

**“The minute you’re offered freedom you have to be
free.”**

**Reflections on the May 1979 *Playboy Magazine*
Interview of Wendy Carlos**

(a first draft)

on December 10th, 2013

by Alyssa Kai

Contents

Introduction

On Transsexual

Arthur Bell

Introduction to the Introduction

Bell on Transsexuals

Bell on SRS

Bell on Liberation

Introduction to the Interview

Dramatic Arc

Wendy on Identification

Wendy on Feelings

Wendy on Liberation

Wendy on Wendy

Introduction

In May 1979, *Playboy Magazine* (v. 26 no. 5) contained, according to its cover page, the following: “FOREIGN SEX STARS – DAN RATHER – WORKING THE VICE SQUAD – SPRING FASHIONS – A SURPRISE PLAYBOY INTERVIEW.¹” The latter, written by the New York columnist Arthur Bell, fills sixteen and spans thirty-five pages total. Interlaced with advertisements for audio equipment, cigarettes, cars, alcohol, and other accessories, bookended by the “Playboy Forum” feature (discussing Kent State, masturbating in public and, quite extensively, penis size) and a fiction piece about a white man’s sexual adventures in Africa, the article concerns none other than Wendy Carlos: the famous innovator, pioneer engineer, composer to Kubrick, Grammy-winner, platinum-seller, eclipse chaser, amateur visual artist. Instead of centering any of that, however, the article concerns the shocking revelation that Wendy is indeed a woman who, in fact, would like to be called Wendy. Instead of the tell-all interview that she wanted, one that would have touched on all the facets of her life²,

¹ Bell, Arthur. "Playboy Interview: Wendy/[] Carlos." *Playboy Magazine*, May 1979, 75 - 109.

² Early in the process, Wendy gave Bell a list of subjects to discuss, all but two ignored: “Photography, computers, cartography, math, physics, acoustic, eclipse chasing (note on how it affirms self worth), astronomy - telescopes, unusual musical scales + tunings, why composing + how, writing for piano vs. orch[estra] vs. electronic, ... , refinements, quad, vocal electronic music, barometer idea, scoring to film, current work, Ravel.”

the article frames her as a transsexual (a term which Wendy, somewhat unhappily, accepts) and discusses, almost exclusively, that transsexuality.

The quote that titles this article does not come from the interview, my text of interest. It comes from a *New York Times* character-piece³ conducted ten years earlier, when Wendy was closeted and going by a different name⁴, and the quote seems to discuss musical liberation. Seeking to become free another way, Wendy met with Arthur Bell in December 1978 and January 1979, filling hours and hours of transcription. In May, the result was released⁵. Later that month, Playboy sent Bell a dozen letters they had received about the article, and printed a portion of them in the June issue – all of them were positive and supportive. For some transsexual writers, it was life-changing. For Bell it was \$277.12 of reimbursement (nearly \$1000 today); for the Playboy editors, it was a job well done. For

Arthur Bell papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

³ “A Tale of a Man and a Moog” Donal Henahan, *New York Times*, Oct 5th 1969

⁴ In deference to wishes for her privacy expressed elsewhere, any mention of Wendy’s previous name has been replaced by the symbol “[...]”

⁵ According to personal correspondence with current Vice President of Public Relations Theresa Hennessey, Playboy Enterprises, Inc. keeps no record of circulation of individual magazines. For the year, she informed me, they distributed 4.7 million magazines; circulation of the May 1979 issue is anyone’s guess, but 400,000 (a twelfth of the total) seems ballpark.

Wendy, it was a horrible betrayal, and her life in relative secrecy continues to this day.

I want to face the harm done to Wendy, and in doing so explore a culture where 'positive' descriptions of transsexual, transgender, and gender-variant people are on the rise. I want to characterize how various cultural phenomena might work through analysis specific to May 1979 America but hopefully extrapolatable elsewhere. I want to interrogate the formation of the transsexual subject, particularly as it has occurred in major media sources, and explore the hidden cost of liberation to those it claims to liberate. However, my subject of choice limits my reading: one rich white binary-identified woman within the transmission of symbols of American white-run hegemonic popular culture. At best, this is a companion piece, a reader's guide to the Playboy interview. Yet, as the first instance I can discover of a famous person coming out as a gender

deviant⁶, I hope it proves useful in a continuing history of gender deviance in popular media⁷.

On Transsexual

I believe that discussing Wendy Carlos in terms of ‘queerness’ or ‘gender and sexuality’ or ‘sex and gender’ discretizes the issues I wish to consider – to ill effect. Other researches have used transsexuality, or gender deviance more generally, as a “critical point” into which one can gain further insight study of gender and sexuality, as an instance revealing that which affects us all. I am uninterested in that which affects us all. My research focuses on transsexuality as a discursive frame placed upon Wendy Carlos, and as a discursive frame that many have placed upon themselves and(/or) had placed upon them. I mean this not as synonymous with transgender or trans* or gender deviance or gender trouble; rather, I wish to explore the incredible specificity surrounding the word transsexual

⁶ Notable figures in this category include Chaz Bono, Janet Mock, Laura Jane Grace, Lana Wachowski and Chelsea Manning. However, history is full of less notable (or simply less remembered, it’s hard to say; my five examples came out after I did) figures who made waves in their field by coming out, including Deidre McCloskey, Sara Buechner, Lynn Conway, Althea Garrison, Barbara Barnes, and Jan Morris (who is mentioned in Wendy’s interview).

⁷ For recent examples, search for the names Nicole Maines, Cassidy Lynn Campbell, the couple Arin Andrews and Katie Hill, and Coy Matthis.

in particular. When I need a catch-all term (with deep apologies that catch-all terms are necessary at all), I will use ‘gender deviant’ so as to highlight not people’s identities but the creation and cementing of legible differences which characterize their relation to normalcy.

Arthur Bell

Arthur Bell was not a random choice or a Playboy staff writer; he was “simpatico” not just as a New York gay man, but also as a well-known writer and activist in the area. Born in 1939, having moved to New York in 1960, and conducting most of his work in the post-Stonewall 70s, Bell’s exploits included work with the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance, columns for *Gay Power*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire*, *Playboy*, and especially the *Village Voice*. It’s unclear whether, in addition to his cultural insidership, it was his gay-ness or his sympathy for trans* people which made him “simpatico”⁸ to Wendy’s crowd. His entry in *Out-Standing Lives*:

⁸ Bell mentions the word in the introduction (p.76). Wendy uses the word ‘simpatico’ (q. 34, p. 86) of the I, referring to a sexual partner before her operation: “We’d been friends for a while, we were *simpatico*.” The word seems to rely on three possible contexts: first, that of a close friend; second, someone comfortable with Wendy’s transition; and third, someone willing to engage in casual, curiosity-driven sex, implying relaxed sexual mores. It is worth noting that no identity category is commented upon in either case, and Wendy’s partner could very well be any category of identity; it is also

Profiles of Lesbians and Gay Men attests, he was a champion for Sylvia Rivera's inclusion in the GAA⁹; he also conducted a lively and sympathetic profile of the transvestite activist BeBe Scarpie in 1979. And yet, analysis of the introduction and Bell's personal papers reveal the immense influence Bell had in representing distorting the content of Wendy's narrative as relayed to him. Thus we require a metanarrative, a story of the creation of this article, which requires a word on Bell's framing of it: both the textual result in the published document, but also his methodological influence through the interview. Bell would have selected his questions based on the frame of transsexuality under which he operates, he will present that frame to the reader by way of his introduction; therefore, in order to more

worth noting that in both contexts this word operates as a shorthand or code-word for acceptance. Thus the term could suggest any of the following: a still-repressive culture for gender and sexual minorities in the 70s; bonds of understanding that attempted to subvert this culture; the obscuring of identity category in favor of trust, friendship, and relationality (being able to interview fairly, or engage in sex); and lastly, given that 'simpatico' refers in both cases to sexual deviants (Bell and Wendy friend), the importance of sexuality as an organizing concept for this bond of understanding. This last point is crucial, as it draws together three threads, gay liberation, transsexual self-actualization, and the sexual revolution, under one concept, potentially as outpourings of the same thing. In further analysis on the interview section and on the historical context, this will be a useful signpost in untangling the meanings and functions of the word 'sex.'

⁹ Michael Bronski, *Outstanding Lives: Profiles of Lesbians and Gay Men*, (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1997).

carefully read Wendy's narrative given that it has been cut up and re-presented by Bell, I hope to establish a sort of locally dominant narrative with which Wendy's words may align or deviate.

Introduction to the Introduction

The article begins with an editorial commentary on historical and social followed by personal commentary by Bell. Before discussing content therein I must note that this division is likely a total falsehood: I believe Bell wrote both the editorial and personal section. In Bell's records of the interview, both texts appear side by side in his folder. They are both typewritten on the opposite sides of journalistic sketches and writings by Bell. They are both edited with the same degree of freedom to add and cut (the original 'editorial' section contained a paragraph on the Korean and Vietnam wars) and with the same color pen. This arrangement has obvious expedience for publishing as well: it is doubtful that a more trusted authority on these matters (either from a journalistic or social standpoint) could have been found on the Playboy staff.

The consequences of this arrangement are myriad. It splits the article's introduction into authoritative and personal sides. If Bell had placed his name on the editorial section, his credibility on these matters could be

questioned as opinion; but instead, the descriptions of gender and sexuality are presented in authoritative tone and with the anonymous editorial credibility of the magazine itself¹⁰. Likewise, it allows Bell to be personable, affable, and sympathetic to a reader without fear of his personability affecting his authority or vice versa. By splitting the text in this manner, Bell widens his power over the interview, allowing him to play all sides of the journalistic board. Rather than follow his construction and treat them separately, and towards a dismantling of Bell's framing, I will instead analyze the editorial and personal sections as if they were one, with commentary on how he presents his 'truths' on sex and society in an authoritative or sympathetic manner¹¹.

Bell on Transsexuals

¹⁰ Though Playboy may not be a scholarly credible source, it has a cultural authority and credibility in its time. Alongside pornographic images, the magazine carried interviews, essays, and stories written by or about famous men and women, widening its scope from desire to social culture. Moreover, as Wendy herself notes in the interview section, the magazine had credibility as part of the sexual revolution: "The magazine has always been concerned with liberation, and I'm anxious to liberate myself" (q. 2, p. 81).

¹¹ The influence of the Playboy editorial staff on this article is very unclear in my research, though it appears as if Bell was given a great deal of free reign. The editorial influence may be read somewhat in the materiality of the interview in publication (e.g. juxtaposed advertisements, photographs used, etc.). A discussion of such details, alongside speculation on how they affect the text's function, is planned for future revision.

The main question for Bell remains one of biography and clarification – who, or what, is Wendy? At time of publication, the term transsexual was relatively new, popularized mainly through Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966). Although Bell never defines the word, neither does he let it stand as an identity category without comment; rather, he marshals a list historical events, witty issues, and subtle characterizations to populate the term with meaning – meaning which will inform the interview text to come.

Bell respects the names of his transsexual/historical subjects - mostly. In discussing the American personality Christine Jorgensen, he drops her birth name once; for American ophthalmologist Renee Richards, not at all; and in both cases uses their chosen pronouns. In Wendy's case, however, he takes a different tack. He tells of her youth and rise to fame calling her 'Carlos' and describing her with he/him/his. The latter detail, referring to a transsexual's youth by different pronoun, is a common construction of the time and of today¹². Besides quotations, Bell does use Wendy's birth name specifically in the paragraph referring to her sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), highlighting the shock of anyone with such a name getting such an operation. Further, as soon as this revelation is made

¹² The practice, however does cement the two sex zones between which one transitions: [...]he/man to Wendy/she/woman.

(though it must have been on the reader's mind since reading the subtitle of the article: revealing "her sex-change operation and her secret life as a woman" (p. 75)) Bell does not switch pronouns. Instead of her identity, her womanhood, her preference, or even her SRS operation informing the pronouns, Bell chooses to have popular opinion on Wendy dictate what pronouns are used – and the public had no idea about any gender deviance. The paragraph introducing Wendy's new name doesn't have any pronouns to it, and then the personal section uses them all the way through. In the structure of the introduction, then, there's a transition: the male historicized Carlos to the female intimate Wendy. Unlike Christine and Renee, whose stories have been well-told and smoothed-over in the media as women, Wendy's life is splayed open for all to see – an astounding feat given a woman who's completed her medical transition many years ago, passes as a woman fine and as a man only with great difficulty, and would seem to be unassailably who she is now.

Overall, Bell seems to assert that these transsexuals are indeed women. He references a realization that Wendy was not "a *man* trapped in a *woman's* body," (p. 76, emphasis mine) the exact reverse of a common rhetorical tool used by some transsexuals today. This phrase validates Wendy twice-over: by asserting that her body is, by all relevant metrics,

female in body; and that she performs and dresses the role well enough that she must be female in mind. The suspicion of non-womanhood is opened up for the audience, however, and the apparent or possible deviance *within* Wendy's female body generates the content of Bell's article. In other words, Wendy's deviances are the point, not Wendy – she's all set, stable, post-operative, ready for the limelight. In fact, all referenced transsexual people in this article are post-operative, treated with hormones, socialized into their surroundings – so what is the interest of these bodies in the first place? I can identify two primary angles from Bell: the visceral and social horror of the transsexual; and the usefulness of the transsexual in telling the story of modernity.

Bell on SRS

Though much of Bell's interview text is celebrity-story, he characterizes Wendy, and transsexuals in general, by their sex characteristics and sex change operations. Within the interview, it's not even Wendy's identification that makes her news, but the act of her change by means of surgery and doctors.¹³ The subtitle of the article “reveals her

¹³ The importance of surgical switch over self-identification helps to explain why the stories of gender deviants like Jennie June, who even published autobiographies in 1918 and 1922, did not gain nearly the immense recognition of Christine Jorgensen who, measuring by number of words

sex-change operation” (p. 75), and the editorial introduction doesn’t note an undercurrent of identity issues in Carlos’ past but abruptly intones that “in a drama that could easily have been written into [*A Clockwork Orange*]’s surrealistic scenario, [Wendy] Carlos underwent a sex-change operation” (p. 76). This arrangement disempowers Wendy (her self-identification, her struggles) while highlighting the medical system allowing and enabling her change and, as suggested by the “man trapped in a woman’s body” comment, the psychological/biological condition within Wendy that started all of this. In the climax of his personal section, Bell describes using emotional manipulation to get Wendy to talk about the surgery, which she’d heretofore refused to talk about. He then regales the reader not only with a graphic and visceral description of the surgery but also Wendy’s mode of relaying the information: “utterly without emotion” (p. 81). Bell has identified the sex change operation as the key element of this text, and built up drama and tension around it; in doing so, he uses horror as a storytelling device to draw in the masses.

The term ‘horror’ has double significance for my work in this context. First, horror draws on primal fears of the audience, such as the

about her in newspapers, was the most the most famous individual of 1953. Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000).

castration fear alluded to elsewhere (q.66, p.95). The act of generating such, however, leads to a second conclusion: that horror relies just as much on the unfamiliar as the familiar. Just as teenage everymen are slaughtered in slasher films, or as small children embody demonic spirits, Wendy's solidity as a woman is an *absolute requirement* to make the details of her transition compelling and terrifying. This reifies a gender binary while allowing discussion of taboos within a supposedly liberatory context. Deeper societal fears of men with vulvas, women with male strength, soldiers becoming women, can be elevated to spectacle by use of the transsexual story.

Bell on Liberation

This last aspect of horror aligns with another project of Bell's: to tell the story of our society. In the beginning of the editorial introduction he comments directly on societal taboos and their lifting. To begin a coming-out article of one person, Bell cites a larger narrative of sexual and social revolution and change – the unrepressing of Wendy becomes the unrepressing of a whole society. In a changing society, a transsexual takes center stage and tells her story, and in doing so, her own. At least, that

might be the case if these were Wendy's words only. But her story has also been tailored to fit Bell's progressive narrative.

First, for transsexualism to appear on the scene, fully-formed and part of the progress of society, so too must the transsexuals be fully-formed and stable. Wendy's "cosmic ramblings," (p. 76) the subtlety of her positions on gender and sexuality, have been weeded out from the ensuing interview text; but so to, by the selection of an "interesting" and medically-approved transsexual, has a whole world of gender deviance. Calling the transsexual the "last of the sexual taboos" leaves out a whole other world of less-discretized gender deviance (with which Bell was intimately familiar), and begins to further discretize gender deviance into transsexuals and transvestites.

Second, inherent in Bell's article is the need to un-repress and to open up, whatever the cost. Wendy's confession of identity and selfhood takes value beyond a personal choice for her to release records and appear in public – her willingness to tell-all allows selection and re-presentation of parts of her story within a version of national revolution. Bell notes that the revolution is not necessarily legal, but that it is powerful enough that we're talking about these things. Perhaps this generates the assumption that talk is enough, and that legal action will invariably stem from

discourse. Yet given how effectively Bell re-framing Wendy's identity along his own ideas of gender and sexuality, we have an immediate example of how discourse can achieve power and do work but, depending on how it's represented, carry the air of authenticity while acting against the wishes or intentions of the speaker. Wendy's reflections on her interview's publication are discussed later in this text.

In order to fulfill this social storytelling context, Wendy's story, given solidity and authenticity by Bell's introduction, becomes also imbued with a kind of motion and dynamism. The post-operative transsexual seems to live out a kind of constant transition, linked up with transitions and revolutions in popular culture. The static, present normality of Wendy's body is almost unquestioned, because one has the correct 'equipment' – there is such a thing as stable sex. On the other hand, there is still something immensely dissonant and unacceptable about past historical data and the leaps taken to reach this stability, i.e. medicalized transition and sexual reassignment surgery. The transsexual becomes a body in motion whether or not they are settled in themselves; they must match the energy of the sexual revolution and the outpouring of sex therein¹⁴ by

¹⁴ A quick etymology note: though referring to sex category well into the past, according to the OED the word sex meaning intercourse arose around the turn of the 20th century. Sexual had this context somewhat earlier, and sexuality had arisen with it, but sexuality relating to identity is an even

contradictorily becoming both completely reputable and open, with their pasts and personal contradiction, for dissection and discussion. Christine Jorgensen's ex-GI status was a constant fact of headlines, as was Renee Richards' musculature (rather than her ophthalmology – safer, if less sexy ground); Wendy Carlos' existent fame, then, brings the 'interesting' element that makes her a story and propels her into the public consciousness.

Introduction to the Interview

Clearly, a great noise has surrounded Wendy's words. Vitality, Bell's introductory remarks and their accompanying frames are not strictly Bell's, but represent collaboration between Bell, his editors at Playboy, and their understanding of the Playboy readership's comfort with transsexuality¹⁵. Where is Wendy? and where are her words? According to Bell, nearly eight hundred pages of transcription were assembled to

later construction of the mid-20th century. I outline this only to note that we must be very careful with what these words mean, particularly if the concepts of sex, sexual, sexuality, and transsexuality may function as manifestations and elaborations of sex, rather than discrete and isolated elements.

¹⁵ This latter concept begs further study: how do perceptions of perceptions of transsexuality guide the discourse surrounding transsexuality?

generate this interview. Bell and his editors would have ultimate authority in inclusion or exclusion of Wendy's words, including the power to eradicate whole subjects of discussion, make certain subjects seem important (in general and to Wendy), and disrupt the chronology of Wendy's words; further, the interview framework ensures that Bell's questions – despite the many humorous moments of derailing – guide the topics and content from which an audience member reconstructs Wendy. Meanwhile, the interview format gives the article authenticity of the subject's voice, while the issue gives the article excitement (described on the cover as “a surprise playboy interview”) and urgency (a coming-out exclusive article). It's very possible that the *fact* of the interview mattered more than the content. Whether or not Bell altered any of the words, the content and reception of the article is guided by this noise, these forces, these frames.

Dramatic Arc

What was important to Bell and his editors? Lacking the original transcript and in an effort to explore how the order/structure the article, I have divided them into sections based roughly on content of the questions and responses. They are as follows:

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1 to 4 (4)	“Your situation”: Wendy’s present
5 to 7 (3)	Trans 101: Wendy defines and describes transsexuality
8 to 24 (17)	Youth – Life : feelings in childhood, schooling, and college
24 to 27 (3)	Youth – Career: beginnings of career
28 to 48 (21)	The Surgery – Before: intake, community, hormones
49 to 56 (8)	The Surgery – During: psychology and practice
57 to 70 (14)	The Surgery – After: psychology and practice
71 – 76 (6)	Sexuality: (also elsewhere) sex post-sex-change
77 – 96 (20)	Celebrity Stealth: gossip, intrigue, secrecy
96 – 106 (11)	Wendy on Music: Wendy speaks
107 – 115 (9)	Parents / Children: developmental questions
116 – 117 (2)	Wrapup: what is transsexuality?

Note the dramatic position of the SRS operation: precisely the center of the article, with rising action and denouement surrounding. While it deals less directly with SRS, the last half of the article contains questions many like “What is _____ like, now that you’ve had the surgery,” which

intend to further chart its effect. And the sections on Wendy's youth may serve to legitimize or explain the surgery. Together, while these questions concern Wendy, they may be entirely about her surgery – her famousness (and questions about it) only heightening the excitement of knowing the what, how, and especially why of SRS.

The structure of this interview mirrors a clinical viewpoint on transsexuality, supported by Wendy herself. Doctors diagnose transsexuality with extensive criteria, and regard SRS as a last resort¹⁶. Wendy echoes this assumption, worrying even that the diagnosis has become too common: “I think it's important that my condition be acknowledged as very rare ... the fact that there were some ‘successful’ transformations doesn't erase the many tragic cases in which an operation was not the full solution for particular individuals” (p. 117, p. 109). In the course of diagnosis, one's feelings determine everything: “The only evidence I had was the history of my feelings” (q. 30, p. 84). So, in a diagnostic context, a history of one's feelings helps to legitimize the medical and social path one is on. The article functions similarly: it presents evidence of youthful happenings and feelings, presents the details (often highly explicit) of the procedures, and explains why they happened.

¹⁶ Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, (New York: The Julian Press, 1966).

Thus even though the article took place long after Wendy's SRS, the story of this famous recluse becomes a playground for readers to legitimize or dismiss transsexuality; every reader becomes a doctor without the responsibility with which a doctor considers (or might consider) a patient. Wendy is a distant, famous person of an entirely different economic and artistic class than the "rest of us," heightening the existing otherness a transsexual might experience. With this otherness, without personal responsibility to her, the public can consider, approve, or dismiss Wendy's claims, Wendy's case – Wendy's *life* – with impunity. The interview is Wendy, the interview is SRS – Wendy is SRS.

The formatting of questions clearly extends Bell's organization power over Wendy's words, particularly in centering "the surgery." The content of her responses, however, meet with and diverge from the framework. I want to hold accountable not only Bell's and Bell's editors' framework ideas, but the stories that Wendy told – how this vital text of transsexual presence in media functioned, what it concerned. To that end, I have assembled a list of topics that I consider salient to the text, referent concepts within questions, across the article, and off to outside sources such as *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. By discretizing the text, I mean to create discursive modules that apply within the text with some limited

extrapolability to other times and situations. I name these modules encouraging them to be fluid and interreferential, and I approach with concerns I have about the state of transsexuality and gender deviance in 2013. At the moment I will offer three such modules: identification, feelings, and liberation. Others which I would like to consider but lack the preparation to discuss include: development; rejection; conflict; asexuality; socializing; surgical intervention; horror; normalcy; secrecy; binary sex; role; vocabulary.

Identification

When did “identify with” become “identify as?” Though the word did not appear prominently in *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) or *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (1967)¹⁷ as an organizing concept,

¹⁷ In Renee Richard’s autobiography *Second Serve* (1983), the word identity appears twice in the concept of transsexuality: “It seemed to him as if his identity had been misplaced” (55) and “If I could just lick my identity problem” (139). Identification has a few instances, e.g.: “the companionship and identification I felt with women was as important to me as the sex” (111). Meanwhile, Christine Jorgensen’s personal narrative doesn’t exactly fit this early identification with another gender. Her general listlessness of youth is only back-explained as related to gender; thus there has been a development of ‘conventional’ narrative here that didn’t enter Christine’s mind at all (cf. Raewyn Connell’s work of theoretical/narrative storytelling). How is this consensus of identity built, particularly when it comes across mainly in the telling? How do we only get told these stories when they become actualized and interesting to us?

“gender identity” is now one of the major axes organizing activism around gender deviance, particularly in the legal world. The development of identity links to a philosophical tradition I am not yet ready to interrogate, but the word features prominently in Wendy’s responses, and warrants comment. Her response to “Let’s start with a basic question: what is a transsexual?” begins as follows:

“By most definitions, it’s a person who is born with the physical characteristics of one gender but who identifies in every way with the opposite gender and may seek an operation to complete that identification.” (q. #5, p. 82)

Though there’s much to discuss here – ‘opposite’ genders, ‘may seek,’ ‘physical characteristics’ instead of sex – I want to zero in on “identifies in every way with.” The qualifier “in every way” may not have been necessary if Wendy had used “identify as,” but “identify with” can signify relations, similarities, proximities of some kind to another objects. In contrast, the complete and total identification with an opposite gender – with the supposed opposite of one’s position – distinguishes transsexuals. Put generally, a transsexual must relate themselves in all possible fashions

with a defined other, and then find ways to actualize that relation. The term presumes a work to be done: the creation and sustaining of “every way.” That one would need to “complete” one’s identification solidifies the stability of binary sex between which one moves; but that one “may seek” to do so” perhaps predates the rise of the category *transgender*, a subjectivity which does not assume the desire for SRS. However, “in every way” simultaneously generates criteria for excluding false transsexuals – given one lack of identification as oppositely gendered (whatever gender means here), one cannot be a true transsexual.

Bell describes an opposing framework in his introduction: that SRS *creates* identity, or at the very least defines one’s positionality more than any other factor. We can observe this also in the first headline about Chrstine Jorgensen: “EX-GI BECOMES BLONDE BEAUTY: OPERATONS TRANSFORM BRONX YOUTH.¹⁸” The idea of “sex change,” as if it were immediate, appeared at least as recently in the May 2010 episode of *Family Guy*, “Quagmire’s Dad,” where the titular character enters the operating room with short black hair and no makeup, and exits after a few hours with long blond hair, makeup, outfit, breasts, and SRS. Even the language of

¹⁸ Chrstine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000).

‘sex change’ suggests a binary and immediate process, rather than the now-common *transition*.

In a following question about whether transsexuals are all ‘former homosexuals,’ Wendy contrasts “choices of sexual preference” and “a matter of gender identity” (q. 6, p. 82). Clearly identification serves as a central engine for Wendy. Yet there are other systems which do not define but *characterize* transsexuality: one’s feelings, particularly those of rejection and conflict.

Feelings

I choose this word because (1) it is Wendy’s word, and (2) it is casual. Unlike the categorizability and canon of analysis surrounding ‘emotion,’ ‘feelings’ offers a more vague collaboration between emotions, senses, intuitions, and impression. In modern and popular coming out narratives of transgender people, I have often heard phrases like “This is just how I feel.” Feelings then reach to the core of the body and cement one’s relationship, forming a kind of bedrock and confirmation schema for the rest of one’s body. In addition, feeling and fact are colloquial opposites, which helps to open up a discussion of the article’s content and that which concerns a diagnosis as transsexual.

Bell asks Wendy plenty of questions about the medical procedures she undergoes (q. 40 – 44, 50 – 56, others), and if surgery is the ‘what,’ then feelings make the ‘why.’ In one sense, the transsexual’s feelings become an agent within an agent, forcing upon an innocent subject certain realities and behaviors; Wendy describes her irrepressible desires to dress in her mother’s clothing, draw her face with different features etc. In another sense, they represent the call of the most innate self, the true self, which can betray one even while trying to pass as normal; she discusses a youth where no matter what she did, labels like ‘sissy’ followed her. In both cases, without trying to continue abstracting one’s feelings, these characterizations fundamentally disempower the transsexual subject¹⁹. They are unable to connect with others, feel comfortable in assigned social roles, keep themselves safe, etc. – and it is not because of forces from without, but *forces from within*, driving all of their trouble. In other words, it makes the pain the transsexual’s issue, the transsexual’s problem.

¹⁹ Christine Jorgensen was not the first American transsexual, but she may be the first American self-medicating transsexual. According to her autobiography, she read about experiments on rats which switched their sex characteristics, the agent being the newly-synthesized estradiol pill. While still in America, she lied to a pharmacist that she was a researcher and attained a prescription for the synthesized version of estrogen – and began taking it. This practice is now regarded as highly unsafe and, for many kids lacking insurance or supportive doctors, incredibly necessary.

Yet feelings make the ‘what’ too, as symptoms of a condition, as what Wendy calls throughout the text “psychic pain.” In response to the question, “How did you assess the evidence in your case?” Wendy responds:

“At first, I was confused. I thought I had to come up with physical proof. But then I realized the proof was within myself. The only evidence I had was the history of my feelings. Certainly, I’d never seen any lines of people at Radio City Music Hall waiting to become members of the opposite sex. Specifically, though, the realization was that I felt myself to be a woman whenever I saw a woman of similar build or looks. It had created a psychic pain within me that stopped me from being able to think or function in any fashion for very long periods. The overwhelming need I had was to resolve the conflict and become the person I had to be. *That* was my evidence.” (q. 30, p. 84)

Yet what happens when the feelings required to prove transsexuality carry a weight of internalized hatred, of internalized disempowerment? Put more boldly, self-hatred and internalized transphobia *become requisites for*

receiving medical care. Admitting that one feels like a girl requires a distance from that identity which must be traversed (otherwise, why even mention it?), and self-hatred creates a kind of kinetic energy which allows you to (in one fell swoop) clear the distance, achieve one's goal, move on with one's life. The word "admitting" is operative here, and ties into a larger discussion on confession left for a different module. Wendy, with a good deal of wonderment and despite her disbelief, admits "I began to *hate* my body, my corpus ... it sounds so mad, doesn't it?" (q. 18, p. 83). But then, the doctors terraform the body and the feelings at the same time:

"[Harry Benjamin] said he had another way to deal with [suicidal ideation] and he gave me some purple pills. I was to take one a day and report anything that happened. Two weeks later, I saw him and told him I didn't appreciate being given tranquilizers. I had been very nervous and hysterical, but I did not want to be relaxed artificially. Then he told me they were estrogen pills, not tranquilizers, that there was no tranquilizer in them. So I took them and the result was that I felt peaceful and relaxed for the first time in my life, as far as I can remember ... [a few months later] I began to

have a noticeable increase in sensitivity around my breasts.” (q. 39, p. 86)

Medical transsexuality consecrates and purges one’s pain and one’s body as the past, and one moves on. For those whom this satisfies, I wish them no harm. But I am concerned that we have no way of validating, legitimizing, or defining the transsexual subject outside of curing their pain, fixing their problem, getting a confession of their feelings.

Liberation

How does a time become the “right time?” Apparently such a time has come, and Bell’s questions about time begin the whole interview process. I have noted above how Bell’s ideas of liberation saturate the interview, and Wendy tells a similar story to his. Her response to the first question, “... Why have you chosen this time and place to come out?” reads as follows:

“But I’ve gotten tired of lying. I think that in the past couple of years, the dangers of allowing the public to know about me have lessened.

The climate has changed and the time is ripe. With the appearance of

this interview, my friends won't have to lie and dissemble for me anymore" (q. 1, p. 81)

Clearly, a liberation of the heart from secrecy and a liberation of quotidian life from lying are at hand, not just for Wendy, but for all her friends, and perhaps they can be more free to be. In judging that "the time is ripe," Wendy proposes that she read the apparent path of progress in deciding when it would be safe to come out; however, I propose alternately that the progressive curve of society would be located wherever Wendy chose to come out. Positive depictions of trans* people or to legal reform are text-forms which generate their own discourse, their own realities, surrounding them – pundits of all kinds can arrange them into a particular picture of liberation, progressivism, slippery slopes, decline of civilization, what have you. Wendy's judgment of safety relied on her power as a rich white person, and allowed her to shape the course of the sexual climate as a cultural agent regardless of other intersection. She shapes modernity. Yet these possibilities are completely hidden from view, and Wendy's personal liberation (and that of other sexual deviants conflate) into a useful object.

Though we may now consider liberation along a host of axes (political, economic, legal, interpersonal, etc.), the near-solitary axis of

liberation is talking: the increase of that about which one explicitly speaks, and perhaps that around which one has no psychic roadblocks. Then *Playboy Magazine* is clearly liberative – no stone left untouched, no taboo too low. I might call this a liberation of *names*, rather than of *content*. In *Playboy*, with its sharp juxtaposition of advertisement, high culture²⁰, and pornography, a straight man discussing his deep sexual fantasy matters as much as Wendy Carlos coming out – the actions become equal, leveled and horizontal in the utopia of the sexually frank and the frankly sexual. Wendy supports the magazine in her second question; relatedly, in her “barometer” metaphor assumes that everyone exists on a uniform scale of sexual comfort:

“As I said before, being a transsexual makes me a barometer of other people’s comfort with themselves. Those who aren’t sexually at peace with themselves tend to be the most uptight around me.

Others who are really relaxed think it’s no big deal.” (q. 69, p. 95)

²⁰ My favorite moment in the May 1979 *playboy* (apart from the interview) is this exchange between an interviewer and Dan Rather: PLAYBOY: “What’s better than sex?” RATHER: “Nothing. No, let me amend that. Honor is better than sex.”

I live in a world where some of the worst transphobic vitriol I can think of comes from lesbian separatists and other supposedly liberated queers.

Either I critique their liberation and try to locate some kind of true liberation which they have improperly done, or I can blow the whole thing open with other critiques. Wendy never even hints at critiquing *Playboy Magazine*, its shaping by male desire and male gaze, not even from an essentialized anti-pornographic view. Just as in Wendy's measurement of progress above, personal liberation measured by discursive agency can mask structural inequality.

Yet one must remember that despite any drawbacks, the consequences of not liberating are serious. Wendy's answers to "Have you ever become interested in any of the men who've dated you?" (q. 75, p. 96) describes all the personal limitations that have come with keeping her secret, how it prevented her from normal life. Her appearance as a man in a St. Louis Symphony event drove her to mental breakdown years after her SRS. And we can regard her choice of hormone therapy, SRS, and other procedures as a method of being publicly understood, of making her body 'talk' legibly with others in language she can stand. Talking, confessing can relieve all of this tension; and yet again, is it truly a liberation if it's compulsory to get one's basic needs, to socialize, to be sexual? And

whatever her intentions in asking Bell to interview her, the supposedly liberative mechanism of explicitness came back to disempower and misrepresent her in popular media, forcing her back into secrecy where she, for the most part, still remains.

Wendy on Wendy

In general, I have no answers, only observations. To close this paper, I wanted to forward comments from Wendy about her experience within the interview. On the “Shortlist of the Cruel” section of her website, Wendy gives an award of “Arrogant selfish prig, with a genuine sadistic streak” to the “Playboy Magazine Editors.”²¹ In a hidden section of her website, she discusses more extensively, and I reproduce two paragraphs in their entirety:

“I’ve mentioned the press here, because over the years I’ve been taken advantage of by a few clever manipulators of the printed word (although I count many friends in this once venerable profession, not these creeps.) I was and to some extent remain incorrigibly naive. A

²¹ Carlos, Wendy. Serendip, LLC, “Wendy Carlos HomePage: Shortlist of the Cruel.” Accessed December 9, 2013. <http://www.wendycarlos.com/ouch.html>.

character flaw. It's only later on that I see when I've been suckered into shooting my mouth off in ways that a sharper mind would have scrutinized as being contrary to one's own sanity or health. The lessons learned are, to be honest about it, what have made me recoil this past 15 years, and to demand, as you would demand, the rights of privacy the USA was created to defend.

Fortunately those early transgressions were largely forgotten. Up to now. Little could I have anticipated (thinking most people don't try deliberately to be unkind) that some of these "sins of my youth" would now be jolted into new life, as in fiction did Victor Frankenstein reanimate dead flesh. I wish it were a fiction here, too, that something that I was manipulated into saying so many years ago now becomes the New Undead, brought back to taunt me. The offspring monsters repeat the lies and inaccuracies a crafty editor and writer spun together, grafting fiction onto fact, using phony photos I had been goaded into faking for "PR", misquoting what was said off the record into something to cater to the bored, distracted

reader who, like the editor, really couldn't care less ("I got my end!")²².”

Lastly, I will quote from Wendy's letter to Bell in May 1979 written after the article's publication. The letter appears in Bell's papers in the New York Public Library Billy Rose Theater Division's special collections:

“By that I suspect you may be confused about my reaction. No, Arthur, I am not at all upset by anything in print, by what was said in the interview. It's the 95% of the real me: my soul, ideas, wit, observations, interests, all that makes me a 3-dimensional person, which you omitted that hurt. This all, despite the many promises early-on that you would not limit this to 90% TS, 10% music & a few show-biz anecdotes, and Playboy's vow that this would be an 'authoritative, complete, comprehensive, in-depth' reference-piece on me - what a marvelous dream ... “

²² Carlos, Wendy. Serendip, LLC, "Wendy Carlos HomePage: On Prurient Matters." Accessed December 9, 2013. <http://www.wendycarlos.com/pruri.html>.

These are Wendy's words, deployed on her terms, and I present them
without comment.

List of Sources Considered

Bell, Arthur. "Playboy Interview: Wendy/[...] Carlos." *Playboy Magazine*, May 1979, 75 - 109.

Arthur Bell papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Michael Bronski, *Outstanding Lives: Profiles of Lesbians and Gay Men*, (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1997).

Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000).

Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, (New York: The Julian Press, 1966).

Richards, Renee, *Second Serve*, (New York: Stein & Day Publishing, 1983)

Carlos, Wendy. Serendip, LLC, "Wendy Carlos HomePage" Accessed December 9, 2013. <http://www.wendycarlos.com>.