NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

YANYI

Interviewer: Zef Lisowski

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Transcribed by Jamie Magyar (volunteer)

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #042

Zef Lisowski: Hello, my name is Zephyr, and I will be having a conversation with Yanyi 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 centering on the experience of trans-identifying people. It is June 11, 2017, and this is being recorded at Yanyi's apartment. Um, why don't we start by telling me your name and your age, if you'd like to?

Yanyi: Cool. So, um, I'm Yanyi, I'm 26, and I live here in Brooklyn, this beautiful borough.

Lisowski: Incredible. What are your gender pronouns?

Yanyi: Uh, he/him.

Lisowski: Mhm, and how would you describe your gender, if that's something that you've—

Yanyi: —thought about or thought things about?

Lisowski: —thought about or thought things about. Exactly.

Yanyi: Um, I think for simplicity's sake, I usually say that I'm a trans man. Um, but I identified as genderqueer for a pretty long time, uh, growing up, and I still kind of feel that way in terms of like... I—I didn't really like, have a sense of like, dysphoria with my body, um, and I think that—or at least I didn't like, know what it's supposed to feel like, because who describes that to you unless you're like, actually severely feeling it? So, yeah, coming into figuring out my identity only actually happened pretty recently, so I would say I'm like, on the transmasculine spectrum and—but, and very much like, identify as a man.

Lisowski: Of course. Great. Thank you for that answer. And when and where were you born?

Yanyi: So, I was born in China in 1991.

Lisowski: What was your early childhood life like?

Yanyi: [Sigh] Um...

Lisowski: Is this a question that you want to warm up to, or are you comfortable jumping straight into that?

Yanyi: I could jump into it, but it could—it could be a long answer if like, you're—

Lisowski: Yeah, take as much time as you'd like to.

Yanyi: Yeah. Um, so, as a kid I—I actually grew up, for the first couple of years of my life, in China, and, um, I immigrated to the US because my dad was going to graduate school. Oh, actually, not the US. North America. Canada! Canada, the other country. Also Mexico. Wait, there are other—yeah, there are a bunch of other countries in North America.

Lisowski: I just thought it was New York City.

Yanyi: I also did, um, because it's such a big country, the one that we live in. Um, so, yeah. We immigrated to Canada. Um, I lived there for a while, and basically, we just kind of followed my dad's graduate school/professional pattern, um, which is pretty typical of like, patri—the patriarchal life. Um, my mom also like, is kind of—I would say like, a successful career person. So, she like, is an electrical engineer and like, kind of started getting jobs, basically, at broadcast stations. And she would get a job basically every time we had to move. Um, so, I ended up in California when—for a year, um, because my dad was going to [University of California,] Berkeley, and then I moved to southern Illinois—not Chicago—for basically like, uh, elementary school through high school. Yeah.

Lisowski: And what—how much time did you spend in California, to start with?

Yanyi: Um, I spent a year there. My mom actually was still in Canada for a period of that time, because she was finishing at her job or something. Um, so my grandparents were actually with us. And, um, yeah. I have like, really good memories of my grandparents being around and stuff like that. They're on my mother's side, so, yeah. But I was always kind of like, a more tomboyish kid. I had a huge imagination, was not really into Barbies, that type of stuff, but I did have a Barbie, but she was just really like, part of the collection of stuffed animals and the cast of characters that I like, created. But I remember I had this like, really great blue bomber jacket and these really like—what're they called?—Ray-Ban-like sunglasses that I always loved to wear. And I also had a Batman, uh, bicycle, which—for my first bicycle. I outgrew it, and I got a Barbie one afterwards, which was not as fun, but—

Lisowski: I can imagine.

Yanyi: —for—yeah, for a while it was like, "Woah, this is like—I feel awesome," and I always like—I always really identified with this feeling of like—this, in retrospect, was a pretty masculine ideal of myself that was also—um, that to me was just like, cool. Yeah.

Lisowski: Of course. What are some other memories that you have of your early life around this time, pertaining towards gender or otherwise?

Yanyi: And my feelings?

Lisowski: Mhm.

Yanyi: Yeah. Um, I remember playing like, in daycare with a group of kids, and one who I really liked. She was really cute, had little like, hair things. Um, and there's a memory that I have of like, rollerblading through the apartment complex where we all lived, and I saw her, and I like, fell. Like, I just saw her and I was like [gasp]. Um, so that's a—that's kind of a cute memory, I think, for my like, very young, not knowing what was going on like, sexuality. But, yeah. I played a lot of games. I got into a fight with a kid over pretending to be the blue Power Ranger, because I wasn't allowed to be one of the boy characters, and I still have the scar from that, actually, which is like, pretty great. He like, scratched me, and that was it, you know? Like, life-threatening wound.

Lisowski: Of course. Did you receive that sort of pushback a lot as a little kid for, uh, instances of stepping outside of your gender box, so to speak?

Yanyi: Um, I mean, it was kind of this, like—I think there was like—it was appropriate for me until a certain point. Like, um, I loved dollhouses, too. There was like, some femme feels of like, "Aw man, like, I love this tea set. I love dollhouses. I love like"—like, my apartment obviously, it's like, "I love pretty things." Like, so, there was always that aspect, that I think that I could capitalize on and to like, reflect the desired gender thing. Um, but I also really loved swords and like, always asked for them. Um, I like, played with—whenever I would go back to China, I would play with my cousins in these like, really aggressive ways of just like, "Okay, now we're like, playing soccer, and we're going to see who can kick the ball, like, as hard as possible at the wall." It's like squash, but with a soccer ball, basically, or like—yeah. I just remember being competitive around those things, and it would be like, unladylike for me, because I'd be wearing like—in my parents' defense—like, silk dresses that they like, got me, because it was so hot. Um, and I would just like, muss them up or something like that. And playing like that actually—like, speaking of more scars—like, I ended up, at one point, crashing into a like, huge, um, armoire that had like, decorative, beautiful glass detail designs on it, and I broke it. Like, shattered the glass, and I have scars from the glass going down my body, had to go to the hospital, that type of stuff. So, um, yeah. I mean, I think that my—growing up, my whole relationship to gender was just that I like, tried as much as possible to not pay attention to my body. Like, I would just be wearing whatever, you know? Like, just—there was a general just, disinterest in whatever I looked like, or... It wasn't that I hated myself, or that I didn't like myself, um, but it was more of a like, "This is what my face looks like. This is what my body looks like. This is what I've got." So, yeah. And that changed a lot after I started experimenting a lot more with masculinity.

Lisowski: Mhm. And I know that you said that you moved around a lot as a kid. Did that impact how you sort of—the various places you were living in, did that impact how you viewed your body or how you interacted with it at all?

Yanyi: I would definitely say that being in—like, being in Illinois for my more formative years was actually really important, not only along lines of gender, but also race. Like, I'm from a town that was like, 85%-93% white, depending on—it was like, one of those towns that's actually two towns, you know? Like, um... So, yeah. I looked it up on Wikipedia at one point, and I was like, "Oh, shit. Like, there's a lot of white people here," and that was just something that I never thought or questioned, um, when I was there. So I had friends who would like, come up to me and do the like, slanted-eyed like, "Hi!" thing, and like—um, I remember, uh, as a kid—like, seven or eight—I started doing this thing called the Sting. And I don't remember actually want the origins were, but it was like, supposed to be an ancient kung fu like, move that other little kids had to beware for me. So I'm guessing that there was some sort of bullying going on, like, where people would say shit to me about like, whatever with like, my race. Actually, when I was in California, I ended up in a fight with this other kid who like—I was in the first grade and this kid was in the third grade. Um, but basically, he ended up kicking me in the face. Um, but we were fighting because he was like, "Where are your—what are your kung fu moves?" or—usually it's karate, because Japanese and Chinese are not different at all. I don't know if you knew this. So, yeah. I just remember that because it was so—it's like, in retrospect, so ridiculous of like, you have to prove, like, the authenticity of your race, um, through this like, really orientalist idea of like, what you should be capable of—um, or essentialist idea. Um, and that kind of followed me through other parts of elementary school. Also like, um, there would be moments where like—like, in the third grade I—um, like, this—this girl who was in one of my classes came up to me and started like, saying, "Ching chong chang" type of stuff to me and just like—it really affected me, but I didn't know why, and I just said I didn't want to go to school anymore. Uh, so, yeah. I mean, I think race was just like, a huge part of my experience in the Midwest and, um, it also is a—like, the Chinese background is also a really complicating factor in my, um, acceptance and ability to experiment with myself in how I felt about my own gender. So, um—and those are two things that I'm still kind of like, working with and figuring out.

Lisowski: Of course.

Yanyi: Yeah.

Lisowski: Uh, so it sounds like a lot of the more explicit racism occurred when you were in Illinois. Is that correct to say, or is that just that you spent more time there, so it came more to the surface?

Yanyi: I think i spent more time there. Kids also like, mimic the types of racism that they see like, from adults in their life, I would say. Um, it—I would say racism is still a thing in my life—

Lisowski: Of course.

Yanyi: —but it's a lot more—it's a lot more subtle, um, and it can be explicit, but it can be done in a way where like, um, if I get angry, it's like, an overreaction and uncalled for, and there's no way to directly talk about those things or, um—there are ways, but it's tough, um, and I find it still difficult to do with even white friends who are progressive and want to be allied in the right ways. Like, there's only a certain amount of emotional labor that you can get to and feel like, "Ugh, is this worth it?"

Lisowski: Mhm. Since you mentioned, uh, this briefly, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the ways in which you felt like—or, the ways in which your gender was racialized growing up?

Yanyi: Mhm. Um, I guess like, I would love to hear more about what you were thinking with that question. Like, maybe some more clarification?

Lisowski: Oh, yeah. Yeah, of course. I was just—about a minute or two ago, you talked about how, um, racism, and being racialized, and being from a Chinese background all played a pretty big role in how you were experimenting or thinking about your gender.

Yanyi: Oh, okay, gotcha.

Lisowski: So, I just wanted to follow that train of thought a little bit more.

Yanyi: So that one—I guess that—that's a little more complicated, just because, um—so, I just started reading this book called Asian American Sexualities that's like, from the 90's, and it's like, an anthology of like, essays, um, about like, queer Asian Americans. Um, so, I started reading the intro, and there's one particular part—I think the author is Russell Leong—um, but they're saying that the connection between home and one's own body and sexuality are really separated in a like, Western immigrant experience for Asian American people. And I actually quite—I like, quite relate to that. Um, so, the main thing about that is that, um, there's a certain amount of like, homophobia attached to like, um, coming out, for me. Like, I came out when I was thirteen. Um, my mother read my diary, and I was bisexual at the time, and I had a crush on someone. But it was one of those like, huge violations of privacy that are also just like—it's understood that you don't have privacy, as well, so I learned a lot about computers, and now that's how I'm a software engineer. But anyway, um, the... So, I had to kind of like, attach myself to my race in a way where it was—that was not—that like, owned it in kind of the face of racism. But also, owning my race meant that there was other stuff that I couldn't be or do, um, with regard to my sexuality or, um, my gender. So, like, gender stuff—I honestly like, was way—like, really only as recently as like, seven months ago that I like—that I really started admitting to myself things that I don't feel, or like, things that I want. Um, it was a lot easier, I think, to use my sexuali—or, not use my sexuality but like, understand my

sexuality, because it was external from me. Um, when you like another person, it's like, very clear, whereas like, "What is the thing that I like about myself?" That's so much harder! And why gender—I think gender is like, so much harder to, um, talk about, in a way. Um, and that's how we get the "trapped in the wrong body," like, rhetoric.

Lisowski: Right. Of course.

Yanyi: Um, so, yeah. It's just like, kind of a precarious balance of like, "What does it mean to be queer and trans and Asian? And how do I own my childhood, and my family, and my sense of home at the same time as exploring this idea that I am also like, not of the gender that I've been assigned?" And like, that—I want to imagine a family and home in a way that includes queerness.

Lisowski: Right. What are some ways that you've been grappling with that? It sounds like it doesn't lend itself to easy answers.

Yanyi: #noteasy! [laughter] Um, so, one of the cool things that's happening in my life right now is that I'm kind of intentionally like, seeking out more Asian American spaces. So, I'm doing this like, really great fellowship with Asian American Writers' Workshop right now.

Lisowski: Oh my god.

Yanyi: Yeah.

Lisowski: Um, sorry. I just know a couple of other people who are doing that, as well. Congratulations.

Yanyi: Wait, who do you—who else do you know?

Lisowski: Uh, Rami [Karim]—

Yanyi: Oh, you know Rami?

Lisowski: Mhm.

Yanyi: Rami's coming over to my apartment in—hopefully, tonight. I don't know, actually. They didn't say, necessarily—but, in like, a couple of hours. I'm having—I'm having like, a queer—or, not queer, but it's an Asian writers' workshop here.

Lisowski: Oh my god.

Yanyi: Yeah. It's like, off-brand Asian American Writers' Workshop, you know? Like, it's just Asian Americans who want to write [laughter]. Yeah, but that's cool. You don't live together, do you?

Lisowski: Uh, we do [laughter].

Yanyi: [clapping] I love it!

Lisowski: I said hi to them right before I came over here.

Yanyi: What?

Lisowski: Maybe I should edit all of this out of the interview, but...

Yanyi: Or you can just be like, "Queer fam all the way," right?

Lisowski: Right, 100%.

Yanyi: I don't know. Unstructured, right?

Lisowski: Of course. Of course.

Yanyi: What is structure?

Lisowski: Mhm, that's—I ask myself that every morning. Um—

Yanyi: Structuralism.

Lisowski: Mhm. I hope not. I hope that's not all that we have.

Yanyi: [laughter] Yeah, yeah, because we're burning that shit down. Yeah. Um, so, yes. I'm doing—so, I'm kind of intentionally, um, seeking out Asian American spaces, and I started this like, Meetup group that is for queer and trans Asians to literally just like, get dim sum and talk about binding. I don't know, like, what—whatever it is, right? It's not so much about, "Here's the agenda." It's much more about like, "Who wants to come and be part of this community, and who needs it?" Um, and that's something that, honestly, writing has taught me a lot about—of like, uh, how to bring people together and get them to show up to workshop, like, every single week. Like, it's the people who want—want it to happen who are going to show up, and that's who your community is going to be. Um, it really translates to a lot of things. Also friendships, like, that type of thing, but, um, I think in particular, like, having a structure around like, "This is—like, my Asian-ness and a community around that is something that I

want, and so how can I, um, productively ask for that to happen in my life and like, have the universe come back at me with some stuff about it?"

Lisowski: Mhm. Of course. That's a—that's a great answer. So, thinking about the ways that you're doing that, and the ways in which you've talked about coming out, specifically, um, what—have you dealt with other sorts of coming outs, as well? Or—I'm wondering what your kind of timeline of like, different self-realizations is.

Yanyi: Yeah. Um, so, I told you a little bit about coming out as queer. I went—also went to social justice camp when I was in high school, which was such a great thing. This program called Anytown [Camp]. It was really transformative to me, to start thinking about the world through a lens of like, oppression and, um—and suppression. Um, yeah. Having—that's the other structure that we're talking about—having like, a system of thinking about the world that is unlike the one that we know now. Um, anyway, back to the question. So, I came out when I was thirteen. I kind of had to go back into the closet, because, um... So, growing up, my parents actually physically fought a lot, and that, um—that was something that I, as a kid, had to navigate, of like, "Okay, I'm literally the person in between these two adults who are like, screaming at each other right now, trying to make it so they don't touch each other and shit doesn't happen." Um, which is ridiculous, because small children really—when adults want to fight, they will fight. Um, but, you know, it's scary. And, um, I would do things like listen to the air vent that was like, in my room, and like, listen for my parents in their room, because it was like, kind of directly below, um, and if their voice—like, I couldn't really hear exactly what they were saying, but it would be like—be about the cadence of their tone, and that type of stuff, of like—to project if something bad was going to happen. Um, so, I'm mentioning that because when I came out, I saw that anger and violence turned on me, and it was really fucking scary. So, uh—I like, didn't exp—I also was so like, "Oh, yeah. I found the answer. Isn't it great? Like, I untied the knot, Mom." Um, and the response that I got from her was so, uh, not what I thought it was going to be. Uh, like, it was violent, and it was also just like—I mean, I like, walked away from it without any scars, or anything like that, but I definitely got really scared. So, um, that's when I started to just lie really low, and lie—same thing—and went back into the closet—uh, kind of continued living my life like, as a queer person on the inside. I watched a lot of bad B-films on—on the internet. Back in the day, we had methods of getting these films, um, through downloading and stuff like that, so I watched a ton of them, just to like—I don't know. You like, read—like, that type of representation. Which like, also, for me, wasn't total representation. Like, it was like, white women, and mostly femme-presenting people. Or like, butches, who I also didn't really like, identify with. It was just like, kind of like, a—it was more of like, desire of like—aligning with a certain type of desire and feeling of like, forbiddenness.

Lisowski: Of course. And what were some movies that, um, stuck with you from that side, in good or bad ways?

Yanyi: Oh my god. Uh, woah, a long time ago. I watched like, a ton of stuff on like, the brick of a computer that we had. Um, I definitely remember watching But I'm a Cheerleader, and I think it's because like, people still talk about it so much, that I'm—it's like, coming to mind right now. Um, it wasn't a favorite, though. Um, I remember watching D.E.B.S., um, which was like, a kind of superhero-y film. Uh, I watched this film called Itty Bitty Titty Committee, like—which was about like, punk anarchist lesbians. Um, there was this really good series of Taiwanese shorts that I really liked, and I don't remember if it was in college or in high school that I watched it, um, but it was like, one of the most like—it was kind of like, a hit-or-miss—it's like a collection of short stories—but there was like, one film in there that like, really resonated with me, because it was this like, uh, Taiwanese couple that like, really were happy together but like, the femme-presenting person had to go and get married and have a kid, and stuff like that. But it like, was very Chinese: the sense of duty, of like, having to give up a part of your life in order to fulfill like, a certain—uh, a certain image of what your life is supposed to be. Um, and, yeah. I think it was called Candy Rain. Something like that.

Lisowski: That was something that, it sounds like, really stuck with you or struck you when you were watching it.

Yanyi: Yeah, because it was, um—I mean, I watched all these things to kind of be like, "I need my happy ending," and I don't mean—I don't mean like, "happy ending." [laughter] Um, because I wanted—I needed and wanted something to hope for, and I think that's also something that I also still—a little more critically now—but like, still want to express in my art and, um, that I look for even if I am like, criticizing everything else.

Lisowski: Mhm. Of course. Striking that balance is so necessary, between still maintaining some aspiration and being critical, of course.

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah.

Lisowski: What other sorts of—so, you talked about coming out and sort of going back into the closet. Is there a point where you—

Yanyi: Yeah, so many times.

Lisowski: Uh, so this is something that happened again, and again, and again, at some points?

Yanyi: Oh, yeah, yeah. And every time, it was this—just like—the sec—so, to continue the high school stories, uh, I started a queer-straight alliance with one of my friends after I like, did social justice camp, because it was like, "This is necessary, and this is a thing that we will do." Um, we—my friend and I—uh, yeah. And also, that's something that you do when you're

in the closet, obviously. Um, but, you know, it was like, ten—more than ten years ago, so the climate was a lot different, um, and people would like, tear down our posters about, "One in four, like, LGBTQ kids get bullied," that type of stuff. And like, we would see them in the recycling bins, and those things. Thank you for recycling, because I was also president of the environmental club, but no thank you for ripping up our posters. And one day—and we did this really amazing, um, "Gay? Fine by me," campaign, where like, we kind of had to underground have people buy t-shirts that said, "Gay? Fine by me," and we asked everyone to wear the t-shirts on the same day. Um, so it was like, really a powerful gesture of like, the quiet number of people who are actually like, on your side, and care about you, and want to be allies to you, or like, are one of you. Um, but I had one of those t-shirts on, and my mom saw it, like, after school one day. Um, and so, we kind of got into it again, and then my parents decided that they were going to read through my entire Facebook. So, they made me log in and told me to go to bed, and they woke me up at 4 A.M. the same day—the next—you know, like, whatever the night was, and they were just furious at me. I was talking to a friend of mine about this person whom I had a crush on, um, like, over Facebook message, and it was like, very incriminating, obviously, and it was the first time that my dad had really like, directly talked to me about it, but he was like, so angry. My parents like, said that they were—they were both very angry, which is like, I think—I think that people say a lot of like, "Oh, when people are angry, they just say things that are like, obviously not okay to say when like, you're not angry, but they were angry," and I just think that's complete bullshit. So like, my parents said that they were like, happy that, um, queers were murdered during the Holocaust. Um, they said that like—that was like, one of the big things that, um, I really—that really stuck with me. And at this point, I don't remember if my like, dad actually made a death threat, or if I just imagined it, because of all over the other stuff that was being said and what was being implied, right? So, um, then I went to bed again, completely normal and not traumatized at all.

Lisowski: Of course.

Yanyi: Um, yeah. So, you can imagine, I stopped going to, um—this was, I think, my senior year—so, I stopped going to, um, my queer-straight alliance—Spectrum—and it's still alive today [laughter]. Um, and my parents started sending me to a therapist who was a radical democracy activist in Taiwan at one point, but also a Christian healer. But she and I got—really got along, and told me that I was great, and, um, you know, just helped me along with kind of what I needed to talk about, if I did need to talk about stuff. Um, but that was my first experience of therapy. It was like, very involuntary, but—it turned out to be nice, but it could have easily gone the other way.

Lisowski: So, the therapist themself wasn't, um, sort of coercive towards your sexuality or gender?

Yanyi: No, not at all. Uh, she was just like, "Sounds like you're queer," and I was like, "Yup!" So that was—that was a good experience, and, um, I do want to say that like, my high school experience wasn't all like, awful. I definitely—I had a guidance counselor who was really supportive of me, and really recognized like, the stuff that I was going to. At one point, I talked to her about like, becoming an emancipated minor if I needed to run away from home. Um, I had a friend who let me keep stuff in his car—like, in his trunk—in case I needed to leave home. Um, thank goodness for most suburban kids having cars or like, learning how to drive, which is a nice thing. Um, I had a violin teacher who was like, really supportive and watchful of me. It's—which is like, a weird—I think a weird thing to say in like, the "having no privacy" type of way, but like, "watching with care" type of way. Like, I was doing some self-harm stuff—it was like, for attention but also like, things that I—I like, wasn't able to express a lot of pain that I was carrying around. Um, so, she paid attention to me and like, wanted me to A) like, be a good violin tea—or, be a good violinist—but like, also just like, to be okay, and she does—she does and did—or, she did and probably still does a lot of that labor for the teenagers and kids who like, come her way as a teacher. So, yeah, really love her. Anyway—

Lisowski: Incredible. And all this was in, uh, southern Illinois, still, right?

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah. So—and all these people were white—so, can't hate 'em all [laughter]. Damn it!

Lisowski: Right? Um, besides the support networks that you had, and the self-harm, potentially, did you have any other coping strategies, or anyone else that you felt like you could talk to during—when all of this was going on?

Yanyi: [sigh] Not really. Like, I called my like, co-president of the—well, the other thing was like, with my—the domestic situation, too, with my parents fighting. It would—it would be like, less frequent, but then like, "Ehh, you know, there's a knife and boiling water," that stuff. So, I like, at one point called one of my friends, but it was really just like, "Wow there's like"—it genuinely felt like no one else in my life was going through the same thing. Um, I think it's—that's probably not true, but like, how to talk about it and how to find that group of people who's experiencing the same thing and like, being able to do so in confidence is like, really tough. So, I—and as a kid, I just had no idea what the resources were. Oh. I was on a messaging board—one of those good old-fashioned message boards. And this one closed down, but it was one for teens. Queer something. [laughter] Really specific, right? Um, QueerTeens, QueerAd—okay, I remember the rhthym. DA da-DA-da-da [laughter]. Maybe you were on it, too. Who knows?

Lisowski: Possibly. So, something that's....

Yanyi: Queer-ority, queer ehhhhh, you know? But, it was really important for me to be on a forum like that. I basically just spilled my guts on like, "What should I do if I'm in this situation?" and it was mostly just people being like, "Hey, I'm like, so sorry that you're going through this." Um, and it was an affirmation that the thing that I was experiencing was not normal and like, not okay. And I needed to hear that from other people. But also, the race—the race thing plays a huge part in this, because it's like, "Of course there's more violence in households where there's a like, man of color at the head," like that type of thing, you know? Or like—which, I also called the police a couple of times, and it was like, always my dad who would like, get taken away and stuff and, you know, that was what the story was, but also, that's what the story stereotypically is, and those types of ways of—like, I kind of quickly realized that the system was not going to help us, and also that our—the community that we had in the Chinese American community was not going to help us. Like, a lot of it would be like, we would ask a friend—we would ask a family friend to come over, and they would be like, "You're fine," and like, "Stop being angry," and that's about it, right? Like—so, there's like, a real—and my parents were just going through a lot. Like, I'm not angry at them for not getting the type of like, emotional care that they've needed like, in their entire lives. And, um, immigrating to any country before Skype and um, any of the communication tools that we have meant that like, yeah, my parents didn't see their family or their friends for like, five years after immigrating, which is a really long time to be isolated. Like, New York is isolating enough, and I know people. So, um, yeah. When we talk about intergenerational trauma, like, that's what I'm carrying, of like—I carry the patterns of abuse that my parents experienced, in whatever way that I experienced them. Um, but I get to maybe like, work on that a little bit in my lifetime, and try to stop the cycle a little bit.

Lisowski: Right. Um, and did your parents spend a lot of time, uh, living apart from each other, or is that just when you first moved to southern Illinois, when your mom was still in Canada?

Yanyi: Uh, they didn't spend that much time apart. Um, and that was—that was in California, so we were like, together by that point. So my parents like, have not been apart, actually, at all. They almost got divorced once, but like... It's just—it's really complicated. Like, what is community, right? Like, that's kind of the main question of like, what does it mean to welcome immigrants to the United States, like—or to North America, I should say? Like, my family joined a church when we moved to Canada. My parents grew up in Maoist China, so I can tell you a little bit about the religion there: atheism. But we made a lot of really caring friends through the church, and we got the types of help that we really needed, um, as immigrants, and like, what—where else does that type of community exist, and are there ways that we can be building those? So, um, yeah. That's something I think about a lot with like, "What is another that I could do as a human that like, would make the passage for younger me a little bit easier—um, and people like my parents a little bit easier?"

Lisowski: Apart from the impact that the community had, did, uh, religion or religious structures play a large role in you or your parents' life in the US?

Yanyi: Um, not really. My parents started taking me out of Sunday school when they figured out that I was starting to believe it.

Lisowski: Okay.

Yanyi: Yeah. I talked to my parents a little bit about religion. I think my mom, um, believes in like, a higher power of some sort, but like, isn't really like, a doctrine type of person. Again, I think that like—my dad doesn't believe any of it at all—um, but I think that there's something really important there, of like, structure, and comfort, and hope, resting somewhere, and think religion can be a place where that exists for people. And not just comfort and hope, but also like, really answering a, um, desire or need for a—for deeper spiritual questioning and connection with something in the world, and having that, and a community of people who are also interested in that, can be really powerful and good.

Lisowski: So, what I'm hearing is that it sounds that, um, the church, for your folks—and for you as a—to a little bit—was sort of, um, building a place of hope, and sort of intentionally seeking out community. Would that be accurate to say?

Yanyi: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, pause, because I have to pee.

Lisowski: Yeah. [recording stops and resumes] So, good. So, um, when we paused, we were sort of uh, talking about the role of religion, and the role of structure, as well. Were there any other structures that were especially useful or especially prominent—

Yanyi: —in my life?

Lisowski: —as a smaller child, especially?

Yanyi: Um, [laughter] I would—so, two big—two big systems were the library system and the school system, actually. So—and I think about this a lot when I think about why I care about public services, um, because in a way, my family had failed to provide the type of help that I needed, or support that I needed—um, not because I was like, materially unwell or like, in want of like, basic stuff like food or water, or anything like that. Like, my parents always did an incredible job of like, taking care of us as a family. Um, but in terms of my mental and emotional needs, like, the library was like, a huge place for me to just like, be somewhere other than the place that I was in, because I spent a lot of time alone or not necessarily like, wanting to be in conversation with like, grown adults. Um, but I didn't grow up in a family where like, my parents would ask me how I felt about things. Um, so, I did a lot of—like, as a kid—like,

imagining and stuff, um, but I passed a way—and I—I also passed a lot of time reading and like, spending time in books, because, um—because moving around you like, don't end up having like, super regular friends who you know forever. Um, so I had like, a bunch of friends in Canada, and then I moved again, and then I made some friends in California, and then I moved again, and then we lived in the suburbs, so like, what is friendship? So I had some like, neighborhood friends. Proximity has always been a very interesting and important, um, way to be around people, but, yeah. The library was like, just this happy place for me, um, where I got all the Baby-Sitters Club books I wanted. And I read a lot of like, fantasy novels. Um, a lot of—I'm trying to remember them. Like, they all—like, Night in the Attic or something like that. I never read the, uh, the Redwood series? No, what was it called?

Lisowski: Yeah, with the talking mice, right?

Yanyi: The talking mice, yeah.

Lisowski: I think that was Redwood. [Redwall, actually]

Yanyi: Redwood, for real?

Lisowski: Mmmm...

Yanyi: Okay. If we're wrong, we're going to have to add a note to the interview saying that.

Lisowski: Uh-huh.

Yanyi: "Strong sorry." Yeah. Brian Jacques. Jacques. Um, but, you know, I read Harry Potter, loved Harry Potter, that type of thing. Um, yeah. Re—and reading was also a way for me to like—to like, have a—have meaning, in a way. Like, as a kid, I like, didn't talk to a bunch of other kids. I was really quiet. And we had this Accelerated Reader program in—at my like, elementary school, um, and every year, I was the person who like, got the most accelerated reading points, because i was reading everything. So you like, got prizes, but it was always like, "But I'm going to get the pizza party with our assistant principal. Like, that's what's going to happen." We got little medals, and it was—yeah, it was a way for me to achieve something that was like, out of the ordinary.

Lisowski: Of course.

Yanyi: Yeah.

Lisowski: God, I haven't thought about Accelerated Reader in so long.

Yanyi: In so long!

Lisowski: That's a throwback, for sure.

Yanyi: #throwback!

Lisowski: What, um—so, it sounds like you gravitated a lot towards sort of books about—fantasy books about discovery. Um, what about those themes or those genres were especially compelling to you?

Yanyi: I think, like—kind of guiltily—like, there was a certain amount of my—my own life was like, not enough to sustain my interest in life, honestly. Like, I was just like—I was bored in school. Like, I got really good grades. Um, I learned that I couldn't be lazy in school, so that wasn't—I got like, a D or something on a quiz once, and it was terrible. And, uh—I lost my train of thought because I had to put a coaster underneath the water. Um, what was I thinking? Do do do do...

Lisowski: You were talking about school and, um, your interest in the books that you read, specifically, and how you had to—

Yanyi: Right, yeah.

Lisowski: Just where—it sounds like, do what was expected of you at school, as opposed to what you were interested in.

Yanyi: Yeah. I mean, it was just like—there was just a wall that I hit, of like—I was basically like, mostly bored all the time, and I was like, in the challenge program and stuff like that, and that was like, mildly interesting, and I became friends with the people who were in the challenge program—or, the other kids who were in the challenge program. But, um, it—basically, I would fall into this trap of like, whenever there was a creative assignment, I could like, go crazy with it. So I would spend like, ten hours drawing, or something like that, because i had the time as a kid. And like, I would just spend like—or, spend a lot of time thinking deeply about my young author book and like, what that was going to be about, and being overwhelmed by how many possibilities of like, fantasy book I could write. Um, and then also like, for fantasy books in particular, like—and I think this is something that worked in my favor—um, was that like, there are a lot of like, young misunderstood boys who like, realize their power and like, go on adventures and stuff, and I was like, "Yeah, I really relate to this. Like, I'm not really thinking about why I relate to this, but I do, and I love the idea of like, having a sword, [laughter] and doing whatever I want," and like, being con—going on those adventures was always something that I loved. Um, but like, now I think about it and it's like, "Oh, there's

not a ton of representation otherwise." So, it worked in my favor, but like, there are problems with it, obviously.

Lisowski: Of course. Did you—did those books affect your behavior at all? I'm thinking about—I also read a lot of those fantasy books as a kid, and—

Yanyi: Mhm. Wheel of Time.

Lisowski: Oh, I never read the Wheel of Time books. Though, A Wrinkle in Time, on the other hand—

Yanyi: Hmm, A Wrinkle in Time.

Lisowski: —I was obsessed with. Though, um, I sort of started, after a while, trying to emulate these like, fantastical behaviors, often to my detriment.

Yanyi: Like what?

Lisowski: Like, trying to get into trouble.

Yanyi: Oh.

Lisowski: Or trying to go on adventures. Um, is that something that you did at all, or are there levels in which you engaged with the books besides just reading them?

Yanyi: Um, not really. Like, I'm—I think there was like, a deep emotional and mental stimulative, like, need that I needed that was getting fulfilled by reading them, but I didn't really like—I didn't really strive to fulfill those needs outside. Um, although maybe I'm lying, because I started watching anime in middle school—classic!—and I loved Dragon Ball Z. That was a huge thing for me in elementary school. Um, but it was—it was all kind of like—I could watch these things, and participate them internally—or, with them internally—but like, not actually emulate them or be them, um, even if I wanted to. Like, there—it wasn't really in the realm of possibility for me. It was just something that I happened to enjoy. But I started drawing a lot of like, fanart and that type of stuff. And I—now, going through like, my old drawings, it's like, "Oh, right, I like—I really gravitated towards drawing all these like, young men who like, I don't—I don't relate to or anything, they just—they're just all of a certain type, and they all have similar personality things that I like, really relate to, but," you know?

Lisowski: Of course. Did you have a DeviantArt account, or...?

Yanyi: Yes! And MediaMiner.

Lisowski: Oh, wow.

Yanyi: It was like, pretty deep. I had—I also wrote some fanfiction for Inuyasha, um, which was one of my old faves.

Lisowski: Of course. So, it sounds like you've pretty—you had a pretty vibrant, um, internet community—or, set of internet communities that you were a part of. Is that correct to say?

Yanyi: Um, yeah, I would say so. Like, I was—I was kind of like—it was dial-up times, so I would like, join all these forums with like, fanfiction writers of like, Inuyasha and stuff, and um, I was very articulate for a teenager, that type of thing. And I always kind of basked in this like, "You sound so much more mature than your age," um, and that was something that I really appreciated and liked, because it was like, "Oh!"—something other people were reflecting about me that I wasn't necessarily getting from my other life, or like my, you know, in-person life. IRL life.

Lisowski: Of course. Meatspace life, as, um, J. G. Ballard says.

Yanyi: Meatspace, yes.

Lisowski: Unfortunately [laughter].

Yanyi: Yeah, I just think of...

Lisowski: For sure. Um, did you—based on what you've said, it sounds like you were raised as an only child. Did you have any other family members, besides your cousins who you saw occasionally, that you were close with growing up?

Yanyi: So, it's funny that you say that. I actually do have two siblings, but they're like, really much younger than me. So, um, they were born like... So, a lot of my like, time—I had already kind of like, been in like, "I'm an only child" mode until I was nine, and then my—the twins were born. And I loved them to death, but I also was just like, "Who are these people?" "Maybe they'll help me get more toys," was really the like—the thing that I thought. Um, but yeah, I have a brother and a sister. Um, I love them both very much. We are still close, which is great, um, and—uh, yeah. I—I think I kind of kept existing with them there but like, not really with them as siblings, I think, in the traditional sense, because you like—I hear from other people about like, the—you fight with them, and like, there's stuff that happens with them, and I didn't really have that experience with them, because they were so much younger.

Lisowski: Do you feel like you've grown closer with them as they've gotten older, or...?

Yanyi: Yeah, definitely. Um, I think that we have like, a certain way of talking to each other that like—there are sibling-esque things going on, but I'm also like, way older and like, there—there's like, stuff that they need that I know, now, to give to them. Like, um—it's like, nice to—it's nice and also healing for me to be able to like, work as an older figure in the family for kids who are not necessarily like, getting all of the stuff that they need right now. So, um, yeah. I had to like, figure out a lot of things for myself that my siblings hopefully don't have to. So, yeah.

Lisowski: Of course. When you were talking earlier about finding ways to make things better for a younger you, are those—has that affected how you've interacted with your siblings, as well?

Yanyi: Yeah, totally. Um, having more conversations, and explicit conversations about stuff that's going on in—at home, how they're feeling, what's going on with them. Um, I was still home for like, I think the residual, like, stuff that was happening, um, in our house. Um, so, you know, we experienced it together, and starting those conversations and having those conversations was something that I definitely would've wanted, and I think having an older sibling who like, understood some more stuff, and who had experienced some more stuff to kind of help navigate, was something that I would've loved to have.

Lisowski: Mhm. When did—um, and you said you moved to Chicago after a while, or did I mishear that? Did you say you didn't live in Chicago?

Yanyi: Oh, i just said "not Chicago."

Lisowski: Not Chicago.

Yanyi: Because whenever I say "Illinois," people are like, "Oh, Chicago?" and I'm like, "Nah."

Lisowski: Not Chicago.

Yanyi: Nah.

Lisowski: Okay. Where did you go for, um, college, and what was that process like?

Yanyi: I—I went to Columbia [University].

Lisowski: Okay.

Yanyi: So, um, yeah. That was probably one of the most—like, getting to campus and being there for the first time was one of the most euphoric experiences that I ever had, just because I was alone for the first time in however many years, and that was an extremely important thing for me, to be able to express myself and come—come out of my like, queer closet shell, like a weird crab [laughter]. Except crabs don't come out of their shells, they just live in—they live in there forever. It's just part of their bodies. Anyway, um, yeah. It was really important for me, even though I was still kind of like, under surveillance. Like, I—it's like, you literally—I had to like, check back in, like, see my parents in person, and that type of thing. Um, so, even though I was a lot more out in college, I didn't really date. Um, and I still like—I didn't do a lot of exploring of like, my sexual—like, I didn't do a lot of exploring of my sexuality or my gender, um, because I thought I had figured it out, A, and then B, I had like, this very intense like, closet thing going on with like, "Even though I can be out here, going to all the same parties as all my other friends, there's still like, this really intense anxiety," I think, with my family, of like, living the double life. So, it was important for me to come out to—come out to them again, one more time.

Lisowski: Of course, of course. You mentioned, uh, when you were younger, being really engaged in creative projects. Is—was that a way, for you, of being out in some ways? Do you have any early or college-age creative projects where you, on some level, were dealing with these issues of gender, sexuality, identity?

Yanyi: Um, I was doing a lot of like—I actually did a lot of Xanga writing back in the day. Um, and it—but it was like—I was like—I read E. E. Cummings for the first time, and was writing all these like, abstract-ish poems that like, played with, um—that played with like, language and stuff like that. And then I started getting like, really DeviantArt about it. Um, I like, had a crush on this person and like, we were both on Xanga, so I would write these like, very—you know, like, subtweet-y posts about this other person, and the music that we liked to listen to together—or, listened to together, and stuff like that. Um, so, yeah. There was some creative projects. The stuff that I was writing felt like poetry to me, but now I'm like, "Ugh, get it away from me." Um, but, yeah. I didn't really start seriously writing and considering myself a writer until college, actually. I had—again, a white woman—but, a professor of literature my freshman year who basically let me write two short stories instead of two like, essays, and just continuously encouraged me to like, do creative work. So, that's how I ended up applying for and enrolling in an intermediate poetry workshop with Emily Fragos, my—fall of my sophomore year, yeah.

Lisowski: Gotcha. And that was—um, that was the real turning point in thinking about writing as something that you did, as opposed to something that you could continue doing, perhaps?

Yanyi: Mhm. Yeah, yeah. That was a big deal. Um, I had a lot—I had a lot of struggles thinking about writ—art as a viable way to do anything. It was a lot of like—I was an econ major, and like, wanted to start a social entrepreneurship and like, had—was like, kind of into tech at the time. I was like—wasn't also—I was like—and also like, "Maybe I want to be in the music industry," and so I was also interning at like, Warner Music, um, and doing—I ended up like, meeting this start-up person at a like, concert, actually, and I was just like—I was so tapped into start-up stuff on Twitter, et cetera, that I like, knew who the person was. And I just, you know, networked my way into an internship. Um, and, yeah. So, there was that stuff going on, and the writing was just like, "i don't know if I can like, keep writing and think of myself as a writer." And it took me, actually, a long time to think of myself as a writer, even though I was like, actively writing and taking workshops.

Lisowski: Mhm. What was that process like? Was that—um, to draw a parallel, how was the—how did you come out as a writer?

Yanyi: More coming out, yeah. Um, I did a lot of writing about it [laughter]. Um, I wrote about like, "What is art? What's the point of art?" Like, I think I was really, at the time, just trying to craft like, an ethics around the things that I was doing, which I think like, is still something that I'm figuring out and trying to do. Just—I just write more. Um, instead of writing about that all the time, I write about that and also the other things that I'm trying to experiment with. Um, but—

Lisowski: What are some of those things? Just to inject or interrupt for a second.

Yanyi: What are—what are some of those things?

Lisowski: That you're currently trying to experiment with.

Yanyi: Um, so, I wrote this book that I finished like—I wrote like, over the past year, and it's like, a very—I'm starting to be in this—like, I understand that like, the—when you write a book, or when you do a project, there—it's not just the finished piece that you have, but it exists in this whole process of how it comes together. And I think what I'm discovering, um, with—with this particular book, I had a process for it that I had just never done before. I used to write whenever I felt like it, when I had an idea or like, something sparked for me. Um, and I would write these like, very lyrical poems that were of like, a certain—not like, rhyme scheme, necessarily, but like, had a musicality of language. And I started writing these poems that were memoir-esque that I—apparently I really needed to write, that—that are all like, just prose poems. And they're like, about my life and this like, emotional kind of like, narrative that I really needed to move through, um, but right now I'm like, kind of like, stuck in this idea of process being part of like—process of—in writing, being part of the politics of how the thing gets made. Um, so, me writing about my life, um, through this like, other process that I

figured out, was, um—like, allowing myself to do it was, um, I think the thing that like, really has stuck with me. Um, I'm not really articulating it super well, uh, but the—

Lisowski: What was—what was that process like? You said you were—whenever you felt like it. What was—

Yanyi: The other one?

Lisowski: —the new process?

Yanyi: Yeah. Um, well, it was kind of—it was more discipline-focused, and the discipline was literally to like, "It's okay to say anything that you want to say," which I think is hard for someone like me who grew up kind of like, in a space where you only could say this type of thing in this way. And, um, actually, I think that this process was part of the reason why I was able to like, move into masculinity a lot more comfortably, because it—when there was one space in my life where I could tell myself like, "Every day you will write a paragraph about anything, and it will lead to something that you will like." That's kind of how I wrote this thing, and I realized that I was thinking about a lot of the same things, and it's like, "Oh, right. Every day, or every week, or even like, whenever I feel like it, I can start experimenting with what it means to be masculine in a way that feels most like me." Like, I got my hair cut and liked my reflection for the first time, which is a completely bizarre feeling, if you've never had that before, of like, "Oh, this is like, a cute version of me. Cool. Like, I can keep doing this." Um, when I got my—like, I bought a binder for the first time, and tried on a binder for the first time. It was just like, "I'm just going to see what it feels like. I don't know if it's something I need or want," and allowing myself that space, that breathing room, is, I think, actually like, political, um, especially—especially if like, the world doesn't feel like your—your oyster.

Lisowski: Right. So, all of these developments were sort of—these personal developments in your life were going alongside the writing process as well, it sounds like.

Yanyi: Yeah. Yeah. And right now, I'm in a space where, um, I am figuring out how to—what like, presence means for me. So like, "How can I be with myself in a way that like, is me really saying yes to the stuff that I want to say yes to, no to the stuff I want to say no to, and how can I create a writing process that's a little more intentional for—for me?" So, um, I'm like, doing this thing where I like, log kind of every day I'm exercising, or I'm logging like, "Okay, I'm going to write for ten minutes every day like, in this particular spot or this particular place." Are you familiar with like, um, CAConrad and—

Lisowski: I was just about to bring up somatics, actually. It sounds very similar.

Yanyi: Right, yeah. Yeah. So, it's not—it's definitely inspire—in like, this process that I'm like, doing is like—it's like, my life, but it's inspired by this idea of ritual and, um, how ritual can create or bring out parts of like, your unconscious or your consciousness like, that you want to form or sculpt in a particular way that other people can also access, and you can access.

Lisowski: Right. To some extent, have you, um, been accessing art—going back to the fanfiction and the DeviantArt as well, in like, the largest definition of the word—um, have you viewed those as ritual, or had those always served sort of ritualistic purposes for you, or is it only recently that they've started to do that?

Yanyi: Um, well, that's—that work was really like—it was—it was kind of interesting because it's kind of obsession-focused. I was like, really into like, this particular show or something. I like, wanted more of it. And it like—I think desire, for me, was like, a rare feeling, so once I found something, I like, glomped onto it. Um, and I think that's—now that's kind of transferring into like, my—my art process of like, "How do I generate desire in my—a little more closely to myself, and to my own life, um, rather than this fandom that I'm attached to, or whatever?"

Lisowski: Right. Yeah, that makes sense. Did you ever consider yourself, um, a visual artist, or was that—or do you still currently? How much does the art you made that wasn't poems, or wasn't writing, or wasn't, um, software engineering, if you consider that art as well—um, how much is that important to your life, or your conception of yourself?

Yanyi: Um, visual art—I actually did like, AP art when I was in high school, so I definitely spent a lot of time drawing and being in that flow zone when you like to draw a thing and it's like, that's all that—that's the only thing that you're doing. Um, and I—I haven't like, kept up with visual art as much, but it's something that I very much still like to do when I'm doing it, and I think it's very much attached to this idea of like, presence and like, being in—with a thing when it's happening. Um, so, I'm like—actually, I did a photography class this like, past semester. Um, it was a black and white like, analog class, and I've been taking photos since high school. Um, but it was—this time, it was a lot more intentional, and now I know how to develop film. Um, and it was a—for me, the goal was like, "I want to get out of my house a lot more, and to experience the world like, slowly." And photography really did that for me, and I think that visual art has a unique way of, um, asking you to let go of certain logical structures of thinking, and it definitely allows me to slow down and look, and consider where I actually am in the world, and I think helps me be in my body the same way that music and sound can.

Lisowski: Of course. And, um, poetry can, as well, I think. I'm sure I'm misquoting, so don't hold me to this, but I think Nicole Sealey was recently talking in an interview about how poems can sort of preserve moments, as opposed to say, as a fiction piece, which sort of is pro-

pelled forward. Is that something that you've noticed or thought in your own practice? It sounds like, especially recently, you've been thinking about more personal types of writing.

Yanyi: Mhm. I mean, it's definitely—that's definitely a big factor of like, my most recent project. Um, I don't know if I would say that it's like a snapshot, per se, because there is, like—I think with artists who I really admire or like, there's usually a thematic progression or resonance between the things that they're working on, that when you read those pro—like, that project as a whole, like, it adds even more layer and dimension to the—the particular thought that was, um, in Nicole's words, like, "preserved." Um, so—I don't know if it's preserved. It feels more like translation. Like, translation seems a lot more interesting to me, because like, a poem also—or any type of art involves the other person also—like, the reader or viewer, or the listener—participating in a certain way that like—they'll experience it in a way that is not like, what you experienced.

Lisowski: Yeah, um, I'm really interested in that concept of translation, specifically. Um, are there—besides the act of writing as translation, are there any moments, um, in your life or your history, both now and in the past, where you felt like you had to translate one thing to another? What are some notable examples of that?

Yanyi: Well, literal examples include government documents that my parents needed help on, or that, you know, like, an essay that a relative needs help on in English. Um, but, yeah. Actually, that's a huge interest of mine that I would love to explore later. Projects. Um, but—my dad actually writes poetry, too, um, but he writes Chinese poetry. And, uh, I tried translating his work—um, at a certain point, he sent me a bunch of poems—and did not succeed. His, um—he—I translated one of his poems, and he responded to me in an email saying that it sounded like it was translated by Google Translate. So, I stopped translating his poems after that, because my feelings were hurt, but also because like, it—like, that was a meaningful project for me, that I—that I hoped would like, um, bring us together a little more. Um, we were also, like—that was kind of like, around the period when I was estranged from my parents, when I wasn't speaking to them, so, uh—like, I was kind of hoping that that would be like, a—a bridge for us, basically, of like, "Maybe there's some way that we can talk to each other that doesn't have to be about things that I'm doing that are like, fucking up family." Um, yeah. Uh, but, yeah. I mean, my entire life, I've had to translate for my parents and for myself between these like, two worlds that seem like they're not supposed to be connected, in a way. Like—and I'm not just speaking like, on a nationality type of way, but like—um, I think my parents blame, like, uh, the Western influence, like, as the source of my queerness or, um, my like, gender presentation. Um, I'm also not out to them as trans, because I think that would be beyond anything of their wildest imaginations, so it's like, not really, um, something that I'm like, ready to talk to them about, and I don't know if I ever will be, and I'm honestly kind of okay with it. Like, this is kind of an aside, but I think coming out is circ—is hard to do, but it's also like, circumstantial and like, contextual and, who gets to come out? Yeah.

Lisowski: Of course. Of course.

Yanyi: I think a lot about—I've thought a lot about that, also, in terms of like, who will be in these like, trans oral histories, and why are we going to be hearing from those people versus other people, and like—um, and the same thing obviously like, translates in the literary arts, and wherever representation can be found.

Lisowski: Very much so.

Yanyi: Yeah.

Lisowski: I agree with that completely. What—so, it sort of sounds that, um, your gender or your transness is something that you sort of translate situationally as well.

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah. Um, I think I accept a certain amount of misgendering, um, for—like, in whatever situation—like, whatever the situation needs or calls for. Like, sometimes it's a safety thing—um, or, a lot of times it's a safety thing—but other times, it's like, I'm very comfortable like, correcting someone who I've just met, like, "Hey, just FYI. Now you know. Amazing!" but, yeah. Like, it's—I don't know who said this. Probably everyone. But you're like—you're always coming out. Like, yeah, whoever you're talking to.

Lisowski: Of course. Um, what were your earliest memories of coming out into a sort of transness like? Is that something that you started at Columbia, or did you—uh, did that happen a little bit later?

Yanyi: Um...

Lisowski: In however way you want to define coming out into transness.

Yanyi: [sigh] I mean, I think that one of the nice things about being a woman is that there are—there is like, a whole spectrum of gender that one can comfortably live in and still identify as a woman. So, I would enjoy—like, I would put on ties and like, button-downs, and enjoy like, kind of the sartorial aspect of masculinity—well, upper middle-class masculinity—and, um—

Lisowski: It's an important corrective to Jack Halberstam.

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah—who I'm actually reading right now! Female Masculinity, la la la... But the—so that was like, for me, enough for a while, of like, "Woah, I finally get to wear ties and like, cute shoes. Like, amazing." Um, and so I had kind of like, an intellectual butch or like, dandy-

esque thing going on for a while, and, um, I just—I have a very like, strong memory of like, being in this apartment I was subletting, um, in the East Village, my junior summer or something, and I looked at myself in the mirror, and I was wearing my like, usual outfit of like, button-down with shorts and like, maybe a tie, and I just didn't like how my body fit in the clothes. And that was like, a—probably a moment of dysphoria that I was just like, "Oh shit. Like, I don't look good in these clothes, so I shouldn't wear them." So, I actually like, shifted out of that masculine mode for a while, because I was just convinced that my body didn't look good in it, and that there's no point in wearing something that I like, am not attractive in. But I never like, questioned what made me feel that way about my body. So, um, I would say like, coming out for—like, in transness—has really been like—really started with the haircut. Hair is so fucking important! Like, I was talking to someone at the diner today about, um—the person I was talking to in the diner, who I just met—and she got like, a haircut—like, an undercut with like, some words on the side and stuff, and then automatically, people like, saw externally who she was supposed to be, and she had to like, live up to it and be that person. And I think that like, that's kind of a thing that also happened with me. Like, I got an undercut, um, for one summer, that was like, very much not visible but that like, made me feel so much more visible, and I like, came—you know, you come forward out of your shell a little more, if you're a turtle, which I was at the time. Um, and I got this—this particular haircut like, starting in—well, I got a version of a short haircut in around 2014. That was like, "Woah! Like, I can have short hair! Cool!" Um, and that was a huge step for me. And I think it's totally okay to take like, what is incrementally—like, my hair's gotten shorter and shorter and shorter, like, in the past, I don't know, eight years that I've been in New York, and it's been really just like, inching towards more of the things that I want, and allowing myself to have those things and to let pleasure be something that I choose for myself, rather than something that comes to me. So, yeah. So, hair was the first thing, and then, um, I dated someone who, uh, was really—really wanted to actively engage with me on topics of race and gender. And it was really surprising for me, um, and, yeah. It was a like, really important relationship, and is an important relationship in my life. So, yeah.

Lisowski: Right. It sounds like it. And that—um, that statement about comfort and, uh, joy and pleasure is a really resonant one, as well. Related to that, uh, it seems that a lot of the times in which you've talked about, um, moving backwards or, um, "closeting yourself"—I used finger quotes, because—

Yanyi: "Close the doors."

Lisowski: —I realized the recorder can't pick that up—um, or "closing the doors" or "going back into the shell," whatever metaphor you want to do—has been, uh, rooted in some experience of displeasure, whether it be from your family or community, or whether it be internally through issues such as dysphoria. Have there been any moments in which you've moved back into the shell that have been more tactical, or less rooted in negative emotions, specifi-

cally? I'm wondering if this is more of a, um—if there are more gradients to this in your experience.

Yanyi: Hmm, right. [sigh] I mean, yeah, definitely. Like, it's not so much, I guess, as explicit of a "going back in the closet" or "coming out," but it's more of just experimentation, like, "Where do I want to be? Like, I'm going to be over here for a second. I'm going to wear this skirt. Like, does this feel good? I don't know! I'm just fucking trying it." Um, and I think that's really, like—so like, when I, at a certain point, was like, "Maybe I'm attracted to like, cis men. Like, maybe I'm actually"—like, I'd met this person who I was like, "I'm like—I like you, and I don't know what this feeling is, and I can't tell if I like you as a friend," because I like, very rarely ever felt like, a true—true connections with cis men, so it was just like, "This is a weird experience for me. I can't tell if I like you." So there was a moment when I was like, "Oh, maybe I'm like, not as queer as I thought I was—or like, gay as I thought I was, in particular." Um, so, yeah. I like, started thinking about that a little more—mmm, no. But, um, same thing with gender. Like, I just remember, like, texting my friends, like, "I'm going through a femme phase right now." Like—and so, where I would like, buy a lot of like, white lace, and stuff like that. Um, and—but I would never wear it, because it was just like, "Oh, right. Like, I love—I love femme things. Like, I love femme people." And I—like, I bought this really nice like, jewelry that is just like—you wear over your shoulders, it's like a chain, et cetera—um, but I never wear it because, obviously, it's not my gender, it's just like, something that, literally, "I'm attracted to this. Like, hello." Um, so, it took me a lot of, um—it took me a lot of time to like, parse out, like, "What parts of masculinity do I absolutely hate, and what actually do I really like or enjoy about it? Like, that—like, what's actually a part of me, versus just, what am I attracted to, or like, whatever?" Yeah.

Lisowski: Of course. How much of a role did—you've talked about the haircut, um, and gradually adjusting the haircut playing a role in sort of like, discovering or uncovering a gender. How much did other externals, or accessories, or clothing play a role in that? Is that something that you've felt you could have more freedom to experiment with recently? Is that something that you've got freedom from experimenting with, or through experimenting with?

Yanyi: Yeah. Um, I think now, I have, I think, a more like, classed base to like, understanding, of like, my sartorial choices like, playing a larger role in what signals I'm giving out and what type of values I have. So I went through like, a very strong jean jacket phase—the Canadian tuxedo phase—um, which is like, still a thing, um, but is like—I don't know. Like, instead of there being just like, one mode that I'm in all the time, I—I like, really got into jean jackets, and now I have like, two. Um, not that I—I didn't buy a ton more, but I would just wear one like, a lot. Um, and it's just kind of like, you're really into this thing, and then you're like, not so into it anymore, but then becomes an option for you, of like, you know how to articulate yourself through that one thing. So, jean jacket phase. Um, I have like, shorts that like, I used

to really like, but that were shorter, and now I'm noticing that like, I like slightly longer shorts, and that has to do with like, me feeling more comf—like, me feeling and wanting a different type of like, masculine presentation that, again, like, I get to pick. Um, so, yeah. There's been, like—I think, honestly, getting a binder has like, totally changed the way that I feel about t-shirts, um, and it has given me a lot more, um, flexibility about like, what type of masculinity that I exude, versus like, having to figure out how to like, hide my chest—or, I wasn't really hiding my chest, but it was just like, this thing that was like, around that I was like, "Hmm, I like you—I like me, but I don't know if this is the silhouette that I want." So, yeah.

Lisowski: So, sort of viewing parts of your body as—or, the image projected by your body as kind of distinct and separate from your body itself?

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah. Um, I don't—like, I think it's just because like, breasts are like, such a feminine, like, sexual object of desire, and but also, like, um, a way that people can gender me basically immediately. Um, yeah. Like, it's not—it's not appropriate, for example, for people, like, to stare at—like, below the—below the waist, or whatever, but, you know, you can—when you make eye contact with someone, in your peripheral vision you can be like, "Is there anything there?" Um, but, you know, it's been—but also, my voice is like, a thing that people immediately gender me with, so—um, even—no matter how masculinely I decide to present myself, like, cat's out of the bag! Like—but I also don't feel like I'm—like, I feel really like, "Eh" about investing in passing to cis people. Like, I really don't care about that, um, but I care about it insofar as the type of violence that could happen to me because I don't pass. So like, yeah. I guess I don't have a personal investment in passing outside of safety.

Lisowski: Of course, of course. How much has community played a role in that? I'm thinking, especially, before you got to New York, um, were you able to find any communities, outside of the online ones, where folks were thinking about gender in these more kind of holistic terms? Was that something that happened at, say, the gay-straight alliance in any sort of way?

Yanyi: I'm trying—I'm really trying to remember if we had trans members. I had like, at least one friend who came out to me as trans, but at that time, like, she was really just like, "I have this thing called like, gender dysphoria, and like, I think I'm a woman," and like, all these things. But she was like, really going through a rough time, and I, at the time, was just like, "I'm going to be an ally to you as much as possible," but she was also not really—I wasn't thinking about it for myself, so I wasn't super talking about it with her in a like, "What exactly does that feel like? Can you be more specific? Because I gotta check in with myself." I also, like—again, with like, intergenerational trauma, like, if no one in your intimate life is asking you how you feel about things every day, that's not something that you do for yourself. So, I, like, didn't really work on having, like, access to my emotional life, and therefore, there were a lot of things with joy and pleasure and stuff that I just didn't feel. So, um, the short version is

like, basically, no—um, at least in terms of like—well, actually, I don't know if that's true. At social justice camp, I had some friends who came out, like, really early as trans. Um, and at that time, it was like, "Woah! Hey!" but I didn't super-know what they were going through or talking about. They just seemed really sad. Trans kids' lives, yo!

Lisowski: Right, for sure. Um, so—

Yanyi: Wait, one thing. Bathroom. [recording pauses and resumes] I'm back.

Lisowski: Incredible. [laughter] Um, no—I've been knocking out this water, myself, as well, so it might be me in twenty minutes who's going into that.

Yanyi: Oh my god, amazing. We should like, have a signal, like...

Lisowski: It would definitely come in handy. Um, so, it sounds like that sort of trans community, um, wasn't really present earlier in your life. Is there a point, um, at which it got more pronounced? Is it even more pronounced now?

Yanyi: Uh, I actually started a transmasculinity group on Meetup, because I work there, but also because, like, it—you know, you start—you try to start the communities that you wish existed. Um, and haven't really gotten the group together, because I—I've like, tried to schedule happy hours and stuff, but like, I think that transmasculine people should meet up, talk about things, become better allies to femmes—like, and talk about binding, whatever. Like, or whate—yeah. So, um, I'm kind of looking for it. My—a close friend of mine in college came out as trans and like—basically, like, he—he, like—he experienced it in a way where I got to experience it a lot more intimately, because we were close. And he is transitioned now, um, and I, like, helped do some of the aftercare for him after he got top surgery and like, um... "What is community?" again, is the question. Because I feel like I didn't really have it in high school, because I wasn't super close with the people who, um, were trans, and like, needed that—they needed more community from like, someone who can—someone like, myself—myself included, but like, I was just like, not ready to talk about it, or ask the right questions, or like, be there for them, I think, in the way that they probably needed to feel more supported. I don't know. There's definitely guilt there. Um, but, yeah. I have a close friend who's transitioned. I have—I know more trans men, definitely. Um, and I think that has to do with like, the fact that more people have transitioned and like, transgender issues are in the news now, and like, it's a thing that can be on your mind, versus like, "I have something to tell you," and then, "Here's my like, list of metaphors that I've brought with me, because this is not part of the national conversation, so we're not—so you don't—you need a context or a background on it." Um, so, yeah. More people coming out has made a huge difference for me. Um, and actually, like, the most recent dim sum that I did with queer/trans Asians, like, included, like, one—one person who I didn't know who's also an Asian trans man, and he like, was so excited

to meet just another Asian trans man that he like, asked me all the questions, and stuff like that. But, I mean, that's kind of the need that, um, I'm thinking about when I'm thinking about like, current community of like, it's still being created. Like, there's some parts of community—like, at least in the trans community—that I'm still kind of missing. Um, yeah. I want to know more people of color who are transitioning, basically.

Lisowski: Right, of course. Um, how has—since you're a writer, too, and work on poetry projects, how has that—um, has there been any intersection between those two? Has, say, the Asian American Writers' Workshop served as a platform, or allowed you to meet more, um, trans men or trans folks of color? Or is there a way in which you navigate that that's not just, say, tokenization?

Yanyi: Uh, you mean like, I don't like, sit in a corner with my sign, being like, "Trans and queer folks come here"?

Lisowski: Exactly.

Yanyi: Um, it's been very natural, as far of like—like meeting Rami, for example, who, um, is like, another fellow. It's just like—I think it's a lot more natural when it isn't around identity, which makes me sound like one of those like, "But I don't see color!" people. But I mean it in a way where we are intentionally seeking out people who are like us, but not necessarily, like, doing it in a way where it's like, exclusive to only that. Um, I definitely have met more queer and trans Asians simply because I've intentionally put myself in more Asian American spaces. Um, I think it's honestly like, dangerous for some people to be more out, um, so I don't blame the in—like, anyone on the invisibility or the feeling that they don't want to be like, super out there about their sexuality. So, I try to be open about it, and try to do stuff like this to kind of just like, be visible enough so that if you're looking for that type of community, you can find it, um, because I definitely have Googled enough.

Lisowski: Of course. Um, so, sort of positioning yourself in this place where, um, you're not the like, the de facto organizer, though you can help folks find other networks or like, help develop bigger or stronger networks of support, it sounds like.

Yanyi: Yeah, exactly. And being like—the queer/trans Asian dim sum thing that I'm doing right now is like, really me just being like, "Hi, friends! Like, let's get dim sum, but also like, let's make this group public, so that anyone who's looking for something like this can also come, and we'll talk about the things that we usually talk about, but with more people."

Lisowski: How long has that group been going on?

Yanyi: I just started it last month, and we've had two dim sums thus far. We're having another one, um, at the beginning of July, um, and I'm hosting, next weekend, a like, screening of Journey to the West in Cantonese with like, English subtitles, um, for the group, which is like, a classic thing that you watched if you grew up like, in a Chinese household—or, actually, being—lots of my friends who are Vietnamese, like, watched it, too, so I think it's just—it's just around.

Lisowski: Right, right.

Yanyi: Yeah, so, just doing like, very particular, specific things that remind me of home with other people for whom it also reminds them of home, but also having like, a larger understanding or political language to understand like, our identities in relation to that idea of home, um, has been super powerful and great.

Lisowski: Yeah, I bet. Would you say you're in any processes—involved in any processes of homemaking? What does "home" mean to you, as a concept?

Yanyi: [laughter] I love it! What is home? Um, well, I love to decorate, but I also think that like, um, home for me has been about, uh, being able to choose—choose things, um, in a stable way. So, stability has been—emotional stability, economic stability, like, all those things have been really healing for me, um, as an individual, because it makes me not dependent on other people who may want other things from me that I don't want to give. And so it's—for me, it's like home has been a place for me to listen myself and to work on strengthening that core part of myself. Like, when I want to make pork shoulder, I can make pork shoulder. Like, I have—I remind myself every time I go to the grocery store that like, I get to buy anything that I want and whatever I like, because it's my life. And, um, yeah. Like, that's a main thing for me, of just being able to hold together all the pieces of your life. Like, if I want things that remind me of like, being Chinese around the house, I can do that. If I want to buy this claw-foot table from Craigslist, I will do that.

Lisowski: This was a Craigslist buy?

Yanyi: Yeah. It's amazing. There's more leaves, too. It gets even bigger.

Lisowski: Oh, wow.

Yanyi: I know. It's a crazy table.

Lisowski: Unreal. Um, for the folks who are listening to this, it's a gorgeous table.

Yanyi: [laughter] Yeah. I started buying flowers for myself, too. I really love flowers. Um, I can name a few, that type of thing. Um, and I live like, so close to the [Brooklyn] Botanic Garden, so it's like, "When are roses in season? When are peonies in season?" Like, there's a whole rhythm and cycle, and stability, and familiarity, to even the like, transience of flowers, which is extremely comforting to me, and that's kind of what home is. Like, it's like, a regularity in your life. It's a way that you can create structure and ritual in your own life that is about you.

Lisowski: Besides—or, maybe including the queer/trans dim sum group, what are some ways in which you've created ritual or order? I know your writing practice seems to fit into that, as well. Are there any other threads of that sort of intention running through your life right now?

Yanyi: Um, I have to think about that one. Maybe the answer is "no," if I have to think about it. Um, I've been really trying to not overschedule, actually. Like, um, I think that is a residual habit of mine from being overstimulated and stressed out, and being asked to produce at rates that were not natural to me as a person. Um, so like, the calendaring thing, which like, is kind of cute and feels like adulting, like, maybe a year out of college, now feels really restrictive and like, um—just like, I think to me, now, it's a lot more like, "No! None of that!" Um, like, and even—and I'm learning stuff kind of like, even as I'm like, living my life now of like, "Oh, I've noticed by writing every single day in the morning that I'm not spending enough time with myself, because I have nothing to say in those mornings," when, if I have like, an engagement every evening of that week. So, um, I think that's another thing about structure. If there's a certain way that you know yourself to be, um, it's a lot easier to tell when things are not in sync. Which—um, I want to make like, a "Bye Bye Bye" joke right now, but I can't—I can't find a joke inside, so, oh well. But, yeah. That's—it's kind of, um—now I'm trying to figure out like, "How does un-structure work for me?" because I'm such a like, goals-driven, "Do things now. Solve the problem now" type of person. And, uh, yeah. The person who I mentioned earlier, who I dated, was, um—or, and is, not very much a like, structure person, um, and they really helped me understand why that's really nice and good to have, so, uh, yeah. So, I'm figuring out what that means for me in my own life, with like, "How can I be soupy for a little bit?"

Lisowski: Right. An important thing to figure out, to be sure. How is that playing out with, uh, the group you started? Is it at all? Or how do you—all of the—

Yanyi: How do I be soupy?

Lisowski: Or, like, the structure inherent in needing to like, make something that people go to, or that people know they can go to, versus allowing some flexibility in there.

Yanyi: Hmm. Uh, I really actually think it has to do with, um, again, desire and need, and aligning that as much as possible. So, um—like, I'll post like, an event, and be like, "Hey, this is going to happen, but also, I could do like, this day, or maybe the week after if that works better." So it's like, flexibility and planning, which I think is the most literal or explicit way to like, talk about that. But I think the thing that's interesting for me is figuring out how that has—has or could work in my friendships. Um, excuse me. I've found that like, you can have a—a cadence with people, of like, "I'll see you every three weeks," or something like that, and that really works with some of my friends, who I have like—like chill, like, we'll see each other about every three weeks. That's like, how often we want to see each other. Um, but I think that it's been really important that I have some friends in that group who really reliably show up, um, because it gives me energy to keep hosting and trying to do that stuff. Um, and then also acknowledging that like, there are people who really want to show up who, for whatever reason, can't in this particular moment, and being forgiving and kind to that, and just always responding positively to when other people express those needs. So, um, yeah. I think valuing that type of un-structure for me has allowed me to be a lot more empathetic to what that could mean for other people—or it could just be like, you have like, a chronic illness and just like, can't get out all the time. Yeah—and, but you still want to be invited to everything, which is like, obviously.

Lisowski: Of course. How does empathy play out in your life? Is that something that has changed—uh, your relationship has changed as you've leaned more in towards a trans identity? Or, how have you grappled with the issue of empathy?

Yanyi: [laughter] These are really, like, intense questions. I like it. Empathy's like, a really interesting one, because I think that, um—as we shift a little, a wrinkle in the sound. Um, it's—I think it's been very easy for me, in my life, to slide into the background and to not—I mean, it's been like, one way or the other. I'm either demanding attention, or I've been just like, "Well, I'm not useful here. I'm not worthy to be heard," or something like that. It's not even about worth, maybe, but it's about like, "I'm used to my voice not being the one speaking, so I'm not going to, or I'm just going to shut down for a little bit." And I've ended up in like, friendships or relationships where I end up being the listener. Um, my—one of my—uh, my friend calls it, um, me being like, a "sidekick," which is kind of—yeah, you know? You're kind of #extra. You're like, not the center of the party, and you're not being engaged with in a meaningful way, and, um—but, for me, I was always like, very much able to empathize and understand and like, play that kind of—do that like, affective labor for another person, um, without the other person really real—like, they would say like, "Oh, it feels so good to talk to you. I feel really listened to," et cetera, but to not have that reciprocated, and to also, for me, like, not demand that. Um, and so, figuring out the trans thing has actually helped me move more towards, like—um, like, for example, I started exercising, um, every day during like, last month—or, not every day. Six times a week. Rest days. But that was a huge thing for me, because my relationship to my body in the past has just been like, "Here are all the imperfec-

tions, and I need them to go away," whereas like, now that I understand my gender identity a lot more, I'm like, "Oh, like, I want my body to—to like, be healthy in this particular way," and I've started thinking about my body as this like, place—well, it's—we're a team, and it's like, sometimes things don't go well, and sometimes things are great. And I have some power over like, how great things are. Um, and the more grounded I feel in my body, the more I'm able to be like, "Hey, like, that thing that you are doing right now is not actually helping me feel good," because I'm actually feeling the feelings, um, that exist physically for me of like, discomfort, or sadness, or frustration. And like, so much of, um, dysphoria for me has just been disembodiment and like, lack of access to anything that I would want, including being listened to for, I don't know, three hours at this point? [laughter]

Lisowski: Of course. How has that sort of listening role—how did that impact your earliest kind of relationships with trans people? I'm thinking about your close friend from college and also, um, the friend, uh, from high school, who, it sounds, sort of confided in you about her gender in a lot of ways.

Yanyi: How did that impact, like, those relationships in...?

Lisowski: Or, i guess, in what ways—thinking about being a listener, was that predominantly your relationship to both of those people? Do you—if you maintain contact with those people, has your role and relation to them changed at all?

Yanyi: Um, yeah. I would—well, uh, for the high school relationship, I was like—I wasn't super close with that person, so I really don't know where she is right now. I actually tried looking for her on Facebook—back when I was on Facebook—like a couple of weeks ago, but I just like—she had, um—she changed her name and so, like, I just don't know if she's still going by the same name or if she has another one now. So, um, yeah. I hope she's—I hope she's okay, and that she's flourishing and living the best life that she wants to. Um, and the other friend, I'm still, like, pretty good friends with, and he was here like, a couple of days ago, and I, um, read through some readings from his natal chart, which was, um, very important for us to do. Um, but he actually took a—he'd ne—I would say that he'd never really treated me as a friend who, like, was there to just listen to—like, to his problems, or to like, help him figure things out. On the contrary, I found him to—I found it to be, um, hard for him, like, to open up to me about stuff that had happened to him and like, how he was feeling about things. Like, he would kind of talk about things in a more surface-level way than like, get down deep with me about them. So, that has actually changed in our relationship, because I think as I've become a little more emotionally sensitive, I've been—I'm an Aries, so, um, I've become a little more able to listen to those Scorpio feels.

Lisowski: Oh, he's a Scorpio.

Yanyi: Yeah. [laughter] No hate, no hate. What are you?

Lisowski: Uh, Pisces across the board, but with a—

Yanyi: Pisces!

Lisowski: —Gemini moon.

Yanyi: Really? Oh my god. So much Pisces.

Lisowski: It's the exact opposite of Kanye West's chart. [laughter]

Yanyi: Amazing.

Lisowski: I try [laughter]. But, was—does astrology hold much resonance for you?

Yanyi: Oh, yeah. Love it. And—well, like, I took a ton of like, personality tests when I was in middle school, when I was trying to figure out who I was. Um, but also, I found astrology and tarot and like, all this woo-woo stuff to be, like—to contain a structure of affective knowledge that like, I really needed and wanted. Um, it's like, part of me being able to like, feel and be in the soupiness, which is now just a term [laughter]. But, uh, yeah. When I was having a really rough time with anxiety and insomnia and that stuff, like, getting my tarot read was like, really soothing, and provided structure and direction for an emotional place that I didn't know where—where it was necessarily going. Um, and the same thing with—um, the same thing with astrology. Like, having a weekly horoscope, or even a daily horoscope, is like, weirdly comforting, because you can at least—even though it's not about like, predicting the future, or about fortune-telling so much, like, having an emotional ground onto which one might stand is like—um, I think important to at least like, when a million things are going through your brain/heart, like, you can at least be like, "Okay, I'm going to start here, and then I'll go up here, and here, and here, and here. But here's the like, overarching mood that I'm going to be in."

Lisowski: So, it serves as sort of a grounding—uh, a grounding pole in some ways.

Yanyi: Yeah, it's—it's like therapy for people who can't afford therapy.

Lisowski: Mhm, totally. What, speaking of grounding poles, is—it sounds like the group that you started sort of serves that role as well.

Yanyi: Which one?

Lisowski: Um, that's a great question. Are there—I'm thinking more about queer/trans, uh, dim sum meet-up, but there are other groups that you're involved with. I know there's the AAWW informal thing that you're hosting, as well. Are there any other projects that you're especially excited about that you did?

Yanyi: [laughter] Well, um, the—I mean, the group that you're talking about, the queer/trans Asian group, is definitely grounding for me. Like, it's, um, experimental for me to try and find what Asian American community can look like and feel like. And, um, that's a conversation and a practice that I want to be involved with. Like, um—I'm doing like, a Christmas orphan dinner this year, too. Like, you know, going to other people's Thanksgivings, going to other people's Christmases, was something that I did for a while and, um—it's also like, an imposed thing, because it's just like, "Everyone else is doing it." I don't particularly like, celebrate Christmas, but, you know, it's like, a particular isolations thing. Anyway, um, yeah. So that's, like—the queer/trans group is a practice that I really care about doing, um, and the—and writing has actually been like, a way for me to be kind of in a community. It's a professional community, um, but I gravitate towards people—I hope—who I can have like, longer lasting relationships with, where it's like, beyond the like, "I'm an editor, and you're a writer, vice versa, and we can maybe help you—help each other make something happen," that type of thing. Um, I've like, made some really good friends from poetry workshops who, like—um, these two friends I have who are both Aquarii—Aquariuses?—um...

Lisowski: I've been confused about that, myself.

Yanyi: [laughter] Um, they—I met them in a, like—in a master class, for example, and we've been friends for two years—over two years at this point, so it's been really great.

Lisowski: How did you sort of navigate into an editorial row—eugh, role, in poetry.

Yanyi: Same. Um, I'm trying to think about that. Uh, I started—well, I got involved with this magazine called Nat. Brut and, um, first became a reader for them, and then I had ideas about where I thought the magazine could like, go in. So, um, I like, had the like, board staff do an exercise of like, writing—everyone writing their aesthetic ideas of like, what the magazine should be publishing, basically. Um, and then we kind of like, stitched those together and made like, an aesthetic statement out of it. So, I've been always kind of like, I think, interested—after I started actually becoming involved in magazines—interested in like, driving—like, "What should we be talking about, and why? And what—where is the intentionality behind this?" Kind of a pattern in my life of like, "What's the intention? What are the ethics? Like, how is—how can we be thoughtful about this?" Um, so, I just basically had more and more conversations like that at the magazine, and then edited—ended up publishing a queer/trans portfolio on, um, Nat. Brut in the fall, which was—or, not in the fall. It was in, uh—

Lisowski: It was just a month or two ago, wasn't it?

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah. It felt like a long time ago, because we—we had submissions until January, I think, so I was—that was kind of when I was like, super involved with it. Yeah.

Lisowski: I'm glad you brought that up, because I was curious how much of a role you had to do with that folio, specifically.

Yanyi: Oh, yeah.

Lisowski: You—was it exclusively you? Were you working in like, sort of bottom-lining or envisioning it? Was it something that the other editors were immediately receptive to?

Yanyi: Um, so, the concept of folios, I kind of like, borrowed from Drunken Boat, which like—

Lisowski: Now Anomaly.

Yanyi: Now Anomaly, yes. Um, and they—

Lisowski: [yawning]

Yanyi: [uncontrollable laughter].

Lisowski: [laughter] Sorry, go ahead.

Yanyi: [laughter] Let it out. [laughter] That's an aside. [laughter] Now I have the giggles. Hold on, hold on. Um, so, the idea of folios was really borrowed from, um, Drunken Boat, now Anomaly. Um, and I really love the concept of inviting people who were not necessarily editors, but who had a vision, and who wanted to start conversations that we were not necessarily thinking about. Um, a lot of—a lot of thoughts about gatekeeping and what that means, and access to like, publishing platforms, and—or editing, right? Um, so, I brought that idea to Nat. Brut and was like, "I also want to do the first one." Um, I—so, I thought of the queer/trans folio, which I think had just been, like, a thing that I wanted to exist, um, and the board editors were, um, all like, gung-ho and like, ready to do it, and really loved it. And, um, yeah. So, I—I read all the submissions. Uh, I tried to—I wanted to be really thoughtful about, um—"who we picked" is the next thing that I was going to say, but it's like—it's not so much about, um—editing is not about like, picking, I guess. It's like—it's not like, "You're on our team or you're not on our team." It was like, um, definitely like, what was moving me and resonating with me the most because this was something that I grew up with or like, identities that I'd grown up with, like, um—what were the specific and unique experiences that, um, I wanted to hear talked about. And sometimes, people would bring things that I just didn't

know about that, like, were like, "Oh, shit, yeah!" So, um, I solicited, uh, a good portion of the folio, and then we had some incredible, um—incredible submissions. And it was—it was so nice to give these writers space, um, and to have them alongside like—you know how it kind of works—like, some more like, famous poets with like—or, like, voices who you've seen around, with people who I haven't seen around, personally. Um, so, yeah. That was—it was a really gratifying, um, project to work on, because again, it's like, one of those things where it's like—kind of selfishly, it's like, "I wish I had seen something like this."

Lisowski: Yeah. So, it sounds like it was a pretty personal project for you, in a lot of ways.

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah.

Lisowski: Did it develop at all alongside the more personal writing you started doing? Were those things in conversation?

Yanyi: Um, actually, kind of no. It was like—that writing project was really like, one—like, I know—it's definitely related, because I'm the same person and like, I have—like, I am the context here. Um, but I wasn't actively thinking about the editorial project as, like, a way for me to get more sources for the material that I was working on. It was more of just like, I wanted to do justice to whatever I was trying to get at, because I wasn't sure what I was getting at, but I was getting at something. Um, and I think that the—uh, the folio itself was really just like, "How can I make some—like, make something exist that I know exists, but is not being kind of like, coaxed out, or talked about, or, um, wanted, I guess, at the moment?" which—and, hmm—"wanted" is not the right term, but more like "asked for," I guess.

Lisowski: Yeah.

Yanyi: Like, something that's not in vogue.

Lisowski: Mhm, of course. And yet, at the same time, there's been—um, especially, I'm thinking, in 2015 or so—though, even now—an increased attention, or maybe even a fetishization of certain types of transness. How—

Yanyi: Mmm, tell me more! [laughter]

Lisowski: How has that affected you? Or, how do you see yourself, your work, and the work that you elevate in terms of that specific type of increased visibility?

Yanyi: That's—you know, I was actually, like—I was thinking about that. I think—I feel as though I think about it almost every day, of like, if—by curating a folio of queer and trans Asians, am I putting, like, a target on every single one of these people as like, [clap] "You're

going to be tokenized in 24 hours! Like, they're coming for you!" Like, that is something that I really worry about, in that I think it's just going to happen. Like, and we're going to have to keep talking about it. Like, um, there's definitely, in my own professional life, of like, "How much of—how much of my success stands on the fact that you like my work, or that you just need another person of color on this panel, or you need another person of color at this reading?" Um, and maybe I'm like, a ton of different identity cards that you can wave around, because not only am I a person of color, but I'm also queer, and I'm trans, like—and I'm an immigrant—like, a survivor of abuse. Like, what—like, you can just keep piling it on, right? And, um, I do worry that, like, we are more interested in ideas of people than in the people themselves. Um, and that's—honestly, I don't have, like, an answer for how to balance that or figure—figure out how to do, um, that justice yet, but it's definitely something that I worry about and I think about as an editor—um, and also as a writer, for myself.

Lisowski: Mhm. It sounds like political engagement—or at least, political grappling with those specific sorts of issues—is important to you in your editorial and your creative work. Does that extend to your professional life as well? Your—

Yanyi: Like, my diversity and inclusiveness work in tech?

Lisowski: Exactly. Is that something that you also dedicate your efforts to, or do you sort of try to keep the two worlds, um, more or less separate?

Yanyi: I will say that it's been a little harder to do in tech, because, um, bread-and-butter day job, that type of stuff. Um, when I was working at my last company, I was very active in diversity and inclusiveness initiatives and got pretty burned and burnt out on them. Um, I wasn't trans at the time. I can't even imagine what it would've been like. I actually have a friend who's still there who is trans, so I could ask him, really. Um, but the—the overarching experience that I had in tech was that I was doing maybe like, 150% of the work and got very little power or recognition around it. So, kind of your run-of-the-mill corporate diversity experience. Um, yeah. The more stuff I said "yes" to, the—the less they—I mean, it was like, yes, more stuff would come in my direction, but it would be like, "Okay, cool. Please do more labor around this. Please, like, mentor people. Here's another, like, women in tech thing." And like, I—I even experienced this in like, women in tech spaces, where it would be like—some organizer would be like, "But don't you want other people of color to see a person of color on stage?" like, when asking me to do something for free in the span of like, two weeks. Like, um, yeah. Like, that—it's that type of like, fucked up like, use of privilege and power of like, "Look how invisible you are. Wouldn't it be great if you were the—if you were the visible piece here and that like, other people could find you and like, see—see you as an example?" Um, and—yeah, so, I got a lot of that, and it wasn't a fun thing, but things are a little better at Meetup. I'm completely out there. My entire team, like, knew my pronouns before I stepped into the building—my manager, who I'd met, like, only during the interviewing process, when they

hadn't asked my about my pronouns, even before I, like, got to my first day. So, I think that he and the rest of the human—like, human resources depart—eugh. He and the other—and the recruiting team kind of like, took care of those aspects. The facilities team was really receptive when I asked for there to be tampons and trash cans in the men's bathroom. Um, yeah. There have been like, nice things that I feel really lucky to have at Meetup, that I don't think I would've been able to ask for at, maybe, other companies that I was interviewing at.

Lisowski: Mhm. How much of that do you think is—is that a result of Meetup specifically, or is it also a result of, um, the way these specific policies and politics have progressed? I'm—I guess, to frame that more specifically, um, it sounds that, going back to college, you were involved in a variety of different industries with your internships, um, your economics degree, the brief period of time that you were interested in music work, as well—

Yanyi: I didn't get an economics degree.

Lisowski: Oh. Didn't you say you majored in econ?

Yanyi: I was in econ for a hot second, and then it was the wrong decision.

Lisowski: Gotcha, gotcha. What did you major in?

Yanyi: I did this thing called information science and tacked on comparative media theory to that. So that was like, an applied computer science degree, um, that was like, a computer science core. So I took like, data structures and, um—I didn't take algorithms, which honestly, should be part of a core—but like, intro to programming and stuff like that. And then I took, um, kind of like, "applications of computer science in x" classes. So I just like—that means just like, pick another department and take a class that has to do with computer science and, um, that thing. So, me, I'm interested in literature, digital humanities, um, so I ended up taking like, a lot of English and comparative lit classes, which was awesome!

Lisowski: Emergent rhetorics?

Yanyi: Huh?

Lisowski: Emergent digital rhetorics, that sort of thing?

Yanyi: Um, I don't know about that, but yes.

Lisowski: Um, yeah, that sounds incredible, but—

Yanyi: It was a fun time.

Lisowski: I bet. Though, was there any sort of progression you saw from when you first started getting involved in those things, back when you moved to New York, to now? What does the historical timeline for that—and for general diversity or handling of that in New York corporate settings—seem to be? Can you generalize that, even?

Yanyi: I don't know if I can, honestly. Um, I was—I was a weird student, honestly. Like, I was taking creative writing classes. I took history classes. I thought I wanted to be in anthropology. Um, I was just kind of all over. I took this class on sound. Like, it—I was kind of all over the place. Um, and I think that kind of translated in my like, commitment to tech in general. There's a lot of skepticism there of like, "Well..." Like, there's certain things that I care about and that I want to happen, and for a while, I thought that like, really working hard on diversity initiative stuff would like, be part of that. Um, but I'm realizing that, um, I have power and can—I don't have to do all the labor all at once, myself. So, it's been a lot more like, just moving myself to a place where I can be more effective along diversity. So like—even like, making moves to like, ask for certain things, like, at the company means that there'll be more space for the next person who like, comes in and makes a similar request. So, yeah. Instead of wide-sweeping, like, "Let's change the enti—all the ways that we do diversity," it's like, a lot more about like, "Am I at the comp—am I at a company that wants to be accountable to the type of things that I want them to be accountable for?" And like, um, the outgoing, um—like, I would say, the director of like, um, humans, like, at Meetup—had a strong passion for diversity and like, actually measuring it in terms of like, inclusiveness, which sounds like kind of like, eugh, but it, like, is really real if like, it's about doing like, qualitative surveys with everyone at the company and asking them like, "Hey, do you feel like you're safe here and that you can ask for stuff that you want and need?" Um, and I think that that can be really effective for people who are not as—who are not going to be as loud about, um, their needs in a corporate setting, but who might, when asked the right questions, um, like, actually offer that type of information.

Lisowski: Right. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. What are some ways in which you feel like you've gone about doing that work? Um...

Yanyi: Asking the right questions?

Lisowski: Asking the right questions, or even making things, um, easier or more manageable, or slightly more diverse for people further on down the line.

Yanyi: Um, I think a big thing at my last company, because I—I mean, I only have been at Meetup for a couple of months, at this point. Um, but at my last company, I was there enough where I felt comfortable enough to like, speak at any Q&A or like, call out some bullshit if I saw some bullshit. And being the loud one means that other people will confide in you. Like,

you have no idea who's listening, and like, someone will randomly message you and be like, "Hey, I have this problem." Like, "Haven't told anyone about it, but like, what do you think? Like, uh, I don't know what to do." Um, or it could be someone who's like, "I really like the thing that you said in this other channel—like, in this other chat channel that I like, couldn't—didn't want to respond to, but thank you for saying that thing." Um, or it can be, um, "I have a question that I want to ask, but I'm afraid to ask it. Will you ask it for me?" And like, yeah. Totally down to do that. Also, like, #allyship, I guess. Yeah.

Lisowski: Yeah, that makes sense. And is that something that you've sort of become aware of, or a trait that you've tried to cultivate in yourself recently, or do you feel it's always been there, to some degree or another, through your time in these spaces?

Yanyi: I think that i was always—I've always been interested in, um, helping, like, people who are not able—like, ugh, so cheesy—but like, helping people who are not able to speak, and I think that has a lot to do with my own trauma as much as it has to do with other people's trauma. Um, but I think I've gotten a lot more, um—I've gotten more sophisticated around it, even though I'm not—I'm still not, like, good at it, right? Like, um, there's a lot of—there are definitely lots of ways that I could be a better ally to the people who I love, and the people who've—I love who love other people, that type of thing. Like, um, but, yeah. I mean, like—I wanted to be, like, a social entrepreneur. Like, that had—I wanted to do something big or meaningful that impacted a lot of people and changed their lives for the better, which is like, a very generic way of saying it, but, like, I do think that it would—it's about like, reaching that person who doesn't have any other resources, and giving them a reason to keep living, and, um, helping create representation where there is no representation, and there sorely needs it—and whatever sorely needs it.

Lisowski: Mhm. So is that perhaps a linkage between your more, uh, creative or editorial work and the work that you do in tech, then?

Yanyi: Yeah, I guess so. I mean, I'm—like, my personal goals really align with my company's goals, which is, like, "Get as many people as possible to like, create groups and have those groups exist—like, and meet up, and..." [sigh] Again, it's like, I feel like I'm just spewing Kool-Aid, but I genuinely believe in it, because it's something that I also practice in my creative life, of like, "What—What is like, creati—what is community? And, um, in the poetry world and in the literary world, like, how can we make power with each other?" [laughter] Rubbing the sticks together.

Lisowski: Right. One can only try. And, um, we've been talking for a bit over two hours, so I suspect energy is starting to wind down a little bit.

Yanyi: Flagging.

Lisowski: Flagging, for sure. Um, hopefully in just one sense of the word, but, um—

Yanyi: Yeah, yeah. Ha.

Lisowski: —I'm just going to, I guess, ask you a few more questions about community, specifically, and then, um, revolve back around to New York again, specifically, and then maybe end the interview around there, if that sounds good?

Yanyi: Sounds great.

Lisowski: Um, so, you've already talked a bit about ways—and I'm glad that you brought in, um, Meetup towards the end there, because, um, it seems like you're viewing it as a platform for community and community-building, specifically. Uh, you've talked a lot about ways in which you've found trans community, um, and ways in which you've sort of participated in poetry community, as well. Have there been any other communities, especially since you've moved to New York, that have played an important role for you?

Yanyi: I'm trying to think about that. Um, I think there's community in proximity that doesn't get talked a lot—talked about a lot. It's really easy, especially in New York, to not think about closeness as—geographical closeness, um, as a reason for people to want to know each other. And, uh, the taco shop on my corner is a place where I organize pumpkin carvings and have casual, like, walk-by conversations, and—do I know everyone's name? I'm trying to, but... Um, I randomly know some of my neighbors, but not all of them. And, being able to talk about your life with someone who just shares the same context as you, even if it's, like, there's the same store across from your apartment, or something, is really valuable, because it's—it's built in, um, in that you, like—I think that community kind of happens based on repetition, and it's not like, an—it's not necessarily an intentional practice. Like, um, the queer/trans group or the writing groups that I'm a part of, like, happen out of similar interests. Um, but I—it's been really important for me to understand that I can be interested in other people for no reason at all, like, that are re—like, that related to me. Like, it's just that I can—I can relate to them because we live in the same space and we maybe want the same things for the neighborhood that we live in. Um, and it kind of goes the other way around, too, right? Like, I can be cared for for no reason, and that's a really important thing for me to feel and know in a place where I live alone, and where, um—I think New York, especially, can be wrapped inside the capitalist shell tighter than any other place in the States. Probably have some arguments with that, but, um, yeah. It's a really lonely city, so, um, my investment in community, which is like, this really, like, nebulous word in a way, um, is kind of in the safety of repetition and recognition.

Lisowski: How do you find intimacy through that? Is there, um—since New York can be, like you said, so lonely and isolating, what sort of intimacies do you try to look for, both in terms of location and in terms of community, and even in terms of like, um, personal platonic or romantic interactions with people? Is there a specific thing that you're looking for, or that you try to, um, cultivate in your life?

Yanyi: That's a very interesting question. I feel myself panicking about how to answer that, um, because the first thing that comes to mind is that I want stability, but like, actually what I want is like, authen—authenticity. And I feel really weird about authent—authenticity as an idea, because there's, like... What is real, and who gets to say what's real? Um, but there's something in there about sharing practices of care, and like, for me, learning different practices of care has been extremely important, because it's helped me build a life different from the one that I was living in, and therefore, it's—and therefore, like, I've changed, and my life has changed, because of it. So, I guess, in intimacy, what I'm looking for is that kind of desire to be in process, and to, um, share that in a kind of like, repetitive—ehh, ongoing way. Um, and I—I think it can be really hard to find, because there's—what—what is the signal for that, right? Like, um, is it a Tinder swipe? Like—um, and there's also just like, these barriers that exist between people around just like, um—trauma around identity, and understanding that, "Hmm, talking to a person who has this particular background will probably not make me feel good about this particular intimate thing about myself." Or maybe—like, that's also an assumption, and those types of things. So, um, yeah. I'm—I think I try to interact with people just in a way where like, in process, if there's something going on with vulnerability, or if there's a door opening, like, I let it happen and engage with it. Um, and if that turns into a stronger relationship of some sort, whether it's a friendship, or a romantic relationship, or, um, just like, a neighborly relationship, like, um, that's something that I get to have and reciprocate in my life, if I want it. It's also about if I want it.

Lisowski: Can you think of one example of a door opening, specifically, that has led to either an increased friendship or an increased romantic relationship recently in your life?

Yanyi: Um, I wouldn't say it's the most recent one, but like, literally the first thing that popped into my mind is that—it's like, my first—my first-floor neighbor who lives in my building. Um, I was going through a break-up at the time, and I just knocked on her door to be like, "Yo, like, we said we were going to get tacos at some point, blah blah blah." Like, it was just kind of like, a random thing where it's like, proximity, again, and we ended up talking for a really long time just outside her door about building stuff and like, things that were going on, like, with the—I don't know, with her and with me that were like, kind of like, surface-level. She literally opened her door and let me into her apartment, and we started talking a little more for longer, and at some point, I was so anxious that I, like—I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but like, I was so anxious that I couldn't think straight or see straight—um, just like, breathing stuff. Um, and after a certain point, I burst into tears and just like, talked

about like, what was really going on with me. And, um, she was really incredibly gracious about it with me, and not in a like, nice—nice to me, in a way, but like, related to me and talked to me about it, um, and we became closer because of that. And it's just like, literally, the door opened, and literally, I asked, like, very quietly for the type of interaction that I needed that night.

Lisowski: That sounds really meaningful. Um—

Yanyi: It's been really great, yeah.

Lisowski: Yeah. In what ways does your trans identity inform those sorts of interactions? I know you've talked about feeling comfortable with some degree of misgendering for safety reasons. Are there any safety concerns that you have on a day-to-day level? How do you navigate those?

Yanyi: Um, I think especially when I first started really presenting myself in the masculine form—it's like a Transformers thing—in the masculine form that I wanted to, um, like, be in, I just—I felt really self-conscious that people were staring at me, or—especially if men—cis men were looking at me, because I think, in particular, the types of violence that I was afraid of just like, became externalized and symbolized by every single passing cis man that I saw. And there were some moments where like, I'd be crossing the street and I play the game where it's like, I make eye contact with you, and I try not to move out of the way, because my whole life, I've been socialized to move out of the way. Um, but there have been some moments where like, literally, I would make eye contact with like, a tall man or something. And there was one time we were crossing—I was crossing the street, and he just stopped in front of me and wouldn't move until I moved. And it was just this like, very quiet-loud, um, motion of like, bravado, and masculinity, and threat that still is a thing, um, every time I like, enter a men's restroom of just this like, anxiety of like—not so much about like, my gender identity but like, the security of other men in the space, of what—their feelings about their gender identity and me being in their space. So, um, yeah. There was another part to that question, but now I'm just having memories of being in bathrooms.

Lisowski: Gotcha. Um, I was—the other part was just, um, sort of other sort of safety concerns that you had, if there are any besides—or, how those safety concerns have changed, um, from when you started presenting in a more masculine kind of way?

Yanyi: Um, so, I mean, definitely like, violence from cis men, and then just like, tokenization, which we've talked about a little bit, and then—um, I've been trying to think a lot more critically about my interactions with femme people, um, which like—there's only so much I can say has been like, not great of like... Learning how to take up space, for me, was really like, mediated through this idea of like, masculinity being a good thing, and a certain type of ag-

gressive masculinity being a good thing. Um, and so I've like—I've really learned how to value optimization, being—taking up space when I want it, being loud, and, um, just doing the exact opposite of what I had been socialized to do, and kind of in process, like, silencing, probably, people along the way. So, I don't know—like, it's like, not really productive for me to like, sit and wallow in guilt about it, um, but there's definitely, now that I recognize myself as a masculine person, that I realize that I can be the source of that type of harm. And, um, it's not—that type of behavior is not something that you can think your way to solving, and so I think that's another part of like, why my projects have been about being in process and in—and in presence, because it's about how I respond—it's about being present when I respond to something, and thinking about it a lot more, um, when it's happening—or, developing reflexes that are a lot more thought out.

Lisowski: Mhm. And it sounds like that's been a more recent development, as well?

Yanyi: Yeah.

Lisowski: Are there any other, um, sort of moments of intentionality that you would like to talk about that you've been cultivating recently, or even have cultivated through living in New York, that we haven't discussed?

Yanyi: Not really. I just watch a lot more TV that I think is quote-unquote "junk," which, it's actually amazing. I don't know if you knew this about TV [laughter].

Lisowski: I'm well aware. Do you have—are there any experiences with, um, healthcare specifically in the city that have been notable or have been commentworthy for you? Is that something that you, um—

Yanyi: —know about, feel about, do about?

Lisowski: Exactly.

Yanyi: Um, I—I haven't personally like, received care yet around like, my trans questions. Um, but my—I have friends who have, and I've gotten advice from them. Um, so right now I'm like, trying to see if I can get an appointment at Mount Sinai. I like, made a call to Apicha [Community Health Center] at one point, but then I felt really weird about taking up space in, like—at centers specifically for, uh—like, people who like, need the space and the price points a lot more than I do. Um, so it's like, Apicha and like, Callen-Lorde. So, yeah. Also like, class privilege, like—I don't know. Like, I'm a person of color, but also I—I can access whatever transition stuff I want, um, partially because my work actually covers that in our health insurance. Amazing! Um, and they told me when they were recruiting me, too. Just like, "FYI, just

in case you wanted to know," and I was like, "Yes. I want to know." Um, but, yeah. Also because like, I can afford it, so, yeah.

Lisowski: Yeah, that makes sense. Um, is there—are there any questions that you feel haven't been addressed so far, that you'd like to talk about, still?

Yanyi: You're an incredibly thorough interviewer, so, actually, no. [laughter]

Lisowski: Okay.

Yanyi: If there was stuff I wanted to talk about, you've thoroughly covered it, and you asked me questions that I was like, "Is this the same interview?" Like, it's been great.

Lisowski: It's true. I'm glad to hear it. Thank you. Alright, let me just move on to a couple of wrap-up questions, then. How do you feel emotionally, mentally, and physically right now?

Yanyi: [laughter] Well, physically, I'm not going to lie, I'm extremely hungry, so that's the first thing that's on my mind. Um, mentally I feel, like, really chill. Like, I've enjoyed this conversation. I've had to think a little bit about some of my answers. Um, and emotionally, I also feel like, pretty good. I feel like, spent, in a nice way. Yeah.

Lisowski: If you want people to hear one thing from you, uh, what would it be?

Yanyi: Oh, shit. [laughter] Can that be the [inaudible] quote? Uh, there are a coup—there are always, like, a couple of things. Like, I would say, like, it's okay to not come out. It's okay to be in process. It's okay to like, not necessarily be achieving all the time. Like, I don't know. There's a ton of stuff there. Doing—do stuff like, one step at a time. Cheesy, but useful.

Lisowski: Of course. Um, in a similar sort of note, if you want to be remembered for one thing, what would it be?

Yanyi: [laughter] This is like, a Myspace bulletin, like, survey. If I want to be remembered for something, um—ugh. It's like, very revealing about how one answers this, including the discomfort that you feel. Um... I want to be remembered for, um, allowing, like, silence to take up space, and to cheat a little, um, to speak to someone who, like, otherwise wouldn't have been able to articulate something that they needed to.

Lisowski: Alright. Um, is there a way that you'd want to want to remember to be for something?

Yanyi: Wait.

Lisowski: I was thinking about, like—

Yanyi: How to want to—wait—what to—?

Lisowski: Uh, perhaps that's getting a little bit too deep into its own belly button.

Yanyi: Tell me—wait, tell me again.

Lisowski: Let me—let me rephrase that. That was a—that was a very good answer. I'm curious if there are desires that you wish you had.

Yanyi: Hmm. Interesting. I feel like part of this conversation has been about desire, so it's like, a meta—it's a meta-conversational thing. What do I want to be wanting? Um—actually, that's actually a thing that I've written about. Um, and like, that's a thing—like, wanting to want, wanting to have access to an emotion like that, or, um... I think I feel really hesitant to answer something like that, because that's kind of the way that I've orchestrated my entire life, of like, having goals, being around it. Um, and, uh, yeah. I guess I'm moving towards and wanting to be in a place where I"m—I'm not necessarily wanting stuff anymore, or not feeling like I"m running on empty in some capacity of my life. Like, I want to be, um—I want to have those thing—the things that I need kind of in rhythm with myself.

Lisowski: I think someone [inaudible]. And, I asked you once already, but just to ask again: is there anything else that you want to add?

Yanyi: Nope.

Lisowski: Great.

Yanyi: I'm good.

Lisowski: Um, is there anyone else you know who might be interested in participating in the oral history?

Yanyi: Um, yeah—

Lisowski: We can talk about this off the record if you want to.

Yanyi: Yeah. I mean, I have a couple of friends who like—I don't know if they'd be interested, but maybe, you know? So, yeah. I can talk to you about it afterwards.

Lisowski: Okay. Sounds good. Well, I think that's the conclusion of this. Thank you so much for your time. It was a delight talking to you.

Yanyi: It was really great talking to you, Zef.

Lisowski: Incredible.