

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**TORREY PETERS**

**Interviewer:** AJ Lewis

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**Transcribed by** Amanda Skaggs

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AJ Lewis: My name is AJ Lewis and I'll be having a conversation with Torrey Peters 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 experiences of trans identifying people. It is June 26th 2018 and this is being recorded in Greenpoint Brooklyn. Hi Torrey.

Torrey Peters: Hey...

Lewis: Can you just introduce yourself for the recorder please and share your gender pronouns if you want to...

Peters: Sure. [phone rings] That's a good start, auspicious, yeah I am Torrey Peters, I'm a writer, pronouns are she and her. Let's see, I'm from Chicago originally been here in Brooklyn a couple years.

Lewis: Tell me a little bit about what it's like growing up in Chicago?

Peters: sure actually I said Chicago like many people who actually grew up in the suburbs outside Chicago. I grew up in Evanston actually which is like a half mile from the Chicago border so it's like a little bit more legitimate that I claim Chicago it's not Juliet or whatever but I grew up in Evanston pretty close to the lake and then, I lived in Iowa, I went to boarding school in Iowa for high school at a quaker boarding school, that was kind of my... those were the two places that I think influenced my childhood.

Lewis: Do you mind if I ask what school it was?

Peters: Sure, it's called Scattergood, it's a bunch of like ramshackle old buildings on a prairie it's off of Highway 80, you may have passed it if you're driving out from driving from Chicago to Iowa City or Des Moines, it's on the right side of the highway. It was founded in the 1880s, when you think of a boarding school you think of brick and Ivy, just picture an old decrepit wood in the prairie, just think of old decrepit buildings, it's very modest Quaker ideology was behind it.

Lewis: Do you have particular memories, either good or bad, that stand out from your Iowa time?

Peters: I mean it was isolated... it was isolated, it was small, and in one way it was great, that was my first experience experience with a lot of things that you see now in queer community, deciding things by consensus. Also maybe it was my first experience with getting really sick of community and finding it stifling. It was—in the winter especially—it was some harsh Iowa Winters and you just went from the dorm to the the main building. I used to think if every time I put my foot on the ground, if it left a red mark, that there would be areas that were entirely red around that school, just because I had been over and over the same places, and it was too cold to go anywhere else in the winter. There was a farm and I killed the pig when I was 16, with a shovel actually [laughter].

Lewis: Is that how you're supposed to kill the pig?

Peters: No, it's like a horrifying story. Basically, it was like a pig that was injured, that they tried to put out of the pig's misery, and they failed and the backup was me with the shovel, so it was like from being from the northern suburbs of Chicago to killing pigs with a disgusting shovel, was a bit of a change.

Lewis: Why did you—why did it become your responsibility to kill the pig?

Peters: It's such a long story...[laughter]

Lewis: As much as you want to tell me....[laughter]

Peters: Sure. Basically, the story is: there's this girl—the pig was injured and this girl, the farm director was gone, this girl was like, “we should kill this pig,” so the other lady who worked at the farm was like, “Well, the way that you kill the pig is you pick it up by its hind legs” this is going to horrify vegans who are listening to this, “pick it up by its hind legs, swing it against a post and break its neck” and this girl tried to do that, and just smashed the pig's head, and it was like “squeal squeal,” it was disgusting. She ran away, the lady who was running the farm started crying, so I was like “whatever” it's just me with a shovel and this pig squealing on the ground and was like, probably some idea of misplaced idea of masculine duty at the time, where I was like, “Well, I guess it's up to me to beat this pig to death with a shovel.” [laughter]

Lewis: [laughter] I actually had—on a different scale—a Quaker boyfriend in high school once, that I think I horrified by killing a bat by putting it in a bag...it's kind of brutal, yeah [laughter].

Peters: I mean, it's funny, actually that's the first story I tell because I've had a weird thing with dead pigs ever since then, and I'm just now maybe realizing the connection that second novela I did has like a picture of a dead tattooed pig on its face with t4t on it's face and it's like my second big identifying experience with a small dead pig [laughter].

Lewis: I'll ask you more about dead pigs later, I think. Did you have any kind of sort of queer trans phase or connections or social ties when you were an adolescent?

Peters: No I was—I had no real connection with queers that were... there were some kids who grew up to identify as gay, and the stereotypical, you know, childhood markers of that, or teenage markers of that were around but...I didn't feel much affinity for gay male sort of like—I was like, that's not actually...whatever that is, it looks difficult, and it's also not me so, I wasn't drawn to it. I mean I wore...I wore girls' clothes from a very young age, and I think in high school I told...I traded...there was one girl that I traded clothes with, you know I would like dress up, and since it was a Quaker School in the middle of nowhere, like literally a barn, but... you know, the rest of the time, I played baseball and...you know, took a lot of pleasure from a very sort of like Americana High School Boy... teenage years.

Lewis: Do you remember how you decided—how you figured out that you liked dressing up in girls' clothes?

Peters: I mean, I knew that from a very young age. I mean...I think that the first time I wore like...my sister and my mom were figure skaters, and I asked if I could also figure skate, and I think the whole reason I wanted to figure skate was because I wanted to wear a skating dress, and so it was actually like worse almost, that I was the only boy figure skater but rather than like—I don't know if my kid logic was in there like, "oh well, okay, we'll just throw you in with the girls and here's your outfit" or whatever, and they took all this time to make special outfits, and that was almost more alienating, that was like, "you are so different from a girl, that we're going to actually have to create this whole other costume for you." So I did things, like I skated in *The Nutcracker*, and I would be the only boy, and so they—there would be these moms making skating outfits over and over and over, the same one, and then they would come to me, and they would be like, "how do we turn this frilly skating outfit into something that can have pants for this one," you know, and...so I definitely had these impulses from when I was very young, and I think I wore a skating dress when I was like 5 or 6, but...I didn't have words for it, and... whereas I think a lot of people, they never learn to sort of repress that, I think that I got very talented at repressing and dissociating from those desires that I now recognize that I had at age...6, or, you know, that I can think of. But that...really only still manifested in my teenage years in sexual ways, like it wasn't...I didn't think that I was girl throughout my teenage years.

Lewis: So what do you mean when you say that it manifested in sexual ways?

Peters: I looked at like... crossdresser porn, transvestite porn, I looked at forced femme porn from like a really young age. I went on, when we got AOL, I think I was in...8th grade when we got AOL at home, I went on and discovered all these transvestite chat rooms, and I would go there and I would say, you know, like CD age, obviously I wasn't whatever age, I really was 12. I was like. CD18 blonde blah blah blah and like chat with, either what was either older men or probably other thirteen-year-olds pretending to be older men, who knows. So, I had like this whole—I began to develop this whole online sexual life, as a girl that was really distinct and compartmentalized from the life that I lived offline. So like, you know, my earliest sexual experiences with other people were cybersex with... what were probably men on the internet or other crossdressers. Who knows...who knows who they were, but the fantasies were like, I was like a girl that they were...that they wanted, or sometimes it would be that I was a boy and they were going to teach me how to be a girl, you know, or force me to be a girl or something. That was early on, and then as like the internet evolved, technologically the opportunities to explore this in different ways also evolved, you know. I think..... You know, I was in college by the time there was... Facebook came out my first year in college, or at least was adopted my first year in college, and prior to that there were like Yahoo groups and there was like Yahoo groups for crossdressers that—I mean, there still are people who got on the internet at one point and they never really evolved, and so they're still on these Yahoo groups. Whereas nobody else in the world uses Yahoo groups.

Lewis: Do you know about—so this was like in high school during the early age of AOL. Do you know like around what year that would have been?

Peters: So that would have been...I mean, I probably got on AOL for the first time like when I was in 8th grade, which would have been—because I listening to Green Day, so it would have been like....

Lewis: '96.

Peters: Yeah, something like that...'90, '95, mid 90s...and...yeah, that's... I think—and I used to be...like I saw my first picture of a trans woman was like sent to me, over one of those chat engines, where you download and it's line by line by line, and it's like a slow revelation of a possibility that I couldn't...you know, it was like a trans lady with breast implants, and she was hard, it was like porn, but like... I sort of couldn't believe it, as it slowly, over a course of 10 minutes revealed itself line-by-line to me I was like, "what...?"

Lewis: Do you remember how you figured out that the internet was a resource for developing...I don't want to—I feel like identity might not exactly be the right word—but for sort of developing a sort of a culture and facet of your identity at least?

Peters: Yeah, I mean, I think that—I think that...so I discovered when I was—again—maybe 14 or 15, discovered trans erotica....and I think that the biggest archive of trans erotica is a thing called FictionMania, which... I mean...it's enormous, there's probably 20-25 thousand stories on it, all mostly... some were like forced feminization some were just like.... but they're all mostly like men being...transformed into ladies...and it was kind of revelatory because... at that—before I discovered that archive, I just sort of figured there were few lone freaks out there, and...when I discovered the archive, I was like, "there's like 25 thousand stories here, and I know that I haven't written any of the stories." So, you figure that there's at least 25,000 people but for every story... I know that I've read so many stories, so for every story there must be ...hundreds if not thousands of readers. Which means that there's actually...you know millions...of people who feel the way I do, and—and just sort of extrapolating from that, from this erotica thing, I just got a sense that there was a whole world of people out there; and I still actually think, that from the num—the amount of porn and erotica and various things that are consumed, the number of trans people and trans women out there, far...dwarf the number of people who actually transition, just based on interests that to me now point towards, you know, the possibility of my own transition, which isn't to say that they—I mean, I guess how you define a trans woman, whether there's like, there is an intrinsic proto-trans thing in people before they transition or not, is...theoretically open. But...at least you can say there's a lot of potential trans women out there in the world [laughter].

Lewis: Tell me a little bit more about the chat rooms and Yahoo groups, just sort of what they were like, what the protocols were, what kinds of—what the sort of norms of interaction were.

Peters: Yeah, I forgot what it is, but you know, you would sign on, and then...you'd have your profile name, your screen name, and...people would text you... I think it was like A,S...

Lewis: Like ASL?

Peters: Yeah. What was that, like age...?

Lewis. ASL, like age, sex, location.

Peters: Age, sex, location, yeah, they'd text you that, you'd say that... and then... but for the—for tra—for that weird little world of... early like defining... these ... categories, you could type in CD for cross dresser, you could type in—where it said sex, instead of just male or female, you'd type in "CD" or "TV" or... you know, rarely "TS" because no one actually believed that TSs would bother with the internet. If someone said they were TS I always thought they were lying. I was like, "no, a TS has better things to do. They can actually go live their lives, they don't have to be typing in that they're a TS on the internet." So you'd type in what you—what your sex was, and then usually you'd elaborate about your particular—and the pleasure of it actually was often in the elaboration of your imaginary or...intrinsic gender that had not yet manifested in life, you know so I was...I think I was CD, and then I sort of described...the...girl that I thought I would be if I was a girl, um... and that's who I interacted with. Like that's who I interacted with, and as you know, sort of like, a really early avatar for...I mean... And now I have actually no interest in avatars, and that feels incredibly alienating to me, but that was the way that I did it.

Lewis: And how central was sex to the exchanges?

Peters. Pretty central, a lot of times. Which is actually one of the reasons why I never thought I was a trans woman, is that...like early internet, there were sort of trans women's spaces. But that whole sort of like autogynephile, like if you were interested in sex, you're not really a woman. And the things that I was interested in were sex, so I just sort of didn't think...that these places weren't places to claim that you were a woman, based on—and if you ran into a trans woman, it—my assumption was that she would immediately, sort of like, point a finger at me and be like "you're not really a woman" and so... I sort of studiously avoided... trans women spaces, thinking that I'd be sort of shamed as like a gross man who, you know, wanted to just wear panties or whatever... so...uh, wait what was the question? [Laughter]

Lewis: I asked how central sex was.

Peters. Yeah, so central that I actually was a...was a.... A structural part of my identity. You were there to have sexual interactions, or to be affirmed sexually, and the gender, that distinction, that started coming about I think in the late 90s between sex and gender, did not sort of exist. Like, I was this gender, a CD, and that meant that I wanted this kind of sex.

Lewis: Mhm. And so, tell me if this is wrong, but if I'm understanding, it was sort of the idea that, like, part of your affinity for the gender was sexually driven, actually kind of disqualified that as a legit trans identity which is supposed to be not sexually motivated, or whatever.

Peters: Mhm. Yeah. I definitely, I mean...and that actually continued, I so—I so like. internalized that at a young age, that I was much older than... a lot of other people who didn't have interaction with that sort of crossdresser world, and I think that when they transition, and I think actually crossdressers spend a lot of—people who identified during that period as—as crossdressers... had a sort of self-reinforcing argument around that, and I still see crossdressers my age making arguments that I feel like were made in a vacuum in these sexual places in the 90s because they have—because they're so sure that they will be rejected elsewhere, that they've never actually...checked to see if they would be.

Lewis: I'm sorry, so what kinds of arguments?

Peters: That...the argument that if you're interested in sex you're not a woman.

Lewis: Oh, I see.

Peters: Like that was sort of a hermetically sealed truth in—in these—in the kind of world, and you were definitely into sex if you were there.

Lewis: Yeah. I see. Were there folks in the sort of online spaces that you had ongoing or sort of more significant relationships with?

Peters: Yeah, I think I had...I mean, I met the first person from online when I was like...seventeen or eighteen. I met a guy, who was like in his fifties, you know I went over to his house, he dressed me up...what we had wasn't exactly sex, but it was definitely sexual, um, I think he was a little.... I .... I don't think he knew my exact age, but I think he figured it out like looking at me, but also he was like... I think he was sort of in for a penny, in for a pound... this is a shameful thing that I'm doing, and so adding statutory rape to it, who cares, you know? Like the worst thing wouldn't be to be known as a statutory rapist, the worst thing is to be known as a transvestite. You know, it was...way worse to be a transvestite in some ways, in I think his own particular...matrix of shame.

Lewis: Did you meet a lot of people in real life, that you connected with on the internet?

Peters: I went in and out of it...and also, the places where you met people changed, you know? In ninety...in 96 you know, I would have gone on AOL, and there was like a whole protocol of meeting people from there, by 99 it was Yahoo messenger, and these Yahoo groups, and.. I mean, I sort of had like forays and I also was skittish, you know, I'd make plans, and then I'd back out, or I'd... I went to college at Hampshire, and there was a club for crossdressers in Boston named... Jacques, I think, like the french Jacques, and it's still around, I actually was in Boston a couple years ago, and walked by it and was like, "oh my god" but it was this place that was like... had

sort of like... totemic sort of thing, like if I actually ever go in there than I am one of these people, so it was like—as I was approaching it, and then not going, there'd be people being like, "let's meet at Jacques" or whatever, and I'd be like, I—you know, I think was like 19 I think at the time, and I was like, "I can't" and also I was living—I had this whole... I didn't have a car, and to explain to everyone why I was going to Boston, 'cause I wasn't—this wasn't an open part of my life, I was... a college kid with no money who was essentially trying to figure out how to fund two whole... sort of social worlds around this, like, if I wanted to go to Jaques I had to have a wardrobe, I had to have things to wear, I had to have vocation—like transportation... and at the same time, you know, I had to do—what I was, I was like a college kid with a girlfriend, you know, so if I had money, I was like, "let's go out for sushi" or something —

Lewis: Mhm.

Peters: "Let's make a spring trip break with my friends" or whatever, so...you know, when it came to actual like material life usually, my life as a college student won out over my life as a transvestite, but I definitely had sort of like the binges, where I'd like... would take, you know, take a bunch of money and buy stuff all at once... and I was look—I was usually looking for places like Jaques or like... these places where people congregated, cause I wanted to like, I had so much life online that I wanted to turn into like physical spaces... and I think my really.... and in some ways the interactions that I had with men, also felt like...like unreal spaces you know, I'd go to their house and... I would never see those men again, like I barely knew where they were, the—the... even though they weren't, even though they were, real spaces they had this sort of like... ineffable quality of the internet, like go to this apartment, and I... I have a hard time describing what the apartments I had been to at that time were, because they didn't exist in public, they didn't exist where anybody could see them, or where I could share or point to them as real places, so I think I was drawn to the places that might actually be semi-public, and in that world, be like semi-real.

Lewis: Mm. So most of your meetings were one-on-one situations just in someone's home?

Peters: Mmmhmm. exactly and then... I think that, I...there was like the glamour boutique that my third novella's based on, that was out in Auburn, Massachusetts and I went there, with one of the men that I met, that was a section in... in glamour Boutique that's based on roughly that trip to glamour Boutique, which, as it turns out, is a sponsor fictionmania that huge... archive of forced femme stories. So, we went there when I was... I don't remember, I was like 20, when I went to... the glamour Boutique, and there was a trans woman behind the counter and it was like very surprising for me to see her there, and I bought breast forms, I think, and some boots and then... you know, those were sort of cherished little items, that, where I was like, I was actually brave enough to go into this place and get them, and it sounds silly actually now that I know lots of trans women who were doing way more, when they were... at way younger ages, but I just... I didn't think I was a trans woman, so it was like, I thought there was zero legitimacy to anything I was doing...

Lewis: Mhm.



Peters: But yeah, I went to that place, that place was a place outside of the internet... and then I went to a place called... God I forgot what it was called, but it was on the southside of Chicago, Blue Island, it was Blue Island's like this industrial neighborhood on the southside of Chicago, and there was, there were like... in Chicago, when I would go home for the summer there were a couple of different like trans clubs where crossdressers would also go. One was Gato Negro, on the Northside, but I think that disappeared in like, I don't know, 2006 or something, but that was like, it was like, Latinas went there but they would sort of tolerate the occasional... it was mostly working girls who went there but sort of tolerate the occasional crossdresser showing up especially since crossdressers were like confused and probably actually wanted sex anyway and were easy, sometimes annoying clients, but like easy clients, so there was like this sort of—that was one place you could go... I forgot where the other one... but the... oh there was one in the suburbs.... I can't—this place was so important to me when I was younger and I forgot the name of it, but... that place they, that place was actually a gay club that the crossdressers sort of made their own, and the people who owned the gay club didn't... it was really downscale to have like, these middle-aged crossdressers showing up to their gay club, and so even though they spent money, they decided that they were going to like class up their place and just be like... you know, one of those.. It was cool to be gay at that point, so... we don't want these crossdressers there, so they started an ID policy that the—your appearance had to match the picture on your ID and....

Lewis: Do you remember around what year this would have been?

Peters: This would have been around 2004-2005, and that was like the big crisis of the crossdresser Chicago world at that time, is that that one place where you could go... didn't want you, and that whole ID policy was not something you know... like, and again actually that ID policy allowed for trans women, right? Because if you were trans woman, you look like the picture in your ID. It was crossdressers that they didn't want... and again that was like the difference between crossdressers and trans women that happened in a material way, socially... so, yeah, and then the place in Blue Island that was like a very industrial sort of working-class place and that was the first, the first place that I went, and probably because I thought I would not run into a lot of people that I knew, there.... And I was. and I was the youngest person in there by... 20 some odd years you know, um, so I started going out to places like that but always as...identified as a crossdresser, and I found this group of mostly middle-aged crossdressers and we sort of all reinforced for each other our crossdresser identity and that we weren't trans women, and that we did like girls, we also just had this other thing that we did and we knew it was sexual... but you know... sometimes you have to blow off some steam or whatever and very invested in keeping your life as it was.... And so we.... this world was, in a lot of ways, safe for me because I wasn't at that point, I had... a girlfriend who would later become my wife and you know, I didn't want to lose her I didn't think she would be particularly cool with this whole thing.. so...um... and I, yeah, I really loved her, I still love her, so it was really, really threatening to me, to be around people who were like... and the second this happened, actually the second that I ran into queers, is that they were immediately like, “oh, yeah, you’re not going to stay with her. That’s not going to work out” and... I didn't want to hear that, and these crossdressers also didn't want to hear it,

so we told each other things that we wanted to hear, which was that, “oh, yeah, you can do this and not lose anything.”

Lewis: Did that feel like a sort of satisfying or plausible way of organizing your life at the time?

Peters: I mean, I think that... if you go back to that thing that I talked about in my childhood that I knew very young that I... had these tendencies, but that I sort of began a process of repression and dissociation... the thing about dissociation is that there isn't feeling behind that so the question of whether or not it's satisfying or not satisfying isn't really accessible, it's just sort of like... there's nothing there, and so the question of whether or not, like, “is this satisfying?” wasn't one that I had the apparatus to actually answer, it just was, and in that it was so dissociated from the rest of my life... it was... until like later on, and I began sort of exploring it, it was very possible to live... successfully as a guy, and I underst—I almost studied sort of like masculine codes of behavior, like an alien would, or like Jane Goodall, something like this is what you do, and this is how you do it, like Jane Goodall with a gorilla, like as long as they don't notice that I'm not a gorilla, you know, and... this is great. I can do this, it's no problem. So, so the answer to that... that question ....is..... Is... if I could ask the question, I would have given you an answer that would have changed my life, but I was completely unable to ask that question that you just asked me.

Lewis: Makes sense, yeah. Can you describe a little bit, just the men you would hang out with in these circles? Were they also—like did they identify as men, identify as straight?

Peters: Yeah. They identified as straight, identified as men. They were... it was actually interesting, because I think when you think of white men, they were mostly white. There was an occasional person of color, there was like one black guy. I knew a black—I dated a black cop at that time, as a... he lived on the South Side, he was very into... like he went to a black fraternity, and was very into teaching his white crossdresser girlfriend Black Culture, but other than that, it was mostly white... white guys... and.... they were.... there were no super.... I ran into super rich crossdressers later on, but at that time I think I didn't know how to find super rich crossdressers because super rich crossdressers were much more protective and savvy about where they went, like you know, Caitlyn Jenner was I guess a crossdresser.. You know. she wouldn't have gone one of these clubs where she went—she would have been much more protective, so you know you had maybe a couple middle-class guys but you never had like really rich guys but you also had a lot of people who were like truckers and bikers, like just sort of people from... a lot of suburban people and like just kind of average, office park type jobs... and because a sort of code was that you were the person you presented at that night... the normal distinctions of class and culture that I think... would have kept these men apart we're not operative... like... so you'd have for instance, you'd have like a country club guy dressing... you know... like... I don't know how to say this that it's not offensive... but you know... it'd be the sort of like you know white trashy sort of look that he's fetishized, right... that like... I'm like a lot lizard or something tonight or you know, and... saying that to literally a trucker, you know, and the trucker's maybe done up with a boa... you know, whatever sort of people said they were that night, that's what they were. And, you could, no one's performance was so incredibly honed, right? So you could easily see through these performances, you could be like... you know, you are actually not an heiress, you know,

even though you're now dressed like one... you... I can tell from your accent that you're probably from Southern Wisconsin and your hands look like you do some sort of manual labor, you know, these things were very... there's still oil underneath your fingernails, that kind of thing, but... it was like a sort of... it was a sort of like agree to.... not necessarily call each other out in those ways.

Lewis: So there weren't norms around enforcing realness, or...?

Peters: No, definitely not, and you know, you had people who were like... at that time Britney Spears was big, and you had people who were like... 70 years old, probably wearing a wig backwards like... in...

Lewis: Baby One More Time?

Peters: In Baby One More Time and Baby One More Time outfits.... And.... and... you know... what's that, what's that... biblical phrase about dust in your eye when you have splinter... yeah, you know it's like, I'm not that 70 year old in a school girl outfit with a wig on backwards like... I guess I could call her out but... I'm dressed like... I'm dressing like... like.. Like a basically like my version of a quinceanera dress like who am I.. to ... to say, you know? And if I don't want to get called out, if I want this to feel good and be told that I'm pretty, then tell that 70 year old she's pretty and "cool outfit, where'd you get that?" It was a lot of discussion of where you got your clothes, and "how did do you do your makeup?" and "how did you put it on?" Nobody knew what they were doing, it's not like drag queens where there's a whole world of this, it was like people put on on makeup in ways that were like... the application had to be sort of self-explanatory by the literal way it was packaged. You knew how to put on mascara because you'd seen it in movies, and that's obviously where you hit the little brush on your eyelashes, clear from the tool how it's used, so things like that, you know, you can put on lipstick... you could maybe put on eyeliner, if you didn't try and do a wing or something like that. Eye shadow was right out, nobody could do eyeshadow, because... knowing where to put it and blend it, is a skill that like takes a lot of time to learn. Nobody could do their brows because nobody could actually pluck their brows for work reasons... you know, something like beard cover was quite sophisticated.. Um... I'd wear clip-on earrings, you know there was not, the level of sophistication with this stuff was very very basic....

Lewis: Did it feel like a supportive space?

Peters: I mean, there was a sort of like... it was a supportive space in that, like....in that....that a sort of mutual shame, it's like if you've both broken out of prison, you don't turn in the other one, you know, and you're going to support that other prisoner who's escaping... um...but you're not... but you're not necessarily always identified with... you know, you're like "well I didn't actually do anything to get in here." You know, there's a way in which... what you thought in your own head and what you said, was very different, because actually when you saw that 70 year old in the schoolgirl outfit you were horrified. You're like, is that me? Do I look like that? God I hope I don't look like that. This is so sad, why am I compelled to make myself look ridiculous.. And... and you also knew probably that that 70 year old was thinking the same thing about you, and

so... it would be incredibly painful if either of you were actually honest with each other. If you actually revealed the sort of depth of your disgust and hatred for each other... um... which again, all of this stuff was like really sublimated or like dissociated from, but you know, I knew that... that I found... that I found a lot of it tremendously sad ... um... and repellent at times and that ... it wasn't like a kind of repellent where you disidentify with somebody that.... that the way in which I found it repellent, was very painful if I thought about it, because it immediately like... doubled back upon myself.

Lewis: Did you get the sense that other people experienced this then?

Peters: Yeah, very.

Lewis: And when you're describing all these spaces, these kind of interactions are happening in bars or private...?

Peters: Yeah, bars.... but I mean, like the Blue Island Bar was a kind of gay bar that you don't see anymore, right? Like the windows were blacked out.... there was almost no signage for it... it was, you know, at the same time that in Chicago you had these tracks, like these three story huge ... um....Boys Town clubs that were neon-lit, you know, the most expensive clubs that you could possibly imagine. Like vibrantly open and gay. The places that I'm talking about... were tucked in and hidden and like... not evident as you had to find out about them from the internet, you never, that other one, you'd never walk into unless you knew it was there. It was like there wasn't even, there wasn't even residents surrounding it. It was on the South Side in an industrial industrial Island, you know? Um.... so the, they were bars but once you were in the bars they were... they had a quality of like, they had an other-dimensional quality.

Lewis: And it sounds like, aside for maybe sometimes looking for a brick and mortar sanctuary in gay bars, that there wasn't much interface socially or culturally with gay dude scenes.

Peters: No, no there wasn't.

Lewis: Was that sort of on your horizon at the time?

Peters: [sighs] Um... I mean I.... I knew. By the time I went to Hampshire, you know... Hampshire there actually was trans culture by the time I was there, there were like a bunch of trans guys, but again, there was only one trans woman the whole time I was there at Hampshire—

Lewis: Early 2000s?

Peters: Early 2000s, there was this trans girl, who... you know, now I guess she's brave and probably awesome and stuff, but at the time I was... this is gonna sound really shitty to say but whatever, I'll call myself out, you know, I wanted to be popular and date girls and be handsome and go to parties, and that girl was like... just played Dungeons and Dragons in some dorm somewhere, and wore cloaks and capes and like even now, I'm not really friends with girls like

that, you know? So like there ....was ...I can parse that better now but I wasn't... um.... there was no—I knew her like the whole time that I wanted to be... I didn't want to wear capes, I didn't want to be punk, I wanted to be pretty, I wanted to wear a nice pink dress, and that's not what that trans woman was doing, and again, seeing her was even still, like whatever this trans thing is, that's not what I've got going on. Like, every trans woman I knew in the early 2000s, wore black cut-off jeans and had tattoos and like.... and total disdain actually, for the ways that I wanted to dress and you know I had to...the disdain was mutual. Like if you read *Nevada*.... there's a section where ...uh... Imogen Binnie is—through the voice of Jane—is describing the embarrassing crossdressers and the detail that really hit me, was that the embarrassing crossdressers all had beige shoes, and I read that line, looked in my closet, and there's a pair of bright beige shoes, you know and now I'm like whatever, neutrals are really really good. You can wear neutrals with anything. But at the time, it was like, that's not what the cool punk trans girls wore, that's not how to be a trans girl, that's how to be an embarrassing crossdresser who like dresses like your mom. So, even though there was trans culture at Hampshire, and there were trans dudes, mid-transition I was friends with trans dudes who were like doing their final projects on their own top surgery, you know? I was.... I was friends with a person who.... I don't, know how they identify now but ....their final project was a documentary on their own top surgery. So I was like, I saw it, you know, and it was very like early 2000s, but I saw it, this stuff, and it was just basically like that's not... that's not me. That's not whatever I've got going on. And then, and... and I was pretty sure that if I did talk about it, everyone... and especially talked about forced femme stuff or the actual sex stuff I'm into, everyone would be like “you're like a fucked up misogynist”, you know, so... so yeah I didn't, I didn't... see that. And as far as gay men like I was friend with... I had a few sort of abortive gay hookups in college, and it was just like, this actually isn't what I want. Like this feels... this makes me feel more masculine than anything else I've done, and that's not what I'm looking for... and because I actually sort of tried it and was like, this does not make me feel, whatever this is, it's not what I get with these men in their apartments. I was never like, I might be gay or..... that might—that culture might have the answers for me.

Lewis: Could you talk a little bit more about sort of like the role and shape that sex took within the crossdressers scenes you were circulating in?

Peters: Um... yeah, so... can we pause this real fast?

Lewis: Alright, we're back.

Peters: Okay.

Lewis: So, yeah, sex in crossdressing scenes.

Peters: Okay so I think that the thing that you're directing me to, and which the thing I'm sort of again associated with, 'cause of that first novella, *The Masker*, is forced feminization in sissy culture. I've always liked the forced feminization stories which have a sort of narrative arc of like a young boy runs into a powerful person, and... that person forcibly changes their gender and that gender change usually culminates in like... the climax of the story is that.... the person who's been forced then like participates in a sexual act, and the story is... that's like the basic story, they

make it like extremely baroque... in the ways that they... like the different genres and the ways that it works, like are you changed through magic, are you changed through surgery, through hormones, through clothing, through, you know, all sorts of different ways that people do this, but the narrative structure of the stories are all almost the same. And I... and I think, I don't remember what it was, but it was like... and these existed before the internet, they were these magazines like *Forced Womanhood*, like there's these sort of 70s 80s 90s like underground circulated magazines that were this genre but when the internet came, and you didn't actually have to go to a sex store and shamefully buy them, they just exploded. And this was what I read and what a lot of the crossdressers I knew, read, although they didn't always admit to it. Because, I think also the humiliation played into this, that it was humiliating to become a girl and that the... that people were... both the humiliation was eroticized but also I think people were like... they loved women, like they both in terms of who they, who they were married to or dated, and also in that they wanted to be like women and the idea that like integral to the structure of the stories is that it's humiliating to become a woman. It was like a kind of cognitive dissonance that... I mean now, I don't have much problem explaining it, I think it's pretty standard for people to eroticize shame, um, and that... and... but at the time I had a hard time basically being like "am I a misogynist that I like these stories?" and I can't tell anybody who you know is, who had a good analysis of this, because telling them that I like these stories would immediately outs me as like having these fucked up ideas of women. But... at the same time that I thought this, and then I think... so there was this whole history of these magazines, and there was these sort of textual... erotica stories on the internet and then... you started getting—as images started existing more—you started getting these more what are called forced femme captions that were like pictures of... usually cis women, but the caption would be like, "she used to be a boy but then like she ran into the football team and look what they did to her", you know, whatever it is, or like, "she ran into a..." that was... they'd be like that one or it might be like, "ran into a magical fairy who you shouldn't have said something mean about women to", or you know, whatever it was... there were—these stories would have this like...would have this erotic story, the little erotic story, and then you'd have a visual image that you'd masturbate to.

Lewis: May I ask, was the sort of typical narrative arc, if there was one, is it one of sustained non-consent all the way through on the part of the sissy, or is there a part where it clicks over and the sissy becomes, or does it vary?

Peters: It varies. Almost always... almost always there's a moment of giving in, but like... I think what's important to some sort of psychology of the stories, is that you can give in but you're not responsible for giving in, and I think that's actually the appeal of them, is that you get to finally enjoy this thing, but it's not your fault.

Lewis: So it's like the evacuation of your agency?

Peters: Yeah, exactly. And that the moment sort of of the climax both sexually and narratively is that moment of like, here's this whole exercise was an exercise in making space for that moment, where you don't have any choice so you might as well enjoy it. And that also is like the ethos of crossdressers, right? Like, fuck I'm this way I might as well enjoy it, you know? It's got all this

baggage and after you are reading the story, you come and turn off the computer, you have this swelling of shame like “why did I jerk off to that?” and the same thing with cross-dressing like you know, get dressed up, maybe jerk off in your little outfit and then suddenly you’re... you're suddenly in the bathroom like, “why am I dressed this way? What is wrong with me?” ... you know, like all that stuff is built into the story in a certain way, so I think that there's a lot psychologically happening with these forced femme stories...

Lewis: Is the dominating party always a man?

Peters: I think actually, most popular is... is dom women, and I have like... I changed sexualities in my reading habits like halfway... halfway through... like I used to only—I used to be grossed out when the stories were about a man, I was like, I don't want to be dominated by a man. And then... I don't know, sometime midway through my teenage years I was like, I switched and suddenly the man had all the power and they could coerce and humiliate so well, that I liked the stories with the men and the stories with the women had to be written in a certain way that really tapped into sort of like... sort of performance anxiety around shame with women, for it to sort of like... have the same sort of punch as a... dominating man. And I still sort of think about how these two things, valences fluctuate in my own sexuality at different times with who I'm attracted to. I mean, I date men and women and I—I don't have a clear map of how I can figure out who I'm attracted to at what point, and the ways in which it all intersects with power, but you can find stories about all of these things. You can probably find a story where you're dominated by a plant if you looked hard enough. [laughter] But yeah...

Lewis: What was the relationship between the sort of forced femme print culture and actual social world where people were hanging out?

Peters: Oh yeah so... so this is what I was going to say with after you have like the sort of captions and stuff, what you started having, is that you had enough images, so initially it was all cis women because there just weren't enough images of like... it was either trans women or cis women, but you didn't have enough images of actual crossdressers out there to put these images on. But then, suddenly there became like around 2006-2007 enough images of—of cross-dressers that those images of cross-dressers began to circulate and you actually had... you began to have your own sort of crossdresser fashion evolving and crossdresser cultural... like... items. Things that like... and now you see crossdresser culture has actually crossed over like... let me—I'll... back up a little bit. But I'll say that like for instance, sissies. Sissies existed as a word but sissies as... as a specific cultural identity, and the clothing and look and affect that goes with sissies, you have now like, you type in “Sissy Tumblr” and just have pages and pages and pages of like, these Tumblrs full of images of sissies. And like initially in 2006, 2007, it was like these hyper femme... it was sort of like an overlap of trap culture also but trap was a little more identified with trans women, whereas sissies were... were... were definitely like boys, but they were the most feminine person, in any situation, like even if you were like—even if you had like... a dom woman and a sissy, the sissy's the most feminine... person even though they're also boy-identified. And I think that like... was a way of solving a lot of the cognitive dissonance of crossdresser stuff... and you had these sex items; when I said that like crossdresser culture stuff crossed over, is you had all

this fetishized sex items that were like very, like, sissy items... things like chastity cages and like where it's like this is how we're going to like solve the problem of the sissy having a dick, is like it's like actually really totally neutralized and caged... and like but also like very, very almost like hyper-present and pointed to, in the fact that like you put this—put this item on a sissy and it marks the sissy as both neutralized and a sissy... and it's also like around the dick, so it's like still... that's where like the potency still of the sex still it's not like sissies aren't looking for SRS you know, they're... or whatever you call it these days.. like GRS... who knows... [laughter] I just like dated myself with this conversation.

Lewis: I think I do that constantly. [laughter]

Peters: So, but anyway, like so that's sort of happening and I realized that I... looked like—at the time—I looked like a sissy in all the pictures, so I begin like dressing up taking pictures of myself and putting it on the internet; and I still have never had as many followers as a trans lady writer, as I did as a sissy. Like that was, if ever I had been famous, it was actually as like a sissy, you know, totally disconnected from my actual identity. I've mostly scrubbed all of that, but that was like... that—it was because I was so deeply like ensconced in crossdresser culture and I wasn't a trans lady and wasn't these crossdressers who were like me but also like—this sounds arrogant—but like a pretty little sissy, I could do that and ... and... I posted them in places where crossdressers went as opposed to like... trans women posted their stuff elsewhere like I posted them in Yahoo groups or like Flickr or places where, that's where the crossdressers congregated and so all these crossdressers began knowing me for my sissy pictures...

Lewis: May I ask to what extent was the cultural disconnect between crossdressing and trans generational, if at all?

Peters: I mean... I think that...that's—

Lewis: I mean, you were obviously young when you were doing it, but...

Peters: I think that, like... I mean, older generations than me, I think there's been lot of people trying to solve this, and I think that even up until the recent years the whole autogynephilia thing, I mean Medical DSM medical establishment, helped like fortify that wall, you know, and and it wasn't until transwomen themselves... began to be like “wait I'm a fuckin' trans woman and I looked at sissy porn when I was younger”. There had to be a whole sort of generation of people who liked this stuff who also transitioned who who could begin to like break this stuff down. If you were in the 90s you couldn't say that you liked you like this stuff as a transwoman, so there was no one, you could lose your hormones, there was no one to actually break it down and I actually look at like some stuff like Camp Trans in 2006, we had a bunch of trans women getting together and talking about what they liked and starting to create art about it, that... that I credit the beginnings of breaking down that wall. But now I think, so I think they're, the divide used to be stronger and it's dissipating generally, generationally, and you living in New York or on the coast, you could think that it just continues to dissipate generationally. But what I what happens now, I think, you know being from the Midwest having in lived in places like New Hampshire and



Iowa... I mean Chicago and the city is one thing, and suburbs is that that divide now exists regionally instead of generationally. If you've got, if you're like... a teenager or 20 something frat boy in Iowa and you like wearing panties, they're still exists like a whole world of cross-dressers to sort of support you. And there's this evolved trap porn to point to and... you can just like anime and you can just do all these different things to sort of also push it off, and so that divide... the lines I think have shifted and evolved, um, so that it looks not like what it was 20 years ago, but I think it's still exists.

Lewis: Can you tell me more about what was in your life as a sissy?

Peters: Okay sure, so yeah, so I started posting pictures and I started getting mostly like a certain amount of followers, you know I had like a Facebook page... I don't remember if there was a certain point where where I had too many—there's a limit of the number of friends you can have and then you become like, a personality or something. You have to create a page for yourself—it's not quite a celebrity but like I think you have a limit of 5000 friends—and I remember I hit that limit and suddenly I was like... not.... you know it wasn't friends anymore, you could subscribe to my Facebook page. And you know this is also like totally separated from like, I now know like massive amounts of trans pornstars my age, and they were doing something similar in a completely separated way from me. And like, the people who are signing up for me yes sometimes they had like jerked off to trans woman's pages, but like trans women, transwomen, this line, that I'm talking about made the identification of trans women really difficult; whereas I think the fact that I wasn't on hormones and then I lived as a guy, made it like possible for people who followed me to be like, "I could be like that too". And then in like 2008 or 2009 this porn company, like got in touch with me and they're like, "we want to like make a high production forced fem porn and we want you to be the Sissy in it." And... it was in Florida, and I think it was even like, now I've been to Kink.com and stuff, and on one hand it's like it was a lot more janky of a production than like the Armory at kink.com, but on the other hand, the actual amount of money they put into like making this movie, was really elaborate. Like, the guy who ran it was a sissy like who was like 6'8" and had all these feelings about his body, and that's kind of why he sort of began he, I think was like... I think he was like Special Forces or something and so...

Lewis: I'm sorry did you say the production company or can I ask?

Peters. I have a feeling I shouldn't say it, yeah because I'm sort of talking about the people behind it, but suffice to say it was in Fort Lauderdale and they actually hired, they hired, cis pornstars of a fairly decent reputé, to, who weren't actually Doms or vaguely Doms to force fem the sissies in the movies. And they did that specifically because most of the audience was heterosexual guys, so it was very exciting to see their... their cis porn... like hetero fixations suddenly in the world of sissies. So like what I went down, it was like, I've been offered porn subsequently what they offered me in 2009 is more than I've ever been offered since. And it was like, it was like a real film. They had a makeup lady, they had... these two women, they had costume changes, they had they had they built special sets for it. The plot was that I was like working at a company and my boss is a woman and she found out that I liked, she found my sissy porn on my work computer and then sissified me and made me into her secretary made... etcetera etcetera, and then I had

to like secure the company a lucrative contract by giving a client a blowjob at the end of it. So it had that same arc I'm talking about, throughout the various scenes of feminization. But they had multiple sets for it... and I think it was also because the guy who was ran it was a sissy, and he sort of fetishized making these highly feminized sets that we were on. But yeah, so that happened and that was actually, that was like a big deal for me because that was the first time I did anything with like a bunch of cis women who weren't into that scene, and it actually was like weirdly a step into my transition, because that whole three days that I was shooting that... I was, you know, I was still was living as a guy, I still didn't consider myself a guy, and I was sort of like, it was like—the women would sit around and get their makeup done or the makeup artist and I'd chat and then there would be like two guys who sort of crew and they would like move heavy things and my instincts were because I was living as a guy was that I should be helping move stuff and... and like participating I think that sitting with the cis woman to the side was... like that's not for me and,..., despite this whole fantasy thing. But I was included and it was like the first time that cis women had included me as like a woman... and like afterwards, they invited me out and like and I was so like one of the women she was like... she was known for her feet she was a foot fetish model, and like we went out drinking and it was —like even though I wasn't dressed up at that point, she still sort of talked to me as a girl and liked at one point she got really upset; she was like “that guy keeps checking out our feet” and like I think that's just what she saw as the sexualized part of her body, and who knows if that guy was checking her out, but she thought he was looking at her feet “he didn't even look at my face”[laughs] or whatever. That was actually really... it was actually like strangely the sort of epitome of my sissy persona and like,..... “fame” precipitated like basically being like what I want in this interaction isn't the sex or the forced fem or like the scene. I actually almost could take or leave the sex what, I wanted was to be included with cis women and I never had something like that before and it like sort of, ...yeah, it sort of like began the process of me being like “what the fuck is this sissy stuff? Do I really want it? What was the thing that was actually satisfying?”

Lewis: Did you have other sissy friends at the time?

Peters: I did but like I mean... one thing that's weird is I was like definitely like more, um dedicated sissy than most of the other people. Part of it was that I'd come out to my wife or then-girlfriend but later wife, and—she was working really hard to be supportive... was definitely confused. I think if I'd just come out of trans it would have been like easier, because there's a whole sort of like... while I think trans women have a really hard time in the world at that point in time there was a discourse that involved with a certain kind of respectability around transness. There's like zero respect involved with sissy fetish almost by design and so... it was hard for her to like orient herself around me, like my husbands not a woman, my husband's this like... really embarrassing other thing that... but that also allows me to keep my life.

Lewis: I want to move into sort of the rest of your life and... your... I guess sort of transition into trans or something... but... what was the question I was just going to ask?

Peters: Is it on your sheet?

Lewis: Oh yeah, I was going to ask sort of like in CD or sissy scene if there was a conscious connection or like awareness of like other kink cultures? Or was it kind of self-contained?

Peters: Uh, yeah a bit. I mean, mostly in that if you were attracted to women and you wanted someone to force fem you, you hired a Dom, and the Doms all did multiple things... and some Doms like sissies and some Doms found them whiny and annoying, and probably the more closeted you were the more sort of anxious, you had, anxious you were about this... and I think that Sissies both pay really well and are really nice, but also are really anxious about it, whereas a businessman just wants to be spanked and has basically come to terms with the like, that is less threatening to the rest of maybe his life, so I think some Doms like that being able to like nurture people through that and some doms are like, "this is so fucking annoying, I just want to hit you."

Lewis: [Laughter]

Peters: Sorry?

Lewis: So you were developing a sort of, like, sissy part of your life or whatever that was, you continued to keep that partitioned from the rest of your life and relationships?

Peters. Yeah, I mean at one point I came out to my, I came out to my, I came out to my girlfriend of the time. It was really bad; she cried a lot. I mean, she really loved me, and I really loved her... and so it took about a year, and it would be like, I would do things like I'm just gonna put on... a silk top around you or something, and see how you feel about it or whatever... and she never really liked it.

Lewis. This was after college at this point?

Peters: This was after college, yeah. But I met her in college, she was my college girlfriend...

Lewis. What did you do after college?

Peters: I worked for the newshour with Jim Lair, also not out at that point, that PBS news show, and then...

Lewis: So you lived...?

Peters: That was in DC, I lived in DC. And then I went to the writer's workshop after that, and I came out my first year at Iowa.

Lewis: Came out as...?

Peters: I came out to my girlfriend and but like also at that point I began meeting, I began meeting trans people. Like I went to IDA (Idyll Dandy Arts) and no I didn't go to IDA at that point, but I met people who went on to live at IDA, but again it was sort of similar thing, and I'm still really good

friends with a writer named Clutch Fleshman who's non-binary and... Clutch was sort of developing their gender..I Clutch was —Clutch was identified as gay at Iowa and sort of Clutch came into non-binaryness as I sort of, over the course of my time at Iowa, began to understand that like made this thing that I was doing was... trans and Clutch kept on being like "it's queer, you count as a queer", and I was like, "I don't count as a queer. " and Clutch was like "no, what you do is really queer it's like, you just put on a pink dress and fucked a man in his apartment that's fucking queer" and I was like "no..." [laughter]

Lewis: Was there a particular reason for your reticence around that?

Peters. Yeah, I think it was that... I thought of queers as like... it wasn't that I was like "I don't want to be queer," it was actually like sort of like liberal knee jerk, like—like I don't deserve to like to claim a marginalized status group thing where it was like real queers suffer and I'm just like I look like a fucking frat boy. You know, like, um... at that point in my life... I wore like, I was a little bit of a pretty boy, but I wore collared shirts and button downs...Like, Clutch would get called "faggot" on the street, nobody said shit to me. So it was like, Clutch being like... radical, saying like, "I'm a radical queer and this is the side of like why I need to rise up and protections..." and I would be like "the system's is kind of working for me" and like how can I claim this like oppression you know...?

Lewis: So you were working in news and then decided to go to Iowa?

Peters: For writing.

Lewis: For writing, and then to come out to your girlfriend?

Peters. Yeah and I actually came out, I wrote this essay in 2007 that ended up being published in 2012 on Gawker, even though by the time I was on Gawker I couldn't even stand by it anymore, but in 2007 right after I came out, I wrote this essay like... or came out to my, I don't know when I came out, but I came out so many times and so many different ways in increments but the essay was basically about coming out as like a crossdresser and like, maybe transgender and I like didn't know that much about it. I think that in the original it got published in 2007 and like a literary journal called Forth Genre, which is published in Michigan and it did okay. It was like I think it was included with notable best American essays that year, but also people didn't know what to make of it. It was just like "so, you wear heels on the weekend, that's fine, whatever". you know, who cares and... and that kind of like, that, except for the sissy stuff, that sort of also that happened to me, where it was like I came out and people were like "I don't have to see this, right?" and I was like "No..", and they'd be like "well fine that's okay do your thing." You know, so that also made me feel like what Clutch was going through and living the whole time didn't apply to me even though Clutch the whole time was like, "this applies to you, this applies to you" and I think for a lot of reasons, including largely in ways that I couldn't apprehend, also fear that like if what Clutch said was actually true, the all these coping mechanisms I have to make my life work especially with my straight, you know girlfriend, who I'd proposed to, were all going to come crashing down and I needed to like prop up all that all that stuff, at that time.

Lewis: At what point did you get married?

Peters: I got married in, so I came out in let's see, I came out in, we had a long engagement. I told her I was about... when I told her I was a cross-dresser in 2006... and then I proposed to her that winter, and I was sort of working out the cross-dressing stuff and I was like writing an essay about it like that whole time, and then we got married in 2009, and I also ended up living... one sort of caveat in this story, that is a sort of interesting tangent is I ended up living with her in... she got interested in... she was like, "I have to understand the person I love is transgender" and so she got interested in trans stuff but she's kind of, she couldn't make sense of it the sissy stuff, so she sort of ended up getting interested in female masculinities and we ended up living in... she got into a PhD program and we ended up living in Uganda during the time of the anti-homosexuality bill. So I was actually, I mean I obviously was like deep closeted myself at that time, but I ended up being around for things that are... like the sort of early birth of trans movement in Africa, I was there for like because of—the Uganda was like because the anti-homosexuality bill was like a focal point and sort of proxy war of the last round of the stuff so I ended up being like there not present obviously, but like and socially around when David Kato, who is like the gay man that was murdered in Uganda that was like flashpoint for homosexuality bill because people felt like he was the murder was incited by thinking that the homosexuality bill would protect him in the murder. I met a bunch of like, I mean again nobody had hormones there so it was, but I met like a bunch of trans people there and it always again probably because of fear, there was always a way for me to disidentify with trans people and that case it was like "well you all are Ugandan and have this circumstances and I don't see myself in it", even though they actually would often identify me as trans just from the way that I like talked about myself, definitely not from the way that I looked at the time. I mean I drove like a four-by-four, and was like.... I didn't hang out with expats but like definitely looked like scruffy weirdo at that time... Yeah anyway, so that happened in 2009 was sort of like this big short circuit in my like... the way that I was beginning to evolve in terms of trans, like going just like I didn't dress up, I didn't talk about being trans but like that whole time it—and also like all of that all the way does that that activism happened there was like a marriage so you could see there was like this calming about Uganda and the trans movement, there was a movie about it Call me Kitchu and that stuff there... and that there's what I actually saw and I probably shouldn't talk about it now because my opinions on what happened there probably not that useful for anybody... but enough to say that like I found a lot of it disillusioning and... and I ended up yeah, so just having to basically pretend to be a tough white guy in Uganda for a year,... both set everything back and maybe also triggered a bunch of things. Like I left Uganda before Olive left, she was when she was doing her stuff I came back here and like I immediately found like this woman that I would like to dress up with and have sex with, and I started fucking guys and was big into like dressing up as a girl, like living by myself while Olive was still there and like... and I went to Ida, I went to Idapalooza you know did molly with a bunch of queers and stuff and I think it was like the reaction of like not having all those coping mechanisms and props that I had, ways to prop me up and stuff that happened when I was in Uganda that sort of precipitated...

Lewis: And where did you move to when you moved back to the states?

Peters: I moved to Chicago for a year, and it was just a bizarre weird year. I was trying write a novel and finish a novel that I did and it never got published. And then I had an agent who wanted me to write about cross-dressing and I was trying to write about cross-dressing but there was like a fundamental flaw in my story about cross-dressing which is... I think I'm a woman, not a crossdresser and I kept running into that and I wasn't supposed to write about it so...so the... so I was in Chicago for a year and then I sort of got desperate and then I didn't know what else to do and like my marriage with Olive, it wasn't exactly falling apart but it was weird, like we did open it up because she was she was like I can't actually... I can't actually support you and like your sexual interest as a cross-dresser like trans or whatever the fuck you are, so like why don't you go find a friends or men who can do this for you? And I was like okay well like I've listened to Dan Savage and I know that if I get to do it, you should get to do it... and then she sort of she had boyfriends and stuff and I was extremely threatened I was like wait I thought I was the man in this house like why do you have all these men coming in here I mean now that's ridiculous to me obviously there was a reason she started looking for men but I thought she was like I thought she would like explore her bi side. I don't know what I thought but like. so... so things were like really weird. I got a fellowship to Dartmouth, I went to Dartmouth and... sometime in the in the fall or winter I went to a cross dressing convention in that area. It's called First Event, and it's one in which there are actually trans women, and there's some trans cross over to the First Event. Like, Kelli Dunham speaks there and it's... it's and I met these two like older trans women there, who I didn't think were very cool but like I came back to Dartmouth and I just like I kept thinking about these two trans women and I realize that I was.... like why am I obsessed with these to try as women that I don't think are very cool and I realized I was jealous, I'm like "I think I'm cool, but I didn't transition, and they're not cool but they did transition, how come they can do it and I can't?" I went to Dartmouth's health department, student health and was like "I want hormones" and Dartmouth, who has a reputation of being incredibly conservative and that's like a problem for them and they're like oh "wow a trans woman on campus, great," here are your hormones, and I got hormones within 2 days.

Lewis: And what year was that?

Peters. That was 2013.... either...no it was 2012.... Yeah and then I was just fucking crazy, like I started transitioning. I still thought I was like, I didn't think I was like transitioning to be a woman. I thought I was going to do some non-binary David Bowie thing and then I would like... be like my friend Clutch or something. Because Clutch was like...Clutch was on hormones for a long before I was, and Clutch had like never transition to be a woman and I was like "I'm on hormones, this feels good, don't have to blah blah blah," and but as soon as I was on hormones, it... I just started being like this is what I want I had like all that disassociation and shit that I had before, began to go away. I... I was obviously like doing all the things that trans women do during transition, like crying all the time...blah blah blah.. but and I was thinking that I would go on to get like a PhD because of the Dartmouth program Fellowship is like a leading to PhD there's like a deal with the Ivys.... I just like I was like everything I've done up till now is just stupid and I didn't know what to do ...yeah I mean this is pretty typical trans shit...but, I think I ran into Topsides books at that point, and I read them that summer and I just got obsessed. I was like.. I.. I always wanted to be

a writer.... I had this feeling reading those books that there were actually written for me whereas all the other trans stuff didn't feel like it was for me, like *Nevada* felt like it was for me, i think Athena's book felt like it was for me, sorry Cassey Plat is Athena.

Lewis. Can you describe a little what is topside is?

Peters: Oh Sure, so topside is a press that was run by Tom Lege, Julie Blair, Nick, originally out of Brooklyn. I think they started it in 2000 or 2011, no around before. They published a collection called "The Collection" of like trans writing and the idea was that the books, it's most books previous to that point, by trans people were sort of cis facing, they envisioned a cis audience, and sort of explained themselves to a cis audience. And what Tom, Riley and Julie said was that we wanted a book, we want stories that are by trans people, for trans people whereas the stories before sis people were 90% explanation 10% stories. If you're writing for trans people I can be a hundred percent story and on top of that if you're writing for Trans people you actually have to say something real because the shit that impresses cis people doesn't impress trans people, like they've already been through it, so you actually have to bring something. Like you have to bring an added thing, you have to like raise the bar if you're going to impress trans people with a trans story. So this book, collections by Imogen Binnie and she'd written a novel called *Nevada* that was really formative for a whole generation of trans women and I think it still is, continues to be formative it's like these micro generations get cut up so much but... she wrote this book that was like one of the first novels that felt like it was for trans women by trans women and in a way that like... Toni Morrison writes for black women and everybody else has to keep up, it was sort of that. She didn't slow down to explain anything and so and she also didn't feel like she had because the audience was trans women, she didn't have to hide things that trans women actually do like look at sissy porn, or like to wear panties or whatever it is the stuff that was like forbidden because autogynephilia, Ray Blanchard divide of the medical establishment. She sort of—and I'm sure there's others I could explain that but that's a whole tangent that I'm sure there's a ton of other interviews in this archive about. So she wrote about this stuff, it was like you know, I've been writing this thing about cross-dressing for this agent for such for a long time and it was like I read it and Imogen's thing and the same thing and I was like my metaphor was like if I was like a portrait painter off in the somewhere France like 1914 and suddenly came to Paris and there's cubism it was like "what the fuck, what the fuck is happening? Like, how come I didn't know about this? Can you do this can you get away with this?", you know? So I ....I it was like a really big deal for me... both artistically and in terms of like my identity and like I was in the midst of this messy transition and here was this like a book that talk to me like I was a trans woman and having somebody talk to me in that way like i as a trans woman was so powerful and suddenly I was like okay I'm a trans woman. I am a woman. Which is also like God dammit.... now I have to do this and also everything I did before is going to suck, also everything I did before it's a waste. Like this is the hardest thing I can be why did this have to happen you know. So I didn't go on to the PHD program. I ended up in like unsure of what to do with myself. Olive and I ended up in this empty house in Lake Placid that summer, it was the worst summer of my life because ... just like Olive was totally destabilized by my behavior. I met a.... meanwhile one of the guys who was a sissy this married guy like once I start transitioning he really started courting me like really hard, and I fell in love with him. He lived in Seattle and he came he flew me out to Seattle that summer

because Olive and I were so confused, while his wife was out of town and I... I took his wife's place for a little while. Like I slept in I slept on her side of the bed I wore her clothes like we went on walk with her dog, it is like, I mean it was like really fucked-up and morally not cool, but it basically just he was this handsome like CrossFit, successful real estate guy, in his late 30s who took me to fancy ass restaurants, you know, bought me clothes. If I needed something like go to the salon get pretty, we took little road trips and and so at the end of this summer I was like where should I go? And I wasn't like, I wasn't hiding this from Olive, Olive knew what I was doing and she also had boyfriends at the time. But I was like Seattle's amazing... and it was amazing because my experience in Seattle was being this handsome man's cis wife essentially... for like in this like fantasy state, out of time. So it's like I want to go to Seattle. and of course once I got there realize that I was a mistress, not an actual trans wife that could be added to somehow to his relationship and I was his mistress for another year actually... with increasingly traumatic results. But, right after I got up there and I was like doing this weird mistress thing that I was like you know living as a woman for first time... topside had a tour with Cybil and Athena who was touring for... Cybil for *Time Bomb* and Athena for *A Safe Girl to Love*... and I had like tweeted at them and I had written to Tom to order a copy and somehow he'd tasks me, "who are you?" or something like that and I told him, and then I wrote a fan letter to Imogen too that was incredibly embarrassing and like so glad she doesn't actually answer email. Especially now that I've subsequently met her and stuff but they were, Tom was like we're doing the tour and Tom was like, "why don't you come out and read with us?". and I was desperate they were the only trans people and I still had barely met any actual like transitioning trans people who I'd like connected with I've been to Iowa a few times but I mostly hung out with nonbinary trans but not trans women I guess I should say. I was afraid of the trans women actually, afraid that they would reject me, so much and... Anyway I read there, I read on the that reading that it was bad. Nobody liked what I had to say. It was like very clear that like what I had written about crossdressers was not cool and was weird and like... whatever but like the person who was both like skeptical and really into it was Tom and... we kept up like a little bit of a correspondence and then eventually we hooked up and... I sort of through Tom met everybody at topside and kind of got indoctrinated into that topside world. Even though I still didn't write anything on my own about trans stuff for like a year and a half.

Lewis: Was that the first time that you've been in a relationship with someone who is queer or identified as trans?

Peters: Yeah... yeah it was with Tom, which was I mean Tom was..., that was,... I don't know it was the deep end with Tom. Tom is someone who's been out as trans since he was 18, ran print website Pretty Queer had dated many trans women before he dated me, and in some ways it was really weird to date this person who had such like a history with trans women that as I was transitioning and dating him he could tell me what was going to happen to me... or like how was going to feel or how in two months I would be wrong about what I thought... or I would see that what I said was stupid and that was both infuriating and Incredibly seductive because it was, it would happen he'd be like "okay now in two months you're going to see that that's stupid in this way", and then sure enough in two months it would be like that's stupid in that way, and "fuck!" And, it was also a little bit destabilizing, because it meant that I began to rely on Tom's version of



the world than my confidence in my own, which was a problem for both Tom and I. So we had... we broke up with each other several times over the course of our relationship. Usually around the time of Tom telling me that something would happen. Basically I would be like "I want something," and he would be like "no you don't, and I know that you don't, you just don't know it yet," and... and that would infuriate me and he'd also be right. And it was that kind of power dynamic that was poison to us.

Lewis: That's always challenging. So you were sort of developing a kind of social world around trans, mainly through literary circles?

Peters: Yeah yeah and I mean Tom also sort of editing my work and Tom was the best editor that I ever had... and when I went to Iowa, which is the premier MFA program in the country, nobody edited my work as well as Tom did. When he wants to be he's ...the...one of the most brilliant editors I've ever had... and I think that anybody could ask for, and I think that that's he had a lot of ideas about what trans literature could do. That I think *Nevada* didn't just take-off just because it was a book that did the stuff, it took off because Tom understood how to publish it as a you know, as... with a trans press targeting trans people he published it under creative commons, he seeded it on Pirate Bay to get to trans women who are on the middle of nowhere who would never be... never go to a bookstore and pick up a trans book. He had ideas like...every other book before that had some sort of play on trans in the title. Even at the time *Nevada* came out, you had "Transparent". like haha a pun.. trans. And Tom was like basically like, if you're a closeted a trans woman trying to figure yourself out holding up a book that says Trans on the bus and... has like how I came to understand my gender as the subtext or a subtitle you're not going to pick up that book. You're not going to have it on your shelf. So if you want to like reach people, treat this book... like have a quality like other things Julie Blair did the cover and created really cool art for the cover. They chose the name *Navada* specifically because it had a certain kind of ambiguity to... it could be passed around and be this like sort of name with a certain amount of power but also... wasn't necessarily like obvious. It lent itself to things like memes for Trans, like "hey have you read Nevada?" it's become has a element of code and that question. "What do you mean have I read Nevada?" when you ask such a thing so he... he had a lot of... he had a lot of vision for how to make that happen and.. I was sort of part of Topside and in an editorial sense and kind of not. At the same time I was there... so basically...I had a year-and-a-half long distance relationship with him where I would come to New York occasionally I meet trans writers and then go back to Seattle. And then I was hanging out with like, mostly Ida adjacent queers in Seattle. They were the queers I had access to and knew, and slowly got to be known a little bit as a trans woman in Seattle. But... Olive went to, Olive got a job with the international Refugee no Oxfam during the Ebola outbreak, Is this interview really really long. Is it okay?

Lewis: [inaudible]

Peters: Ok, She got a job Oxfam and basically went to Liberia and Sierra-leone for nine months for medical anthropology with the Ebola outbreak or 2015, 2016... no 2014-2015 and, she'd be gone. It was supposed to be deployments for like 3 months but the outbreak was bad enough that it turned into deployments of 8 months... and you know when I left I think I still look like a

bit like a boy. She came back 8 months later and, I mean, she got off the plane and I had a bouquet of roses and I went to kiss her and she recoiled. You know, like there was just this strange woman trying to kiss her. And... she also just kind of completely shut down. She didn't want to be married to a woman and this was like at the thing I secretly knew, the whole time, that I wanted to be a crossdresser and maintain this... all the stuff that... I mean I remember I was furious at Tom early on because Tom was just like... he told me that the relationship... that he'd seen a million relationships like mine and they all failed, so like, stop doing this to try to be like do a poly thing where, I'd be married and see Tom on the side, it's pathetic and just like... just don't do it. And, which, both Olive and I were like fuck you you don't know us. So it was very upsetting to this couple of the year and a half that everything he said was right and... that I had made this decision to transition and had a lot of ramifications for her... and that task her to stay with a woman when she straight would be either... a life of misery for her with us living a huge lie would result in US breaking up. It felt like in a lot of ways at that moment felt like I use the word reckoning a lot at the time because... all of the everything that I had said the whole time that I was a cross-dresser, you know suddenly got reframed in that moment that I was doing that stuff so that I could have Olive. I use Olive and [inaudible] interchangeably she goes by both names. And suddenly I felt like that was credit that I borrowed like my entire twenties as a crossdresser and now there was a reckoning and I would have to pay it back. Like, I couldn't keep this thing that I borrowed money and a kind of credit as a man that I didn't actually have... and it was really hard because I wanted to I wanted to blame her on one hand and say, like you know, "if you love me you would stay with me, you'd love me as a woman", and on the other hand I sort of had to take responsibility for that and that I chose the word reckoning because reckoning has a certain sense of arithmetic to it, that there's just the natural logic to a reckoning and then on the other hand the whole point of a reckoning is that you can't give the reckoning to somebody else. It's the reckoning. Whoever has the reckoning, that's their reckoning. It's my reckoning and like, I had to take responsibility for it. And meanwhile like, the more I was, the longer I was with her the more she shut down. So I essentially, I wanted to stay with her, I was deeply deeply in love with her still and because of the conclusions I sort of drew from that reckoning I decided I had to divorce her. And she shut down at that point she didn't want to participate. So I kind of got divorced for both of us. Like I did the work for her side and for my side and you know I epilogue that little part of the story which is, she's married to she's married to she's in a long-term relationship with a man in Seattle who has 3 kids and is living... you know the life that you can expect us you know as a woman raising three kids. Which, she... I think, letting her go was the right thing to do but I still incredibly sad in some ways that person who's raising three kids with her isn't me. So, and when I left I didn't know what to do so I moved in with Tom here and.... at that time topside was a little more [inaudible].. they put out one more book. Um, but it was like starting to like fall apart for various reasons and... I was living with Tom but I started writing my own work and I.... I decided to take what I saw top side do and instead... So the problem with top side was that at that time there was only one trans press publishing and you had the phenomenon of people basically thinking that... but they kind of gatekeeping, that had, and was also happening in the rest of the world, was also happening with top side. There was a problem with the collection but most of the writers in that collection were white. It was owned, the press was run by you know a white guy. The published mostly trans women. And you sort of had this sense of a scarcity model that like, if there's a only one game in the town why... why is this guy running it. Or, you know, and that led

to like a lot of politics that I found really troubling in a lot of different ways. On one hand I agree, I agree with it with all that stuff, and Topside fell apart because it didn't expand to include other types of voices and relinquish the sort of centralized ownership that it ha. On the other hand, Topside worked because Tom put all of his time and energy into it and.... and that was that was a lesson for me. Was not... was it like the thing that's missing is tons and tons and time and energy. Not who has ownership or who gets published. Tom has an Adobe account and Create Space account that's it there's no press in his basement. You know I've seen this happen and and good marketing and good ideas... good ideas on how to reach trans people. So I was basically like... I want to write a book for sissies because sissies don't ever, they don't have any literature. Like if... if Imogen wrote the book for trans by trans women ...I'm the person to write a book for sissies by sissies and I know where to find sissies like in ways that nobody else does like I know... I know where to... no Publishing Company could find Sissy's as fast as I found Sissy's, and I could still find Sissie. So I did the stuff that I learned from Tom which was: I wrote the book, I published it on Create Space, I made it free to download, I charged eight bucks for hard copy and then I made a bunch of forced fem caption pictures starring myself... holding a masker and disseminated it on the sissy sites. So that, and this works, like this worked really slow actually. Because the sissies I'm sure weren't looking for literature, they were looking to jerk off on these sites, but it was sort of exciting in queer trans spaces that have done this for like 6 months or something like that and then I like publish a book and then we'd have to move really quickly and trans circles

Lewis: the sissy book was the Masker?

Peters: yeah the masker, but I shut down my website because I want to focus on this novel. I think I shut it down this spring, but up until this spring... all the other books that weren't sissy books I could basically see how people you know had a rough idea of how people found out about them and bought them. The sissy books I was still getting orders for, and it was completely of obscure to me how these people found them. And it was.... and I know that it was the forced fem caption pictures of myself as a sissy that were still getting disseminated that people would come across them and be like "What the fuck is this masker... this forced fem caption is weird, it's not working the way it's supposed to work", you know and people would repost it also on their sissy Tumblr sites, not really understanding what it was.... like this is sort of like and not that sexy GIF this is a trans girl, she's like dressed like a sissy, but she's holding a book over her crotch like... it's weird but whatever we need sissy so whatever repost. So yeah so that's why I started and then I began. I did more novels after that and more novels after that and that's where I am but the the emphasis for publishing it the way I do, was to decentralize what I saw as a flaw, or at least to not subject myself to the flaw I saw on Topside; and to the Topside people, even though I actually think that Topside was a very important force and was a lot of its behind disseminating a lot of ideas that changed how trans women often think about themselves and like... I don't know, I feel like this maybe arrogant to say, I feel like after I published the masker, you did see more sissies more sissy conversations in trans Twitter and stuff

Lewis: remind me what year the masker was published

Peters: 2016, it was around the spring of 2016

Lewis: Why'd you decide to go for an apocalypse nuevela for the second one?

Peters: That is... that has a lot to do with my personal life. it's that Tom.... Cat Fitzpatrick and Athena... who again Casey Platt is Athena's pen name. They put together a collection of speculative transfiction called *Meanwhile Elsewhere* and... *Infect your friends and loved ones*, that started off as a short story for that Topside collection. As I was finishing it I broke up with Tom and the idea of going to him as my editor as we were in the middle of like kind of a messy breakup just didn't seem like I a great idea. And by that time I'd already published the Masker and I was like really excited by this idea disseminating my own work and making it the length that I wanted, shaping it and choosing the cover. That's the one that had the cover with the pig. Full circle to the beginning of this interview. And it was also... so I had started writing for that and also was at the time that... you know like for most of my life I didn't know I was a trans woman and suddenly I was surrounded by trans women, and that book was a lot about how trans women are amazing to each other but also we can destroy each other. You know, which was not a possibility that occurred to me or I didn't know a lot of trans women that the book has... has t4t on its covered it's tattooed on the pig's face I have T4T on my foot, tattooed on my ankle and if I can do a digression on the history of this tattoo and how it ended up in the book is that... Clutch here's my version of T4T and I think there's a lot of different versions... T4T started out as as, on craigslist, a category you could look for and there's a history I think of trans women not finding other trans women attractive, mostly because of we have internalized a lot of trans misogyny and also that among trans women we're pretty mean to each other and if you were trans you could. for years, two trans women next to each other you could be clocked as trans. One girl who's like a little bit tall great; two girls that are little bit tall in a particular way, you're like "Hmmm, what's going on there?", but two trans girls hanging out with each other accept that there.... all the trans girls have this way of like looking at trans girls that date trans girls as kind of like consolation prize like if you couldn't get a real cis lover like you fucked another trans girl. There's a corollary of it in drag, this disgust around drag queens... Queens of Queens and stuff.... but anyway that's started to change more more trans lesbian relationships, but I ran into T4T because there was an orgy that Clutch was in with some other girls and there was a tattoo gun at that orgy and they were like T4T shouldn't be the stigmatize thing. We're fucking the hottest thing going and we should all just fuck each other all the time and so VV, VV Veronica from San Francisco who dated Sid Nova who's a writer and pornstar. VV tattooed on Clutch in the middle of that orgy and it's super messy T4T on Clutch's hip and Clutch tattooed VV back and then there were these two other girls. And one of them was for a while like a kind of "IT" girl model trans model, she's since stopped modeling. She got T4T tattoo'd between her boobs and that got in some like modeling pictures and the pictures were really sexy and so then other people started being like well what's this T4T, what's this all about. So that kind of happened in this like tangent for fashion that people saw T4T. Almost immediately after that orgy, VV came to Seattle was telling me what T4T and she was like "I want to like, this should be a thing." Like we should, if you have T4T you should share your hormones with each other, you love each other, you think like you're really hot, if a girl is T4T and you're T4T and she needs a couch you like put her up and VV had this whole ethos. I think she actually has an article written about it in Bitch magazine, that's

coming out soon. It's now summer of 2018, so look for that. But, so VV was like "girl, you got to get T4T", and because I'm like a soccer mom I was like "Girl I am not letting you near my skin with the tattoo gun VV". So she was like "Fine, we'll go get this tattoo", I was going to say Salon but what are they called? Parlors? Salon... and she's like "well, guess it can still count if I'm there, and it's like I'm giving it to you". So, VV gave me the T4T, and I was really into the T4T idea, like for a while, until ... at the time that I started writing I had that tattoo for probably a year or so before I started writing *infect your friends and loved ones*, at least before I published it. But, the... what ended up happening was I saw, I began to see, that when trans girls only hung out with other trans girls there was a, it's sort of like... Insurance pools, like everybody is high risk in that insurance pool then that insurance pool can fail. Which is the most lame capitalist analogies I realize that's for this radical trans love thing. But it started happening, and I don't just mean for material resources, you know, for emotional resources. You know, if I actually gave my couch to every girl, trans girl who needed a couch I'd be running a couch hostel,

\*vacuum turns on\*

Peters: like is that okay

Lewis: yeah that's okay

Peters: Alright, so and more importantly I think that my couch hostile, or emotional things, there is there's a way in which trauma can also be spread inside of groups of people, or at least this I've witnessed, I can't say definitively, but you know if one person is really traumatized by a micro aggression—that maybe wouldn't bother another person—when you are with that person always traumatized by that microaggression enough, eventually you are traumatized by that what's going to happen when that microaggression happens, and suddenly then you are traumatized by that microaggression and then you talk to somebody else who's traumatized by this microaggression. So you have these houses of trans girls, who would sort of kind of like to convince each other that they were the only ones in the world who could understand or be kind to each other. And they'd end up sort of living isolation traumatizing and retraumatizing each other and... slowly growing to completely hate the world. And that this was the flip side to that T4T that I was really into. So the... so I wrote *Infect your friends and loved ones* it's about trans women who like love each other but also like kind of destroying the world.... in a certain way. And there's like some possibility for redemption, that they're... the the destruction comes out kind of both that hope and trauma that we circle it amongst each other. So, but in that that was probably the most popular novela that I had. And T4T was like something that the girls who did this all had that tattoo. So then what ended up happening was people that read the book that all started getting that tattoo and in some ways the complexity and the ambivalence I have around the tattoo didn't get picked up with the ambivalence what's in the book and other people got mad at me. And took other people got mad at me in there like you took this T4T and you made it like your symbol. I.... I don't want the book I don't want the symbol I wrote entire book kind of talking about my ambivalence of the symbol. I guess, I mean... I still get like people still get T4T tattoos they'll like tag me in their T4T tattoos. And I'm totally like, on one hand, whatever, I don't own that symbol, like that's the thing it's not mine, it's me commenting on this like symbol that's

disseminated in in the world and I have an ambivalent commentary on it. And on the other hand I am associated with it I and I don't exactly know what to do with it this ambivalent association with the T4T. I mean you know what I saw yesterday is that.. oh shit... I should have probably voted for him today... this the guy who's running the progressive guy who's running for house with trans as part of his campaign what's today's date

Lewis: the 26th

Peters: shit yeah today I forgot to vote for but he has to trans girls as part of his campaign and they he tweeted something he's a cis politician and he tweeted about [inaudible] and the hashtag was T4T and I just don't know what to make of a cis politician running for congress tweeting T4T hashtags. You know, given where we're at I think it came from I think it means how did it how did it circulate to this place that it's now just so generic we support trans like...

Lewis: this sort of like affirmation

Peters: yes order of the hashtags were just kind of like T4T and trans lives matter I'm sure both of those really meaning not for this this I'm all for that that Progressive guy who's who wants the support [inaudible] that's that's not... that's not exactly right so... that's the... that's how the post-apocalyptic novel came to be.

Lewis: I want touchdown the stuff that you've been making more recently, but I'm also curious because I'm sort of traveling... going through... Ida has cropped up I was wondering if you could describe Ida or your other travels through elsewhere in the country?

Peters: Yeah, I'll probably make this thing on Ida sort of brief, because I don't feel like I'm the right person to talk about it but Ida, as I never lived there and I was never actually involved in any... I know a lot of Ida people, but I never had deep stakes and Ida and I think there's a number of people... you should do one of these interviews with Clutch because Clutch was at the heart of Ida... sort of transformed. But briefly, Ida is a intentional community in Tennessee, it's about 20 years old, that is near Short Mountain which is the Radical Prairie Preserve there. And there's a couple intentional communities that sort of cropped up around Short Mountain with different groups of people who were interested in what Radical Faeries were doing and the possibility of being gay in ways that are just urban gay life... but so for instance there's where does a dyke fit in in a radical Faerie Community? It's like, it doesn't, it's not the greatest fit. So... IDA started out as... it's actually a guy named Phil who was going for Short Mountain, and try to start his own for gay men and somehow ended up with like a bunch of mostly working-class Dykes who were living on that land and a community and as 2000s, and a lot of dykes started transitioning, there were a lot of trans men on the land that was mainly dykes before. But, it was mostly working class and and largely Southern, you know there were some overlap, it also had a sort of crusty vibe to it. It definitely wasn't very hippie, it was like crusty people rode trains.. it had a a very punk vibe and... and then when there were trans women there other trans people began to

\*phone starts vibrating\*

move to that land and Clutch was one of them. There was Eliza, there was the two fairies that had been there for a while, and also we're sort of gender non-conforming one could say. And then there was... the way that Ida paid for the mortgage, was every year they threw a festival called Idapalooza. Which is a music festival, but also people go there and take a bunch of drugs there was a playground that there was a lot of BDSM stuff to play around with and you could tie people up, whip them and he could go to the southern area that was called the [Inaudible] and take a bunch of drugs and just like fucking get crazy. It had a reputation like there's Ida but there's also this wild party Idapalooza that was like super queer, all sorts of bodies, music... it was sort of...actually Idapalooza was run by a person named Cassidy who had organized the Michigan Women's Festival... Cassidy had helped organize it, was second. Basically Cassidy was not really down with the ban on trans women in the Music Festival, was kind of like "there's a ton of institutional knowledge here that's just important and we should be capturing this institutional knowledge. This is how you run a festival. This is how you create community through festival. This is how you feed all those people. This is how..." this is the knowledge that's important and so Cassidy... Cassidy learned most of the Idapalooza knowledge from Michigan's women Festival ...a couple people in Brooklyn Allison, Anna also worked with the Michigan Women's Festival and learned I don't know exactly what she did with that knowledge but she took that knowledge back to Ida and it became how Idapalooza was run for a little while. I was even there when everybody who was there was angry at the Michigan Women's Festival, it was the thing that made Idapalooza possible, was the women's Michigan Women's Festival. So, I mean there was probably some crossover with Camp Trans, which was a protest of the Michigan Women's Festival. I think historically the festival and their ban on trans women influence the way that Idapalooza... well Camp Trans and Idapalooza happened. But, Clutch moved to Idapalooza in in 2009 and I was scared of Idapalooza, because that's where all the queers go crazy, and I was just like.... I'm some guy whatever... and I don't belong there. But, I started going there and got to hang out and watch Clutch build a cabin and building that cabin is actually chronicled in their first book which is an extended prose poem essay thing called this is Syzygy, Beauty... they built a cabin on Ida and I started going down to stay in the cabin and met like a lot of different queers, including some trans women and again, they were very Punk trans women which wasn't what I wanted being in the crossdresser world. But it sort of gave me a different lens of ways on seeing those things, so I went Idapalooza was terrified, also did drugs, it was fun

Lewis: terrified of all the drugs and...

Peters: Just terrified by the gender... it was like... it it wasn't I mean it wasn't like... I'd done plenty of drugs before that... it wasn't like oh my gosh drug...s it was sort of like... if all these people can do this, the ways in which I'm holding back my world work, if I believe in this it will start a fractured and I was terrified and not in a, "oh my gosh, these people are spanking each other" or whipping each other or whatever they're doing... it was like it was like.... What if I'm one of these people and everything I've done is wrong you know. It turns out I am sort of one of those people and everything I've done is wrong, [laughs] but so...then I became friends with VV because we got the t4t tattoo... VV moved there. I think in 2016 there was a big change in Ida which we'll still see how it happens. It's a result of that Idapalooza for a long time, was working class white and

POC people came and were.... they didn't feel comfortable there there were a lot of things where stereotypically stupid cliched stuff would happen where people would like, on drugs, touch black peoples hair, just shit that was like not comfortable. And so they brought in the [inaudible] project I think it's called for a while to like begin to sort of talk about race and gender. Things like consent, which you'd think queers would know a lot about, but it was actually quite upsetting to a lot of people. You had a space that white people couldn't go and there were a lot of white people that were like "I thought this was like a free whatever festival, how come we can't go back here?" and then there were the people that Ida and the people who were residents were often like super stressed out because they were trying to make this place like better racially and it was going to like... when some stupid white person was gonna something really fucked up.... and all the work it would require etc etc.... the same stuff that I think happened throughout a lot of queer institutions over the last 5-6 years... but what ended up happening in 2016 is that basically... a lot of the residents who were there before were like okay, actually the way that should happen is that this should be a space for trans women and POC and so...many of the residents who lived there for a while moved out now. It's kind of a new moment where it's... where it is the residence that look different and are running things... this is my first year that I didn't go to Idapalooza in a while. I thought I was going to get surgery and that didn't happen, but so, I couldn't tell you how it's going, there's probably other people that are qualified to. But I think it's interesting, because I can speak for conversations with like people like Clutch, where clutch was like the way that people could survive there before, was they were kind of white working-class and so they could they could kind of have jobs there. If they're like non passing trans or your POC in Tennessee the reliance on the community is going to be much much higher, so like the question of whether or not everybody else.... and meanwhile the community around there has expanded because a lot of people got older and they didn't want to live on a collective, so they bought houses and like you know there's like 300 some odd properties that are queer in that corner that little area of Tennessee. But the question is whether or not a place like Ida can actually support the community the lives of people who can't necessarily integrate into.... or comfortably integrate into the local economy. And Clutch said basically, that it's... I was like I was like "it would suck if Ida fails" and Clutch kind of brought me up short a little bit and was like "if Ida is an institution that can't exist without, you know, with trans and queer people on the land then maybe it's time for that Institution to fail." Which is both like upsetting to me like and I think the correct...the correct take on it. So this being 2018 it'll be interesting to see whether or not it can transform that way, and I should say that I think I had a caveat early on, that I... that I watch this through the lives of people I care about and it's not actually my life and I hope in this oral history that other people who can talk about it in a much less sort of distanced way then I can feel qualified to

Lewis: I'm going to continue to meander about here, but you also in recent years ride motorcycles...

Peters: I do you're a motorcyclist also

Lewis: how long have you been riding a motorcycle?



Peters: I had a motorcycle in college bought one on eBay

Lewis: oh okay

Peters: and then I never had a license or insurance so, I was always just kind of driving around illegally. I was actually...

Lewis: A dirt bike or something?

Peters: No, it was actually a big ass shaft driven 650 that I bought on... was like a Yamaha and then I had a Suzuki GS 650. Both 80s shaft drive motorcycles, but I never had insurance for them. I never had a license for them, so I was just in Western Massachusetts driving on back roads and stuff and then when they broke—I couldn't even—it was always a shame to bring them into the shop. So I just kind of rode them both. They cost me about five or six hundred dollars each, these 80s bikes in the early 2000s. I just rode them until they broke and then I kind of couldn't do anything about them because I was afraid to bring them to anybody and get in trouble for the insurance. I mean now I know that motorcycle guys don't care...

Lewis: about your insurance [laughter]

Peters: Felt like I was 18 and terrified. So I learned how to ride, I bought that first motorcycle from a cop. Like, I couldn't believe it when I showed up and he was cop and he was like “you know how to ride?” and I was like “yeah” and he was like “well I'm just going to wheel this to the driveway and take the cash and after that it's up to you. I'm going to turn my back and go inside.” so I kind of taught myself how to ride, because someone had explained to me that conceptually. I dropped it once that morning, at a low speed, and stalled it a bunch of times, but I ended up taking it home on the freeway that morning. The morning that—I had never been on a motorcycle.. and I was on a freeway two hours later, and when that bike broke it became like a project somewhere, for some Hampshire hippie artist, was like “can I have your broken bike” and showed up in like some installation somewhere. Then I didn't ride for a while, but when I was in Uganda I saw a KLR 650 —when I was in Uganda I had a diesel, an 89 diesel [inaudible] so I can go out of the city, I mean it's beautiful there and see animals or whatever. I could take like, by myself, I could take what would cost other people like \$10,000 Safari just with that old ass—it was a really tough old like 4x 4 jeep thing. But the thing that was really tough was—so I could go a lot of places out there but people with these KLR 650, these single cylinder, dual sport Adventure bikes that are pretty cheap and pretty bulletproof and I just thought they were the coolest thing. And there were like—but also they were extremely masculine. Everybody who had these bikes was really really masculine. And, I didn't really think about it but then I... We moved to New York and I was living you know, by myself I was trans I felt extremely meek. I didn't used to justify for for people on the street and like not I don't want to get harassed, I don't want to get bothered. I didn't want guys to notice me, because if they hit on me it's like a pain in the ass. I just—I just didn't feel like I was engaging with the world with any sort of ferocity I guess and I remember these bikes as just being the toughest thing going and I was like well, why can't I just like why the toughest thing going, while I'm in Brooklyn. So I went to the dealer on Staten Island,

I had written in like years, a decade or so, and I bought a KLR 650 and drove that home on the horizontal bridge and that was like—I painted it. A lot of people always thought it was my boyfriend's bike. I always get that—a lot of people—I mean even just the other day someone shouted at me “do you ride or did you just get that?”, and it's like who—why would you shout—would you shout did you just get that to a Harley guy or something? No you wouldn't, that's a bad idea so I painted it pink because it was a super tough bike and I wanted to be like no this is a girl's bike and... and it kind of came with my signature thing for a little bit. Torrey on this big pink bike, and I'll take it out sometimes and drive it. It got stolen on Valentine's Day this year, so I got a—when the insurance money came in, I got a—it actually doesn't make sense to have a bike that big and rugged in Brooklyn. If you had up north great but otherwise it's kind of overkill it's just not the right bike for a street, honestly. It's the right bike for Uganda, but the—so when they insurance money came in I got a Yamaha FCS7 and I just painted it pink again, so I'm back in the game.

Lewis: A helmet too?

Peters: My helmet's pink to

Lewis: To ask the kind of on the nose question what's your experience being trans wman in the world of motorcycling?

Peters: It's been... I took a trip last... The thing is largely the trans stuff doesn't factor in because I think most people are just surprised by a woman on a motorcycle and that scrambles gender stuff enough that they're like—they're like that's what's weird that's going on is that there's a woman on a motorcycle. The added things of trans doesn't occur to most people and also I mean like—I think when I'm—like I drove down the Blue Ridge Parkway, that's Appalachia so I wasn't like —I didn't stick like a trans flag or anything on it, it wasn't something I would broadcast. So mostly it's just experience of women on a motorcycle, there's like a little bit of trans stuff in that like, it sometimes fucks with my own perception of gender, because it feels, because it's considered such a masculine thing that—it's not exactly dysphoria —it's like my own gender presentation gets thrown off a little bit by it. Sometimes I feel like I'm sort of butching it up to fit the bike and other times I feel like I can be overly femmed to compensate for that bike and the clothing that's motorcycle clothing is like highly gendered and a strange version of fashion and functionality that like it kind of works on like—it kind of works for a masculine aesthetic or one grafted or that aesthetic grafted onto like women's fashion is also really confusing. So that like you know just like you have things like giant shoulder pads or talk about how you can just take a crash no problem. It's always like masculine things on masculine symbols, which I think most people are so preoccupied about the particularly gendering of the symbols but when you're trans it's all you think about. So you know, I'm constantly now getting the way that that bike messes with my gender. Also it's different, that bike is —when I'm doing like a road trip on that bike by myself and I'm like around... Lots of dude bikers will come and talk to me while I'm on that bike and I'm modulating my gender presentation for them and then also when I'm around queers and I don't want them to see the bike it's a set of different presentation for them. It's at times annoying and at times very... like makes me aware of gender in like hyper clear ways that I often

haven't even thought about since transitioning. Things like how am I sitting on this motorcycle become like my posture. I become self-conscious about them or aware of them in ways that I hadn't in ways that I wasn't self-conscious since early in transition and—and on one hand that's really annoying and another hand it feels good to sort of like not ossify into a gender comfort

Lewis: There's probably a lot of material we haven't covered but I also want to be mindful of time

Peters: Yeah, this is a pleasure...

Lewis: Do you have...

Peters: I feel like I'm growing less and less articulate as the time goes on...

Lewis: Are there major things that we haven't hit on yet? I wanted to ask you at least briefly about your current work is there anything else that we've omitted?

Peters: No I think that's about it. It's pretty comprehensive view of my life as trans; actually probably more comprehensive than I've ever said in one sitting before, I prefer to I prefer to keep an air of mystery and you've really kind of destroyed it by connecting it all. You know—you can sort of create a mystery by having a transition in your life or trans at least in the way I transition. Which is somewhat non-standard people just know certain sections of your life and you can sort of cloak the others or—or say things more glamorous than is the reality I mean like I've lived three lives now [laughing] You know like—like that if you actually laid out and see the progression it's like no you didn't, you were confused the entire time.

Lewis: do you want to comment at least briefly on what you have going on now

Peters: Sure, I'm writing a novel called *Detransition Baby* which is about detransition and my occasional urges to detransition. Not because I don't think I'm a woman, it's more because I think it's hard to be a trans woman and sometimes I feel like “oh I think I've learned everything I need to know from this little experiment and I want to detransition.” But I know it's not really a little experiment, it's my life—and so I'm drawn some ways to that. And the other way that I'm drawn is to motherhood, which is less about children than it is about wanting the sort of comfort of of a cis lifestyle. The affirmation of a cis lifestyle in the way that I'm jealous of moms that I meet, not because I want their kids, but because the way I think the world treats them as—there's a certain place in womanhood for mothers that that feels very securely on the feminine side and that I feel like I'll never quite get to and that... Anyhow I think it's an illusion I think that things are extremely hard for mothers to but and a sort of grass is greener sort of looking in to the house from my nose pressed against the window that looks like a place where I might finally get to relax. And I'm envious conflicted and just as I did with my feelings about trans women and t4t and my feelings about sissy stuff; one of the ways that I'm kind of working out is writing. So this is—this is sort of like a book about the rest of my life. Like you transition that's a big decision and then it's sort of like well how do you live as a trans woman and there's a lot of books about transition but there's very few books on how to live... and I think again my urge to detransition, there's no

models for me how to live. Like there's very few trans woman have lived full lives in the kind of situations that are available for trans women. So, to me, my generation and so I don't have role models and I don't know how to do it and nobody knows how to do it. We're kind of inventing what it means to live a life as an out trans woman amongst other trans women in trans culture at this particular point. The to the model of cis womanhood, you know you look at Sex in the City and they're at a similar point in their life is me. They're like, we partied too much in our twenties and now what do we do and like the answer is like "get married, have a kid". You know, be successful as a—be crazy successful have money and if those are the models of womanhood that popular culture offers... I mean even Miranda who's like the most gender non-conforming ends up with like Steven. I mean that's like the worst option honestly.

Lewis: And they moved to Brooklyn.

Peters: and they moved to Brooklyn. None of those are really applicable to a trans woman in her 30s trying to figure out what the fuck to do with the rest of her life. So I'm playing out scenarios in this book.

Lewis: Is there something in particular that you want readers to take away from your work?

Peters: There's a lot of things I think that—I think that the—I said the I said the word reckoning earlier and I think that, I transitioned later and a lot of my life. And a lot of things I did had to do with not wanting a reckoning. Wanting to just continue with the things as they were, not having to make a stand to make a decision, and I think that the most of the things—most of the subjects that I've written about—are actually reckonings. The reckoning that mattered to me, they seem to also matter to my readers and sometimes the reckonings aren't... you don't see them through they're setting up the situation for which there is a reckoning and you're going to have to make a choice and usually the worst choices to try to put off the reckoning. My current reckoning is like the fact that I've got into the far side of transition and there's—probably for a while now—I mean there's no... I wanted to Coast. I was like "I did it", you know this.. was like this whole story I went through all those things to get this place and I'm like what the fuck now. And probably is going to involve a bunch of more hard choices and involve giving up more things and becoming okay with losing more stuff and that's—that's hard that's actually I think the underlying—the underlying conflict and most of what I've written

Lewis: This will probably be my last question, but is there an element of your writing either in the past or stuff you're working on now this year especially pleased or proud about?

Peters: I mean kind, of to do with *The Reckoning*, the characters are largely based on me. This book has more variety and the other ones have been first person and pretty much just based on me, taken from things for my life. This current one is third person so there's more pride of the characters, but a lot of it is still me, and I think that if you like my writing like that Gawker article I always wanted to portray myself as heroic. It's very, very tempting to be the hero of your own story and I think that largely when you hear your own story it's a lie and that it doesn't resonate with people. But, it also really sucks to make yourself the bitch or the villain over and over and

I'm proud and I think I succeeded when I go—and it's not there's definitely a ton of ego in my own writing. But in order to believe that somebody else should read your ideas and take time out of your life to hear the equivalent a monologue of your voice and their head for like hours at a time is an active incredible ego. But, there are occasional moments in my writing when I think I've gotten over my own ego and said something that's like true or real. All of the postmodern caveats of life and truth—where it's it's finally not my ego speaking and that feels like an artistic accomplishment. Especially given a life that's full of deceptions to feed my ego

Lewis: Thank you so much for all your time

Peters: Thanks for caring.