

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**MCKENZIE WARK**

**Interviewer:** Michelle Esther O'Brien

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Michelle O'Brien: Hello. My name is Mich— I am Michelle O'Brien. And I will be having a conversation with McKenzie Wark for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Libraries' community oral history project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is June 20th, 2019, and this has been recorded at the New York Public Libraries' Midtown Manhattan Offices. Hello!

McKenzie Wark: Hi there!

O'Brien: How are you doing today?

Wark: I'm wonderful, thank you.

O'Brien: Ah, let's start off and have you introduce yourself for a little bit.

Wark: My names McKenzie Wark. I'm a professor at the New School of Social Research and Ugenia College. I teach culture and media, and I'm probably mostly a teacher in order to support a truly ferocious writing addiction [laughs] that I've probably had for most of my life. I'm recently from New Castle in the East Coast of Australia, but I've lived in New York for 20 years. Mhm.

O'Brien: What pronouns do you use, or words do you have any identification with?

Wark: I'm probably a they/them at the moment, I feel like I'm kind of intransent. I feel like I— the one thing I really knew is that I wanted to get out of masculinity. And I still don't know where to. So this is just me, my personal thing right, but I— but I'm transitting through the they/them and I may end up a she/her at some point. And I feel like that's where I am. But that's for now.

O'Brien: Lovely. And what was your childhood like?

Wark: I grew up in the steel and coal town 100 miles from Sydney. My accent just got Australian for a minute [laughter] it's ridiculous. It was, you know, like a middle class upbringing. My father was an architect, my mother had been a Psychologist, which she had to give up to become a homemaker [inaudible] people did. I think she— she was involved in designing hearing tests for kids in school was one thing I remember being told. I was really proud that she'd done that and I actually did the test when I— you know, if like the van used to come round and test your hearing. So she did that but then she had to give that up and then, she died when I was six, so this is sort of the big event of my childhood is um, losing my mother. But I had older siblings who were like a decade older than me, so I was raised by teenagers essentially. And my partner says "raised by wolves" and that sort of in retrospect is what it feels like. I thought they were grownups but like, they were like 15 to 17 years old, you know like [laughter] I have a child that age now and I'm like "Oh my God! If we put you in charge, what would that be like?" You know, my father is still alive, and we didn't have a bad relationship but you know, we were never close and I say he was a heavy drinker: he was really an alcoholic I think looking back on it. And a little temperamental and that's why I used to just stay out of his way kind of thing so I really don't have much to say about that but yeah. Raised by teenagers and me in public schools in this steel and coal town. I

was not gonna do the surf, but it had the best surfing in the world basically. Like it's not a big wave or any of that, but the coastline is very twisty so you know. I remember my brother would always be with his friends, would be like its 4:00, midsummer with the rising tide and a nor'easter so we're going to cave's beach! And I was just like "what is this knowledge?" I hated the whole beach thing and you know and I just— there was just nothing to do if you didn't wanna surf except you know, become a communist or drug addict, a delinquent or something like— or a punk rock! I did a lot of those things instead [inaudible] that was New Castle.

O'Brien: What order did you do them in?

Wark: Uh could—delinquent first I think? This explains why as kids I got caught shoplifting and talked my way out of it when I was a teenager. [laughter] A lot among the things not to do kind of stories you tell kids. Cause like I would've ruined my life right? If they had actually called the cops, like, I wouldn't be here. I would probably not be able to come to America. Um I did that— it's a port town so the drugs were great cause that's like the entry and the transit everything, and— definitely punk rock and I used to hang out at the pub— the grand hotel where the punk bands played in the back, and the front bar during the day was like cops and lawyers cause the courthouse was across the road. You could by from the publicans who ran it essentially at that time I'm not speaking of the grand hotel now. Merchant seamen used to come through and, you know, after it closed sometimes we'd end up on the rec rooms on the ships and stuff. It was kind of super interesting— Oh and it was close to the psych hospitals for mandracks right! [laughter] And the pool table had this weird warp, and it's the only one I ever played even possible well on cause if you knew that you could just beat the out-of-towners. [laughter] If you knew how to do it. I mean it was like two punk bands, I used to just hang out with uh— In high school I used to hang out with the university people. Cause they just, you know, they seemed super interesting and they had good weed and they had better record collections and so I was just drifting into that orbit a little bit. You know, in my late teens. And yeah I became a kind of labor movement [inaudible] sixteen, seventeen, I don't remember exactly when the refamous label got rid of [inaudible] was thrown out of office and now there's only five [inaudible] and so essentially it's CIA backed, quite cool, and it just seemed kind of like referencing wasn't gonna work! So what else do you do? I figured out later that I had absolutely no talent for actual politics whatsoever. [laughter] But that was my training so— it was how to do that stuff. Steel workers with bits of fingers missing and stuff like that.

O'Brien: What was your role in the union activism you were doing?

Wark: I ended up in popular front work, you would say, the peace movement was a huge thing. I remember doing a— participating in a pro abortion rally in 1979. What else did we do? I was really interested in the trade union environmental center, so I used to hang around with those guys, which those were more like engineers than workers which was kind of interesting. Um, training and research center. Yeah you could [inaudible] really interesting instead of progressive labor, history. Coal and ports thoroughly, so, like choke points, all the kind of labor that worked to shut down industry: we had them all. It was really interesting history, you could kind of connect too.

O'Brien: Where there queer communities?

Wark: I met— I never know whether to call Glenn Hennesy my first or second boyfriend because he was like the first gay man I met, but he wasn't the first one I slept with. We had this, you know, making doe eyes at each other thing. He was at university and he was like a gay communist aboriginal, and I was illegal! I was underage! If he got caught with me it would not only fuck his life, he'd probably die for it. So he was quite circumspect not only for that reason, like he was incredibly gentle and respectful with me. We used to talk into the night and he studied linguistics and German and stuff. He was the last speaker of his own language and this burns me up to this day that he was alive with a dead language in him. And I'm still angry about this, I put it in a book but there's nothing I can do with it. You know what I mean? This is just the thing about [inaudible] but he's the first person I met, and I met the people around him who understood him and accepted him. But there was a kind of like "old queens" kind of scene in New Castle that I stumbled into occasionally and kind of tried to figure out— I kind of felt a little but like, you know, fresh meat. [Laughter] I was kind of a little weary. So yeah, I didn't really connect to gay people till university, until I left town. Cause this shit would get you beaten up in New Castle, it was a working class town. Prevential town.

O'Brien: Where did you go to?

Wark: I couldn't wait to get out, I went to Macquarie University. I asked the comrades [Laughter] what university I should go to and they assigned me to that one [Laughter] so I went there. Which was kind of great! And where I met my first or second boyfriend who I had on and off for thirteen years, and he was like a gaslighter, it really wasn't a great relationship in lots of ways but boy was the sex great! And he had access to terrific drugs. And so it just went on for way too long, you know, and he's called Edward so when I write about him, which is not his real name. He's still alive, I just want to be respectful of that but I don't want any contact with him. I went to his mother's funeral with him after we had broken up, and that was the last time— I was like "this is the last time we'll see each other." So yeah, I was secretary of the student union when I was nineteen years old and way over my head and trying to do this left wing coalition of gay and lesbian kids, and the environmentalists, and the feminists, and the communists, and the left leaning labor party! And then I was like "Nah, I'm gonna be a writer, I'm gonna do something else." And so I thought I was gay, like it turned out I wasn't but that was powers trying to resolve everything. It was like "Oh, I'll be gay." And it was through sexuality I found femininity, but I didn't know what else to do with it, I just didn't know what to do with it. And what kills me about this now is that this is Australia in the 80s, there were probably only like six trans women in public life in Australia, at all. Right, there are obviously more than that, but who you would publically know? There were six and I met three of them, at my own university. And I didn't relate. I had Cathrine Cummings, who was the humanities librarian, who I really loved and who I'm pretty sure, in retrospect, clocked me. Very kind to me. But she was very like— her actual— the way she ran her life was conservative. She was a very open minded person but I just didn't relate to the sort of midlife suburban lady. Wasn't me. And I met Rebertta Perkins who was a former sex worker who got a PhD on trans sex workers, and was an advocate for sex worker health. She was

just physically not like me, you know I was always tiny and I kind of felt feminine because I was always a small person. I didn't kind of physically connect to her, even though the work was really super interesting. And you know, signs that you are trans are you're this [inaudible] in women's studies. Which was set up by R.W Connell (Australian Sociologist) pre transition— is a lady known as Raewyn Connell but still known as R.W. And set up this women's studies, we sat on beanbags and read Michele Barrett or whatever. So yeah I didn't connect, I'm disappointed in the times where I didn't quite see what was in front of me, I feel like, as an undergrad. So I tried being gay and I tried being straight, it was a terrible time to try to be gay if you were fatty and femme, cause I kind of got there right when the Clone era happened and this Thomma Finland hypermasculine thing was going on. And it's connected to the awareness of the AIDS pandemic where everybody thought that if you topped you were safe. This is not a fact right, but this is what people felt at the time so if you're a queen you are like the plague. Both straight and gay people thought that, there were clubs you couldn't get into. So I had a couple of close calls, like in Sydney you're assigned a number and you would get your test results back in the mail addressed to your number. And you would open the envelope alone, you know, like a lottery sort of thing. And it scared me straight, I'm not proud of this but I just fucking fled you know, I just couldn't deal. And I tried to be a straight person, and it's like "I need to either be these things?" but neither was really the problem you know what I mean? It was like "Oh! It wasn't about sexuality in the end." Yeah that was that.

O'Brien: What was Connell like?

Wark: Sorry?

O'Brien: What was Connell Like?

Wark: I have to be careful here because my memory is all pre transition— and to be respectful of her. And I didn't actually take gender studies with her! She was studying class and I did these really terrific classes on class but I mostly didn't go to— is the other thing like I never went to class you know, I would just get the hand out. And I got a pass for being political cause you could do that in these days. And also I would just spend my free time in the current cereal section of the library reading all of the debates that were going on and write papers on the stuff that our professors sort of wanted to know about but hadn't gotten around to and they LOVED this. So I just got— I didn't interact with Raewyn all that much but I modeled my pre transition on the pre transition R.W Connell. There was this jeans and flowy shirts and boots thing that was going on and I was like "huh?" [Laughter] I'm like, I kinda clocked out and this was the 80s when you could hang out with your professors and your professors would fuck you if you really wanted to kind of thing. Which never happened in this case but yeah so I was like modeling myself partly on pre transition Raewyn [Laughter] it's funny to think about now.

O'Brien: So at some point you transitioned from being an organizer to being a writer?

Wark: Yeah yeah. And it was partly I got outed— and I was kind of thin skinned, nerdy, an intellectual and queer even if not in the way I thought I was. Yeah so I'm not cut out for this but

I like to write, and that's my contribution, I'm a writer. And how do I support that, I was a journalist for a long time. Cannot make a living doing that, let's try maybe radio for a while. I fell sideways into academia completely by accident. I was doing a master degree and they said "oh you should apply for this full time teaching job cause you're adjuncting a bit and you won't get this job but it's the rules that you're an internal candidate you must be interviewed and you'll get the experience of that." And so I signed up and the interviews are one after another, 45 minutes, it's not like in the states. You know, and I'm waiting there in a suit that doesn't fit and I hear shouting coming from the room and I'm like "is that how this works?" And it's not a funny story, like the guy who had lined up to do the job had a nervous breakdown in the interview. And I'm ushered in and this is like [inaudible] interview committee, as they hand me this full time job because I'm already doing it! I'm already the adjunct for all of this stuff. I haven't even finished my masters degree and I'm a full time academic with 14 TAs reporting to me, doing lectures to hundreds of business students to give them their token humanities courses which they loathed and hated and despised. So [Laughter] I would like show up for work, go to the toilet and throw up, set up a video camera, I had to video tape myself doing all of the lectures cause half of these students didn't speak English as a first language. So we'd video tape them so they could watch them with friends in the library to get information out of it. Here I am in the library and there's my face on monitors. To this day I'm dysphoric about my own image so I'm going to the library and there's me talking, it was just a nightmare. And the department didn't love me because I wearing suits to work to try to relate to the business students so I didn't look radical enough. This was what's now called University of Technology Sydney. Yeah so after a couple years of that they fired me and I ended up back at Macquarie where I'd been in undergrad. There is a little [inaudible] I got headhunted to go back and run that department a couple years ago. [Laughter] I heard out the head hunter spiel. "Because of your historic connection to the University of Technology" I'm like "no thank you." I had real friends there I gotta say and including one gay man who was very very kind to me. And what was otherwise a quite wonderful lesbian who had hit on me, but it didn't work out, but administratively it just wasn't a home, and I ended up back in Macquarie for 10 years.

O'Brien: What were your social connections like during this period, both politically and your friendship networks?

Wark: God can I remember anything about the 80s at all? It was the ecstasy era, you know of the trans stereotyped types I was "drug trans" quite a lot and lucky as hell to have never had serious addiction issues or to have contracted hepatitis or HIV. I kind of think I came close a few times but I sort of skated through that era. Being much more reckless than I should've and it was all of those gay [inaudible] the word queer didn't exist yet. And there was the gay seem was Gay, capital "G". But there was like adjacent to that was a world that was kind of a lot more fluid than that, and there wasn't really a name for it. So yeah we all just E and hung out, it sort of really wasn't about whether you were gay or straight or anything so that was my world and it was kind of bohemian I guess. We lived in the kings cross part of Sydney and Darlinghurst which was sort of pretty shady in those days. I remember wearing tennis shoes and stepping on a sharp that went between my big toe and the next toe, you know, and I'm like "you're not gonna get HIV from that but hepatitis is a possibility" you know what I mean, that's what you're thinking. Or

tetanus! [Laughter] So I was kind of living a reckless life with a strong sense of self preservation which is a weird contradiction but that's what I was doing, and being an academic as a day job and writing for all of these little magazines, and making radio which I really loved but it didn't pay. And I ended up with a newspaper column, my bio used to be "Lapsed Marxist in the pay of Rupert Murdoch" (Founder of News Corp.) because I had a column for 9 years in a Murdoch national news paper, the token lefty. Or one of them, now only two of us I think.

O'Brien: And how did your writing evolve over time?

Wark: I'm so thankful to have done a lot of journalism. Like one job I had early on was with— was called "On the Street" which was a weekly free Rock n Roll newspaper popularly known as "In the Gutter" cause that's where our reputation was and where you would find our editors at probably about 3am. And my job was to be in the office by at least 11 to answer all the angry phone calls from everybody— no, it's a little bit slap dash so we would've spelt bands names wrong and get all the ads wrong so these venues are refusing to pay for them and stuff. We were all paid cash and envelopes under false names so you had to remember which one was yours [Laughter] it really was horrible in a lot of ways but it was like 4 people living a 48 page book every week. The layout artists would work on wide bold so he was tryna get a portfolio together so she could actually show somebody. The other writer I can say her name now, Shelly Roy, may she Rest In Peace. For a while took so much speech, she went blind so I had to do her job as well. It was just so pathetic. I graduated into that from a job delivering it, you would literally just throw them in a dumpster. [Laughter] Why am I still alive? You know I kind of wonder this sometimes. I wasn't super reckless but I was on the edge of just, madness. But that and doing a column where I did op eds where you're given— you learn to pitch something at 12 or you're assigned something and it has to be done by 4 and on the phone you would edit with the editor and it would just be like "nope that paragraphs gone, this one doesn't make any sense" and it was this instant training in progress and how not to be precious about it. This is part of my teaching now: writing is manual labor, if you're thinking about it you're doing it wrong. You just bang away and if that doesn't work you throw it out and you try again.

O'Brien: So the timeline here— what were the years that you were primarily a journalist and then the years you were— got into being an academic?

Wark: Yeah— Let me see. I went to Sydney in 80 and I was university 80 to 85 and I had two jobs. I was chair person for [inaudible] student counsel and I edited the unions journal which was also really great. And I laid it as well, I learned all of these— I learned [inaudible] skills in the days before computers and I actually got work doing that too. I approached writing as a Marxist, I wanted to know the means of production, so I wanted to know about printing, and so I learned all that stuff. I almost learned offset printing but I really wasn't diligent, didn't pay attention, but I used to assist with that sort of stuff, with comrades. And in 85 I got to do a lot of writing cause I had a job that supported it. I don't know if it's still there, like the gay mile in Sydney was Oxen Street, like about two blocks of it. And the shadiest place on it was numbers, it was like you go up these stairs and it's like sex toys and wank mags (magazines) and videos to rent and harnesses and stuff. And out the back is glory holes and I had the midnight shift, so I'm just selling tickets

and [inaudible] under the counter. But I could write! I would just take my electric typewriter and get everything done there, it was supporting this. And you paid cash, you could skim, had to be super careful cause it's like NOT right? This guys would show up to collect from the safe. There was a phone number stee taped to the bottom of the phone to call cause you'd never call the cops. I mean not that you would anyway but you'd call this number and these guys would show up with "what's the problem?" There was also a can of mace that probably did not work, so I waved at somebody once [Laughter] It's like, I'm not gonna press the button because if it doesn't work I'm just screwed here. So I think that's what it was like, but it was this fantastic job for writing because you're just there all night so I ended up with this nocturnal life, that was what I was doing. And really I was in the closet as straight in that world! I had a girlfriend at the time that lived a couple blocks away so I'd do this job and then sneak off there because I wasn't actually gay: my boyfriend got it for me. So yeah there was that and then writing for magazines and harassing them about invoices and all that stuff. It was a great era for the kind of people who took the punk rocky (inaudible) into publishing and really thought they could do things. And you'd work for it for three issues and it would fold and you'd go to the next one. So it was that until New School. But also I got into Academia, I adjuncted for a while and I got this full time job, and I got some others. And I said, oh I'm on the tenure track essentially by accident, I was full time teaching before I finished my MA, this is impossible now. Even in Australia this would never happen. So I can't advise anyone on how to do this stuff cause I just did it all wrong! I have no idea how you do it.

O'Brien: What year did you move to the New School?

Wark: I immigrated to New York in 2000? I fell in love with a New Yorker and it probably coincided with a midlife crisis [Laughter] I'm like "I'm just leaving it all behind!" I got off at— she was prepared to come to Australia and I was prepared to come here. It was like "alright so we're on." But I got off at a one year visiting job at Binghamton University so I'm like "I'll go! I'll go to New York!" It's theoretically 200 miles from New York but I sort of figured it was close enough. So yeah I immigrated in 2000 and was commuting right up Monday and come back Friday it was exhausting. It was miserable I was living basically in a squat up there. Paying rent for a squat, that was how awful it was. At first you got a car, on the bus. No one goes up there for anything but prison so you can imagine how much fun that is. The bus got lost once [Laughter] so I did that for two years, I probably would've got to keep that one because I think they liked me except "not live in" happens and the state was broke, and there was no money. So yeah I lost that job and I was teaching composition at Albany which I hated, I hated Albany so much, I lived in Troy like in the (inaudible) part which has been going down since the Civil War. You could buy a building downtown for about \$20,000 at the time which was really tempting. And they were like— I got taken to the 3rd best Tai Restaurant in Albany and told "you gotta write another book before we consider you for tenure and you must live here full time." And it's like I already wrote three books, this is massively unfair and incredibly rude. And also this Tai food is just not that great! [Laughter] But I kind of thought that was my fate like "oh... I'm gonna move to frickin Albany." But yeah I got— I lucked into a 3 year contract at Lang College, it was unranked, maybe renewable? And I just thought well "I'm taking it! And I'm gonna be there!" And I've been there for 15 years. I have a courtesy appointment with grad school, and my job's in the undergraduate division which I've

been conflicted about but decided I really loved. I'd rather teach undergrad (inaudible). Graduate students got very conservative cause they're just desperate, there aren't any jobs, whereas undergrads they're like "show me the world!" It's so much more fun and also I don't have responsibilities to a field, like I'm technically in media studies but I'm teaching undergrads. I don't have to ship a grad student through the job market filter, I can basically write about whatever I like. So it's like "why did I keep trying to leave this!" It was golden, you know, like I'm really in this sweet spot.

O'Brien: So what year did you start at Eugene Lang? (College of Liberal Arts at The New School)

Wark: 2003.

O'Brien: And how are you spending— going back, how are you spending the mid and late 90s in Australia? What were you doing before you moved?

Wark: Can I remember?

O'Brien: Were you back in Sydney?

Wark: Yeah, yeah I was always in Sydney. First 8 years of my life in New Castle then 20 years in Sydney and now 20 years in New York so it's like my life is in three chunks geographically. I have this love hate relationship with Sydney now cause it's gone like all of my world is gone. Yeah I was just bouncing from one relationship that would last a couple years to another and I wasn't a terrible straight boyfriend, I was fairly aware and respectful to partners but it just never lasted. There was something going on and I didn't know what it was, what was going on. When I was having sex I was dissociated, I was falling in love with people I wanted to be over and over again. Then I'd attempt to be gay, but gay men don't wanna have sex with someone they think is a boy who wants to be a woman, that's just not what they want. That's not working, you know? So I never really figured it out but that was my life. At least a few times a year I would just get really really high and that would be like my best days. Get high and have sex that's what I lived for. Oh and parties! I'm an introvert [Laughter] I'm not really sociable but it just seemed to be a world that my body responded better to. I can't do it anymore but at the time that's what I did. So yeah I was teaching and I was writing, I wrote three books before I immigrated, and two of those were direct interventions in the culture wars. I didn't really touch on trans stuff at all but I felt like— it was all about diversity and feminism and all these post moderns and all of these things that you were getting attacked as. You know, as ways to kind of assert some conservative agemity on the culture that had kinda exploded in the early 80s and effervesce in all sorts of interesting ways. The biggest tourist event in Australia was the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Party, hundreds of thousands of people show up for that. I had a kind of bad relationship with that, I missed the demonstration it started from which I still feel guilty about, where everybody get beat up by the cops. Some really smart queens figured out to not make it a protest but to make it Mardi Gras. And to move it and claim it, and that was just political genius. I have so much respect for the folks who did that, most of whom are dead. And it became the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras because dykes had to run stuff. Everybody was fucking dying so it became intra communal politics and

dykes ran it. But it just got bigger and bigger, but there was this moment where it got so big that it was like “alright we gotta stop all of these straights from coming from the damn party. How do we do it?” Well, make everyone sign a piece of paper when they’re members where you can be either you can be gay or you can be lesbian and there’s no third choice. Right? [Laughter] and I’m like “I don’t really identify which either of those though. I have to go into the closet to stay in this organization I’ve been in every since it had a membership?” I was so alienated by that, to be pushed out of my own community. And grudgingly letting the trans people in cause they were like “what the fuck! You let us entertain you!” Cause this was a category at the time included people who did drag as well as people who were gender non conforming and trans. So it was like “ok... you’re in as well. But not the bisexuals!” [Laughter] so I was kind of alienated by my own community in that sense. But yeah that was 90s Australia, fighting culture wars and losing essentially, they lost.

O'Brien: Tell us about your books, and the process of making them and what their circulation was like.

Wark: The first one was academic and happened by accident, someone from (inaudible) wrote to me in 1998 about something I’d written and was like “well if you ever wanna do a book (inaudible)” and I was like I’ll propose a book, I didn’t realize it should be my PhD or something, I did this book before I did my PhD. It ended up with the university press. And then I did two trade books which were for Australian readerships, I was a “public intellectual”. And this is sort of a real syndrome if you A, are in the closet about shit or B, you don’t even consciously know that you are. You become public, you create a public persona. I just think this is such a thing. And so I was writing newspaper columns and doing all this public speaking and on the radio and stuff. I was C list public intellectual through the 90s, tryna fight the good fight, I was always verbal. That was how I survived school, I was always this runty little weed of a kid. And I was in public schools in a small city so these were like multi-class, and I had a lot of respect for working class kids but they still weren’t keen on your faggy affectations. Or your Bourgeois pretentiousness would get you a beat down as well, so I mostly managed to avoid that by being funny, by having stories. I had this early, this way of enduring so I could think on my feet. I’m a law school drop out too, I kind of thought I’d be embarrassed but then at some point I’m like “oh my god do I really wanna be in court about tax law? I don’t think so!” [Laughter] Doesn’t sound like any fun, I just kind of knew I was too weird for that.

O'Brien: Anything else around your life in Australia that you’d like to talk about before we talk more about New York?

Wark: Yeah that was sort of it. I was like C list public intellectual, I was involved in not the sort of founding of cultural studies of Australia, but the second wave of it. I always shot for things a little too late, academically I find. So I had a reasonable career there academically and appearing in public. There I was struggling to have relationships I think, and I figured out MUCH later that I—the term gender dysphoria is problematic and not all of us love it right? And I definitely didn’t have it in the acute form but I think I had this obtuse gender dysphoria I couldn’t place. I couldn’t relate to it and I felt that my thought about trans people, particularly trans women, is that it’s an

option that surgical. I didn't understand anything about hormones at all, I thought that's a surgical option for aligning of self. Have I only just figured out couldn't do and probably still can't. Because (inaudible) is relevant and that my life is. I was born with club feet, I've had six surgeries on my feet starting in childhood. And that was so awful, I don't want to have any relation to that space ever again. So I only figured out much much later that these things were connected in my head, I couldn't think of myself as trans partly for that reason. I misunderstood the range of things that could be, like obviously surgical transition is valid it's just for me that was a thing I couldn't and maybe still can't approach. So that's where I was in when I immigrated.

O'Brien: So when you were living in New York State, you moved here for one person.

Wark: Yeah!

O'Brien: What were your other— what was your social life like? And what were your connections with people like in New York?

Wark: Ugh kind of truncated you know? I'm still married to Christen Clifford, bless her that she's been able to put up with me for 19 years. I'm trying to get a relationship to work and I'm upstate half the week and I'm spending the weekend recuperating, it's a four hour drive to Binghamton so felt kind of severed from a social world that had supported me and I didn't acquire another one. I felt like I had to acquire a professional social world to survive, I had these temporary jobs, I gave up tenure and came here mid career, I had degrees from university's no ones heard of. If I was an authority on anything it was Australian culture that which no one gives a damn in the United States, it's just completely irrelevant to anybody. So I just felt like I had to reinvent myself. I kind of— I thought that and still feel like I didn't construct the social world I needed for myself. I didn't find the people I needed, it took a very long time and I'm still working on that frankly.

O'Brien: So you were pretty isolated.

Wark: Apart from the relationship, you know. We have our stuff like anybody who's been together for 19 years. But I really felt, I still feel, like that's it this one's for life. And one way or another I'm gonna figure this out. And I think Christen knew as much as I knew about my queer self from the get go. And that hadn't always been the case, I've been in the closet with people. I came closet— Another thing that's signs you were trans that you had missed is you're having relationships with lesbians. I did that twice. If you count Kathy Acker, three times. And now I look back and I'm like "oh, I was allowed in that world" cause there was something about me that I didn't even know. So I felt like I had to— when I got to the New School we had to build it, college wasn't a whole lot, the entire faculty could fit in this little room. And it's now— there weren't even departments! There was nothing, we had to build it. And I'm proud of that, I was part of that and it turned out I had some political acumen about how you organize things and structure things and get things done. But I did that and I built a department with my colleagues and I actually designed and ran the 10 year promotion system. So there's two things that I built that are still there, so I'm kind of proud of that but it took a lot out of me. And there was a point where I felt like "oh I've been a chair and associate dean, maybe I'm on management track." What the

hell was I thinking! I look at pictures of myself in suits and I'm like no wonder no one was surprised when I FINALLY came out, like I look at myself and I'm like "oh my god! You just— no honey, just no." [Laughter] So yeah I looked at being dean and somebody else stood for the position and I'm just like "that person would be better, they would just be better. I have to make sure they get elected. That's my role and I'll work for them."

O'Brien: The New School has had an impact on a lot of levels on New York's academic. Do you wanna tell us some about its political history and the process of building about?

Wark: It was founded in 1919 by people who came down from Columbia University because they refused to sign loyalty odes. The founding spirit of it was John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, Charles Beard, these were sort of legends and still known in their fields. They decided from the start not to have an endowment, like what were they thinking? And they sort of invent this kind of adult education as a way to pay the bills. Pretty much anybody who's interesting in arts and culture in New York from 1919 through almost to now has some connection there. If you're reading memoirs or biographies about New Yorkers and they don't mention the New School, they're just not interesting or authentic, it should be there somewhere. You know, "and then I took a class at the New School!" It's just part of the place and it's a significant New York Jewish institution, the original student population was at least a third Jewish as if being excluded particularly from Columbia and from other schools. And it was the university next to ours so an untold number of progressive scholars from Europe who were gonna get persecuted by the fascists and the nazis passed through there and kind of seated. But I'm a francophile rather than— like I don't even read German, so it was a heavily German institution at one point. But New School is also where Claude Levy Strauss met Roman Yakenson and invented structuralism. The French all went home after the war but the Germans sort of created this Graduate School or a piece of it. I kinda have a courtesy appointment in but I'm more on the undergrad side. I think it's struggled to live up to this jewel reputation of its founding and its refounding as this open minded and progressive institution, but there's no money. Like it's all Jewish based, it's ridiculously expensive and that's just the reality of it. And it's small, it's very very hard to be a small institution. So I just feel like keeping it alive and keeping it viable is part of my job. I was trained to be a cadre by people who ran things, like who ran unions, who ran centers. I'm not one of those Marxists who's in opposition to everything all the time, it's our job— is to make things work. It's to build things, and I tried and I figured out again the limits to my political nous, like I'm not actually as good at this as I thought I was. There's things I haven't got done but I'm moderately proud of having been a trusted institution builder in New School. We built a cultural media studies and screen studies— I got someone hired in Anthropocene studies and I want to do trans studies, we don't have it. And it's like fuck it, I'm gonna spend five years building up to getting align, to getting someone hired. I don't know if I'll succeed at it but I kind of have the context and I'm trusted so if I say this is a thing we should do and have good reasons I think I can get it done. So that's motivation now. If you're listening to this in the future and I didn't please forgive me! [Laughter] I promise I try.

O'Brien: Do you wanna tell us about your relationship with Kathy Acker?

Wark: I met Kathy on book tour in Sydney in 95 I think it was, and had sex with her in her hotel room cause she was like that. I'm not, like I never cruised. When I was gay cruising culture didn't work for me and I never did casual straight hookups. I'm a serial monogamy type of person but I did it, I hooked up with Kathy. And she had this thing, she'd just instantly fall in love with people so it's not specific to me at all I'm just one of many. The only thing that was different was I kept their emails, we were just emailing each other and then I joined her in San Francisco and we hung out together and then she came with me to New York and we hung out together. It worked because I actually wasn't a fan, like I read her books, I respected her as a writer and I was super interested in her as a person. But I wasn't a super fan, I feel think she was feeling kind of alienated from that sort of attention so I was just handy in that sense. My secret, completely unprovable, speculative theory is Kathy could've been some kind of trans. Like GNC (Gender Nonconforming), there's something about her that I can only read through those terms and it's partly in the books and it's partly in her public life and it's partly cause I knew sexually what she was like in how she tried everything. To get right with her own body is how I feel about it, and I was too. And I didn't know I was doing that and I don't think she ever knew it either. It's sort of the thing that breaks my heart about that, but this is a completely subjective interpretation and as (inaudible) said, "we all project" we all want to see everybody as one of us so those are the caveats with that. And I sent her a copy of the email correspondence, I don't know why I just think I wanted— I always felt very fondly towards her even though we tried to have a relationship and it didn't work. I sent it to her and her executor just called me up out of the blue in 2005 or something and I met him in Chelsea at this restaurant that Sandra Burnheart used to go to, which I was just a frequent for that reason and no other. And he's like "can we publish the correspondence?" I really thought— I didn't wanna do it, like I really felt exposed in it, and I now realize proto-trans in it. And I was persuaded, I asked a couple people and one said no, one said yes, and yeah so that came out and people asked me Acker stuff and I'm like "I should read the rest of the books I suppose." And that helped me head towards transition oddly enough was ready Kathy cause the way gender works is just so liberating. And it turns out there's a whole really deep trans trench of trans people who are Acker people. Like she's one of our people right?

O'Brien: I was certainly one of those.

Wark: Oh my God yeah!

O'Brien: I discovered her in late high school.

Wark: Yeah! It's like gender is so fungible in her, and it helped me. It helped me to revisit all that and I'm doing a book on Kathy now that I'm supposed to be working on now. You know, I'm distracted. That was that and how it came back into my life and Christen's not super happy about. I still have the ring, so I have Kathy's ring which I kept on the grounds that because she passed, it's not a piece of jewelry from other girlfriends that I had to— and boyfriends that I had to get rid of. And there's the wedding ring like a proper cis married [Laughter] normative person. That one won't come off. So yeah it was a pretty brief but significant relationship in my life. She kind of got me, and she topped me, she was the first woman who did that. If that's what she was. And I'm like "Oh! It's not about being gay or straight, it's I'm fem. I gotta deal with that."

O'Brien: The last couple of years have been quite a moment of reflection and discussion about Kathy and her legacy. Do you have— you have obviously played a prominent part in some of those periods of reflections. Do you have any thoughts or insights about her legacy?

Wark: I had a bit part in it because of the correspondence, and I think that helped, it was one of the little steps to— I take the politics knowledge very seriously. Like I couldn't do politics politics but the politics of knowledge is something I know a little bit about and know how to do it and the canonization of Kathy is on the table and I think we have to push, and push, and push to get that to happen. The last conversation I had with her was in London, I think she knew she was sick and had been in denial about it, and we talked about her legacy. I tried to give her an account of why I thought she mattered that was bad and I still feel I owe it to her, which is one of the reasons I'm writing. But she was still in print in 1997, she's been continually in print, she's now being reissued. The correspondence helped connect her to a younger readership because we were doing in email what people do now with texting and stuff. I tell people I've been doing social media for 40 years and they look at me like an idiot like it hasn't been around for 40 years. Yes it has! Doing this shit on the internet that long ago, and Kathy was an early an early adopter of that. Like you'd give her a connection to the internet and a bottle of wine and she's gotta start figuring out fun ways to play with it, and she did all through the 90s. Sorry, in the last couple years of the 90s. And it was Chris Kraus that really wanted to do the correspondence with semi text. There was another publisher who sat on it for years and couldn't get it done, for honorable reasons. And Chris I think was seeing it as this little beach hit for their (inaudible) book. And then her executor is right, so that's out, and the first biography is out, there's gonna be a second one. We are just gonna march on into the academy with this.

O'Brien: Why do you think for canon— or Acker's canonization is important?

Wark: Because she's a woman, because she is some kind of queer. She's not pro sex, sex is mostly awful in her books, but she's sex inquisitive. There's a politics of the body as an open site of inquiry going on in her writing. Writing is— can writing be a way of bracketing off what ideology says the body is and a way to discover what else it could be. And that is so enabling. Not just for trans people but we're one of the communities that helps. So that matters to me, when we do that. It's formerly inventive and, yeah.

O'Brien: How did your own research and intellectual change over the last— since you moved to New York?

Wark: I get bored really easily. There's foxes and hedgehogs in academia and the hedgehog just digs the same hole, I really totally respect that. I can't do it, I get bored and the fox just jumps from one thing to the other and I'm hyper up the fox end. So I'll miscontinuem I know where I am. And always was. Yep, super fox in the academic sense. I'm notionally in media theory but I've also written history's of the (inaudible) gods. I mean the thing I was doing when got here in 2000 was more "what is the implications of the change in the motor communication that inner is only a part of? How does that change the entire structure of capitalism?" I wrote Hacker

Manifesto and Gamer Theory, were the two books I wrote then. Which was, what should have been career suicide, Hacker Manifesto was turned down five times, I really thought I was just done for. Lindsey Waters at Harvard saved me, I presumed on a very slow acquaintance with Lindsey who's kind of a legendary editor there. I sent in this manuscript and he called me on the phone like four days later, you know, like this never happens in publishing. This never happens, except with Lindsey, he'll wither completely ignore you and not even bother responding or he'll pick you out of the slush pile and tell you we'll make this happen. Their editors— in academia there's always it's gotta be external readers and there's editorial boards that— at Harvard there's two, there's two boards. And he just had that sixth sense for how to navigate through that and if it was good to get it through those filters, and he did, he got that book done. So yeah I booked with Harvard University Press that's like— most people I think would agree is pretty top drawer in humanities publishing. So (inaudible) made it possible to stay, I didn't realize I should've capitalized on it then and look for a better job. My whole life I refused to be mentored by anybody, and I didn't do it on my own, people helped me against my will. I'm totally grateful to all these people who looked out for me, who I just disrespected. And it's a fucked up thing to do with losing a parent maybe, I talked to my therapist about this but it's like "I'm not gonna depend on you because you're gonna go away. You're not gonna do it." But of course people looked out for me, and Lindsey was one of them yeah, he just picked me up. So yeah I did Hacker Manifesto, I did Gamer Theory which is sort of I think fairly an early intervention in game studies when that was starting up, so I got a toe in the water with that. You know, I aged out of and new media studies. Like you really do, I have very very obsolete and now atrophied knowledge of unix, I taught myself enough computation to get on the internet, to find my people. So I did cultural history, I thought when I was doing Hacker Manifesto that I was part of an avantgarde. That was where a punk rock approach to technology and the internet and the digital and politics and radical aesthetics all came together, and I met so many super interesting people in that world. We were an avantgarde, that was our data, but you can't age out of it all so "Oh so I'll do histories of avantgardes! What's the prehistory of that?" So the books on the situationists and that backs into the Marxist bit. I read— I was reading (inaudible) when I was a teenager, I know this field. Doing books on obscure sort of Marxists and I did my Donna Haraway tribute stuff. That's sort of the body of work in a way, it's like twelve books at this point. And at some point I just felt "Fuck it! I'm a full professor with tenure and I write whatever I like." The next one coming out is auto fiction, it's sort of not quite memoir. I think memoir is where the subjected voice knows something about themselves and this is about my complete ignorance about my own life so— and some of it's a little made up because there's living people. There was a libel in Australia, ferocious, so I had to fictionalize a little heavily around certain living people, people I knew who were prominent. That's called Reverse Cowgirl, which is the best title I've ever come up with, and it has several meanings, one of which being an immigrant to America, to be a backwards American. It's the luckiest kind of immigration you can possibly imagine because I speak English as a first language, I'm from elsewhere settle colonial developed "world", under the belt world. I'm legal, I have a green card, I had a job to come to. But what is with this culture? I still don't understand a damn thing about it! It's a mystery to me and I feel so alienated from it. Anyway, I'm rambling sideways about this but yeah that's sort of the body of work, and it got me tenure and it got me promoted. I still have stakes in certain academic fields but I feel like I'm sort of the weirdo outsider. I get invited mostly to the graduate student conferences that all these things connect

to because— and this was sort of like, I figured out it was sort of my role. I don't teach a lot of grad students I had many students I love, that's one of my joys is those folks but I know a lot of PhDs. But I get invited to their conferences because they had fun reading my books because they just know that I'm allowed to do that. It's like this forbidden fruit that you write like this, they know they're not allowed and I'm not quite legit. And I just have some love hate relationship with that, being not quite legit, my provincial colonial outsider, punk rock (inaudible) with no credentials. I have an actual PhD but it's from Murdoch University, people ask me if it's named after Rupert Murdoch. But what's hilarious, is this Australia, the answer is no it's named after his great uncle. [Laughter] Cause the Murdoch's were a prominent Scottish family, as were some of my ancestors frankly. Not my branch of the family, we were excommunicated.

O'Brien: So you've lived in New York City for a while now.

Wark: 19 years, I've become a lifer. I was walking across Central Park the other day thinking "I'm gonna die here." Not soon I hope! But it was peaceful it was like, this is it. This is my place. I've tried to leave many times but I can't.

O'Brien: And you've spent a lot of that time writing books, a lot of that time helping to build the New School.

Wark: And raising two kids.

O'Brien: Oh wow. Why didn't you tell us about your kids?

Wark: I don't know, they might not want me to say that much but they're 10 and 15, and they're New York kids. I love them to bits.

O'Brien: Were there moments in New York's trajectory during your time here that you were apart of, I don't know, the change in city or movements here or scenes here that struck you?

Wark: When I met Christen Clifford it was in Williamsburg in 1997 and she was like original Williamsburg hipster, she was working as weight staff and tryna be an actor which is like [Laughter] and rollerblading under the BQE (Brooklyn Queen Expressway) so it was like oh my god, that was it. You'd go to all these bars and the 90s barely existed as a scene with these tiny little art galleries and people were forming their bands and stuff. I was a little old for that, I was in my thirties already but I was kinda like "I know this, was like when I moved to Sydney!" You would just hang out and people would do stuff. But by the time I got around immigrating it was 2000 and that was one of the property burns and we were there for a while and we got pushed out, been up Jackson Heights. And I think both of us felt like we became much too heteronormativity suburban in our lives in a way. Its really frickin hard to raise kids any other way in the city, and we tried! And we do have a sort of extended family by choice of people who— all of our kids were born around the same time. And we still collaboratively— the older kids don't all get along so it's sort of becoming something else, but these are like my lifetime benchmark people in a way. We do this summer commune thing where we're all together, it's like five

families, thirty people in two houses at our own lake upstate for two weeks kind of thing. And you know, it's bonding, and the bits with divorces and one of them slept with the one of the other ones, like all the things that happened, happened. And one of them was trans [Laughter] like we did all this shit. I remember looking around this crowd lots of times and I'm going "oh you're like me! You learned early on that nuclear family is a fucked up thing and won't work. You lost a parent like I did, you're parent was crazy, you had to run away from your dad." You know just looking around going "yeah we got something about each other that was just like radar" and we found each other and that's why we're doing it. I found this world too gender divided, I've kind of loved these men that I've hung out with for so long, we used to go fly fishing. Like seriously! I'm so honored that I was included in that, but it's kind of not me. I never did like— I was never a bro. Like I can't do it. And that should've been one of the things, one of the signs.

O'Brien: You've foreshadowed a lot around coming to your gender process currently. When did that start coming together for you as something that you could talk about and take some steps around or be more public about?

Wark: Yeah and it's sort of like— and I'm not the only person who reports this, I now actually have no idea. Christen found notes from a conversation we had in 2011, where I was still in this mindset that transition is surgical and I can't do that even if I hadn't thought through why. She has notes from another conversation in 2013 where I'm ready. It's like "I'm gonna do this and our relationship has several things it has to figure out" and that's one of the things we gotta figure out is, I may be some other gender in the future. Christen got sick, she had cancer and is in remission but this took several years out where I was just running the show. So that was it, I just did that. And then I don't know, 2018 I was on sabbatical. Fucking now or never bitch, just do it! I started fem presenting in public all the time, I got a therapist, I started making appointments. It just takes three months to make an appointment to see anybody. So I'm chipping away at that. Therapy helped a lot and I'll say the name, it's Jay Langer, was so helpful and specializes in this stuff. And there's a book on it that I found really useful, because SJ is worth thinking about. And it is rooted in the concept of dysphoria which is not everybody's, but there's a— but maybe there is a pre linguistic basis to your relation to how your body signals to itself, and that's what dysphoria is. And maybe it's not even explicitly gendered, hormones will change how your intestine works and maybe that's what's out of alignment. You know what I mean? It was all speculative but I'm like "oh that's so enabling for me." I can embrace this because I've struggled with thinking this in terms of the social construction of gender roles my whole life and that doesn't seem to be entirely what it's about, for me. There's obviously a huge part of it but there's something else. So I went on HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) and I'm like "Hello. This is it, this is how I'm supposed to be biochemically in the world." That's it, I'm trans.

O'Brien: You referenced not being able to identify with the trans women that you met in Australia.

Wark: Yeah, I feel so guilty about that by the way. They were wonderful.

O'Brien: Have you— the sort of ways that trans communities and gender different communities have evolved in the last several years have you bared witness to that or had contact with that in a way that's been positive for you?

Wark: Yeah! There were individual trans women who were getting to know which was really helpful to me, a lot of whom were much much younger to me. This is like trans temporality yeah? My big sister is our— can be half my age technically but in trans years they're twice my age or more cause they transitioned, let's say six or seven years ago, and I'm six months into HRT and a year and a half into the whole deal. I'm a baby. So it's this weird temporality, it's been incredibly helpful. And tryna figure out what trans aesthetics could be cause they were just there— like particularly books that for me were just so helpful and they (inaudible) by younger people. If they're not in my life at all there's just something about reading (inaudible) reading all of Tori Peter's books was incredibly helpful to me even though that's not quite my deal. Like the way those characters are, I'm like "oh shit!" I actually sort of bought this whole thing about Autogynephilia, I thought I was just some weird fucked up pervert, battle this stuff. And I dealt with that like I dealt with that was who I was. But it was still in those categories. I didn't realize I could think past that, I didn't feel like I could be a legitimate trans person. I was attracted to women, I'm maybe a Kinsey 3, but I didn't feel like I fit any of the conventional stories in here and particularly in fiction. Here are all of these other stories, and none of them are mine, but none of them are the conventional ones either. So I'm possible, I'm possible. And I'm gonna write my own story, I'm gonna write it. And I did, and that helped as well. It's sort of what's bitter sweet about this is feeling like I don't have contemporaries. Like there are trans people in New York who have professional lives or academic lives, who were born in the 60s, but I don't really find people I kind of gel with. I'm looking, at peoples whose stories make sense to me much younger. And so I feel like what I've did is I've made myself rare. I'm a lifetime fan of Oscar Wilde and this is actually one's goal in life right? To be a work of art that's absolutely singular, but to me it comes with a lot of solitude and I'm still tryna find to whom do I connect. God knows nobody wants to sit around with another trans person and talk trans shit all day is just boring as hell right? But there's just something that you get when you talk about something else, like anything, but there has to be other things that you have in common. Which is (inaudible) and it's literature and it's theory, and it's Marxism or whatever but I just need to be able to talk to our people about this stuff. And feel heard, and felt. And that's what I'm working on, is I need another community, and I don't have it. So yeah that's sort of the price of late transition too. I'll be honest, I worked that male privilege billshit for all it was worth, I mean, I did it. I'm a white person who got a job and tenure, that I'm totally not entitled to but I worked those advantages. And I just gave one away. But I haven't lived the life— but I came to terms with it like this, like, I used to think if I transitioned at 80s god I would've been a pretty trans girl, I really would. I don't think I'm kidding myself with that, I really could've been fabulous. And I'm so regretful that I didn't do that and then one day I'm like "oh wait a minute, I could also be dead" And the likelihood of that is high. Just because of HIV or getting your head bashed in, I don't worry about that so much now. No one looks at an old bag on the street (inaudible) older cis women being ignored, because I'm also ignored now, that's how it is. I don't fear as much of that as if I was younger, but I could be dead. So now I just think "thank god all my younger selves knew how to stay alive. Kick this shit down the road to

the point where I could deal with it.” Even though I still dealt with it too late, and that’s where I am.

O'Brien: Why did you decide to do this interview?

Wark: You know I didn’t want to do it at first [Laughter] it took a bit of persuading and I was like “I haven’t been at this long enough. I don’t feel I have anything. I don’t have any knowledge. I’m such a baby.” But then big sisters are all like “tolerate your enthusiasm, you’re never gonna get bored with this stuff and you’re just gonna live your life.” And so I came back around to thinking “I’m excited about this now!” So I wanna talk about while I’m this naive trans baby who wants to read all the books! [Laughter] and I became such a homebody and I’m now going out several times a week cause there’s a book party I have to go to, an art show I have to go to. I gotta see what the youngins are up to cause I feel like my generation didn’t generate a lot of trans culture. I’m super thankful for what exists and I don’t wanna obscure the fact that books were written and art was made, but there’s not a lot. And there’s not a lot a feel intimately close to or aesthetically, intellectually connected to. But the stuff that’s around now it’s just blowing my mind. I just feel like that’s my job, is to go find where’s the avantgarde? And we’re it, but it’s younger, it’s much much younger than me.

O'Brien: So you’re trying to create a professorship in trans studies at The New School?

Wark: I feel like I’ve— yeah it’s out. I kind of do this, I’m not someone who’s really much prone to depression but I am a little prone to mania. I’d like get these plans, I think I could pull that one off but like please don’t hold me to it if I fail, cause I will have at least tried to get something to happen. It’s gotta be full time and I’m just tryna raise money for little things at the moment cause there’s a thing in a Natalie Win video that she says just in passing only once about being part of the trans 1% and that just hit me like a hammer on the head it’s like, well so am I. I have a full time secure job with a professional salary, how many trans people have that? Or will ever have it? So what do I do, what do I do without being some patronizing chadel bitch about it? That’s not good enough. So I gotta raise money and give it away but that’s not right, yeah that’s the charity thing. So can I create work? It’s not enough to create visibility, but I can. So I’m wrestling with this, plus my job. And my therapist is like “you know, even just giving people recognition is not nothing in our case.” But yeah I struggle with that, I just honestly don’t know what my role is, what my job is. And it can’t be Political, with a capital P. Knowing I’ve put myself, no that’s not me. I’m still in this stage where— I mean there’s a lot of people who do HRT will report “yeah it changes the emotional frequencies you tune to.” It’s not true that women are more emotional, this is patriarchal bullshit but it is true that your frequencies of emotional awareness are different. I do feel that and welcomed it, I had emotional dysphoria. I knew that but now that what I know to call it. So I feel so much better about that but I don’t have the reflexes that go with it yet. And I catch myself, I don’t have the level of sophistication on how you read what’s going on, and respect people and steer things. Like I can’t, I don’t have it yet. And maybe I’m too old to really get good at that so I gotta— I cant do leadership. So what’s a backseat role? I’d theres an avantgarde, I’m not in it. Can I bring the soup wagon, you know what I mean? I feel like I gotta figure that role out.

O'Brien: You haven't referenced a lot about trans work in the academy. What are your thoughts on trans studies? Or your relationship to it.

Wark: I haven't read enough to have an opinion you know? I'm getting up to speed on it and trying— I was sort of a little more interested in the literary bit, throughout media. Cause I've sort of been reading that a little longer and I think I wanna take my time kind of figuring out. I kind of have a view of what the project is and I'm not by any means alone with this line of thought. Having been nested in queer theory, queer studies, those got its limits. (inaudible) saying this in the 90s, queer theories aren't entirely for us. And I'm kind of queer identified in lots of ways but there's parts of my life that doesn't deal with. And this is not exactly that performativity, it's not a concept that really works when you talk about doing THIS to your body and living at 24 hours a fucking day. So yeah, how do you firstly recenter a little bit building on the, what I call the kith, the trans kith that came before us in the academy with little pieces of this. I'll a little bit firmly make this gesture because I'm not dependent on queer studies gate keepers at all, that everyone else is who's coming up. So can I stake out a position that's a little bit "let's be separatists". So with all do respect to our queer brothers and sisters, and I am also that, we got our own thing to figure out here. It's separate and related, and the part that's separate actually needs a little attention and some thought and a careful rereading of the pieces of that, so we can put that together. And so for me that's sort of the project at the moment going forward. And I want to think that through aesthetics. It ain't camp, and it ain't gay aesthetics— I love gay aesthetics. I even love drag, and that's kind of like— not all trans people do. But there's something else, need different forms and different modes of expression, so I really need to spend a little time cutting that space out. And for me it would also be about technics, to what extent are we all human bodies that are technically artificial. Pressiato usually does this, somebody once said there's a bone head cyber punk version of Paul Pressiato that's a little hard to take. But he does do this thing of saying "ALL bodies are technical", all bodies are produced by these sort of porn and pill regimes, and surgical regimes. So we're not alone with that, cis bodies are not natural, that's so enabling. But the technics part doesn't get a lot of attention, are we a special kind or technical body? And to what extent could our people have a knowledge of what engendered embodiment and embodied gender be that is absolutely unique, that cis people do not and will not and will never have until we explain it to them? How can find a language of that? How much we, an ongoing experiment in what it means to be human, that's a really quite special sort of uncontrolled experiments that had to be treated as such and not categorized in advance. And what's a knowledge you could wrap around that, that's enabling? I just think that's a huge project and if I could do a tiny bit of that as one more project, that would make me happy. That's one more thing I can do. You know, I'm 58, you start to realize "I've got more projects in me than I'll live long enough to do." But I'd so love to put a little stake in that one, and if at all.

O'Brien: Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about today that we didn't get to?

Wark: Yeah... I think i we've kind of covered the frickin waterfront with this didn't we? I was really holding myself back from breaking, I got kind of emotional a few times there [Laughter] I hope it was coherent enough, cause it was like to hold back the flood, a few times. You know?

O'Brien: Of course, nothing wrong with being emotional.

Wark: Oh god no, I just feel a kind of tension between myself that was always verbal, and was I always mostly able to skate past that point. To my undergrad, know I am known to just break down and cry in lectures even before I was on HRT, that was the thing. That moment is so close to the surface now, it's like a weird cliché. So yeah, I just feel like that's a little close to the surface here. That's my life, god I feel like a little bit like, it's out! [Laughter] Oh the other thing was— this is like the 21st century version of doing this. I came out at work, came out to family, came out to friends who were like real friends in the world, and all that went well. I had to come out on Facebook! [Laughter] I had to do it three times cause most people don't even see it when you do it, so on like the third time I'm finding a hook to hang it on. And the last one was to do with, I had to unfriend somebody who I felt like was cis-plaining me. And I explained that it happened and it's like there's a whole other wave of people who didn't know. But over and over again, no one is surprised. I'm sure I'm not the only person who ever reports this, but I've gotta get this one story in. One of the three times I came out on facebook, like Sandy Stone, who I'm friends with just comments "Now you know why when you met me, I made you nervous." And I'm like "Holy Fuck I was clocked!" By Sandy in the 90s, and she remembered it! I'm still like— I'm gonna cry about that one you know, it's just oh my god how did you saw me? But it turns out everybody did, so that's what happens. I know have a list of all the signs I missed. [Laughter] And when you transition it's like, boy, there were a lot of signs. So I looked like the villar of "is anybody out there?", who thinks they left it too late, honey, it's never too late.

O'Brien: Beautiful.

Wark: So, thank you Michelle.

O'Brien: Thank you McKenzie.