activists, and cultural producers have been asked to respond to the question "What is power?" in whatever form best relates to their work and thinking.

BETWEEN SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW: TRANSVOCALITY AS TALMUDIC PRŒESS NICKI GREEN IN CONVERSATION WITH BINYA KOATZ AND XAVA DE CORDOVA

¹ NG: This text, titled SOFT BRICK, was Dear Friend, sof 1 BRICK, was ultimately a publica-tion and performance lecture, originally written and performed for the 2018 College I'm writing to you to see if you'd be interested in having a conversation with me about Power. In November 2020, I was invited to produce a text for the

Art Association conference, Critical Craft Forum panel: Voice of the Object, in which I discussed the complex and problematic legacy of ceramics icon Peter Voulkos with the bricks from his kiln at UC Berkeley. 2 NG: In this class, we studied a gay-famous sugya (passage) from masakhet (volume)

Bava Meztia 84a, known colloquially as "84-gay." Below is the text that was translated by Binya and Xava for our class. In true SVARA style, though, we, as style, though, we, as students, explored and translated this text word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence for four weeks. I include here my teachers' translations as it gives context to the themes of our class and offers a streamlining or unification (however specific that may be) for the ideas we hashed out

together.

Bava Metzia 84a (Excerpts for TGT101, out of chronological order, translations by Binya Koatz and Xava De

Cordova- translation at right)

⁴ NG: "To embody 'realness,' rather than performing and

competing 'realness,' enables trans women

to enter spaces with a lower risk of being rebutted or questioned,

policed or attacked. 'Realness' is a path-way to survival, and the heaviness of these

truths were a lot for a thirteen-year-old to

carry, especially one still trying to figure out who she was." (116) Mock, Janet. Redefining Realness, 2014 Atria Books

5 NG: "Rhizomatic

thought is the principle behind what I call the

Poetics of Relation, in which each and every

identity is extended

through a relationship with the Other." (11) Glissant, Édouard. Poetics of Relation, 1997 University of

Michigan

project called "Papers on Power." I had originally worked with them on a different project called "Craft and the Hyperobject" which was a large group "roundtable" discussion using Timothy Morton's book Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World to discuss craft practices. Prior to this event, I had begun exploring dialog as an alternative process to

the academic text. I have struggled over time with the singular, stiff production of an academic text, even when enhanced or supported by other people's work. I loved the ease and accessibility of a conversation. As a visual artist, I have often felt complicated about the need to produce academic texts, this expectation that my ideas must follow a specific, recognizable structure has felt burdensome, stressful to uphold. I wrote an essay in 2016 called The Poisonous Mushroom as Uncanny symbol of Queer Reclamation, which was a conversation between my partner and I while we were making dinner. My professor sent me edits, which I then folded into the conversation, and this layering got me thinking a lot about the breaking of linearity and the possibilities of an experimental text that is anchored in the idea of dialogue as a means of connection and text generation. I've done multiple conversations-as-papers over the past five years, including conversations with other artists, academics, and one with a stack of bricks. On a parallel track, I began studying Talmud around the same time this practice began for me, primarily through SVARA: A Traditionally Radical Yeshiva's Queer Talmud Camp, and something that struck me through this engagement was the way these texts are so layered, the idea of Talmud as a trans-historical document, the folding of ideas and questions through time and space, the importance of contradict-

Center for Art Research at University of Oregon, Eugene, they're doing a

ing arguments, etc. I have always been really excited about the possibilities of engaging transness that is not centered in the body, and so this felt like an exciting place to push off of, Talmud as a Trans Text. Note: At the time of this paper's conception, you two, Binya and Xava, were my teachers in the Zoom class Trans Girl Talmud 101.² It was such a joy and a challenge to enter into a space that was not just predominantly queer or trans and Jewish, but explicitly for trans women to study Talmud together. In a world that works so hard to keep us separated from each other myself moved to be in such direct conversation around such specificity. But I've found this to be one of the many things I love about text study, the expansiveness in specificity, that we worked with such a short, contained subject for four weeks and only scratched the surface of extrapolating how to understand the ideas, questions and concepts in the text.

Binya Koatz: Torah has a narrative, has Xava De Cordova: You know my characters, has explicit things that it podcast has become more successful talks about. It has a set of items it lists, a this year and my classes have become more successful this year and I feel countable number of names mentioned, a like I'm somewhat known as a teacher countable number of items mentioned and you could try and count and list out the in the Community, and so I feel like in events of the Torah in order if you wanted some ways I'm in a position of power,

ness the gorgeousness of Rabbi Yohanan... They should bring They should bring a silver goblet fresh from the smithy (/Blast House.) And they should fill it with ruby-red pomegranate seeds. and encircle it with a wreath of red.

Once upon a time Rabbi Yochanan was

b a t h i n g in the Jordan. Reish Lakish

Jordan. Reish Lakish saw her and lept into the river after her. She said to him, "Your strength is for Torah!" He said to her, "Your beauty is for women!"

Rabbi Yohanan said

ones of Jerusalem.

I am the only one left from the beautiful

One who needs to wit-

with a wreath of red roses, and place it between sunlight and shadow. This glow is a semblance of the beau-ty of Rabbi Yohanan. Rabbi Yokhanan used to go and sit at the gates of the mikveh. She would say: [this is] so that when the daughters of Israel come up from their purification mikvehs, they will encounter me, in order that they create children(/tgirls?) who are

beautiful like me and learned in Torah ³ NG: In Torrey Peters' recent NYT bestselling novel Detransition, Baby, she discusses the specificity of white trans women's community dynamics are inherently disconnected from the familial surrogates, often referred to as houses in trans communities of color. She discusses trans women experi-ence their connectivity

to community through the intermediary of the internet, both abundant in its reach and limited in its warmth. My experience of trans community dynamics, as a white trans woman, resonates with this internet-based stratifying, though I also moved through the warmth (was it though? Connection maybe?) and familiarity, despite feeling slightly outside of it, as a teen in downtown Boston in the late nineties and early aughts. ¹⁵ XD: I think this is something a lot of marginalized teachers deal with. And we all deal with, in a way, since most of us are both marginalized and privileged on several axes.

axes. NG: Yes! The bal-

ancing and exchange of power becomes so

students' wellbeing. It feels like a heightened, more tenuous position.

much more loaded

when you're responsible for

says, what "realness" is. You know, Janet Mock. And yeah, it's amazing. Whoa, I'm just thinking about her book, Redefining Realness⁴, what does truth mean? Her memoir isn't titled "Woman Born in Wrong Body," you know? That's one way of talking about the facts on the ground, not that any of us, at least in this generation would really use those terms as much, but she's like "oh my story is about redefining realness" and it feels like that's what this trans pedagogy and trans Judaism is, with our bodies it's making explicit the tradition in that constellation of characters in transness and seeing what comes out of it and finding the larger principles and depth and it's the same process Torah went through, that we're going through with transness and we're doing it with Torah as this fractal, you know? Fractally gay. NG: I mean, the fractal, I think about (Cat mews) Wow, my cat is like "I'm here for this!" BK: "I have something to put into this Talmud!" NG: Totally, like "wait for me, I'm here to participate!" (Picks up cat) Right, so this fractaling, makes me think a lot about the rhizome⁵, this beautiful concept of building on each other and that expansiveness that's possible not on its own, but always in relationship to what's around it. I'm also obsessed with that idea of realness, what "redefining realness" actually means here, realness in relationship to whom? To what? That realness is so much of a relational idea as

BK: Yeah and it really does just apply

this series about trans people in Israel, a

miniseries filmed by trans people in Israel6,

just really stunning. And there was this one

girl who is like, "I don't get it, what do you

mean some guy would want a real woman?

more into their womanhood than me, you know? I am a woman." And that applies

I'm the realest woman, nobody has put

not only to trans fertility, but fertility in

general as well.7 What does it mean that

what does that imply about lineage and

knowledge and reproduction in general?

And that's also a trans thing, even back

in the Torah. This idea that giving birth

on someone's knees as is described in the

Torah is equivalent to that person giving

birth. Joseph is the only "man" in Torah

womb. Josepĥ's probably the next class.

Because in Jacob's blessings to all their

the Rabbis have a whole thing about it,

"the milk of the land" or all of Joseph's

explicitly Joseph gets blessed with titties and womb. And just thinking about trans

descendants will never miscarry, but

where somebody gives birth on their knees

and also Joseph is blessed with breasts and

children, Joseph gets the blessing of Birkat

shadayim, birkat rekhem9, the blessing of

titties and the blessing of womb. And then

giving birth to someone is teaching them8,

to the whole of everything. There was

to, it wouldn't be easy or that useful in

some ways, but you could. And then that's

comes in, to be like "Actually, this is all of

life and everything ever all combined into

one, let me add a bunch more specifically

specific things to it and also bring out the

contact with each other and a gender and

a body in a society, in a person - these are

But then everything that comes out of that

the specific characters in a trans story.

interaction and all the events that you

could list out also have a larger story to

tell, a larger thing to say about the nature of truth, about the nature of, as our mama

larger truth in it" and I feel that's the same

with these two types of transness, transness is about a gender and a body coming into

what the Torah is, but then, the Talmud

the casual and familial way I'm communicating is maybe not how I would feel comfortable communicating to a straight student. That distinction has been alarming, but it's that realization of a shared life experience. Like, I remember when I was 18 and the only trans student in my classes. In those moments, I get to be the teacher that I wish I had, but I'm also having to negotiate boundaries really differently. I can imagine that that's something that comes up that a lot in these queer Talmud settings, our teachers, the rosh yeshiva (head of the school)! These are folks who operate as both our peers, but also our teachers, we go from the beit midrash (study hall) to the end of Queer Talmud Camp dance party grind train and there's something that feels actually really natural about that transition. I wonder if that intimacy can only really come

where I really have to watch my social relations. You know, I couldn't date a

student, for instance, you know that's

like a really concrete example, But I

still feel so disempowered in my own

life because of societal structures and

it's really hard to live inside those two

head spaces at once sometimes.15

NG: yeah totally. In the past year I've

XD: mm hmm.

expanded my teaching practice as well!

NG: I've been having a lot of these mo-

ments lately where I'll be talking to my

trans and queer students and realize that

immense amount of emotional trauma in these spaces, or is it the shared life experience? Is this similar for you when you're teaching??

because our teachers end up engaging this

XD: Yeah, I was just talking with Binya

acted out my trauma on my teachers,

they acted out their trauma on me and

Now my students act out their trauma

on me and the cycle continues. I was

thinking while you were talking, there's

this personality type that is successful

[than mine] almost like a "tenderqueer"

raunchy and we're not too loud and we

don't curse and there's all these subtle

successful in that scene, which I don't

cast to break out of that mold and talk

about sucking dick on my podcast and

break that because I think it's a kind of

queerness that I think is really important,17 that particular kind of nas-

NG: I just love that you brought that up

because I've been thinking a lot about

that show Veneno that recently came to

the US, have you seen it? I was talking

to Ita¹⁸ about this when I first saw it on

my birthday this year, Christina [Oritz

my body, I'm fucking hot," you know?

Like, "this is just like how I operate in

the world" and that, I don't even know

what to call it, it's not necessarily just a

XD: There was like a camp element to

raunchiness but that kind of...

it as well.

Rodriguez], La Veneno, really represents

this kind of 90's trans wildness and a very loud and sexual and unapologetic way of being trans in the world¹⁹, like "this is

talk about cum in class, I'm trying to

really represent.16 So I'm trying really

intentionally, especially in my pod-

in the Queer Talmud world that's very

West Coast it's hard to describe

exactly what it is, but it's a very

social codes that help one be

ty and mean flavor.

different particular brand of queer

kind of energy, where there's like a

lot of therapy talk and we're not too

the other day about this sort of

phenomenon. I feel like I definitely

now we're all switching positions.

is pedagogy offth? Is birth pedagogy? BK: Yes, that's what I mean here: in Judaism it's taught that teaching Torah to someone is as if you've given birth to them 9 BK: Genesis 49:25 10 XD: And it was really personal to me, really personal to me, because the year before this, I had lost before this, I had lost the opportunity to have a child with a partner because of divorce. So already I had been really rethinking fertility and my own connection to it. Even my name, which in English is Eve, for me has always been about claiming fertility for myself. 11 XD: But rose petals do reflect light, right? Doesn't everything, and that's how color exists? I don't know what that means for our tale, but even the things that don't cause a gleam are still reflecting.

BK: Rose petals just don't sparkle light off them, like silver or luminous pomegranate seeds. NG: Right, Rose petals have a matteness, a sort of satin-quality that just engages light differently.

⁶ BK: Al HaRetzef

7NG: In Binya and Xava's course Trans Girl Talmud 101,

we're studying a

sugya of Talmud, Baya Metzia 84a,

which discusses

of an incantation.

which initiated a

on trans-fertility.

pomegranate seeds as a material component

8 NG: What about the

"teaching them is giving birth to them"! Is pedagogy birth? Is

other way around-

12 NG: Is "bussy"

a conjunction of "boy pussy" or "butt pussy"? The latter

would obviously allow

for a connection to a broader spectrum of genders, but I've only ever heard it referred

to in the context of gay men's sexuality, hence

the assumption of the

BK: I've always thought of it as 'butt pussy.'" as

13 NG: Where did this ref-

¹³ NG: Where did this reference to "glittery" come from? Was it part of the text we were studying?) BK: It's the end of the sugya that we're studying. It says "the shine/glimmer [off the goblet] is a semblance of Rabbi Yokhanan's hearts."

¹⁴ BK: Derogatory term in nationalist/nazi

Germany for Jews and others who are 'not landed' or 'rootless cosmopolitans'

final response...

NG: Right.

BK: And we're told to fill it to the top with

pomegranate seeds are just inside and not

of it, the reflection, and so there are parts to

this incantation that aren't directly causing

pomegranate seeds, the vast majority of

refracting any light. And what we're supposed to see is the light that's coming off

the light refracting, that's what we're

supposed to see, and it's the statement

way, what's inside you can affect your

that in a metaphysical and trans-physical

appearance. And it makes me think about

the ways that I've experienced, what, from

a purely materialist perspective, are the same sex organ on a different person as a

different thing, you know, the difference

between a cock and then a girl cock, like a trans girl clit or something like that. Or the

way that something can be an ass, but also

be a pussy. What's inside the person affects the shine that comes off of different parts of

them. And this feels like a statement to that, this shine won't be the same if you fill it

with paper up to the top and then just cover the top with pomegranate seeds, or

if you leave off the rose petals, the shine won't be the same, and Î think it's some-

thing similar, it's the process of making

this and of calling this person into being

that affects what we see. And the process

of seeing someone for who they are, and

being able to see the same physical object

as two different things in different contexts

feels like an important skill and one that is widely applied to different things and feels

NG: I mean, the idea that a "bussy" could

be, not just a divine means of engaging with the body and, obviously in transness

we're not talking about a "boy pussy" 12

the active understanding of something

beyond its surface, its visual, allows the

not, "Oh, just fill the goblet with crum-

pled newspaper and then top it off with

pomegranate seeds to mimic the over-

flowing of fullness," it has to have this

relationship to these materials and this

BK: Right, because what's inside affects

what is outside, even if it's not direct, be-

terial, and this does get back to questions

of Judaism versus fascism, the materiality

Zionism are like, "stop being disconnected

to the land, stop being luftmenschen (air

of the world and being. The origins of

people¹⁴) in the air, you have to have a people with a land and materials, and guns and borders and things you can touch and own. Enough *up here*, I want what I know and what I have and what I see and everything to be aligned and not

cause there's a deeper truth beyond the ma-

here, but just this idea that perception and

like something really active in transness

and something to learn here.

reproduction, I was like, "Xava, let's talk about this,"10 just because it didn't come up in the first class when we talked about the pomegranate seeds representing fertility, but it's feeling like, just from last class, just over the last 24 hours since last class, wow, there's a lot of material here and it's really rad as well. NG: Yeah, it's so amazing. Even just the materiality, the thing that I just can't stop thinking about is what somebody in class said, something like, "the pomegranate seeds are these pods that refract light and in and of themselves create this expansiveness." And I don't know if this is threaded more into cis understandings of the pomegranate as a symbol of fertility, but to me that just blew open that idea of the pomegranate as not just a fertility symbol, but a queer for fertility symbol. These aren't just seeds, they're specifically pods of liquid, of light... BK: Light reflecting gems. NG: Yeah totally. They're much more than just a fertility symbol. BK: Also, they literally represent mitzvah, which is a queer way of reproduction via teaching, and the other thing I'm thinking about now is the fucking fact that it's the light that's cast off of it that looks like Rabbi Yochanan. I missed that the first X number of times I read it, I was like "Rabbi Yochanan looks like a silver cup filled with pomegranate seeds with rose petals, that's stunning." But it's like, no, do that, and the light that comes off of it is what Rabbi Yohanan looks like. And what's trippy to me now is that, okay, we can say "reflect pomegranate seeds," but rose petals do not reflect light, right?¹¹

NG: Yes! And, a kind of sarcasm, and this explicit, sexual forwardness is engaging how we interact with other trans folks and how that contrasts with how we interact with cis folks, what the expectation is around how we talk about our bodies and our experiences. Like, the "Overshare" as this expectation of the trans experience.²⁰ And so, I keep wondering how this translates to pedagogical space, where is that boundary? XD: Mm hmm and I'm sure I'll find it one day, and someone will let me know! In certain parts of the queer Community, we've accepted straight cultural norms around communication, some of which are fine or neutral, but there's a phenomenon and I don't want that to happen, When I first started transitioning, I was doing a bunch of really traumatizing sex work, and I feel like I had like my tragic trans experience, and I want to be as catty as, I've paid my dues, you know.21

NG: yeah yeah.

NG: Right right.

to go into the meat of it.

Rabbi.

XD: I don't want to have to, like

conceal that element of myself to be a

successful Jewish teacher or to be a

NG: Yeah yeah, and then when there's

like funders to answer to, the relation-

ship to boundaries and appropriateness

and acceptability must be so different.

It just seems like the way that you've

approached presenting class and study opportunities is so much more DIY and expansive, you know? XD: Our next class even has bitches in the title. It's gonna be called Talmud for Boring Bitches, I'm really excited to NG: Wow, I love that. XD: Yeah. NG: What are you focusing on? XD: In Talmud for Boring Bitches? My idea was that I want to teach a class where we get away from the sort of "glitter bomb-y" style19 that dominates the queer Talmud world with the "gotcha's" and the cool! Hot! Points!" I want to study what I call the "Flyover Talmud." Partially because, personally I love that shit and I actually I've loved this Transgirl Talmud class, but I actually much more love tax law.

XD: I want the Queer Talmud, capital Q

capital T, Movement to claim its place.

to step up to to do that, and I think part

of that is going beyond learning all the

cool Talmud tricks. You know, we need

NG: I really hear that. Over the years

of attending SVARA events and other queer Talmud workshops, it's felt more

session is so curated and there's this

identifiable emotional build up, peak

and euphoria that is being cultivated in

that space. And I mean, it's satisfying, it

feels like it's built to be satisfying, you

know? I cry so much in these spaces, but the last couple summers at Queer Talmud

Camp I've come away from it wondering

"how does this [Talmud study] function

for someone like me if you don't have a

sugya? Like, if I'm interested in XY&Z,

teacher, a queer teacher, curating the

how do I enter these texts and start to

explore it on my own? Or in a more

discursive, fluid way?20

and more tangible that the focus of each

I think there's a certain rigor we have

XD: I think that that curated thing that

dynamic where you get this far into the

text and you see that they are creating this beautiful opportunity where you,

the disenfranchised, can like step up

witch you are destined to be. But then

and become the powerful Talmudic

you get inside that and you find out

that there's actually just like another curated structure that's holding you,

preventing you from accessing your

XD: I want to like be in a world where

Queer Talmud scholars are respect-

ed in the field, I want to be in a world where Queer Talmud is a movement

ecosystem of institutions. And to do

great, it's gotten us to where we are to-

day. I just viscerally feel like the scene

that, we have to move beyond this

"candy" format,22 which has been

is ready to break out of its shell.

NG: Yeah, that holding, being held,

creating structure makes me think so

much about this desire for conversation,

an exchange as a structural element of

Talmud. My limited experience with it

questions and the layering of voices. In

(study partner)²³ and she brought up the

stamma (Talmud authors/editors), like

what is the stamma's role in all of this?

XD: When you think of [Talmud] as a

book²⁴ it really encourages the idea

to power and curation?

How does that role engage a relationship

class I was talking this out to my chevruta

has been so anchored in the asking of

with its own life and a diverse

full power as a scholar.21

NG: Right.

you're speaking to creates this

that there is this thing called Talmud that has a certain set of contents that is a Thing you can go out and get and then bring back, but in reality the "thing" that we think of as Talmud is just the skeleton upon which Talmud happens as a verb, which is a much more appropriate understanding. I think more important to me than the multi-vocality of Talmud is this idea of a cross-temporal involvement between the students and the material. There's this idea that Sergey Dolgopolsky talks about in his book What is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement, where he has this metaphor called Svara Michutz (judgement from the outside). The idea is essentially that within every Talmudic utterance, a conclusion is folded into that that's not explicit in the language itself. The metaphor that he uses is that each Talmudic utterance is in a geometrical shape. And what we, the students have to do is deduct from the spaces and the edges of that shape which conclusion best fits into it. That just feels relevant to me because it highlights that it's critical to the process of Talmud that we not only take

in the opinions of multiple people, but also that we directly insert ourselves into that dialogue as participants.

you and do you harm. ²¹ XD: I just feel like, when the kind of humour that comes out of my queer trauma is sidelined I'm losing a piece of myself. And that piece is really connected to the legacy of other trans women. I mean if you see videos of Sylvia Rivera back in the day, she is camp as fuck. BK: Zichrona livracha, may her memory be for a blessing.

16 BK: I totally feel this tenderqueer thing. Wow, it's definitely a lot different than the campy queers I grew up seeing, and I'm wondering chout the class dynamics

about the class dynamics here. Who talks soft and

eydl (ashkenazi word for "delicate"), and who's

dirty with their tongue.

17 BK: It IS important!!

18 NG: Ita Segev

performance artist, who I'm currently

working on another iteration of this text project with.

19 NG: See fellow

trans, Jewish writer

and actor Hari Nef's

recent ARTFORUM article, Poison Pen: Hari Neff on Veneno

²⁰ BK: I think it's also

something to do with our being in a closet for so long. We broke out of

mitzrayim (narrowness) and entered merhav-(wilderness/wideness). I believe there's a lot

about the experience of gender restriction that leads to gender expan-

leads to gender expan-sion and taking up a lo

of space after you break out. I also think taking

up space is a defense mechanism - against those who wanna shrink

19 XD: By glitter-bomb I really mean pieces of Talmud that are enthusiastically and explicitly about queer sexuality and gender. Those pieces are awesome, but I think we all know our tradition contains a lot more than just that kind of easy-to-digest material.

material.

NG: Right, like

queerness or transness

information across the board...

²⁰ NG: The organization of Talmudic thought and topics on the daf (page) feels pretty discursive as it is, would you say that's an accurate observation?

that's an accurate observation?
XD: Yeah, it's definitely discursive, and in an alive way because that dialog actually involves the learner as well, not just the voices on the name.

page. NG: Wait, the dialog

NG: Wait, the dialog involves the learner, like the reader? How? BK: Idk what Xava was exactly trying to say, but there are many times in the Talmud where the text refers to the reader as "you". As in "Why does the Talmud teach A? Because otherwise

you would think B."

not just as a subject but as a lens with which to engage

thing, whatever it is, to become significantly deeper, richer, more expansive. BK: Glittery!¹³ NG: Glittery! Exactly! This idea that it's

volume, et cetera.

questioned."

BK: And I want to look around and see and know everything that I'm going to see and know how to categorize it and not be surprised and not have things that shift lines or blur boundaries. That level of thinking leads to the global apartheid system which is fascism and nation states where we both self-segregate and forcibly segregate others into tiny little infinitely small, not just ethno states, but like ethnic, national, whatever differences you can separate, put a border around and give guns to. And everybody disagrees on how practically big and small those borders have to be, the Spanish think they're in a Spanish state, but the Basque think that

they want to be in a Basque state, blah blah

blah and it's just a very material thing that

wants borders rather than border crossers

and wants boundaries rather than boundary crossers and wants binaries rather

than binary breakers and with transness,

multiple things, doesn't always sync in the

same ways. And you don't have to crush

one or the other, you don't have to make

the appearance align, like you don't have

to have every trans person be cis-passing and you don't have to have every person

who says they're trans stop saying they're

trans and just revert to cisness. And there's

a new synthesis that can happen, where you

can have a different type of beauty, that is

a woman's beauty, but is a trans woman's

hood and through that synthesis you reach a deeper truth about what is womanhood

beauty and it's different, but it's woman-

itself, what is beauty itself, and you add

world, and that process is stunning and is

Torah and is what our ancestors want us

to be doing and is the gift of this tradition

among all the traditions that are similar to it, to the world. It is that process of saying

"there's something deeper here, and there's

contradiction here, but the contradiction is

truth itself, and you don't have to squash one or the other," and via the synthesis

of the contradiction you actually reach a higher truth than you would in the simple p'shat, truth of making things align. And

those who want to stop that, it does lead to

the world, to fascism, to nation states, and

the destruction of the world, to the death of

to the gorgeousness of the Torah of the

the way that you can have one thing be

so this trans Torah and trans Talmud feels like a further insight into the project of those who are against that and for a deeper and really truer understanding of truth. NG: The truth of the depth. The depth of meaning and understanding is not just nice, but it's actually deeply, deeply important to the understanding of not just bodies, but boundaries in general, and the permeability of boundaries and the need for permeability. BK: And also, just the truth of that permeability. Every border, every boundary is ultimately hevel (nothing), it's ultimately dust in the wind and ash. "The only constant is change." But that's a mamesh (yiddish,) truth and that's radical and earth shaking if you really sit with it and understand it, the only constant is change means that all of life and history and possibility

is in constant motion, and that truth, the objective truth, is changing and constant and the most true thing is constantly in development, in dialectic, in process and full of contradictions and multi-directional and that's fucking wild, and it's scary to some people and it's unprofitable to some people. And so, there is push to clamp that down. NG: And to identifying boundaries and ways in which things could be described as unchanging in order to create that kind of control. That then brings me back to this discussion of light and perception, that it's also not just the undeniable fractaling of light, but it's actually the experience, the deeply subjective experience of witnessing the fractaling of light that is Rabbi Yochanan's beauty, that is the transness, or it's "a portion" of it. Like a

BK: ...just a semblance of it, that fucks me

BK: And what you were saying made me think that, the fact that it's the semblance of the light on the earth just adds an extra layer of perception to it, because what we're seeing is sun-hitting-cup-hittingearth-hitting-eye, rather than sun-hittingcup-hitting-eye, it even adds an extra step, which is even gayer and more queer, it takes four steps to even see it.

NG: Right, sun-hitting-cup-hitting-earthhitting-eye that is then reversed and

fraction...

NG: Totally.

up, that's a mic drop.

NG: Like tangrams. XD: Exactly like Talmud tangrams.²⁴

²⁴ XD: This is part of what I love, is that the tangrams are fractal. Our interpretation has to be crafted to fit the text, then our xevruta has to be perfectly shaped to fit ourselves, and ultimately our selves are shaped to perfectly fit the divine. Talmud and Judaism are a never ending chain of imperfectly matching shapes reaching toward matching perfectly.

BK: Tangrams are a kids' toy with colorful shapes you can put together in many ways, just for those who (like me) didn't know...

²¹XD: And I think that first curated step is important, but eventually we all outgrow the container. BK: Woah - curation as disempowerment. That's wild. I guess that tracks with SVARA's goal to get us to understand the inside/outside meaning of every word in the text. The next step of that is to be able to choose our own Talmud to learn too.

²² BK: But, to be clear - I LOVE candy, Both the sweet, and the

23 NG: Honestly, the

chevruta dynamic was the primary inspiration for this method of text

generation. At one of my first Queer Talmud Camps, Rabbi Mónica

Gomery mentioned finding a piece of text

she was interested in and bringing it to her chevruta to work through, and I became

so inspired by this idea that chevruta could be a method beyond the

beit midrash rather

than simply the way

you're "supposed to study talmud" in this

very specific context.

²⁴ XD: Which is not

²⁴ XD: Which is not accurate, it wasn't originally composed that way, it was composed orally. And even beyond how it was composed, it isn't a static piece of literature like a book in the Western imagination. Talmud is in fact a process and the "book" we call Talmud is just a big stable core in that unfolding process.

²⁵ BK: OMH (Oh My Hashem) this is the COOLEST metaphor ever. like Talmudic dark matter.

Pose character.

21XD: And I think that

translated to the brain. BK: Exactly, and then put into context of all your tradition and your society and your understandings of gender, that's the raw material, but then processes through the entirety of Torah and then comes to an understanding, like "whoa. Now I understand the beauty of this person." NG: Now I understand a semblance. BK: Now we understand a semblance, it's

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start by creating a Jewish learning program in Washington prisons called Beit Midrash Behind Bars. She went on to found the first ever Queer Talmud podcast, Xai, how are you?, which has been running for over a year, and co-founded the first online-first queer yeshiva, Shel Maala. Her writing is recently featured in the anthology, There is Nothing So Whole as a Broken Heart, edited by Cindy Millstein. © 2021 University of Oregon, Center for Art Research

Nicki Green is a transdisciplinary artist working primarily in clay. Originally from New England, she completed her BFA in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2009 and her MFA in Art Practice from the University of California, Berkeley in 2018. Her sculptures, ritual objects and various flat works explore topics of history preservation, conceptual ornamentation and aesthetics of otherness. Green has exhibited her work internationally, notably at the New Museum, New York; The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; Rockelmann & Partner Gallery, Berlin, Germany. She has contributed texts to numerous publications including a piece in Duke University Press' Transgender Studies Quarterly Trans*Religion issue and a piece in Fermenting Feminism, Copenhagen. In 2019, Green was a finalist for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA Award, a recipient of an Arts/Industry Residency from the John Michael Kohler Art Center, among other awards. Green lives and works in the San

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