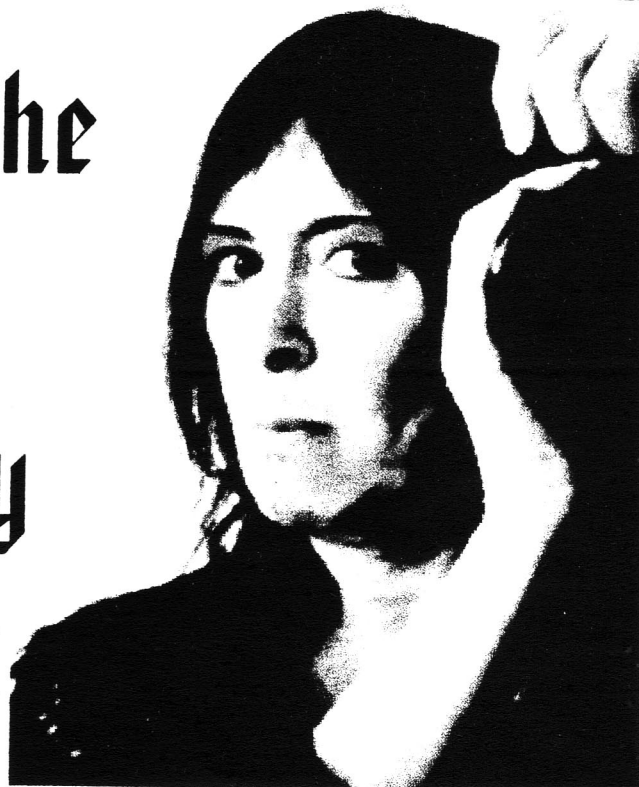


# Interview with the Transsexual Vampire: Sandy Stone's Dark Gift



Allucquère Rosanne Stone

by Davina Anne Gabriel

Nearly every transsexual woman who identifies as a lesbian and/or a feminist has, at one time or other, heard the name of Sandy Stone. In fact, Sandy Stone -- whose full name is Allucquère Rosanne Stone -- has become somewhat of a legend within the transsexual lesbian/feminist community. As a recording engineer for the all-women record company Olivia Records in the 1970s, she found herself unwittingly thrust into the unenviable position of being the focal point of the most well-known controversy involving the inclusion of transsexual women in women-only space to date, a position that was accorded further prominence by its recounting by Janice G. Raymond in her book *The Transsexual Empire: the Making of the She-Male*, in which she stated that "the Sandy Stone controversy" had assumed within the lesbian/feminist community a position of prominence comparable to that within popular culture to that of the controversy over René Richards' legal challenge to play professional women's tennis, also in the late 1970s. The so-called "Sandy Stone controversy" has become practically emblematic of the entire controversy over transsexual inclusion in lesbian/feminist space that is now well over two decades old.

Her essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" which was included in *Body Guards: the Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, redirected the entire course of academic discourse on transsexuality; was instrumental in sparking the beginning of the transsexual/transgender civil rights movement; and has gone on to become one of the most frequently cited works in both academic and nonacademic discourse regarding transsexuality since it was published. It was, in fact, her statements in that essay that transsexuals had failed to adequately

develop effective counterdiscourse to the criticisms of academic feminists such as Janice Raymond and her admonition to transsexuals to begin to define their own lives that provided me with the inspiration to begin publishing *TransSisters*.

Currently, she is Assistant Professor in the department of Radio-TV-Film at the University of Texas at Austin, where she studies issues related to interface, interaction, and agency; and is director of the Advanced Communication Technologies Laboratory. Previously she was a visiting lecturer in the

*"...when Lestat ... gives the Dark Gift to mortals, they are not only freed in time, but they're also freed from fixed identities....real self-knowledge frees us to move beyond a single identity to be all of who we are in complex, multiple ways -- to come to use all our identities..."*

departments of Communication and Sociology at the University of California San Diego, where she taught film, linguistics, gender, cultural studies, and feminist theory. She has conducted research on the neurological basis of vision and hearing for National Institutes of Health; was a member of the Bell Telephone Laboratories Special Systems Exploratory Development Group; has been a consultant, computer programmer, technical writer and engineering manager in Silicon Valley; and worked with Jimi Hendrix in music recording. She was invited to Sundance Institute in 1986. She produces the Monterey Symphony radio broadcast series. She is director of the Group for the Study of Virtual Systems at the Center for Cultural Studies, UC Santa Cruz, was program chair and organizer for the Second International Conference on Cyberspace at Santa Cruz, California in 1991, was an organizer and member of the program committee for the Third International Conference on Cyberspace at Austin, Texas in 1993, was a member of the program committee for the Fourth International Conference on Cyberspace at Banff, Canada in 1994, and is an advisor for the Fifth International Conference on Cyberspace at

Karlsruhe, Germany in 1995. Her academic publications have been translated into eight languages and include "Will The Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures", in Michael Benedikt, ed.: *Cyberspace: First Steps* (MIT Press); "Sex, Death, and Architecture", in *Architecture New York* (ANY); "Virtual Systems", in Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, eds.: *Incorporations* (MIT); and "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto", in Kristina Straub and Julia Epstein, eds.: *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Sexual Ambiguity* (Routledge), recently reprinted in *Camera Obscura* 26. Her book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* will be released by MIT Press in Spring 1995. The next book in a projected series, *The Gaze of the Vampire: Tales From the Edges of Identity*, will be published in early 1996. Her first science fiction novel, *Ktahmet*, is forthcoming from DAW Books/New American Library. She is currently working on a study of vampirism, desire, and presence.

This interview with Allucquère Rosanne Stone was conducted by telephone on Sunday, 29 January 1995.

**Davina:** Most transsexuals who have heard of you have done so by reading *The Transsexual Empire*, but it seems like not very much else is known about you within the transsexual community. So, to start off with, could you just provide some background information about yourself and what you were doing before going to work for Olivia Records?

**Sandy:** Well, I kept it a secret up until now, but I'm not really a transsexual; I'm simply masquerading as one... No, but seriously, before Olivia I was engineering for Jimi Hendrix and Crosby, Stills and Nash and Van Morrison...I did *Tupelo Honey*, for instance. One of the names I used back then was Doc Storch. I had several *noms de engineer*.

**Davina:** What recordings did you work with Jimi Hendrix on?

**Sandy:** I did most of the warehouse tapes at Record Plant, and I did "Stone Free."

**Davina:** You transitioned in the early 1970s, is that right?

**Sandy:** That's right.

**Davina:** What was it like transitioning back then? Was there a lot of pressure to conform to cultural stereotypes?

**Sandy:** Well, I deliberately chose Santa Cruz to transition in because Santa Cruz is a very accepting community, so I found that I really didn't have to conform to too many stereotypes. That was an experimental stage for me too, living as a woman preoperatively for several years.

**Davina:** Did you identify as a lesbian when you were in transition?

**Sandy:** I didn't identify as anything in particular when I was in transition. I was quite open to seeing which direction my sexuality took, and besides, I had read the laundry list quite well, and one of the things on that list was that one should accept the possibility that one will be completely unattractive to people of any gender or sex afterwards, and this was repeated to me a number of times by therapists and by the people at Stanford. One in particular who was trying to shake me out of my conviction, quite brutally at one point said, "Do you have old friends?" And I said, "Yes, I have many old friends." And he said, "What will you do when they reject you?" And so I decided that I needed to be true to myself more than I needed not to be rejected by anyone else, so I did proceed, but that was why I was doing so without any real sense of sexuality; I didn't expect to have one necessarily.

**Davina:** So, what did you tell your physicians in regard to your sexual orientation?

**Sandy:** I told them that I didn't know, and that was a point against me. I told them that I was seeing a woman. I was, in fact, living with a woman at the time, but we were not lovers. And they said that was bad and that I had to stop it, and I wouldn't. And that was strike one.

The Stanford program and I did some mutual retraining. In my final interview before approval I refused to say that I was totally committed to wanting surgery, and they said that if I weren't a hundred percent committed, then I wasn't eligible. I said that anyone who was a hundred percent committed to anything was probably crazy, that everybody had reservations if they were honest and looked deeply enough. And Don Laub, who was doing the interview, said "I don't believe that, and I'm sorry, you've struck out." We actually went back and rewrote that conversation later with the assistance of Marty Norberg, the coordinator. Marty wisely saw that we had arrived at an impasse which was merely linguistic, and she scripted another meeting between Don Laub and me in which Don simply said, "Are you ready for surgery?" And I said, "yes," and we proceeded from there.

**Davina:** So you were instrumental in their revising their guidelines; is that correct?

**Sandy:** I was one of the people who was. I may have been among the first, but I know that there were lots of other people. I remember talking with another person who smoked a pipe and was there at the same time I was. I said, "Tell me, if you think of yourself as a woman, why have you chosen to smoke a pipe?" She took out the pipe, a small ceramic one, and looked at it. And she said, "I am a woman. This is my pipe; therefore, it is a woman's pipe." And she grinned, and I said, "Ah, I understand!"

**Davina:** You mention in "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" that transsexuals are generally expected to create a "plausible history." Was this something that you were required to do?

**Sandy:** Yes. It was not something that I was required to do for Stanford, but it is certainly something that is required by society in general, and so my policy is and was that in order to get along in the world as gracefully as possible that when strangers ask me about my background I come up with an invented history, and if I get to know them well enough, or if they already know that I am a transie and they ask me a direct question, I will give them a true answer.

**Davina:** When did you first begin working at Olivia?

**Sandy:** I think it was 1975.

**Davina:** How did you get the job there?

**Sandy:** The women of Olivia had heard about me from one of the few women engineers then active. I think they had approached her to ask if she would work with them, and she was busy with other projects or didn't want to, and she told them about me. And so they sent a delegation to meet with me and talk with me. They called first, and I didn't know anything about Olivia at the time. And it occurred to me later that another friend of mine who was postoperative had set me down on the couch, clamped headphones over my ears, and played Cris Williamson's "The Changer and the Changed." And I remember lying there thinking, "Oh, this music is so beautiful, but wow, the mix is awful!" It was a harsh judgment, perhaps; they were doing the best they could. Then when they called me, it took me a while to connect the name Olivia Records with hearing that album, because I had heard it a

year or two previously.

**Davina:** Did you lose work in the mainstream music industry as a result of transitioning?

**Sandy:** No, I had already withdrawn from the mainstream music industry. I had gotten tired of waking up on the floor, quite frankly. I actually worked with Marty Balin for a while during transition, and he was fascinated. Most of the rock musicians I knew were. Crosby, Stills and Nash were very supportive; everyone I knew in the business was.

**Davina:** Janice Raymond mentions several transsexuals in her book, but she seems to single you out for particular vituperation. Why do you think she has such animosity toward you in particular?

**Sandy:** I can only speculate because we've never met. I know that she is an extremely angry person, and I know that a lot of her work on transsexualism stems from deep hurt and scarring, and I can't deny her that experience, but I think that she took off after me because of the Olivia thing, and also possibly because of some feminist writers' conference in 1970-something. They had a list of the ten biggest problems in the women's community, and right under "Is Gloria Steinem really a C.I.A. agent?" [laughs] was "What do we do about Sandy Stone?" I think that the Olivia events gave me a certain profile that perhaps neither I nor Olivia wanted, but having achieved, we didn't know quite what to do about. There were a number of mistakes that I made and that they made, in public debates with lesbian separatist communities back in the days when we still believed that there was a possibility for dialog, and I think that those exacerbated the situation. And it's possible that Janice Raymond had some friends in that community because there were some academic people there, and it's also possible that Janice Raymond was friends with Julia Penelope, who at that time was known as Julia Penelope Stanley, and was the Chair at the Dept. of Linguistics at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. And there was a kind of odd connection between there and Nebraska having to do with a lover of mine at the time.

**Davina:** Raymond doesn't really give very many of the details surrounding the Olivia controversy, so could you elaborate on that?

**Sandy:** Yes, in the first place, I don't think she really knows much about the Olivia controversy. In the second place, I was quite open with the Olivia collective about being a transie. In fact, they already knew, but I didn't know they knew, so one of the very first things I told them when we had our initial meeting and got to like each other very much was that I was a transie. What I didn't tell them was that I was still in transition, and I didn't tell them that not because I was afraid of it or that it might eventually be an explosive issue, but simply because I felt it was personal information and I wasn't ready to share it. So at the time that I started working for Olivia, I was actually preoperative. They didn't know that, and I didn't know it was volatile. I figured I would tell them at some point when we got to know each other better.

**Davina:** So, before going to work for Olivia, you weren't aware of any controversies regarding transsexuals within the lesbian community?

**Sandy:** You didn't really "go to work" for Olivia; you became part of that collective. It was really a sisterhood at that time, and in a very deep way. I didn't feel so much that I was being hired, so much as that I was joining a family, one in which we shared

common goals and beliefs, the primary set of those goals being to make music and politics at the same time.

The controversy started with Janice Raymond sending us a chapter of her book. It happened to be a chapter that didn't mention me, but was quite vituperative about the issue of transsexualism, and she asked if we would pass it around for comment. I think she thought she was blowing the whistle on me. I think she thought that no lesbian in her right mind would have anything to do with a transie and, consequently, that Olivia must have been totally ignorant of my situation. So this thing came in, and I think Judy [Dlugacz, one of the founders of the Olivia Collective] probably read it first, and passed it around with a note on it saying, "What do you think about this?" The other women were writing things like, "This is sick, what's wrong with this woman?" And I thought about it for a while, in my sort of academic way, and wrote something like, "I think that a book on transsexualism from a critical perspective is certainly needed, but this is not that book."

We sent that back to Janice Raymond, and then sometime later she published the book, and I discovered I was in it. Shortly thereafter, or possibly a little bit before, we started getting letters from other women and they took the form of trashing one of the new albums in terms of the quality of the engineering, and they were all written in about the same way. Judy commented on the fact that they all took the same general shape. There would be some paragraphs on how awful the album was, and toward the end there would be some sort of mention of, "Oh, by the way, we understand you have a transie working for you in the capacity of engineer," and after a while there were quite a few such letters. Some of them were quite astonishing. They made distinctions between what they called "male" and "female" styles of recording and mixing. This seemed to have to do with how prominent the drums were in the mix and whether the lead vocal was featured or pulled back into the mix. We were stonkered by this. Such distinctions were meaningless, really; they were simply based on local prejudices, and we didn't share them. We were making the best music we knew how, and we felt that the things these women were objecting to were the very things we wanted to be doing. Not me, but the collective as a whole. I personally felt that we were witnessing a nostalgia for the Bad Old Days of women's music, when albums were mixed under poor listening conditions and on equipment of inferior quality, and that a certain segment of our audience preferred that style because it really did create an identifiable genre. They didn't realize that we were trying to *escape* that genre. We didn't want to spend the rest of our lives making garage-quality music.

We soon found that we couldn't escape the politics in which our audience steeped every single thing we did. Stuff that we thought had no possible political connotation turned out to be political hot potatoes. For instance, there were a lot of politics around what our artists wore on and offstage, all related to the idea of what a Real Lesbian should wear. I recall how heavy the reverberations were when Teresa Trull first wore lipstick onstage...talk about dividing the community!

And so, in addition to all that -- which was novel for all of us and needed grappling with -- we became aware that there was a contingent out there that was quite vocal and that didn't like at all that there was a transie at Olivia. So we had meetings and decided that the best thing to do was to have some meetings with the women's community at large and air those issues and address

them directly and find out what we could do about it. So we did that.

The first meeting we had was in Berkeley, while we were on tour. We discovered that a contingent of radical separatists had flown in from Chicago for this meeting, and that...let's say that the crowd was ugly. We were happily tripping along thinking that what we were going to do was to create dialog. We were too naive to recognize that the meeting had already been stacked against us. And so we went in, we sat down, I think there were possibly eight or ten of us from Olivia present. There were maybe twenty, maybe thirty other women in the room, maybe more. I don't remember whether Judy made a statement first or whether the other people did, but I remember that the statement put forward by a spokesperson for the other women in the room was purposefully inflammatory, and said things about transsexualism and related topics that were simply untrue, but I don't remember exactly what they were. It was more-or-less Janice Raymond-like statements about transies being men and raping women by their presence and it was couched in a sort of "everyone-knows-this" language, and "have-you-stopped-beating-your-partner?" type statements. The collective and I glanced at each other while she was reading, and our jaws began to drop. And when the statement was finished there was silence for about a minute, and Ginny [Berson] looked at me and said, "Sandy, would you like to respond to that?" And I made the biggest mistake of my life, possibly to date -- I said, "That's all *bullshit*." The tone in my voice wasn't hostile, it was more like wonderment that anyone could actually stand up in public and maintain a position so bigoted without withering away on the spot.

And instantly the room was filled with screaming, shouting women. We were never able to restore order. There were people standing on chairs, shouting. I remember Nancy Vogl shouting, "Now Olivia's finally shown its true colors!" When things finally did quiet down the contingent of women other than those who were members of the collective refused to continue with the discussion unless I left. The collective said I was a member and they wouldn't proceed without me, and there followed pandemonium, and it wouldn't stop. We realized that we were in an unheralded situation and so we retreated to the other end of the room, and held a little caucus in the midst of this noise, and decided that for the sake of finding out just what it was that these women were angry at, I should, for this one time only, leave the room, and so I did. I left and went back to where we were staying, and eventually flew back to Olivia House in Los Angeles. And the problem was that, once I did leave, there was no resolution, and the meeting finally broke up with no understanding. And that was when we first realized that we had a problem. We were all in shock.

Then the rest of the group sat down and drafted a statement of support that was published in whichever lesbian publication those things were published in at the time and we began to strategize. What we did was to continue to publish statements and try to engage the community in dialog. And, of course, there was a tremendous amount of support. There was no question of that, but, there was this absolutely intractable, small, but extremely "moral majority," that never let up, and eventually began to do things like threaten boycotts.

**Davina:** So the movement to have you ousted came completely from outside Olivia?

**Sandy:** That's right.

**Davina:** And there wasn't a contingent within Olivia that wanted to get rid of you?

**Sandy:** Absolutely not.

**Davina:** I think that's very unclear in Janice Raymond's book, because when I read her book I got the impression that there was a faction within Olivia that wanted to oust you.

**Sandy:** To the best of my knowledge, there was never a faction within Olivia that wanted to oust me. We became terrified that someone would actually launch a boycott of Olivia Records, and that would kill us. It wouldn't take very long at all to sink us. Our financial situation was okay, but precarious. We had a very big accounts receivable, much, much higher than a company should have had, dangerously high because we wanted to support our distribution system and the women in it, and that meant because they were all living financially close to the line themselves -- many of them -- that they were slow in paying. And we wanted to support them in that as best we could, and so we ran a high receivable. Anything that interrupted our cash flow could have been disastrous. And when the boycott began to be threatened, we had to sit down and do some serious thinking. And there was a point at which the collective said, "Sandy, the reality of the situation is that if you don't leave, there's real danger." And so I left.

**Davina:** And when was that?

**Sandy:** I think it was '78 or '79. I was postoperative at the time.

**Davina:** You were accused of taking work away from women and coming by your skills because of male privilege. How did you respond to those charges?

**Sandy:** Anyone who knew the real situation knew the accusations were false. My purpose in coming to Olivia was to train women to be engineers. The idea was that we could bootstrap a corps of women engineers by giving them training that they might not otherwise be able to get, and give them that training in a supportive atmosphere. That was the whole idea of my coming to Olivia. We wanted to build a studio that would be a school, whose purpose would be to train women.

**Davina:** Janice Raymond stated that you played a very "dominant role" at Olivia. Would you characterize that assessment as accurate?

**Sandy:** Of course not. It's not only inaccurate, it's ludicrous. In the first place, Raymond had no way of knowing what actually went on at Olivia Records. The collective meetings were only open to the collective, and there were no leaks to Janice Raymond. [laughs] Olivia was always run on a consensus basis. I had no more influence than anyone else. And the thing is: one can make a blanket statement about men, that by virtue of their socialization, men tend to be more dominant or aggressive in a given social situation than a normally socialized woman would be. But of course, there's tremendous variation among individuals. And while I certainly had male privilege, my way of moving in the world has always been to be extremely shy, which I realize is at odds with my public persona quite frequently, and my way at Olivia was just that.

Sometimes within my area of expertise I was assertive. I was there because I knew certain things, and it was my job to talk about them. Outside my area of expertise, I didn't know, and at that point I listened to other people, and I think there was a pretty reasonable give-and-take, and I think that if there had not have been, I would never have been asked to join the collective because

we spent quite a while checking each other out before I joined. I wasn't just hired by telephone from Los Angeles. I was interviewed. I was questioned. I did an album with them. I went down and visited with the collective and then went down and stayed with them for a while. We had meetings. It was a long process during which we all got to know each other very well.

I also feel that the idea that I could play a "dominant" role in Olivia is demeaning and insulting to the other members of the collective. They each were, in their own ways, quite assertive when they wanted to be. The few original Olivia women started a women's record company. That takes incredible guts. It takes incredible assertiveness. The idea that I was a person who waded into the middle of this room full of wimps and just took it over is crazy.

To write that a transie is naturally a dominant or divisive force in a women's group tells us more about the writer than it does about transies. It reveals the writer's own personal sense of helplessness and anger. It assumes that all women are easily manipulated. Most of the women I know find it ludicrous. I feel that it replicates the oldest problem in building a feminist consensus: that we can be our own worst enemies, that for whatever reason some women find it more satisfying to increase divisiveness rather than work toward compromise.

**Davina:** How do you respond to Raymond's charge that if your "commitment to and identification with women were genuinely woman-centered [that you] would have removed [yourself] and assumed some responsibility for the divisiveness?"

**Sandy:** I think that's an opinion and I think that she's entitled to it, and I don't think I would have done it, and I don't think there's any way to know. That requires an entire episteme that did not exist, not just on my part, but on everyone else's part as well.

**Davina:** Are you generally satisfied with the way Olivia handled the situation?

**Sandy:** Yes, absolutely. I'm still friends with some of the Olivia people, and I think there is a great deal of mutual affection there that has yet to find ways to unfold. We live in different parts of the world now and do different things. Olivia is now a distribution center and a travel agency. It's not a collective anymore. Many of the Olivia women have gone through significant changes in their lives. While originally the collective was a hundred percent separatist — men were not allowed in the house, for example — some of the women have gone on to rethink their positions. A few are now in heterosexual marriages. We've all gone on to become more of whoever we are and more deeply textured in who we are and the ways in which we move in the world.

**Davina:** Who were some of the musicians you worked with during your time at Olivia?

**Sandy:** Be'be K'roche, Cris Williamson, Linda Tillery, Holly Near, Meg Christian, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Teresa Trull, Mary Watkins, Woody Simmons, Nancy Vogl... and a number of others who did independent projects.

**Davina:** Did you ever work with Alix Dobkin?

**Sandy:** No, Alix Dobkin came out as an anti-transie right away.

**Davina:** Yea, I know. She's very virulent in her opposition even now, still.

**Sandy:** Yea, I know. I read the latest issue of *TransSisters*. [laughs] I worked with anyone who was connected with Olivia Records or even some people who just came through there, and of

course all of the musicians who played on our sessions for all of the albums that Olivia did between 1975 and either '78 or '79 including remixing "The Changer and the Changed."

**Davina:** What did you do after you left?

**Sandy:** I went back to Santa Cruz, and resumed my life there with a much, much higher profile in the women's community. And again we had a meeting because there were separatists there who hadn't realized that I was there. And I did, if you want to put it that way, "divide" that community in that the major part of the community -- and this is what I think it ultimately comes down to when Raymond says transies divide women; this is what I think that ultimately means in practice -- in the Santa Cruz community, the overwhelming majority of the women there felt that I should be considered a member of that community and the two or three very angry separatists felt I shouldn't, and on that basis, we all went on.

**Davina:** But overall, you were well accepted in that community?

**Sandy:** Overwhelmingly. When I say two or three separatists, I'm not fooling. There was not a very large number of women who were not accepting.

**Davina:** When I was at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival last year, someone who was an organizer of that event back in the '70s told me that you worked on the sound crew there at one time. Is that correct?

**Sandy:** No. I was never at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. But I remember one story coming to us during the height of the separatist flap at Olivia. When Sandy Stone seemed to be the buzzword in the women's community and we were figuring out how to deal with all those issues, I remember that someone in the collective said that she had spoken to a woman who had been at that festival who said that I had gotten up on stage drunk and had grabbed the microphone and had made some obnoxious remarks. And we got a huge chuckle out of it. And I remember saying, "Ah, the Sandy Stone persona is up and walking through the world like a golem. [laughs] Gee, I've gotten to be so well known I don't actually have to go out on tour anymore; my persona's out there on tour for me."

**Davina:** I've heard one person who knew you back in the '70s describe you as "a lightning rod for hate against transsexuals." Do you think this is accurate?

**Sandy:** Yes.

**Davina:** Why do you think you became this as opposed to someone else?

**Sandy:** I think it was largely because my visibility at Olivia and the way that that issue unfolded in the press. I think that we were actually at that time a fairly close-knit community that communicated in part through publications and through meetings and festivals, to which very much the same people went, and that news travelled very fast in that way.

**Davina:** I understand that there was the beginning of a transsexual feminist movement back in the mid-1970s. Is that correct?

**Sandy:** Yes, although I don't know very much about it.

**Davina:** I also understand that there was something called the TransSisters collective back in the '70s. Is that correct?

**Sandy:** Oh, you're talking about the TransSisters. The TransSisters was not, strictly speaking, a transsexual political movement because most of the women in it were genetically female, but we were an organization. We had t-shirts and we

marched in parades as a contingent and so forth.

**Davina:** Why was it called the TransSisters collective?

**Sandy:** Because there was at least one transie involved and we were a group that felt like sisters and we were involved with electronic work, so it seemed like the name covered all those possibilities.

**Davina:** What happened to that collective?

**Sandy:** We simply disbanded gradually in the late '70s or early '80s. It got to be almost ten years old and we were getting tired of it. All of us wanted to do things that brought in more money. Some of us reached a point at which we began to think about going to college or going to university and getting educations in one thing or another and some of us did. In other words, our lives just began to diverge. You might say we began to grow up.

**Davina:** Why do you think that there is a transsexual feminist movement re-emerging at this time?

**Sandy:** Because I think that the *geist* is right now. I think that many women in the first and second waves of feminism, particularly American feminism, have had an opportunity to get a better overview, or get a better lay of the land, to see what the terrain of feminism is in a more deep and complex way, and have seen what's possible. In other words, to understand a little bit more about how power works in our culture and in our society and within the feminist movements, and to understand that the analysis of transsexuals as men and as always divisive and alien is a simplistic one, and to understand that real life is more complex than that, and perhaps understand that all people need to be judged as individuals, and that some transies, just as some women and some men and some who are none of those categories are, in fact, objectionable and some are not.

**Davina:** What about factors in the transsexual community itself?

**Sandy:** The factors within the transsexual community are very similar. I think that most, if not all, transies now have a broader awareness of the political issues and the social issues. Having been through a number of years of identity politics, we understand that personal, inner strength as well as the ability and power to move gracefully in the world comes not from denying one's identity, but accepting it fully and affirming it. And that means all of one's identity, that locking out or closing off or denying one's past is not standing in the center of one's personal power. It's not moving from the center of one's grace. It's not being fully who one is in a deep and loving and consequently capable-of-being-loved way.

**Davina:** What do you think about the general course of transsexual activism and transsexual feminism today?

**Sandy:** I think that, so far, it's moving ahead in an absolutely magnificent and glorious way, and I think that about the time I will think of something to say like, "Well, I think that maybe it should be heading off in this direction," that it probably will.

**Davina:** Do you see any trends within it that are disturbing?

**Sandy:** No, I can't think of any. If you want to suggest something I'll tell you how I react to it.

**Davina:** Well, it seems to me that any kind of social movement develops an extremist fringe, and I see that happening among transsexual activists today, and I find that to be rather disturbing.

**Sandy:** Well, that's been true of any movement including the feminist movement. There's nothing you can do about that except draw boundaries, and that's always difficult, and near impossible to do. You have to say, "Those people are not part of this movement as I or we conceive it." I don't know what else

anyone's ever been able to do about that.

**Davina:** Do you think that we are making any of the same mistakes that the feminist movement made?

**Sandy:** Oh, yes. I think that to the extent that there is extremism it is the same kind of extremism, but from a different point of view. But that kind of divisiveness is ultimately destructive. The thing is, it's not destructive in the short term for the people who need it, because they do need it. And there's nothing you can do to change their minds at the moment when they need it. It's just a stage of their personal growth that they have to go through, and if they're lucky, they go through it, they complexify it, they unfold it, and then they encompass it. And by encompassing it, it becomes part of them. It doesn't become all of them. It doesn't overwhelm them and rule their lives. And once that happens, they look around at the world, and see that the world is a bigger place than they thought, and people are deeper than they thought, and they move on. They open to the rest of the world and to other people, and they re-establish those links, and they find in those links the deep love of themselves and others that they thought they were going to find when they closed themselves off.

**Davina:** What are some of the lessons that transsexual feminism can learn from the larger feminist movement?

**Sandy:** I think we need to learn the specifics of how identity politics works. I think we need to learn how to build coalitions, which the feminist movements at large have never been terribly good at. I think we need to learn the compromises that we must initially make in order to be able to bring the larger part of the transsexual and transgender movements into closer contact with the mainstream of feminism.

**Davina:** Are there things that transsexual feminism can learn from the separatist wing of the feminist movement?

**Sandy:** Yes, I think we can learn a great deal about how pain works and about how denial works, and about how deeply that scars us. By "us" I mean both us and the separatists as the community of beings.

**Davina:** I feel that there is still not a high degree of feminist consciousness among transsexuals, and one of the reasons I started *TransSisters* was to promote that kind of consciousness. How do feminist transsexuals go about addressing the lack of feminist consciousness among transsexuals in general?

**Sandy:** By doing things like publishing *TransSisters* and widening its circulation and continuing to raise the level of its quality, which you are doing. Thing number two is by the more difficult, more time consuming and complex process of face-to-face and day-to-day conversations and understanding, by forming focus groups, by forming wider political associations, and addressing the issues in that framework, by what was called in the 1960s and '70s "consciousness raising." We are probably at the stage now that American feminism was in the 1960s, or possibly 1970s. We're running twenty years behind. That's not unreasonable, and I think with time, more and more of us will become aware of the tools that the feminist movements have already forged and tested. We can benefit greatly from them. We'll inevitably learn to use them, but it will be a long, slow, and not unpainful process.

**Davina:** Do you think that Janice Raymond makes any valid points in *The Transsexual Empire*?

**Sandy:** Well, I'm sure there are some valid points in it, but I can't remember at this moment what they are.

**Davina:** In "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" you state: "I read Raymond to be claiming that transsexuals are constructs of an evil phallocratic empire and were designed to invade women's space and appropriate women's power." In the introduction of the new edition of *The Transsexual Empire*, she denies that that is what she was saying. How do you respond to that?

**Sandy:** First of all, I'm grateful for the new introduction because it allows gender and sexuality classes at the university level to have two sides of the issue, even if one side is a little crazed. I have not changed my opinion in regard to her book. I think she is still, quite covertly, writing from a position of deep hatred of men, and she projects that onto transsexuals. I think that if she really believes she is writing an objective book, what I feel for her is pity and sorrow, and I wish that she could grow to the point where she could get over it or through it.

**Davina:** Do you think that the reason that *The Transsexual Empire* has been re-issued at this time is as a response to the gains and increased visibility that transsexuals have achieved in the last several years?

**Sandy:** No, I think it's because there's an opportunity to sell books. I don't think it has anything to do with our gains. I think it has to do with the rapidly increasing number of gender and sexuality courses, and of the rise of queer theory, and that translates into volume sales.

**Davina:** You stated that the informing principle of "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" is that "technical arts are always imagined to be subordinated by the ruling artistic idea, itself rooted authoritatively in nature's own life." I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean by that, so could you explain what you meant there?

**Sandy:** What I'm saying is that one of the ways that people justify oppressing people of any alternative gender or sexuality is by saying that the social norm is natural. That is, it originates in the authority of Nature itself. In other words it comes from God, an authority to which there is no appeal. All this is, in fact, a complete fabrication, a construction. There is no "natural" sex, because "sex" itself as a medical or cultural category is nothing more than the momentary outcome of battles over *who owns the meanings* of the category. There is a great deal wider variation in genetics than most people except geneticists realize, but we make that invisible through language. The way we make it invisible through language is by having no words for anything except male or female. One of the ways our culture erases people is by not having any words for them. That does it absolutely. When there's nothing to describe you, you are effectively invisible.

I wrote a novel many years ago, whose theme was a very small group of women, one in particular, who began to dream in a new language, and the dream became so real that they began to speak it in their waking life. It raised itself up out of the dream state. It followed them into their waking existence and eventually they discovered that by speaking that language they could fall through into another universe in which other things were possible, things which they had never dreamed of because they had no language in which to express them. Because that universe was under attack by a group of people whose purpose was to change that language and restructure it so that those things would become invisible again, this group of women realized that what they had

to do was raise some sort of army and fight the group. So they went looking through all the universes, to find women who were capable of fighting that battle. And they did -- they organized a core group and they raised their army around it, and they fought back against this force. And they almost won; but in the end, the countervailing force won. It couldn't kill them, but what it did was to cause them to forget who they were and to forget the source and center of their power, and scatter them to the four winds. They lived that way, cut off from who they were, for many, many lifetimes. Then one day, one of them began to dream again, and once again realized what was going on, and knew that she had to try again to fight that battle. So again she went out to find the others. I was one of the others; this is my personal myth. One of the things they forgot was who they were in their current universe.

And one of things that I was in that universe was a woman. That's a fantasy scenario, obviously at odds with reality, but it made a very interesting basis for a book that was really both a kind of lesbian separatist screed and also a fairly accurate picture of the lesbian feminist movement of the '60s and '70s from a particular point of view. That view had to do with the discoveries that some of us were making about language and about the way language was used. This was about the time that Adrienne Rich wrote *The Dream of a Common Language*. It was a time when some of us thought that complexifying and enriching language -- in and of itself -- would empower us to build new cultural bridges. And in fact, that happened. Many of those bridges were built. But language in and of itself, just like any other tool, in and of itself, was not enough to empower us to change the world in the profound way that we all dreamed we would. But it was still enough to make a small but significant change. In regard to specific areas in which change occurred, I think at Olivia we hoped -- we dreamed -- that the very fact of bringing a new kind of music into the world was going to profoundly change the way that women thought, and by that fact, it would crystallize out a new set of beliefs in the larger women's community, and then in the world. And although we didn't manage anything quite so profound, we did contribute a change: a smaller change, but a real change. It was that way with so many other things, some of which were connected with feminism and some that were not. Rock 'n' roll contributed a significant change. Computers contributed a significant change. Each in their own way, they're all pieces of some puzzle which we are all trying to assemble, and thus to move towards some greater understanding of ourselves and each other; and by that process, to transform the world.

**Davina:** Was that the same book that you were referring to in the interview you did with *Mondo 2000*?

**Sandy:** Yes, *Kthamet*. Among other meanings, the word means "Remember".

**Davina:** And you said that that was going to be re-issued?

**Sandy:** Right. After having it in my drawer for years, and not thinking about it really as a publishable thing -- I wrote it in 1967 -- I took it out of the drawer one day, and almost on a personal dare, because my partner at that time liked it, I sent it to DAW Books. I simply sent it; the expression for that mode of submission is "over the transom". When you submit something over the transom it goes into the slush pile, the resting place for

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all unsolicited manuscripts. Eventually someone may read it, but in large publishing houses the slush pile grows faster than editors-in-training can read through it. Thus the odds that an unsolicited manuscript will be read may not be great. So three months went by, and suddenly I got a phone call from Betsy Wollehim at DAW Books telling me that they think the novel is powerful and gripping and important, and that they're going to make it a leader in the line. And from there it was all downhill. I wouldn't do the revisions they wanted, because the revisions didn't preserve the things in the book that I felt were important, and eventually when I got a good agent I bought the rights back. And I haven't yet put them out for bid again. I'm so busy with writing and performing right now that I haven't had the opportunity to do the editing on the book that I want to do, but at this point I no longer feel the urgency that I did. I will eventually do the rewrites and turn it over to my agent and see what happens.

**Davina:** What exactly do you mean by the term "posttranssexualism?"

**Sandy:** When I wrote the manifesto, I wrote it with an imaginary community in mind. I dreamed of addressing a huge audience and saying "Will all the transies please raise your hands and come over to this side of the room and we'll form a caucus", and *mirabile dictu* a huge number of hands go up, and next thing you know we have a whole crowd of transies caucusing. At the time it was nothing more than a dream, but now I understand that I will see it actually happen in my lifetime.

I wanted my hypothetical listeners to understand that we need to work on our own issues as transies, and that we need to prepare for the "next transformation" -- which I envisioned as a deep and complex thing, involving new ways of thinking and acting. At that time "posttranssexualism" meant to me transsexuals who acknowledge and affirm all of their personal history, their entire background, back to birth -- their male, their female, their other -- everything they've done that is good or bad or indifferent. In other words, to take our own stance from our own deep centers, to move from that place like dancers, and by that act to become something other than a person who is trying to become an "unproblematic woman" -- a person who is not trying to disappear into a particular social community. When we do disappear in that way, I feel strongly that we inevitably lose or deny important parts of ourselves. Many of us hate some of those parts, for example the "man" part that many of us MtFs have left behind. Some of us express differently the parts we leave behind; it doesn't matter how specifically they are expressed. I think that some of us make a tremendous effort to deny them, to close them out, and to see them as having been painful and demeaning. I think it's necessary for some of us to see them that way, just in order to be able to marshal the energy to go on, to complete our transitions.

It's possible to draw a kind of energy from that self-hatred, and in a society constructed like ours, self-hatred can be a powerful source of energy. For example, self-hatred drives most acts of gender differentiation, such as the stereotype of feminine anorexia -- images of women as presented in popular culture teach women to desire kinds of physical appearances that they cannot really achieve without hurting themselves. Many young women naively assume that the anorexic women whose images continually bombard them from billboards and television are physically normal, which means that they themselves must be abnormal. They learn to hate their bodies, and to desire bodies that only exist

under painful and stressful conditions. And not just bodies, but the entire feminine identity -- Feminism 101, so to speak.

What I was trying to say in the manifesto -- what I'm still trying to say -- is no matter how you may do it, when you seal off a part of yourself, when you deny a part of yourself, you drain off a large amount of your energy into maintaining that denial. And the way to free up that energy is to be uniquely yourself, and to accept the consequences, to be willing to take the risk of being who you really deeply are -- a wonderful, beautiful, shining being -- and to be ready to accept the light that pours out of you. When you shine like that, people will open to you in a much deeper way, in a much more complex and more loving way than they will ever meet you when you are holding back.

**Davina:** Are you surprised that the community you imagined has come into being so quickly?

**Sandy:** Yes! Delighted. I think it's a better word than surprised. Just absolutely delighted. I cry about it. I admit that quite freely. When I first found out about you and *TransSisters*, when Kate Bornstein took me to a reading that she was doing where I met a large group of people, when I found out about Transgender Nation; moments like that, there were moments when I quite simply wanted to cry from happiness, from the sense that it was really happening. Yes, the moment has arrived, and the moment is only beginning to peak. Besides transies in the general population, in jobs or all kinds, there's an entire generation of transgendered academics who are just beginning to come of age. They're getting to the point where they can start writing dissertations. Once that happens there will be a tremendous visibility and a tremendous complexification of the discourse of transgender within the university. I'm helping to kick that along the best I can by publishing a book on transgender theory which is specifically meant to provide an academic underpinning for much broader discourses of gender and sexuality, and shortly I will not be the only person doing it. In a few years there will be quite a few transgendered academics in tenured positions, and they will mark off more wonderful moments on that upward curve.

**Davina:** You discuss the evolution of criteria for transsexual surgery in "A Posttranssexual Manifesto," and seem to be saying that they've not always been appropriate. Do you think that they are any more appropriate than they used to be?

**Sandy:** I think so. I think that a lot of physicians now are a lot more aware than they used to be. However, I think that when they evaluate candidates for surgery they still apply standard social criteria, and from the standpoint of preparing people for "normal" lives that's not unreasonable. I remember Don Laub telling me long ago that they probably wouldn't offer surgery to someone who looked like a fullback for the Rams. But on the other hand, some surgeons *do* do surgery on people who look like fullbacks for the Rams, although with a certain trepidation. From my conversations with them, I think their trepidation doesn't arise from bad motives. They feel that what they're doing is worrying about their client's ability to live in a world which makes certain social assumptions. And ultimately we all must live with some set of social assumptions; that's the definition of society.

**Davina:** You also talk about surgery on demand in "A Posttranssexual Manifesto," and this is something that some transsexuals are advocating a return to. Do you support this idea?

**Sandy:** I think it's a good idea, but I think it has big risks, and the risks are that if you do surgery on demand -- regardless of any



psychological criteria -- you are inevitably going to do surgery on someone who is going to go berserk later, and then that's going to be used against you in some court of law. It could be professionally damaging to you, and that's going to make medical people think twice.

**Davina:** I can also see it jeopardizing the availability of surgery for other people.

**Sandy:** Do you mean in terms of surgery for psychological reasons that health plans cover?

**Davina:** Not specifically. Just in general, I can see it jeopardizing access to surgery. If someone does surgery on someone who is going to go berserk, then a lot of physicians are going to say, "Well, this is too risky. This is not something that I even want to bother with."

**Sandy:** Yea, I agree with that too. It's something of a dilemma - philosophically I believe in surgery on demand, but practically I think it's a huge worm-can, and I think it will result in trouble for everybody.

**Davina:** Do you advocate removing transsexuality from the DSM?

**Sandy:** Absolutely, but I also realize that that means trouble.

**Davina:** How so?

**Sandy:** In that I think that some people who are now able to get surgery through their medical plans may not be able to get it. I think that's just the price of being recognized as people.

**Davina:** So how do we go about balancing those different interests there?

**Sandy:** Well, I think that the people who count on getting their medical procedures through being declared as having an illness are going to have to give that up. I don't think there's any other way around that. I'm not saying I would force them to give it up, but I think that that's inevitably what the course of things is going to be. I do not think it will simply be driven by altruistic motives on the part of the medical community that that diagnosis will be removed. I think that far and away the major reason will be that they begin to understand that transsexuality is like homosexuality, that is, part of a broader spectrum of normal human behavior than they have been previously willing to consider.

**Davina:** You also talk about the "wrong body" metaphor, and say that it is something that we should regard with deep suspicion -- and I agree with that -- but do you think that it might be a valid metaphor for some transsexuals?

**Sandy:** Yes, I do, but in the sense that as young people and growing people, we do have a limited vocabulary with which to deal with the world. And things which we might think of later in a much more complex language, we might early on learn to think of in fairly simple terms, and become attached to those terms, and never re-think them. And were we to rethink them later in life, we might find ways of expressing those same things, but ways that take into account greater psychological and social complexity.

**Davina:** Do you agree that the "wrong body" metaphor is something that has been imposed upon transsexuals by the medical profession?

**Sandy:** Yes, but I also think that it originates in society at large. I think that, for all intents and purposes, the only way we can speak about feeling that we are "other" in the sense of being transgendered has been to talk about it in terms of being in the wrong body. In other words, we simply haven't had the depth of

description to be able to think about it in any other terms because our society has made those terms invisible.

**Davina:** You say that the lexicality of the phrase "wrong body" suggests "the phallogocentric, binary character of gender differentiation." I understand why that term suggests binarism, but I'm not sure that I agree that it is necessarily phallogocentric. So could you explain to me why this phrase is necessarily phallogocentric?

**Sandy:** Certainly. It comes from first and second wave feminism, which had a fairly simplistic idea of what phallogocentrism was and how it worked; namely that any binary opposition must by nature be phallogocentric. That worked very well for a long time, and it allowed a lot of powerful, useful and transformative feminist discourses to arise and gave us good tools with which to examine the ways we use and respond to description of ourselves and others. One of the ideas common at the time was that any binarism was phallogocentric, since phallogocentrism implied intrusion, division, seeing things only in black & white, having no room for nuance or negotiation. Now I no longer believe that's strictly true; I would have to say I'm currently re-thinking the entire analysis, as are many other feminist theorists. You have to be doing that continually -- rethinking things you once thought were true for all time -- because social configurations, societies, continually evolve and change, and the meanings we attach to things change too; but that's off at a tangent from our discussion here.

**Davina:** You say that "transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counterdiscourse" to radical feminist theorists. Do you see this situation changing?

**Sandy:** Oh, yes, definitely. As a matter of fact, it's not just a single counterdiscourse now, it's many discourses, some of which are effective, some of which are not.

**Davina:** How effective do you think this discourse is?

**Sandy:** I think at the moment it has limited effectiveness, but that it will become more so; it will become more effective with time as the situation evolves. Likewise, nontranssexual and nontransgendered people who are engaged in that discourse with us evolve as well, so the shapes which the dialogues can take evolve further and present new surfaces to each other.

**Davina:** You also say: "In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body which is itself a medically constituted textual violence . . ." Could you explain what you meant there?

**Sandy:** Yes. Think of textual violence as using writing to disrupt thought -- not in terms of polemics, but by the act of turning writing against itself, producing disturbing juxtapositions and making meanings clash with each other. Some poetry and much of contemporary music does this. Now, sometimes it's useful to understand the world by "reading" it, applying techniques of textual analysis. The underlying assumption is that we're all inveterate storytellers, that in fact all conscious civilized activity can be interpreted as storytelling...buildings tell stories of relative wealth, automobiles tell stories of speed and prestige. And bodies tell quite complex stories of desire and adventure, failure and achievement, dominance and submission.

When we are reading along in a text, the mechanism of reading and of the production of textual meaning -- our internal parsers and dictionaries and associative links -- is invisible unless it's disrupted. Tapping you on the shoulder while you're reading may disrupt your chain of thought, but the flow of meaning from

the text resumes as soon as you go back to reading. The mechanisms by which you produce meaning out of a text remain unaffected — they can only be disrupted by the text itself. No polemic can substitute. Now if we substitute “man”, “woman”, “bodies” for “text”, we are talking about the kinds of textual violence I suggested. When we construct the stories our bodies tell in such a way that they disrupt the mechanisms of meaning production, we are embodying textual violence. Today we have a much simpler term for this process, but the term *genderfuck* didn't exist when I wrote the manifesto. I don't think that *genderfuck* quite conveys the full dimension of what textual violence implies, but it's close, and drawing out the differences is beyond the scope of this discussion.

**Davina:** You suggest constituting transsexuals “as a genre -- a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored.” Could you elaborate on that?

**Sandy:** When I talked about constructing transsexualism as a genre I was suggesting that we could use the power of genre, and the multiplicity of genres, to mobilize thought quickly. Essentially a genre is a cluster of codes, sometimes quite subtle and elusive, that constructs our expectations and sensibilities in relation to a particular aesthetic. Each genre produces its own set of expectations... in film, for example, a Western won't tell its story in the same way that a romance will, visually or narratively. Each genre is unique; we know one pretty quickly when we see it. And most significantly for our purposes, there are more than two genres. Thus rethinking gender as genre avoids the trap of binarism, and also avoids some of the sticky problems inherent in trying to create space for a “third sex” or “third gender” when what we're really talking about is a continuum of sensibilities and behaviors. Kate Bornstein points out that talking about a “third gender” merely reinforces the binarism out of which the “third” is created and in juxtaposition to which it is seen and experienced. The gender-genre move is a relatively simple way to avoid this problem without having to invent an entire new language. Of course, I also believe that we do need a new language, but that comes later.

**Davina:** You say that “Passing means the denial of mixture.” By this do you mean that passing is the same as conforming to sexual stereotypes?

**Sandy:** Yes. By “denial of mixture,” passing means that we cannot present ourselves as partly male, partly female, or partly anything else, to use the traditional way in which that would arise in transsexual discourse. What passing means to me is denying parts of yourself in order to pass yourself off as the person that you want to be.

**Davina:** I don't understand passing quite in the same way. To me, passing just means that I can walk out on the street and be perceived as a woman, but at the same time, I don't feel that I have to deny masculine aspects of myself, which I don't. I think that most people perceive me as a butch lesbian. So I feel that I pass, but I don't feel that I am denying mixture.

**Sandy:** I support that absolutely. When I say “passing,” I'm referring to the older transsexual idea, and in the spectrum of transsexualism, the extreme end of the spectrum that says, “I deny my male history. I was terribly unhappy as a man. There was nothing good about it. Now I've become a woman, and there's nothing male about me. There was never anything male about me. I was simply in the wrong body.” That's what I'm referring

to when I say “denying mixture.”

**Davina:** Well then, do you see the definition of passing as changing from what it used to be?

**Sandy:** If what you're describing is passing, then yes.

**Davina:** Well, I don't know if it's what most transsexuals think of as passing, but it's what I think of as passing.

**Sandy:** Well, I'm certainly happy to embrace that. I think that's a very productive definition. I don't know what that says for transsexuals who still need to deny. They're certainly still going to use the word “pass” and use it in a different sense.

**Davina:** You say that “transsexuals who pass seem able to ignore the fact that by creating totalized, monistic identities, forgoing physical and subjective intertextuality, ... have foreclosed the possibility of authentic relationships.” Are you're saying here that it is necessary to be out to everyone to be able to have any kind of authentic relationship with anyone?

**Sandy:** No, I think that would be suicidal. Everyone must choose -- because the world is a big place -- how much and to whom they reveal themselves.

**Davina:** So, then what I understand you saying, is that to have any kind of authentic relationship, you have to be out with those particular individuals with whom you want that kind of relationship.

**Sandy:** Yes, and that it's your job as a human to expand that circle as far as possible, but I don't expect people to go around wearing t-shirts that say, “I am a transie.” I mean that the quality of life improves with self-revelation -- mutual, caring self-unveiling as it feels appropriate and graceful. And of course, that's true for everybody, not just for transies.

**Davina:** Do you think that there are other ways that transsexuals can gain the kind of visibility you're advocating other than deliberately not passing? Is there some kind of middle ground we can pursue?

**Sandy:** Oh, there are all sorts of ways. There could be something like a transsexual anti-defamation league or a transsexual media organization that deliberately set out to encourage positive portrayals of transsexual and transgendered people in the media, which is really how popular taste is formed. If, by some miracle, there were a number of positive portrayals of transgendered people in the media, there would be some flash point at which, all of a sudden, it would be hot to be a transie, and then it would die down, and it would simply be okay. I think that there have been a number of breakthroughs in that area, but they didn't reach the flashpoint. One of them was the transie in *The World According to Garp*, which was very well done. And if I think for a minute, I'll come up with some others ...

**Davina:** *The Crying Game*?

**Sandy:** I think *The Crying Game* was a very interesting and problematic case because the person in question was preoperative and wanted to interact with the protagonist as a preop, and that was very positive. I think the way the character was portrayed was very positive. The reason that I prefer the character in *The World According to Garp* is that I thought that character was portrayed in a more ambiguous way -- as a mixture of elements. And that just tends to be, or tended to be at the time, my personal sense that this was the right way to do public education. But it doesn't necessarily have to be. The person in *The Crying Game*, insofar as she represented a positive portrayal of transsexualism with which the audience could identify and with which the audience could mobilize some empathy, was good.

**Davina:** You say that "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" is about "telling the truth about gender," and you call on transsexuals to be out and to not create "plausible histories," so isn't this agreeing with Raymond's contention that transsexuals who become part of the women's community, and who don't immediately reveal themselves to be transsexuals are deceiving nontranssexual women?

**Sandy:** Yes, but what about nontranssexual women who join women's groups, and don't reveal themselves? I'm not saying that people should reveal themselves immediately and unquestioningly in every circumstance. Everyone needs to be context dependent, and to move forward as they feel comfortable, but I also feel that everyone needs to take bigger risks. Now, of course what's happening in the feminist communities is that the situation there is changing, and it's easier to reveal oneself as a transie within the women's community than it was a few years ago. It's still not unproblematic, but it's definitely easier.

**Davina:** But you don't feel like you have to announce yourself, which to me seems what Janice Raymond is saying transsexuals should have to do?

**Sandy:** Well, I would put that back to her this way: Suppose every woman who walked into a group of women had to immediately say, "I am an alcoholic" or "I am a victim of childhood abuse," or whatever else the case may be. That would be something that women might not feel is everybody else's business right away.

**Davina:** Some transsexuals are now saying that all transsexuals have an obligation to be out and have felt justified in outing other transsexuals against their wishes. How do you feel about that?

**Sandy:** I think that that's exactly the same as going to a tupperware party and announcing that another person in the room is a member of an A.A. group.

**Davina:** You say that "We need a deeper analytical language for transsexual theory." Do you see that happening, and could you give an example of it?

**Sandy:** Yes. I think the word *transgender* is a good example. That was a tremendous breakthrough. It's hard for me to give specific examples, because so much is just now being produced, but when I say a deeper language I'm talking about the kinds of analyses I see now in which the issues are not so simply drawn. I would have trouble saying exactly what I mean without taking a long time. A good deal of it turns up in fictionalized form in my novels, where the women speak a language in which gendering (and other things) works differently. That language is based on some work that I and a colleague of mine did in the '70s — the fantastic, quite fictive, but at the time immensely powerful idea that there was an essential common language that we had forgotten and that could be "remembered", and that could, through its descriptive power, transform the world. It was a heady time...for instance, Adrienne Rich had just titled her new book *The Dream of a Common Language*. Almost certainly she meant nothing so literal, but what happened around our attempt to recreate such a language was so fantastic and so dangerous that I was able to mine it for a whole series of novels... but that's another story. So let me just say that the issues of male/female, of man/woman, of genetic things, of social performance, of behavior, of self-image, of psychology, of the law -- all of those things are now being seen in much more complex ways just as feminism has become so much more complex and deeper.

**Davina:** You conclude "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" by saying

that "perhaps it's time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation." How do you envision that transformation?

**Sandy:** I think the transformation that I envisioned at the time was in part the articulation of transgender, and partly it was the posttranssexual moment of transies taking responsibility for all parts of their lives. The transformation which would bring that about would be the making of space in society for transsexuals to live openly as transsexuals -- to have fulfilling lives and relationships without having to deny parts of themselves, and not only to just not have to deny, but to be able to affirm — which is quite different from not denying — to be able to say "Yes!", to be able to make love and music and high art and high writing with other people -- with nontransie people, with every bit of themselves, with the male, with the female, with the neither, with the both, with every bit of themselves, without being afraid, without being the least hesitant.

**Davina:** Do you think that transformation has already begun to take place?

**Sandy:** I think it has just begun to be underway, and I think it's incredibly promising. I think this is a moment of high promise, of deep and wonderful promise, and I, for one, am joyful and proud to be alive and to be writing in this moment.

**Davina:** In the footnotes to "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" you say that you hope that Judith Shapiro's work will supersede that of Janice Raymond as the definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic. I think that you could probably make just as strong a case that Anne Bolin's work has already done that. Would you agree or disagree, and why or why not?

**Sandy:** Yes, I would. At the time I wrote that, Anne Bolin hadn't yet published anything. Subsequently I've had some wonderful conversations with her and I do agree. I've mentioned certain ways in which I think she totalizes, in which I think she can slip over into treating transsexuals as a uniform class with uniform characteristics, and I think she's become a lot more conscious of that, and I don't know that she does it anymore.

**Davina:** What do you think about Deborah Feinbloom's work?

**Sandy:** I'm not yet that familiar with her work to be willing to say.

**Davina:** In the introduction to the re-issued edition of *The Transsexual Empire*, Janice Raymond claims that Judith Shapiro appropriated a lot of her critique about transsexuality while trying to simultaneously dissociate herself from it, and I do see a lot of similarities between Raymond and Shapiro. What are some of the crucial differences you see between their understandings of transsexuality?

**Sandy:** Well, first of all, I think that's a bit of Raymond's ego showing, because what Judith Shapiro was doing -- from my point of view -- was adopting a discourse that was more common among some of her colleagues, some of whom were publishing and some of whom were not. I don't mean that she adopted it whole-cloth, but she took parts of it that made sense, and she built on that a fairly coherent structure. I don't think she got most of it from Raymond. Raymond was working the other side of the street. In other words, they both got foundational material for their theories of how gender and sexuality work from the same sources, from the same broad network of feminist theorists. What Raymond did was to use that for her own purposes, to take her theoretical grounding and apply it to her deep hatred and loathing of men, and to come up with her particular theoretical framework. I think that Janice Raymond's original contribution to the 1970s

was not *The Transsexual Empire*; it was demonstrating that one can cloak a radically conservative position in liberal language. It's the sort of thing that's become commonplace now... "pro-life" is a good example, an excellent case of spindoctoring to give a positive, upbeat, "yes"-oriented sheen to an extremist conservative belief system.

**Davina:** Both Raymond and Shapiro say that transsexuals generally are very conformist in their ideas about masculinity and femininity. Do you think that stereotypical transsexuals are still the rule or have they become the exception?

**Sandy:** Well, that's hard to say, but my hit is that if transies of the old school are not currently in the minority, they soon will be.

**Davina:** Raymond and Shapiro seem to agree that "addressing gender issues through sex-change surgery is a bit like turning to dermatologists to solve the race problem." Could you comment on that?

**Sandy:** I didn't agree with Judith on that, and I still don't, but I think that she's changed since then. That was a paper she had written in the late '80s, and you have to understand that that was a time when a lot of analysis regarding transsexualism and transgender was just beginning to be done in serious ways. Up to that point all that there was was Green & Money and Benjamin and a few other books, and Raymond, and then Catherine Millot. So for someone of Judith Shapiro's insight and stature to be writing a paper -- even a paper which had lots of problems -- was still a huge step forward. Today we see that paper as terribly retrogressive, and definitely dated, but at its time, was quite nice.

**Davina:** So what you just said would also apply to Shapiro's statement that "what we see in systems of institutionalized gender-crossing is the maintenance of a society's gender system through detachment of gender from the very principle that provides its apparent foundation." Is that correct?

**Sandy:** Yes, though I haven't spoken with Judy Shapiro recently. I'm inclined to think, knowing her and knowing her sense of the issues, that she has changed her position quite a bit now. Of course, I can't speak for her, but that's my impression.

**Davina:** How do you respond to Janice Raymond's criticism that "A Posttranssexual Manifesto" mystifies and distracts "from the real material and political questions of surgically turning men into women?"

**Sandy:** Well, that's her radical conservative, right-wing, fundamentalist streak re-appearing. It's the underlying basis of her entire work, and she can't shake it. If she ever shakes that, she'll be a different person. Of course, Janice Raymond's particular distorted way of seeing these issues doesn't have anything to do with what's actually going on. I don't think it's a real issue. It's a total red herring. There was a time way back when, as a red herring, it was a more important red herring than it is now, but now I think it's completely irrelevant to everybody -- the doctors, the patients, the lawyers, the psychologists -- everybody is very clearly aware of those issues.

**Davina:** How do you respond to Raymond's contention in the introduction to the new edition of *The Transsexual Empire* that "the language of sexual conformity as sexual rebellion has come to dominate the public field?"

**Sandy:** I'm inclined to think that it's a misperception. Again, I think she tends to see things with a particularly skewed viewpoint. I honestly, simply don't think that's what's happening, and I don't want to put much energy into finding

counterexamples.

**Davina:** In an interview you did with the magazine *Mondo 2000* you said that you think that transsexuals invented virtual reality. Could you elaborate on that?

**Sandy:** [laughs] Yes. Transies were on the scene at the beginning of V.R. Several of us were, but I don't know that they're out yet, but you may know some of the people I'm referring to, some of the people who wrote some of the very basic theory of the electronic systems that we use now are transies. I was back at the beginnings of a lot of activity regarding virtuality. That's one way, quite directly, in which transies invented virtual reality, but more to the point, the traditional transie has to generate a virtual reality in which he or she is and always has been a man or a woman. And that's about as virtual as it gets.

**Davina:** Also in that interview you say "How much oppression can you learn?" Do you mean by that that you think that male-to-female transsexuals can never really understand what it means to be oppressed as women?

**Sandy:** It was in the context of saying that there is a limit to how closely a transsexual can approach a person who had been raised from birth in the gender of choice. I meant that, as a male-to-female transie, simply in terms of time, one can never learn as much oppression as a woman who was born and raised as a woman in our society because, of necessity, that person has absorbed a lot more information in the form of oppression and other things than you or I could absorb. Now, in practice, that might not mean very much because after a while you could asymptotically approach some limit of how much absorbing oppression actually affects how you move in society.

**Davina:** The author of the *Mondo 2000* interview said that the first time she saw you that you were being carried on a palanquin by four sturdy dykes. Why were you being carried on a palanquin by four sturdy dykes?

**Sandy:** [laughs] That's total fantasy! Apparently back in the '70s she had run across me. I have no memory of that, but she might very well have. But I was never carried aloft on a palanquin by four sturdy dykes. Actually it was five sturdy dykes. Just kidding. [laughs]

**Davina:** You're working on a book called *Transgressions: Adventures at the Edges of Identity*. What's that going to be about?

**Sandy:** It's had a change of title. It's now called *The Gaze of the Vampire*. It starts out with a thought experiment, and this experiment represents the concluding chapter of my book that will be out in May, that will not be about transgender, but it acts as a link to the next book. I'd actually been doing this work for a number of years -- but my hit was this: The vampire Lestat is a very interesting person in and of himself. He's a liminal character in that he lives in the boundaries between many worlds -- French and English, life and death, adult and child, even to a certain extent man and woman. He sees humans, whom he calls mortals, from a position simultaneously outside and inside. He participates in humanity in that he walks among people and looks like them, but he is not really human. He feels at times like a mortal, but he isn't. This both-neither simultaneity is the nature of both a liminal creature and also of a cyborg. Cyborgs are very interesting and problematic. They are, by virtue of their ability to disrupt traditional categorization, tremendously promising creatures. I saw Lestat in that way, and I saw that the way he viewed mortals was very useful to my work. So what I did was

to conduct a thought experiment with Lestat. I sent him to a university, and I got him two degrees -- one in Cultural Theory and one in Anthropology. And possessing those degrees -- in other words, changing his epistemic frame -- has changed his visual apparatus, which is to say, changing what he knows changes the way he sees. So he now sees humans not only trapped by time, but also trapped by subject position, that is, by their belief system regarding who they are. That doesn't just refer to gender. It also refers to the basic sense of singularity, of us seeing ourselves as individual, single identities. That sense of singularity may be an artifact of the political system in which we live and the webs of power that that political system produces, as well as what in Art Theory is called the "apparatus of visual representation," which is to say the way in which we learn to interpret our world and the objects within it. And that's a very difficult thing to grasp. Now, when Lestat -- I mean the anthropologist and cultural theorist Lestat -- gives the Dark Gift to mortals, they are not only freed in time, but they're also freed from fixed identities. I call that liquid identity, or seeing one's chosen persona as a boat which is only momentarily at anchor in a vast sea of possibilities. That's a bit metaphorical, but what it means in the real world is that real self-knowledge frees us to move beyond a single identity to be all of who we are, in complex, multiple ways -- to come to use all our identities, not necessarily simultaneously, but perhaps serially, or in various combinations.

**Davina:** And so, you see this as analogous to the situation of transsexuals?

**Sandy:** In part, yes, but it also plugs into other debates and other forums regarding multiple personality and regarding another postmodern idea called fragmentation, which is about recapturing and recovering our personal sense of multiplicity in ways that have nothing to do with gender necessarily, but just have to do with selfhood.

**Davina:** When is that going to be published?

**Sandy:** Probably in early 1996.

**Davina:** Weren't you at one time writing a book called *In the Belly of the Goddess: "Women's Music," Feminist Collectives and the Cultural Arc of Lesbian Separatism*?

**Sandy:** Yes, that's a chapter in *The Gaze of the Vampire*.

**Davina:** And is that about your experiences at Olivia?

**Sandy:** It's partly about the Olivia collective, but it's also about the cultural arc of lesbian separatism in a broader sense because there was a time there when lesbian separatism reached a peak, and is now declining. And there were also a series of stages in the development of that analysis that were quite interesting that raised useful questions. For instance, why it was almost exclusively a movement of Caucasian women, and so on and so forth.

**Davina:** In the interview with *Mondo 2000* you said that your book *Khtamet* was written from "the perspective of a cyberspace-surfing transgendered polysexual Jewish Neopagan hacker." Surely you couldn't have identified as that back in 1967, could you?

**Sandy:** I would have to cross off hacker because... No, I would have to leave hacker in too because I had been at M.I.T. already at that point, and hackers did exist. Jewish? Yes. Pagan? In the sense of contemporary Neopaganism, no. But in the sense of exploring for some alternative spirituality that I couldn't quite define, one that involved some sort of Earth magick or mysteries

of that kind, I would say yes to that. Transgender? I was certainly in the midst of my personal battle with transgender at that time, but I was not living openly as a transgender person, so in that sense, that would have to go.

**Davina:** Well, back then did you identify as transsexual?

**Sandy:** Well, in '67 I knew about Christine Jorgensen and several other people, but my personal childhood with regard to the transsexual issue went like this: I used to have dreams, and then later, waking dreams, of doing things with girls, but they were not traditional girl things. They were adventuresome things like swimming rivers and climbing mountains -- things that later I actually got to do with women -- but at the time it was not the kind of thing that girls would do. So I didn't so much start off thinking of myself as a girl in the more traditional sense, but I definitely started off thinking of myself as a girl. Why I thought of girls in a completely acontextual, unheard of way of being adventurers, I don't really know, but I definitely thought that I belonged, somehow or another, that my way of moving in the world was as a girl rather than a boy. I didn't use the word *transsexual* consciously, but all of that imagery has been present.

**Davina:** How long have you been involved in Neopaganism?

**Sandy:** I started to have that consciousness about the time that I started living as a woman, but it didn't necessarily come from talking with other women at the time. It did shortly thereafter.

**Davina:** So you mostly came to Neopaganism through the feminist movement?

**Sandy:** Yes, I would have to say so. Not entirely, but the ideas that were being put forward at that time were what we would now call ecofeminism.

**Davina:** You also encountered some opposition within the Wiccan community because of your transsexuality, didn't you?

**Sandy:** Yes, but that was partly because I thought that my correct entry point into the larger Pagan community was through the Dianic tradition, and so I blundered in on Z. Budapest and got chopped up for it. That was [laughs] an interesting adventure, but not one to recount now. Both Z. and I have considerably changed our positions since then.

**Davina:** There seems to be a very large number of transsexual women who are involved in Wicca or in the larger Neopagan movement. Why do you think this is so?

**Sandy:** I think that probably if one has thought deeply enough to think about one's personal identity, one has also thought deeply about other things -- things like what's happening to the world around us, and what's happening to traditional religions, and certainly ecofeminist Neopaganism is one of the viable alternatives. Once you start examining those issues, it becomes clear that your identity might not be the only thing that's problematic. But it's also possible that ecofeminism is, at least in the United States, the main way that many folks experience Paganism. So transies who first begin to investigate the women's community -- which I think a large proportion of male-to-female transies do -- sooner or later encounter Neopaganism as well.

**Davina:** In closing, what advice would you give to the transsexual feminist movement?

**Sandy:** You're all beautiful. Keep it up. There's nothing we can't do if we keep going in the direction we're going now.

