

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Kay Gabriel

Interviewer: Michelle Esther O'Brien

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Michelle Esther O'Brien: Hello my name is Michelle O'Brien and I will be having a conversation with Kay Gabriel for the New York Trans Oral History project in collaboration with the New York City public libraries community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is June 4th, 2019 and this is being recorded at the New York Public Library. Hi!

Kay Gabriel: Hi Michelle! Thanks for having me!

O'Brien: Absolutely. Thank you for coming. Could you start off and introduce yourself?

Gabriel: Sure. I'm Kay Gabriel. I am a writer and a grad student. I live in New York. I've lived in and around New York for about a decade, but I'm originally from Canada. Specifically, I grew up in Toronto and it's cool to be here.

O'Brien: Yeah, what do you write about?

Gabriel: I am a poet and a [inaudible]. I am also working on my dissertation and I would say that that ranges from um— [Sigh] What do I write about? Um... I write— [laughter]

O'Brien: Take your time.

Gabriel: Um— I mean part of wants to be kind of a troll and say I write about gay shit in class for— and not you know be a little too abrasive and a little too immediate. Ultimately [laughter] I would say that I desire for my writing to congregates around various kinds of queer and trans desires and pleasures and histories on the one hand and on the other various kinds of revolutionaries, currents in the presents and histories that I am responsive to. Incidentally, both of these things. I would say I pursue this both in kinds of poetic projects or aesthetic projects and I've pursued in argumentative projects and both of these are a little tangential to my dissertation that I am writing right now but it is my day job so I don't consider it my writing. [laughter] I am sure you will know exactly what I mean when I say that and that's like— so that's like a lot of the work I am doing, and I am not uninterested in it. It just has it is somewhat removed from various kinds of like communist and revolutionary organization moments in my thoughts and interests and its very removed from anything related to queer and trans identity and sexuality.

O'Brien: Your dissertation—

Gabriel: My dissertation is something I have to write about every day right now.

O'Brien: What is your dissertation?

Gabriel: I am writing on— so I actually do like my project. I am writing on adaptation of the great tragedian Euripides [Euripides] in modernism and the Avant-garde and I am close to being done. I am working on my final chapter which is fun and cool and exciting or maybe it isn't exciting to a bunch of other people but it's exciting to me because I am to be done with grad school and I want to— In the lucky circumstance, I want to have some kind of job no longer be living on TA wages— and looking forward to closing this particular chapter in my life. But like you know its nerdy shit

and my class is very training and I have a tattoo of Sappho on my left breast [laughter] and that's real nerd shit but I read Greek and Latin. In my dissertation I am looking at adaptations, reworking, translation, recreative adaptation of Euripides that was an author among like Medea and Bacchae and a bunch of other equally cool plays that are performed and looking at moments that are in the 20th century— History when Euripides, an adaptation when artist have adapted Euripides in some kind of proximity to actual social revolutions and with some kind of fidelity to Avant-garde form. I am thinking about triangulation between tragedy and revolution and the various desires that we call the Avant-garde.

O'Brien: So, for people who aren't academic, Euripides is an ancient Greek playwright? Is that right?

Gabriel: Yes. For people who are not academics, Euripides is a tragedian playwright, dramatist of the 5th century BCE who lived in Athens in the second half of the 5th century during the decline of the Athenian empire and a lot of his plays have been variously read with conversation of war and decline and he died in 5 BCE in sort of self-imposed exile in the court of Macedonia.

O'Brien: So, you're looking at more recent 20th-century writers.

Gabriel: Yes.

O'Brien: Who use or references plays?

Gabriel: Yes.

O'Brien: And are doing exciting unusual things in their writings.

Gabriel: Precisely, precisely. Yeah, for example one of my chapters is on the American poet H.D. who I'll say right away she is my favorite but who is H.D. [Hilda Doolittle] She is a modernist, close friends at one point and romantically involved with Ezra Pound [Ezra Pound] before he took a really deep dive into the fascist pool. I am not saying she's not reactionary because she is. She expatriated herself with Pound to London where during the 1910s and lived in Europe for most of her life with her girlfriend prior and in 1910-1920s. She was involved in the movement we call imagism. Which was basically dead by 1920. She kind of keep operating in that mode and in 1917. She has an essay where she talks about where she imagine Euripides in 1917 London and she thinks about this quote "ultramodern spirit" would be received or accepted or thought about as some kind of anti-war and so okay— Is H.D some kind of weirdo, a cultist, conservative? Yes, all the above is true but she fixates on this moment of what would Euripides do about the world war in 1917. Well what do we know about that? We know that— Why is 1917 important world historically, that would be like February and October right? So, she's talking about—

O'Brien: The revolution in Russia.

Gabriel: And she's not talking about the October Revolution in Russia, she is certainly talking about February and she certainly as sort of like how Perry Anderson [Perry Anderson] modern

argues true of modernism in general. She certainly proximate to actual social revolution going on under her feet and she's pretty apathetic towards it but she provides conditions for her writing which even as it sort of has this romantic ant capitalism. She doesn't like capitalism because it's ugly and industrial and because it proletarianized a lot of people and then you have to share cities with poor people. I don't think there's really much to recuperate in her but nonetheless she produces this work that is formally interesting and it's about Euripides and adapts Euripides and its formed in conjuncture with all of these actual revolutions going on under her feet. I think that's kind of interesting and that would be one short piece for my dissertation.

O'Brien: So, let's go back and learn something about your life and how you got here. So, tell us about your childhood.

Gabriel: I was born in Ottawa, but I grew up in Toronto. I grew up in the east end of Toronto just as far as you can go east. In a neighborhood called beaches and I lived in 90s and left in 2009. I... let me see, I think Toronto is probably not a bad place in general for people to grow up gay or queer or trans and it happened to be a really bad place for me. In in those capacities specifically and that had to do with some combination of bad luck and I guess— You know it's like the city where— I mean I guess Toronto has a complicated queer history, in so far as in goes back a long time but also like the kind of equivalent major event in Toronto history that is sort of up the scale of Stonewall for instance happed over 10 years later and those were the bathhouse raids in 1991. I believe that there wasn't a Toronto or any kind of major pride event demonstration in Toronto. I am pretty sure up until after the bathhouse raid which is also like coming to consciousness and I kind of like, you know gay liberation arriving in the city and I am not a historian, and this is just my impression of having heard a little bit. It also meant that the kind of development of a really organized gay liberation movement in Toronto happened as the same time as the development of the Aids crisis. I think that has this impact on the city where I was growing up and I knew even when I was teenager, I knew a number of older people who have lived through it or are shattered. But then also this sense— there is a very different kind of romanticized relationship of the past because in NY or San Francisco— it's not like there's this idea of the 70s or this super hyper time and then reality came crashing down I think there is somewhat a different relationship there. There's is a pretty... there is a 519 center and it's a major gay center downtown, there is a major LGBTQ center and I would go to youth groups there and there's all these social programs. Nonetheless, I didn't have peers when I was a kid. I knew no gay people or queer people my age and I definitely did not know any trans people my own age. I had a couple of dyke friends and so most of the people I knew were significantly older than me by 10 to 20 or 40 years and so I don't think it is true for necessary for a lot of people who came out or outed as young as I am and nonetheless I felt isolated. I was out when I was 12 and I was kicked out of school I was at for basically having sex with another student at his house not at school [laughter] and he and I, he did not face consequences I did and I had to leave. I was basically forced to leave school for pretty normal adolescent sexual experimentation and that was in 2005 or 2006 my specific memory of dates are blown to bits. That kind of really formed a lot of my— this was a major experience that inflected in my relationships where I was living or growing up and bounced through a few different schools before coming to NY actually.

O'Brien : Do you want to tell us more on how you were like as a child and what it was like with the relationship with older people.

Gabriel : [gulp] I was a nerd. Let me see... I guess I kind of like— what was I like as a child? I wasn't like antisocial I just had some trouble relating to people. [laughter] I was like a weird nerd and I was into— I had kind of an indie phase and scene phase. Neither which endeared me to the people I went to school with at any of the schools I went to and I played the violin which wasn't especially cool and I spent a lot of my time reading poetry and I had really long hair and wore my sisters clothes. So, like idk, I was kind of a weirdo sensitive loner. When I said I didn't have a lot of queer peers, I also did not have a lot of friends like period. Cause boys my own age [laughter] only had nasty things to say and but I did have a community orchestra and it was a gay community orchestra and I joined it when I was 13 or 14. We played Tchaikovsky and fun stuff like that. I was the youngest person there by 10 years and most of the people there were 20 years older than me and it didn't necessary help me meet other people my age, but I did like developed these friendships with queer men and women, significantly older than me. I would do things like you know we would finish up and we would go across the street to the bar and except during pride week I never got carted, so I was just going in there all the time and that's like the thing right. It was perfectly fine because I got to talk to people about— these were people who had moved to Toronto— these were people who had moved to Toronto in the 70s and 80s and had lived in the kind of [Inaudible] village which is the gay area downtown or cabbage town which is right next to it for decades. and it becomes I would say those relationships at the time were really lovely to me in terms of knowing people who knew— like I felt I was so isolated in my day to day life and at school and at home and I'm seeing people who were just as not party animals but living really interesting full lives and they knew a lot and they liked that I was a weird young person who showed up every week and those were lovely experiences. I am not in touch with any of them any longer, but I would say for a couple years when I was in my early teenage hood that those were some really sweet relationships.

O'Brien: What were parents like?

Gabriel: My parents are both still alive. We have a complicated relationship. I think I am actually going to skip that one and maybe we will circle back to it when it is important.

O'Brien: Can you tell us what kind of jobs they did?

Gabriel : My dad worked in a professional managerial and worked in public relations for a bank as sort of the Canadian term for it is a red tory and I guess in the US you just say socially liberal something like that kind of things that no one really believe but that was his world. My mom, when I was really young my mom was a PhD student and she was raising 4 kids, two from my dad first marriage and my sister and me. She finished her dissertation, and which involved a lot of field work and then doing contract-based editing work. I will say again, we have a complicated relationship but now that I regret, I am finishing my dissertation. I can't imagine doing it with one kid let alone for. Props go out to her for her that's really cool and then she adjusted at University of Toronto I want to say for about a decade working at all three campuses. She also managing editor for an academic journal.

O'Brien: And you moved to NY for college?

Gabriel : Yeah, I went in 2009 to Colombia. I started college young and Toronto is a big city but it's not as the same scale as New York, so I got here when I was in some kind of adolescent and I was [laughter] like just a little triangular hard. That's how I will put it, but I was surprised and confused at the start at the place I moved to, but I don't know. College is some kind of class especially 4 year colleges, especially private colleges are some kind of class ripening room that transmit a certain kind of build on to mostly to members of a certain class you know not exclusively and it keeps you in there into you are mature and releases you to some kind of management shop or whatever. When I say college students are idiots, I don't mean that in some ontological claim in like people and their like 17 18 19s, I mean that as a claim that like the kind of class-based experience which is an intentional denaturation that is meant to [laughter] that is meant to preserve you till you're like ready to or be some kind of middle manager depending on what kind of classes you had going into it like some kind of owner. In general college students are idiots, but I wouldn't exempt myself from that I think I was an idiot. That's sad. I will also say that I started college in 2009 and I collided with and overlapped with occupy. I would say that Occupy was meant in general for people I was around and also for me personally of radicalization. You know like I— nobody is born a communist you do have to figure it out and also I believe that class ideology reproduces itself by a secondary school and also by a post-secondary education but especially for a secondary education because high school is very controlling and that's not a very original thesis but when Kathy Acker [Kathy Acker] says in her novel of the same title Blood and Guts in High School that is all I know— parents teachers boyfriends all have to go kind of what she is trying to get to is that high school is some kind of experience like reproducing class ideology while also trying to turn you into some kind of worker. I won't say I was immune to that but I would say that I got to college and I was some kind of monk to liberals but I did have certain ideas that were on the right track or what I would consider to be on the right track now was Palestine and anti-Zionist. I was very suspicious of family and those were two little seedlings for like thinking about what I would now consider international politics on the one hand and politics of queer liberation on the other but the kind of major event that was political awakening for me and as I think for many people at the time and continues towards people in the present was Occupy and not as much as some people but I produced both that kind of actual occupy and also in various other forms that were kind of happening at the same time. I remember this also as a moment that taught. For context I was 18 and 18/19 while this was going on and I remember learning and you know that Occupy has some sort of political history and impact and certainly in ideological orientation but I do remember learning organizing tactics and I remember this being a moment of really bottom deprioritized organization and I remember learning you can come and put yourself somewhere and you interrupt everything else that is supposed to be going on there. I fear that is a critical tool and remains a critical tool in the present and also things like mic check which is a great way to get your voice heard in a loud space. That was more important than anything I learned [laughter] in college and it happened to happen at the same time.

O'Brien: Describe encountering occupy.

Gabriel : I guess like— you know— I remember— okay part of the way that things happened if you were a student at a private university and there a few of them in uptown Manhattan is being filtered out of there's some weird shit going on downtown and lets be real Colombia has a private landowner isolates itself from the actual events intentionally and geographically and financially isolates itself and I think it's the largest landowner apart from the city itself and the one right behind

it is NYU and seems some kind of corporation so it kind of began as this thing as oh some people called for this sort of— I remember hearing about it the summer before it happened like there's this moment for this autonomous organization or zone in wall street and I mean I have a hazy memory of that part because for it seemed a little bit like organized and it wasn't really clear what the politics of that they were and it seemed anti-hostility and I don't think I knew that that mean at the time but then once it started moving like actually entering the space and actually going like this is like people are just here and they are camped out and they're like trading books and having meeting and they're talking and you know I think that we used the word especially in some more anarchist or anti-state affiliated and spaces we use and prefigurative and this is prefigurative of communist and that's not and maybe not complicated but you know like I don't know— I think about collectives that set themselves up or spaces that set themselves up in gentrifying neighborhoods and talk very loudly about how they are prefigurative of desalinating of social relations of something like that. [laughter] You seem to have a complicated relationship or like actually straightforward relationship to people you are displacing namely you're gentrifying and so in what sense this is prefiguratively and seems like you have a farm share in Bushwick and that's not the same thing. Putting that aside I will say that my experience of occupy was this feels like what I would now call an attempted of prefigurative social environment because it like— A lot of was like organizers and students it was a lot of students and why were students involved because they have a relationship or flexible relationship with the lecture day so you can control your time and you can go and be there— and that everyone is recognizing that and also like long term radicals who just clearly been at everything since the 80s or 90s. Also, like homeless people who were like in the park and know didn't have anywhere else to be and were present and were there and was executed. I don't want to iron over or romanticize but it did feel like a kind of social space that allowed various kinds of organization to happen and various kinds of solidarities to develop and then there were and I wasn't involved in like the major mobilization like people arrested on Brooklyn bridge but then they arrived but there were these really big mobilization and you can see those solidarities activating into actual movement and actual interruption of sort of reproductive and circular life of the city and yeah I would say that it remains important for me. I think the other thing I will say about that is like Kristin Ross [Kristin Ross] is a theorist who I really like and she has this really good book called Communal Luxury which is also about the Paris commune and more recently she has been writing about land based about land based movements and she talks about occupy and holding on to space and insisting upon being there and getting in the way of developments there and the connections to standing rocks I think and the ongoing encampment on unsettled territory in British Columbia. Those connections are pretty obvious and connections to urban struggles to anti gentrification for instance are that seem like important contribution namely that space is one way and space isn't abstract and it's about their lives and relationships between each other and therefore that kind of social space that dimension where you live your life around other people or moving or passing by or in certain kind of commercial relations and that is insipiently the basis for certain politics. I would say that like is a kind of lesson that occupy and its various aftershocks I think like still— I think that that still recuperates into this moment that I think is especially true when we start to think about the privatization or poisoning or disposition of land and water and its true when you think about people losing their homes and the kind of major— and its true obviously when you think about colonialism and Palestine in the present and where people actually live is both recursively political and the basis for movement and organization and I think that the kind of space of like instantiation Occupy were like furnished that political imagination for people in an informative way.

O'Brien: Could you tell a concrete story that connects to your own radicalization at occupy?

Gabriel: Nothing comes to mind right away, but can we circle back to it?

O'Brien: Of course.

Gabriel: Cause my mind will be stimulated by one thing or another.

O'Brien: What was it like, where you at around sexuality or gender for yourself when you were at occupy? What was that like?

Gabriel: That's a really good question. I think, talking about my childhood and adolescent. [blows nose] sorry. I had kind of like— let's say like gay adjacent adolescents and like I was pretty— yeah, I mean I... I don't know. I mean I would say I had a few years of identifying as gay but in ways were even I could tell as a youth when I would meet gay teens was like I had really long hair and I was mistaken for a girl like all the time and I also happen to wear and take clothes from my sisters room. Sometimes with permission and sometimes not and it took me a second to realize the people I thought were like you know were like other gay identified teens who were not on that wavelength as gay which was already like some kind of difference of— although kids do all kinds of stuff and kids do all things trying to figure out what feels good and that awesome and I don't kind of have [inaudible] that I impose and kind of like because it's just like I don't know. Teenagers are very confused and also trying their best frequently, so I have a lot of sympathy for myself and I try at this point of my life to have a lot of patience and then I think like I got to New York. It's not like I didn't know trans people when I was a teenager— and what I mean when I was an adolescent in Toronto because I did know some but not personally and not as friends and not in any sort of intimacy either. I would sort of just meet people at the teen center. I met people in passing. Never in any kind of social formative way and only when I reached New York did I actual start meeting a couple of trans people and a couple that were anywhere between 14-15 years older than me. I started to have a sense that this is one way that people lived and that also and like I had one effect of bouncing around between a lot of different school was like I never had any kind of real. I mean this is true for most kids but I think I had it somewhat worse because I had this very uneven relationship to things to learning the curriculum and I never had a sex-ed class and Ontario had this really shitty sex education thanks to the government and I am sure that there was some period of time when that was somewhat more liberalized and whatever and I don't actually know what it was like in the mid [inaudible] going up to 2009 because I never had in a school and I went to 4 or 5 middle and high schools. I don't and I guess that's where somebody might learn something like at this point this is the type of situations where you might learn something about the possible different ways to have a body which might include hormones or include like surgery or various other ways people organized their relationship to sexual difference and others. I knew fucking nothing and only when like I moved here did I actually begin to meet people who were like transsexual and were whatever and had made various kinds of major changes in their lives and for a second there that was like this kind of space of pleasant indeterminacy. This is a long way of saying of when I started to be radicalized and I wasn't really sure where I feel in any kind of spectrum and was going by they/them and I hadn't changed my name and I felt pretty. On the one hand, having a lot of fun trying things on and on the other pretty like kind of confused and a little

scared but I will say that through Occupy I did meet a bunch of other queers. I met other trans people that was not at the time not tons but then again some and that was like though Occupy and throughout occupy it was related movements. That was also a time when involved for a little while with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice that I know has been going on for somewhat longer but that was my thing. Going to meetings and later on and when (Jay Brich?) was partnering with other organizations in terms of logistical support for anti-stop and frisk actions and for cop watches and things like that. Even though (Jay Brich?) was not and I am not involved with them anymore and more... I don't know the status if that organization and they're not explicitly a queer organization but it happens to be full of queer and trans people and this is like oh yeah I am here and people look different from other parts of my life and that's cool and exciting and I am still friends with folks who were involved. I will say that there was a kind of not even necessarily problematic overlap between queer and trans politics on the one hand and the various kinds of anti-capitalist of politics of Occupy but there was a really distinct Venn diagram and that is also I keep thinking about.

O'Brien: Excellent. So, we just had a break. Coming back before we move on to talk about other things is there anything more you want to share about Occupy and its impact on you and your experiences there?

Gabriel : I guess the thing I will share is there was a big overlap between— so this didn't happen at occupy itself but it was facilitated and there was a big overlap between people who were variously radicalized between stuff going on at occupy and people involved with justice for Palestine in Colombia and I was never really involved. That ended up proving critical during the 2012 is really bombardment but there were a lot of kind of like spaced takeovers and it was a campus based politics and that has its own limits that pretty apparent and that I would say that it was really critical overlapping that ended up meaning that I was in a lot of antizionist for Palestine conversation. I would say that's— I am trying to think of a specific story there that wasn't just that isn't just lie well we had a really critical action. But that was a major feature sorry there was one more thing I wanted to say but [pause] but yeah that was more specific.

O'Brien: Your family is Jewish?

Gabriel: My family is Jewish, yeah. I am somewhat more observant than the rest of them. My mom's side of the family is Jewish and it was a mixed household cause my dad's dad was a Presbyterian minister but my dad is not a believer of any particular kind and I think my parents told and my paternal grandparents were going to raise the family in a mixed faith tradition to make them feel okay, but in fact there wasn't any of Christian influences aside from the big cultural ones. I remember going to church in the local and I guess in Canada it's called united and here it would be called Methodist church and what I was really and what I don't really liked very much and I never went back was the Jewish tradition probably to the degree to that for a lot of non-religious Jews. Judaism is some form of secular practice and that was a pretty prominent part of growing up. I didn't really go to Hebrew school, but I did have bar mitzvah and in my life we kind of observed the major holidays with your— If you're a North American and you're not a [inaudible] and so we have Passover and other holidays. I am more observant than the rest of the family in that I do things like keeps things for Passover for Yom Kippur I'm vegan, so I keep kosher by default the rest of the year. These are things that you know help me to think about my relationship

to a certain spiritual and social tradition on the one hand on the certain kind of politics on the other. The other thing I will say about my family is that they're all anti-Zionist well I don't know about extended family but my mom and all of my siblings are and I have a complicated relationship but like my whole life my mom had a principal for Palestine politics that she's like regularly acted upon and very publicly and I look up to it and we talk about that a lot in terms of this social dimensions of Judaism and how that requires an internalist anti-colonialist politics how it's not Judaism. Judaism is not a nationalism and my mom lived in Israel Palestine for a couple of years because she was married to a man who moved there so she and this was before— I think this was before the first [inaudible] so it would of been because he married my dad in 1989 and I think she was back in Canada by 1986, so she would of been living there in the early to mid 80s but she was witnessing all of the social relations of the apartheid regime. I mean critically that affect my mom was born in South Africa and she and my grandparents and her brother left when she was young, a lot of her family was still in South Africa so she grew up like very conscious of that many Jewish people that left south Africa in order to not be complicit with apartheid and this became the basis of solidarity politics.

O'Brien: Your adulthood roughly corresponds to the growth with a very visible Jewish non-Zionist and anti-Zionist occupation or opposition to occupation. Do you— It sounds like you had some breakthrough for justice in Palestine though others who had some relationship to this development and emergence and your family was precursor to it.

Gabriel: Yeah, very much so. I mean, I think that becomes a probable in a lot of— I don't want it to sounds at all like [inaudible] to sound like I have any kind of— you know like contempt for age but the generational divide I will say among North Americans is very probable. Into the degree that I think a lot of people under 45 are really keyed into a lot of critical actions whether through— fuck. [laughter] There is some kind of split there not like—

O'Brien: Jewish voices for peace.

Gabriel: Yeah, that's what I am thinking. Thank you. Brain fart— And I think the thing about JVP is cool is they don't take a particular— and you know there is some kind of critique you can make from it, but they don't take some kind of line in terms of one state two state. They are very similarly— is just make conversation about scarecrows and peace process while the occupation continues and while apartheid continues. You know I think right around the time of all this development as you say like it's very visible non-Zionist solidarity movement— I coincide at the same time of the development BDS sanctions as a critical element. I would say there have been various kinds of actions that I've been involved in which goes back to that in the past 6 or 7 years. I think that's that's— I'll say that I think because of Zionism is a nationalism that is pursued with a brutal and murderous military ethnicity in the name of Jews in Israel I think they take it as some kind of political imperative to refuse to be spoken for in that way and be turned into a rhetorical barricade or rhetorical shield. To insist upon— Now in terms of academic work organizations and at various kinds of universities there's all kinds of suppression of antizionist pro Palestine speech there all kinds of suppression of [inaudible]. It is an organization that has American universities like being forced repeatedly to defend itself and get legal help in its various chapters. I mean we can go back to 2015 when [inaudible] was like fired a tenured job for his statements about Israel. You can think about the kinds of academic sanctions that people have been subjected to. And you

look at all these events and you can identify that the actual— you know if under McCarthyism are communist politics was an actual site of suppression in or among other organized institutions or cultural or universities, things like that. Right now the thing you cannot— the actual position that will bring you under administrative sanction at US universities is not fascism, it's not white supremacy it is isn't like any of the actual violence that are kind of being or violence that are being carried out continually every day at borders and also kind of higher education institutions— the thing that will force you or risk administrative sanction is being explicitly pro Palestine and being explicitly opposed to the projects the natural project of these states referring to Israeli apartheid, voices support for bds. these are actual concrete political stances that the organizations of— Israel and the us have carried out a cultural tools of suppressing internationals support for Palestinian liberations for occupation and the end of apartheid. It's pretty sickening and the other for those of us who are participants in Uni. I think like the kind of— another political imperative to be forceful and outspoken and not a liberal terms of freedom of speech, although it is the case it is a violation of freedom of speech but in terms of refusing to be silenced and refusing to be some kind of passive witness to imperialist violence in the present and into political suppression that enables it.

O'Brien: How did you become a communist?

Gabriel: [sips drink] Good question. I think it was around the time of Occupy or whatever. I was like— like some kind of anarchist. I would say I became radicalized as you know for good reasons. You see the bad stuff happening is police brutality and you're like fuck the police and you're like various kinds of somewhat. Various kinds of interactions with like the law arm of oppressive institutions of private armies. You see that happening and you're like I want to be opposed to that. For me, there was a while where I am like some anarchist and I am still some kind of anti-state politics with— at this point a period transition. I would say that there wasn't a kind of critical event that pushed me into communism as to identifying as a communism or communism as the name for the political horizon that around which I organized with my desire and actions. On the one hand learning a lot of history without being a historian but learning about communist movements in 19th and 20th century. This is something that grad school has lecture structured in and that because you are teaching and you are doing your research and you have a lot of time off in your day when you have to be doing teaching or research but no one is telling what to do. I think there are worse things to do with that time on the one hand than becoming a part of organized projects and the ones that require your solidarity in the moment. Teaching yourself about the history going on underfoot has maybe very recent maybe 1967 is in some sense very recent and teaching and learning about this stuff in part because that is the kind of thing that grad students are good for because you have a lot of time off, you can and because you have a lot of access to privatized knowledge you can go to university libraries like teaching yourself some of this stuff so you can be there for some kind of solidarity and be there in a present and principled way. I am not going to say that grad school turned me into a communist, I am using air quotes. I will say that learning a lot about social movements and the Scottsboro trial and took places in the mid 30s when black men were accused two white women where legal support was provided by the US party, learning about the Panthers, learning about the various kinds of national liberation movements of the 50s, 60s, 70s, and their relation to Maoism and third world Marxism, spending a fair amount of time reading [inaudible] like these were the things that kind of moved me to a place of straightforwardly moving I'm a communist. That is, I would say on compromising position in the presentment and

for what it's worth, I think it's important to insist on the C word and insist on Communism not as opposed to socialism. There are some situations where some people will say this is a socialist thing and I'll be like yeah that's great but there's much— the right wing of the left that is to say the DSA or the kind of umm... labor aristocracy, all we need is a union movement, we don't need to think about the compromises unions strike with capital. We don't need to think about open borders or all this stuff like the right wing of the left. It gets a lot of screen time. It's very political strong on the left right now and the word they use for their politics is socialism and all the kind of the late 19 century critiques of socialism of all the— and all the critiques of the second international as this is a word that means compromises between capital and labor in the global north in the center in the center of empire. Those are kind of still true and you read some stuff in Jacobin. You guys are straightforwardly Bernsteinian. You think all we need is a sort of leftish social democracy among in the core of the empire. At this point people who defend that stuff also defend strongly borders and also say things like good fences make good neighbors. They say all that kind of stuff at this point because of the interrelations between capital and the state, that stuff is a vicious politics because it is a politics of racialism expulsion of migrant populations from the nation. Sorry that was a tangent. Maybe I shouldn't have apologized for it. When I say communist development based from anarchism. Right now, it is a communism, yes its anti-capitalist, yes it's of the left, yes its anti-imperial but it's also anti and opposed to that kind of socialism that refuses to take up any kind of anti-state or anti-border internationalist program. It's something I say very out loudly right now.

O'Brien: In this interview, you shared a lot on the level of ideas

Gabriel: Yeah.

O'Brien: And I'm thinking about you came out as a woman as some point and you did some transitioning.

Gabriel: Yes. [laughter]

O'Brien: Could you tell us about the relationship of your body and gender and the trajectory and timeline.

Gabriel: Totally. Yeah, I came out [pause] around— well so I guess I kind of hit a certain level of rock bottom for me in terms of not I guess in terms of necessarily precarity but in terms of personal or deep personalization seven years ago where I just and that was a critical point for me when I was 19/20. Not that everyone relationship to this takes places through personal crisis but mine did and it felt like one. In kind very typical like ways I was drinking a lot and I wasn't eating. I was doing a lot of stuff and I having a lot of same sex and doing a lot of things that were pretty close to various kinds of self-harm and that were all sort of running away from disassociation from my body. I came out and I changed my name six years ago and that was also right when I started medically transitioning a little bit beforehand. Because the UK has VNHS, a really bad relationship or bad system for gate keeping trans health care. I met a lot of trans people the second I arrived in the UK for my program because I sought them intentionally but I already knew what I wanted to do and I kind of hand the sense you could buy stuff online and I started ordering in house cause like you can. It's a thing that people still do and I also happen to that people should get any of these stuff over the counter without doctors permission or not even filling out that fucking form

and you say yes and no that this will fuck up my body in certain ways and that I will do it. I think you should be able to buy their shit and so that's what I did. Obviously, do it safely but I don't know if I was doing safely but I did know that I was in some kind of pretty personal crisis and stumbled on this as this is like the thing that at least need to try it and figure if it feels and I don't you know— my narrative is oh! Silver bullet but it is the case that ended up being the— for me like [pause] the medical transition in— at that time became this thing that did in fact alter my relationship to my body as like this is something that I can use to feel pleased and not just physical sensation but like have some sort of full engaged conscious non dissociated like intentional relationship to myself and my own actions that feels good and I don't have to bury under a welter of pain. What kinds of relationships do I want to be having? What kinds of friends do I want to be having? What kinds of sex do I want to be having? I think it's definitely the case that one thing that's become that become important but having like friendships— a lot of my friendships have been with women and this has been like every moment. I am not saying I transitioned so I can have more friendships and that's kind of a weird thing to say. I don't think anyone thinks about it that way. I have very different friendships with women now and relating to women as a woman and that's a very important part of my life. These various kinds of feminist t relationships with women that are not lovers or partners but that are on a level of friendships. But also stuff like who do I want my partner to be and when I am with them how do I want to be with them and I think that for me transition was the event that let me start posing those questions intentionally in ways that felt good as opposed to ways in which I ended up dating kind of shitty people in one case a very shitty person and in some other cases people who just weren't very good for me and doing that as various ways of self-harm and distancing. I haven't looked back. [laughter] I also made about certain kinds of aesthetics, certain things I liked. That kind of all clicked into place. I also feel very lucky I did and one thing I didn't talk about that is true is that I went to start my PhD because I needed health insurance and I knew that I could go back to Canada and get some stuff covered? Yes. Not a lot of the stuff I wanted and I knew that I would have a much better chance and it sucks that that this is the case but I would have a better chance with a private health insurance when you can get when you're a graduate student in the university in the US. I knew that that was starting to be the case for a lot of different institutions, and I went to grad school for health insurance basically. I don't regret that decision and I think that was the best decision. Grad school sucks in lots of different ways. It sucks because you're overworked and underpaid and it sucks you have a procreate relationship to your visa and you know you're looking forward to adjunction and can I make a living wage? Prob not. But it was really good and really critical decision because this is a job, I can do for 5 or 6 years and have health insurance. The coverage for the stuff I need and want and for that reason a lot of trans people ask me should I go to Grad school and I'm like what do you want to get done is the [laughter] is the kind of thing I say. It's maybe the decision like going to grad is one of the things I regret the least. I think I regret it not at all [laughter].

O'Brien: Two things you mentioned that I wanted to loop back to. One you talked about during this period of self-harm in many different ways prior to or transition struggling around eating. Is there more you want to share about your trajectory?

Gabriel: Yeah, sure. I will say I am in recovery from an eating disorder and that frequently from any disorder in general and it frequently takes from restriction and over exercising and shit like that. I do find it very hard to talk about. I'm not going to say that I got this thing because it's a very a constant feature of my life still. I think I am a lot more conscious about it now and more conscious

about the things that this is supposed to be doing for me. What are the kinds of— What sort of pain is it trying to resolve with a different kind of pain and it's a pretty continual problem. I guess— but it's very isolation you know. One of the things about eating food is that it's very presential because you can do it with somebody else. Make food for somebody else, something that families do together and restriction is very anti-social because it's a thing that you do on your own by refusing other people company and it makes you kind of bitchy and it puts you in a terrible mood and it's like you know.. comorbid with depression and you know all of that stuff. It's very isolation and it's also embarrassing. I think that a lot of people I know that have some kind of disordered eating are embarrassed by it. The other thing I knew is that I knew so many trans people who have some kind of difficult relationship to food and eating and that has to do with all kinds of stuff the various ways that body image based on your stature and skeleton and fat distribution in your body and also lines with socially imposed normativity about size and all that's shitty and it collides with people with all kinds of ways. For what it's worth when I transitioned my eating disorder got worse not better initially and that's like something— you know whatever it's just real life right. It's like and I would say it's something I continually work on and struggle with and sometimes it's worse and sometimes it's better. You know I... wish for everyone who's like kind of like has challenges of a similar order to find the peace and coping that they need. I don't have any resolutions because I think it does like kind of bear on all the ways that again you cope with [pause] like a shitty and miserable and really hard to handle world. Also, when you're visibly trans, which in some sense yes that's true for everyone but it's very true when you're transitioning but you're fending off a lot of public scrutiny. In my life for a couple reasons that's not something I deal with anymore but at a period when I was like I don't want to go out or see people because every time I leave the house somebody had some fucking bullshit to say. That also means that I want to go out to interact with people even to the extent of going to the grocery store and getting food. It also felt like I could control things like what I was eating, and I could control like other features of my appearance. That's a symptom of dealing with a lot of stress and misery. One kind of positive thing that it has been some sort of sublimation of these desires is that I do like to cook a lot and bake a lot so when I'm doing that with other people it feels really nice and affirming and often means I get to feel enjoying the stuff that I eat. I— Yeah, that's like the good thing and that's something I hope I continue to be very present in.

O'Brien: To the extent that you have been in the process of the recovery. What does that look like? Do you find support in groups or with mental health care practitioners or in your individual process?

Gabriel : Right. I mean for me, I prefer a therapist. It's also like and I am touched on this but its comorbid for me like PTSD and so there's like one kind of coping mechanism among a bunch of others. I will say that that the other thing that was good for me was that I could go to therapy at my university student center/ student health center. That's not great for a lot of people I happen to have a great provider and I could do that for free under the health insurance. That's also the first time in my life that I had any kind of affirming relationships to mental health care. Because my first relationship to mental health care was when I was kicked out of school for being gay. I was forced to see a therapist and this therapist, and I was 12 or 13 at the time, when I was in my sessions with him [pause] he would tell me to stop talking about being gay. He was like, your problem is

that [laughter] you have all these problems because you talk about it so don't talk about it and then he basically told me a bunch of other stuff and his point was that you're fucked up and desires are fucked up and the things you want to do with your body and other people are fucked up and that was like this major side of wow, I can't talk to anybody like this is somebody that is some sort of practitioner that's supposed to be alleviating other people's pain and suppose to tell queer children to stop talking about their desires is supposed to asking them what they need and being a friend. That's the kind of— you know I have a lot of feelings and thoughts about what do you like queer and trans kids need that is some kind of affirmation that is something different. It's something that all kids need namely that autonomy enabled by the older people in their lives who can talk on the phone and pay bills and drive them places and that's kind of and who can help them in doctors and institutions and stuff like that. I had a terrible relationship with doctors and especially terrible relationships with mental care providers until I ended up being lucky with this one person who at the time was at my grad school, was at my university student health clinic and has since moved into private practice. That has been a very important part of my life and important relationship to it and its real bullshit that therapy so financially unavailable for so many people because there's so many situations that's so critical to having somebody to help you and talk about the shit. Who is not a friend otherwise friendly and is on your side and is emotionally involved in your life. Among the other things I talked about in my sessions with this person I also talk about the eating and other kinds of stuff and she's very good for that. She's very good for being understanding and thinking about other coping mechanisms and she's very not judgmental. I also think that's really lucky because I happen to know a lot of or not a lot, a few other providers who are very judgmental.

O'Brien: So, over the last hour and a half, we covered a lot of ground about Euripides and growing up in Toronto, Occupy, Palestine organizing, Judaism, disordered eating. Are there other topics that you really want to talk about or cover?

Gabriel: I kind of want to talk about poetry. Can we talk about poetry?

O'Brien: Absolutely.

Gabriel: Yeah! I don't know what to really say about it except I'm also a poet and that's like probably more important, significantly more important to me in terms of my writing like. Its significantly more important to me [laughter] than my dissertation. Yeah, like completely unrelated, I started writing poetry at the same time I started my transition and those really didn't have anything to do with each other [laughter] Michelle is now giving me a look like she doesn't believe me. [laughter]

O'Brien: Connecting to ourselves in a fuller way and engaging in any creative endeavor I am very profound. [inaudible]

Gabriel: Yes, I love that. I think so too. I wasn't really writing poetry with a content that was about the stuff I was feeling, and I think that's maybe what I want to say. I'll say know that my desire and the way— one of my desires is class work and the way that I want to write about that most often is poetry. I recognize that's a historically complicated answer and a complicated stance and kind of a weird one. I'll say perverse again because I am enough of a person to like perversion and to think that its general and a good thing. Nonetheless I would say poetry is a major orientation in

my life and thinking about a communist poetry looks like, what kinds— what is poetry good for politically, it's a small list, but I don't think it's empty and also the writer Trish Sala [Trish Sala] is somebody I really love and look up to and work I admire intensely. She talks about a trans poetic and she's somebody who's very formative for me in terms of what does that mean and what does that look like in the past 6 or 7 years there's been a lot of it, growing and that's exciting and cool. Yeah so like what does this communist poetic look like? What does a trans poetic look like? These are questions I spend a lot of time thinking about and put into my writing and excited about. I know there are so many panicking liberals all around that are like the future is dead and you aren't allowed to be excited about anything and I'll say one of the things that makes me feel that is parallel to organizing that makes me feel like there's a future and we are fighting for is poetry. That's a feeling I want to hold on to. Yeah.

O'Brien: Is there more you'd like to say on poetry?

Gabriel: I think that's what I've got for now. Yeah. I am doing this anthology with my friend Andrea and it's a radical trans poetic and thinking at the same time of poetic that in the left and thinking about Avant-garde orientation or desire. That's going to come out next year and we are starting to submit submissions now and it's something I am really excited about.

O'Brien: That sounds like that could be a basis for some good oral history.

Gabriel: Yes! It does actually. [laughter] I'll put you in touch or maybe I'll talk to people. [laughter]

O'Brien : I think you'll be an excellent interviewer.

Gabriel: Yes

O'Brien: In wrapping up, are there both communism and trans poetics you're referring to non-pessimistic, as in opening to futures. Can you say a bit about where you hope this goes?

Gabriel : Yes. I'll talk about pessimism. I think that like [pause] you know— For a very good reason, kind of emergency in the present protestor or an invigorating far right, multinational capital, there's lots and lots of reasons for feeling disheartened in the present and I don't mean at all to me poly Anish about any of them. I think that we live in a miserable world driven by hunger and war. At the same time, I have a certain kind of optimism of the will and I maybe don't even want to use that language because even optimism is not necessarily the right mode. I think that it is a political imperative to insist that Amiri Baraka [Amiri Baraka] does we want to hold the world. Like (person? Maria Maranda) does, remember you can have the whole world, ask for anything. I think about those all the time. Incidentally both in poems, both are quotations from poems, and I think about that all the time. I also think about the necessity and the imperative and possibility that is against the day and you know... I also think that we don't even need to reach very far into history. We don't need to necessarily need to but why shouldn't we also think about Paris 1971, the Commune. We don't need to think about Russian revolution in 1917. We don't need to think about the China in 1941. Although we should all be thinking about these things. We shouldn't be thinking about 1968, we don't need to think about it. Or thinking about Stonewall now 50 years on but we should also be thinking about. In order to find evidence of politics like a class politics and anti-

imperial politics that is capable of transforming the world. We can think about Arab Spring. Those various kinds of movements have suffered counter revolutionaries and defeats. And yes, we are like living with the kind of [sigh] the complicated and frequently tragic of sorting out history after the thrilling event that is some kind of major change or shift in relations. That happened this decade. The Egyptian got rid of Mubarak this decade. Not very long ago and in fact Occupy, probably the most concrete world historical ramifications of Occupy would be the Arab Spring and all the kind of movements continuing from that moment. We can think about if we are talking about the kind of climate and logical fight and the Cochabamba water wars in Bolivia where a coalition of rural and urban people without resources held off the force of the most moneyed institutions in the world. Those are the events that we practice some kind of fidelity to as we move forward because the world belongs to the expropriated and we have to fight for it. And I think we can end there. [laughter]

O'Brien: [Inaudible]