

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

LUCA LEE

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Transcribed by Luca Lee

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Aviva Silverman: Hi, my name is Aviva Silverman and I will be having a conversation with Lee for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans identifying people. It's November 6th, 2019, and it's being recorded in Chinatown.

Luca Lee: Hi.

Silverman: How are you doing?

Lee: I'm good. How are you?

Silverman: I'm fine. How was your day?

Lee: My day was great, actually. I had classes today and midterms. It went very well so I'm very happy about it.

Silverman: Can you tell me why you're happy?

Lee: I'm happy because I've been working on some projects I guess like...I'm Chilean and right now there are so many things going on in my country. So I'm trying to connect my projects with the things that are going on in my country. Like not exactly with some things that I've been reading and with the protests, but I ended up just creating things that are connected historically that make a lot of sense for me, and made a lot of sense to my classmates and my professors. So it seems powerful.

Silverman: When you say it seems powerful, can you tell me what that means?

Lee: Means that...It 's like a very deep question, I guess. [Spanish] Significa que le estoy enseñando a la gente cosas que la gente no sabe acerca de la situación en mi país sobre una herencia de desigualdad, de rabia y de injusticia. No pensé que eso podía de alguna manera conectar con ciertas maneras de creatividad que estoy desarrollando acá en Nueva York y realmente me emociona y me hace sentir super feliz. De ser capaz de poder conectar experiencias personales, emocionales e historia con lo que estoy haciendo acá en mi máster.

Silverman: What is it? I don't know if this is jumping into something you want to talk about right now. But like, what does it mean to be in New York and feel and understand what's happening there through media and through phone calls with your family?

Lee: I think...first of all, I feel like I don't want to be here right now. I wish that I was in Chile. There's something very deep that I've been feeling, and I wish I can just take a plane and go there and like, go to the protests and be with my friends and my family. Be with my friends and go to the streets, write a poster, those sorts of things I'm not doing here. I'm trying to be in contact with some Chileans, with the Chilean community, and we are doing things. We're organizing our gatherings and yeah. It just feels isolating, somehow. But at the same time, I think that I can do something like, maybe I created this wall and it doesn't exist... I call it micro activism, the way that I connect with people one on one and I talk about the situation in the country, or what I'm feeling, or talk about my family. I talk about our history and that makes a lot of sense for me, like, I do that on different levels: with friends, with lovers, with classmates, with my professors, vaguely with people that I don't know sometimes at parties. So it's powerful every time that I can spread the word. Or just being open and honest, and talking about things are important for me right now. Seems powerful.

Silverman: I wanted to ask two questions that are different, but I wanted to know if there's a song from your childhood that you ever think about, or that you've thought about recently. And also, as a follow up, if there's anything from what's happening in the protests that have been stuck in your head.

Lee: There is a song by Victor Jara called El Derecho de Vivir en Paz. That song has been played a lot in protests, there was a day or a few days I think, maybe for a week, I'm not sure. They were playing the song every day at the same time. All the houses were playing the song. So then I'd be reading Social Media and seeing the experiences of some people. A lot of people were crying. A lot of people had a lot of anger. Just to give some context, Victor Jara was a musician, singer and songwriter. He was killed by the military during the dictatorship, and the way they killed him was brutal. They broke his hands because with his hands he was playing guitar. So they broke his hands first, and then they killed him. They tortured him. So that song has been in my mind a lot these days because of the protests, but also because of myself. Somehow relates to my personality and the way that I isolate myself many times I think, when I feel things so deeply. So it has been present before the protests, and now more than ever.

Silverman: Would you mind saying or singing some of it?

Lee: Well, it's a long song. I don't want to get very emotional I guess. El Derecho de Vivir En Paz means The Right to Live in Peace. It's all that I can share because he's just so deep. Feels very private.

Silverman: And what is your relationship to living here now?

Lee: Relationship with?

Silverman: With New York.

Lee: My relationship with New York. I came to New York four years ago. I was actually driven by dreams. I started dreaming about New York, the dreams were very vivid, and this was happening very often. So I was like wow, maybe there is something I have to do in New York or, why am I dreaming? I didn't know the reason. I just thought that maybe I had something to do here. Or maybe it was connected with some sort of, like, past life or something? So I created a path for myself to come here. I got a fellowship from the Chilean government which paid for my life here for a year and that was very nice. And it has been a hard time I guess. It is still hard, but it has been changing through time. For me, New York is a challenge every day, every minute. It's like finding a more authentic version of myself. Very new and it feels like a rebirth. It feels like there are also many transitions that I'm going through right now. The fact that I've been developing a career in journalism for so long, and here somehow I'm able to connect journalism with art, it's something super big and something that I couldn't do somewhere else, I don't know why. I'm more connected with my body in ways that I haven't seen before in my life too. So that's also very important.

Silverman: Are there other ways that your dreams have driven some of the ways you are in your waking life?

Lee: Suelo tener sueños premonitorios bastante seguido, muchas veces no sé qué significan, o aparecen imágenes que no entiendo, pero luego de algunos años soy capaz de ver que esas cosas ocurren y me acuerdo que lo soñé previamente. Tengo sueños de creaciones, tengo sueños con arte, tengo sueños con personas. Esos sueños me transmiten energía, transmiten a veces temperatura, me transmiten olores, me conectan con experiencias, pero también con cosas que no han sucedido. Si, podría decir que tengo sueños...una o dos veces al mes tengo sueños que después ocurren, pero no he encontrado la manera de tener una participación más activa en esos sueños, o de comprender o generar algún tipo de conexión más racional con esos sueños. Creo que los sueños me explican maneras...me explican procesos a través de colores o a través de formas. Me explican como tomar decisiones y esto tiene un toque de Realismo Mágico pero me gusta, me encanta.

Silverman: Is there any that come to mind right now, like a specific one that you're thinking of?

Lee: Hum —[laughter]—. No, nothing comes to my mind. Maybe something comes up but I don't want to talk about it.

Silverman: Okay. I wanted to know what is the way that you talk about your gender?

Lee: I'm exploring that.

Silverman: I'm going to repeat the question. I wanted to know if you could speak about, or explain to us how you talk about your gender.

Lee: My gender it's something that...when I think about it, it's hard for me to put words, like to describe what's my gender. I think it has never been one thing that can be described through words. Probably I wouldn't find the words in English to explain what I'm feeling, nor even in Spanish, I think I'd be short. I never explain my gender through words. When I think about my gender I feel...I don't know. I don't think about feelings. I think about colors, shapes, smells. I know that it might be very abstract the way that I'm explaining it, but I think I don't have words.

Silverman: Is there an early memory that you could describe where you were like, oh!...

Lee: Yeah. I think when I was a kid I was convinced I was a boy for many years until someone just said you're not. So everything that I was doing, like boyish things, such as the way I was playing, or the things that I liked doing, games, or the way I was dressing. I saw in many pictures that my mom let me dress as a boy for many years. Um. But then she freaked out at some point, and she tried to correct the way I was seating, talking, and behaving. So I think gender for me has been changing through life many times. As a masculine-of-center...ser forzado a comportarme socialmente como una mujer creo que fue una experiencia traumática, y estoy recién dándome cuenta del trauma que eso generó en mí. Pero tiene una raíz en muchas cosas que también estoy explorando a través de terapia. Creo que nunca tuve la oportunidad de entender lo que era una transición. Nunca tuve esa información por parte de mis padres, profesores en el colegio, en un nivel educacional. Nunca tuve esa información en el trabajo tampoco, nunca tuve acceso. Por ejemplo, si mi mamá me hubiera llevado a un doctor cuando tenía cinco años, un doctor no hubiese podido ayudarla tampoco porque crecimos en una dictadura que no nos permitió tener un acceso más profundo a la educación. Y ese es un trauma que mi familia, mis padres sobre todo han tenido sobre ellos toda su vida. Y de alguna manera me tocó a mi, ya que yo crecí criado por ellos, y no tuve acceso a muchas cosas, porque ellos no tuvieron tampoco ese acceso. De la manera en la que entiendo el género, volviendo a tu pregunta, me identifico como un chico. Creo que siempre me he identificado como un chico pero nunca me lo permití por treinta y cinco años. Me identifiqué mucho tiempo como lesbiana pero tampoco me senti feliz o pleno con esa definición. Incluso teniendo acceso a poder leer, o conectar con algunas personas transgénero en Chile en los años 90s, o comienzos de los 2000s,

nunca me hubiese permitido eso tampoco por un tema de presión social. Creo que existe un trauma y tuve un bloqueo emocional por muchos años. Y recién ahora en Nueva York me he sentido más libre de explorar, o más que explorar, poder permitirme la libertad de decidir y poder ser feliz con respecto a mi género y poder transicionar. Creo que no me habría permitido eso de chico, nunca, pero me lo estoy permitiendo ahora en Nueva York y me siento super feliz. Creo que no es algo que la sociedad me está permitiendo, ni me lo están permitiendo las hormonas tampoco, si no me lo estoy permitiendo yo. Es un regalo que me estoy haciendo a mí. Y ese regalo se conecta con la intención de ser más honesto, y ser más honesto conmigo mismo es el primer paso en esa intención.

Silverman: Okay. So I understood some of that —[laughter]— and I think that at any point you should fill in what I missed. I wanted to know when the idea of transitioning came to you also, which perhaps you got into. Or you did speak about being a child and I wasn't sure.

Lee: Yeah, I was talking about just behaving as a boy for so many years. But then my mom freaked out and then I didn't allow myself to explore my gender identity for decades because of many things. It was family pressure, social pressure. Also in terms of education, there wasn't much education about gender identity in the country because of the dictatorship. So my family grew up with a lack of information and education, and somehow that was transferred to me and my sister. And it's like something...some sort of trauma that is carried over generations. Intergenerational trauma. So I then allowed myself to explore that even though I knew that there were some things like, okay, am I lesbian? Maybe. So that was the label that I put on myself for many years.

Silverman: How do you say lesbian in Spanish?

Lee: Lesbiana

Silverman: Okay —[laughter]—

Lee: So I put that label on me and I wasn't happy. There was something weird, like I wasn't comfortable, I kind of labeled myself that way because I was dating a woman, or queer woman or cis woman, whatever. There was something missing within that framework. So yeah, then I started researching more and I was like, okay, what's going on with me? And yeah, I had a few trans friends too, but I never allowed myself to make decisions about it, mostly because of pressure, because of work, and society. There are so many things that I feel like I wasn't able to do in my country. And then I came to New York and here I am feeling so much freedom which is a very contradictory feeling too because there's no freedom at all for people like us. But at the

same time, I feel a lot of freedom being far away from my country, and in allowing myself to be more empathetic and honest with myself.

Silverman: Would you mind elaborating on the no freedom at all? When you just said there's no freedom at all for people like us. Could you elaborate for people to understand what people like us means.

Lee: For people like us? I mean, self-determined. Self-determination, gender. People of color. Otherness. Because of the government, because of the system. But more than Donald Trump, I think is capitalism itself, which is getting bigger and bigger. And it's sad to see that people are not really noticing the way that they are exercising capitalism everyday in their lives through emotional connections. Creo que la gente no es consciente de cuanto ellos...de la cultura capitalista en la que viven y de la manera en que ellos se mantienen ejercitando ese capitalismo en la manera en cómo se relacionan con las personas. En la manera en cómo escuchan, o en su inhabilidad de escuchar, en la manera en como tratan de generar dinámicas de poder con otras personas. En la manera en la que creen que están haciendo activismo pero su activismo en realidad no vale nada cuando no son capaces de escuchar a personas que tienen un background diferente al de ellos. En la manera en que ejercitan dinámicas que carecen de empatía, dinámicas que carecen de compasión. Me parece que esas son cosas que son difíciles de encontrar en esta sociedad, y lamentablemente las veo todos los días. En mis amigos, las he visto mucho en relaciones emocionales y amantes, la he visto en personas que he amado muchísimo y son activistas, o artistas, pero me han tratado como basura emocionalmente. Sé que es un statement muy emocional pero sí, creo que la falta de empatía es algo que esta sociedad tiene que trabajar. Y cuando pienso en eso generalmente me siento muy triste. Siento que no se muy bien por donde viene esa noción de cambio de la que la gente a veces habla. No se si mi generación, o las generaciones más jóvenes, están realmente trabajando en temas de empatía y en mejorar sus habilidades para escuchar. No lo sé, no lo he visto, pero esa es una opinión super personal.

Silverman: All I want is your personal opinion. Okay. There's one thing that I might have misunderstood...

Lee: Sorry

Silverman: No, I love it. You were talking about some sort of like, trash mentality among artists or something?

Lee: Well I wasn't talking about the trash mentality but that I'm seeing a lot of a lack of empathy and compassion. So when I'm talking about capitalism, that's the way that I see white capitalism among the people around me. It's very sad for me to notice that a lot of my friends, past relationships, or lovers, or classmates that are so...the art they're doing as activists is so amazing, but then on an emotional level it's just so poor? You know, again, I may not be using the right words, but I feel that the way they behave emotionally is always very selfish. So that's capitalism for me, and that's the wildest way and the ugliest face of capitalism that I'm seeing within the society. And I see that every day. So then I reflect a lot on what are people really doing to change the system because that sounds very good in a piece of art, in a poster when you go to the protests "let's dismantle capitalism", for me it's like what does it mean for Americans today? That's my question. When I'm gonna see that on multiple levels. I'm not sure if people are conscious about what capitalism means today. How can you fight it, what's the way that you can really fight it? Are people really fighting it? I'm not sure.

Silverman: Do you believe that art can affect political change?

Lee: Yes. I believe that. I may be naïve, I think. But I've seen things that at least have touched me on a very deep level and are in my mind for a while, and if they even allow me to change my behavior, like behavior that I don't like through art, then I think it's a way. One of many ways.

Silverman: What's something you're thinking about?

Lee: Something that I'd change my mind about or something?

Silverman: Just something that touched you, that you saw.

Lee: I think music somehow touches me a lot. Sound art touches me. Music. Collective and participatory art touches me a lot, things that are coming from communities. Like political art.

Silverman: What is political art?

Lee: Everything can be political art I guess. It is a very broad concept.

Silverman: Anything you saw recently, you've held on to that and you've returned to and thought about it a lot.

Lee: I've been thinking a lot about Jacoby Satterwhite' piece. I guess because it has touched me like...

Silverman: Sorry. Can you just give context to what that piece was?

Lee: Yeah, it's a virtual reality piece at Pioneer Works right now. I think he's talking on a very political level, but also on a very personal level. You Are At Home I think it's the name of the piece. It really made me feel at home. La manera en la que expresa su queerness pero también de una manera bastante emocional y personal. No se, la verdad no puedo explicarlo, It's just amazing, I can't find words to explain it, it just touches me on an emotional level. I feel connected to it, I've been dreaming about it, it's just special because of the medium also. I think creating realities...is something that I want to do. The realities or scenarios you're not able to see right now, I think it's so powerful you're able to create them. Is something I really want to do.

Silverman: I wanted to know more about how you first came to journalism and then how you transitioned to art.

Lee: I think the first thing that was in my mind was art, for my whole life. I wanted to be a musician actually, but I couldn't because of like family. And yeah, they just said that they wouldn't pay for me to be a musician. So I just kept it as a hobby and tried to do something else with my life. At that time I was very rebellious so it was like a year that I was fighting for it. Like, okay, I really want to do this thing, but I don't have the money to pay it by myself. So I was depending on my parents' financial help and support. So I ended up doing something like... I kind of liked journalism and the connection with working with communities and the social justice connection between journalism and my political views. But art was always in my mind. I got very like...No se, fue super triste en ese momento para mi no poder desarrollar una carrera como músico, y lo bloqueé por mucho tiempo. Por quince años no fui capaz de tocar música de nuevo. Me convertí en periodista, trabajé mucho tiempo haciendo crítica de cine, siempre me ha gustado mucho el cine, videoarte, entonces trabajé mucho con gente creando video arte también. Yo creo que es difícil para la gente entender cómo el periodismo se conecta con el arte, y como yo lo conecte en algún momento en Chile. Lo conecte a través de la crítica de cine, lo conecte a través de la creación documental, trabaje mucho tiempo en investigación documental. La gente que trabajaba en documental de una manera más artística necesitaba siempre investigadores, gente que investigara temas. Y para mi era super satisfactorio investigar ciertos temas y estar en contacto con la gente, poder entrevistarlos y poder armar...poder conectar toda esa información que yo reunía desde las comunidades en una pieza documental, en una pieza de video. Eso me hizo sentir que estaba haciendo lo correcto, que estaba en un camino adecuado. Entonces creo que mi periodismo ha estado siempre conectado con el arte, de alguna u otra manera. Un par de años actué. Actué en dos películas, un cortometraje y una película. Fue una experiencia increíble, me gusto muchísimo, escribí un

par de guiones también. Entonces podría decir que el periodismo estuvo siempre conectado con el arte. Ahora estoy mas seguro que quiero usar el periodismo como una herramienta para crear arte o ciertas herramientas que el periodismo me dio, usarlas para crear arte. Que no necesariamente es arte documental o narrativas que se relacionan a la no ficción. También me interesa explorar narrativas híbridas, y narrativas dentro de la ficción. Y quiero usar medios no necesariamente relacionados al documental o a lo audiovisual, también quiero usar medios relacionados a la realidad virtual, o el arte interactivo, al arte generativo, arte cyborg. Pero el periodismo es una base, me da una base para poder hablar de la sociedad y hablar de temas que están ocurriendo. Hablar de la sociedad. No lo puedo explicar de una manera más compleja porque no es tan complejo.

Silverman: Are there certain musicians or artists that you admire?

Lee: Um. Yeah, there are many. I think the most important ones are Brian Eno...I really like his statement, what he has been doing. He's not a musician, he calls himself a no-musician, a self-taught musician. So that relates a lot with what I'm doing right now because I never had a formal training in music. So it's always coming from instinct, or from feelings, or from the fact that it's easy for me to play instruments, just like I've been learning instruments by myself. So I really like what he was doing in terms of composition, not following rules. It's just amazing. I like a lot Ryuichi Sakamoto. I think his music is just something that no one can do, just something very... Es muy personal y es muy emocional en todo lo que hace. Ha hecho música para películas, no sé. Creo que siempre me sorprende, nunca deja de sorprenderme, siempre se está reinventando también. Entonces puedes escuchar algo de lo que hizo hace diez años atrás y va a sonar muy diferente a lo que está haciendo ahora. Creo que siempre me enseña algo. Además su música me hace llorar, que es algo que no sucede muy frecuentemente y su música me ayuda a conectar no se muy bien con qué, pero me ayuda a llorar. Quizás a conectarme conmigo mismo.

Silverman: And prior to this, when you worked for Democracy Now! I was wondering what kind of affinity politically did you have towards working for that organization?

Lee: Well, I was working for Democracy Now! for a year. So far, it hasn't been the best work experience that I've had in my life. It was very meaningful for me because I was wondering how I could help my Spanish speaking community. Somehow I was thinking about volunteering for organizations, but also time has been hard for me since I've never had much time because I have always been working two or three jobs, and also have classes now. So my free time is very limited. I'm still exploring and trying to reorganize my skills to do volunteering work. So Democracy Now! was just an excellent place to work around journalism, although I was trying

to leave a little bit journalism at the time, they offered me this opportunity and I couldn't say no. What I was doing there was mostly translating, but also creating content for the Spanish speaking community. So we were not just creating content based on our own ethics and our own editorial view, we were working with communities. We were going to organizations, we invited people to the studio, we were talking to them, listening to them like, what do you need?, how do you want this to be told? So I've never done it that way before in journalism. I think it feels very embarrassing sometimes with journalism, mostly because journalism in my country is so bad, yea it's just horrible. So the fact that we were connecting and listening on a deeper level was so...yeah.

Silverman: I think I know what you mean. But could you explain why media in your country is so horrible?

Lee: It's horrible because journalism in Chile is very corporate. The main TV channels and newspapers or radio, are very corporate. They're just following the rules and trying to keep the status quo in the same way that it was during the dictatorship. So they are not informing, they are lying sometimes, like many times. But you can decide all the time. I guess you can decide to work in alternative media or like leftist media, and I was doing that, but then it is very precarious because of money, and you're not getting much money to develop other things like volunteering, since you'd get a very low payment. You can't make a living by just doing that. So I always had some sort of collaboration as a side job, but I had to work on something bigger to make my life possible in Chile, which is a very expensive country too. It's similar to New York but people there earn four times less than the average here. Yeah. So I guess my work for Democracy Now! felt somehow like connecting with a journalism that I was trying to get rid of a little bit, a framework of work. But I guess that was my last job in journalism, and I haven't worked in this field after that. I like doing journalism, and it also felt like doing some sort of activism at the same time, and social justice work. I was learning a lot. I can also say that working for the Spanish department helped me learn so much about Latin American history. So many things that I didn't know. They learned a lot from me about Chilean history, and that was amazing. When I left they thanked me. Because I prepared, a few times, very interesting information. I can say that's not the right word maybe. Let's say special segments about Chilean history during the dictatorship, and the U.S. intervention in the politics of my country. And they were like wow, this is very good work and this helps us a lot to understand the history of your country from a first person perspective. So that was great.

Silverman: And can I just get a basic landscape? Because I am not familiar. When did the dictatorship end?

Lee: 1990

Silverman: And has there been a way to access like a queer trans history in the main cities? Is there a history that you have familiarized yourself with, or was it just not possible to do due to the dictatorship?

Lee: It wasn't, at all. Right now people are more into talking about queerness. I'd say that the first thing was talking about it and recognizing and looking at each other like hey, we're queer.

Silverman: And how are they talking about it?

Lee: Yeah, I wasn't very connected I guess. It seems like talking about these things makes me reflect on how much dissociation I have been allowing in my life for so many years. So I think a lot of ways that people are talking about queerness are through art actually, or video art. I've participated in some very interesting projects in collaboration with queer people. Also there's a lot of activism on the streets right now, like the queer communities are very visible in the fight...

Silverman: What do they look like?

Lee: Uh, you mean like, look like?

Silverman: Not like physically, but how do they manifest through, like, posters and?

Lee: Yeah through posters, aesthetics. There're alternative media, websites where they portray themselves, also talking about things like kink or, you know. queer sex work. There're a lot of queer artists doing amazing music. Yeah. There are a few movies too...

Silverman: What are the names of the movies

Lee: There is one called...I can't remember the name in English

Silverman: You can say it in Spanish

Lee: Tampoco me acuerdo. I don't remember. It's the same director who made two very good movies about a transgender person. I was invited to curate at Anthology Film Archives a few years ago, and I brought this movie and it was shown in The Trans Film Series. It was the first version of the Trans Film Series so it was very important for me to show the movie, and the

reality of a trans person in Chile. Although it was very hard. I guess Anthology was very open to showing the movie but the curators, white queer transgender people, were very against me showing it. A contradiction because they invited me mostly because they wanted to have queer people of color curating, but then with the movies, I think they didn't get to understand the movies. For them it was like there's so much poverty or oh, this is talking about transness from a medical way or like, from a place centering genitals or surgeries and all these people being denied access to medical transition. And I was like, wow, these movies are talking about this because this is the reality of my country right now. So if you don't want to see that reality, then don't show movies from other places. You're super safe in the trans white community in New York, which you think is big, but it's actually very small. There are other experiences about trans people around the world that are very different from your community. So if you want to make a program, or a series about just happiness and like positive bodies and a super happy trans community, then just show something different. Don't invite me to show cause I'm gonna show you something different.

Silverman: I'm trying to think of like a really positive trans film that I've seen just as a counter-narrative. Um.

Lee: Yeah, well, they had many, at least then that were like oh, this is from someone from Norway. And this was just like queer and trans people in a car having so much fun. And it's so nice to see those realities too for me, you know. It's just like being trans is not just that. Because you had access and the privilege to transition when you were like 20 years old, and your parents paid for your surgeries, you know, and you had all that accessibility (or access, I don't know what's the right word) you can't think that is the experience for all trans people around you. Or because that is your experience, or the experience of your friends, or your community, that doesn't mean other realities don't have a place to be shown.

Silverman: Yeah. What do you think about...and it's called in some circles, the trans tipping point. We're at a place where so many people now have coverage and are able to medicalize their transition early. And then also how it's been already like a subsumed into the media, and there's all these portrayals of trans people in ways that people want or don't want. And, how do you relate to that as someone who's out of their twenties and has arrived at a different point in their life's transition. Looking at American, perhaps cultural media and also the reality of trans teenagers and younger people doing the US right now?

Lee: Creo que es un buen momento...uhm, es difícil de explicar. He escuchado otros amigos trans explicarlo de la misma manera. Es un buen y mal momento al mismo tiempo. Siento que hay más visibilidad, y el hecho de que un seguro de salud cubra tu transición y pagues muy

poco dinero por ella, me parece increíble y una muy buena señal de que estamos avanzando hacia un lugar en donde tenemos más libertad. Pero al mismo tiempo el gobierno en el que estamos está también castigando esa libertad de diferentes maneras. A través de darle espacio a empleadores para despedir a una persona trans, o para no poder contratar a una persona trans, o para negar una cirugía que está basada en un seguro de salud dado por un empleador a una persona trans. Osea, creo que estamos peleando por esta visibilidad y que estamos logrando espacios para poder mirarnos y para poder pelear juntos y tener más visibilidad. Pero al mismo tiempo siento la contradicción de estar bajo un gobierno en el cual creo que no podemos sentirnos seguros. Feeling safe is something that we cannot just hold I guess. Sentirnos seguros de que vamos a tener estos privilegios por un largo tiempo, porque siento que se pueden caer en cualquier momento. Eso es lo que siento. En mi caso personal, reconozco el privilegio de poder transicionar en esta ciudad, de poder tener una transición médica porque mi transición emocional ha estado ocurriendo en mí por muchos años. Pero la transición médica a los 38 años es algo que agradezco. No sé muy bien si es algo que me lo agradezco a mí por poder permitírmelo, o de tener acceso también a un seguro y una cobertura que me permite tener una cirugía, o las cirugías que quiera. Tener acceso a hormonas. Sí.

Silverman: Are there some experiences you'd want to share about being on hormones? If not, that's okay.

Lee: It's okay. It's just... I think being hormones brings a lot of changes. I'm dealing with things, I guess. I think the best things are like the huge amount of energy I'm having right now. And that energy...I'm working towards having like, or transforming that energy in creative ways such as art, or trying to be more concrete about some ideas, because I always have so many ideas that sometimes it's hard for me to put those ideas in practice, or make concrete projects, make things happen. Then wanting to show them that's the hardest part I think. As an introvert, I don't want to show or I don't feel like showing anything, but then I feel like I should. The negative part of hormones I guess is anger. I feel that I have a lot of energy, but that energy also feels negative sometimes, somehow in forms of anger. And I'm learning through therapy how to deal with it. I also feel like, well I haven't been able to cry for seven months. And that just feels very hard. I'm trying to learn techniques to help myself to cry again. A friend who is a performer is trying to help me like oh, maybe you can learn techniques from performance. She's an actress, so maybe I can help you cry. And we're like ok let's talk more about it. But I'm...I think by now, I think the main thing is my inability to cry and it has been hard to see what's going on in my country right now. And I'm seeing so much violence against my people and I really want to cry. I feel that I really need to cry. But I can't. So all the feelings are transforming into anger. And I don't want that because I'm full of love. So I'm exploring how to fix that problem. Yeah. Is taking me a while.

Silverman: Sorry about that. I also wanted to know where you go to have fun. Little transitions.

Lee: Where do I go

Silverman: What do you do for fun? You don't need to go somewhere...

Lee: Yeah. Again, I'm an introvert so the place that I have the biggest fun is like when I'm alone. I have some spots in New York where I go to be alone for hours just to listen to music, like Prospect Park, or the waterfront in Williamsburg or Greenpoint. There are a few spots that I really love, so I just go there and I write or I listen to music while I'm eating something that I like. And yeah, it's just like I feel so much happiness when I do those things. Sometimes cooking something that I like, or sometimes working out makes me happy. Biking makes me happy. The rain makes me happy. Watching the clouds, walking in the city. Um. Walking late without having a clear point to get to like I don't know where I'm going, I'm just walking for like two hours or three hours in Brooklyn. I enjoy that a lot. Sometimes I enjoy one-on-one meetings with people.

Silverman: Sometimes —[laughter]—

Lee: [Laughter]— And at the same time that I'm talking about this, I'm afraid I might be a freak, but I'm just an introvert. I'm an INFJ, so I enjoy those sorts of things.

Silverman: I'm an INFJ too.

Lee: Are you sure? —[laughter]—

Silverman: Yeah —[laughter]—. I think you have to kind of check in sometimes.

Lee: Yeah.

Silverman: Want to go over your whole spectrum? Which sign?

Lee: Well, I'm a pisces also, very interesting. A combination of introversion and...

Silverman: Speaking of astrological signs. I wanted to know if you use any other forms of divination or rituals?

Lee: Uh, no actually. But I would love to learn. I'm into learning more through friends, I have two friends that are very into mediumship. And healing through meditation and Reiki. And that's a type of work that I really like and admire. So I'm learning, trying to learn more from them. Sometimes they send me meditations. I've been doing meditation for a while, but I'm trying to be more serious about it, and then develop a practice that helps me connect with myself somehow, better.

Silverman: Are there ones that speak to you more than others?

Lee: Um, meditation helps a lot. I'm not sure if this will fit into some sort of practice but I enjoy it a lot...and this is related to your question. The question about what do you enjoy? What do you do? Yeah, I like a lot touching, which I feel is very complicated here in this country, in the city. I wish I can touch more people and I try to control myself with people because it can be weird if you touch them too much, and I don't want to be invasive, I don't want to be disrespectful. But I wish I could touch people more. It makes me feel so happy when I can get hugs, or make out or touch bodies. It's just so much pleasure.

Silverman: And if any face of some sort, uh...

Lee: Yeah, it's like I can't just touch. Isn't like hey hi! and touch, because that would be weird. I guess I should learn a little bit how to like...set an intention when I want to touch someone like, hey, how can we build boundaries about it, or check in what makes someone feel comfortable. I guess I tend to just touch but I control myself a lot and I wish I can touch more, or for longer periods of time.

Silverman: And I think...

Lee: I like physical contact. Yeah, I'm very introverted and like to do many things alone by myself but I just love physical contact so much that makes me so happy. It's something that I miss from my country. I think in my country and in general in South America, people touch a lot. Even if you don't know someone, you give a hug to someone, or you sometimes just hold hands, or you kiss people. People hug each other in groups or yeah. When you say hi, you give a hug, I don't know. I just miss that here, where people just shake hands. I've been here for four years and this is still hard. To control myself and to touch less than I used to be. I used to do.

Silverman: Yeah. How do you interpret here, which I think has a really specific kind of like consent culture.

Lee: Mm —[laughter]—

Silverman: Yeah —[laughter]—. In a way, just what do you make of the ways in which it's been kind of authored through the last few years and like, kind of a specific code?

Lee: I think I'm learning a lot like...consent was something that you...Ok I'm gonna to talk about myself. I've been experiencing the concept of consent, and the way that people experience consent here within the queer community. So that's something that I'm learning and I'm very grateful that I'm learning how to express or set boundaries with people. It's something new for me, and I'm learning it here in New York. So I guess many years ago, twenty years ago, when I started exploring queerness you'd do what you feel and I used to be very impulsive. So, I don't know. I'm thinking now how that people might have felt when I was just like kissing, or touching, or being sexual or whatever. Yeah, I guess I'm learning a lot about it. I'm still learning and I'm gonna keep learning.

Silverman: How do you learn about it

Lee: I think I'm very impulsive, and here in New York I'm less impulsive. I'm more rational and I'm letting impulsivity go when I'm allowed to. But in general, I'm very like...I try to control myself a lot —[laughter]—.

Silverman: And is that new? or is that something that just happened as soon as you got here that happened this? How did that get kind of integrated?

Lee: I think integrated because people have boundaries. So that's super good to learn. Like people say I don't want this or I want this to be this way or what are you open to. You have to have some sort of dialog before doing some things. I think it's nice.

Silverman: I hear you. Yeah, I guess we can start to wrap up, but I wanted to know if there's other things you'd like to share or something that you haven't talked about that feels really pressing or important to you. In your experience living here, and your experience moving here, and your experience being an immigrant now. Everything that is politically nightmarish in our landscape, just anything.

Lee: I'd expect that people are more open to understanding intersectionality. It's a word that I'm hearing and seeing everywhere. And I think people are using that word for many things and I'm not sure if they really understand what intersectionality means. So I guess like, I don't know. I wish that people are more able to listen. To people, to otherness, in ways...

Silverman: Hmm. Well, you first said that you think people are using that word more as a way, as a motive of understanding themselves and locating themselves in relation to other people. And then you said you don't think that they understand it. And I want to know for you, like, what does it mean? Or does it have the effectiveness that it is supposed to be inserted into our dialog, you know, breaking down certain sorts of systems that aren't, you know, apparent.

Lee: What's the question again?

Silverman: Basically what intersectionality means to you, what it is defined as with you. And if you think it's functional, if it's functional for you, since you said that you don't think people actually know what it means

Lee: Si, creo que es funcional para mi en términos de que puedo entender mi identidad desde tantas perspectivas diferentes y creo que ni siquiera he terminado de entender mi identidad o terminado de construirla. Creo que puedo hablar desde la voz del inmigrante, desde la voz de una persona de color, queer, trans. Y todas esas voces convergen en la persona que soy. Me pasa muchas veces que creo que la gente me escucha desde una sola perspectiva, o que trata de escucharme desde diferentes perspectivas pero de alguna manera los sobrepasa, y al sobrepasarlos, escapan. No creo que haya un esfuerzo por realmente escuchar o tratar de entender la convergencia de identidades de una persona. Y eso a veces me frustra. Es algo en lo que pienso muy a menudo. Y creo que estoy aprendiendo a hablarlo más con las personas y a manifestar esa intención que espero ver en la gente.

Silverman: And when you or anyone has to define themselves, at least in certain terms, you know, like I'm a man or woman, you know, like all these different kinds of, like, demographic information. And then thinking about like the expansiveness of transness and the ways in which in the beginning you mentioned you didn't know how to describe it, even because it's a shape, it's a color, it's textures, it's outside of the kind of the realm of like how intersectionality seems to still mark you within like a certain kind of terminology that's like verbal. So I wanted to know if there's like, there are things that you wish other people knew about you that were outside of the realm of these or these distinctions.

Lee: I don't know how to respond to that.

Silverman: That's okay. It's a big set up.

Lee: Yeah, I will need to think about it. I might come up with a response, but I want to think about it.

Silverman: Well, thank you so much. This is so sweet that you came to talk to me.

Lee: Thank you. Thank you for listening.