NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

CHRISTIAN APPEL

Interviewer: Dinick Martinez

Date of Interview: May 8, 2017

Location of Interview: SAGE Midtown, New York City

Transcribed by Micah Katz

NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #038

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.
Dinick Martinez: Hello my name is Dinick Martinez and I will be having an inter—conversation with Christian Appel for the New York City Trans Oral History Project in collaboration with New York—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 April 29, 2017 and this is being recorded at Midtown SAGE (Advocacy and Services for LGBT Elders) location. [pages turning] Okay, Christian, tell me your name and your age, if you would like.

Christian Hansen Appel: My name is Christian Hansen Appel and I am 33-years old.

Martinez: Um, what is your gender pronoun?

Appel: Um, I take they/them or she/her.

Martinez: How would you describe your gender?

Appel: My gender, hmmm. Well, I identify as trans-feminine and nonbinary and genderqueer.

Martinez: Hmm.

Appel: Um, and my gender is fairly—fairly fluid, um, but I identify very mu—very strongly with—with, um, with femmeness.

Martinez: When and where were you born?

Appel: I was born in New Roch—oh actually I was born in New York, um, on the Upper East Side at least the hospital, but I grew up [laughter]—I grew up in New Rochelle, New York, which is, uh, in Westchester County and it's one of the—it's one of the first cities north of the Bronx.

Martinez: Hmm. Ok. And we're going to talk about your early life.

Appel: Ok.

Martinez: How long have you lived in New York?

Appel: In New York City? Uh, well in New York State my whole life, um, but in New York—well no actually that's not true [laughter]. I've lived in New York City for the past two and a half years, um, but I—I grew up until the age of 18 in New York, coming into New York City all the time.

Martinez: So how—how has it changed over—over these years?

Appel: Oof, how has New York changed? Um, well it's become a lot more expensive, it's become I—I usually describe it as kind of like a playground for the rich. Um, when I was in my, like, very early twenties, it was kind of on the tail end of like wild-ass New York, so there were still a few, like, really big, amazing parties, like the Motherfucker parties, I remember that. I went to one of them in—at Limelight, um, before that shit was shut down, um, and I loved it, uh, but uh—yeah so a lot of—I think a lot of, like, the [deep breath]—the radical, queer, like out there culture has kind of, I think for a long time was pushed aside. I think it's making a—I think it's making a comeback. It really is. Um, I think [Rudoph] Giuliani was responsible for, you know, getting rid of so much of that and [Michael] Bloomberg just like, made this, like, what I said, a playground for the rich, um, but uh, I think it's also changed a lot since September 11th, [2001] unfortunately—

Martinez: Just to, um, just kind of follow the same questions, what do you miss most about the way it used to be?

Appel: The way that New York used to be? Mmm [pause] I miss—I miss how dirty it was, and it's still pretty dirty, but I just miss how it was kind of gritty. Um, I miss that—I miss that it wasn't just like a—a really ostentatious display of wealth everywhere. It wasn't just all about money, and that, like, it was more about art and culture and like, being weird. New York was about being weird when I was younger, which was great because, like, in the suburbs there weren't that many weird people, so just knowing that this whole community of weirdos and queerdos existed, you know, so close to me helped me, like, be okay with the fact that I was [laughter] weird as hell.

Martinez: Okay, um, let me ask you—sometimes, like, can I ask you right after, like—

Appel: Yeah, you can ask me whatever—

Martinez: —who are some of the great characters from here?

Appel: From New York?

Martinez: Yeah.

Appel: Some of the great characters, oh, um…oh that's an interesting question. I don't think I was around New York enough when I was younger to, like—I mean I remember like Michael T from—from the Motherfucker parties. She was the DJ and, um—actually—I remember, like, meeting her and hanging out with her was really formative for me because she was super gender nonconforming, like, she was—always had full face on, like full makeup on, um, but she had short hair and her like, suits were just like kind of flamboyant but you know, I never saw her in, like, a dress and she always did a lipsync at the end of every Motherfucker and it was always amazing, but I remember that was, like—that was and interesting thing for me to see somebody who was kind of in control, but also gender nonconforming, like, someone that was, like, the organizer and the host of this huge, amazing historical party and was—just didn't give a fuck about, like, conforming to any kind of gender, um, but wasn't just a performer or just at the party, was like, running that shit. I remember that being a big deal for me.

Martinez: Interesting.

Appel: Mhmm.

Martinez: Do you remember—um, describe—describe your childhood and family background.

Appel: Umm well my parents are both from Europe. My mom is from Denmark, my dad is from Germany, um, and I think because of that, they were really open to me expressing myself and my gender in ways that most parents in the 80's would not necessarily have been comfortable with, so they allowed me to play with whatever toys I wanted to, allowed me to dance around in a tutu with my sister, um, like encouraged me to take dance classes and do theater. My father's side of

the family had a lot of arts, like, people in it: my grandfather was a drummer, and my uncle was like a pop star in Germany and did a lot of theater as well, so, yeah I think they—they were good about that. I do—I have a very distinct memory of hanging out with this, hanging out with this boy when I was like, I don't know, five or something, and I—we were playing and I told him that I wanted to be a girl and he got kind of weirded out by it and I guess I told my mom later that day that I had told him that. She said to me: "you can't tell people that," and that was like, kind of one of the last moments where I remember considering, or like really internalizing "oh I want to be a girl," but I—uh, I feel like maybe I gave it up then, you know? But there was no—I had no exposure to trans people at all, had no concept of that for many, many years. I mean, I've—I'm sure I saw a lot of things in the media but everything that I saw in the media was terrible about trans people. It was either trans people getting killed, or you know, trans people as like, villains, or trans people as—as like, sex workers, which—which is great: if you're a sex worker, you're a sex worker, but, yeah, and sex workers rights are important and like at—when I was a young kid, like, they were portrayed as like, bad, horrible people.

Martinez: So this answers the question that I want to ask,I want—I wanted to ask, that you—basically you discovered that you were different at age four.

Appel: Yeah, yeah.

Martinez: Nice.

Appel: Yeah.

Martinez: Um—

Appel: Yeah my favorite color was pink. [laughter]

Martinez: Pink?

Appel: It was pink, yeah, when I was a kid and I remember very distinctly deciding that it was no longer going to be pink. It took me a long time to like pink again.

Martinez: So that's your earliest memory? That answers the question, what's your earliest memory?

Appel: My earliest memory? Um, that one, the one where I told my mom, I think that was a pretty early one. I have another one from preschool, so I must have been like four—three or four and [sigh] god, I can still see myself. I'm, [sigh] um, dressed in women's clothing, because they had, like, a dress-up bin of costumes and I have, like, a long dress on and a hat on and a string of pearls and I guess some of the boys had made fun of me and said "you can't wear that," and I went and sat in my cubby, you know, where you, like—you put your things and just cried and sat there and

I can—I have this, like, outer body image of myself, like I can see myself somehow, weirdly. It's totally ingrained in my head.

Martinez: Mmm. That sweet.

Appel: Well sweet and sad. [laughter]

Martinez: [laughter] You're right about that. Okay. Do you have any nicknames? And how did you get it?

Appel: Um, I—I don't. I don't actually have, do I have any, actually, no. I do have one nickname. My sister calls me, um, schmee, and I'm—I'm not even sure where it came from. I think she just—she likes—my whole family likes to say weird words and make weird noises. We're kind of weird. So I think it just came from something that she was—I think—Oh I know what it was. She, like, called me bro-shmo for a while and then when I was eventually, like, "I don't want you to call me bro" [laughter] she was like"okay, well let's just change it to schmee" and she always calls me that, um, which is nice because it's kind of like totally gender neutral. [laughter]

Martinez: So, as you know I'm learning, so, um, I'm going to kind of rephrase the sentences—the questions again—

Appel: Uh-huh.

Martinez: So, what were your parents like?

Appel: My parents? Uh, yeah, uh, well like I said before, they were really sup—very supportive. My dad, um—my dad died when I was 23—

Martinez: Mhmm that's sad.

Appel: Yeah, so I never really got to talk to him about my gender identity, um, that's like around the time where I started identifying as genderqueer but I wasn't really vocal about it and I didn't start identifying as trans until I was, like, 27 or 28. So I think a lot about what—how he would have responded to it. He was super supportive of me being queer, and I think he would have been fine with it? He was a very deep, kind of melancholy person; didn't have a lot of friends, but was very gentle and sweet, and I still have a very—I still have a very profound relationship with him. His ashes are buried in the woods near my house, and I go and visit them once a month and just talk to him, and I have the sense that—

Martinez: —you are like him.

Appel: In some ways I am like him, yeah—

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, since I met you, now you know where you get that from.

Appel: Where I get what? The—like the melancholy?

Martinez: Yeah [inaudible]

Appel: [laughter] I guess so [laughter]

Martinez: So, what interested you as a child?

Appel: Uh, performing, theater, dressing up, imagining things, um—oh, I—this is actually really funny. My—all of my friends were, not all of them, but most of my friends when I was—for a while, were boys, like I had this group of boys that I hung out with all the time and whenever we played house, I would always play the mother. Every single time without fail, and they always accepted it. That's just what it was. I also bossed them all around and told them what to do all the time [laughter]. I was a little bit older than them and they—so they remember that—they all remember that, that I was always the mother and they're all—and I'm still friends with some of them and they all were like, "yeah, you were the mom. Duh. Like, you were super feminine, but also told us what to do all the time, so, duh. You were the mom." [laughter] That was hilarious.

Martinez: When you were growing up, did people encourage your interests?

Appel: Yes. Yeah, my parents very much encouraged my interests. Um, they did make me play sports though.

Martinez: Oh.

Appel: And it was interesting because I sucked at soccer and I sucked at baseball and they made me do it and I hated it and then I finally got to stop and then I took up playing soccer again when I was a little older and I was a little bit more, like, comfortable with my body and then I was like, really good, which was kind of fun [laughter].

Martinez: Okay. Who is the most important person in your life?

Appel: [deep breath, sigh and lip trill] Oof wow that's a hard question. I mean I don't really—I try not to make hierarchies in my life in general, so I don't really think there's one person, but I think that, like, my mother and my sister and—and my father still too are the people that I feel most connected to, and that I feel most responsible towards. Especially since my father died, I felt really—and—and they've been—and my sister has been incredibly supportive of me through everything. She's like the sweetest, most gentle, most loving person, and I live with her, actually, and her name is Christina, [laughter] so we literally are kind of the same person in—in some ways.

Martinez: So that's sweet.

Appel: Yeah.

Martinez: What is the moment you are proud of.

Appel: Um, what's a moment I'm proud of? Ooo, well I think in most recent memory, last year, I started the Trans-Generational Theater project, which is, a theater project for trans and gender nonconforming people of all ages here at SAGE. It's like an eight week program where we created theater from our own ideas and then had a performance at the end and I think at our very last performance there was like 150 people that came and it was a hard process for sure. It was my thesis—my masters thesis project for a degree in applied theater, but I just remember sitting there and watching these participants, who, when they—most of them, when they first started the program had no experience in theater and were like, "you want us to do what?" [laughter] and then were up there and creating this really beautiful theater, really powerful theater, and just looking at all of these people watching this happen and all of these people were totally in awe, just like, I can't, like—because it was something so unique and so special and something that's never actually happened before in the history of the world. There's never been a project that has been an intergenerational project just for trans people, for—around theater [laughter].

Martinez: So, this is a question of—that I want to—of mine: um, how do your, uh, professor who assigned you this project feel about it and was he or she witness—witnessing the event?

Appel: Uh, yeah actually. One of the—my—the professor who helped to connect me with the project was somebody who had done a similar project here at SAGE beforehand. It was called Bridging the Gap and it was also an intergenerational theater project but it was just open to all LGBT-identified people and, she had actually done it as part—she had done that project as part of her thesis and I read—when I read through her thesis paper, I noticed that over the course of five years of doing that project, she had had like one or two trans people the whole time and I was like, "oh, ok, well…this is something that trans people could really benefit from." So that year they had decided not to do that project at SAGE, so there was a vacancy, and that's why we decided to do it.

Martinez: Mm. [pause] Have you been inspired by a recent or historical social or/and political movement?

Appel: Um yes, yes very much so. I think I'm right now most inspired by trans women of color and black trans women in particular who are organizing across many different movements, but most prominently within racial justice movements and trans justice movements and the way in which they kind of integrate a lot of different oppressions into the work that they do, you know, understanding how intersectionality and how different oppressions are connected. Yeah I'm really inspired by the Trans Women of Color Collective here. I'm really inspired by the Audre Lorde Project and the Sylvia Rivera Project. I think it's, as a white, trans person who comes from

a relative, from class privilege, I think it's really important for me to be, to think critically about how my own identity intersects with the experiences and the identities of trans women of color and how I can be, how I can live and act in solidarity with them, considering that they are my trans sisters, so I'm very inspired by that movement.

Martinez: So this is a nice segue to the next question—

Appel: Okay.

Martinez: What does community mean to you and what does your ideal community look like?

Appel: My ideal community, ooh, community looks like all sorts of shit for me. It's funny, after doing the TransGenerational Theater Project has been one of the first times I've been in trans only spaces, and there's something about trans community that's just like, really beautiful. Everybody's a little fucked up [laughter] and that's just—and so you kind of bond over that too, but people are so gentle with each other, because of that too—because everyone is a little fucked up, you know, people are just open and willing to take whatever you have to offer: if you're weird, if you're socially awkward, if you're on the Autistic Spectrum, if you have a disability. Those things, they are acknowledged and they are accepted, because at your core, you are still in community and solidarity by—simply by the fact that you are trans. At least here that's what I've experienced. I don't know if that's true everywhere. Um, ion my ideal community? I mean it's people that are supporting each other, that are showing up for each other, that are living—that are practicing mutual aid. Yeah I have a—I have a number of people in my life that are extremely radical in terms of giving themselves wholly and fully to supporting trans community and all of their resources and time and it's a really beautiful, inspiring thing that I'm working towards being able to do more, but there's—there's something in that—there's something about that: about living your life every day devoted to the liberation of our community and of our people that is what I would like to be doing some day [laughter].

Martinez: Okay it says, the other question is like, what are some particularly memorable positive experiences you have related to community? Negative or positive?

Appel: Um, positive experience? I think this one is the biggest one. I also, well I should say—well I go down to this, radical queer and trans space in Tennessee called IDA (Idyll Dandy Acres) that has a big music festival ever year, and I've been going there every year since I was like 25?

Martinez: Hmm

Appel: Um, and they started doing this thing called the Trans Ladies' Picnic, where on the Saturday of the festival at like noon, all the trans ladies got together and sat in the creek and ate together, and I remember the first time I went I was so nervous about it, but, it was just—it was one of my first experiences of just trans people together, and it was really beautiful, awkward, but beautiful. Negative, yeah I mean…I've had a very difficult time with the queer community

or—yeah the queer community. I think the ways in which queer people and trans people, like, queer—cis, queer people and—and trans people create community together is—is just difficult because of the politics of desirability and because of the way, in which, for so long, like, femmeness or femininity was looked down upon and masculinity was put on a—a pedestal, so I have a really difficult time, like even now going out in New York to parties because so many of them—so many of the queer parties are filled with cis, gay men and I'm just like not interested in being around them, at all, anymore, and there aren't as many—there are very few trans-specific parties, and not that many, like queer women-specific parties and the ones that they do have, some of them aren't great for trans people either, so I wish there was more spaces and more opportunities for queer community that was more cognizant of the ways in which trans people could be centered in that community.

Martinez: So what part of—what communities are you a part of? Describe the communities that you are a part of.

Appel: Uh, well this one: the TransGenerational Theater Project. I am also part of SAGE, which, stands for Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders. I have a job at SAGE [laughter]. I am the Women's Program and Arts and Culture Program Coordinator, so I am definitely a part of this community of older LGBT adults and I love being a part of this community because it is such a great—it gives me a lot of insight into the ways in which that I want to age and how I want to age, and what to look forward to in that process.

Martinez: So how do you see yourself in this moment of increased LGBTQ visibility?

Appel: Um, that's an interesting question. I mean, I'm just trying to live as openly as possible. When I walk down the street, I try—I literally try to imagine that I'm in a bubble. I remember in middle school, I used to walk around as if, I used to walk around as if I was, like, marching through a minefield, I would just not—I would try not to look at anybody and I would try to walk as if I was better than everybody else, just as a protective defense mechanism, you know? Because I was always ready for people to say nasty shit to me. I've gotten to this state now where I walk down the street now and I literally feel like I'm in my own world and it's also kind of New York, nobody gives—most people don't pay attention to you, but I don't even notice when people look at me funny. I don't notice at all anymore. So, I will walk down the street in a beautiful dress, in a leopard-print, huge coat, with a beard, or a little bit of facial hair and long hair and I'm sure people are looking funny at me, you know, because when I walk with other trans people they're like, "did you see that person? Did you see that person? Did you see what that person did, or looked at us?" and I'm like, "No. I don't." I think—I also think when—in this—in this moment of increased LGBTQ visibility, you know, I do think about what this visibility—who this visibility impacts. Who it helps, and who it hurts, and something that I think a lot about is the fact that as a white, trans person, I am in a lot less danger or I feel, in my own experience—I feel like I have been in a lot less danger of harassment than my trans sisters of color and that's something that that I try to think a lot about, because visibility is not always just a positive thing, you know? It can have really intense consequences for different people.

Martinez: How do you see yourself in relation—in relation to other recent movements: social and political movements?

Appel: Um, well I see myself; I try to see myself and I try to act as an accomplice to those movements. I don't really like the word ally because you can, like, say that you're an ally but not actually do anything. An accomplice means that you're actually taking an action that may or may not be illegal, that may or may not be going against what is considered legal or right, in order to, support, what needs to happen politically or socially by any means necessary [laughter].

Martinez: Um, this following question, I want to expand it a little bit. How do you balance yourself, personal beliefs, like religion, political party, with community beliefs?

Appel: Ooh, that's hard. Well I'm an anarchist, so it, um—

Martinez: Can you elaborate a little bit, what is anarchist?

Appel: What is an anarchist? Ooh, okay [laughter]. So an anarchist is someone who does not believe in any hierarchy at all. So I for example do not believe in government, and I don't believe in institutions, I don't believe in non-profits—or I mean, I don't believe that these things should exist, but I'm working at a non-profit because I need to survive [laughter] and living in New York is really expensive, and if I'm going to be here and I'm going to survive, I'm—I at least want to try to be able to do something that I like, or maybe even love doing. So yeah. I'm constantly having to push my personal belief systems aside in order to, you know, engage with the world around me, particularly at work, and that's ok for now. I mean, one of the cool aspects of anarchism is that it doesn't say—it doesn't have, like, a—a clear end goal. It's not like communism or Marxism where it's like, "Our society and world needs to look like this." Anarchism just says that: "all of this shit is fucked up and we know that and we need to take it down, we need to dismantle it, and we need to create something new. We don't know what that is. We don't know what that looks like. We have some ideas because we can see people working together in ways that are different from what we have had for so many—for—since the beginning of human kind," and so, you know I just try to focus on that outside of the work that I have to do in, you know in the non-profit sector, or any projects that I engage in. I can be doing stuff and I can be building community and I can be building projects that are more in line with my personal anarchistic beliefs.

Martinez: So what do you think religion plays a role? Or religion in general, it doesn't matter if you're Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Catholic…what role do they play in our community—trans community?

Appel: Oh, um, well I mean if people have personal religions, that plays a role for them. I am—I'm an atheist so I don't—I don't believe in god or anything like that. I think that spirituality is something that's really important, for anybody, but particularly for trans people. It's something

that I haven't had access to for a very long time and I'm really trying to get more in touch with in a number of ways: through meditation, through communing with nature more. Yeah I think—I mean trans people need to heal. You know, we're in a constant state of needing to heal because we're forced into this world that has no interest in our survival. So healing is integral to that survival, and I think that spirituality and developing a spiritual approach to living life can be a really great way to access radical healing.

Martinez: So, now we're going to talk about identity.

Appel: Okay.

Martinez: What is your relationship with other transgender nonconforming people?

Appel: Well, it's very good [laughter]. Um, I actually have two partners. I identify as—well, I'm like kind of polyamorous and kind of a relationship anarchist, which means that I have multiple partners, and yeah and both of them—I have two partners right now and both of them are—are trans and gender nonconforming too. Having trans relationships, like, intimate sexual ones, or partnerships I should say totally changed my life, changed my relationship to my body, changed my relationship to sex and love, and what I imagined my future to look like. I'm so grateful. I'm so grateful for that. One of my partners is transmasculine and my other partner is transfeminine, which is also fascinating to have—to be, you know—to have a relationship with people—two different people who had very different experiences of trans identity and have very different bodies too that I can interact with in very different, amazing ways. It's just kind of—it's expanded my understandings of what relationships and sex and intimacy can look like. And then…

Martinez: How do—

Appel: —some of my—oh, um, just one more thing. Some of my—most of my best friends and most of the people that I hang out with are trans now. I just really try to surround myself with trans people because it makes me feel good and seen.

Martinez: Hmm. How do you see how do you see the world or how do you think the world sees you?

Appel: Uh, how do I see the world? [pfft] Uh, well this world is fucked up. I see the world as a white supremacist—uh, what is it? White supremacist, capitalist, cis-hetero-patriarchy [laughter]. So, essentially, it's really oppressive, and is something that we need to tear down and rebuild. The world sees me as: radical, probably insane, all over the place, dirty, unreliable, kind of a creature, a little bit of a freak, but also I think—I mean the world sees me as that. I think in the trans community, people—I like to think that people think that I'm powerful and magical [laughter].

Martinez: This says, how do you feel—do you feel more visible because of your identity or identities?

Appel: More visible? Yeah, for sure. When I walk down the street? Absolutely, people are constantly, like, I'm sure, looking at me [laughter].

Martinez: How do you understand gender?

Appel: Whoo, gender [ululating]. So gender is, uh, for me—is a very personal thing. On the Sylvia Rivera Law Project website, they talk about gender identity, as a galaxy. So everybody has their own star and that star represents your own personal gender identity and every star is unique and there are millions of stars in the sky—

Martinez: How beautiful.

Appel: —Which means there's millions of genders. I don't see it as being on a spectrum. Um, I don't see there being fixed points. I think it is a galaxy.

Martinez: So what does it mean to you to be yourself, to be real, or to be authentic?

Appel: Oh god. In terms of my gender? Um, yeah I think it's just wearing what I want to, looking how I want to. It's really interesting, when I first started this job, like, I'm the Women's Program Coordinator and I felt a lot of pressure to be really femme all the time and I had to realize that my authentic self was much more nonbinary than that and that if I wanted to come in with a little bit of stubble on my face and no makeup on and, you know, pants and a sweater on, that I needed to do that in order to be my most authentic self [laughter].

Martinez: Okay, so, this question is, when did you first become aware of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion?

Appel: Ooh, that's a lot. Uh, when did I first become aware—ooh god I have no idea. Of gender? I think when I was really young. When—I mean, when I told you that story about me being [laughter] in preschool and my cubbyhole [laughter] and sexuality? God, I don't even remember. I remember this other moment, when I was in, like, fourth grade and these two girls made up a song about me and I can still hear it in my head and it was like [sings], "he talks like a girl, walks like a girl, sings like a girl, acts like a girl," um, "moves like a girl. He is a girl!" and it's so funny because [laughter]—

Martinez: Oh really? That's sweet.

Appel: Well it's funny because they did not mean it sweetly at all, but it was also just kind of affirmative because they ended the song by saying, "he is a girl" and I'm like, "great. Okay. Yes. That's true" [laughter]

Martinez: That's sweet.

Appel: Yeah.

Martinez: When did you first become aware of race?

Appel: Of race? Um, fairly—fairly, um, early. My—where I grew up, is New Rochelle. It has one of the highest black middle classes per capita in the country actually, and the schools that I went to were extremely diverse in terms of race and class and there were actually more people of color, in all of my classes in elementary school than there were white folks, so—

Martinez: What about ethnicity?

Appel: Same thing. Yeah, I mean there were people from all over the—from all over the world there and from all sorts of different backgrounds and we—the great thing about it was that it—the education was a lot less Eurocentric than most schools, I think, in this country for sure.

Martinez: What about religion?

Appel: Religion? [laughter] Pretty young as well, because there were lots of, I mean—lots of different kids with lots of different religions, but my parents weren't religious at all.

Martinez: So you said at the la—at one of the previous questions that you were atheist. So when did you first realize that you—you were—again, "religions is not for me, I'm going to decide to be atheist?"

Appel: Oh pretty young. Uh, my mom made me [laughter]—my mom made me, get confirmed when I was 14 in the Danish Seamen's Church [laughter] in Brooklyn, um, yeah, Danish Seamen's Church. I had to go to, Sunday school for eight weeks and it was all in Danish and I didn't really speak Danish that well at the time, so I had no idea what was going on. On the day of my confirmation, I said to my mom—because I knew that—I knew that one—one of the only things I knew was that the priest was going to ask me if I believed in god and I was supposed to say yes, so I said to my mom: "what if I say no?" and she's like, "do you want your Nintendo 64?" [laughter] and I was like "yes, please, I'll say yes" so that was the only reason I said yes, was because she bribed me, [laughter] but yeah. No I've always been—I've been an atheist for a long—for a long time.

Martinez: So when did you first become conscious of yourself as an individual?

Appel: As an individual? Um, ooh that's interesting…

Martinez: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds to me like you were conscious at an early age

Appel: Yeah, yeah for sure—

Martinez: —Like at your first communion you said, "you know what…" at 14 years old, you don't want to become…you don't believe in religion.

Appel: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, pretty young. I mean I think my parents really encouraged me to, you know—to do what I want to and be who I wanted to be.

Martinez: Ok now we're going to change topic—

Appel: Okay

Martinez: The next topic will be relationships.

Appel: Oh, great.

Martinez: So what does companionship mean to you?

Appel: Um, companionship? I think it means really showing up for people whenever they need you and in whatever ways that they need you. Whether it's emotionally or even financially. I think it's being present when times are good and when times are difficult. I'm not [laughter]—I'm not very good at staying in touch with people or even communicating with people via text or email or anything, but when people need me, when people are having a difficult time, I will be there and I will be present and that's something that's really important to me. Freedom is really important for me. I really don't like feeling like I'm tied down by anything or anyone. I don't know why, it's just I feel very, very strongly about it that, I need to be free. Yeah—I suck at communicating [laughter] with people and the people who, um—I—you know I've lost a lot of friends because of that, but the people who come into my life who are okay with that and who have stuck with me. I have beautiful, beautiful relationships with them, because they are—they don't expect that of me, but when they need things and they tell me that they need things from me, I will show up for them.

Martinez: What does intimacy [yawn]—

Appel: Intimacy?

Martinez: What does intimacy mean to you?

Appel: Intimacy, I really think, is really about vulnerability. Um, it's about being—you know, sharing the saddest and darkest aspects of your life and—and your thoughts, and knowing that

that person will those hold things and will be appreciative of you sharing them and will share that—will share that sadness in a way.

Martinez: Okay, um, since we don't have enough time in the thing right here, we're going to try to like—

Appel: How do you know that?

Martinez: 46? This—this is—has a, like, fifty something—fifty something minutes.

Appel: Oh, how do you know that?

Martinez: They say that over—

Appel: Oh, okay.

Martinez: So what's—now we're going to talk about self-care and systematic issues.

Appel: Oh, okay.

Martinez: So, what is going through your head when you are getting ready for the day?

Appel: Uh, [laughter]—um, well I've increasingly had a more—a more difficult time getting dressed in the morning. Especially as—I've been—I mean only in the past year have I been dressing super femme—or in the past two years, and then when I started this job about a month ago, I started wearing dresses almost every single day and when I had my big coat on, I felt kind of protected by that, but now that it's getting warm and I'm just going to walk outside of the house in dresses, I'm nervous, for sure. I have mace, though. So, I can use that. Disable some people. [makes a spraying sound] [laughter].

Martinez: So what are the things that you think about when you think—when thinking about your gender identity?

Appel: What are the things I think about when thinking about my gender identity? Um, I think about, how it's going to change, you know? and what it's going to be like in a year from now or in five years from now. I'm thinking a lot about hormones right now. I don't have a lot of body dysphoria. I never have really. Well that's not true I have some, but mostly around, eating disorders, and eating issues. I had that a lot in my early twenties, but I never, you know—I—I have a big old booty and I have some hips and I have a chest that's pretty pronounced. It's a very feminine body, I always have and I have really long hair, but what I'm most interested in now, is the impact that hormones would have on my brain and on the way that I engage with the world and on my feelings, and I wouldn't mind some boobies. I like boobies. [laughter]

Martinez: Oh, okay. So what are your—what are your everyday safety concerns?

Appel: Uh, yeah that people are—someone's going to throw—recently people have been throwing things at me [laughter]

Martinez: [inaudible]

Appel: Yeah, I was walking in a park and these kids started throwing tennis balls at me and I just threw them back at them [laughter]

Martinez: Okay.

Appel: And then someone threw ice at me, too, so I'm just worried that someone is going to throw, like—I used to have this fear actually, when I was on a sidewalk, when a car with a—with a rolled down window would walk—would go by that someone was going to throw a bottle at me and, like, seriously injure me, so I carry mace with me now, like, as I said earlier.

Martinez: So you do you feel that you have to choose between expressing your gender identity and economic security, social ease.

Appel: Oh my god totally, are you kidding me? Like, getting this job, this was one of my only prospects, because I had no, I couldn't even have imagined myself working in a space that, in some way, wasn't connected to trans people, because, uh—yeah I couldn't. It's wild to me to think about how few spaces there are—how few employment opportunities there are, that are not only available for trans people, but that would actually be remotely supportive of trans people, so yeah I've had to give up—I mean if—I'm sure I could have had many more, um, opportunities or whatever if I had not—

Martinez: So the question is—

Appel: Come out as trans.

Martinez: —How do you balance your personal ideas of beauty with community standards of beauty?

Appel: [laughter] Um, actually that's interesting. I've been thinking about that a lot lately because when—when I do dress up very, very femme, I can pass pretty—pretty—fairly—fairly well and I'm not even on hormones and the ways in which other people in the trans community kind of put that on a pedestal when I'm doing that and I'm like, "oh my god you make such a beautiful woman" like, "you are—" like, "you look so good, you pass so well." For—at some points, it's started to make me feel really good and I—and I feel like I've had to really resist that and be like, "no, fuck that. This is not what it's about for me," like great, when I look—when I put all—when I'm super femme, I look beautiful, great, but I want to feel and look beautiful all the time, whether or not I'm super femme or I have some stubble on my face. I think non-binary identity is, for me, a more—I think it has more radical potential in terms of changing the narrative of gender and

changing our society at large than binary, trans identities and that's a very intense thing to say. You know, I think anybody should identify and present themselves as they would like to, but I think in terms of really dismantling and challenging the historical understanding of gender in this world, I think non-binary kind of, you know, blows the lid off of that shit and is exciting in a way.

Martinez: Do you have any experiences with mental health and mental illness?

Appel: Uh, yeah. I don't know any trans people that don't [laughter]. Yeah I've suffered from depression, um, pretty debilitating depression, from substance abuse issues, anxiety issues. I mean I think I'm doing a lot better than most people. I think mostly because I have a family that really supports me and I've had that as an incredible support base emotionally and physically, in terms of housing sometimes and financially too and that's saved my ass and probably my life many times.

Martinez: So what is your experiences with healthcare?

Appel: Ooh, um, I didn't go to the doctor for such a long time. I didn't go to the dentist for seven years, which sucked, because I hated going to the doctor, because they didn't know what to do with me and when I—when I finally—I went to Callen-Lorde for a few years. I didn't really like it there that much and then I started going to Apicha, because they have a trans clinic there, and I've loved it. I got—they asked me if I wanted a gender nonconforming doctor, so I had a gender nonconforming doctor for a while and I had a trans therapist too and it totally changed my life, it totally changed my relationship to my own health and to my body it made me much more able to advocate for my health and much more excited about taking care of myself and, like, being a relatively okay person [laugh].

Martinez: So that's, uh, part of the next question. Do you feel these movements and organizations adequately service and represent trans and gender nonconforming populations?

Appel: [long pause, sigh, and groan] That's a really rough question. I mean, no. I think a lot of them are really trying. Something that I think a lot about is the fact that there are so few opportunities—there are not very many opportunities for trans people to come together and build community. Like there are some support groups, but there aren't a consistent group of people there and the conversations rarely ever get very deep or go on for very long and something like the TransGenerational Theater Project, where you're spending, a set amount of time building a community and you're creating stuff together—It's a model of—it's a model of engagement with this community that I think supports mental health for trans people and supports, gaining access to different resources in a way that I haven't seen very many other people or organizations or institutions doing, and I would really love to see more of that, just more creative and, innovative ways of engaging the community and building support systems for trans people in particular.

Martinez: The next question is tell me a time when you feel—felt seen—

Appel: —felt seen. Ooh, tell me a time when you felt seen. [page turning]. [Deep breath] A time when I felt seen. I would—I mean, I think…Wow, this is hard. It's not that—it's not good that this is hard, [laughter] no I want to answer the question though, because there has to be…um…I mean this project has made me feel seen. I think it took a while, um. I mean the TransGenerational Theater Project. It took a while because I think people didn't quite understand that I was, you know, not—not a trans—not a—not woman-identified, um, but I think—especially the younger people in the project last year, I think they really saw me, because a lot of them were gender nonconforming, and I don't think they knew a lot of people my age who were. I mean a lot of them were, like—especially the 19-year olds. I think they saw me in a way that a lot of people my age—trans people my age do not, also because they saw my gender and they saw my politics, um, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Martinez: So now, um…I want to ask you one question and I, um—and if you can answer in like, using one—one or two, like—when I ask—

Appel: —one or two words?

Martinez: —a question that can answer in like one or two words, just quickly.

Appel: Okay.

Martinez: What do you think of our United States political system—

Appel: [sputters and laughter]

Martinez: —republicans and democrats?

Appel: [laughter] Uh, I think it is all bullshit [laughter].

Martinez: How do you feel emotionally, mentally—now are wrap-up questions. How do you feel emotionally, mentally, bodily, right now?

Appel: Um, I feel good. It's so funny when you do something like this, you reflect—it gives you an opportunity to reflect on, like, your whole life [laughter] and where you've been and where you are and where you're going, and it's just a nice reminder that I've been through a lot and that I've fought and that I've worked really hard simply to survive and especially to thrive and I am thriving, which is not something that many trans people can say, so I'm very lucky to be able to say that.

Martinez: I can see it in your tears.

Appel: [laughter] Dinick you love when I cry [laughter].

Martinez: You want to be able to hear one thing from you, what would it be?

Appel: If I wanted what? Oh if I wanted people to hear one thing from me what would it be? Oh—oh my god. Okay. Okay. Um, one thing that I—I have a mantra that I really like sharing with people, and I think it's great for trans people in particular because, as I was saying earlier, we are constantly going through—almost constantly going through a state of healing and—yeah let me say it and then I'll give the caveat afterwards, so the saying—the mantra is—or maybe I shouldn't say mantra. I don't know if that's right. The saying is, "I can't control how long it will take for me to heal, but, I can control the quality of my life during that time." I will say that that might not actually be true for everybody. Not everybody might be able to control the quality of their life at any given moment, but if you do have any sort of control over any aspect of the quality of your life, I think that that—focusing on that—focusing on what you can control and what you can make beautiful or feel good for yourself will help you through that healing process tremendously and then the last—the other thing I would want—I would—what was it? I want people to hear one thing from me. Um.

Martinez: You want people to—the question is do you want—

Appel: —yeah—

Martinez: —you wanted to be remembered for one thing—

Appel: —yeah—

Martinez: —what would—would it be?

Appel: Oh, if I wanted to be remembered for one thing? Oh definitely this. I mean definitely TransGenerational Theater Project, I think also just being a radical, being an anarchist, challenging everything and, just my, vision of the world, cutting through all the bullshit and striving for total liberation.

Martinez: Okay we are almost wrapping up. If there is anything you wanted to add.

Appel: Oh, is there anything else I want to add? Um, well I want to thank you, Dinick, for doing this. I want to thank the Trans Oral History Project for existing at all. I want to add that—I didn't get to talk about New York a lot, but—I mean—there is—I don't think there's really any other place that I could imagine myself being as trans as I am. I mean maybe out in San Francisco, but, like, eh. That's too small for me. I think what I love about this city—what I love and what I hate is that, like, you can—you can get lost here in a good way and in a bad way, like, you can get lost in that, like, you can be whoever the fuck you want and most of the time, people aren't going to care, but in the bad way, you can slip between the cracks very easily here. There are so many people that you can be forgotten about, which is scary and which I think I would love to see the trans community, [sigh] you know, have the resources to be able to support those people who might be slipping through the cracks, what else do I want to add? I think that trans people are magical. Absolutely magical. I couldn't imagine—I could not imagine not being trans and I wouldn't want to not be trans. I would not want to be cis. I mean it is an—it is an opportunity to

unlearn and undo things that were spoon-fed to you as a child that are completely bullshit, and it is an opportunity to create—to recreate yourself and to create your own—completely own understanding of who you are and to own that and to revel in that and to express that through so many different ways, and it means being a part of something that's larger than yourself. It means, challenging norms and it means, being, like, a magical creature [laughter], like a unicorn or a—a mermaid, and I'm very honored to be part of that magic.

Martinez: So trans is magic.

Appel: Trans is magic [laughter].

Martinez: Okay, so would you like—would you give the opportunity to some people to learn about transgender people, like, some people that are closeminded but now they're in the middle of the spectrum trying to understand it, but they're not yet—we don't give them the opportunity to learn, including cisgender women

Appel: Do I have anything to say to them, you mean?

Martinez: Yeah.

Appel: Oh. Something I think about a lot is, if gender is a galaxy, that actually means that cis people don't exist. Like, this idea that your gender that you were assigned at birth matches the one that you have, like, who the fuck assigned your gender and no one should be assigned a gender. You should choose your own gender and if, like—I guess if male or female works for you, okay that's cool, but there are so many other options. You can be whoever the fuck you want to be, so do that. You know, have fun with it. Like explore. Think critically. Think critically about your gender. Like, really do. I'm happy you've never experienced any dysphoria. That's great for you and what are you missing by not exploring it, by not really looking deep into who you are and the possibilities of who you could be and that you get to decide that and that no one else does.

Martinez: Love it.

Appel: Thanks.

Martinez: So, is—was my pleasure to interview you and was an honor, so, once again, thank you for give me—giving me that opportunity, me: Dinick Martinez.

Appel: Thank you Dinick.

Martinez: So it's a pleasure.

Appel: [kiss]

Martinez: Thank you.

Appel: Gracias mi amour.