INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

IMAGE OBJECT

Interviewer: Matthew Dicken

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Matthew Dicken: Hello, my name is Matthew Dicken and I'll be having a conversation with Image Object 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. Today is March 19, 2018, and this is being recorded at a lovely collective house where I'm currently dog sitting in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Hi.

Image Object: Hi.

Dicken: How are you doing, Image?

Object: Oh, I'm doing. I'm doing—yes, I'm doing [laughter].

Dicken: Do you want to tell us your name and—if you'd like—your age?

Object: Sure, uh my name is Image Object, and I am 28.

Dicken: And we got to talk about this a little bit before we turned the recorder on, um, but do you want to talk about gender pronouns?

Object: Yeah, uh. Hm. My current relationship to the pronoun question is refusal to answer. Not that I don't have pronouns. Not that someone like is supposed to use my name—I just refuse to engage with the question, um, because it feels to me like—I mean, I [laughter]—I'm much more uncomfortable being asked the question than I am with any pronoun that anyone could possibly use for me. Which I know is like the opposite of what you're supposed to tell cis-people, but [laughter] like that is my reality. Um. And like, it feels—whenever I give a directive, straightforward answer to the question: “These are the pronouns you should use for me”, it feels as though I'm accepting a reality in which pronouns are necessary, which is not something that I want to do. Um [laughter] so before I came to this arrangement—which feels more aggressive [laughter]—I would answer the pronoun question with, “My pronouns are a mirror,” and I would ask people to use their pronouns for me—which felt satisfactory in which it implicates someone else in their gendering of me at all times, which also reflects my relationship to gender [laughter].

Dicken: I'm so excited for us to have this conversation about identity and desire-based politics. And where we are in the world and I'm curious about this next question it is like a different framing and way to open this—how would you describe your gender?

Object: Um, I wouldn't describe gender as mine, first of all. I don't think that I have a gender. I frankly don't think that anyone has a gender, but uh, I also don't want to tell other people what they do or don't have. Um—I mean—being sort of an aquarius—I have this very like theoretical conceptual experience of gender, as well as an embodied experience of having to deal with the ramifications of those concepts, but um I feel very much that I like—I think I emotionally and physically experience the fact that gender is a thing which is external to me but which I cannot escape, rather than an internal or intrinsic quality that I have. And so it's much more been a
process of figuring out where I want to be in or how I want to relate to that structure rather than identifying comfortably with a particular room of it.

**Dicken:** Maybe let's go sort of the to the start of your life and your story and see how those questions sort of come up and like where you've learned parts of this along the way or discovered these things

**Object:** Oh my god, yes. Brilliant.

**Dicken:** Where and when were you born?

**Object:** I was born on January 20, 1990 at 8:30 in the evening in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Um, my parents were in Grand Forks, North Dakota for my dad's grad school where he was getting his PhD in Psychology, and I only lived there for a couple of years. Most of my childhood was spent in the suburbs in Maryland.

**Dicken:** Me too. I don't know if I knew that.

**Object:** I don't know if we talked about it. No, I didn't know that.

**Dicken:** So I'm even more curious about some of the next sets of questions about like when—uh do you have a memory of an early encounter with the trans community or trans individuals?

**Object:** No, I don't think I do. There weren't a lot of queers in my life growing up. Um, I had an aunt who I didn't see more than once or twice—who lives here in New York City. Her name's Dempsey. She lives with her partner Vicky. And I remember the one time that we were in New York City and we stayed in their apartment, I was like, “This is the coolest person who I've ever met.”[laughter] I was just overwhelmed by how chic her apartment was and how cool she was. Um and maybe—I think one of my brother's friend's older siblings was a gay man and I like knew him a little bit and we ended up going to the same high school in Massachusetts. But really, the earliest queer relationship I had was with my friend and crush—Andrew Malone—in second grade.

**Dicken:** Mhm. Tell us about Andrew.

**Object:** [Laughter] Andrew Malone—the first love of my life. He was this like very charismatic compulsive liar who was obsessed with the Titanic and told me he had been to it in a submarine and we like—he lived in my neighborhood but one bus stop away, uh and we would like sit together on the bus to school and hang out together at recess and—I would have him over for playdates all the time. At one point—I can't remember if it was over a summer or just like a warm day in the fall or spring—but my family had a boat at the time and we got to take him out on our boat and while my dad was driving the boat, he and I were in the cabin downstairs and he kissed me. Um, so that was my first kiss and on a later playdate—I think it must have been later—he and I were playing dress up and I was wearing a like glittery fairy costume and he was wearing this vintage dress that used to belong to my mom. And she got this really, really cute
picture of the two of us. We were like—we were just in the basement dancing. I was dipping him, naturally. And my mom got this really cute picture of us and sent him home with a copy, and his conservative Christian parents told him that I was the devil and he had to stop talking to me.

Dicken: Ah!

Object: But the joke's on them because six years later, I saw him leading the baton twirling squad in the marching band on the Fourth of July, so he still ended up a beautiful faggot—as did I. Um, but it was really funny for me to look back on that relationship like over a decade later—like 15 years later—and be like, “Oh, shit!” Like, “Yup, I have always been drawn to the gays.” Like, that has always been my vibe.

Dicken: You said you were in second grade when the kiss happened and you were getting to know each other?

Object: Yup, all of this happened within the span of one school year, for sure.

Dicken: Yeah. What were some of the other circumstances of your life at the time? I mean, you mentioned that his family was Christian. What was your family's religious background or—?

Object: My family, my immediate family has always had a very lackadaisical relationship to religion. I was baptized Episcopalian but I think more to appease my grandparents than through an investment either of my parents had. We went occasionally to Unitarian Universalist Church for a few years of my childhood, but the one Unitarian church that was within driving distance—the kind of leadership structure of it was sloppy and my parents didn't want to be involved more than a couple of years. So we stopped going to that after a little while, but I did have some positive experiences there while we went. It was super inclusive space—as I think Unitarian Churches tend to be—and I remember there was like a summer workshop one year where they had members of the church—who practiced all sorts of different religions—would do daylong workshops on their practices. So there was a day of Native American workshop teachings. There was uh a day of Wicken practice teachings. Like it was a really, really cool learning experience as a young kid. Um, I would say around that time in my life, the most powerful shaping forces were my love of horses and my best friend Jacqueline. And I loved books. I was a big reader when I was a kid. Um, read a lot of fantasy and fiction and dabbled in writing myself. I was also big into visual art—was doing a lot of drawing at that point in time. But yeah, mostly I was a horse girl [laughter].

Dicken: What were your parents or your immediate family like?

Object: Um, my parents are great. I have one younger brother who is three years younger than me. A very sweet, nerdy, little jock Taurus. He's very, very—he's a darling. Very proud of him. Um—my parents are sort of exceptional in that they—verbatim—told me and my brother when we were young, “We will love you no matter who you are or who you love.” Like said those words to our faces, so I like never had any qualms about having a queer identity um—it was
something that as I was growing up, I remember having the thought, “I wish I was cool enough to be gay.” [Laughter]. Like you know—it was—there was absolutely no like prescient force in my life that was like, “This is a bad idea. You shouldn’t acknowledge queer impulses that you have.” I was like hungry for queer impulses in myself but didn’t feel them—couldn’t access them myself until like college-age. So yeah—I mean—my childhood was—by all accounts—easy and comfortable.

Dicken: Do you remember—if not like—or among a few queer people—do you remember hearing words or narratives about trans people or queer people or gender-nonconforming people?

Object: No. I would say it was almost entirely absent from my early life, which like could play a part in why it took me so long to come into a queer identity. It just like—you know—I think as my mirror-pronoun impulse shows I have a strong tendency to um reflect the people around me. Um and so yeah—I was perfectly happy to be femme and that was given to me from childhood so that was absolutely—like absolutely my favorite t-shirt for years was a bright pink t-shirt with a bust of a unicorn and a wreath of flowers, and my mother—I know for a fact—threw it out once when I put it through the wash because it was starting to get holes in the armpits and I asked her about it, and she was like, “I don’t know what happened to it.” And I was like, “No, I put it in the laundry and you didn’t give it back to me.” She didn’t want me wearing it anymore because it was starting to get holey, but it was my favorite t-shirt and I was devastated when it was gone. Um yeah—I don’t—like I remember, distinctly I remember uh looking out my bathroom window once and seeing a dude mowing the lawn behind our house not wearing a shirt because it was the summer and dudes don’t wear shirts when they mow the lawn in the summer. I was like, “Mom, why are dudes allowed to not wear shirts and women aren’t? It doesn’t make any sense. Why is that a thing?” And she was like, “Because men’s and women’s bodies are different.” And I was like, “No they’re not. How?” [Laughter]

Dicken: What did she say?

Object: She—I don’t know—I like—don’t remember how she explained to me. How she could possibly have a good reason for breasts to be sexualized. I don’t know how she explained that to a five-year-old. But I—it was instinctive to me that it didn’t make sense [laughter]. But yeah—there was—I was—I didn’t feel a lack of queer perspectives in my life—I was—I didn’t feel like there was something missing. But, I think there were like small ways, like that in which I pushed back against being gendered from an early age. Um and also I think you know in small part it was likely my parents sheltering. I was very sheltered from uh—they took some pains to keep me from being overly exposed to uh adult sexuality—and most gender is about sexuality and most sexuality is about gender—so like those two things were sort of missing from my childhood a lot. My early childhood sexual fantasies were all like narratives about in-between animals because I didn’t have—I like wasn’t allowed to watch cartoons even until I was—I don’t remember what age. But like most of my early uh fictions were all written and then most of my early TV was all uh Animal Planet and Discovery Channel. So like lions humping on Animal Planet was like the only access I had to sexuality until I was a fucking teenager. Um which is—you know—its own weird ballgame. It is what it is. It did mean that I was able to consider myself
a teenage girl and still have a sense of self-worth and confidence which is—I think—something not a lot of people who go through their teenage years as a girl can say. Uh I wasn't allowed to have magazines. I wasn't allowed to watch MTV or VH-1. I wasn't exposed to literally any media that gave me an opportunity to critique my own body. So I was able to just like kind of be a theater nerd with like three or four friends and like not worry about it.

Dicken: I was going to ask about how you were perceived or like perceived yourself being perceived at those—that age—elementary and coming into teenage-hood. Like did you—some of the stuff you're saying about like ways you were pushing back or ways that your parents were taking pains to, you know, have a say about your media content—media intake was—did you see yourself as rebellious? Did you like have an analysis of class or race or your positionality at that age?

Object: Oh absolutely not [laughter]. I mean—uh—no—I mean all of my consciousness about how to relate myself—how to—how I—how my position related to the world at large was very much something I built in adulthood. Um I would say my first experience of consciously choosing to alter the way I moved socially was around sixth grade. I went to a very small private middle school where there were like 30-35 kids per grade. Um my parents took me out of public school in second grade after my—or sorry—in fourth grade—took me out of public school after third grade because my third grade homeroom teacher thought ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] was something that was made up in order to give lazy children an excuse. My dad—who is a psychologist—went into the parent-teacher meeting and was like, “No, that's not how it is.” And she was like, “I don't care. That's what I'm going to believe.” So they took me out of public school after that. Um in this small private school, I was no longer at the middle school of my best friend Jacqueline who lived up the street from me—who was a year younger than me—and she was the one who I mostly played with at recesses and everything in school—I like hadn't made a lot of friends in my public school. And again—when I switched to the smaller private school—like pretty much latched onto one person—Sarah Kirsman—and Sarah [Kirsman] was my primary friend that I spent most of my time with through like fourth and fifth and some of sixth grade. And around sixth grade, I think I was like, “Oh, I want more than one friend.” And like—you know—talked about it with my parents first and they were like, “Yeah, we support you doing this.” And then talked about it with Sarah [Kirsman] and was like, “Hey, I want to hang out with some of the other kids at recess. You should—you could—we could hang out with the other kids together. Or you could hang out with people other than the people who I hang out with. Would that be ok?” [Laughter] You know, sixth grade kid being like, “Let's alter the terms of our co-dependent relationship!” [Laughter] Um and that was—I think—a crucial turning point in me deciding that—in sixth grade—codependent relationships are not for me. And then again going to boarding high school as opposed to day high school was also really crucial in my social development. I think I would not know how to talk to people [laughter] if I hadn't gone to boarding school and been forced into like 24 a day contact with people my own age. I was always—through—up until my like teenage years—all through my young childhood—I was much more comfortable in conversation with adults more so than with people my own age.
Dicken: And you mentioned college earlier as a sort of turning point around queer impulses. Where did you go?

Object: [Laughter] I spent my freshmen year of college out in Wisconsin at music conservatory for classical voice—which is its own particular weird tale. Sarah Lawrence [College] is where I spent—Sarah Lawrence [College] is where I spent my final three years, where I graduated from, where I initially wanted to go—Sarah Lawrence [College] was my dream school. Sarah Lawrence [College] was one of those things in my life—there have been a couple—but it was like a king pin, where it was like—I know in some unexplainable like larger psychic way—I know that I need this. I know that this is a place where I have to be in order to become the person I want to be. Um and being years past it, I feel that that was right—I needed to be there—didn't get enough financial aid to go for freshmen year—spent a week convinced that I was going to run away with the circus rather than go to any other school, and then my parents talked me down from that tantrum and uh convinced me to go somewhere else for a year and then transfer. I'm glad that I got that year doing classical voice. I wouldn't have gotten that in depth music education any other way. I wouldn't have gotten that if I had gone straight to Sarah Lawrence [College]. Um I also—I don't know—it was good for me. And then being at Sarah Lawrence [College] I think was the first time I found myself in a social environment that was—where queerness was predominant. Um, I would say that the social and political scene on the Sarah Lawrence [College] campus is—has very strong queer elements—has a strong queer thread. Um, [laughter] I mean, [laughter] there is a running joke on campus: "Queerity, you're my back." It is undeniably a large part of the campus atmosphere. Um and I think just being surrounded by it and absorbing it allowed those parts of myself that I had just never really made room for to come closer to the surface—to show themselves. One of my closest friends during those years—someone I lived with my junior year—was another trans guy. Um, I had my first crush on a woman my junior year—yes. I had like a really serious crush on one my junior year, and that was a moment when I was like—I mean—yeah—it was the first time I was like—I'm strong attracted to someone other than a dude. Um, it wasn't a struggle for me to admit that. It was a struggle for me to acknowledge that that attraction qualified me as queer [laughter] because like [laughter]—I don't know—because it is not something that I can necessarily speak to—but I think it was also in part due to the fact of I was—so many of my closest friends were so like loudly and adamantly queer that me being like, "Oh I have a crush on a woman for the first time in my life," didn't seem like it counted [laughter]. And I was like, ok, baby steps. And it wasn't until after graduation and being—like living in the city and re-contextualizing myself again to the like the greater world where I was like, “Oh, compared to the world at large, I am a free queer." [Laughter] Compared to the Sarah Lawrence [College] campus, I'm normal, but [laughter]—so it wasn't until like five years ago that I started—less than five years ago—that I started to use the word queer to describe myself.

Dicken: Was that when you moved to New York City?

Object: I moved to New York [City] six years ago in 2012 after I graduated from Sarah Lawrence [College].

Dicken: What was the scene like when you first got here?
Object: Um most of my memories from that first year or so are very self-absorbed. It is very much—those memories are much more about me than they are about the city. Um I feel like—I mean—there are concrete ways that I can point to in which it has changed since I've lived here, but uh I don't feel like I have a like large—outside of those like specific points and the trends that they fit in with—I don't feel like I have [sigh] a particularly authoritative vantage point on the ways in which New York [City] has changed. Six years is not a long time to live in New York [City] [laughter]. You know in the grand scheme of things it's like not very long.

Dicken: What scenes have you been apart of either from the beginning of your time in New York [City] or today?

Object: A couple of different ones actually. When I first moved to the city, it was with the intention to be here for a few years and do the starving artist thing while I figured out what to do next. I knew right off the bat that I wasn't gunning for a lifelong career as a performer, but I didn't know what I'd rather do. So I was like, alright, I need a few years to figure that out. I'm not ready to go into further grad school right now, but I know that I will want to eventually. So I started out immersed mostly in the modern dance scene, which is what I had studied my most—my last couple of years at Sarah Lawrence [College]. It was mostly dance and hard sciences. I did like computer science, physics, anatomy and physiology, and dance. So, that first summer of 2012— that first summer and winter of 2012 where I was mostly in the dance scene—and I think that was a really good place to land. Dancers tend to be really invested in their personal health. You know—when your body is the instrument of your art in such a nuanced way, you can't help but pay close attention to its needs. And I think having that grounding served me really well in the upcoming years when I left the dance scene behind for the queer nightlife scene—specifically the drag scene. Um I went to the very first Bushwick that fall of 2012 because I had just moved to the neighborhood a couple of months ago and had signed up for this mailing list for local events and saw this like day-long festival drag and queer performance and was like, “That looks amazing!” I got a couple of friends to go with me, and like that night was pronouncing on the way home, “This is my new thing! This is— I'm so into this! I need more of this in my life!” And then naturally I forgot about it and kept doing what I was doing for like another four or five months until February I was at a variety performance night where [inaudible] Hamm Samwich—now Theta Hamm Wall—was performing an original piece. And I saw her number and was like, “Oh right—like I forgot about this thing but this thing didn't forget about me. Like it came back to find me.” And I went and looked her up on Facebook, discovered that we went to school together, figured out that we had mutual friends and that we knew each other, and looked up every single Facebook event that she was listed as attending that was happening for the next month and just went to all of them. I was like—that was how I found the scene. Literally, that is how I found the scene, no joke. And at the time it was just then the first round of Mr(s) Williamsburg, which is reborn now as Mr(s) BK. Um but so that was my entrée into the drag world, which was a hugely formative experience for me. I like dove in the deep end on that and had a—like hosted my own weekly party for six months, was doing shows and attending parties multiple times a week for like almost a year there. [Burp] Excuse me. And that like—nightlife was how I initially made most of the connections that has led to what I would call my closest friendships now. Or if like—if I didn't meet someone
at a bar—like that entrance into queer networks was definitely like what unlocked all of the things that I have—now access in terms of like queer connections. And then also specifically the art and activity of drag unlocked a lot of things for me as well. That was definitely the beginning of my interrogation of my own relationship to gender.

Dicken: Are there other particularly um special characters from either of those scenes—modern dance or drag—who like Theta, like just come to the top for you right now of like who makes the scenes the scenes that they are?

Object: Um let me think. The first person that comes to mind that feel like I have to talk about is Charlene. She and I were entering the scene at exactly the same time. She was like—I think I met her on like my second or third night out ever and I just remember seeing like a giant brown hair in a tiny skirt with legs that went all the way up to her butt and just like prancing down the street in heels, and I like whistled after her—I was like woah. And like the next time we were met each other at an event, she sat me down and was like, “Where did I have to go? Where did you figure out where to do this thing?” and I had only been like finding the shows for like a month maybe before her, but I was like, well, you have to meet Merrie Cherry and Untitled [Queen], you got to go to Metro[politan]. At that point in time it was Metro[politan], TNT [This N’ That], and Sugarland [Nightclub]—the big trio. You know, Scarlet Theater Fridays. Uh—what else were the big parties at the time? There was like a weekly underwear party at Sugarland[Nightclub] that was cute. Oh! Bizarre had just opened up and JessMS and Merrie Cherry were doing a like—a white clothing party called White Diamonds at Bizarre that was a big deal for a minute. But yeah—it was—I mean—obviously Merrie Cherry and Untitled [Queen] are the ones that I would name as the stewards of the scene since I have known it there. And Horrorchata too I think, but she does a lot behind the scenes. Um I think—yeah, she’s a personality who I saw on stage less. She is a beautiful performer, but I think enjoys djing and making the party happen as much as she enjoys being on stage. Where as Merrie Cherry and Untitled [Queen] both are very much stage personalities—faces that the people recognize and see a lot of—or at least that I saw a lot of and befriended early on. Um my entrée to performance was Merrie Cherry’s DRAGnet at Metropolitan. She invited me to be a part of that, and I made it to the final round—competed against [Madame] Vivien V, Lucy Balls, and Minnie Cupcakes for the title of DRAGnet that year, and Minnie Cupcakes was the winner—luckily. She deserved it. She’s fucking brilliant. But just that opportunity to take the stage and perform was what started making me a lot of my friendships and like gave me the thing to point to that was like, “Hey you should give me a gig. I performed at this thing.” That’s how it is. You just get one and your foot’s in the door.

Dicken: Sharing secrets—“I’ve been doing this for a month and I can take you to this party.” Um were there—you talked about like, “These are some ways the city’s [New York City] changed.” Were some of those moments that were coming through your mind a little earlier while we were talking—do they have like an overlap with ways that the drag scene or the queer nightlife scenes have changed?

Object: Yeah totally. It’s hard for me to say personally—it’s hard for me to tease apart and divide if it’s my relationship to nightlife changing versus where it is the nightlife scene itself
changing. I know that there's plenty of nightlife happening. I know there are new events that are happening that I don't know about because I am not as enmeshed in the scene anymore. And yet it does seem like there is a concrete trend of us losing spaces. Like Sugarland [Nightclub] was a gorgeous, gorgeous space—did you ever see Sugarland [Nightclub]?

**Dicken:** No.

**Object:** Sugarland [Nightclub] was really, really cool. It had these weird stained glass panels and like a raised upper level that the dj booth was on and like a sunken like pit that you could give blowjobs in and like the biggest stage. Like the stage in Sugarland [Nightclub] was like—was like the size of the entire length of TNT [This N' That] and like maybe half as wide. It was huge. It was like by far the best performance stage in any of the three Brooklyn bars. So it was by far—if you were a queen who liked to do shows, you wanted to get a gig at Sugarland [Nightclub]—like that was the place that you wanted to gig. And that is where they held all of the final rounds of Mr(s) Williamsburg back when that was a thing. But by the time I was there and going there, Sugarland [Nightclub] was this weird like one story building between a pair of high-rise condos. It looked really out of place on the block. Whereas I've continued to work in my life as a bartender instead of as a drag queen now and have met people who have been around a lot longer than I have, and they have told me, that back when it first opened, Sugarland [Nightclub] was a one story building in the middle of an empty lot. And it was nowhere. And it was the perfect place to have a noisy gay bar because there was no one around to bother. And when it eventually got shut down, it was because the luxury condos next door took it to the community board were like—with noise complaints and were like, “We don't want this here anymore.

**Dicken:** It was in Bushwick?

**Object:** Sugarland [Nightclub]?

**Dicken:** Yeah.

**Object:** It was on N 9th [Street] and Driggs [Avenue] I wanna say. I could like walk you by it. I could find it easier than I could remember exactly what street it's on. And I'm pretty sure that the space is still there unused. It hasn't been purchased an changed into something lucrative. They just got out the loud faggots [laughter].

**Dicken:** Who owned it? Do you have a sense of who was like leading—not just Sugarland[Nightclub] but who was—

**Object:** I know that Metro[politan] and TNT [This N' That]—and I think Sugarland [Nightclub] and Macri Park also—are all owned by a consortium of bar owners—I think—that own a number of spaces in the neighborhood. I don't know much more beyond that. But I know that at least Metro[politan] and TNT [This N' That] were owned by the same people who own a number of other bars. But yeah—so Sugarland [Nightclub] was a huge loss. We all mourned Sugarland [Nightclub]. And then TNT [This N' That] was another blow much more recently. TNT [This N'
That] was almost a weird bunker. Um weird vibes in that place. It felt like—yeah, it felt like being at a weird barracks. It was like, oh like here's where the gay cockroaches are going to survive the apocalypse. This like weird curved cement ceiling—super, super bizarre. And I think its loss was a little bit more unexpected, but uh Metro[politan] is still going strong at least. And there have been other gay bars that have like come and gone and tried to take hold. Fucking Lovegun was weird. Were you around for Lovegun? Lovegun was such a weird moment. I’m pretty sure it was Frankie Sharp, right? I probably have the details of this wrong because it was happening after I had already started pulling out of the scene, but one of the party producers that runs a big venue in Manhattan tried to open a bar in Brooklyn and like on opening night had shuttle buses from Brooklyn to this—from Manhattan to this Brooklyn spot. And I was like, “No, there's plenty of people—there's plenty of queers in Brooklyn to go to your gay bar. You don't have to bring the Manhattan crowd out to like their vacation spot in Williamsburg. No.” Lovegun was super weird and short-lived. And then Macri Park has been its like weird back and forth between it's a gay bar, it's a video bar, it's a gay bar, it's a drag bar. Macri Park almost doesn't count in my mind—but it is what it is. There are people who love Macri Park. Macri Park has its loyals. It's fine—I won't deny them their spot. Um yeah I'm clearly very much a like North Brooklyn— like Bushwick, Bed-Stuy [Bedford-Stuyvesant], Williamsburg are my stomping ground. I've been to a few parties further south in other neighborhoods in Brooklyn, but it is such a hike that I don't do it to much when I'm in full regalia. And also have—back when I was invested, I spent a little bit of time doing Manhattan parties, but not as much to speak of. The only other place that also used to do drag shows in Bushwick—which has since closed down was Tandem. Tandem had a large backroom which was good for events. And luckily we have Secret Project Robot and they've been consistent. They've switched spaces, but they're going strong and dedicated to the crowd. Have lots of trans people on their staff, um lots of queer events, queer djs, queer performers. Um so Secret Project [Robot] is a stronghold of the community—that isn't going any time soon, I think.

Dicken: Has that been—has nightlife and like this like both map and timelines of bars and this nightlife circuits been the primary way you've come into trans or gender nonconforming communities?

Object: Yes, and no. It's definitely I would say where I made the initial connections for all of those communities, but I think for me, the real generative relationships have all happened outside of a bar setting. Because like there's only—like the way in which a relationship forms when it happens at night over drinks is different from the way it forms when you expand and add other activities. So like—I think finding ways to take those relationships I found in nightlife and turn them into more robust friendships that included other things was crucial. So like—I—it started with me finding like a few other people who came to queer nightlife from like a theater or performance background and who were taking the things they were doing in drag and queer nightlife and recontextualizing them in a theatrical or performance setting. And that was one way that I found to build out those relationships. And then another sort of foundational or necessary experience was being introduced to the queer sanctuaries in Tennessee, which are historically varied spaces that have expanded to welcome lots of different identities and yeah—having the opportunity to be there was also foundational for me. Both in terms of—I think it’s—I think being in those spaces is important to a lot of people, and I had a
perfectly classic, cliched experience of revelatory self-acknowledgement on the land, as many people do.

**Dicken:** Um so many questions in my mind. I'm curious to pose one fairly general first though around—are—are—what are some positive memories in relationship to these communities that just come up? [Recorder cuts off] Ok, I think we're rolling again.

**Object:** Perfect.

**Dicken:** So we're hydrated and getting deeper into these questions of community and like drag scenes and queer sanctuary space and Tennessee. And I just asked about positive experiences that jump to mind of you in relationship to the community.

**Object:** Um I mean [laughter] there are like an infinite number of like dumb, fun nights that I recall from nightlife. I absolutely would be remiss if I went this whole interview without talking about Bathsalts. Bathsalts was my church for like a year and a half. I—so my first job when I moved to New York [City] was as a baker. I was making pastries at this little coffee shop in Bed-Stuy [Bedford-Stuyvesant] and so naturally my shift was from like five am to two pm and that is very much at odds with a drag queen's schedule, as you can imagine. And so in order to accomodate my opening shift on Tuesdays, I would nap Monday afternoons from like six to eleven, wake up at eleven, go to Bathsalts, close down the bar with Bathsalts and Macy [Rodman] and [Severely] Mamed and all of those people at four, and then go to work. And I did that on an almost weekly basis for like four or five months. When I look back on it now, I'm like, “How the fuck did I do that?” But alas, I was a young 23 year-old and my body was not what it is now. Yeah Bathsalts was so incredible. The space that Macy [Rodman] and [Severely] Mamed like built with their presence and their personalities was so incredible. Like I don't know—they're both super into the humor of the grotesque and of the absurd—like they are both huge John Waters fans. Severely Mamed—with a name like Severely Mamed, what do you—what do you fucking expect? And Macy Rodman is just so brilliant in so, so many ways. Like her sense of humor is just so sharp that like—and like it was a fucking Monday night party. Like Monday night is Industry Weekend. It is well-known in the like bar community and nightlife community that like, if you work all weekend, you have Monday off. So like it was the night that all just like the dumbshit nightlife people came to to unwind after their long weekend of partying—you party after your party. Um and it was like—the crowd was like usually in the ballpark of like one to two dozen people. Like not by any means a packed bar, but like people who were there to see each other, not to be seen—you know? Which is at odds with the like Friday and Saturday nights lot. Um and you could tell that Macy [Rodman] and [Severely] Mamed were doing it just because it was fun for them. Like it was a Monday night—they gave no shits. If we're not having fun, there's no point. Like it wasn't to make money—it was to like be a dumbass and have a good time about it. And so like that I think was both a refuge and a point of excitement simultaneously. It was like oh you never really know what you're going to see at Bathsalts. Like something could pull something really wacky out of the bag just for shits and giggles, and at Don Pedro, you could absolutely get away with it—you could get away with anything you could then. The closing night—by the time Bathsalts came to an end, it was a big deal. Um by then Macy [Rodman] had come out as trans and uh had been in nightlife long enough that she and
[Severely] Mamed both had been in nightlife long enough that like the volume of people that they knew packed the bar for closing night. And I remember Merrie Cherry broke a table by performing “I’m Your Cherry Bomb”—that song—and she just spent the entire song dive bombing cans of beer on the table and crushing them with her tit. She was just like diving onto the table to crush an empty beer can and broke the table. That was brilliant. Uh Amber Alert did—oh fuck what was the song? It wasn’t “You Make Loving Fun”—it was something else 80s and joyous like that. And she just stripped down to a monokini and had someone pour salt and cold 45 all over her in a plastic baby bath—in a plastic baby pool. And so she was just drenched in salt and beer. And then—oh! Another fun thing that Macy [Rodman] did almost every night was a little gameshow between sets where she would just like bring a couple people on stage and give out drink tickets for like answering a question or doing a dare or something. And on this last night, she had someone do a shot of the salty pool water—the cold 45 with salt in it for a free drink ticket, which is just like, at this point, you’re desperate [laughter]. And her show on that final night—someone at some point had gotten their hands on a like science materials catalog and had gifted Macy [Rodman] a frozen fetal pig [laughter]—which she had just kept in her freezer to use some time—I forget what song she did—but she just like made out with this frozen fetal pig on stage. It was beautiful. Um antics—absolutely antics. The kind of shit that you know—you’re like—that is what I want to see! Like that is what people move to New York [City] for—is to be stunned and astonished by what they see on stage. Um and Macy [Rodman] was one of the people who consistently turned out those like stunning, astonishing moments that like floored and entertained all of us. Um and then I would also be remiss not to talk about Casa Diva which is a—which is the name of Charlene's home, first and foremost—but it is also used as a venue to some capacity um and it is wonderful to be able to gather in a place that's not actually a business and a place that you can 100% trust that the ethos of the space is about serving the community because it is literally someone’s home rather than a bar that is trying to make money. Um and I often bartend for them and their parties that they have in their space, so I'm deeply invested in those events as well. Yeah I mean—there are an infinite number of stories that I could tell, but that is a taste—a lick of the icing.

**Dicken:** I love it. I am curious—before some questions around like politics and trans-ness and like this moment in relationship to these scenes. I’m curious—I mean—uh like these stories have also been haunted with like—as you named it—mourning and closure and these like trajectories towards—

**Object:** Birth and then loss.

**Dicken:** Yeah. And I’m curious just about the flipside of the question that I just asked. Like moments as a community in mourning or moments when your relationship to community were taut or negative or...

**Object:** Yeah I mean—the loss of parties, the loss of performers, the loss of spaces is like less shocking. Nightlife has high turnover because it—I mean, A) it's business. It is a little bit fraught that our primary access to community in some ways is in these spaces mediated by capitalism. But it’s what we have—so like, while it sucks to lose one, at the end of the day, it’s the nature of the free market—businesses start and businesses close. Um and again, like being a performer
in nightlife has a high burnout rate. It's exhausting. It is largely incompatible with having a day job. I experienced that myself. Uh—I think—um—yeah. So that's a sort of come-and-go thing that I feel personally pretty at peace with. Um I think the general trend of like losing queer spaces without seeing them replaced at the same rate is a little bit alarming. But again, six years doesn't feel like a long enough data pool for me to make that claim in a solid way yet. What I feel more interested in talking about as a less positive memory was my—the development of my relationship to my sexuality in the context of these spaces, which was naturally fraught. Like of course starting drag and like using drag as an avenue through which to consider my own gender and my own sexuality was crucial and important and like absolutely fertile ground. But it meant that as soon as I started to grasp that like faggotry was a sexuality that made sense to me, it began to sting that there wasn't—didn't seem to be space for me in it. Um and that as much or maybe more than feeling physically and temporarily burnt out was that I was emotionally burnt out by being sexually rejected by fags was I think—I would—yeah, I would call it the primary reason that I started to remove myself from the scene when I did. You know, it's like—after being so immersed in the spaces for like fag sexuality is openly on display and I could really find myself immersed in it, it was clear to me how differently fags related to sex and to one another than straight people do—like obviously, but also worth saying. Like I was like, "Oh yeah, this is a relationship to sex that I could get down with. I absolutely can't get down with being a straight woman. Like that sounds like hell, but like this, I can do. This seems playful and fun and like, yeah—this seems like a thing I can get with." And feeling for maybe the first time in my life so at home in a sexuality and feeling simultaneously shut out was—it was really hot and cold. It was hard to handle. Um—and like—I don't know—I could point to a couple specific instances. There were a couple of times—multiple times actually—where a dude would be like genuinely flirting with me and like say, "I'm attracted to you and I don't know why. I'm not into women. But I'm like feeling your vibe." Or something like that. And I would be like, "Duh—it's like—I have fag vibes. Like you're picking up what I'm putting down. Like stop looking at what category I'm supposed to be and pay attention to that."' Because for me, that's always where attraction has lied. I've always been like super conscious of the fact that sexuality and sex is a—like a bonding tool for me. That's what it is—like I don't get—yeah—at least that is my relationship to sex. Lots of people use it for a lot of other things. Um but that's what it is for me. And so to have someone say, "I feel this bond that we have, but it doesn't make sense," made me just want to shake someone. I was like, "But you feel it! Like why—don't fight it—like feel it. It's there." Um the repeated frustration of that was enough to make me pull back and reconsider how to situation myself in relationship to the thing.

**Dicken:** Um yeah. I'm curious about like a bridge between that pain and like the way you started changing your relationship to the community and some like really present stuff uh in this sort of moment of trans-visibility or like whatever capitalism is doing to us at large—where there's like these battles for ownership of various cultures—performance cultures, drag cultures, specifically queer sanctuary—and like around transness and around gay maleness. And I'm just curious what um—like how you see yourself in this moment of like people knowing what trans is and its different strange hyper—you know—like corporate media-tized way and how that has changed what your scenes feels like?

**Object:** What was that last word you used?
Dicken: How that like moment of trans-visibility, this moment of trans-visibility has been for you and how it's changed what you being in your scenes—

Object: Oh, scenes—

Dicken: —has felt like.

Object: Um I think first and foremost, my concept of and understanding of myself is unanchored right now. Like I'm at a point in which my self-understanding is fluctuating really rapidly. So it's hard for me to nail that down in any extensive way. But—I don't know—it's really, really new, and so I—I don't know. I very much feel hesitant to name it this early—but then again that's just my nature. I'm a waiter. I'm stressed by speed and high tempos, and my impulse when given the option is always to wait until I'm certain. Um but it's been—it's been a battle with myself in some ways not to settle back into a stable gender presentation. Like politically I—politically and personally also—I think the reality of my relationship to gender and my like—the most authentic that I could possibly be with the world would be to present in such a way that my gender is always in question. Like having a legible binary gender at all would be an abandonment of my politics [laughter]. Um which I knew going into this, but as much as I knew it, I was unprepared for the psychological experience of confusing the public on a daily basis. I was unprepared for how draining and exhausting it is to be met with like—no matter how hidden or contained or small it is by the parties in question—to be met with alarm and confusion every time [laughter] you interact with someone—someone new. And like absolutely that's aligned with my goals and with my gender politics, but uh it is a challenge to continue to do that on a daily basis. So I think as soon as I realized I was able to access binary gender again—but a binary gender that I hadn't had access to before—I was like—I started allowing myself to sort of settle into that and like regain that measure of comfort, and I'm just now starting to push back against that impulse in myself and encouraging myself to—as much as I feel capable—um destabilize my presentations. Even though it risks destabilizing that hard-won interest of fags that I have just started to feel. Like finally having like turned the corner into being legibly and clearly a hot guy, it's been really a—it's been a soothing balm to have people fawn over me and be like, “You're a hot dude,” and I'm like, “Oh yes! I always knew that, but now you know it too.” That's really satisfying. And yet it absolutely is contrary to all of my stayed politics and goals to just like live in that and let that be the end game.

Dicken: Are there people who have taught you or like lessons that you've learned within yourself or—I'm curious like self-care toolboxes. And like for the—yeah like that, that thing we do with non-binary people of every day, once again, being like, “This is a commitment that I'm making to how I present to the world, and to doing some things to make myself feel good, but also pushing against”—ah yeah—I just empathize with what you're saying about comfort and like non-binary existence. And are there people who like gave you tools for a toolbox of how to live through that?

Object: No, I'm making them as I go.
Dicken: Yeah.

Object: It's not something I see reflected anywhere around me. It is absolutely—no, I take it back. Not that I take it back, but I want to elaborate on that. I've seen other people's tools but I need to build my own. You know, I like—I think step one for me is like moving through the world as a visible faggot, as someone who people look at and say, "That's a very gay man." Like flamboyantly so. And like once I feel like I have that in my aesthetic toolbox and am confident in how to shape that, then a question will be like, ok I know how to do fag, I know how to do hot cis-woman. How do you like make the purple that is in between those two, and make it in a color that doesn't just turn into mud, make it in a color that is like legible for me, that makes sense. So I think I'm again biding my time and taking it slow. But it's an intuitive thing more than a conscious thing in a lot of ways. Again that fucking aquarian-forebrain likes to take all of the emotions and just analyze the fuck out of them. But you know—I got into a full drag phase again for the first time in like a couple of years last weekend, and that felt really good to be like, "Oh I can still get in drag. I can still like get in a look that's like not appropriate for anywhere but inside of a club or on the stage and like go out and drop jaws. Like I still know how to do that." That felt good because I had this moment a couple of weeks ago where I realized that no one who's met me in the past year knows that part of my life. And like I still held it—held my past very much as a part of my present self. I was like, "No that like—the drag queen is still alive and well in me. She's like sitting on her throne and coaching me through my day." But like lots of people don't see her, and I was like, "Ok, well, she can have a twirl. Like she can come out for a night." And just like finding the ways that feel comfortable for me to dismantle gender's hold on me while still feeling good in the world. Like—I think a lot—I mean—I named myself image Object [laughter], like if you're going to name yourself “Image”, clearly there's a lot of consideration given to presentation and aesthetic, and I—I don't know. I'm like desperate to get my hands on a whole new wardrobe but also, I'm like I can definitely do what I have to do with what I've got. It's like, this combination of feeling ancy in the gender that I'm starting to settle into [laughter] um and uh—feeling like I like—feeling like I don't know yet what I'm trying to make, but I'll know it when I see it. Like—like I have to just get my hands on as many options as possible and just keep trying out different combinations until I land on the ones that feel right. Getting dress is absolutely a half hour-long process for me every day. I'm like, “No this half of the silhouette works but this half doesn't. This needs an extra thing here.” Yeah—for gender has always lied in silhouette for me. Like color and pattern, sure, those are great. Those are—those have personality, they have flavor. But gender is about silhouette. And so I'm like very much trying to figure out what pieces to combine and how in order to make silhouettes that don't have a legible gender or that feel like they're unexpected combination of genders. Again this is the aquarius thing—like aquarius likes to invent stuff, likes new ideas, like always reaching forward—and so I'm like very much in that place. And like this is a creative activity that's difficult for me. Like I—when I was studying dance, I resisted hard every time I was asked to make something without a specific prompt. I was like—I'm very much—this is my capricornian-side of my nature, is that I like to know what I'm trying to build before I start my foundation, and like—if I'm trying to build a bridge, I can't start a foundation for a building. I don't want to work without knowing where I'm going. Like that's inefficient. Um so this isn't my comfort zone—of just like alright, well you got to do something. You can't walk out of your house naked today, so like dig in and see what you can do [laughter]. Put together something.
You might not feel great about it, but you'll be dressed [laughter]. Um so it's—it's yeah. It's been a process. Um and will continue to be a process for probably the rest of my life. But I feel good about having swung my pendulum basically as far as I want to towards masculinity and now I'm letting it doddle back around towards the middle.

**Dicken:** I want to do three things right now. The first one is to share with the listener and maybe with you that there's like a gorgeous rainbow effect happening from the windows of the basement that we're in right now, and there has been like this really lovely palenscent thing that I've experience of you with this like, several different splashes of rainbow while you talk about color and palette and all of these spaces that like refuse to like—that bounce off of you hair to your forehead to your chest, to like—yeah it's beautiful.

**Object:** Yeah, these crystals in the window are really helping me right now.

**Dicken:** Yeah, they're like ghosts of what people will hear of this one day. The second thing in relationship to that because I feel people deserve to like hear Image Object talk about the image and the object that you're presenting to the world. Do you want to tell us about your silhouette today?

**Object:** Sure. Um the outfit that I put together today—I woke up thinking about feeling really, really immature. Don't know why. I felt really—I felt like a big, dumb baby today when I woke up. I was like, “Who am I kidding? This being an adult thing is a sham!” I really didn't want to put on t-shirt and jeans because that doesn't feel like an adult outfit. So today, I am wearing these really fun punk dress pants made by my friend Claire Flury who is an incredible indy designer. They're this chambre fabric with external seams that go down legs on the outside that are relatively rough hewn. The front has a sort of buttoned flap patch over the crotch area that is a dark green plaid and the rear—the back like belt hem of the pants is a red plaid with buckles. Um my undermost layer today is this like mustard yellow silk camisole—like tank—loose, loose silk tank top—with a sort of ambiguously-gendered silhouette. And then over it I'm wearing this loose emerald green velour collar polo shirt. Um this was the closest I could come to a mature outfit today [laughter]. I had to wear the silk top because silk is a mature fabric [laughter]. And I had to wear not jeans. I'm not wearing jeans and a t-shirt. That's what guided my outfit today.

**Dicken:** That is a very important like priority around like silhouettes.

**Object:** [Laughter]

**Dicken:** I'm also curious—um, something that I've like heard that—I don't want to just over-determined as an analogy—but I'm curious for you is like—to have you reflect on it—is um like you know what you’re doing and how you’re going to building a foundation of drag secrets. Like, you met one person and were like, “I can now ask and share secrets and literally guide myself and build this toolbox together into a scene.”

**Object:** Mm.
Dicken: When I asked about like tools or like, just like tactics for non-binary existence and dealing with that like as you—away from a scene and in a scene and out of a scene and all of those things—you were like, “No, and there's no people and I'm making the tools.” And I'm just, that analogy is so striking to me—that yeah—about the thing of how these scenes um—

Object: Are hyper contextual. And it's like, what—I mean, you know—what's appropriate in the context of a drag event—like I feel great wearing an ostentatious look to a nightlife event and like having strangers look at me and fawn over me and ask to take my picture—wouldn't feel great doing that getting my groceries. Um you know—so like the tools for uh expressing a non-binary identity, the tools that work for the given task—vary from context to context. And like absolutely being a drag queen is a form of the non-binary identity in my eyes. There are people who disagree, but I think it is. Uh—and I think we're all fighting the same beast but we all have to fight it in our own ways—like no one gets out of gender. No one get a get out of gender free card. It doesn't exist. We're all implicated. Um and so we—I—I think—and I think that the moment someone becomes prescriptive about how to cast it off is the movement that gender has its hold on you again. Like because as soon as you build a unified way to resist it, it will adapt to your resistance and it will reify itself. So I'm like absolutely here for people to—I mean—I am maintaining a non-binary identity while doing medical hormonal transition—or “transition”—I don't usually use this word to describe this process for me—like I'm maintaining a non-binary identity while doing hormone therapy—I'm here for people to maintain non-binary transness without ever doing any kind of medical intervention—I'm here for people to—you know—battle this beast in whatever way makes the most sense to them and brings them the most comfort. And I think that every strategy contributes to the overall goal which is all of us having a more functional relationship to the lines of power that flow between us.

Dicken: What other parts of your identity like—um are important to your sense of who are you are, and what those forms of power are, and like what—how you fight the beast?

Object: Mm. Um the things that my body can do just like materially that uh—the things that it's capable of are a source of identity for me. Like I have always been pretty athletic and—athletic or not, I've always been very active, even when I was young, and then like middle school and high school and etcetera back when I wouldn't touch sports with a ten foot pole—I was still very much into theater and was always drawn to things that engaged my body at the same time as my intellect. I have been studying boxing and Muay Thai for the past I think year and a half and as I said—before drag, I was in dance. So highly nuanced and codified studies of the body are a huge source of identity for me. Like I have a really, really clear memory of standing in the shower as like a small child—I can't put an age on it, but probably around six or eight—standing in the shower and thinking I was standing perfectly symmetrically and looking down at my feet and seeing them not aligned and feeling astonished that my self-perception could be so different from external measurable reality. And that kind of nuanced self-analysis has always been a huge source of curiosity and of interest for me. And I funneled that first into a study of dance and now I have found a really, really excellent boxing coach that gives me plenty of space to do that work inside of uh the structure of that sport. So I identify with being strong and flexible. I've always been stronger and more flexible than people expect me to be. And those
qualities of my body that aren't associated with gender—or that are, but like strength is associated with masculinity, and flexibility is associated with femininity and I identify strongly as both of them. I—just that the fact that—um in my self-perception, those qualities aren't gendered. They're just qualities of my body that I appreciate and take joy in and am proud of. I take great pride in being strong and in being flexible. And I think another centerpoint of identity for me has always been my academic strengths. I've always—since I was young I've been told I was smart by a lot of people and I think I absorbed that and self-identify with that a lot. I think it's part of why—again, aquarius, very much in my head—like I self-identify with my own self-awareness. I'm like if I wasn't as self-aware as I am, I wouldn't be who I am. And I think that hyper-identification with my own mental state was I think one of the reasons why I hesitated so long to ever—or why I was always super cautious about substance use of any kind. I like was very, very gradual in my self-introduction to alcohol. I've—I waited a long ass time to try psychedelics and other party drugs. Yeah I think any time that my mental state is significantly altered I feel a minor crisis of identity, so I've always been super cautious about intentionally altering my mental state as a result.

**Dicken:** What you just said about sort of like crisis of identity relates to me for like various ways you've talked about that in this conversation and um two of them being like this category or this box of like how people were experiencing you versus what you were putting down and the pain there of like energetic versus gendered dissonance. And also what you said about like my self-perception—the crisis of my self-perception not aligning with um measurably realities or external sort of—yeah, realities. So I'm curious about like other boxes in the sort of nomyn of identity politics at large—like how your—if there are ways that like you feel like your race, your class, your ability etcetera intercept with your politics or your experience of your gender?

**Object:** Yeah absolutely, I think they inevitably do. I think in almost all of those arenas I'm highly privileged and so the ways in which those parts of my identity affect my experience are much more obscure to me. I think that's like the nature of the beast that as soon as you lack privilege you sense the lack a lot more acutely than when you have it. So I think I'm in less of a condition to speak to those thing—those qualities' influence on me than perhaps people who know me well who might have an external perspective on the way that those things affect my life. Yeah definitely my whiteness and my upper middle class-ness have significantly impacted the entire trajectory of my life. Like I think they're one of the greatest sources of needs and of comfort in my living—like yeah. I have never felt significant lacks or like never feared significant lacks of any kind in my life. I've never felt limited in my access to the world. And despite you know being female for most of my life so far—whatever that means—um yeah and then also naturally like being able-bodied. Like I would have absolutely a massive crisis of identity if my physical abilities were to be drastically altered in a sudden way. Like even the small changes in my flexibility over the past couple of years as I've aged have been like—have sparked significant introspection and like [sigh]—you know, when I started the dance program at Sarah Lawrence [College], the first like large piece of feedback that my primary dance professor gave to me was that I was so flexible she almost didn't know how to teach me. She was like, “You have such a large range of motion and you enjoy the feeling of using it so much that I'm worried you're going to hurt yourself because you're going to the ends of your capacity where your strength is limited and I'm worried that without having the strength to control yourself at those
extremes, that you'll find yourself injured." And so since then my focus in much of my use of my body has been interrogating smaller ranges of motion and making the conscious decision to work in a smaller range has naturally—both working in a smaller range and just like the deterioration of a body over age—just like watching it over the past six years, I've lost flexibility. Not a lot, but enough to notice from the inside. And even just that has been like—I would have like small moments of panic [laughter] where I would be like, Oh no, I can't do the splits like I used to.” I'm like, “No that's not something you need to panic about [laughter]. You can still do lots of things that aren't the splits [laughter].” Um yeah.

**Dicken:** Has that impacted your understanding of when gender has swung like a pendulum and when you're doing something closer to like the mixing of purple?

**Object:** Um not directly I don't think. I don't know. No, I wouldn't say that I can draw on any specific corollaries between my athletic pursuits and the trajectory of my gender experiences. There might be one, but I haven't drawn on it if there is. They are independent arcs in my mind.

**Dicken:** Do you have intergenerational relationships with trans or queer people?

**Object:** Regrettably, no. Because most of my queer relationships were formed in nightlife and because nightlife has such a high rate of burnout, I haven’t yet given myself any opportunities to form meaningful relationships with queer people of another generation—or well I mean I guess it kind of depends on how you define generation. But no I can’t say that I have any that stand out in my mind.

**Dicken:** And how do you see yourself in relationship to other social movements or political movements that have sort of been ongoing for these six years in New York [City] or beyond that?

**Object:** Um I mean, admittedly, I see myself as largely removed from much of the political struggles that are happening. I'm back in school again now and spending most of my time either bartending to support myself, in school, studying for school, or socializing. And while uh my politics have continued to radicalize over the past six, eight, ten years, and I definitely—time is the resource that I can spare the least of—and so I spend very little of it participating in any political organizing or advocacy. But luckily I'm in a bartending gig that's lucrative enough that I often do have more financial resources to spare. So I enact my politics in my budget more than anywhere else in my life right now. Like I've built reparations into my budget, I've built charity into my budget—obviously those are separate things. Uh I've allocated sort of like flexible emergency fund that gets used either for me or for close friends whenever someone is in a crisis. And like I also—my political consciousness informs my career choices to a degree. Like I'm in school right now for—I mean I'm on track to pursue a PhD in neurotechnology [laughter]. Basically I wanted to design cyborgs, but I would ideally like to design cyborgs in such a way that contributes to the dismantling of capitalism rather than its reification [laughter]. So I have some vague ideas about how that could happen, but again, they are all conjectural and theoretical and many decades off from being enacted. So while I would absolutely say that I'm empathetic and sympathetic with most of the radical political
movements happening at the time, they don't get a lot of my daily energy. Not as much as plenty of people I know. But also more than other people I know. Like yeah.

**Dicken:** Yeah, I'm curious about that specifically because it's like um—yeah I'm curious about—because we've talked about these queer nightlives and visible queer politics and the way externalization of capitalism's trans moment has impacted the queer nightlife scenes that you're in or have been in—and I'm curious to flip that a little bit about how you've seen resistances or like relationships of queer nightlife to politics—or just to like—whether that manifests as like political organizing or explicit relationships there. Or I mean—I know your budget and I also know like you have a very clear politics around like local communities of color and specific—you know—and that relationship to queer nightlife in Brooklyn?

**Object:** Absolutely.

**Dicken:** Yeah.

**Object:** Politics informs every choice you make—not just one or two choices you make. For instance, when I was trying to figure out how to build some kind of athletic activity back into my life when I like knew I wasn't trying to be career-performer or dancer so wasn't going to invest [cough] in um dance classes—which tend to have a higher price point per hour than just a gym membership—I was shopping around for gym options and rather than do a like chain gym like Blink [Fitness] or Planet Fitness or CrossFit or what have you, I was pretty invested in doing a like smaller more local item and for a year I was boxing at a local family-run Puerto Rican boxing gym in [blowing lips]—in Ridgewood. And then switched recently to again, a one person business run by this guy Mario Meren who is a New York native and Muay Thai fighter and an excellent, excellent trainer, and I really love being in his gym. And he also has a like weekly donation-based trans boxing that happens in his gym, which is—funnily enough—how I found it. But now I don't attend that event. I am a full member of his gym and I go to pretty much every other class so I can leave space for people who are maybe less confident in a not trans-oriented gym atmosphere. And like—again that's like—I think for me that falls under the general umbrella of being a budget decision. I mean, in a capitalist economy like money is always political. So a lot of how I—again—and people will call this a capricorn trait too—is enacting my politics through my finances. But um I think—I don't know. There's—I'm like—I'm very much a practicalist. Like there are very few ifs and isms that I actively identify with. Queer and trans are pretty much the only identifiers I actively claim. Like—mm—anti-capitalist, sure. But I don't like actively claiming an anti as an identity. It's like, “Ok, if not capitalism, then what? What is it that you want instead?” “Something else!” Like, “No, that's not practical. That's not actionable [laughter]. That's not actually helpful.” Um and I—if it doesn't serve me, if it's not practical, then I don't feel the utility of aligning myself with it. But I do think that nightlife along with almost every other business venture in the country has noticed that politics are becoming something that they need to engage in. Like—I don't know. It's—it's become such a thing over the past couple of years that like businesses need to prove to you that they're not bigoted [laughter] in order to be worthy of your business. Which is like a weird [laughter] thing for them to try to do because you're like—well, you're a business. Like you're not a person, you're a
business. Anyway—I don't feel like that directly addresses your question. Will you rephrase it for me so I can come back to it?

Dicken: Sure. I— I asked— yeah just—

Object: — Unless you feel that it is sufficiently answered.

Dicken: No, I mean—I do feel like you touched on it. I asked if— just if there was anything that you wanted to add, but I asked just about if you've seen like a change in the way that queer nightlife is relating to political resistance or social movements or— um but—

Object: I mean in small ways, I think yes. Yeah I think it depends on where you look. Like there are definitely uh small— some would say token— ways in which people pay lip service to political movements. And then there are other like—I don't know— I don't know. I think at the end of the day it's like, well your event is still about whatever you said it's about. So if you're coming together over drag and performance like— sure that's inherently political in a certain way in that it's queer and celebration of glamour and of femininity— and glamour and femininity are downtrodden in the world and like every time you celebrate that's a little bit of inherent radicalism and a little bit of political content I'm sure. And like there's no need to like guild the lily and try it over politicize and do more than that. Like, that's what you're doing— do that. And then people are also using nightlife organizing as a way to bring people together around a political idea. Like for instance Starr Bar, Mayday Space, and the alliance that they have this cool. Just for the record, Starr Bar is this bar in Bushwick that has a partnership with a political organization called Mayday [Space]. Mayday [Space] is a people of color-led social justice org[anization] that gets 10% of Starr Bar's profits off the time, and they are involved in a lot of their event organizing, and so most of Starr Bar's events are run by and, or geared toward queer people, people of color, Bushwick natives, immigrants— stuff like that. So it's cool to have— like that's a model that I don't see replicated anywhere else that comes immediately to mind. Yeah.

Dicken: Um so I'm curious to carry just a little bit through one question of sort of like systemic trans-issues or whatever like in relationship to what you just said a little while ago about your politics being expressed through your finance— financial decisions and budget. And I'm curious about how you have accessed— or are accessing or started accessing or thinking about accessing— transition or how your like people— and you talked about like emergency funds for care and emergency funds for friends— how— yeah. That sort of intersection of like how your money has been related to transness and your politic— political decisions.

Object: I got really, really lucky. I had a GP [general practitioner] that I really connected well with at the time that I wanted to start hormones. And she basically like— I walked in, said I wanted to do hormones, and she gave me the green light. Like it was that easy. I just— I brought it up one day that it was something that I wanted to do and she responded with, “Okay, I've not ever done that for a patient before. I've never administered or prescribed hormone therapy. So if you want to see someone else who is more experienced, I support you doing that. Or if you want to do it with me, just give me six weeks to do my research and come back and we can start.” And that's what I did.
**Dicken:** Wow.

**Object:** Yeah, that easy. Naturally, wrestled with my insurance company with getting it paid for, but um as far as accessing it, it was really a blessing to have her at that specific point in time. And I since then had to switch GPs [general practitioners] due to changes in insurance, but it's like—once you're on the regimen, you don't get questioned. So that was relatively easy. I am dating someone who doesn't have healthcare and is a trans woman of color, so I uh—a lot of my financial resources—I keep some dog-eared for her needs. She's accessing her care mostly through the free clinics in the city, so she's taken care of on a regular basis, but her mental health isn't stable, and so whenever something happens, I want to be sure I have enough available to cover her expenses so that she can get the—whatever care she decides to seek without worrying about the financial aspect. And then there is a small sort of DIY community pharmacy that is being slowly accrued at one of the [blows lips]—at one of the sanctuary spaces in Tennessee. And I'm contributing to that as I'm able. They're stockpiling hormones, Truvada—a number of different things. So as I get access to things to give them, I send it their way.

**Dicken:** Have you ever gotten any form of healthcare outside of like a legal or licensed medical context?

**Object:** I have been luckily enough to not have to do that.

**Dicken:** Yep.

**Object:** Yeah.

**Dicken:** And another way of thinking about that question—like are there any things—either specifically outside of the context of western medicine or just ways that you've—that have helped you feel better in your body? I mean you talked about Muay Thai and boxing and different relationships to like physical activity making you feel better in your body in relationship to your gender?

**Object:** Yeah um...

**Dicken:** Or spiritual practices or drugs.

**Object:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I've had—you know—my revelatory acid trips, as have had we all. It is sort of a right of passage. I am lucky enough to live right now with a self-taught herbalist who makes her own tinctures. And so she's been gradually introducing that knowledge into my life, which has been fun. I would say that impacts areas of my mental health that relate indirectly to my transness, but that's been cool to absorb anyway. Yeah definitely the um quasi-medical experiences that have most impacted my transness and queerness were the psychedelics. You know—my—an acid trip was like the key to my personal gender decision. It was like ripe for the happening, but that was the tool I chose to unlock my door [laughter]. I knew I was about to walk through it. I just needed a key and that was the key I picked up.
**Dicken:** Yeah, the toolbox question.

**Object:** Yeah it was like—that was a part of my—the like arc that I've drawn for myself over that portion of my gender journey was like once I started with drawing from gay nightlife and drag nightlife because of feeling so rejected by gay sexuality, I had a like pretty significant denial phase that I was like semi-aware of at the time. It was basically like me saying for myself, well I have to like be sure I cross everything off the list before I try being trans [laughter]. I have to make sure I can't make it work any other way. So I like had a solid year and a half—almost two years—of like dabbling in various like reincarnations of being high femme. And like making a real concerted effort to be a fun slut. Succeeded in being a slut—didn't succeed in having a whole lot of fun [laughter]—and like needed it badly—needed to go through it and needed to be exhausted by it in order to come to the end of my rope and be like, “Nope, I gotta do the trans thing.” And so it was like spring of 2016 that I had gotten really exhausted by being high femme for like a year and a half. Really exhausted by fucking a lot of straight men that summer, and I sort of just spent the winter hibernating and letting all of that marinate psychologically. And by the time spring rolled around, I was like starting to dabble with wearing butch outfits even though summer is coming and summer is a really good time for being a femme slut. I was like, “Mm, I'm feeling kind of butch.” I was like—I knew I was ripe for it. And it was going to be my second time down that sanctuary, and I like brought this dress with me that was going to be my acid trip dress. I was going to trip acid with Charlene for the first time—Charlene is such an acid queen. I was like she has to be it the first time I trip. I was like, “I'm ready. This is the thing.” And it is this—I don't know if you've ever seen it, but you would love it—it makes me think of you. It is a giant muumuu—that's literally—I sewed the sleeves up so they're snug. The silhouette has snuck sleeves, and just like big open body with like a boatneck. And the fabric is this like textured sort of crimped royal blue with like a splashed pattern of like gold over top of it. It looks like sunlight on water. It's beautiful. It's absolutely gorgeous. It's the dress you want to be wearing when you're having an acid trip, you know? Brought it with me, was down on the land like—it was uh my like—I'd a boyfriend who gave me my acid—like you know, you do this thing when you get on land—you like link up with one person and they're your boyfriend for the week. And we like u-hauled our tents and like slept together for the next three days. And then it was the day before I was set to leave and like we like dropped acid and went to the waterfall together and had this whole like gorgeous day when we like covered ourselves in mud and stood under the waterfall and soaked up the sun and hung out with our friends and did the whole thing. And I was wearing the dress and felt great until I didn't anymore. And then I was like, “I'm surrounded by all of these beautiful queers who get it in these gorgeous woods. Like there's no reason external to me why I should be feeling icky about wearing a dress right now. So if I'm feeling icky and I need to go put on a jockstrap and a crop top, then that's coming from inside me, not projected onto me from anyone else. And it means that I have drunk the same kool aid as everyone else and I have to dig it out of my own head. Like I don't have to do hormones for anyone else's benefit. I have to do it for mine.”

**Dicken:** That's beautiful.

**Object:** That was it.
Dicken: I think that was around when we met each other was spring 2016. Yeah. If you wanted people to hear one thing from you, what would it be?

Object: Oh god. I don't think I have an elevator pitch that I'm prepared to give [laughter]. Nothing comes immediately to mind. I don't know—I'd have to think about it. I don't have a slogan. I mean—I'm the image, the object—it speaks for itself I guess.

Dicken: And if you wanted to be remembered for something, what might that be?

Object: Oh god. Well now we're going to delve into my delusion of grandeur.

Dicken: [Laughter] We're talking about anti-capitalist cyborg—or like—not anti-, but cyborgs doing something other than capitalism!

Object: Amen!

Dicken: So I'm ready.

Object: Yeah you can think of me as the first cyborg—first anti-capitalist cyborg—that's what I would love to be. Someone who started something else. I don't know yet what it's going to be.

Dicken: Anything else you'd like to add?

Object: That does it for me.

Dicken: And any people you think of who you've named already—or haven't named—who you think might be interested in being interviewed for this project—or interviewing others?

Object: Charlene would be a great choice. Um [sucks lips]—I would love to think that we could get my girlfriend's story out of her, but I don't think she would be willing [laughter]. If I think of any others, I'll let you know.

Dicken: Yeah, yeah. Maybe one day, right?

Object: We'll see.

Dicken: I love you.

Object: I love you!

Dicken: I'm really glad we did this.

Object: Thank you, truly.
Dicken: And I'll turn the recorder off. Bye!