

NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

ZENO PETERSON

Interviewer: Aviva Silverman

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Location of Interview: Zeno's apartment in Harlem

Transcribed by Maria Yuquilima

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Aviva Silverman: Hi my name is Aviva and I will be having a conversation with Zeno for the New York City Trans Oral History project in collaboration with the New York Public Library Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It's May 28, 2019, and this is being recorded at Zeno's Apartment in Harlem. Hey!

Zeno Peterson: Hey!

Silverman: Okay go ahead.

Peterson: Alright, my name is Zeno and I have prepared for you all a little rap. That as I say encapsulates my essence. It's intense. [begins rap] 'I am the benign ghost behind every guy post designed in guy clothes or a rhizome comprised of rhinestones, crying in tried tones the limestone thickness of my abysses invictus. I got through with the sickness, just to exist in rickness. And the parapraxis that I practice is a tactic of my blackness. The backward apparatus of my madness, if you seem the crystal lattice in balance on the event horizon you've seen the Magi leading me on a zentonion. I am making eyes with the end and relenting instead of crying. I am getting relentless sigh and antediluvian, proof that Judas was new being skipping school with the hooligans up in Jerusalem.' That's it.

Silverman: That was great.

Peterson: Thanks!

Silverman: So, because of your lyricism, I was wondering some people talk about 'writing from the wound' and I was wanting to know what experiences you draw from when you write.

Peterson: Yeah, that something, honestly, writing from the wound I don't remember where I learned this word, but it's 'descarga'. And its discharge, in Spanish. And it—I don't remember where I learned that, but it was talking about basically, that writing from the wound and there was also this thing that I think was called the 'diascene' or 'diasense' or something like that. That meant this wound a festering wound or something like that. I try really hard not to always write from a place of pain or a place of hurt or a place of woundedness, but those are the most potent moments it seems, so I definitely tend to write from moments that are wounded for sure.

Silverman: And are you, who are you speaking to when you perform a rap? Do you have someone in mind or a group in mind?

Peterson: Yeah, that's interesting. I actually, I actually always write and—[laughs] I'm a performative person so I have a problem not writing for an audience but the thing is I never really think about who the audience is so— [brief pause]

Silverman: The yet to be known [laughs].

Peterson: Yeah, the yet to be known. My hope honestly, if I am being honest, is that— [brief pause] it's as many people as people as possible and then, I don't know, because I think that it is always really fun to have people hear random things that I decide to say.

Silverman: Gotcha, I know you did a big performance for your college thesis—

Peterson: I did yeah.

Silverman: —and I wanted to know more about that.

Peterson: Yeah it was called “on sum cusp // laughing with me” [laughs] I don't really know why there are two slashes, but thinking of wounds it makes a lot of sense. And thinking of a cusp, the edge, kind of seems like a wound. But umm, yeah. It was basically this thing that I created um to kind of lace together. I don't know if lace is the right word, more like well together into a weird shape, poems that I had written over the last year, over that last year in college, where I felt like I was uh doing this thing that I call traumatic narcissism, or being this thing that I call traumatically narcissistic.

Silverman: Can you expand on that? What that means?

Peterson: It means that [pause]. It's not a misnomer and I think it means that I have had a lot of trauma and I think that it has forced me to be engulfed in only my own problems and make it really hard, or only, [pause] I don't know it's not narcissistic meaning I am the best and I am the only great thing, even though it is something like that. But it's narcissistic in that, I can't. It's hard for me to think outside of myself, but it is also interesting because I um I can basically like connect my life to anything, you know. I don't know if other people could do that or not. And that's traumatically narcissistic. Thinking I'm doing something that other people [unknown interruption] that uh, that I'm doing something that no one has ever done, um—

Silverman: So you feel that you're pioneering...

Peterson: Oh always! Always am I pioneering. I have a funny story about how when I was in tenth grade, I thought I came up with hormone normative. Have you heard of hormone normative?

Silverman: I think I have, but can you break it down just—

Peterson: so what I understand of hormone normative is people who are gay, but they might as well just be a regular, they are just a regular person you know.

Silverman: Maybe they are called basic.

Peterson: Yeah, exactly! Like a basic—like a basic—like oh, I'm just going to work my job, you know, not a gay person that you know, someone who is I want a white picket fence.

Silverman: Still has aspiration for a hetero way of life.

Peterson: Yes! exactly! Precisely, thank you.
[take a pause]

Silverman: Okay, we're back. You were talking about hetero normativity or homo normativity.

Peterson: Right, so it's, it's the kind of homo that wants to be that wants to contribute to and benefit from hetero patriarchy and um. I think, and I also have this thing that I, anyways so I thought that I came up with that. come to find out that I did not, at all. Then I had this whole thing about trans normativity that I thought that I came up with. I was I never heard it so, but the thing is, I am not really looking. So, the fact that I never heard it, is not surprising. Anyways, so I didn't come up with any of these things and while I think that I didn't come up with them, I do think that in the case of trans normativity, which, I, which is not the same as hormone normativity. It's not hormone normativity with trans people. Umm what I understand to be, trans normativity, is this thing that I really try to avoid, which is um trans normativity is forcing yourself or not forcing yourself, but feeling like it's your will to be invinaries when its not. Does that make sense? I feel like toxic masculinity and transmen is trans normativity, like kind of like feeding into the binary—

Silverman: Like an internalized—

Peterson: Like an internalized, intense, like its, yeah, like the same way that you know—

Silverman: Sense of patriarchy that's already kind of dictating, I don't know the ways in which people are controlled to think they have to be.

Peterson: Yeah. Right. Right, and so in the case of trans normativity, it's more of a defense mechanism and with homo normativity, in my perception of it, it may be a defense mechanism too. And I just have a little less tolerance for it, I'm not sure.

Silverman: So on this, where do you see your gender?

Peterson: I'm really I used they/them pronouns for a long time and it was not satisfying. And I used, obviously, I used she/her pronouns for a long time too. Uh, kind of nonconsensually. But, umm, and that obviously did not feel right so I changed it to they/them pronouns. And that did not feel right either. For some reason it felt like a cop out. For some reason, it—it was just becoming a trinity and not disrupting a binary, does that make sense?

Silverman: I mean I think it depends on how people feel.

Peterson: Yeah, and I was just fuck it. I am just going to use he/him pronouns because its not she/her pronouns its the opposite in some way, but it was, it was when it comes down to it, I think it was just easier, uh, it was just easier.

Silverman: So the thing you were talking about um fighting against the binary or feeling like you don't have to scribe for them, it is in some ways opting towards the binary

Peterson: Yeah.

Silverman: For things just to be in a way they happen, but maybe that's not true [laughs].

Peterson: But it's also I can't tell what is socialization and what is my will and my truth.

Silverman: And language is its own trap.

Peterson: Exactly! And I know that, and I know that I've come to the conclusion that no pronoun will feel right because the way that we do pronouns is not even right for me. I don't have an alternative. But, I know that it is not right for me because when people use he/him pronouns, I'm 'who'. And when people use they/them pronouns, I'm 'uh uh'. And then, when people use she/her pronouns, I'm 'no, no, no.'

Silverman: There's just need a meter of comfort.

Peterson: Yeah, totally! And like [stutters] an identity has to be what. And I always wonder what's more effective and whether this is even a dicatomoym that important to make but defining something by what it is or by what it isn't. And I forget where I was going with that but—

Silverman: that makes sense, it's it's yeah... it's like if I can't describe it, what outside of it defines it for me in the way things agree to specific—

Peterson: Right, right.

Silverman: [inaudible] understood.

Peterson: Yeah, and I think about, identity, with and I'm—if I can't, I can't describe—if pronouns are equal to gender, which they aren't. But if they are, then, there were have to be [brief pause], if pronouns were equal to gender and gender is equal to me, then there has to be a pronoun that equals me, right, and there's not.

Silverman: It's like naming. I mean, you chose your name. D you think your name is closer to your gender than your—

Peterson: Yeah, one hundred percent, one hundred [laughes].

Silverman: So people just often call me my name.

Peterson: I know, I know. But then it becomes like this thing where I am—I think I am making this statement. Every time someone talks about me there is this statement. And then you know what happens, I know how people are going to do it too because I'm that kind of person. Who—I met this person, who only, [inaudible] I don't even know if I did it right just then. But only went by their name. I don't want to say their name. So say their name was Max. If I was talking about Max, I would have to say Max's name every time I was talking about Max, rather than, if I am saying Max's name I have to say their name every time I talk about them, right? But, I would, you know, I would be talking about Max, which is not the real person. And I would be oh Max this. You know, every time I had to say it, it would be this thing, that I would be laboring about, which is I don't know, I don't want—

Silverman: There is some contradiction in like—

Peterson: Yeah, tell me about it.

Silverman: Well, no cause you're talking about causing a disruption in the binary, like a way to make a space for this other thing. But, then it's I do not want to make that much space to create this other option, which is, say my name.

Peterson: Yeah that's true. But you know what, I don't even know. But okay, so here's the thing about, it's interesting you bring, or maybe it's not, maybe it's poignant, or pertinent, or germane, that you bring up naming as being closer/ further from my gender identity because I don't know if I hate binaries.

Silverman: Go on.

Peterson: And, uh so Zeno is an ancient Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea, who created these paradoxes in support of a man named Parmenides. Parmenides, who I assume was drugs, uh believed that everything in the universe was uniform and timeless and that everything we sense changing was a delusion. That's what Parmenides believed. He was from Elea, as well. Zeno, and this may not be his intention, but my understanding of it was that he was just a troll. And, so basically Parmenides brought out this idea about us all and these delusions. And then, you know, whoever the contemporary was whether it be Aristotle, or Plato, or Socrates, for whatever one of those guys there was one of them that was contemporary. Came out of these paradoxes, that were like Parmenides no bro, that is not the way that the world works. And then Zeno in defense of Parmenides, in what I assume to be a kind of devil's advocate troll moment, created these paradoxes in support of Parmenides because they were from the same town. And the paradoxes don't really make any sense. They have to do with the fact that, no matter what, we can never reach something because our distance from it always halves, rather than ever reaching zero. And so we can never fully reach a finish line, or, I don't know, kiss a lover, or whatever, and even if we sense that we touch each other we don't because we're only ever having each other.

Silverman: That's kind of like cycling back to trauma narcissism. In a way it's I don't know. I was just seeing some sort of parallel.

Peterson: Yeah!

Silverman: It is not being fully about an absorption of oneself, it just—through this other it's broken down through this other system.

Peterson: Yeah, totally!

Silverman: That's interesting.

Peterson: But also, Zeno was the head of the Elea school of philosophy and said to be the creator, founder, inventor, or whatever, of the dichotomous and like having, literally being like 'not this, but this'. And [pause], I don't know, I think it's definitely socialization, that need to be on one side or the other. I am always thinking in pairs and two's. And you know, on the other side of the coin, as if there is only two sides of this coin, this coin is like a tetrahedron, um so, yeah.

Silverman: And also you're competitive.

Peterson: I am very competitive.

Silverman: What have you been competitive with in your life?

Peterson: Everything [giggles] every single thing I'm competitive about. I use to be the person who would cry in gym class. I'll say that on the record. I did cry in gym class if I did not do well. But I think it comes from the fact that my dad was uh. What's the word? A bombastic—a spectator of my sports.

Silverman: What would be some things he did?

Peterson: Can I yell or is it—?

Silverman: Yeah, you can do your thing.

Peterson: He'd be like 'get the fucking hole, get the fucking basket', screaming. I was in fourth grade, there would be this basketball game and this big black man screaming on the sidelines in this all—white town. It was just embarrassing, is what it was. I was like I have to do well because I cannot deal with him screaming like that. I was always competitive and I don't know why. I've been competitive in gym class. I'm competitive, I'm competitive when it comes to bronze and brain, brain and bronze actually. I want to when someone says they are stronger than me, I'd be, unless they are really stronger, in which case, I would be like okay you're stronger than me. If they are really obviously stronger than me I'll say. But if I think I can win, I'll compete. Every time.

Silverman: And what's it like working with children. I mean because you are supporting character, but also you are guiding and setting in front of them, meeting them?

Peterson: Yeah, it's hard. It's really, really hard, especially because I'm not the kind of person who's I'm not the kind of person who is [pause] wise. I don't think.

Silverman: Okay.

Peterson: Like I think that, and wise prudent. I'm not like "oh I think everything out" and "I'm not organized", you know. I feel like the advice that I give to my students is the advice that I give to myself, which makes me a little nervous and feels a little ingenuine because I am not convinced that these [inaudible] I know that if I was organized, my life might be easier. But, I've gone pretty far, cutting corners and you know, and not doing readings and not completing homework and getting addicted to drugs and having crazy sexual experiences I am fine. You know, I have some trauma, whatever. I think it's made me better. So it's hard to it's I feel protective of them. And I don't want them to have shitty experiences. And so I try really hard to [pause] you know there are certain things I will be really authoritative about. Like when kids make jokes about consent and I am like no. Like a girl was saying the word retarded today, and like was saying "I am not retarded". And I was like "Woah", come outside for a second. You know, like there are some things where you just [pause] I want them to understand how important it is. the black boys, I'm like "do you understand that people get shot for doing what you're doing right now" [laughs]. [stutters] I've never said that but I want to say that. [stutters] it's like they, I just want them to understand that the world is really crazy and that they have to be careful. And like today, they were talking about drugs and getting things that were laced they were all like "that doesn't really happen" and I am like "you guys do not know what you are talking about" [stutters], I get really scared.

Silverman: Are you able to have this conversation with them?

Peterson: Yeah, I mean they learn about it. They were learning about it. I wasn't the one teaching that class. And sometimes I was the only teacher that they allowed in the sex-ed class I guess because honestly, I think because they were talking about gender and stuff like that and I am the only trans person around.

Silverman: You know what's it like being a visibly queer educator with they are middle school kids right?

Peterson: They are very cultured kids. I have gotten misgendered by them a few times, but honestly, I think that people slip up on pronouns all the time. regardless of whether the person is trans or not. I've done it before with people who are cis. I've said the wrong pronoun by accident. So I feel, and the school is really, like really supportive of it. [stutters] if there are, and I don't know why I am surprised by this, but I guess like the reason, but if, the other day there were two boys making a lot of ruckus in the boys' bathroom. There is also a gender-neutral bathroom for faulty, but there is one genderqueer student we allow to use that whatever. And, a woman,

who was a teacher, walked by and was and like I was walking passed and called me to go into the bathroom. And I was like me. you know, I don't know, and this happened a lot but every time it is exciting. And when we're going to Washington DC this week I am going to be on the floor with all the boys. And it feels lowkey weird for some reason. [stutters] I don't feel like that kind of trans person, that I'm I don't know. I don't know. But for this kind of stuff, with my job, I am so happy that I didn't go in there as genderqueer with all this stuff we have to do, with housing and rooming. I'm just happy I didn't do that because I'm already me. I already have a tattoo on my face. I have, you know, I don't want, I get nervous about being the one that gets people to change everything I don't want to be too much. Then my grandmother is always, and my mom is always convincing me that they're going to that I am going to get fired. They're 'do you have a job next year', and I'm 'yeah, why do you keep asking me that.' It's these things where I feel I am not. And yeah, it makes me feel nervous. I don't want to push, and I understand now. You know, Booker T. and all the others who didn't push every single boundary. I understand why they rested by the sidelines so much with MLK. [pause] It's a lot for some reason, for everyone to deal with everything all at once and so.

Silverman: What other mentors that you've followed or looked up to?

Peterson: That I know personally?

Silverman: No, just historically or yeah or personally.

Peterson: I really looked up to Silva Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson because I think, obviously, I listened to this podcast, and I always, I never knew how little love they got. I never knew because I was always around people who loved them. And I listen to this podcast, really not that long ago. I am used to people loving them. And obviously, I knew they didn't get all of their dues because they are trans people in the 60's [laughs]. That's just the way it worked. But I listened to this podcast and she was speaking, and the last thing she said in this thing was in this interview was something along the lines of, "I would have done anything for the movement but the movement just did not want me". Did I tell you about that?

Silverman: No, it's historical. I feel that's like the line that I always hear too.

Peterson: Oh, I never did a lot of research about her, to be honest. I just thought you know. It was really, it made me think will I, I don't know, it just really moved me that you can be so uh taken over by a movement or being such a part of a movement that you don't care if it, I mean you do care but you know, you do it anyway. You do it regardless of anything. You just do it and that is obviously really inspirational to me and um [pause].

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: Yeah.

Silverman: Also, when, what was your first experience of a trans person or understanding of transness? Do you remember?

Peterson: [pause] But as transness, like transness as transness?

Silverman: Or anything that hinted that you can now understand as that. I guess people can call it your root. Some root experiences that actualizes as the thing you identify as or with.

Peterson: Wow, I, no, I never thought about this.

Silverman: That's okay we can return to it or you can just—

Peterson: The way I became trans was really weird, I think. It was not and I know this is not, like I know everyone's narrative is different. I was not I did not know [laughs]. I did not know—I think I don't remember when I found out what trans, oh, oh, oh, oh. I had a friend who was trans in high school but I did not think I was trans when he came out as trans. I really didn't. But I also didn't think, so basically what happened when I got to high school and I started dating this what she would call [aggressive] or stud and very, very masculine, right. And so we dated. And I was very feminine at this point. ninth grade, just pretty [feminine], yeah [feminine]. And that happened and then we broke up and some stuff happened. And I don't remember if my friend had come out as trans yet or not, but my switch from [feminine] to [masculine] happened that— [snaps fingers] over a summer. I was I threw everything out and started again. And I was like 'okay.'

Silverman: Was it something you saw you wanted to emulate, how did that transformation happen?

Peterson: I really don't remember because I was not the type of [masculine] person as the person I dated. it was not the same. So, I don't know whom I was really basing it off of I really don't. And I didn't know anyone. But I was just wearing clothes that I liked and I really didn't, I just immediately felt better. and not better, but not great, but better. And then, [pause] you have to forgive me because I have a terrible memory because of the Xanax, but [pause] I didn't start using they/them pronouns until college.

Silverman: And what else helps affirm your gender? your gravitating towards a different style, helped you feel better. Are there other things that helped affirm your gender?

Peterson: Other people [laughs].

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: I am having sex right now that is very affirming to my gender sex, depending on how the other person does it with me is affirming. But also, I feel like everything that is affirming is maybe less noticeably, but equally "unaffirming".

Silverman: Can you talk about that?

Peterson: It's only when I notice when something is affirming. So, in my head I'm saying 'Oh, this is affirming me' and I know this is affirming me or this is only affirming me because I'm what in my head person calls 'not a real boy' or something, you know. This is affirming, someone saying— Can I be explicit? Someone saying 'your dick is so hard right now', affirms me. And I'll be 'oh I love that they said that' because I don't have a dick, which is 'unaffirming' to me. Then, I have to do this thing where I am —oh [stutters] but if I had a dick, I would be a dick that no one that the people that I wouldn't even want to deal with because the people that I I would be a cyst man. Right, uh, well no. If I were a cyst man, sorry ah, I'm getting bio essentialist and I'm not trying to be. I'm in this place of penis envy and that is so intense right now that I can't help but be in this bio essentialist place and I don't want to, but what I'm trying to say is that if I were a cyst man I would be a cyst man. And who the fuck wants to be that, who the fuck wants to be that. And [pause] and I just, so I just feel it's these things that are affirming when I say oh that was affirming or that feels good because it was affirming. Affirming to me implies, which is me being so insensitive maybe, but affirming implies that it is not true. [laughs] A little bit. I affirm you. I affirm that you are crying right now because you're something stupid happened, right. It's your affirming something that um is almost coddling. It's like appeasing. So, just that reality, reminds me of all the things that don't affirm me. Almost every time that I feel affirm. But the affirmation kind of overshadows, not overshadows, but over glows it.

Silverman: I like the overglow, I like it.

Peterson: [laughs] Yeah.

Silverman: [pause] so I know or I have seen photos of you on [instagram] in protest waving a flag with a lot of chains.

Peterson: That was one photo.

Silverman: Okay, it was one photo but it felt epic!

Peterson: Right.

Silverman: And I also know you have a relationship of some time to afro punk and also using your image, and I just wanted to know yeah the experience of your own politics being a part of a political movement. And then, also in return the ways in which that, particularly your image, is used to further other people's politics.

Peterson: Yeah, my politics are really not what people, I don't know. I don't know. well anyway, I'll talk, let me see how I should get into this. Afro-punk, fuck afro punk, honestly, because they used my image on all these billboards and this, that, and the other thing with the speak truth to power. I didn't see a cent. I did the math and, I have other issues with them because of what

others have told me [stutters]. You know, they are selling a hundred thousand tickets at a hundred dollars a pot. I know they are paying a lot of money to have the people there, but they didn't even ask. They didn't even ask to use my picture, and I know I didn't do it because I don't have faith in any system that I know there was something in the fine print, of the this, of the that, you know, of the second booklet. Do you know what I'm talking about? Them saying, how we can use your likeness for any of this. And I know that is there. I know that they covered their tracks. And so, I was going to get involved in this lawsuit with this guy, who honestly had much more [laughs] much more ammunition than I did. I was just mad they used my picture. I don't know what I was expecting them to do from it. what, give me 100 bucks. I don't know what to fucking ask for. But this fucking guy. So, he's a photographer and apparently, well not apparently, he showed me the receipts, on FaceTime. He showed me these receipts. took most of the black and white images that you know of afro punk their advertising black and white images are taken by this guy. The guy at afro punk, he was at afro punk. He took the pictures and posted them. They asked if they could use them. They asked him if they could use the pictures, he said no. They used them anyway. This guy goes to, starts to bring some action against them, whatever, goes to afro punk and then the guy who runs afro punk, apparently gets this guy, gets security, to break this guy's camera and kick him out of afro punk the next year. All this shit. But, anyway, so I was on Facetime with this guy. He was telling me all this stuff. I don't know if this is true. I don't even know, but I didn't get involved because [stutters] they just used my picture. I didn't feel like I was going to get anything out of it, but who knows.

Silverman: But—

Peterson: But, anyway. Yeah, go ahead.

Silverman: No, but in the beginning, we were people wouldn't assume the politics that I have or whatever you started with, I'm wondering [inaudible].

Peterson: Yeah and it's also I guess I like to speak truth to power. I give them that. But I also feel like maybe it's not that people assume the politics I don't have. I think it's people assume a past that I don't have. I am realizing more and more as I get older that pretty much majority of the revolutionaries that you know, [inaudible] and Fidel, and who else can I think of. you know, Lolita Lebron, you know, at least people that I know, the Latino revolutionary world are all privileged people or people that come from privilege in some way. And I don't know, maybe [inaudible] maybe people don't assume. [stutters] People assume that I have, that I know this truth or something, that my opinion based on my feelings, based on my experiences as a trans-black blah blah blah.

Silverman: So can you give more in your background?

Peterson: Sure. I grew up honestly rich, my mom was a fucking baller. She helped start Jon Jon, we had a huge house. It was huge. It was amazing. It's not that way anymore, but it was. This was the way I grew up. I lived in a town called Promise, from ages 5 to 15, or maybe 5 to, yeah 5 to 16 or 17. I don't know and it was 97 percent, maybe more than that, white town. I was the only

black girl ever. There were these two other black boys and I never thought of that until recently, which is crazy. being an only black girl, but there was never any other black girl. It's really weird now that I think about it. but anyway, I love, I was chilling. You know people call me a nigger every now and then a few times, but I was whatever. have you seen my house? [laughs] Have you seen my house? [stutters] It was the fucking kid, this kid, my mom used to buy his mom groceries and this kid called me a nigger. don't call me nigger! Oh, oh, okay. c'mon now. You're welcome for your dinner. That's how I felt growing up. It was always the same kids that would be picking on me. It would not be the kids that had a lot of money. It would be the kids who were not doing well in school and didn't have new clothes. I think that it made kind of, my defense kind of became elitist. It was how dare you, because that was the only thing that I had. I was black. it was checkmate, almost like that. All they had to be was "yeah you're a nigger". And I would be "you got there. You are right. I am black and you are not". it makes me [less] than you here. So, you know, the only defense I had was "oh my jacket is expensive", you know I was I was tryna floss to feel good about myself, all the time. And I feel that really affects how I am now and um [pause].

Silverman: And I know you went to private school also—

Peterson: Yeah, I went to boarding school.

Silverman: Oh, boarding school.

Peterson: Or prep school, whatever. I went to the Lawrence [inaudible] in New Jersey and I don't really want to talk about that.

Silverman: You don't have to talk about it.

Peterson: that was interesting, but that was also a very specific kind of experience where I learned to network and read the economical shit. I had teachers that were turning in on a Ted and people didn't like me. The students. Teachers liked me. The administration liked me, but the students didn't, a lot of them. Some of them did. Just mainly the white boys like the lax Bros. the girls that they hung out with loved me, I was friends with them. Then, I went to Wesleyan. You know, I've had a very easy economic life. But then things haven't been that great with my mom's financial situation recently, or for a while, honestly. It was really hard. It has been and it continues to be really hard for me to adjust to it, almost impossible, to adjust to being, you know. Never were, my parents, you know, they weren't being crazy with what they would give me. People were getting more than I was getting. [stutters] I never got a car or anything.

Silverman: You always compare up.

Peterson: Right, right. I compare down too, don't get me wrong. I don't want to make it seem my parents were giving me everything. They were still black parents who were "where are you going to get the money for that?" They would get me whatever I wanted but they would give me a hard time about it. Now, my mom can not do that. She doesn't have a lot of money because things

have not been that good. It's been hard for me to cope with that for a long time and my spending has not really changed and it should. But, still, I find myself still making sure that people, now I find myself making sure that people know I have money or I've had money or have nice things because I want them to know I am not scary. And I feel like they'll think I'm not scary if I dress in a certain way, and dress up, and dress in this. It's like whistling Vivaldi, but it's like wearing Versace. You know what I mean.

Silverman: When you say people, you mean other queers?

Peterson: No

Silverman: Who?

Peterson: People in the street.

Silverman: Just people in the street.

Peterson: Yeah, white women outside they are not mean to me, they're really not. When I go outside, I am smiling, wearing my Fendi hat, looking cute, looking artsy, what I call the [inaudible] effect and they are 'Oh I love it,' 'would you like to sit here', I don't know. I want people to understand my biggest thing is 'I can look this', and I feel like I have a tough exterior, I don't know. a kind of rough and tough exterior to people who are not hip, you know. Obviously, the people who know me, know I am a little bitch. But people who are not hip, they're 'oh', you know. But they are not that way, because I feel like I don't know what it is about me that elicits, but I feel it is the way that I dress. I feel it's the way that I dress and present myself in situations.

Silverman: And do you feel that's armor for you?

Peterson: Uhuh, totally! and the thing is, I'll use that armor to my detriment. you know, and this is actually the thing I hate most about myself is that I will—when I am defensive I am very elitist. I'm like I get very like only towards white people [inaudible] you know I remember this one time that there was this dumbass. I don't remember what happened, but ugh. I don't know but I'll get really elitist about things and and I remember this one time I was getting arrested and, this was back when I was on Xanax, so I was just saying anything, honestly. And I was talking to the cop and I can't remember what I was saying, but I was making fun of how much he made. you know, I remember talking this guy who was on this bus one time who was cause you a nigger or is you a bitch. He's a black guy. And I was are you wearing fake Jordans right now? That's fucking whack. and fake Jordans, he probably maybe he couldn't afford real Jordans. You know, I feel I say things that are kind of elitist and I'm can you read you know and I'll get so angry that I'm trying to find anything that I have that makes me stronger than these people because I feel I [pause] I feel the identities that I hold are [pause] in situations of, you know, fight or flight or you know, they're nicks in my armor. And I try very hard to [pause] I don't know. It's just the way that it comes out. My dad's very similar.

Silverman: Hmmm.

Peterson: Um.

Silverman: Do you want to get into the musicals?

Peterson: Ohhhh.

Silverman: Since I know those two things are—

Peterson: Yeah, yeah. Um. Yeah. The musical is going well.

Silverman: Can you tell the audience about what it is?

Peterson: Yes, the musical um so I don't have a title for it yet, audience. But, it is about me and my father. Kind of our parallel, inversely proportional [stutters] I forget if it is inversely proportional or proportional. I think it's inversely proportional, but it depends because I don't know where I am going yet. Anyways, it's about me and my dad and our relationship and how he grew up squatting and poor in New York City, and how I grew up having whatever I wanted in Suburbia and how we kind of— and he has this beautiful [inaudible] my dad kind of how he came up from nothing and I came up from a different kind of nothing [inaudible] suburbia. Uhhh, an excess of nothing and nothing of excess. And how we're meeting in New York City together and my journey coming out as trans and going on hormones. His journey, you know, being a man who didn't know who his father was for a long time and you know going to boarding school when he was young. You know, literally after living in a park bench after a month so, it's following both of us and kind of both of our journeys to becoming better men or better masks identifying people.

Silverman: Do you want to perform any parts of it?

Peterson: Oh, I don't know which one I should do. [pause] so I have this one. Okay, I'll do this one part from my dad. [pause] it's like this: [sings] "I will not say goodbye to the image of my daughter and though she made me rive, every mistake she made was mine, and I'd be lying to act fine with this goodbye." My real name, my dead name rather is Mya. [continues singing] " Oh my, oh my, my, Mya. She disappears before my eyes and I see Zeno and think, what does he know about goodbyes". And it goes on but yeah. That's kind of the essence of my dad's character.

Silverman: Mmmm

Peterson: And my character is for some reason much harder to come up with.

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: Um because I feel so influx currently and don't know what I want my character's arch to be. I feel where my dad's character is going to and coming from, but it feels harder to figure that out for myself.

Silverman: Are there other creative things you are working on?

Peterson: no. I mean kind of. I write poems every now and then, and I am trying to find people to make music with. But I had a recent friend breakup that has left me musically deprived. [pause] but recently, I think I am going to try to make music with my current [inaudible] ex-boyfriend, who makes music. So, it's going to be an interesting get-to-together.

Silverman: [inaudible]

Peterson: I am really trying to make music with anyone because I don't really produce music and I don't have the software to, and I can't afford it right now. But, yeah, just a lot of poetry and a lot of this musical and I had this, I also had this comic book that I was working on. But it's not, it's really just an idea.

Silverman: I like the idea. Can you just trunk it a little bit and tell us what it's like?

Peterson: So, basically, code switch is the superhero in question or the "superhumanode" being that is half human and half code and he can shapeshift basically to become anything that he wants and look like anybody that he wants. So he goes and infiltrates white-supremacists groups and kills people in cold blood. His name, uh, I want there to be a lot of questions about, or not questions, but complete uncertainty about who are good characters and who are bad characters. and then his main enemy is Doctor [inaudible] who is this genius, who is trying to get a hold of the AI that made code switch possible. There's a lot of things that go into it but I am trying to figure out [inaudible] Doctor [inaudible] is gay. He's hormone normative. Well, yeah hormone normative.

Silverman: With that name?

Peterson: Yeah [inaudible].

Silverman: Okay, okay [laughs].

Peterson: He's uh [pause]. He's a white supremacist, which is normal [laughs]. Yeah.

Silverman: switching it up. I don't know if you want to talk about this but if you want to say anything if you had experiences with mental health that you wanted to discuss or mental illness? Or just anything at large within those topics?

Peterson: Big Pharma is really you can't live with them, you can't live without them. And I've had a lot of issues with mental health. actually, I feel like my life is full of things that just happen. my

masks switch up, just happen. I do not know what triggered it. my emotions, they just happen. I can really, never, draw back to a trigger or a starting moment. And the same thing with my mental illness. I really don't know what started all of this. But it wasn't always there. I was fine. I was fine. I was fine. [pause] And [pause] I really don't know what started it. And it, but it came on heavy. And I guess that happens. you people don't develop and you know I've been called bipolar, don't think I am. You know people don't develop these things till later in life, which is so scary. Such things schizophrenia, people don't develop it till anyways, but, you know, I am on this cocktail of medicines right now and I have never felt, it's just— I've been on medicines that have made me feel so bad, made me feel nothing. But now I am on medicines where I feel normal. And I feel like maybe they are really, you know, there is something to it, but I don't like the way it's all happening but that's the same thing as pretty much everything in the whole [inaudible] world. I don't know, I am just really happy that I can afford healthcare.

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: Or not that I can afford healthcare, that my dad has healthcare and I am dependent on him until I'm 26. In that case, I don't know what the fuck is happening then. But, I am just really lucky, which is all I think about when I think about my mental health. And, I'm around people, recently, who don't do anything about their mental health and have the resources too. And that is where I start to get unsympathetic, unfortunately, and I know it's hard to get. But, I just feel so lucky that I can get the help that I need. That I feel that people, I just feel [pause], and I know it's hard [inaudible] I was always trying to go to therapists, let's do this. I need help. I was always aware of that and I know that not everybody is. It's a privilege for me even to say that my mental illness is the type of mental illness that allows me to get help or recognize that I need help. But—

Silverman: And has there been any difficulties like [inaudible] as a trans person?

Peterson: Sure.

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: Sure, but I am also not that sensitive about stuff.

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: I haven't been to a doctor. I have this one doctor referred to—she would name it. She would be you're experienced, but she names my transness. And that was something I was — okay, fuck her. I am going to another—but, I had the privilege to—I am just going to another doctor. bye bitch. I don't need you. I am going to find a trans doctor, and that's what I did. And I am going to find a black doctor, and I am going to find a blah, blah, blah. It really hasn't been that hard and I really think it's economic privilege and healthcare. It's really, I can't. There's this transfeminine person that is homeless that kind of sometimes is around my school, where I work, and I was talking to them the other day and I have also seen them on other occasions, talking to themselves and clearly having some kind of—You know I just think it's damning to me and that's

the thing that I think I am most grateful for is mental health, and health benefits, that really pisses me off, and clean water. Fuck, people not having clean water, that really pisses me the fuck off. But, yeah. I mean my therapist is trans. My psychiatrist, he's black. He's fine. I am getting a new one soon, but I am trying to find someone who is trans. And, yeah.

Silverman: Yeah.

Peterson: It's just you have to get into this network, unfortunately.

Silverman: Yeah. Is there anything else you want to talk about?

Peterson: It would be great if I could fart right now. But, no, I'm good.

Silverman: Okay, thank you.

Peterson: Thank you.