

**NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**HARRON WALKER**

**Interviewer:** Nico Fuentes

**Date of Interview:** December 21, 2019

**Location of Interview:**  
Harron's apartment in Brooklyn, New York

**Transcribed by** Chelsea Hoskins

**NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #189**

**RIGHTS STATEMENT**

The New York Public Library has dedicated this work to the public domain under the terms of a [Creative Commons CC0 Dedication](#) by waiving all of its rights to the work worldwide under copyright law, including all related and neighboring rights, to the extent allowed by law. Though not required, if you want to credit us as the source, please use the following statement, "From The New York Public Library and the New York City Trans Oral History Project." Doing so helps us track how the work is used and helps justify freely releasing even more content in the future.

Nico Fuentes: Hello, my name is Nico Fuentes, and I will be having a conversation with Harron 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 December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, and this is being recorded at Harron's apartment. Hi!

Harron Walker: Hey!

Fuentes: How's it going?

Walker: I'm good, I'm good.

Fuentes: [laughter] How's the past week been for you?

Walker: Umm.. the past week has uh... has been interesting. I started it in New Orleans. I flew to New Orleans Sunday night to see a friend of mine who-who used to date years ago when we were really different genders, but now they had just gotten FFS [Facial Feminization Surgery] three weeks ago, so theoretically I was there to take care of them, but they were fine. So I kind of just went to New Orleans. I had to keep telling them that we were going out of the house or going to Bourbon Street, or doing something touristy, because they're just like, living their normal life...and then on Wednesday night I was stuck at first the Virginia Airport because there was a snowsquall in New York that I totally missed, but I still wasn't able to fly into New York for it. Then stuck at the New-New York Airport for about 4 hours or 5 hours. I don't know. I didn't leave there until 4:30, I was supposed to be home by I think 1am, didn't get home until 6:45. Normally wake up at 7am for my job so I slacked my bosses so I could say "Hey so...I can't work today" and went to sleep when I normally wake up, and then had one day of work today.

Fuentes: Yeah, where do you work?

Walker: I work at Vice Media. I am on their Life Desk, which, "What is life?" Life is many things and think that we're still kind of working it out. But it's still kind of a lot. It's focused on health, healthcare, kind of service content, around kind of, almost narrative "How-to guides", or reported narrative, "Life hack" kind of adjacent content. Which has been an adjustment for me because whoever is listening to this, can't see, but I've lived in my apartment for about two months. I still have boxes in the living room. So it's a lot of like, "What are the things I do actually know or could figure out, or dispense advice for someone?" Because I'm not about to tell them I make a beautiful living or...

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Or I don't know, a delicious dinner for eight or something. Um... I've been working there for three months, as one of the senior staff writers on that desk. [pause] I, it's been kind of an adjustment from the last the place I was working, which was Out Magazine. Whereas a staff writer, where with that team there was about 15. We-we kept losing people throughout the year,

for reasons I can go into later. I did not sign an NDA [Non-Disclosure Statement], so I can get into that later. But the entire team was queer people and trans people that were, two other. Yeah, there were two other trans women. Five trans femmes total of any gender and one of whom, Raquel Willis, was my boss. I got to work with her on a number of my stories that I was the proudest of. I think, I kind of just...That became very normal. In a way, that the idea I could be in a room with only trans feminine people is normal. At this point, it's not, it's not notable, it's not even like...I feel like at first, I remember hanging out with two trans women at once. That was, I remember being excited about that. First hanging out with one other trans woman, then two. So three of us total. It just felt very exciting and activating. And then like, the first time I knew I was going to a trans poker game at my friends Torrey's house. I was terrified just because it was, it was like "Okay", I knew there was going to be 15 trans people and I never have done that before, and it's just this assumption that like...People will not welcome you to a space or that like everyone is waiting for you to fuck up, that you can fuck up in that kind of space. Which I mean you can, but like... [laughter] not just through being stupid or something. Well no.. yes you can. I don't know, whatever. But not because you're not-not-not cool enough or something. You're all a bunch of gender weirdos in someone's world. So, usually that's not the energy people are coming with and something like that. But I think I just got very used to that and a media workspace um...and just having an all queer space. Many trans feminine people around me, and above me, and editing my work, people I didn't, who-who actually would encourage me to explain things in my work. In fact, in an earlier-early story, about how medical institutions push trans women out of their care into less supervised settings through like gatekeeping. The cost, the cost of procedures actually push people into say "hormone black markets" or silicone injections in critically unsafe settings. I remember these two paragraphs that I had in the original draft that I turned into Raquel explaining like, here's what hormones do to you, and here are different surgeries trans women get, and then even maybe something maybe trans men that had nothing to do with the story. And she was like, "You don't have to do any of this." Write it for, write it for, wrote it for us, write it for you." Which was great! I didn't have to do explanatory commas, which I learned from this podcast, Codeswitch, NPR [National Public Radio] Codeswitch. That's where I learned that term about basically pausing, putting a comma in, and then unpacking an in-group. A pretty well known in-group term. Because there's an assumption that your reader is from an, the out-group. So basically writing for readers...Say you're writing about trans, writing about trans people if you're a cis [cisgender] reader, or writing about Black people for a white reader.

Fuentes: Mhmm.

Walker: Anyway, Vice is not that kind of environment, there are three trans women total in our newsroom. None of us, we're all on diff-different desks, Janice Rose is on our Tech Desk, Diana Tourjee' is on the Issues Desk and also just sort of writing features. Um... I also just want to say on the Diana desk, she sort of a features writer at this point, and so we don't work directly together. We obviously sit near each other and talk to each other or commiserate about anything, but it's definitely been an adjustment to write for like, be-be part of a system and a news team basically. Especially when it's based around life and lifestyle and it's not something I've figured out yet, but I am feeling a little bit caught between how do I? How do I write from my own

perspective, and draw from my own life's experiences in the same way that is welcomed on our desk, in a way that doesn't feel...I guess ex- exploitative of either myself or the communities I come from? Because I'm still making, I'm still making money from this. So, oftentimes I side step that problem entirely and then just kind of have this almost parody, hyper version of a persona that I'm writing from who maybe like...straight-drag or something. Which also, isn't like, "It's not an authentic moment!"

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: And it's like...There's limits to it and not always a joy to that...It might be a joy to write from that perspective, and then once I get edits back actually have to take it seriously, then I'm like wait "I don't feel committed to this and I don't know why I wrote it this way, I don't believe any of this. What's going on." So I haven't really figured out how to do that. I think also, lately have started to wonder if I have trust issues with editors that aren't trans women, who want me to write about trans women.

Fuentes: Why?

Walker: Um...because I-I-I just don't know what their motivation is. I think working at Out [OUT Magazine], I understood everyone's motivation. In general, it was that, this is... "Can I do math?" 30-ish, 25-30-ish here. LGBT publication that has that legacy. So everyone there is invested in journalism by LGBTQ people. Specifically with that team, I understood they were interested in journalism about and by trans feminine people, beyond just it being, I guess, SEO [Search Engine Optimization] friendly.

Fuentes: SEO?

Walker: Oh, Sorry. Search Engine Optimization friendly. I guess, I guess that it was trendy or everyone is talking about trans women. We got, "What's our trans story?" or something.

Fuentes: When did that start?

Walker: I started, I mean I definitely, I-I feel like a lot of the... hmm... I don't know if I would be the, a diff...I don't think I'm a definitive source by any means, since I didn't start working as blogger until 2013? Um... in a professional kind of way, and then as a reporter not till 2014-2015. But from my observations, because I know there's like... I know I've seen articles from Samantha Allen. She's a trans woman and reporter who...I've seen her writing about Trans Day of Remembrance as far back as 2012 or 2013, in a way, I think you could almost see someone you could imagine reading the same thing in 2019.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: Where it's like a narrative that has since become the go-to for Bustle.com decides to write about Trans Day of Remembrance for no reason. Nobody asks them to, and it's kind of just

like parading the same talking points that people were hitting in a way that seems much more connected to maybe organizing groups like the Anti-Violence Project, or Audre Lorde Project, or the different trans and often trans women of color led organizing groups that were trying to affect that kind of media change. Is my percep- perception on it. I still don't think this is necessarily totally historically factual. That's definitely my perception, and definitely the 2014 to 2016 years I remember there being a lot of gay men in media, gay men or queer men, and um...very occasionally a trans woman reporting on trans issues. Often... That's sort of when I started seeing the-the narrative around of violence against trans women breaking through and becoming and a legible, ma-mainstream media narrative.

Fuentes: Yeah, where were you seeing that?

Walker: So, the people I'm thinking of... there's um... like Matthew Rodriguez at dot com was like frequently on that beat. I was doing it when I was at Fusion.

Fuentes: What year?

Walker: 2015? 16'? And this is not in a like-like, I was doing it kind of way. I was trying to at the place I was working, make sure that these narratives were then also being recorded upon further. Say, an activist was falling on Twitter, or AVP [Anti-Violence Project] or...

Fuentes: AVP?

Walker: Oh, Anti Violence Project. Which I think LaLa Zannell was still there at the time. I think she just left to join the ACLU, American Civil Liberties Union. I remember Diana Tourjee' was also reporting on that too. Not... I don't think anyone who actually worked on staff was a Black or brown trans woman who was reporting on any of this. So there was also that...there was an element of someone who is LGBTQ is reporting on it often times in the most stable and resourced kind of way. Like if you have an in-house beat reporter, who's on the trans beat usually white, usually cis, often some kind of LGBTQ but, usually not a trans woman of color. Who was then um... sort of in charge of shaping this narrative in a long-term way, maybe it would be hired freelance or something.

Fuentes: What was the narrative before that then?

Walker: I don't remember. I don't know if there, I mean...I obviously, I'm sure there was, but I just really remember taking note in 2014 or 2015, onward. So that was the beginning of when I started to notice an emphasis on there were 35 trans women who were killed in 2015. Which now has just, I think be really decontextualized and misunderstood in a way by..."Sorry," I don't mean to keep going in on Bustle.com, but like I hate Bryan Goldberg its founder. I'm going to keep going in on him. He's a union busting asshole, who's just trying to take over all of media. He, his website. "Sorry." Now you have on Jan 7<sup>th</sup>, of the new year, if there's a news of a trans woman who has been killed. The headline is a go-to like, "XYZ becomes the first trans woman killed in 2019." Which just is written with implied of the first of many, or the second or the third.

There's-there's-there's a really dark connection with the way, the other way that we're often written about, which is an emphasis on our firsts. What this historian, Morgan Empage [?] has called the novelty of transness. Where we're always like...just arriving. Anytime were covered, it's like the first trans woman to... It's like... Sara McBride, the first trans woman to give a speech at a major political parties convention or something, which is like "Sure." Daniela Vega, first trans woman to ever present at the Oscars. I'd rather celebrate when she gets nominated or I'd rather be celebrating when she get, she wins. I don't know... I'm the first trans woman to offer you bagel chips...

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Before the Trans Oral History Project... but there's that really um... The violent flip side of-of that is this emphasis [clap sound] on the first trans women murdered this year, which is also written in a way that expects more to come and isn't actually interested in it, in a narrative beyond just "Uh...this is the narrative we do for this and its violent and its continuing. I don't see any investment or interrogation or even just any effort being brought to it." Its um... The failures of this imagination strike again and service really more narratives about ourselves for their own readership and financial benefit in this case, like page views or clicks or time spent on page so they can take to advertisers to sell ad [advertisement] space. When I was working at Fusion in 2015 and 2016, which at the time was... It started as-as I'd say on the phone to people. Because nobody knew what the fuck Fusion was. Which I still don't think people do, but it's a joint venture between ABC Disney and Univision, and then ABC Disney dropped-dropped out and Univision had taken over and like a week after, or no... a couple months after I left to go freelance and be a girl, Univision sold it to.... No! Univision bought Gizmodo Media Group, which was broken up by Peter Theil's billionaire funded efforts with Hulk Hogan to take down Gawker, which he did. So they bought Gizmodo Media Group, they rebranded Fusion to Splinter, and sold everything to this E-commerce company called Great Help Partners in 2019 and now they shut down Splinter, which was a politics site, by the end of it. A year before the election, off on a left-leaning politics site. I just think it's a good encapsulation of like... private equity and media and um...How there's the people who control everything in media just actually don't care about the thing they control or the people who are working there.

Fuentes: Hmm..

Walker: When I was at Fusion.. [laughter] "Sorry." When I was at Fusion. I do remember, kind of remember. I joke about it. I-I was still a boy when I was working there, and I didn't even.. I mean I had some sense of gender trouble. It didn't have the sentient thought that I was a woman. But I look back at a lot of my work there and it's like almost embarrassingly funny to me. That my framing in my head was like, "I'm a gay man, so I need to use my platform as an ally to trans women." I am just really entrusted in interviewing...Eve Lindley about playing Sylvia Rivera and like Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel's *Happy Birthday, Marsha* or like... I just really want to interview Mya Taylor about *Tangerine* and what's next, and make sure that the narrative... She gets media narrative beyond this one movie. Just because "I'm an ally, that's my investment." I

really want to write on the estrogen shortage because that's important. There's so many interviews with trans actresses that I did. [laughter]

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: I was like very umm... I just remember consciously thinking like...or asking in interviews...are there, "Do you want me to say your trans in the headline?" How are you?" Just thinking about things like that, trying to correct mistakes that I felt were not serving the people that I was interviewing. In the rest of media, which was like, "This trans actress fell down the stairs." The focus on: "This trans actress"... She has a name. You could use it. You're interviewing her, so you think she's worthy of coverage, but none of that ever clicked for me. Why I was so concerned about trans women media representation or anything. I just had my own rationalizations. I did end up leaving Fusion in 2016, coincidentally the same week as the election, presidential election that year. Three days later. Also, coincidentally, four days before my entire desk and a 1/3 of the company was laid off. Which obviously isn't good, but I do remember thinking "Fuck!" I would have gotten severance if I just... instead of...I had to go my own way. Um... I-I-I didn't know I was doing that in order to transition that consciously or with that clear of an intention. I do remember thinking that were things I was exploring, or growing my hair out, or changing how I'm dressing, or embodying myself differently then. I knew I couldn't do there, but it was never as clearly focused as like, "I am a transgender woman" or something. Until that suddenly that clicked in early 2017. Then it was clear as day, and began asking, audaciously asking for immediate she/her pronouns from my friends 24-hours later.

Fuentes: Going back to the thing you mentioned briefly, you started off by blogging. What were you blogging about? What years?

Walker: So, all through, all through middle school and high school I had, I think, Life Journal was the first social media...I guess Neopets was there...

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: And like Gaia online... Which is actually the first website I met a boy through, off the internet. [laughter]

Fuentes: Wow.

Walker: [laughter] Yeah, very awkward date in 2003. He worked at the high school in the summer and we went to go meet up. I was like 14 I think, yeah 14, I walked three miles to the high school in my town. We sat side by side and then ate a sandwich and nobody talked and then I just went home.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Um...

Fuentes: Gaia online! [laughter]

Walker: [laughter] I don't know how...

Fuentes: [laughter] Can you explain this vaguely, this Gaia online...

Walker: Gaia online was this website where you... it is was similar to Neopets, if that's a more familiar reference point, whoever is listening. But you had an avatar who is like- like an anime sprite. Um... you can dress them up with...you would do mini games and just... to earn coins and then even just pass the time and earn coins. It was all just one of those coin collecting...and then you spent it on outfits, or... [inaudible] [?] your character.

Fuentes: [laughter] Very familiar...

Walker: Yeah, or this this forum and you can talk to people as your characters. I don't know how I met someone who was also from Holden, Massachusetts, but somehow that happened.

Fuentes: Wow!

Walker: And we didn't falling love.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Surprisingly!

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: And he's my husband to this day. Come on out Pete.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Fuentes: So, Life Journal.

Walker: Yeah, so Life Journal. I think in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I started using it and it was for the like... five years that I was using it, until the end of high school. No, until college started. It was mostly just me and like 10-20 people I knew from school. Or maybe even just less than 10 of us. Basically just blogging for each other, because the way Life Journal I remember was set up was.... It was sort of similar, it was similar to Tumbler. You had your own Life Journal, your own blog, and then which, you would generally post texts in it. YouTube didn't exist yet. So it was 2003 I think when it started, so I was just thinking... that I'm sure there was a way to embed a WMV [Windows Media Video] file or something, but it wasn't really like you were sharing songs or videos. You were sharing song lyrics if you wanted to post a song, or you had...or you could write what your mood was and the song you were listening to was, but mostly it was just blogging about your

day. Sometimes I'd be getting in to fights with my friends in these really, really passive aggressive writing, basically second person letter about someone from school who I know followed me, knowing they would read it. Then in the comments he would, he was like, "Is this about me?" I was like, [tongue click sound] "No. narcissist much?" Or something like that...

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Horrible conflict irresolution, no people skills. Then, I don't know...Two months later I guess we all got over it after we all unfollowed or unfriended, and then finally friended each other again. Um...What happened? Wait...Life Journal, Life Journal... Oh! I came out on Life Journal as gay in 2003.

Fuentes: Wow!

Walker: Yeah.

Fuentes: How was that received?

Walker: Positively? I mean it was like...it was eight people I knew who were directly reading it and then five goth girls from around North America or something, that I met through different Life Journal groups. And then I joined, there was, there were some LGBTQ groups and stuff, I was... the communities. Generally fine I think. Then I remember people from school. It was sort of like I put it out there, there was no school...Facebook wasn't a thing. Myspace wasn't a thing yet, or at least it wasn't with anyone I knew was there, so there wasn't a broadcasting to the whole school, but it was, I think I understood that it was out there. Um... Oh yeah, AIM [AOL Instant Messenger] was also a sort of also another, AIM and Facebook together... Oh sorry, AIM and Life Journal together was sort of disseminating information in the summertime when you weren't all at school together. I think it was as well received as it could have been. I mostly just hung out with this, "what's it called?" Kind of multi-circle Venn diagram of the theater kids, and the arts kids, and the stoners, and the goth kids, and the kids who hung out at the coffee shops after school, kind of contingent at school. So I didn't have to often...I didn't often spend a lot of time wise...I guess a lot of the kids... I mean there were definitely negative incidences and stuff, with people being assholes. One teacher who, on day of silence, "Is that thing people still do?"

Fuentes: What's that?

Walker: It was this thing the gay straight alliance would do. Every year in April or March where...It's actually a really ineffective form of protest, but it was a whole day to protest the...I guess the uh... whatever... not to knock or... We didn't make it up or anything. Not to knock the efforts teenagers, gay teenagers, or the post Matthew Shepard years. But, it was like...you would take, you would just be silent for the day and wear all black and maybe have a rainbow ribbon on your shirt and carry some sort of Leaflet, which is information on why you're silent, and just to protest. I don't know if it was just cultural homophobia or I don't remember really being super pointed or specific, but I do remember on that day there was some math teacher who handed

out his own pamphlets. Also, two of his students who were being silent... about how like... those homophobic faux stats like domestic violence, queer couples. That's how I learned the term anal fissures, because this pamphlet... This very religious man was handing out was saying "Men who have sex with men, they uh... get anal fissures and contract HIV and they have, they all die when they're 35." Just all this negative programming. That was the only, I think, school official who was antagonistic in that way. There was a protest of a student, a male student we knew, who had worn a skirt for the day and I think he was taken out of school for the day. So then 20 of us wore skirts over our clothes. Which we checked the dress code and was technically in the dress code, because we were still wearing pants. So I know a lot of teachers were flustered and frustrated about that... Life Journal! [laughter] I went off on a tangent there.

Fuentes: Political. Early political protests.

Walker: [laughter] Everyone in skirts, much more skirts [inaudible] [?].

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: No, I joked. I cycled... I was like a fake goth and a fake emo and a fake scenester. I was just doing different sub-cultures for... I didn't know music. I just wanted the eye liner and the girls jeans.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Trying on identities...

Fuentes: You...

Walker: Just to like to be able to wear girls clothes.

Fuentes: [laughter] You mentioned that Matthew Shepard, was somebody that was really present as a figure at that time for you?

Walker: Not in, not in a personal way but, I remember there was like... MTV had this special of *Anatomy of a Hate Crime*.

Fuentes: Mhmm...

Walker: I think it was a dramatization of the Matthew Shepard story. I think Harvey Milk was maybe a more like... a someone... Gay figure who was um... murdered. Was a present one. The movie hadn't come out yet, but in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, our drama teacher just decided to put on this play called *The Execution of Justice*. That was from the early 80's, and Wesley Snipes was actually in it as this nun in drag. A sister for perpetual indulgence. I remember that was like some fact we saw in the script, but it was all about the trial of um... Dan White. I think his name was...

Fuentes: Mmhmm..

Walker: So, I remember that being sort of like a-a murdered gay historical figure who was like very present and Matthew Shepard I think was already...it was like five years before I started high school. So I do remember it happening and I remember like... you know? Probably what he looked like, but it was a little more distant in a way that Collin Binarity [?] would have felt distant by then. And this was also the idea of "Bullying is bad," as a coded way to say, stop calling gay kids "Gay."

Fuentes: Mmm.

Walker: Didn't really start until I was in college.

Fuentes: Okay. Where did you go to college?

Walker: Sarah Lawrence. Yeah there was, wait-wait...Was that guy's name Tyler Clementi?

Fuentes: Tyler Clementi?

Walker: The Rutgers student...

Fuentes: Tyler Clementi.

Walker: He was like bullied by his roommate I think, I might have the name wrong but... His roommate filmed him on a webcam, like hooking up with a guy and he took his own life and then that sort turned into, I think it was the impetuous for the, "It gets better" videos.

Fuentes: Oh, okay!

Walker: I think of Glee when I think of this, and like Lady Gaga's first pivot to "Don't ask, don't tell" is bad. Bring troops to VMA's everywhere you go.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: So there just wasn't really this bigger narrative around that when I was in high school. We were still trying to tell people to stop saying "Gay" when they meant something sucked. [laughter]

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Still in the Eminem era of gay politics and thinking and stuff.

Fuentes: Yeah, so you were going to Sarah Lawrence. What year?

Walker: 2007.

Fuentes: What was your major?

Walker: So, it was like this “No major” school. Where we had these concentrations and stuff. Those are basically the same thing. It ended up being uh... I went in thinking I would do theater and French and then I dropped theater as soon as all of the required stuff...As soon as I could when I got there, so it was just like “Oh, I actually just, this was more of a social thing in high school and I’m actually a terrible actor and everyone here is insane and I need to find something else.” Or, “I don’t feel the way everyone else feels about this. I just like doing the plays and I’m going to remove myself as soon as possible.” Then I started taking gender studies classes and queer studies classes, that in hindsight were super limited and very... So it was...There was only one professor for all of the, the entire LGBTQ studies department, was one woman... Anyway, I shouldn’t, I don’t want to dismiss it so immediately or something.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: It was, it was where I was reading James Baldwin and where I read texts that still stuck with me.

Fuentes: Like what?

Walker: There’s *The Lavender Scare*.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: Which taught me about the Lavender Scare, which is like the purge in the state department in post war years. There’s George Chauncey’s *Gay New York*, which was um... Really, you know there’s the those books you read which changes the way you think about, change the way you think afterwards? So, that book was about the thriving gay social world or worlds from 1890-1945 and...“Was until the 60’s?” No, I think it basically stopped during WWII. The whole part of the book is he says in the beginning, is to disrupt the Stonewall narrative that tells us that before Stonewall we were hiding, we were isolated. We were all internal. It was three “I’s”. There’s their narrative that says we’re isolated from each other, living in isolation, that all we had internalized homophobia and hated ourselves and hated gay people. Our whatever other words we would also throw in there now. I think it was still a very gay kind of focused analysis. There was a third one that I don’t remember, another “I.” But it was basically just like, we all lived in a cellar of our own internalized homophobia and didn’t connect.

Fuentes: Yeah...

Walker: All of history is a progress narrative and that like it’s always sort of moving upwards away from homophobia, towards acceptance or equality or something. It was one of those books that explored how there were just thriving gay social worlds in like Harlem, in the Bowery, and

Greenwich Village. This was well before...I think invisible was the other one, as in invisible, we were all invisible to the straight world. It just included a lot of archival research that showed there were common stereotypes about gays, and about in the 1910's they all wore red ties or something. That like asking for a cigarette meant he was cruising you, or like they bleached their hair, or tweezed their eyebrows. Just things that could have only existed in major newspapers if like gays were known at a part of the social fabric of like however derisive their inclusion was. Then also, I think that book, and there was also this one by Crispin Glover. [laughter]

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Quentin Crisp! That was it. I forget what the book is called, but his memoir of, just this old British faggot who like, I think he would dye his hair purple until like the end, the end of days. It was a memoir about his life as a younger kid and up till WWII, and just showing WWII was actually a great time to be gay .

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: In-in the UK where he was, and I saw similar books and narratives around that in the US, because like... all the men were at war and also women and gays just kind of had this different kind of access to different roles than they were used to. Women could go-go to work, gays could just go fuck in public a little bit more. It was a bit of a twilight experience and then it slipped away, and then in the post-war years everything became very regressive and rigged gender-wise again.

Fuentes: Wow, so a lot of significant queer theory and history you were encountering?

Walker: Yeah, and there was a friend of mine I met, maybe four months in, was really fundamental for that. His name was Spenser Barnett, and like I remember the first time...He was two years older than me. I walked into the pub, which was the name of the like, one of the two or three places to get food on campus. I walked over to where there were tables and I saw him and my friend Tyler who, at the time was on week two of like a seven week, lifting her dyed black hair to bleach blonde platinum. So she was white roots, yellow for three inches, red for four inches, brown for four inches, and sort of still black on the tips. Or maybe the reverse of that. She got through it. I remember seeing them and was just like, "They look mean." I met them and I was like, "I was right." But like they were my friends, and he was like this older fag on campus who was just like here are books you should read, here's music we're listening to, let's listen to *Gravy Train*.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Do drugs, and drink together, and yell about...He had this gay astrology book where we would write the names of different guys we slept with or had crushes on, look at our compatibilities and talk about Karen Carpenter and... He was so...he was also sort of outside of the classroom forming, I guess a sense of being queer, as...just new narratives of what that could mean. New ways of existing in a queer way, with other people who also feel that way. Sort of re-

centering your perspective on yourself and people like you, as opposed to... I guess understanding myself through narratives that were not written with me in mind in the first place. [pause] Yeah, he ended up dying in 2008 from a congenital heart issue, so I only knew him for like...only knew him well for about 10 months. But I was hanging out in his dorm room almost every day for the months we were in school together. Very important person that I knew there. Yeah... I still...So I guess It was 11 years ago that he died. But I still have thoughts now where I'm sort of, "I don't want to engage." I don't, I don't know if...I feel like a lot of trans people do that and are sort of looking back and are like... "Wait was that person?"...Whether it's a family person who's always depressed, maybe they were actually trans the whole time. Usually it's an easy answer, but sometimes it's like trying to trace lineage I feel like.

Fuentes: Mmm.

Walker: Trying to find some sense of , "I was always building my life around this somehow." So, I don't know. Not to speculate on the genders of the deceased, but he's just someone... I-I-I try to wonder what his life would have been like right now. Because he was just kind of a really brilliant and jolting and um... sometimes aggravating, but really exciting and activating person to know. I just, I, yeah, am curious as to what that would have looked like if he...it would have continued to like, the age of 21.

Fuentes: What comes to mind?

Walker: Oh! I mean there's, there's wondering if um.. I guess maybe this is me projecting my own potential disappointments with my own life. Just wondering but, "Oh, would he still want to be friends with me? Would he think I'm a sell out or something? What would he think of my choices?." It's like he's kind of frozen in time as this like, queer 21-year-old who gets to live a little bit more idealized state of queerness and radical politics because it's not engaging with the real world and the realities of work as much I guess.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: At least at that, I know he-he worked on campus and stuff, but it's not like, he got to live in...We were both living in much more of like a... "Theory can be practical" kind of place, and so I think I'm probably just being unnecessarily hard on myself through thinking of that but, yeah. I don't know, or maybe, I don't know. We would have had a falling out and not survived 2011 Facebook cancellations and call out posts? I don't know. [laughter]

Fuentes: What was, what was that time like?

Walker: Well...

Fuentes: What was a 2011 Facebook cancellation?

Walker: Oh, I-I honestly kind of, I just got in a relationship with another at the time. Both of us were gay guys, but are no longer either of us that, but um... I got in a relationship with someone and kind of dipped out, and was this gay guy who lives with his boyfriend, and they have a dog and it's, it is this weird period to look back on because of how just like, what my desires were at that point, but I think of [dropping sound] in reverse to Facebook and stuff. I just remember... it bit of... I think on the surface level it was a whole a lot to see all the time in groups or just on walls, or people I knew, or contingently knew through going out, or through like... I guess picking fights with each other and sort of exposing problematic behavior in a way that didn't always necessarily seem, sometimes seemed warranted, sometimes it was like "Wait! Do you not just like this person and need to create two cams or something?." Also, then seeing that on tumbler on this way that was very cyclical where you see someone continually call at everyone else out and you see someone get this zenith of power of call outs, and then suddenly it's just like, called out themselves, and then you never see that person again and in this way that...

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Just like watching that was sort of like...I remember feeling very sort of, its- it's just the same thing keeps happening over and over, but then it keeps repeating, and I don't really know what to make of this. It could be voyeuristic or not, I don't know. But I think on some level, so... I remember kind of scaling back on Facebook and focusing on offline life a bit more, but then I also do think in that there was some sort of retreat from community or retreat from um...Difficulties, or conflict, or accountability or something. I think I kind of just, I don't think that I-I think probably my worlds were smaller than they've ever been. I kind of just went to work and lived with my boyfriend and had 5-10 good friends that I've been friends with for a while, and didn't enter un-curved spaces or whatever.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: For a couple of years. Or if I was at a gay bar I was, I wasn't meeting new people, I wasn't trying to meet new people. Um... so I feel like that sort of the side of it that I wasn't consciously thinking about what the motivation was behind that.

Fuentes: Mhmm.

Walker: So I don't know. Sorry. I know I was joking about like-like, [inaudible] [?] on Facebook and everyone's just fighting each other and stuff. But, I think that's an important part of that, like how I was understanding it, looking at it, and how I responded to it or reacted to it, or something.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Yeah, I think... I don't know if I really put that into words that way, it was like a retreat from community...I think across the board, it wasn't just Facebook specific, it was just across the board that being a period where I whether consciously...not consciously, but was making choices that limited my world and the people who I would meet and actually not really meeting people

and um... I don't know. I'm happy with that's not, that doesn't feel a like description of...That doesn't resonate with how I feel...I think about my day to day now. I think about the people who I have been spending a lot of time with, and a lot of them I've only met within the last year or less. That I meet new people through people I know in a way that I just like, wasn't always so curious. That-that's been a really good feeling about. I don't know. It's been one of my favorite things that's come out of transitioning, is this engagement with myself and also engagement with placing myself and contextualizing myself with other people.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Where we don't have necessarily anything in common through being trans because trans can mean anything and also nothing. [laughter]

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Um.. and like I don't know... I definitely also know people who aren't communal about it and are very individual about it. So it's not like it's inherent to transitioning or something. I'm really happy the people who are...have tried to model myself after sort of and viewed the importance of sort of knowledge sharing and so... I don't know. Making space to be with other people like you in that way.

Fuentes: So you're in Sarah Lawrence. You're reading a lot of books about queer theory. You have this really profound friendship. What was the... At what point did you start writing?

Walker: I was writing for all my classes, I didn't think of myself as a writer until like... years later when I was like, "Someone has to say I'm a writer, so it should probably be me." I don't know if I-I hmmm... I remember Facebook and later Tumblr was like... I just had a lot of fun on Facebook in a recreational kind of way.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: And having fun with posts and writing short condensed um... like posts sized post link things and then also just playing with screenshots, and collaging with screen shots of just reality shows I was watching or movies and tv shows I was watching, or articles I was reading, and maybe I could be like..."This is early media criticism or something," but it was mostly just shit posting I guess.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: Oh yeah, and just a lot of America's Next Top Model screen grabs just flew through my head! It...I remember, so that was really fun and I like had this sense of wanting to...I had been applying to different internships at-at Gawker Media at the time it still existed or Gawker. I didn't get this one. Both the times I applied for it I remember the guy was like, "If you, when you move back, just...I don't know. Come back to New York, or I don't know. Get in touch." He switched

companies with this place called Thrillist, and he still was like-like... I applied for internship with him then and that's sort of how I got into copywriting. Sorry, but to talk about writing and stuff. So I was writing and researching a lot, more of like an academic kind way. Not interviewing people, but much more just reading tax, synthesizing ideas, quoting entirely from text. I don't, I think maybe there was one thing I like...one research paper in college for-for definitely fewer than five. 1-3 maybe, where I remember interviewing someone for it. So that was something that came later. I just didn't think of it as writing though, because to me, writing was like "Oh, my friends who do poetry, or my friends who write fiction, or my friends who are in creative writing classes." They're writers. Even though I'm literally writing for all my classes. It just didn't click as writing, or that I'm a writer I guess... um...Then I think there was, so... I guess there was always something about the audience response and audience relationship, like a Facebook post. That was a big driving thing. I definitely still feel that now, like I get a total adrenaline hit when I have something that I've been working on, and I'm really into, and proud of, and it finally gets published. Then I share it on Twitter and I just can see the notifications sort of popping up about it, or seeing how it hits, and who it resonates with, who's retweeting it, who's liking it. That was also a good indicator for like, "Is this a story about trans people that trans people care about? Or is this a trans story that cis people care about?" It uh-...So it's like not super healthy or anything but there's definitely a kind of adrenaline high, a kind of manic energy I get out of it. So that's definitely still there, I think in a bit more of a...There's more thought and "praxice". "Oh, I'm sorry," practice to it. [laughter] More of an ethical standing behind it, not just sort of people respond if you do, if you do the thing, get the response, the response is good. [loud boom sound] I think figuring out what kind of response is how that's, or it's shifted now. I still crave response and attention but in, hopefully in a way that meets terms that I'm hoping piece [microphone sound]...registers with people. Then I was like... a friend we made through one class, she was running some kind of online magazine through, I think the Women's Studies grad program, and she asked me to write something once a month. So I remember writing. I think that was the first times I was outside of the school setting. Kind of getting a chance to write kind of like pop culture takes and musings and stuff. I tried, I did, only one, I was like... Do you remember that ABC show Revenge? From 2011?

Fuentes: Describe it.

Walker: A girls...She's, her family's murdered and she assumes new identity to seek revenge, one by one.

Fuentes: Wow.

Walker: Everyone in this photo she crosses. I watched half of a season of it, but I loved that half-season. I remember like-like looking back, "This is amazing," there's this chance to blog about it for Huff Post [Huffington Post] and I was so excited about it. I wrote one post about this theory I had that this character, is actually... she seems like sucks, but she's actually the most important character. Also, I think she's like this person's son, but it's her daughter, but it's like a secret, never revealed yet. [laughter] Then I didn't do any follow up posts, but it was,...so it was the end of my recapping that show in my career. In hindsight, Huff Post wasn't paying me, they didn't

start paying contributors until 2015 or something insane like that. So it really was just like we're paying you in exposure. I was like "Awesome," I have no basis to understand how this is exploitation. Let me write. I love just attention from the writing about the TV show. I don't understand this is work yet. It's 2011 and I'm like, 22 or 23. So that was I guess, sort of... and then on Tumblr... In between shit posts, or retweeting, or just commenting, and stuff, occasionally trying to write something more out... Usually along pop culture like a Rihanna video, or about songs I was listening to. That was sort of where a lot of the, my interest was.

Fuentes: Mhmm. What was, what do you see your ...What was your... What is your pop cultural view of that time now? This-this era of your life?

Walker: Oh... Like specific to me or?

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Or like universally or something?

Fuentes: Yeah, what do you...

Walker: Yeah.

Fuentes: What do you see about that time in pop culture when you're thinking or counting this?

Walker: I think it's the height of the Stan Wars um...

Fuentes: Stan Wars? What's?...

Walker: Oh! [laughter] So, it was maybe between 2008 and 2000....I'll say 13' , I'll say it ended Beyoncé, dropped the bomb [loud dropping sound] of her self-title of the album. It just...She was like "This conversation doesn't serve me, [loud dropping sound] so boom! It's over. I've declared it irrelevant." So it was a way...So it was a period when solo female pop stars like Beyoncé, Britney [Britney Spears], Lady Gaga, Rihanna, um... Kesha, um... were profitable. So music labels were promoting them heavily. I guess there was still money in the music industry, so they were giving them flashy music videos, and then the YouTube ecosystem was still beneficial to that whole project. Where they would have eras and lots of money behind them. They're music video releases were a big deal and not just among teenage faggots, but also like, in the culture at large. In a way that I don't think is the case anymore with the rare exception, they're not really not topping the charts anymore or being given the resources for... no one is being given the resources for a big music video anymore, unless they have the resources themselves. But it was also kind of like this narrative around you know, all of these people are in the same conversation because they are a beautiful woman in her 20's or something, who is a singer. Even if like...they're all invested in their own music to wildly different degrees. So when I say it ended 2013 with Beyoncé's album, to me, this is obviously...This isn't what she said, but to me the way I understand it, she had been lumped into being in conversation with Britney, and Pink, and just

people who were doing vastly different things than each other and operating in different ways and the same I guess, milia [ ?] and um... It was kind of a useless conversation that was all about pop, and pop music, and pop divas, but never interrogated what the word "pop" means. Or it's racialized commendation throughout history. It's decontextualized sonic roots in the Black church and singers like, Whitney Houston who had upbringings in the Black church, that translated that into pop. You get someone who watches a YouTube video, and a white 13-year-old girl watches a YouTube video of an American Idol contestant, who grew up watching Whitney Houston videos, and it's just this telephone game of the roots of things and the context of things are lost until it's just this marketable product or something. This is all a big tangent, there are people who have said it way smarter and way earlier than me. I think it was a really fun time to be um... young and gay, but also, I don't think that it was a very limited kind of moment for probably the people involved.

Fuentes: Why?

Walker: Well I think it's-it's like kind of doing a one size fits all narrative on each and every one of those female pop singers. Like you're a diva, you're empowered, you are wearing a leotard.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: You are empowering your sexuality, but also still not allowed to call yourself a feminist because that means you hate men still in 2009-2010. [clap sound] You still have to do these crazy press tours and just be very public, consumable figure. This is before Instagram. Before a lot of celebrities retreated from the traditional press model. Where they're kind of just going to Good Morning America, to Dateline, to interviews with everyone, and everyone-anyone who will interview them. Doing promo 24/7 for every single thing they do or...[pause] I don't know, maybe people got a high from it in like a gigantic universal scale of like of me getting a high from a tweet promoting an article, getting retweets. I'm sure it's also, could potentially monstrous place to be. I missed all that success. Like Amy Winehouse or someone who, or Whitney Houston. That kind of attention kind of, kind of destroyed them. Or locked them in a place where they could destroy themselves.

Fuentes: So do you think the fun for gay fans...

Walker: [laughter]

Fuentes: Ended after that, after that time?

Walker: Um... I think it's just like an age based thing. Then I look on twitter now and its-its, there's still the same very enthusiastic, like "Faggy" Stan Armies who are like, Dua Lipa, "No," Ava Max or I, uh..."Oh no!" They're all into K-pop now too! Those are also like the K-pop groups like BTS, who don't want to, like I-I don't have any thoughts on BTS period, but thank God because I think that saying anything about BTS, that the BTS army would be like-like a death sentence on the internet.

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: I still think, there-there are still there...I just think its maybe reduced itself back to just same core super fans who would have been doing this in any era, I think maybe it's the age, teenagers are always invested in this maybe because they have less time that they're spending on... Maybe have less, fewer responsibilities in the world, so they have lots of time to be like a pro-bono defender of a celebrity they'll never meet.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: I guess maybe I just stopped being as interested in that sort of...I was never harassing people under an avatar with like, [screeching sound] like Britney Spears' face on it or something. I just used to find the whole, I don't know. I think I used to find it interesting and funny and fun as a sort of... Just too old to actually be in it, kind of observer. When I was younger, I was always really into pop music and watching music videos. I still remember seeing a Paula Abdul video and this greatest hits CD compilation flash across the tv, in 95', and I just like... "I don't know what this is, but Paula Abdul straight up, Paula Abdul straight up," just reminding myself of this phrase so I didn't forget it. When I went to a juke box at a restaurant, when I could remember, I could put it on or something. I think a lot of that was this projected displaced femininity.

Fuentes: Mmm...

Walker: I don't find myself as moved by pop star esthetics in the way that I once did. Just sort of like watching an endless catalog of music videos, or a beautiful, very feminine women is like singing or miming-singing to a song or something. I, it used to captivate me in a way it doesn't anymore I guess. I feel like there was some sort of like using it as a like, using it as a... "You can, I'll watch you do this," or something. I guess there was some element of that. [pause] How, I don't know, like a cross dresser is married to a woman might like be controlling of his wife or something. Eww, eww! [laughter] Like controlling of his wife, and sort of wear this, wear that, because she's his avatar for womanhood or something. There's maybe an element of that with...

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: Because the gay pop star fan relationship sometimes of worshipping this, yeah, avatar for your own womanhood or femininity that you can't or don't feel like you can access, or don't even know you want access in your own life. Yeah, which might also just be like your regular old misogyny. I don't know. Yeah...Also, [loud dropping sound] I worked at MTV [Music Television] and blogged about pop music, and pop music celebrities for a year and a half and I definitely sort of lost my ability to like-like, I didn't have the interest for discovering pop music in the same way.

Fuentes: Why?

Walker: I remember in Tumbler I learned about new music all the time, going into that job, which I started in 2013... So it's Tumbler's where I learned about Nico Blanco, and Leaf and Keg Killer[?], and Grimes, years before she married Elon Musk or started dating him for his Rocketship he's going to build one day. Learning about all these interesting musicians who... There was a proactive element, there kind of like a, there was a social element to it too. I'm learning about these songs from someone else who I follow, or someone who I follows re-blogs someone else. There was a social element to that too and just an interest in it, and me actually wanting to seek out new music, and new things to listen to... New sounds, things I've heard before. Then it being my day-to-day job, especially somewhere as institutional as MTV, just killed a lot of that interest. So, I had to... Part of it was because the music I did listen to had to be .... I guess a lot of it was chosen for me by the beat that I was on, which was pop music and then also up and coming artists. But up and coming in the sense of the like, usually the A&R [Artists and repertoire] team from the... A record label is like "Hey MTV, were coming in with the new artist whose an, is the up and coming artist for you to listen to, they're going to play three songs in this fluorescent lit lounge." And so it's like... There's no actual, there was very little room for you as the blogger to have any say in who deserves attention or not. I did manage to do that a few times, but it was usually not possible, it was a lot of assigned top down. We cover everything Adam Lambert does because his fans are a bunch of really fanatical suburban moms and they click on everything, and they share everything. You always cover him, you always cover Miley Cyrus, you always cover Lady Gaga, you always cover Britney Spears, you always cover Rihanna, you always cover, like there was a list of people we like...

Fuentes: I see.

Walker: Yeah, like Selena Gomez posts an Instagram post. "That's a blog!" [loud dropping sound] Write 200 words about whatever the fuck she just posted. It was sort of trying to manipulate that fan interaction for... Or, I guess, exploit it or leverage it for the page views that automatically blogging about someone would bring to the site I guess. So there was a disengagement I guess, from having a point of view from the process, there was not really a lot of encouragement to like um... I guess bring new sounds to the table or maybe unknown artists that didn't have a lot of clout or a record behind them. A record in both sense of the word and um... I think also just, so then also be good at my job, I would, you know, be listening to things I knew I could write about, or should be writing about, or things I should be familiar with, and then I think also when something becomes your job it, like any of the magic or fun that was... Or a lot of the magic or fun that were in it, kind of gets sucked out. So if I'm listening or thinking about music all day, even if it's not music that I would always 100% want to listen to outside of work. The second I get home it's like... I kind of almost, I don't know... I don't want to then spend all night doing an unpaid version of what I was doing at work all day...

Fuentes: Mhmm.

Walker: So yeah, I guess that's sort of, those are all the different ways that...

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: I stopped being as interested in these... I mean, I still think Paula Abdul, I like appreciate her space and the space she takes up in the cannon of music. I think I'm just not as captivated or fascinated by them in the same way.

Fuentes: Yeah, and that inflicted by... you-you're theory around your gender?

Walker: Yeah, I think so. I mean it's still not fully crystalized I think. I just thing about it sometimes and those thoughts just keep coming and so I figured there must be some validity to the idea that pop stars were just this avatar for womanhood, or femininity, or girlhood that was also kind of taboo, and still something to listen to in private, and make fun of publicly. I had an older brother who listened to Marilyn Manson, and Limp Bizkit, and Ozzy Osbourne and so, I couldn't like...It was still like, "Oh, this is embarrassing for me to like that" or something. I have to make fun of them publicly. Then go on Kazar or LimeWire and downloaded a bunch of videos by them.

Fuentes: So is the way you're think...You're saying that it hasn't... Your idea how your gender formed or hasn't fully crystalized yet, what has, where, what, has been the thinking and shift in thinking to end this direction? Or who has been there to shift your view on... Or this argument for pop stars and avatars and...?

Walker: I would say I see a lot of parallels with...So, I don't have the cissy-cross dresser, like pre-transition background to it or like-like-like a do... A nightlife drag, through clothing and makeup, and having queer nightlife like settings like doing gender play or drag or anything like that. Which, I think of is like two sort of ways that two different kinds of non-sentient trans women might engage in trans femininity before everything kind of clicks.

Fuentes: Mmhmm...

Walker: Not that obviously you can't be a trans women and a drag queen. You can be a trans woman and a cross dresser.

Fuentes: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

Walker: You can be anything you want to be! But, I think sometimes almost this gateway where it's a more socially sanctioned way of exploring this thing like you haven't realized. But since I don't sort of have...It's like reading like Torrey Peters. She has this novella called, *The Masker*, that is about this character who's like ...Also, this other one *Glamour Boutique* that came out a couple years after that one, that are both have characters who are sissy's or cross dressers who like cross dress in this very specific kind of Lolita, petty coat, pink foofy dress, curly, very like [clears throat] "excuse me," little girl kind of esthetic. Are meeting up with men on Craigslist who are either also into that or fucking sissy's. How it's sort of this erotic gateway for these character's into eventually sort of realizing they're trans women or debating with one of the characters and the masker, trying to... Has the central conflict that, um... I'm meeting all these trans [loud dropping sound] women-cross dressers, trans women, transvestite a... Plus their maskers

convention in Las Vegas. She meets-she's not really fully out yet in her regular life, but she's sort of maybe considering it. She spends a time with the trans women there and there's a lot of internalized trans misogyny, and the way she describes the trans women characters talking about evidence of their surgeries, and just talking about trans, women who've had transsexual surgeries period. Because she's in this headspace where's she's kind of choosing between "Well, the reality of being a trans women isn't as sexy, compared to the erotic sort of limited, stunted, space of staying in this like-total fetish role, play space"...Anyway, yeah. That's a great book about this. But this-so hearing about that and also hearing from other trans women about just sort of what their gateways into this way or even having friends who were drag queens and then either had a hard pivot when they came out and just were like "I'm not a drag queen anymore, I'm a trans woman." Maybe still worked in nightlife. It's like drag was their steps into it. I guess maybe I've just been curious like "Okay, I've had to had some sort of gateway into this or some safe zone in that way." Or some analog to that, but I didn't have those, so I think I was...I've been trying to pinpoint what-what is my socially sanctioned way of feeling womanly or feminine or something.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: And I've spent a lot of time like watching movies, or listening to music, watching music videos, often times with like, I don't know, beautiful women in them. In a non-sexualizing way. Not like it was ever was sort of like "I'm attracted to her or something." So I feel, that seems like a plausible theory to me. That-that was some sort of safe-zone...

Fuentes: Yeah. Yeah.

Walker: To engage in all that or feel like directly embodied or something.

Fuentes: Yeah, so vastly different than earlier narratives in like uh... in the time you were talking about when Lady Gaga's a prominent figure and it's a narrative of *Born This Way*...

Walker: Yeah. Oh yeah, the *Born This Way* moment. That was a moment! [laughter] I like, I really think we need to...I'm so curious how that Obama first term like Glee, Lady Gaga, *Born This Way*, "It gets better", "Don't bully gay kids" moment is going to be written about soon. I feel like it hasn't really...like... the...general sentiment about, you know, about a Trump presidency is so negative, that a lot of people aren't casting the critical eye and making the connections I guess, preceding that and stuff. So I feel like I-I don't know. I feel like there's so much, so much there, even in a period of like-like gay progress or something, to really look at it, almost have fun with and play with. So it was really, really fucking weird. I don't know...

Fuentes: So on the note of sissy's...

Walker: [laughter]

Fuentes: You have very publicly did a book criticism on-on um... on a-a book... I believe, I didn't caught the title.

Walker: Sorry, I didn't know where that was going, I was like "What did I do, oh no!"

Fuentes: [laughter]

Walker: You very publicly, I was like, "Oh no!"

Fuentes: You-you-you wrote a book criticism on...

Walker: A memoir by Jacob Tobia called, *Sissy*.

Fuentes: What was yeah... what was the... why?

Walker: Oh, so my interests in doing it... and so I feel like it can read a bunch of different ways. So, to explain the review is sort of part book review of this book that...to get it out of the way, I didn't like the book. I didn't think it was a good book. Um... Then I approached the review as its also sort of an essay on the trans memoir and kind of like putting it in context in a cannon that it belongs to and sort of...The memoirs that-that like legacy its published out of. [tap sound] I chose to frame it that way because in reading the book it didn't seem to me that the author had done that reading or it seemed to be as aware of the decades, or even over a century of trans memoir writing that, or trans memoir in first person literature that proceeds them in their work. So it was a bit of, I mean I guess that's kind of shady, just sort of like, well, "You didn't do the reading, so I'm going to do the reading, to do the reading!" But I-I also really wanted to make sure that it wasn't personal... I mean first of all, I also don't know Jacob. So, in writing it was really important for me to like...I really didn't want the review to read as personal, I didn't want it to read as a call out in the way that I think that any trans-on-trans, trans-on-trans criticism is often understood as a call out. Or any sort of in-group criticism. The nuances of criticism are easily lost and it feels sort of like "Oh God I need to immediately pick a side, only person is correct, only one person is right, they're fighting this is like a proxy battle for my own like... My own politics and my own ethics or something." I-I-I didn't, I wanted to create kind of trans-on-trans literary criticism that I just want to exist in the world. That already proceeds that review too. But, that I would just like to see more of, and then also just challenge myself to critique the content [loud dropping sound] of what someone has written without falling into, you know, it's... It would be easier to ad-hominem personal attacks on this person I don't know, but who I can easily reduce down to certain critiques that seem to make sense if I'm only looking at their Instagram. So I don't have the full picture of them. I thought the book itself was not good, and there was plenty, that's plenty to rest a bad review on.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: I think mostly, I mean that's a, that's a piece that...I've-I've really liked the response to it...Even... It was a couple of days ago someone had said something about like...I just don't remember who it was. Yeah, I don't remember who it was, but someone who was trans had said that like ... Oh! Oh! I remember who it was. It was a writer who I know had said something about

like “Oh this other person who I saw by the way said something you know, passed along basically, positive words someone had had about that piece or that it was good”. Which made me feel good since it’s a lot of trans people are passing along their response to it to me.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: So it-it makes me feel...that tells me that maybe I accomplished what I set out to do with this. It’s being read by people, it’s being read by the people I want it to be read by, first and foremost. That also it’s moving them to the point where they feel the need to tell me like “Oh that’s great!” Because it’s actually...I feel like it’s more common that if you like something just, I-I don’t usually, I hear a lot more um...I don’t know. I write things all the time and usually don’t hear anything about it, so if someone is going out of their way to give a simple compliment, it’s like “Oh cool, this is like a good sign about-about that.” [loud noise] It’s, it seems like it kind of hit a cathartic release for some readers, which I also appreciated. Just frustration with a specific type of trans success that operates entirely on cis-terms.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: I don’t mean, I don’t mean Jacob. But, I just mean, say a memoir like *Sissy* to me, is a piece of trans cultural production for...actually, “How am I phrasing that?.” It’s either trans cultural production for a cis-consumer or cis-cultural production on transgender themes. I don’t know which side of that it would fall on actually, but either way it’s- it’s a...It in reading the book, it read like something about me but not for me, and I wanted to explore like “Why?” What, what in the book fails to actually make it resonate for someone who you would think would be a-a target reader for this book, for trans lives. It was also just fun. I don’t know, I felt like... It was just like, it was just fun to be “cunty,” but in a... [dropping sound] Not just for its own sake I guess. To also explore a new kind of style, which I haven’t really done that many books reviews.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: In trying to figure out “What do I have to do?” Okay, here’s things I should read first, here’s things I should reference, here’s...It was also giving myself an excuse to read parts of Caroline Cossey’s memoir.... [dropping sound] To learn more about Lily Elbe or something.

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: The research part of it was really fun too.

Fuentes: Yeah.

Walker: To feel like I had walked away with knowing, “Okay,” actually understand how to place a creative work in a conversation it belongs in. So I’m not just sort of sitting at my computer spewing out a take based on my first major reaction.

Fuentes: Mmhhh.

Walker: That review would have just been “Cunty” for “Cunty’s” sake. This one was more measured I think. Also, I-I hope that when anyone reads it they come to the understanding that I would love it if... Would love it if Jacob’s next book is great. I think everyone is capable of writing a great book. But, if the books not good, I don’t think we should have any sort of sense of being beholden of defending anything, just because a trans person was involved.

Fuentes: I see...

Walker: Yeah, although I do think, in intra-community critique is really difficult to do in mixed company.

Fuentes: Why?

Walker: Or at least I struggle with it, because I have to think about um... I do think about the precarity of someone’s position who maybe has a very visible platform and the way that critique... Like say if I-I really like Trace Lysette a lot, so I’m using her as an example purely because I don’t feel this way. But I’m like, say Trace Lysette is... I don’t know, made an Instagram post holding an assault rifle with Pete Buttigieg, and was like “Pete fleet baby” or something, I don’t know. Something super stupid and frustrating for so many reasons. I wrote some op-ed, [Opposite the Editorial Page] “Why Trace Lysette is bad now,” or something for Vice.com. The readership of that is mostly cis-people, the people editing it are mostly cis-people. It’s not necessarily the best for like...I would feel kind of fraud about necessarily writing that for them, because so many people reading this actually don’t know anything about her. They don’t know her history, they don’t know anything else she’s done. [clap sound] Maybe the first they’ll see is this thing that I’m now bringing to everyone’s attention, that she did wrong, and if the goal, if the goal if why I’m doing that is just to make sure that everyone knows that she did this wrong thing then that’s maybe the most appropriate venue... But if the goal is...Can you actually like...am I invested or interested in you understanding why this is not great or something. I could probably DM [Direct Message] her or something. Who knows if she would see it, but it’s a different way to go about it. I think there’s also just a way that launching an intra-community critique within a professionalized news platform kind of space. I think it’s different if it’s on social media, where everyone sees.

Fuentes: Why?

Walker: It’s the power differentials, the platforms and everything and if I have an elevated platform through being paid money by a media company to write for them, and if I’m using that to maybe, call out, maybe...Not even not like, Trace. An example: Trace Lysette. For something she never did, just to clarify she never did that. But just someone I know in my communities who’s bothering me and I’m just like, “That was problematic. I’m going to write a blog post for Vice.com about why like this thing that you did at a party last week was fucked up and use your name.” That’s, that would be like a deeply fucked up way to engage in criticism on my part.

Fuentes: Mmhhh.

Walker: It would just, the power differentials are totally... The power difference is totally out of whack. I would basically have the force of a media company behind me to critique someone who does not have any platform. Then on top of that, in front of an audience of mostly cis-people, who don't know this person, who are coming at it with their own internalized trans misogyny, that maybe would lead them to be predisposed to want to see any of us as bad people. Because it confirms, "Oh right, thank God I don't think have to give this person sympathy, I knew that they were bad."

Fuentes: Mmhhh.

Walker: Um... and so that-that is something I had, I...had to work through a lot with the Jacob Tobia review. Also, it motivated me to be really careful about it being about, as clear as I could make it it's about the book and not about the person. [pause] Because I don't know, there has to be some kind of productive, constructive point to say criticism like that. Not across the board, I think if someone has really unethical behavior, they deserve an appropriate criticism and at an appropriate level, or power level that they're operating on...

Fuentes: Mmhhh.

Walker: I'm not trying to turn into someone right now who's like, that thinks "Cancel culture" is bad, you should just be nice to everyone. No, I think critique and calling out are both constructive methods of addressing conflict, but when I'm getting paid by a cis-media, by a straight media company, to potentially engage in like addressing conflict in that way or critiquing something, or a body of work by someone, or a piece of work by someone, I don't know, it's tricky. I don't know. Yeah, and making sure "Am I doing this because my straight bosses love a queer cat fight? Or am I doing this because I have something to say about this piece of work, or about this thing that happened in the news that will bring some sort of-something constructing can come out of this by this being written about, by me, beyond just improving ad sales numbers for the company I work for?"

Fuentes: Mmhhh. [pause] What type of uh...to put in it in your words, trans-on-trans criticism are you hoping to see?

Walker: [pause] Well, I guess first I would like to see more books, and movies, and TV shows, and albums by trans creative people, receive the resources in order to exist on the same sort of distribution levels as the kind of work that does get mainstream press and criticism, and then if that's there, I would like to see the work engaged with-by critics from all backgrounds, but...Also, engaged with by trans critics, and trans journalists, and trans writers who might be more adapted to contextualizing some of the work in the context they were written, or recorded, or filmed out of. I would like to see trans-on-trans criticism that isn't afraid to buck up against the visibility focus politics we've had for...Sort of on defining conversations around trans media for-for the

maybe 10 years or so. Which, makes sense and I understand it's utility. Also, I like reading books about trans women by trans women. I'm not like... I too can live for visibility, but I-I think there are limits to it, and can also hold us back in terms of taking work about us as seriously as it deserves to be taken. And if-if your um...Celebrating bad art is also not good for the person making it, because they'll never actually grow if their constantly being told it was great, when there are maybe things they could work on or reconsider or... I think that anyone...I appreciate criticism on my work because that's like being challenged is like how I've been forced to get better on my end. So, I don't know. I just think criticism is-is, it can be like a very productive exercise, and also an exercise, a loving exercise, a caring exercise, and one that anyone who makes something should hope to receive in the world, because it means that people are actually taking your work seriously, and not just patting you on the back because of who you happen to be.

Fuentes: What is the risk if there isn't any trans criticism?

Walker: [pause] That bad trans art will be treated like it's good. That uh... boring trans art will be treated like it's interesting, that unoriginal or unimaginative trans art will be treated like it's revealing or revelatory because the critic conceptualizing it, or thinking about it...The cis-critic, won't understand what's actually fascinating or what's been done or if everything is new to that critic because they don't have either lived or communal... Lived experience or communal knowledge, aren't familiarized with the cannon that work was made out of ... It can be prone to calling something the most important, the most significant, the most incredible piece of work about trans experience, when it's not. [pause] I guess also, the flip side of all those negative statements is also true then. Good trans art will be unnoticed. Good trans art won't receive engagement. Artists who are producing interesting or provocative work won't receive the kind of engagement that would spur their further development. They won't receive the kind of attention that could lead to resources to like...

Fuentes: Mmhmm.

Walker: Help them continue developing their work. Possibly leading them to stop making work. There's-there's this line in um.. uh... it's not out yet, but...my friend Torrey's book that is coming out next year, I think she would be fine with this, But there's this..."Ugh!" Yeah, I think she would be fine. There's this line in it about how every...the characters are trans women in Brooklyn. There's some line about how every...Sorry, wait. Can we actually cut that? Can I rephrase that? I actually, it's-it's like...I didn't ask her permission to do that and I don't want to... I feel like she would be fine with it, but I'm also like, I don't know if I should be referencing a line from something that isn't published yet. Should I just sort of pick back up or?

Fuentes: Sure.

Walker: At least here in Brooklyn, there's so many trans women just making things, and there's like GoGo Graham's making beautiful couture, and has been for years. There's artists star Marasu [?], out in the Bay area/sometimes here, who's making music and drum [?], and Chrissy Bell, all making music. It seems like there are more trans models than there are not trans models.

Sometimes, there's so many writers, and artists just make, Nash Glynn, incredible figure painter who's here. There's so many of us making incredible work that isn't always given the due or attention it deserves and... I don't think it has to be this way but I think we're the only ones who notice the work oftentimes or have the ability to either put it into existence around art and music and film or TV. [loud dropping sound] Writing, but also like create conversations centering this work by trans feminine artists. So I think, I think that's-that's what's lost too when not having trans-on-trans criticism, supported and resourced.

Fuentes: So...we're about out of time. Is there anything that you want to say that you feel that you didn't have an opportunity to say?

Walker: Um... I guess thinking about like the Trans Oral History Project, [cough] "excuse me." I think about how important and fundamental the social sharing of information was when I first started transitioning and has sort of continued, you know. From hearing from a friend, you know? "Here's who you can go see for laser, here's the trans woman who does electrolysis, and also just here's-here's what makeup is, and here's like um"... and just like the things that they don't tell you, like implicitly. "Oh, here's ways of dressing, and here's ways of being in the world, and models you can draw from." I think this is a really important project because so much of even-even as we have like a bigger communal platform in the world. So much of our -our just like ways of being is passed on orally, and just...In a sort of one-on-one, interpersonal kind of way. So I'm really happy this record of, so many records that the project has done, exists.