some ways I kind of overshot what I was going for and I'm now curious about kind of trying to I got back to some kind of imaginary middle. So yeah.

Silverman: How would you describe what the imaginary middle is?

Brostoff: I think I'm very attracted to the idea of like of like real androgyny like I think, I think that actually going back to your question of trans representation or visibility when I was a kid I I think that like figures that were mostly not identified as trans at the time, but you know, maybe would have been you know in a different moment. Who were really influential to me were like just kind of gender bending rock stars of like the 60s and 70s. You know, like I just really loved umm Lou Reed and like Patti Smith and David Bowie and um and love the kind of shape shifting-ness of those kinds of gender performances and the kind of fuck you attitude built into them and I don't know the kind of like almost like you know continual transformation for its own sake or as a way of life. And I think you know I was like like love like Hedwig and the Angry Inch and when I was in High school so I think there's in some ways, a little bit of I don't know like an awkward fit between like those images that you know are sort of very, very deep for me and then the actual like lived experience of just kind of having the opportunity to transition and going for it. Where, like I definitely didn't set out to you know, start passing as a man. That was never that that really, like wasn't my horizon and. And actually, turns out it's a little bit tricky to kind of I mean, you know to to to get some of the things that to get the things that you want when you're on HRT and not the things that you don't want that, might kind of push you into just being read differently. Which also I realize is you know very different for different people but for me I think like you know the the thing for me that just kind of flip the switch in terms of how I was read was growing facial hair and it's still something that I feel like extremely on the fence about. It was not something that I wanted to was something it was scared of and then it started happening and I actually really liked how it looked and it was also happening in a moment when I was in a relationship with somebody who was into it and who I felt like I was kind of you know collaborating with in some way on figuring out what I how I wanted to present and and that relationship ended later and I think it feels a little bit like yeah, it's raised the question for me of like, well, what do I actually want for myself. And you know, like how do I feel about being like read as a man when I go into a bodega and and and I it's just like I just truly don't know the answer yet.

Silverman: And umm OK! So I just want to do some establishing done. You grew up in California and then how did you get to New York?

Brostoff: I went to college near New York and I spent a bunch of time in New York, like on breaks from school and also kind of always wanted to live here and then I moved here right away after I graduated and have been here ever since.

Silverman: Where did you go?

Brostoff: I went to Wesleyan in Connecticut.

Silverman: And how was that experience?

Brostoff: [Sigh] MIXED! Like real culture shock had no idea what you know East Coast private liberal Arts College was going to be like. Yeah, felt, I think pretty overwhelmed by a lot of you know, like the the kinds of like wealth and cultural capital or whatever that I was encountering there, but also made like really wonderful friends. I will say since this is the theme of the conversation, I think gender wise I think it was like a really, really strange experience and. UM? Not necessarily a good one though. Kind of an interesting one, and there were. Do you want me to {snapping} OK, I'm just re-associating here. It was such a strange time. It was like so yeah, I started College in 2003. I graduated in 2007. So like I said earlier, you know I met I mean, I think sort of tellingly was like the very first people that I met in college basically were like the trans kids like we just. I don't know, we just found each other right away. But I they did not actually wind up being my friends, they were they were really, really like deep into I don't know a kind of identity politics and like I mean they were almost like you know, like like quasi-professionalised as trans kids, you know like they they were like on I'm I'm really talking about like mostly like two people here, but you know it felt like a lot because I didn't know any trans people before that. But yeah, you know it was like they were on like national boards of like trans youth organizations and and you know I think and we're like super involved in like fights on campus about gender neutral bathroom accessibility and just like you know, I think they took I think the way I would say it is that I think that they took gender and their own genders seriously in a way that I found really un-relatable and like like cringe or something and I'm sure in retrospect I was actually just terrified of and didn't realize that and also just like it wasn't me like it just wasn't you know, it was like there was obviously some reason that we met so early, but like we kind of had nothing in common, and I didn't. See I the there were other kids that were like genderqueer who I think I also often didn't really feel like I connected to, but it didn't feel I mean, I think this is just one of the main differences between you know what college was like that and now it's like. I mean, kids were experimenting with their sexuality constantly and publicly, but experimenting with your gender was just like not wasn't really happening or it was happening in a totally different way. Like I don't think I was just saying this to a friend the other day. Who I went to college with and who's actually just starting to transition like now and and I think we were talking about how at the time we had no image of like what a kind of like trans masc identity or embodiment could be that wasn't related to being like Butch and which is not a way that either of us identify as at all, like. I mean I'm like you know? Very like Faye and kind of faggy and like not I don't know like I have like a lot of feelings and I use a lot of emojis [small laugh] I I'm not going to I'm not particularly handy. You know like, I'm just like not like I'm like. I think I like kind of thought for a second. That maybe I could be, but it was like that like that really like never got off the ground. You know, like there were the the dyke scene at my college was like very much organized around the rugby team and I was like I could never. Like just total disconnect, so so yeah, I didn't really see a lot of options there and what happened instead is I became like you know, like a self identified fag hag and you know, like really surrounded myself with a lot of gay boys and tried to be kind of like bitchy and ironic in theatrical and in ways that felt like more, you know simpatico with my like gay boy scene and and also I was like terribly resentful that I like, couldn't actually be one of them, you know and I was like in love with my gay best friend and you know, felt, and I literally would say things like you know I was like cursed to be a woman because like really, I'm a gay man, but like that's just my cross to bear and it

never occurred to me or you know, to anyone that I said that to as far as I know that that might mean I was trans it it. Just was like it was like metaphysical or something. And and it was happening partly because or those ways of articulating things was happening partly because of the education that I was getting because I was like really reading ??? who you know. UM? Famously identified as a gay man, but no one quite knows what that means, right? And she died in 2010, before a time when she would have presumably like started thinking through that in different turns. And you know what I? Was really like reading this kind of like 90s queer theory Canon that was very much about like transgression and about gender performance and as possibilities, but it really was not about transness, so I think I just felt think I felt very stuck and very like illegible to myself and kind of like I was just doing like a really complicated stick and you know, and and then. And then after that I just kind of became like a like a vaguely straight girl. UM? You know, because because it was the best available option and you know, but then continue to have a kind of gendered sitch for a long time. And yeah, and the idea of actually thinking about thinking consciously about transitioning I mean, there's obviously a million, you know things that I remember saying or doing over the years that are like OK like that's basically just saying that you want to transition but but in terms of consciously thinking about it and actually starting to do it, I mean that happened within the course of like literally like a month or something. It was like well, anyway, that's another question.

Silverman: You could skip ahead

Brostoff: Umm no if you want if you have more scene setting

Silverman: Ohh uhh sure, we could talk about your entry into New York? How you met certain communities that might have helped bring new aspects of your identity forward.

Brostoff: Yeah, totally. I moved here in 2007 and I guess I would say I have like two queer communities that I was a part of. One was just like the world of friends from college or, you know, friends that I was meeting later and who were again, like mostly gay boys, some dykes and who were like you know, really, like building a kind of cute like Brooklyn queer world. I had there's a group of friends that I started going to, we started taking these weekend trips every summer that we called Queer Summer Camp when I was like 25, but we're still doing it. And you know, like a kind of shifting group of people that actually like one really interesting thing if you know if you were to kind of ethnographically track just this shifting friend group, it's like so many people like there were no trans people in that group at the beginning and like half the core people and that started transitioning in their 30s. Actually, Jules, who I think he maybe wanted to interview as well, is like part of that group and and yeah, a lot of yeah, a lot of like like shift from like one kind of queer identity in our 20s to like like a like really pretty different in our 30s.

Silverman: And can you name parts of why you think that was possible or able to happen?



Brostoff: Yeah, I mean I think like I think it really speaks to the way that transness feels more available now. UM? And also simultaneously, I think having a long term group of queer friends that made it feel really like once it was kind of like more and more conceptually available like taking the leap was umm felt really possible because like other people you know, were kind of doing it along beside you so. Yeah, umm yeah, I think we all really like helped each other. And like you know and with with close relationships in in in close ways and with more distant relationships like it was like still really, you know like just like knowing people that you had known for years, even if you weren't super tight with them, had like gone through this process and that they had done it you know a little bit older I think. Yeah, for me that was like a hugely like enabling thing. And so I think so all of that was like one community for me. Although you know I'll say also like I was really dating man mostly and and so also felt a little like. Like I was not fully living in a well, in like a. I don't think I felt like a like a full. Participant in in in my own queer community, even though I always felt very accepted within it and like a part of it if that makes sense, but I think I did feel like something was. I think I felt for a long time, like I didn't know how to be queer and that people were gradually figuring it out. And then I kept getting stuck figuring it out. And transitioning, I think you know, was something that really changed that, although questions remain. And then the other queer community that I should mention is like I had these much older lesbian friends actually through like the lefty Jewish world Alisa Solomon and Marilyn Neimark and Esther Kaplan and Eve Sicular and other people, and the scene around this radio show called Beyond the Pale that I was part of for a few years that for many years was kind of the only left Jewish anti Zionist like media outlet. And the people who started it had been Act Up people and they you know they were like hugely. It's funny saying this you know, for the public archives, because, like I, I wonder if they even know how important they were to me in that way. I think I I think they know how important they were to me as mentors. And, you know, in terms of kind of coming into like a left Jewish politics. But I don't know if they know they were also really important to me in terms of being like we're elders, but they they really were. And and I think. Yeah, that was like. You know, I think that there was like a uh, seriousness to their politics and the way. that they thought about. UM? Those was kind of like like integral to where they were coming from politically, but also was not like the endpoint of where they were going politically. That was just like so exciting for me to just like be in the midst of.

Silverman: Totally yeah, I guess that there's this question that sometimes is asked that's like what other aspects of of your identity are important to you, which is kind of a part of that.

Brostoff: Yeah totally umm yeah, I mean. UM Jewishness is really important to me, I think interestingly, in the same moment that I started transitioning I also took the job that I have now as an editor at Jewish Currents, which is a left Jewish magazine And that actually really changed my relationship to Jewishness. I think I had felt and given up in a lot of ways on having like a having sort of anywhere to go with Jewishness because I was just so frustrated with the kind of political and cultural limits of the community as I saw it, and you know. I mean, in a certain way it was similar to kind of pre transition trans feelings, it was like you know, a kind of like a schtick or something that I was performing. And performing like alongside other people, and felt legible

to some people, but like it wasn't it didn't feel like it was really like materially like. I don't know like deep or something. And then being part of the magazine really changed that, and I think the magazine itself has done a lot of work. I think the magazine is I think trying really hard to you know, kind of like create a different kind of Jewish culture and the world and and so being part of that has yeah has like really made that feel like way more available to me so I would say that's super important and like yeah like being on the left is very important to me and. I do a lot of organizing work.

Silverman: Could you talk about that?

Brostoff: Sure! Yeah I am I do a lot of tenant organizing I started doing it in a more committed way in really not that long ago which is crazy cause it became such an important part of my life. But yeah in 2020 I coordinated a rent strike in my building, at the start of COVID, when though it went strikes all over the place and I got really into it and then now I'm pretty involved in the Crown Heights tenant union, which is the tenant union in my neighborhood. In another group that doesn't really have a name, but that has a meaning for like over a year now that is doing a lot of strategizing about building a citywide tenant union, and yeah, so that's [coughs] excuse me, something I spend a lot of time doing. A lot of time doing and thinking about. And I think you know, being on the left just kind of guides the way that I think and move through the world in a lot of ways.

Silverman: Is it present for you in any way being in Crown Heights to kind be kind of walking through the historical kind of like Jewish and black communities history there?

Brostoff: Yes, hugely, that is my current obsession. I really want to start putting together like a kind of like black Jewish uhh tenant organizing caucus I've Have actually been talking to a lot of people about that in the last couple of months and think that that's something that might get off the ground like like really soon. It's not something that really exists right now. It's like you know, it's something that desperately needs to exist. But I do think that that's part of my attachment to crown heights that I've thought about a lot more recently is that like there, it's just like a really strange and interesting place to be Jewish and to be a Jewish person who you know is committed to stopping gentrification.

Silverman: And when you speak of like, the Jewish left are there more prominent issues that are on your these days.

Brostoff: UM? You mean like what are the issues that like like register for me like as like a Jewish leftist in particular? Yeah, I mean I think like Palestine Solidarity movement is like very much at the at the centre of Jewish left politics as I understand them because of the way that Zionism has been, you know, kind of posited or something that represents Jews in the diaspora and that that challenge is designed as an are tantamount to anti-Semitism. It feels like there is kind of obligation I feel like to you know, to to refuse that and. I think there's also I mean I, I think all of it is really inextricable from that to be honest. But but I think that there's a way that like the American Jewish community is like like in in it's kind of, you know most mainstream or

like establishment forms. Is it really very conservative and and like really like much more kind of like right wing and isolated than the community itself necessarily realizes, I think, because of the way Israel Palestine politics have kind of skewed things and like I think that you know I think I have family members, for instance I used talking points that like would not be out of place on Fox News even though they very much identify as like Liberal Democrats. But you know, also, like the Democratic Party is itself so much more conservative than it realizes, right? So like it's, it's like it's. It's kind of that. Yeah, I think that. That I think there's kind of like misrecognitions within the community and and trying to like create an alternative or or a challenge umm yeah, just like feels really important.

Silverman: I guess in a broader way how have you seen kind of like your interactions that they put up or like organizing projects and the trends or queer community evolve over the years?

Brostoff: Yeah, wait, sorry to be dunce here, but like are like. Is the question like how like trans politics and the and the the kind of like movement work that I'm organizing around are like coming together or or or you're thinking more like kind of next to each other.

Silverman: I know I asked two questions at once. I guess you could say either or like if you feel like there's been a recognizable shift, and perhaps they've crossed, or if one or the other feels more present for you.

Brostoff: Yeah for sure. Yeah, I mean I think no. I think I think part of the reason I'm struggling to answer the question is that it points to a gap for me, which is that in some ways they're not super connected and I would like them to be more connected like I think. I think in my organizing life I feel very accepted as a trans person. I'm not the only trans person around, I think. Actually one thing that has been cool is to be in relation to a lot of people who I'm like sometimes like the first trans person that they've met. Just like you know, like older neighbors. Or like having yeah, like getting to kind of be the the person who other people can like practice using they them pronouns with or whatever. And feeling like. You know? I mean, I don't. I don't want to give myself any undue credit for this. I think this is for all kinds of reasons that have to do with everything from like being a white person to being a little bit older than a lot of people are when they first, start transitioning. To just like you know, I don't know my personality or something. But like I you know, like there's that kind of like there's like kind of attitude that exists of like it's not my job to educate you, and that's like not, I don't feel I don't identify with that at all like I like, I think I think I like actually think I actually sort of enjoy educating people like you know like and enjoy like. UM? Yeah, like watching people like work through their own confusions or whatever, and maybe in part because it was really hard initially to transition within my family and it feels a lot lower stakes in some ways to kind of like do it you know like in the community of my neighborhood. So yeah, so that's sort of like 1 answer and then. In terms of. I don't know like where. How like trans politics are changing? In my in my world like I don't know, I think they. I think I think that. I think trans politics feel really different to me now than they did. When I started transitioning four years ago, and in ways that I'm still trying to wrap

my head around. I don't quite know what else to say about that for the moment, so I'll stop there.

Silverman: Yeah totally. Well, I guess I'm looking into all these three main questions and I guess I have some particular interest in I got to know you through a talk you did online about the Talmud and kind of GNC narratives, and I was wondering. Yeah, well, your interests are in that vein if that's something that feels interesting to talk about.

Brostoff: I mean I was the was the moderator for that conversation, and it was actually something I knew like nothing about, but was really excited by. And you know because of his book that came out last year called Trans Talmud and that you know, I was just really curious to check it out and to talk to the writer and and the other guests that were part of that conversation just kind of about the idea of a trans archive. But yeah, I think that the I actually think. I mean, I know we've been talking about like. both Jewishness and transition in this conversation, but I actually I think for me, the way that Jewishness and Transness relate to each other feels really different from that conversation feels much more like it has to do with kind of like diaspora Jewish identity formations of like. You know, like the past 50 or 60 years. Whereas the Talmud is, you know a whole other realm. Uh, but I do think that. Questions with the Trans Archive are super interesting, which is part of why it's so fun to be doing this conversation. I think the way that. Yeah, I think it's really. It's really strange to be like participating in a kind of major shift around, like the contours of. UM? Of gender and the self and the body that like like none of us know where things are going to land and. I think that that open-endedness, this is like. Yeah, sometimes it's really fun. Sometimes it's really overwhelming sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I sort of check out from those questions altogether for some period of time because I'm just like living my life and then kind of remember that. That that's something that I'm participating in and like. Like I don't know like what I. How I am read in the world or like? UM? I don't know like what my own kind of trans politics are like. Like in like I don't quite know what to say. It's but it's like. It's like I'm in flux and transness in the world is in flux and like. And if I like if I like don't check back in too what that means for a while, and then I come back to it and as I'm just like, oh, I don't even. Like I don't even know what I'm doing like what like what is everything. I don't know if that makes any sense, but yeah, it's like a very. It's very strange and humbling and. Uh, maybe one way of saying it too, this is something that Jules and I have talked about a bunch is that I think like. UM? I think it's really hard to talk about transness outside the context of like of ageing, and I think that I've experienced that in one particular way, like someone that started transitioning in my 30s. But I think that is also just true fundamentally, like in the way that. UM? Idea of transness and in fact the idea of gender itself grew out of umm kids seeking the means the transition and ways that those kids were kind of used by the medical establishment as like the basis for imagining, like the body as a site of gender, plasticity and inventing like the concept of like like the way like the endocrine system like shapes the developing gendered body for teenagers and and you know all of this stuff that like is now sort of very like hotly contested as the right, you know gets you know increasingly obsessed with trying to stop trans kids from transitioning and like. Like all of those questions are like in some way fundamentally about like the about bodies moving through time, right, like? Like what does

it mean to stop a kid who is 11 and wants to take puberty blockers versus like letting the kid start transitioning who's already gone through puberty versus transitioning when you're older, like at like at at every point it becomes a question of like are sort of moving through the the the you know the kind of like normative developmental stages in the way that you are being asked to or are you able to kind of exert some kind of like autonomy over over that process by fucking with your hormones and with your gender expression. And so I think. Yeah I don't know. Yeah all of that to me just feels like really really connected to like the kind of like lived experience of doing this, if that. Makes any sense, yeah?

Silverman: Are there other things you feel important to add to this? To this record?

Brostoff: Maybe I mean, I think. Yeah I want to. I want to give actually like a complicated shout out to my friend Andrea. Because she's like a trans public figure and also a really important person in my life, but some of these who I Have like a really different kind of experience from so Andrea Long Chu to who should I say who that is for?

Silverman: Yeah sure!

Brostoff: Because I'm assuming that you know her work. But yeah, Andrea Long Chu, who you know, is very brilliant essayist and critic and public intellectual. And who is a trans woman, a few years younger than me, is somebody who I became really close with when, God, she was like such a baby. She was like 23 and I. Was maybe 30 and and or like a little older than that and. Yeah she umm she was actually like my first really close Trans friend because this was like before s lot of my other friends started transitioning and before I you know met a lot of other trans people and she really like. I think I think initially just like having a lot of conversations with her about her own transition and. And her own like frustrations with. You know ways how transness was being publicly articulated. Was like really kind of brain exploding for me when I was still thinking myself as a girl and and then and she was also really the person that encouraged me when I started thinking about transitioning and really kind of like told me I could do it. And I, and the reason I wanted to mention her is. Is that I actually think like I think the the the thing that she really like put out into the world that I don't think had been kind of said publicly yet was like the possibility that like transition could be a sight of all kinds of disappointment and ongoing dysphoria and you know and and. Even like hopelessness, and that that wouldn't make it any less legitimate and. I think that I feel hugely complicated about that and and that that's still something that I'm really contending with, and that I think is like. UM? I don't know like for me just like a. Huge question around. What it means to be trans right now like I. I think I initially felt like, and I mean I'm, I feel comfortable saying all of this publicly because, you know, I've had this conversation with her like I think. I think in some ways it was like incredibly liberating and enabling, actually. To to be given to understand that, like. It was like allowed to want to have a different gender? Even if you weren't sure that you would be able to like do it in a way that felt successful all the time. And the idea of kind of like reaching for something that you couldn't actually arrive at and that still being like worth doing, I think was just like so huge for me. And I

think at the same time that like. At the same time, I really understand and I think this is much truer now than I'm you know, further into my own transition. I think I understand why there was a lot of resistance. Among a lot of trans readers to that idea and the sense that you know that that kind of pessimism was like actually like a dead end and like. And and and rather than seeing it as giving permission, you know seeing it as like just kind of like remaining trapped or something. And I think the thing that I would have for myself is that, like in a certain way. I think I am feeling. I think I think. Just in the in the particular moment in which. We're speaking, I think I am feeling. My own sense of pessimism, or stuckness or you know, even like hopelessness and some moments about the shape of my own gender and. You know, kind of like wondering if I did it right, or like what I actually want. But I think what's interesting is that, unlike in Andrea's version, which is so much about kind of wanting to be a woman and and having a very clear image of what a woman is and finding that really difficult to reach, I think for me it actually goes back to a question that you asked earlier of like what what it means to really be in the middle and. I think that that actually feels really hard to reach like this sense of like overshooting, or like in some way overshooting. But in other ways, undershooting or whatever that is like I think. I don't know like that like I. I actually think. Landing in a kind of indeterminate gender that feels good is like is really hard and and. I think it feels important to me to say that because sometimes I think that the discourse around nonbinaryness or gender nonconformity is like itself really really shot through with this like militant optimism or something like that that you know, because that's saying like fuck you to the gender binary, that that's the option where you know where it's important to like really feel good about where you are because you're not trying for the thing that you can't have, and I guess. What I want to report is that I actually think it is very possible to want a kind of indeterminacy and not feel like you're able to get it or not or or not. Get the one that you want and like and that feels just like I don't know. It feels hugely complicated. Both kind of like socially and medically and umm. Yeah, I think yeah, I just I just thought I would like add that to the archive here. But yeah, that's all I have.

Silverman: Thank you

Brostoff: Much, yeah, thank you so much. This is really fun.