

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

MICHELLE ESTHER O'BRIEN

Interviewer: Ted Kerr

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Transcribed by Jamie Magyar

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Theodore Kerr: Hello, my name is Theodore Kerr, and I will be having a conversation with Michelle O'Brien for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experience of trans-identifying people. It is January 16, 2017, and this is being recorded at an NYU [New York University] building on Lafayette Street, in New York City. Hi, Michelle.

Michelle O'Brien: Hello. Hi, Ted.

Kerr: Thanks for being here. I guess my first question for you is like, what is your first memory?

O'Brien: I have very few memories as a child. I think I was a depressed child. I remember, I originally spent the first eight years of my life in a small town in rural Oregon, a grass-seed farming community called Brownsville, and I remember coming down the stairs in my house and seeing my parents cooking in the kitchen below.

Kerr: Who else lived in your house with you?

O'Brien: Well, my mother and father, at that point, and we had a cat.

Kerr: What was the cat's name?

O'Brien: Louise.

Kerr: Louise?

O'Brien: I used to chase the cat, and torture it, and it scratched me very badly. And I remember feeling shame and thinking that I was a bad person.

Kerr: Because the cat scratched you?

O'Brien: And that I'd provoked it. And I never chased the cat again.

Kerr: What was the area around your house like?

O'Brien: It was a rural Oregon town. Stand-alone houses, uneven streets. Yeah. Not much there.

Kerr: Do you want to say a little bit about your parents?

O'Brien: Sure. They were both hippies. My mom had dropped out of Berkeley High School in 1968, following the—when they voted to go out on strike in solidarity with the French workers, and she wandered around, and ended up at a commune in rural Oregon called Crowe Farm, and my dad had spent some time being strung out on speed in New York, and spent some time doing a few other things, and ended up in Eugene. Also a hippie, relatively apolitical, and my parents met while working at a cooperatively-owned restaurant called Mama's Truck Stop, which was nowhere near any trucks at all, where they got—usually didn't get paid. And under pressure from my—his grandmother, my father went into law school once he got cleaned up, and he became a lawyer, and my mom became a secretary, and they set up a practice in a small town outside of Eugene. And my dad was drawn to the particular legal work he was doing because it was—he avoided any antagonism. He really disliked conflict in his life, and so he wouldn't do any legal work where anyone disagreed, very strongly. So it was like wills, real estate, probate, things like that, for farm owners. And, yeah. And growing up, I had a positive relationship with my parents, by and large.

Kerr: You were an only child.

O'Brien: I was. My—both my parents remarried, and I eventually had a sister on my mother's side, who is much younger than me.

Kerr: Huh. You said for your first eight years you were there, and then what happened after that?

O'Brien: Uh, my parents separated and we moved to the nearby city, the college town of Eugene, Oregon. Sort of known for its politics and other things, and the University of Oregon.

Kerr: And you lived with your mom, or your dad?

O'Brien: I went back and forth. Week by week.

Kerr: Oh, okay. How was that?

O'Brien: I'm not sure. I was a tortured child, but I think it was fine.

Kerr: What does "tortured" mean to you in this way?

O'Brien: Oh, I was depressed a lot growing up. I had mental health problems, and struggled on that front, and I didn't particularly blame anyone. I mean, perhaps the world, but my relationships with people were mostly positive. I also had a dynamic imaginative life. I was a—I was a nerd, I guess.

Kerr: Hmm. Did you know you were dealing with mental health stuff when you were a kid?

O'Brien: No, I really didn't develop an analysis around that until late into my teenage years, probably around at sixteen or so.

Kerr: And you said you had a rich imaginative world. Is that what you said?

O'Brien: Yeah. I was interested in fantasy games and science fiction novels, and that sort of thing, pretty early on, and sort of did a—spent a lot of my time as a teenager doing that sort of thing. And that continued into mid—early-mid high school, when I did a shift into orienting towards politics.

Kerr: Do you remember titles of the—of some of the games or books that you were reading?

O'Brien: Uh, well, I did a lot of role-playing games as an early teenager. *Tabletop* role-playing games, or *Rifts* was a science fiction game that I played a lot. And in terms of reading, uh—yeah, I read a lot of science fiction novels, I think, that were influential for me as a—as an adolescent. I know it's come up—his name has come up recently around his opposition to gay marriage, but Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* was a book I really liked when I was like, ten and eleven.

Kerr: Mhm. How did you find the books? Like where did—how did you get them?

O'Brien: Through the library.

Kerr: Through the library.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: Yeah. And uh, like—can you tell me a little bit about library experience? Like, did you sign up? Did your parents sign you up?

O'Brien: Uh, I think I was a very active patron of libraries from fairly early on. I don't know when I developed independence around that, but I have a fair number of memories of my school libraries and my local libraries. Yeah.

Kerr: And you said—did you use the word "geek" or "nerd"?

O'Brien: I used the word "nerd." Yeah.

Kerr: Yeah. Do you want to—do you want to say more about what is a nerd to you?

O'Brien: Um, well, I was interested in, um—in particular subcultural artifacts that were entertaining to me, but had very little social status value, I guess, would be a way of saying it. Yeah. That earned me little in the way of reputational support but, uh, were entertaining. Yeah. And—and that—a particular constellation around fantasy and science fiction that—that have, you know, associations today with nerds. A lot of that shifted around the time I was sixteen or so, and I started politicizing and started connecting to the world more, and encountering queers, and encountering political action in a variety of ways.

Kerr: And you say sixteen—is that like, a switch in school, or is that a switch in like, friend groups, or...?

O'Brien: No. I started orienting out into the world more, and—yeah, definitely a switch in friend groups. Got involved in a couple of political organizations when I was sixteen and seventeen. Started hanging out with older queer people, and that was a big shift for me in a lot of—sort of my—a lot of my life has been dominated by my relationship to political action, and that moment was when that started flourishing, I guess.

Kerr: Do you remember the names of those political groups?

O'Brien: Well, I got involved in a group called Youth for Justice, which was the youth project of a multi-issue social justice center in Eugene called CALC, which originally stood for Community Alliance of Lane County—I'm sorry, Center—Clergy And Laity Concerned. Civil Rights-era

organization that Martin Luther King, Jr. had been a part of, and the national organization had collapsed, but a few local chapters survived, and then eventually they changed their name to Community Alliance of Lane County. And there were several projects going on out of CALC, including—uh, I forget exactly the name. Communities Against Hate, I think? There was a big neo-Nazi, skinhead, and neo-fascist movement in Eugene at the time, and CALC was on the leading edge of anti-fascist organizing, and then also doing a lot of Latino rights organizing, and other things. And so, they did this youth project that had a staff person, and we had a lot of sort of anti-oppression trainings and organizing skill trainings, and then had very specific campaigns around opposing military recruitment in the high schools, around opposing homophobic ballot initiatives that were coming up, and a lot of Oregon solidarity with the migrant farmworkers' union in Oregon, which was called—what was it called? PCUN [Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste].

Kerr: Say it again?

O'Brien: PCUN.

Kerr: How do you spell that?

O'Brien: P-C-U-N. It's an acronym for a Spanish name of "Treeplanters and Farmworkers United."

Kerr: How did you find this group?

O'Brien: Youth for Justice?

Kerr: Yeah.

O'Brien: Other kids at my high school were involved with it. So I did Youth for Justice work for about a year, and ended up on the board at CALC, was very active, and then I also got very involved, um, in ancient forest defense work. So, Earth First! is probably the best-known kind of network of this style of protest, but people trying to stop logging of ancient forests in the Pacific Northwest, and, um, using largely direct action—mostly, yeah, nonviolent direct action of a variety of sorts. The tactics changed over the years to stop logging. And the ancient forests were quite, um, I don't know, spiritually moving for me and a lot of people—were quite extraordinary places, and are rapidly disappearing. Particularly low-elevation ancient forests are disappearing permanently, and it was a very high-stakes, high-intensity struggle that I got involved in, but thanks to Youth for Justice, I had all these organizing skills. So, although I was comparatively much younger than most people in the ancient forest defense work in Eugene, I quickly moved into a position of facilitating meetings and coordinating substantial campaigns. And there was a—the main campaign at that point, in the early 90's in Eugene, was called Warner Creek—or I guess mid 90's—which was a—there had been a forest fire there, and they were looking to, what they call "salvage log" it, and we were trying to stop that. And this was in the—so I was—graduated from high school in '96, so a lot of that—the destructive logging practices were accelerated under Clinton's presidency, under the salvage logging rider, and so I was very involved in my last year

in high school in political work. So, on the one hand, this sort of like, group that taught me political analysis and skills and thinking about, uh, capitalism and racial injustice and homophobia and sexism in an intersectional, dynamic way that sort of helped me be a well-rounded progressive person, and on the other hand this very high-stakes, high-intensity direct action campaign that was extremely galvanizing and dynamic and very intense for everyone. And I've come to see sort of both of those as like, the two halves of politicization. That if someone just has the high-intensity campaign, they end up with very weird, confused politics. But if they just have the social justice education without the organizing, they don't really get the stakes of what we're—of being really psychically and emotionally absorbed in the work. Um, and—yeah. And so that—those two things are really what dominated the last couple of years of my high school experience. And at the same time, I was getting involved in some older queer communities, and, um, that was very helpful to me as a very confused, sexually ambiguous teenager.

Kerr: This is a—maybe a bit of a boring question, but to give a sense of like, what life was like then, were you a driver at the time? Like, how did you—how did you navigate all these spaces?

O'Brien: Did I have a car?

Kerr: Yeah.

O'Brien: Oh, no. I rode my bicycle everywhere.

Kerr: Oh, okay.

O'Brien: I was quite hostile to automobiles at the time.

Kerr: Okay. And was riding—so riding the bike was also part of politics, not just a mode of transportation.

O'Brien: Right.

Kerr: Ah, okay, that's inter—I'm glad I asked. Um, and—it seems to me that you maybe had friends that were a part of all of these groups, but also maybe friends that weren't? Or, what were your...?

O'Brien: There was no other overlap between those two major political communities.

Kerr: You were the only one.

O'Brien: Yes.

Kerr: Ah, okay.

O'Brien: There was the—sort of the multi-issue Left of Eugene, and then there was the ancient forest movement of Eugene, and most of the ancient forest defenders had no connection to any other meaningful social movement at all, and were sort of vaguely, unapologetically racist, and misogynistic, and homophobic, in ways that they had no great interest in sort of interrogating. But—and because of that, they—the sort of multi-issue social justice Left really avoided them. And, a yeah. So no, there was no other overlap.

Kerr: How was that for you?

O'Brien: It was fine, I think. I mean I—I found my way in it. I was an anarchist, and in this sort of—at the time, in Eugene, there were—uh, being an anarchist was the main way of articulating a broader critique of capitalism within the ancient forest defense movement, that many people in the ancient forest defense movement were like, very confused liberals, sort of primarily interested in non-violence, but in a very conflicted, poorly thought out way, and to be an anarchist was to articulate a sort of strong critique of capitalism and the state. But there were many different types of anarchists, and it was all very fuzzy, and within that, I was what was called a social anarchist. So I was interested in the struggles of the working class, and the struggles of people of color. Um, but there were also green anarchists, and shortly after I moved away from Eugene, the green anarchist scene really crystallized ideologically around a particular, very obscure political tendency that Eugene momentarily became the world headquarters of, called neoprimitivism. And it was a green anarchist scene that had a critique of civilization itself, and was interested in the eradication of civilization. And they—these people got some notoriety in the news because of the protests in Seattle, and they did a bunch of tours in the Left and had some newspapers and things like that. And I was around those people and had ideological differences with them, but the sort of dynamics—I was an anarchist really interested in trying to figure out how to connect across these political movements, um, in this kind of hotbed environment.

Kerr: Mmm. And—and you mentioned almost like, a third group, which were the older queers, and there's no overlap with the older queers and these two different activist—

O'Brien: The older queers definitely were very involved in the multi-issue Left, the more political ones. So, that took a few forms. I hung out with Radical Faeries—they're this kind of rural, pagan, sort of hippie arts gay male scene, and at the time I identified as a questioning gay man, I guess. But I wasn't sexually active, and the older Faeries in—around Wolf Creek, and other Faerie communities in Oregon—there's one concentration of Radical Faeries in Oregon and another in Tennessee, so I was obviously in the Oregon scene—were very kind to me. I—they were very supportive, and patient, and kind to me, and I attended a couple of Radical Faerie gatherings and a conference of some sort. And then I also spent a lot of time hanging out at a lesbian feminist, um, weekend coffeehouse called Baba Yaga's Dream, that included a lot of expats from Oregon's substantial lesbian separatist communities. So, women that had lived in lesbian separatist lands, of which there are several still surviving in Oregon, for many years, but then had gotten burned out or had a male child, or whatever—wanted to do something else, and so moved to Eugene

and been involved in this coffeehouse. And I hung out there a lot, in a way that was very peculiar for everyone, you know? I was male-identi—like, people identified me as male, and I had an unclear sexuality, and—but I hung out there a lot. And then there were a couple of very influential mentors, who were political, older, um, I'd say gender-conservative lesbian feminists who were very active in the Left—sort of multi-issue Leftists—and who played a big role in my politicization. And so I was hanging out a lot with queer people in their thirties, who had either come out of this Radical Faerie scene or the lesbian separatist scene, and had come to a place of being interested in multi-issue social justice organizing.

Kerr: And you were like, a late teen or in your twenties by then.

O'Brien: I was, uh, seventeen.

Kerr: Seventeen. Okay.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: Do you want to name the mentors, or no?

O'Brien: Uh, no. I—I don't remember their names very easily.

Kerr: Okay.

O'Brien: I lost touch with most of them pretty soon after that. Um, yeah. Yeah. I mean I—I remember the sort of more institutionally rooted mentors at CALC, but not the queer mentors in my life. I can remember their faces and—but I—my memories of my youth are quite blurry a lot., and not remembering names is a big part of that. If I don't have someone in my telephone, I can't remember their name anymore.

Kerr: And then—so we kind of have like, a nice sketch of your life up until seventeen.

O'Brien: Right.

Kerr: And then does—does it feel like a different period comes after, or...?

O'Brien: Yeah. I mean, I went off to college when I was eighteen, and it was a—somewhat burnt out with Earth First!—with that scene; it wasn't technically Earth First!—but with ancient forest defense. Um, there was a raid at Warner Creek, and I felt the sort of race and gender politics of the ancient forest defense scene was quite oppressive and tiresome, and, um—and, so I wanted to do more left-wing work, and I moved to—I went to college in St. Paul, Minnesota, at Macalester College. And the first year, I got very involved with a peace and justice group that was at campus, Macalester Peace and Justice Committee, that was partially sort of mentored by some older Maoists who had graduated from Macalester and got very involved with a communist

organization in the Twin Cities, called Freedom Road—a socialist organization. And they were leading figures in the Minnesota Welfare Rights Union, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, with the Campus Workers' Union, with a few other big political projects in the city. And so I got very involved with them, and got involved with CISPES, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, which was a left-wing organization that had supported the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador through the 80's and 90's. And, um, I sort of was very politically active that first year of college. I, um, started studying Women's Studies, got very interested in feminist thinking of the 90's, sort of bell hooks and figures like that. Um, I was still very, very much a die-hard anarchist, so working with these Maoists was very odd, and that first year I sort of politically engaged, I was—as might be evident—I was a very arrogant, kind of hard-headed person at this time. Um, but feminism helped with that a little bit, I think—being a little kinder. And, uh, then—then things really shifted in my second year of college. Uh, a really extraordinary political—oh, and I was hanging out mostly with other queer kids, and active in the queer union, but still not sexually active, and still very ambiguous sexually.

Kerr: And when you say "ambiguous sexually," does that mean sexually and gender-ly? Is gender-ly a word?

O'Brien: Yeah, um, it wasn't really clear. I seemed like a gay man, but not quite. Like, I was a little off, somehow, in a way that was hard to pin down. I wasn't actively effeminate yet, but I became much more feminine a couple of years later. Um, the next year, a particular political struggle came together in the Twin Cities that was very influential for me. Um, they were rerouting a highway in South Minneapolis and going—demolishing a chunk of a working class neighborhood, and destroying part of a park, and a bur oak savannah that was very nice, but also land that was—um, that was sacred to the Mendota Mdewakanton people, a Dakota Nation tribe that had been annulled by Congress, so had no legal standing, and Earth Firsters, in Minneapolis—ancient forest defense kind of people, but who were much more oriented to native sovereignty than the ones I was working with in Oregon, teamed up with the Mendota Mdewakanton and a lot of the remnants of the American Indian Movement, AIM, a revolutionary native organization from the 60's, and launched an occupation, the summer between my first and second year of college, in South Minneapolis, to stop this highway construction, and were very smart, politically. And this was perfect for me. It was absolutely perfect, and I, you know, went out there and very quickly visited camp—visited the camp, and very quickly connected with a lot of the sort of senior organizers there, and became the main person around organizing, uh, solidarity amongst college students. And Macalester students, we did—a dozen people did a walk down, direct action at the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and played up us being privileged Macalester College students as a way of sort of trying to shift attention away from the camp being a bunch of like, "low-life losers," as it was in the media—that this had broader support, including in the prestigious college. And this was a strategic, sort of thought-through choice on the part of a lot of the organizers, and I brought many, many college students to camp on a regular basis, and helped kind of broaden out their support amongst that scene. And that would—that—it had various names: the campaign against the reroute of Highway 55, the—it had a free state. Hiawatha Free State? No. I forget. It had various names, that campaign. And it was—I think the

closest that I've seen, of a multi-issue, uh, urban united front—multi-community united front that I've seen in quite some time. Uh, they started building alliances with bl—African American residents of the north side of Minneapolis against the demolition of public housing up there, and it really—you know, like, we had marches with many thousands of people. Thousands of people got arrested over the course of many, many months of direct action, and the campaign ran for a couple of years. There were a couple of really massive military-style raids on camp, including one that December, that—people responded by re-occupying the camp four days later, after it was entirely destroyed by over a thousand police officers in a military raid, and it was—it was a very powerful campaign to be a part of. Should I keep going? Do you—?

Kerr: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

O'Brien: So, yeah. That—that was very influential for me, in sort of trying to think about multi-issue politics and the possibility of the environmental movement and the anarchist movement playing a role with a kind of broader set of working-class forces and people of color in re—in challenging urban politics from the bottom up, and it was a great, great campaign. Like, I'm very proud to have been a part of it. And then I studied abroad in London in my third year. I was studying post-structuralism—post-structuralist philosophy and feminism in queer theory at this time. And I studied abroad in London, and in London I, uh, dated a dyke in the South London queer punk squatter scene, which was very vibrant. It was dying at that moment, but it was vibrant compared to any comparable thing in the United States. And so I got very involved in the South London queer squatter scene out of Brixton. There was an anarchist social center there called 121. I was at 121 for the last few months of its existence. It'd been around for eighteen years. It was at 121 Railton Road, in Brixton. And the woman I dated was well-known for being focused around vegan chocolate within this scene, and she'd organize vegan chocolate parties. She lived out of her truck. Um, collected scrap wood that she'd burned in a little wood stove, and had been homeless for many, many years, and was Scottish, and she was great, and quite patient with me as a very sexually confused person. Um, and—well, she wasn't that patient, but she was great. And she—um, her job was making beds in a brothel, and that was—I hadn't encountered that sort of sex worker scene, I guess. And all her friends were working-class queer punks in the South London anarchist scene. And I got involved with a group in London, um, called Reclaim the Streets, which was a very famous political organization that organized giant dance parties where tens of thousands of people would destroy highways in the middle of dance parties. Um, and Reclaim the Streets turned out to be a coalition of, uh, anarchist political organizations, each with very rigid, deep ideologies, sort of figuring out how to work together and then appropriating their relationships with the vibrant dance scene of London. It was a very odd kind of organization. You know, there was like, Class War there, and the Anarchist Communist Federation, and a few other of these like, very dogmatic factions, and then they had just the right relationships with a group of incredibly famous DJs, to be able to pull off these incredible events. And I was there for the planning process over many months of what was, uh, June 18th, and this was in '99, and June 18th was an international day of protest—I don't even remember against what—but in London, they shut down the stock exchange in the city of London. A woman was killed that day. They managed to completely crash the police communications grid for London, through, you know,

like—whatever it was, like, half a million people showed up, they got masks, and then in the back of the mask it had a poem about Carnival, and it said to follow the flag for the color of your mask, and then flags in five different colors went five different directions, and it was all totally secret where they would go, and the police flipped out. They were following every path and they couldn't keep tabs, and they overwhelmed their communication system. People destroyed all the surveillance cameras in the stock exchange area. I mean, it was—it was a really amazing action. So I was involved with that, and, um, I—I attended this event, an anniversary of the Diggers—350 years after the Diggers Occupation—and I got involved on the periphery of the Anarchist Communist Federation, I think they were called—um, and with this sort of feminist anarchist scene in the ancient forest—or, it wasn't ancient forest, but in the Earth First! movement of—I went to an Earth First! gathering in Nottingham that I got invited to, where I met Carolyn, the woman I dated, and I got involved at this gathering, as I have managed to at many political communities, in trying to get a sexual assaulter thrown out. That came up again, and again, and again, in anarchist scenes. And, um, through the connections I made in London, I, um, then went traveling and—uh, on the continent, staying in anarchist and communist squats in every country I went to. My parents—my mother and stepfather—were living in Rome at the time, so I visited them for a few months, and visited the communist—all the communist squats of Rome, of which there are many, Centri Sociale, and I was very impressed with them. And then traveled in Milan, and Barcelona, and Madrid, and Amsterdam, and Leiden, and then, uh, Vienna—or, not Vienna, I'm sorry. Um, Swiss Geneva. And in every city, staying in squats and getting to know, uh, the movement. It's called "autonomist." Sort of a particular current in Europe of people not so interested in parties, but really emerged out of the 70's around valuing direct action and direct democracy, and militant confrontation of the state, and a sort of variation on anarchist and communist politics that placed a lot of emphasis on each social milieu in being able to sort of self-control the institution. So, students taking over universities, workers taking over factories, neighborhood people occupying their buildings. And so I was very active in this sort of autonomous scene. I have many, many stories from those few months in the squats. I saw beautiful, beautiful things. I learned how you defeat riot police on the streets, which no one in the US knew how to do at that point, but we learned—you know, like, was a regular part of European protest tactics. Um, and I moved back to the States just in time for the planning process around, um, the November 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, that were very famous. And people—it was just the kind of prime moment for people to start incorporating much more confrontational tactics on the street, what became known as the Black Bloc, that was modeled after German anti-fascist organizing, and so I played a really integral role in the Twin Cities scene of like, developing out of Black Bloc and trying to create a protest culture where people didn't allow each other to be arrested at all, ever. And Seattle happened, then—Seattle, the '99, November—N30, the N30 anti-World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. And for me, and I think many thousands of other people, Seattle was the first time where we had that—where we had experienced that moment that people talk about in riots a lot, where you are out there in the streets, you are fighting the police, and you realize there are way more of you than there are of them, and they don't have a chance, and they flee, or they hide, or they—you know, they—and you have the streets, and you can do anything. And this sense that like, the world can become possible in a totally different way, and that all of people's creativity, and

passion, and love, and hope, and care for each other, can flourish. That it's like, anarchy, but in the best possible sense. And Seattle was beautiful, and for a day, um, the riot police were—had no control over that city, and we stopped those meetings, we completely derailed the—that event, and it was through a combination of, um, massive lockdowns in the streets, uh, a huge march, and Black Bloc—people breaking windows, and stuff like that. And it was a great—I mean, there have been a lot of critiques of it, but I really think it was a high point of political struggle in the US, uh, in the post-1970's era. Um, drawing very heavily on sort of AIDS protest tactics. And so I—in the middle of all this, I graduated from college in 2000. Um, and in Europe I'd become very gender-questioning. Very, very gender-questioning, and was sort of trying to think about what my sexuality or gender was. I dated—had dated two lesbians at that point, butch—well, one very butch, one somewhat butch—and I was a very feminine, gender-ambiguous queer person. And I graduated from college and I moved to Portland, Oregon, and got a job organizing queer people—an internship through the Rural Organizing Project, ROP, a group in Oregon that recently was in the news because of the fascists operating a—or, who occupied a nature reserve building this year—and ROP was the main left-wing organization organizing against them, the Rural Organizing Project. And that was great, and I got involved in the Portland kind of dyke punk scene, and the anarchist scene in Portland, and I came out as trans fairly—fairly quickly after I moved there. In college, studying Women's Studies, I think it would've been very difficult to come out as trans. It was a pro-trans environment, but being a "man studying in Women's Studies" if—I was sort of locked into this position as an ally, and I think if I had sort of claimed Women's Studies for myself, that tentative step would've been very alienating to people in a transphobic way. People would've been alienated. And, um—and if I had come in as trans, I think it would've been very different. But I came out as trans, and I came out as trans in 2000, on the West Coast, and in a very particular—in the sort of radical queer milieu, and what might not be obvious to young people coming out now is that there were no trans women. None. That there were two other trans women in the entire scene in Portland, one much older and somewhat famous—not much older, but older and famous, Emi Koyama, who did the Transfeminine Statement—and, um, in this sort of broad punk radical queer scene, a lot of people were transitioning along the transmasculine spectrum, and a lot of genderqueer people were transmasculine, and a lot of people thought of themselves as pro-trans in a way that was really focused on transmasculinity. And—and then there were a lot of dykes, and there were no trans women. And as a trans woman, I was—as an effeminate, ambiguous gay man, everyone wanted to sleep with me, of all genders. As a trans woman, no one at all wanted to sleep with me under any conditions. Like, I was absolutely—like, within this radical queer scene, made people very uncomfortable, and it was quite painful and hard, and weird. And then as well—and many trans women have had this experience—I lost a huge amount of not only sexual status but also reputational status as an anarchist. That being a man in anarchist scenes made it much easier to walk into a scene and be taken seriously very quickly, and develop a lot of relationships with leading organizers, and suddenly people didn't take things I said very seriously at all, as a woman, or as a queer ambiguous person, right? I wasn't passing, by any means. And I hadn't started any sort of physical transition, and so I really sort of found myself in a position where I felt very alienated. Part of these communities that I counted on, but really struggling with my role in them, and I took a step back politically and sort of re—spent—I kept organizing, with CopWatch and this anarchist

prisoner—um, political prisoner support group called APLAN, but I—and I started a group at the anarchist center in Portland. The center was called LibCo, Liberation Collective. And I started a group called Riot Queens that a bunch of teenagers showed up to that was pretty cool, that was around for just a little bit. Um, but like, mostly I was trying to figure out what I was doing. And I worked as a bike messenger at that point, and I got involved with the Wobblies [Industrial Workers of the World] around trying to unionize bike messengers—but like, far less political activity than I'd done before. And mostly I found myself hanging out with this queer teenager scene. I didn't ever sleep with any of them, but like, they were coming out just like I was coming out, and like, we would go to dance parties together, listen to a lot of 80's pop and... Um, I lived in a house of mostly CopWatch people, so I was sort of in this milieu, but really trying to figure myself out, and I ended up moving to Philly in the middle of that. Philly had a very vibrant anarchist scene in West Philly, and, um, ACT UP Philadelphia had a really—hegemony, political status in the Philly anarchist scene. So there was a big orientation around queerness, and direct action, and political sophistication that appealed to me, that included a lot of queers, and some older transfeminine people, um, that were—that had been involved in ACT UP, and I was drawn to that. Not—not in very famous leading roles, but had been players. And so I moved to Philly, and—um, in 2002, so I was in Portland for a little over a year or so. Um, and I moved to Philly—actually, I know what date I moved to Philly, which was September 11, 2001—

Kerr: Oh.

O'Brien: —because we started hitchhiking across the country, and that morning, the—the, um, terrorist attack in New York had taken place. So we were hitchhiking rides with people the day of September 11, um and we were queer punks. We would—assigned a cis man in our group to go sit in the front to chat with people, and we would sit in the—me and my friend Adele, Nick was the cis man in our group—we would sit in the back and do our best to like, roll with the crazy things people were saying in rural Idaho and Montana. Um—

Kerr: About September 11, or just generally?

O'Brien: Oh, about Arabs, about Al-Qaeda, about Osama Bin Laden, about, uh, their—you know, their—terrorist attacks provoke a kind of nationalist hysteria, you know? Um, but I ended up in Philly a few months later. Took some time, stopped a lot along the way, and got involved in the anarchist scene in Philly with similar uncertainty, lived in a group house there that had been called Castle Greyskull, Butthook Manor, and various other things, but we eventually came up with the name, The Percolator, for a coffee pot. We drank a lot of coffee in that house, and it was a great house. I lived with Adrienne Low, who has since become a leading figure in the trans scene in Philly, involved with—what's it called—the trans prisoner zine that comes out of Philly, um, In Our Hearts. Wonderful project. So I was out as trans. I hadn't transitioned in any way yet, but I presented as genderqueer, got assaulted a lot, got yelled at a lot, got harassed a lot on the street, and worked as a bike messenger. And then I eventually stumbled into a job as an AIDS—in the big AIDS service agency in Philadelphia, as their trans token. They needed—they had a trans grant—you know, trans women are very high risk of HIV—so they had an AIDS prevention grant,

and it was about connecting people to services. It became clear to me very quickly, there were very few services available, so I focused all my time on organizing with other people around accessing services, around demanding access to services. This was in 2003? I guess? And it turned out to be an extremely vibrant time for trans organizing. We, um—we put together this multi-racial, multi-class coalition of trans activists that included a lot of older African American trans women that'd come out of the ball scene in Philly, which was very vibrant, and it also included some trans men who were like, social service professionals, included the suburban cross-dresser scene, and some of the young, punk queer trans dudes, and we organized, and we organized really well. I was on the planning committee for the second and third Philly Trans Health Conference, that I think it still happens [yes, it does]. I was, um, there at—at the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, which was all the executive directors of all the shelters, when an African American trans woman—who I got to know really well, whose name I can't remember—presented there about her experience in the shelters and how horrible it was, and it managed to win over all these directors, and they—they were like, "Oh my god, that's terrible. We should do the right thing. What can we do?" And I ended up co-chairing that task force that told them what they should do. We like, adopted the very best of trans inclusion models from—that'd come out of Toronto in a report. The task force had just done a great report, that [name] had co-written about what shelters should do, and I got to know like Jake Pine, who—these people are still in my phones, so that's why I know their names.

Kerr: [laughter]

O'Brien: And we brought these people down from Toronto who were doing something way ahead of what was happening anywhere in the US around trans inclusion in shelters, and presented it as if it was the standard best practices model that everyone was doing. [laughter] And the directors were like, "That sounds great! Let's do that." Well, meanwhile, in New York, there were these brutal, protracted lawsuits with the city, and I left before that really came to fruition, but it led to Philly adopting the most trans-inclusive shelter policy in any US city. Um, during that organizing, Nizah Morris, an African American trans woman who had come out of the ball scene and, um, gotten murdered by police, who denied having killed her—they said they had no idea who killed her, but—you know, it was like—I mean, the Philly cops were just horrible thugs, you know—so they killed her and then just denied it having happened at all. And uh, so we organized around that, and Nizah's sister was an ex-cop, you know, and was like, "Oh no, they definitely killed her, that's clear," you know? Um, and that—that was really intense, um, the Philly organizing. And I wrote a lot during that time, about sort of trans politics and sort of in—from an anti-capitalist, anti-racist perspective, and sort of trying to connect it to a broader revolutionary politics. And I became really interested in the AIDS movement, and this particular nexus of people—poor people and service providers struggling around access to services in very militant ways. And during that time that I was in Philly, they set up a trans health clinic, they—the first steps were taken to what eventually became a service agency focused around HIV prevention and organizing the trans communities—I think it was Trans Health Information Project became its name—that was after I left. Um, and a lot of great work—a lot of great work came out of that, and I got to know this very vibrant community of working-class African American and Latina trans

women on the East Coast that was linked to the ball community and involved a lot of women coming out as teenagers in a way that—at that moment in history, very few white, middle-class women were coming out as teenagers. Like, the life arc was that white, middle-class trans women came out after they retired and no longer cared, and African American trans women with a lot more social support but a lot less resources—social support as in interpersonal support—came out as teenagers and ended up as sex workers. And so I—in Philly, not in Portland—but in Philly, I met many African American trans women my age. I still wasn't meeting white trans women my age. Um, and the African American trans women I met had no connections to anarchist scenes or punk scenes at all. They came out of a whole different world that was incredibly vibrant and dynamic and politically sophisticated, and there was a lot there. And so encountering that community and really being deeply impressed with it—like, queers are so brilliant. I mean there was a lot of good avant-garde performance art coming out of the punk queer scene, and then this whole other set of avant-garde performance art coming out of the ball scene that was so sophisticated. And very deeply, in Philly, tied up with the history of AIDS organizing and AIDS struggle. Um [clears throat], so in the middle of all this, I moved to New York. Um, I was on—quickly joined—I got a job at a syringe exchange program in the South Bronx. I was really sort of in this nexus of sort of thinking about poor people services and AIDS services. Uh, because of that nexus, I was moving away from being an anarchist and towards some—I had always been really interested in the history of working-class, 19th-century struggle—the sort of context that Karl Marx was writing in—and always really interested in like, taking capitalism seriously as a political object. So my politics were never as vague as most people I was around. Like, most people I was around were like, radicals, and that meant everything to them all the time, but like, I was always interested in like, exactly what kind of radical are you, and what's your relationship to the questions of the state and of capital? Sort of the foundational questions of the old Left, in a way that people didn't talk about so much then. Anarchists and communists talked about it, but other people didn't. And so I started really questioning how anarchists talked about the state in a context where all the struggle we were doing was within and around state services, and I kind of came to the conclusion that anarchism, in a narrow sense, was not compatible with a meaningful commitment to AIDS struggle, that AIDS struggle relied on winning state services, and maintaining and defending state services, and that you could do that using anarchist tactics, but if your model of a revolutionary transition was an anarchist one, like, you were going to run up against the actual dynamics of AIDS struggles repeatedly. So I started moving to being a socialist, of varying types. And I moved to New York. I quickly got involved in the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. I ended up on its board, and I ran into a lot of conflict with some people in SRLP. There were some weird dynamics at that point between transmasculine people and transfeminine people that were very hard for me to negotiate, and I got shamed around a lot. Um, and that was hard and weird. I felt—uh, I got, at one point, shamed around writing that I had done and lost a lot of confidence in my writing. Um, and I also got involved around Critical Resistance, which—uh, anti-prison organizing group, and I worked at the syringe exchange program in the Bronx called New York Harm Reduction Educators, in the sector that I really cared about. Syringe exchange programs spoke to me in a deep ethical and spiritual and political way. It was like the embodiment of what we should be doing with our lives. Um, you know, their non-judgmental approach, their sort of deep engagement with hypermarginalized communities. And, uh—I didn't last at NYHRE.

I was there, I don't know, a year or something. I bounced around between different jobs in AIDS services. I got a job as the community organizer at Gay Men's Health Crisis, um, where I sort of oriented as a leadership development—as like, a leadership development/political education center for members at GMHC. And it was a very successful project. And again, that was a space where—you know, most of the people there were working-class African Americans and Latinos, and it was a mix of mostly queer, with a substantial trans presence, mostly people who were formerly incarcerated, and I loved that work. I just loved it. And organizing with people in that space. And then my role, partially, was mobilizing them to plug in the projects that were conceived of by our policy department, around trying to get more funding for things like GMHC, which was slightly different than the mission as I conceived it, which was really about kind of an empowerment from the ground up. So there was tension there in the job that I spent a lot of time trying to negotiate. Um, so, yeah. I worked at GMHC, worked—ended up getting my social work degree working at Rivington House, a nursing home for people living with AIDS, then did another placement at Queers for Economic Justice for a while, where a lot of extraordinary queer activists—Jay Toole and Amber Hollibaugh, Kenyon Farrow—um, but then I got a job offer to be an executive director at a coalition of major housing justice, affordable housing groups in New York City. So that was my first sort of big step out of this AIDS/queer world, and into very intense, high-stakes, big power democratic politics. We were trying to get a major piece of legislation around rent regulation passed in New York state, and there were a lot of forces involved, a lot of very ugly political compromises involved, so I did that. Uh, yeah. So I spent a lot of time in Albany, and coordinating all these housing tenant groups all over the city, around mobilizing to Albany in particular strategic ways. I did that for a while as an executive director, which was—I always thought I wanted to be an executive director of an agency, and it turned out I didn't, that I got really, really burnt out. And this whole time, I think I'd been able to sort of avoid and mask some of my depression and mental health issues by moving on from a job after eighteen months. That's like, I would start running into problems and I'd move to a different job, you know? But—but that really, those problems stayed with me in a lot of ways, and working 70-hour weeks as an executive director, I hit a wall. The economy collapsed, I stopped being able to get any funding at all, and I, um—and I bailed out by starting in this PhD program at NYU. And I mostly, uh, at that point really wanted to go deeper into understanding the dynamics of capitalism, uh, that I felt like all the struggles we were in were being deeply shaped by the structural dynamics of investment and disinvestment around us, that we didn't fully understand and didn't have the means to talk about. But the nuts and bolts of capitalism were constraining exactly what we could accomplish and when, and enabling us at times, and I really wanted to understand those dynamics of capital. Like, why were AIDS services getting cut every year? Like, that's a good question. It wasn't straightforward, the answer, you know? And so I came to NYU really to study Marxism, and spent my first three years studying Marxism and organizing with my union here, and then—my dissertation work is about how the economic restructure of New York City since the 1960's, this move of—the city moving from being very dominated by organized labor and social welfare programs, to being really dominated by, um, the finance industries, by aggressive policing, incarceration, by increasing cuts in social welfare of all sorts—how that's shaped gay organizing and HIV organizing. That HIV sort of emerged precisely at the moment of welfare austerity, and that shaped what people could imagine and what people fought for. And then like, how the growth of financial services enabled particular kinds of a gay rights organizing to be really

successful in the city, while limiting others. So that's my life arc, and obviously I can go into more detail about any of those, but...

Kerr: I would love that. I have some follow-up questions. It's been an hour. Do you wanna take the break now?

O'Brien: That sounds great.

Kerr: Does that sound great?

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: Okay. [recording pauses and resumes] We just came back from our break, and you provided a really, uh, beautiful and exciting and, I think, thoughtful and interesting arc of your life until now—or, aspects of your life until now. Um, I have a few follow-up questions, but do you—is there anything you wanna kind of plug in now before we...?

O'Brien: No, no. Ask your questions.

Kerr: Okay. Um, so, in no particular order, I guess my first question is like, why—or I guess I'm gonna move backwards in time—why NYC? Why the move from Philly to NYC?

O'Brien: Well I've always, um, been a city girl. I think I wanted to go to college in a city. Um, I kept moving to bigger and bigger cities. Every time I visited a giant city I thought it was incredible—you know, London and Mexico City and um, Barcelona. And, um, when I visited New York I was really deeply drawn to it. I felt very compelled and excited by New York. And sure enough, when I moved here, it was the first time I'd ever lived in a place that I really, really, really liked, um, and that feeling hasn't gone away. Like, I felt this very strong relationship to New York City and during my time in New York City—you know, I moved here in 2004, so I've been here twelve years—thirteen years—I moved here at the beginning of 2004, so thirteen years—um, I have—I haven't ceased to be in awe of it and to really love it. And I've spent a lot of time reading history books about New York City. All of my papers are about New York history, and when I tried to think about what I—and there are, you know, all sorts of things about New York that really are exciting for me, and the social democratic post-war history of the city is—I think is really remarkable. The really comprehensive system of social welfare and social benefits, and social goods that were—people won here in the city, like public hospitals and public housing and libraries and mass transit and health insurance, you know? The welfare cash-transfer benefits. That these things in New York were comparable to how they were in Europe, and totally unlike anywhere else in the United States. And you know, that system was largely—oh, and free public education, higher education, right, CUNY [City University of New York]? And that system was largely for white immigrants, but then through struggles in the postwar period was really extending to be accessible to working-class African Americans and Puerto Ricans, ahead of it being accessible to such folks elsewhere in the country. So, you know, just this incredible history of struggle. But when I think about why

I love New York so much, so much. I think a chunk of it is tied up with my experience as a trans person that is—I have identified, has everything to do with this city being very dense with immigrants. So in my history in queer communities, most of the time, uh, up in—you know, there aren't that many trans women around. Like, the AIDS movement and stuff around it is the exception, like, where there are trans women. But like, in my history, certainly in the queer punk scene, um, you know, there would be very few trans women, and then outside of that scene, just so much hostility and harassment all the time, in all sorts of places, and in New York—I mean, I'm butch-presenting these days—um, as a butch-presenting, gender-ambiguous trans woman—I mean, I mostly pass as a butch woman, but, um, not elsewhere, necessarily—I get very little harassment in New York, that like, if someone gets my pronoun wrong, if they say "he" and I correct them, the response almost invariably is "Oh, sorry, ma'am." You know? And they just roll with it. And they look at me, and they're not sure my gender, and my gender is confusing to them, and it's not a big deal. They just roll with it. And I thought about why that is, and—you know, I've thought about the—my encounters with trans people in the city. You know, when I worked at NYHRE, at the syringe exchange program where I worked in East Harlem, worked in the Bronx in some neighborhoods where there were no out queer people on the street—but in East Harlem there was this huge out queer scene on the street, including a lot of Puerto Rican trans women who had lived in the neighborhood for a long time, and there'd been a queer scene on the streets of East Harlem for decades. And you know, like, using the bathroom at the supermarket at 125th and Lexington, and the women in the stalls joking about having penises, because they had penises, you know? [laughter] And like, that—like, the not—the cis women out in the hallway, you know, washing their hands, laughing. Like, it just—and them all being sex workers, right? There are some incredible trans scenes in New York, really beautiful trans communities, but, um, I think what makes this city so much more pro-trans than like, Philly, for example, is actually that so many people in New York have had the experience of living next door to someone who doesn't speak their language. That so many people in New York encounter folks on a regular basis who they don't understand, who aren't like them, and in many places people are kind to those who're not like them, and suspicious and uncomfortable with those that aren't like them, right? And that's certainly how people are in Philly. Like, people in Philly aren't mean; they're just mean if they don't understand you.

Kerr: Right. I just wanna make sure, because I think—uh, so you're saying people, broadly speaking, are kind to people that are like them, and unkind to people that are unlike them.

O'Brien: Right, right.

Kerr: Okay.

O'Brien: I misspoke. And in New York is one of the only places, I think, where people have developed a respectful openness to people they don't understand at all. So it's not that people are pro-trans. Like, if you ask people like, "What do you think about somebody changing their gender?" you know, they would be like, "Oh, that's icky," you know, whatever. But like, they encounter a gender-ambiguous person and it is not a big deal, because they encounter people

all the time that they don't know how to make sense of, and that they've learned to be tolerant of that—like, learned to be respectful of that. And, um—you know, this isn't the experience of all trans people, by any means, but I have never lived in a city where I am consistently shown as much space and respect in my gender as I have in New York. And I see that sort of experience—people learning to show respect to extreme difference that is way beyond their comprehension—as enabling a far more, like, vibrant, dynamic, livable, humane place. And that's really helped influence my ideas about politics, that like, my socialist politics are not about—as many anarchists are these days—about networks of people that know about and care about each other. Like, I want social benefits that you get no matter what you look like, no matter who you talk to, no matter what friends you have, so those like, whackos who won't talk to anyone and have no friends at all have guaranteed housing, have guaranteed food access, have guaranteed healthcare, that doesn't depend anything on your behavior, you know? And of course, most of the social service scene has elaborate behavioral management programs built into them. But like, things like syringe exchanges, where it's like, "Your life matters. You deserve services no matter what. We don't care what you look like or how you behave. You're welcome here, and if we can find ways of helping you out, we will," you know? And being interested in that kind of world that I think New York has come much closer to in many ways.

Kerr: So this world that you experience here and feel here, is it something that you saw right away? Did it affect your dating and your friend life as soon as you came?

O'Brien: Definitely. Definitely. Yeah, no, I started dating, um, in New York, in a way that I never—casual dating in a way that I never had before, and, um—and I made friends across this sort of heterogeneous political queer scene. It wasn't punk at that point, but it was political, you know? Sort of people in the milieu of the Left, queer—young Left queer people of color organizing, were as most of the crowd at the parties that I went to. And they were connected to a broad array of very, very diverse communities. Um, yeah. Yeah, no, absolutely it influenced my life.

Kerr: And now you have a kid, and I think you're in a relationship?

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: And is that recent-ish, or is that...?

O'Brien: Uh, my partner and my child, I've lived with for six years now. Um, so some time, and it's very, very satisfying to me.

Kerr: What has been the role of culture in your organizing and in your political work?

O'Brien: Um, I've always been—I've always left culture to other people. That—I don't know—I mean, I remember going to punk shows when I was sixteen years old to recruit people for an anarchist communist study group that I was leading. Um, and I would go to the punk shows in order to hand out flyers. And I couldn't make heads or tails out of the music, which was hardcore

at that point—you know, these incredibly fast, brutal songs—but everyone was really nice to me, and a lot of people came to my study group. You know? But I like, went to the punk shows, which was where everyone was at, in order to recruit people for my study group. And I—but I wasn't musically savvy. And then, you know, in the early 2000s, when I was coming out as trans, all I was listening to was hip-hop. I listened to hip-hop all the time. And in Philly, where I had the opportunity, I went every month to see kids breakdance. Um, you know, I loved breakdancing—but like, none of my organizing had anything to do with that at all. Like, that was just the culture I liked consuming. And then meanwhile, my organizing—like, I was really interested in this kind of cross-cultural organizing. So like, a group of women that'd come out of the ball scene, a group of women that'd come out of the crossdresser scene, a group of men that'd come out of the punk scene, and really interested in organizing together, and culture there was an obstruction, because we were really trying to bridge these differences, you know? So like, what music we would play at our little pseudo-parties was very awkward, right? And similarly, like, in an ongoing way I've recognized culture as playing this very important role in organizing, that I leave it to other people to figure out how to pull that off. Um, that—that I'm aware of some of the obstacles it poses, and my own cultural interests have often mismatched that of my political community.

Kerr: It—um, one area of culture that seems kind of a throughline are books or writing, and I wonder if you wanna talk about writers and books that've been interesting or cool for you.

O'Brien: Sure. So I think there are two genres of books that I read very heavily, and one is political philosophy—mostly Marxist political philosophy—last year I edited an anthology of revolutionary feminist writing, which is mostly debates about gender amongst revolutionaries over the course of a hundred years, from 1890 to 1983, and it cut off before sort of all—everything we know about feminism that I studied in Women's Studies was all post-Second Wave, so it was all post-1983—but this was sort of the legacy of debates about feminism in communist circles, um, in anarchist circles, in Black Nationalist circles, in the new Left, in second—like, the most militant threads of Second Wave feminism, and then a lot about Marxist feminism and the evolution of Marxist feminism. And it was all original texts, you know? And—so I edited this anthology and people did study groups of it in 21 cities. At least 300 people studied this collection—you know, week after week after week. And we did it here in New York, and we had, you know, thirty-some people coming every week for a while, and some very vibrant and lively debates. And that sort of came out of some years I had spent studying about the history of feminist and queer politics in revolutionary spaces, and reflected some of the kind of niche I'm interested in of thinking about what gender and sexuality means in the long arc of capitalist development, uh, and capitalist class relations. And so political philosophy has been a big thing for me—sort of queer theory, feminist theory, and Marxist theory, and black liberation thinking, um, as the kind of major forms of that. And then the other major form of that for me has been science fiction, that I've consistently maintained a really strong interest in science fiction, and read a lot of feminist and queer science fiction, and communist science fiction, and science fiction that both kind of explores key elements of how social structure shapes our lives now, that I think science fiction, um, lends itself much more so than most kinds of genres to really thinking about social structures determinant of people's lives—and I can say more about that—but also, of

course, a current of science fiction that thinks very about more liberated societies, more alternative forms of gender and sexuality, more alternative forms of material social relations between people. So, depictions of sort of socialist or feminist societies in science fiction, I think are very rich and wonderful. Um, and so those are the kind of two kinds of books that I've engaged consistently for a long period of time, and play a big part of my life.

Kerr: And—um, with the political philosophy it sounds like you have like, communities either created or whatever, that you're able to talk about those books with. Is it the same with science fiction?

O'Brien: No.

Kerr: No.

O'Brien: I haven't—no, unfortunately, I don't really know the science fiction scene.

Kerr: Right.

O'Brien: It exists, but I don't have any ties to it.

Kerr: And then—it's interesting to me that, um, the internet has not played a big role in your narrative—or like, the world wide web—like, I'm sure I'm taking for granted some things, but I wonder if you wanna talk a little bit about like—because also, we're of an age where the internet—you know, there's a—I'm sure you can track your life. Like, life before you had email and life after you had email, and I wonder if the role—if that has anything—if there's anything interesting there that you want to share.

O'Brien: No. I'm not a—I mean, I use the internet a lot, but I'm not—I've always been, like—and I'm technically savvy, like I've always known a lot about computers, and I'm quite comfortable using them, and often using the sort of latest technologies that're available, but—but I have always been somewhat skeptical about online communities really functioning as political spaces. And I haven't—some online communities I've certainly engaged. I mean, there was a pivotal period where I was coming out as a trans woman in Portland, where I knew almost no trans women, and I engaged this feminist punk website called Spread, that'd come out of Chainsaw Records. And Spread.org—was that what it was called, I think?—was very intense debates between radical queer people, and a lot of trans women, and I read their LiveJournals as well—that were partially geared around Camp Trans, and targeting the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. This was in a shift towards the boycotts of musicians who performed at Michigan, which was a departure from previous tactical eras. And so on Spread, people argued a lot politically, and that—that was influential, and I read their LiveJournals, and I wrote my own LiveJournal, and it was certainly a community, but when it came time to organize—to do what I thought of as organizing—that's not the place that I went to. Like, that was nice, like, as a place for my own thinking—I mean, I'm a part of a couple of leftist discussion groups on Facebook. One about

Marxist value theory, another that's sort of gender-oriented, European communists, and other—you know? And like, I get a lot out of those discussions, but like, if I want to accomplish anything, that's not where I go. And, um, much of the political organizing that I've done—not all, but much of it—has tried very hard to stay completely off the internet, um, for sort of secrecy or security reasons or whatever. I mean, the ancient forest defense work was never on the internet. Much of the communist and socialist organizing that I do is not on the internet at all. I mean, there's no record of it anywhere. Our union work here at NYU—like, a chunk of it is public, but a huge chunk of it takes place exclusively through face-to-face relationships. Some email debates, but I find that people over email get really angry at each other really quickly, and have quite serious misunderstandings, and the kind of solidaristic relationships that're really necessary to accomplish things politically are usually forged through face-to-face, collaborative work. So, that's—I have engaged internet communities, and they've been helpful, but my organizing—sort of my political work has been almost exclusively face-to-face.

Kerr: Mhm. Um, and what about your own writing? Like, you've talked about various writings that you've done, and I wonder like, are the—where are those available? How—like, was it—were you blogging? Were you publishing?

O'Brien: Yeah, I was blogging. I had a website that I put stuff up on, and I went through periods of shame around my writing and sort of pulled everything back down—off, and two essays ended up getting published in anthologies, uh, and I would like to publish more. As a graduate student right now, there's a lot of anxiety around entering the job market and kind of how people evaluate your writing, and what that is, and it's a perpetual problem for me—sort of trying to put out writing in the world that circulates beyond my control, and wanting to share, and wanting to be out there, and at the same time having a lot of fear and anxiety around it.

Kerr: Can you talk more about the shame and anxiety?

O'Brien: Not as an aspiring academic. I think I shouldn't talk about that.

Kerr: Yeah, that sounds good. Um, the other—I had some more questions. So, you talked—when you were talking about the work that you were doing around, um, trans communities and HIV/AIDS, especially in Philly, you got very animated and it sounded like an exciting time. I wonder like, were there—was it AIDS Philly? Was it Philly AIDS? What's the organization, AIDS Philly? Or was it a different organization?

O'Brien: The name of the main AIDS service agency in Philadelphia is called Action AIDS.

Kerr: Action AIDS. Um, and did you guys release any reports or anything like that, or was it...?

O'Brien: Well, several projects came out of that work, and this sort of trans-focused work. I mean, I wrote an essay about that organizing, um, that I think was called "Taking it to the Streets," that appears in Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's anthology *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for*

Resisting Assimilation. And so that's an essay about the trans organizing. But then the traces of sort of trans-specific work are through the Philadelphia Trans Health Conferences that had a major presence, and the Trans Health Information Project—the sort of service agency that came out of that work, that reflected a lot of the thinking—uh, and—that I had contributed to at very early stages.

Kerr: And so—again, um, if this doesn't seem under the purview of this, we can talk about it another time, but that work to me is super exciting, and is super under—like, I would say—almost undiscussed—or, almost undiscussed, you know? And so—to the point where, when you talk about HIV and trans women now, people often feel that they are starting at zero if they're not part of—if they're not trans women themselves or part of trans communities with trans women already, and I wonder—does that ring true for you?

O'Brien: Start at zero because of the lack of documentation...?

Kerr: Lack of documentation, or just lack of um, history—like, lack of institutional memory around this stuff.

O'Brien: Huh. Yeah. I don't know what kind of trans history people have available. I—yeah, I mean, I'm not sure. I feel like a lot of moments of trans history are quite lost, and certainly any moments that involve poor people, which most trans history does. But I—in my mind, by far the most vibrant, important, and dynamic, uh, threads of trans organizing are within the AIDS movement, are around sex worker organizing, around syringe exchange access, and around um, service and healthcare access for poor trans women—African American and Latina trans women, mostly. And that's happened within—particularly in the AIDS movement, there was a shift in the 90's—or a split, I guess, in the 90's, to some extent—of a chunk of people being almost exclusively and entirely oriented around drug research, and becoming sort of drug research experts, and then another current that was very organized around winning and developing and demanding social services for very poor people living with AIDS—and sort of out of that came Housing Works, and all the syringe exchange programs, and all of that, and organizing like NYCAHN [New York City AIDS Housing Network] VOCAL [Voices of Community Activists and Leaders]. And in that latter work there was quite a gender spread, and some very macho elements here or there, but by and large trans women have been a consistent presence and thread throughout the history of this kind of poor people organizing around AIDS, since the 1990's. You can go back into the 80's and 70's, but it's a scattering of projects here or there. But since the 90's, in a place like New York, there've been continuous, dynamic projects dominated by queer people of color that trans women have played a really important role in, and I think played a very powerful place in sort of the survival and organizing, and coherence of trans communities. And that has its sort of subcultural counterparts in the punk scene and in the ball scene, I think, both of which had a big influence on the development of syringe exchanges and AIDS poverty services. Um, yeah. In New York, especially, I think those two subcultures played a big, big role in the 80's and 90's, around shaping what AIDS services meant. And I—yeah. And some of that is documented, but yes, I certainly imagine that a lot of it is not.

Kerr: And something—you spoke about um, the work around Highway 59—did I get that right? Highway—

O'Brien: 55.

Kerr: 55. Thank you. Sorry about that. Highway 55, and then the work around, um—around—that we would understand as the—

O'Brien: Minnehaha Free State. That was the other name for it.

Kerr: Minnehaha?

O'Brien: Yeah. It was a Native word for the region.

Kerr: Um, and a lot around the work that we could understand as like, the anti-World Trade Organization work. And I wonder if—are there specific actions around HIV/AIDS that you were a part of, that you wanna get on the record?

O'Brien: Um, well, by the time I came of age politically, in the late 90's, the AIDS movement was really shifting, and the tactics of environmentalists and anarchists and others had drawn very heavily from the AIDS movement. I think the AIDS movement really pioneered the direct action, um, protest tactics in many ways—of lockdown devices, and very concrete things like that. And there were some incredible protests around AIDS in the 90's, but I didn't really come into contact with the AIDS movement in a meaningful way before moving to Philadelphia in 2001. And there I had a lot of contact—I wasn't involved with, but I had a lot of contact with ACT UP Philly—and they were continuing to do protests around AIDS and prison, which I got involved in, and around, um, international drug policy, which I cared about, uh, that were continued by Health GAP and others—Health Global Access Project, and um—and, you know, the prison work, I tried to be somewhat—yeah, I tried to have various connections to it. There's a—what is it?—Philadelphia Prison Health News, I think is the magazine that came out for prisoners. Um, and it was a lot of good work, but the era of high-visibility direct actions was largely over—that by the 2000's, like, the [Rudy] Giuliani era sort of came to an end in New York. And I think things, in many ways, peaked in 1999, and uh, what—and many, many, many of the militants that I organized with in the 2000's in New York, in the late 2000's—2004, 2006, 2008—had been politicized in the direct action AIDS organizing of the late 90's, and the organizing against the Giuliani era. Like, I'm very interested in like, the bridges and tunnel action that happened—what, April of 1999, I think—when they shut down all the East Side entrances to Manhattan, but I, um—I didn't play any role in any of those. And I guess probably the only kind of dynamic, exciting AIDS protests that I was a part of were centered around Occupy Wall Street, um, and were sort of anniversary events for ACT UP in some ways. So I was, you know, in the middle of the AIDS scene from 2005 on, but that no longer was about sort of these massive direct actions. I mean, there were direct actions that happened around Occupy Wall Street, and VOCAL has organized many civil disobedience actions,

some of which I participated in, but it's a different time now. And what—why the AIDS movement shifted away from that kind of work is one of the subjects of my dissertation that I'm trying to make sense of.

Kerr: Mmm. So that's the ongoing research that you're doing now.

O'Brien: Yeah. Yeah.

Kerr: And—and is it a mix of talking to people—who're you talking to? Or what do those communities—who are the communities that you think have some of the answers?

O'Brien: That's a great question. Um, mostly I'm in the process of talking to people. It's—my dissertation is stressful.

Kerr: Ah, okay.

O'Brien: Yeah. I can—let me hold off in saying too much about my dissertation.

Kerr: That sounds wonderful.

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: It doesn't always make for great tape. [laughter]

O'Brien: Yeah, totally.

Kerr: Um, I think you really have a really strong analysis of like, your experience in different worlds and you've experienced like, a variety of different communities and worlds and cities, and I wonder if you wanted—one community that we haven't talked about, or one space and place we haven't talked a lot about, is NYU, and the university. And I wonder if you want to talk a little bit about your experience of being a grad student and being a scholar, and and... yeah.

O'Brien: Um, well, I really appreciate my union comrades. So, graduate students do a substantial amount of the academic work of a university—teaching and research—and are—you know, we are paid our stipends, are paid very, very little, and there's—the growth of graduate student workers has been a big part of the transformation of universities, and an increasing economic reality that the majority of graduate students are never going to have academic jobs once they graduate. You know? That didn't used to be the case, and it really is the case now. Um, and that's gone along with the—what we call the "adjunctification" of academic labor, so that the majority of teaching in the United States is done by temporary, part-time positions—adjunct instructors, who can't make a living wage off their jobs. And so there's been a move towards unionizing graduate student workers, and that happened—there were waves of unionization in the 1970's in public universities, but the fight—the laws governing public universities are very different than

the labor laws governing private universities, and up until very recently, uh, graduate student workers at private universities had no right to unionize, and NYU was twice the only private university in the United States with a union contract. And this summer—so I was part of the protracted fight around winning a union contract again at NYU after we had lost it—and then this summer, the National Labor Relations Board issued a ruling that allows all other private university graduate student workers to unionize. So there's been a lot of campaigns kicking off all over the place, and here in my work, we've had to really fight the university, but we've also had to fight the—our union, the United Auto Workers, and the staff that they brought in, and the approach that they had to the work differed a lot from ideas about how we wanted to organize from the dozens of people kind of galvanized by the campaign. And we've had to really fight pretty hard around, um, some autonomy and some differences of approach, and we formed a dissonant caucus called the Academic Workers for a Democratic Union, AWDU, which was named for our comrades in the graduate student unions in California, in the University of California system, who are also part of the United Auto Workers. So we worked very closely with them, and that's been a very successful platform for us to articulate a clear critique of the UAW's approach while strongly identifying as UAW members and being committed to the future of the UAW, um, and also—uh, AWDU has been a platform for multi-issue social justice organizing through our union. So, we passed a resolution last year, I guess, in solidarity with the Boycott—or, calling on our union at NYU to join the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement of the state of Israel, and at the time, I think we were the third local in the United States that had passed such resolutions. There've been several since then, but it—you know, it was uh, quite a—both very controversial, but also really kind of a leading move in that—in the political environment of United States labor. And, you know, we've been very active in supporting Black Lives Matter and Occupy—well, Occupy was a little earlier—but yeah. Um, and so through that, I've developed a lot of close camaraderie, and people that I really love and care about in—at my university. The other—the rest of my experience of university is quite grueling, that—that it's, uh—that academic life is very—these days very competitive and ugly, and um, very crazy-making. And I—my immediate mentors have been really quite supportive, but I really have not yet found my path in that work, that feels sustainable.

Kerr: What department are you in?

O'Brien: Sociology.

Kerr: Sociology. Mhm. And is it—um, yeah. Yeah, that sounds true [laughter].

O'Brien: Yeah. I mean, I'll be entering the job market next year, and I am thinking hard about back-up alternatives and other kinds of work that I might be willing to do, given that, one, I can't leave New York because I have a child here, and two, it seems like entering the job market for most people results in failure, and that's—that's a precarious position.

Kerr: Mhm. Also, considering what we're interviewing here for, how would you say that like, the university is a place for trans people or trans communities?

O'Brien: That's hard to say, I think. Um, that there are sort of trans tokens who have found their niche, but like, I—I don't know any other trans women at NYU at all. I imagine there are a few, but I haven't met them yet, and I know very few trans academics total, and the—and including at queer conferences that I—queer studies conferences that I go to, like, um... And if you limit it to trans women, it's really just a handful that I've ever met anywhere. Um, there are probably more that I don't know, but, uh—but it's—and there's kind of a polite ignoring of gender that happens in liberal academic environments, where you're listened to precisely to the extent to which you speak like a man, and no great disrespect is shown to you when people don't listen to you. So, you know, open misogyny, open homophobia, open transphobia quite rare, yet, um, it's like—it draws out my most—like, in order to get heard, I butch myself up a lot. Uh, and my sort of—and I see all my female colleagues having to do the exact same thing in subtle ways. Um, so that it's you know, kind of—quite an ugly environment, but one without open hostility, where everyone just politely ignores the fact that you are unfortunately not a man. [laughter] Like it's a disability, you know?

Kerr: And does that parallel—earlier—

O'Brien: I mean, no disrespect to disability.

Kerr: Right, of course. Um, does that parallel the experience you had when you were first experiencing, um—you talked about going from being like, a man who could be read as gay, or a person who could be read as gay, to understanding yourself to be a woman, and the way in which you went from being like, lots of people want to sleep with you, to people like, just like—I don't think you said open hostility, but it made me like—yeah, I wonder if there's a parallel.

O'Brien: Yeah, I mean I—I think being an effeminate gay man would—I mean, I know very few effeminate gay men in the—at NYU—but would put you in a similar boat as women to some extent, that you'd have to butch yourself up to be heard. Um, I think there are obviously feminist and queer studies environments, but like, I haven't had much opportunity to be a part of them in any kind of sustain way. Yeah. But, yes, uh, in my experience within the university environment, a certain subtle form of masculinity is inseparable from, um, being heard at all, or taken seriously at all, and everybody learns some form of how to perform that.

Kerr: I'm—I'm thinking—one of the important aspects of this project is that we—there's always a lot of talk in the media—not always—in the last few years there's been a lot of talk in the media about this notion of a quote-unquote "tipping point" when it comes to, uh, transness—and being led by trans women of color, and we push back against that, saying that like, this is not a new—like, being trans is not a new phenomenon, and it—like, what does a "tipping point" mean, and is that even a goal, and what about—what about everyone that's come before this point? And the "tipping point" would be—are usually like, around representation. So, celebrating the work of Laverne Cox, or Janet Mock, or even Caitlyn Jenner, to some degree, and we kind of push back against—that there's a tipping point or that we need to focus a lot on that tipping point.

O'Brien: I've heard this critique, um, and, you know, there are clearly some left-wing trans people that speak of it very articulately. I, um—I think that, uh, recognition, that visibility does play a huge, huge role in what's politically possible. That—that, you know, like I—the first year that I—at the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference, there were a handful of people—like, four or five who showed up who had trans children, and who were trying to make sense of that, and the next year there were like twenty of them, and then the next year they formed a caucus and workshop [inaudible], and there were like a hundred of them. And now there's an online community of thousands of them, and I have friends who track, like, some of their political problems, right—like, they tend to sort of very traditional narratives about transsexuality in some ways—but it is incredible. It is so miraculous, and so beautiful that there are currently thousands of kids around the country who came out as trans pre-adolescence, whose parents support that, and who're like, trying to make sense of things, right? And that was not the case before. I mean, like, that sort of—the world of like, trans children coming out and getting to avoid the horror of sort of hormone-induced gender non-confirming adolescence through hormone blockers, and getting some support around that early on, I think is such an incredible step forward for our society. And the political forces that are enlaced in that, the sort of struggles around trans narratives, the struggles around like how, what it means to be a parent of trans kids, the struggles of what the roles of children are in trans movements—that all of that is like, still up in the air, and no doubt will have many, many ugly manifestations—manifestations that are politically noxious or negative. But like, that is made possible in part through the growth of visibility—through like, a critical mass of like, vaguely queer-friendly parents taking a very bold step because they've heard other parents—about other parents who do this, and are able to find them, of supporting their children's gender nonconformity. And I think that's giant. Like, I think we will live in a whole different world. I think gender—and I think this is partially tied to transformations in capital and labor markets—that gender is undergoing a really massive transformation right now, and that trans visibility is both a kind of—one of the most outer expressions of that, and is a contributing positive factor to, you know, the ongoing liberation struggles that we have at hand. And obviously we shouldn't erase the history, but like, what it means to be trans right now is totally different than what it meant ten years ago, and it's different for the better. Um, and visibility is a part of how that has happened, um, and how that's continuing to happen. And Laverne Cox and Janet Mock I think are—are like, epoch-defining world heroes, you know? Yeah. I think there's a—there's a form of queer anti-assimilationism that's really tied up with being culturally isolated, with being culturally marginalized, and I'm interested in a kind of universal communist politics that everyone gets to participate in. Like, I'm interested in a queer communist world where everyone gets the opportunity to engage in kind of non-assimilating, gender non-conforming expression of all sorts. Like, I imagine a future where there are literally hundreds of genders, and only a quarter of them are identifiably human, you know? And in winning that kind of future, I think the dynamic work that happens in these very marginal subcultures helps keep that spirit alive, but like, elements of those subcultures ending up in the mainstream, um, and transforming it is actually really, really helpful for everyone. Because the total number of people that get to participate in a subculture at any given time is a very small number, and like, everybody else needs that, too. And—and figuring out how to do that without sacrificing political substance,

without sacrificing, you know, what really matters and what's really beautiful about it, I think is part of the difficult task for all cultural radicals of all sorts, but that that's a task that we have to contend with, and trying to avoid mainstream attention, or—is not the answer for that.

Kerr: Um, it was really exciting to hear you talk about the—that transformation that you saw with the kids showing up at the Trans Philly Health Conference, and I wonder if we want to look at the other side of the age—uh, age spectrum, and talk about like, aging and trans realities. And like, we can talk about like, wishes, what does that look for, or we can even talk about like, your experience working with older trans women and men and gender nonconforming people, um, but I just—for the public record, it's really good to talk about like, aging and trans.

O'Brien: Yeah. So there—obviously there's always been old queer people of all sorts, but I think a number of factors have led this issue to sort of be coming to a head in recent years. Um, and the big one is—is about broader social demographics. So, you know, there was a huge generational boom in the United States—immediately after World War II a lot of people were born—and a lot of those people sort of politically came of age in a very, very radical, very dynamic time, in the late 60's and early 70's, that really saw the flourishing of a queer liberation movement that was very different than anything that had happened before in the United States. And so this whole generation of people that came of age in the late 60's and 70's are now entering their senior years in—across America. So you have this giant generational bubble that's aging right now, and so a lot of struggles are coming out of that that are really interesting. Like, there's a struggle around—um, that is being led by the National Domestic Workers Alliance around winning universal home care insurance, that unites seniors and domestic workers around trying to win a massive new social benefit that enables people to stay out of nursing homes and instead hire domestic workers to help take care of them at their house—homes. And like, that—that's the kind of aging organizing, universal benefits future that I—that I'm really happy to see people organizing around. Um, and so like, broadly, a lot of people are aging in our world right now, in the United States, and for radicals, including outside of the queer scene, an entire generation of people that were really radicalized in this particular period that was much more politically dynamic than anything that has happened since—um, are now aging, right? And so we have a whole generation of kind of revolutionary elders that are aging. And then this plays out in the queer scene in very particular ways. You know, that—that a lot of—um, a lot of people came up through a wave of struggle around the Gay Liberation Front, and then another people came up through a wave of struggle around AIDS, and those that are still with us are now much older, and—and encountering—you know, like, as queer seniors and as trans seniors, they are much less likely to have children to support them. They're much less likely to have extended family members to support them. Their—in all likelihood, their employment has been very erratic, so it's very rare that they have any sort of retirement savings or that their social security is substantial. Um, they—you know, like, uh, are a lot less likely to sort of have accrued a kind of—less likely to own their homes, for example. And so, like, a life—a lifetime of being economically marginal, as they enter their senior years, they—and are no longer able to easily work full-time, it becomes a crisis of very, very serious poverty. And I think people are starting to kind of clue into this, or wake up to this. There's starting to be some discussion about it, but I think queers of

all ages have an enormous responsibility to um, learn about the experiences being faced by queer elders, by learning what we can about their political experiences during periods of much more heightened struggles, and, um, for taking seriously the economic struggles and economic survival of queer elders. And, you know, the groups that are working around that are very important, the links between sort of queer elder communities and other kinds of elder rights organizing around defense of social security or other things are important, and that—um, that we really need to figure out how that people can spend their 70's not living in severe poverty, and that that's— that's an urgent, urgent task before us.

Kerr: Um, before we conclude, I wonder if you want to just riff on your own future—and I'm not talking like, I think the next few years are, you said, like, there are lots of question marks, but I wonder if you want to forecast like, into twenty years or forty years. Are there things that you're hoping for, whether it's for yourself or your family, or the world?

O'Brien: Um, I think things are politically going to get very bad. Um, and that the sort of character of the struggles we have now and what we build over the next few years will have a huge impact to play on who survives. Yeah. I try not to talk too much about the future, because it discourages people.

Kerr: You think so?

O'Brien: I am, um—I have spent a lot of time sort of studying the revolutionary strategies of past eras, and I'm increasingly of the mind that the paths to making the world a better place that have been pursued by generations before us for various reasons are no longer open to us, and that the path for making the world a better place moving forward is one that no one has found yet, and that, um, only a sort of abstract faith leads people to have confidence that we will find it. And the path for the world becoming a much, much, much worse place is, uh—is very clear. And that, you know, this—that partially comes out of an analysis I have, uh, about the character of the crisis of capital, of capitalist profitability since the 1970's. And I have that faith sometimes, and I certainly think struggles—whatever struggles people do now are of the utmost importance, but I'm really worried about the future, and my future, and in the midst of that, the future of everyone I love. And the Trump presidency is an accelerated confirmation of the kinds of things I've been worried about for some time. I hope to, um, develop—get my writing out there more in my later years, to write more, to write more confidently, to—uh, to buttress myself against the—some of the judgment that that subjects you—yourself to, and I also would like to play—figure out how to play more of a cross-generational support role for younger people than I do. That I have some older mentors, but I'm not in touch with much younger people in the kind of queer world, and I would like to figure out how to do that without being—you know, without barging in where I'm not wanted or something. Um, but, yeah. I would like to write more.

Kerr: Wonderful. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to put on the recording?

O'Brien: Um, well—I sort of mentioned this about the hundreds of genders, and only a quarter of them human. I think, um, that—and thinking about queer communism—I think that humanity has a tremendous and incredible potential for creativity and realization—self-realization that, um, I think historically is embodied in the Marxist tradition and in the queer subcultures, and in the black liberation movement. That people have this vast, creative, dynamic potential that we are forced to devote the vast majority of it to figuring out how to get and secure a lousy job. Um, and—or, what we think of as a good job, but then one that deeply alienates us from—like, that siphons our creativity in very particular ways that, um, render us like, less full of life. And that the future that we need to fight for is a future where people's creativity fully is able to emerge in a world that isn't, um, geared around desperate material scarcity, and, um—and where the kind of—a society dedicated to full human development, I think, is one of the definitions of socialism I've heard that I like. And in that future, what trans people are doing might now—I think—in the midst of great adversity, I mean, every trans person that I know like, got shut out of whole career paths, whole means of survival paths, often lost friends and family and jobs—and trans people, you know, really struggling to survive, but out of a deep commitment to our self-authenticity and our self-realization into our capacity to become full human beings, have done something that's largely socially unacceptable and transformed ourselves in really unexpected ways—that we are the future. That like, in the future—in a better future—everyone will look deep in their hearts and find profound and unexpected and extraordinary ways to transform themselves. Transform their own bodies, transform their own minds, transform their social presentation in the world, and become something radically different than what anyone around them expects, and in the better world they will be able to do that and be able to flourish, and that I sort of—there are ways of talking about transhuman and posthuman that I—I think the world, the future—that if we get there, if we overcome the vicious violence of profit and capital, and the kind of tyranny of work in our lives, that we, um—that we will be glorious. We will be profoundly glorious. And if we want a clue of that future, we can look to what trans people—to the last century of trans people struggling to survive in the midst of capitalism, and doing incredible and beautiful things along the way.

Kerr: Thank you. Are we good?

O'Brien: Yeah.

Kerr: Okay. Thank you.