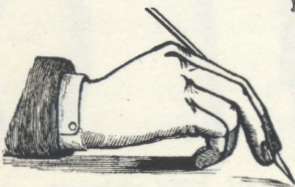




julia serano



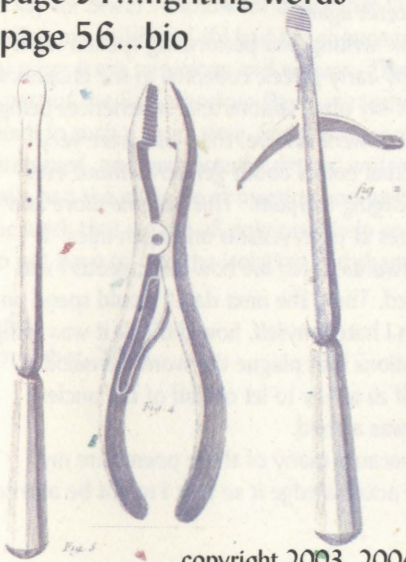
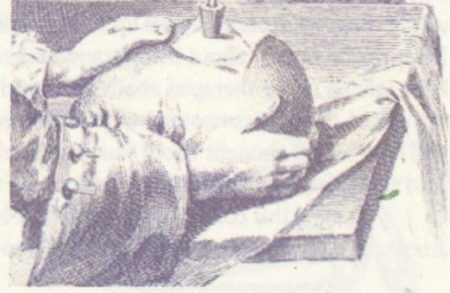
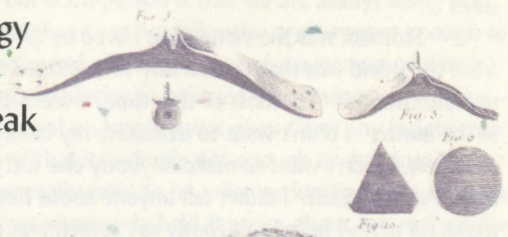
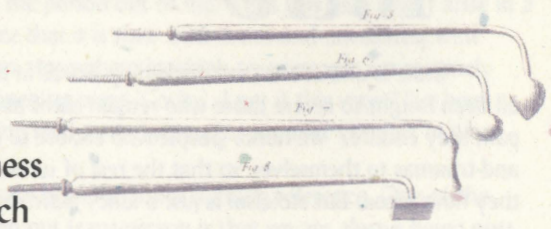
draw blood





# table of contents

page 2....intro  
 page 4....cocky  
 page 7....terminated  
 page 9....sleeping sickness  
 page 12...mix and match  
 page 16...opening analogy  
 page 18...endgame  
 page 20...submissive streak  
 page 24...kinky  
 page 27...self-deception  
 page 32...calling a spade a spade  
 page 35...on being a woman  
 page 39...period piece  
 page 41...draw blood  
 page 44...deconstructive surgery  
 page 47...open letter to lisa vogel  
 page 51...fighting words  
 page 56...bio



# intro



Stoic is one of the most fucked-up words in the English language. We have all been taught to revere those who remain silent about the obstacles they face, the pain they endure. We honor people who choose to keep their own personal tragedies and traumas to themselves, so that the rest of us need not confront the horrors that they have faced. But stoicism is just a fancy word for shame. Secrets kill people every day.

Stoicism was the virtue that I lived by for most of my life. The secret that I kept from the world was that I was a boy who wanted to be a girl. I never told anyone until my late twenties. For most of that time, it seemed like I didn't have much of a choice in the matter. I didn't want to devastate my family, to freak out my friends, to distance strangers. I didn't want to make anybody else feel uncomfortable on my behalf, so I kept it all to myself. I didn't tell anyone about how much I hurt on the inside. I never spoke up when I heard somebody say something ignorant or hateful about other gender variant folks. Instead, I let all of that pain and shame build up inside of me until it literally consumed me.

In my early thirties, I took the first step towards relieving myself of that pain: I transitioned from male to female. When I came out, many people reacted much as if there had been a death in my family. After hearing the news, they gave me their support and condolences. They respectfully began referring to me as Julia and as she/her, but they never brought up the subject of my transition again. I'm sure they were just trying to be polite, avoiding a potentially sensitive subject. But for me, after having kept a huge part of myself hidden for so long, the silence was deafening. I wasn't about to let my life turn back into a secret again.

The need to break this silence led to me writing and performing spoken word during the first year after my transition. In my early pieces, collected in the chapbook 'Either/Or', I set out to communicate some of my observations and experiences being transgendered. In retrospect, while those pieces were sincere, they also were very controlled. I tried to make important intellectual points about gender without ever getting too emotional, without ever acknowledging my pain. This became more and more obvious to me as I performed those pieces at poetry slams and open mics. I would often have people come up to me afterwards to tell me how courageous I was for speaking openly about being transgendered. Then, the next day, I would spend an hour talking to my therapist about how much I hated myself, how difficult it was living with all of the ugly connotations and assumptions that plague the word transsexual, and how I often thought about hurting myself as a way to let out all of the ancient pain that I had kept buried within me since I was a child.

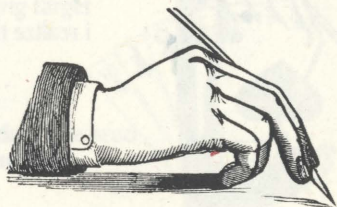
I named this collection 'Draw Blood' because many of these poems are my attempts to bring that pain to the surface, to acknowledge it so that I might be able to

finally move beyond it. In the title piece, I describe this process as being "like cutting into a snake bite in order to work the poison out of me." But this pain didn't arise in a vacuum. Many people fail to realize that it is their own issues and uneasiness with gender and sexuality that create an atmosphere in which trans-people are routinely ridiculed and demonized. In the opening piece 'Cocky', I put it this way: "I've been made to feel shame and self-loathing so that everyone else can take comfort in what their bodies mean."

It is no coincidence that Draw Blood is also a fighting reference. One of the most frustrating aspects of being an out trans-person is that we are always being put on the defensive, forced to explain ourselves to other folks who are arrogant enough to believe that their own personal definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man apply to everyone, people who have the audacity to believe that viewing a Discovery Channel documentary or an Oprah special on transsexuals gives them any insight into our lives and experiences. I have found that it is simply not enough to convince the world to "tolerate" trans people. If we really want to be taken seriously, we must go on the offensive and challenge the naive yet commonly held theories about sex and gender that are so prevalent in both the straight and queer communities, for these misguided beliefs form the very framework that allows others to place us at the bottom of their pecking orders.

One of the main reasons why I spend so much time writing and performing spoken word pieces about my trans experiences is that I am trying to fill a void that has been present for as long as I can remember. For decades, trans people have been methodically marginalized, our voices silenced, our existence reduced to the status of laughing stock and pop psychology caricature. As I say in the closing piece 'Fighting Words': "everyone needs to stop talking about transsexuals and listen to what we have to say for once!" I know for a fact that I would not have felt so scared and alone during my childhood if I had the chance to hear songs, stories and spoken word pieces by other trans musicians and writers. That's why it has been so inspiring for me to be a part of the San Francisco Bay Area trans-performance scene, and to see it grow so much in such a short time. For this reason, I dedicate this book to all of the trans, intersexed, and genderqueer artists, writers, performers, activists and organizers who I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with over the last few years. Hopefully, the work that we are all doing will help ensure that today's sex/gender variant children do not have to face the isolation and shame that we had to endure.

·julia  
november, 2004



# cocky

we are often told that we are living in a man's world  
and in this culture

no image represents power  
more than the phallic symbol  
and if the penis equals power  
then i am illegally armed

and my body  
full of freckles and feminine curves  
is like a stealth bomber

i fly just under everyone's radar  
but only because they choose not to see me  
only because nobody wants to believe  
that a sweet, petite green-eyed girl like me  
could ever possibly be packing heat

they say that it's not the size of the wand  
but the magic that it does

well after many months on estrogen  
my penis is pretty darn small

but she has supernatural powers

she's like some pissed off ancient greek goddess  
my penis changes the meanings of everything  
and because of her

every single one of my heterosexual ex-girlfriends  
has slept with a lesbian

and every guy who hits on me these days  
could be accused of being gay

because my penis bends everyone who's straight  
and she can make the most entitled cat callers and womanizers  
scurry away with their tails between their legs  
all because of six small words

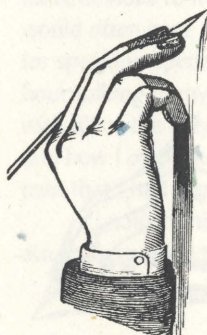
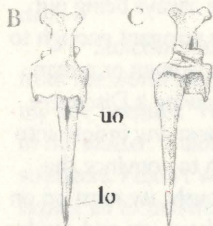
"i use to be a man"

and being a transsexual

i realize that most people see my femaleness  
as a facade

an elaborate hoax  
but i am more real

than any of them could ever hope to be



i am real because unlike them  
 my gender is not based upon what other people think of me  
 and that may make me an object of ridicule  
 but i am not the butt of anyone's jokes  
 because i know that people make fun of trannies  
 because we are the one thing that they fear the most  
 i am more bad-ass than any gangster  
 more dangerous than an entire marine corps  
 my penis is more powerful  
 than the cocks of a million alpha males all put together  
 because when a man is defined as that which is not female  
 and a woman is defined as that which is not male  
 then i am the loose thread  
 that unravels the gender of everyone around me

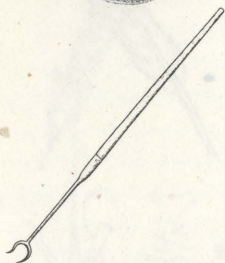
they say its not the size of the boat  
 but the motion of the ocean  
 well my penis gives most people sea sickness  
 she makes them dizzy  
 because most people are not secure enough  
 with their own masculinity or femininity  
 to survive a night in the sack with me  
 my penis turns simple sexual pleasures into political acts  
 she turns biological impossibilities into cold hard facts  
 my penis is the curiosity  
 that you've been told will kill your cat  
 see my penis can be deadly  
 especially to me

and i've heard almost every true crime story  
 about what frightened macho boys do to trannies  
 every bludgeoning and mutilation  
 bodies beaten beyond recognition  
 and i've imagined it all happening to me in first person  
 and every time i get up in front of a crowd  
 to perform one of my out-spoken word pieces  
 i can feel myself morph into a slow moving target  
 and at the end of the night  
 when i walk back to my car  
 i'll be holding my breath  
 half-expecting that inevitable blow to the back of the head

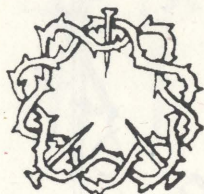




and sometimes i wonder why it hasn't happened yet  
and sometimes i wonder why they don't just get it over with  
and sometimes i just wish i was dead



see i never wanted to be dangerous  
and i spent most of my life  
wishing that i didn't have a penis  
and i used to hate my body  
for not making any sense to me  
and these days i often hate it  
for being so in between



and some mornings i can barely get up out of bed  
because my body is so weighed down  
with ugly meanings  
that my culture has dumped all over me  
see i've been made to feel shame and self-loathing  
so that everyone else can take comfort  
in what their bodies mean

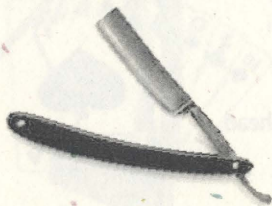


and if i seem a bit cocky  
well that's because i refuse  
to make apologies for my body anymore  
i am through being the human sacrifice  
offered up to appease other people's gender issues  
some women have a penis  
some men don't  
and the rest of the world



is just going to have to get the fuck over it  
and if i am destined to be the loose thread  
that unravels the gender of everyone around me  
then i am going to pull  
and pull  
and pull

until everyone is exposed  
until they all finally see that all along  
they were merely wearing the emperor's new clothes



and i know that people don't like it  
when i turn the tables on them  
but what the hell else am i supposed to do?  
play a hand that was dealt

from a deck of cards  
that's been stacked against me?

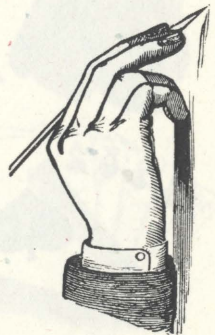
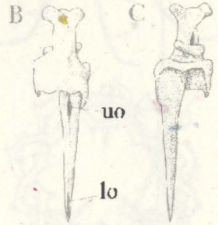
and if i seem a bit cocky  
that's because i've spent my entire life  
being backed into a corner  
and like a frightened animal  
pumped full of adrenaline  
and sick of hunger and hiding  
i am finally desperate enough  
to come out fighting.

# terminated

a friend recently told me  
about someone they met at a poetry slam  
who really enjoyed my piece  
but wasn't quite sure how to refer to me  
"you know, the poem by that man  
...woman...transvestite?"  
now this sort of thing happens all the time  
so i figured i would set the record straight  
with this brief lesson in tranny terminology

i am a transsexual  
which is someone who has changed their sex  
i was born male  
but then i transitioned to female  
and now i live as a woman  
transsexuals are different from transvestites  
also known as crossdressers  
who are men who occasionally wear women's clothing  
and who tend to be heterosexual  
unlike drag queens  
who are predominately gay female impersonators

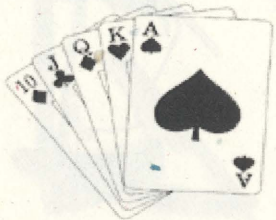
now when i was a young boy  
i wanted to be a girl  
so i thought that meant i was gay  
but i just wasn't into boys that way



and since i was attracted to girls  
 i seemed heterosexual  
 so i naturally assumed i was a crossdresser  
 until many years later  
 when my gender dysphoria got the best of me  
 and it became obvious  
 that i did indeed have GID  
 gender identity disorder  
 so that's when i transitioned to female  
 and now for all intents and purposes  
 i'm a lesbian

now i may be a lesbian transsexual ex-crossdresser  
 but you can also call me an MTF  
 which stands for male-to-female  
 cluing you in to where i have been and where i am now  
 there are also FTMs  
 in other words transsexual men  
 who were born female then transitioned to male  
 now don't confuse FTMs and MTFs with MFTs  
 marriage and family therapists  
 who often counsel transsexuals  
 through the process of transitioning  
 my MFT happened to be an FTM  
 but that's a completely different story

now how does one become  
 a lesbian transsexual ex-crossdresser MTF like me?  
 it's easy! just begin HRT  
 hormone replacement therapy  
 i take progesterone, estrogen and an anti-androgen  
 and i've also had lots of electrolysis  
 now most people assume that i've had SRS  
 sex reassignment surgery  
 (in other words a sex change operation)  
 but i haven't  
 because it costs about 20,000 dollars  
 and it's not covered by insurance  
 so unless i hit the lottery soon  
 i'll continue to be a pre-op transsexual  
 as opposed to a post-op



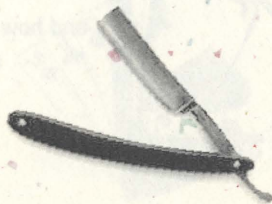
now the fact that a girl like me  
 can stand up when she has to pee  
 makes some people think they can call me  
 a boy-girl or a he-she or a she-male  
 but that's a no-no  
 these people seem to forget  
 that they call everyone else simply he or she  
 without having to inspect their genitals  
 and between you and me  
 any time that some guy  
 has the gall to call me a chick with a dick  
 it's generally a sign that they've seen  
 one too many tranny porno flicks

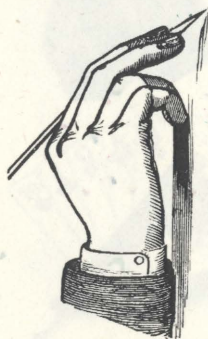
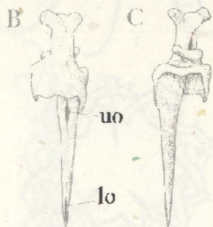
now i may be  
 a lesbian transsexual ex-crossdresser pre-op MTF  
 but you can also call me transgendered  
 an umbrella term

for all people who transgress gender norms  
 sometimes my mom calls me a "transgestite"  
 she's still trying to sort it all out  
 she used to get frustrated with all of these terms  
 until i told her  
 "mom, let me explain what all these words really mean"  
 see, almost all of these phrases  
 originated with some m.d. or ph.d.  
 who invented labels and categories  
 in order to distinguish themselves from me  
 but to truly respect me as a person  
 you don't need to be a walking dictionary  
 all you need is the common courtesy  
 to simply refer to me as a woman.

## sleeping sickness

in the name of the father  
 the son  
 and the holy spirit  
 amen  
 that's how it begins





my nights are spent  
 composing insomniac open letters to you  
 two hour long monologues  
 that end in exhaustion  
 and sometimes in the middle of my day  
 i'll remember that i fell asleep  
 before ending my previous night's prayer  
 with a proper amen  
 and i'll wonder whether my channel to you is still open  
 my every word an invocation  
 the sounds of my atari games  
 little league practice  
 and eighth grade history class  
 becoming the annoying-background noise of heaven

and maybe forgetting to say amen  
 makes my life one long continuous prayer  
 and if so, then you were there that afternoon  
 when i tucked my penis tightly behind my legs  
 just to see what i'd look like without it  
 when i wrapped bedroom curtains around my body  
 like a prom dress  
 turned tattered shoe laces  
 into necklaces and bracelets  
 and you were there later that same night  
 when i began another prayer within a prayer  
 to once again beg for your forgiveness

wanting to be a girl  
 never came up in CCD or sunday mass  
 and it's not covered in the ten commandments  
 but from everything the nuns and priests taught me about you  
 i know that you do not approve  
 and when i turn to your holy words  
 to look for anything that might shed some light  
 onto whatever this is that i'm going through  
 i keep returning to the same story  
 the one about abraham  
 and how you commanded him to sacrifice his son to you  
 stopping the blade only seconds before  
 he actually went through with it  
 and forgive me father

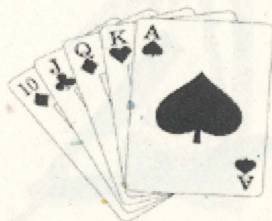
for i can't help but think  
that that was a fucked up thing to do

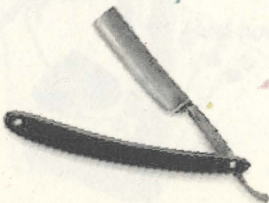
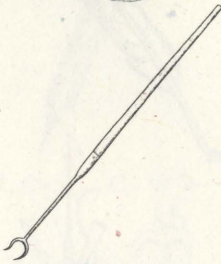
and maybe i'm like abraham  
and this is just another one of your tests  
maybe you put girl thoughts  
into the heads of twelve year old boys  
just to see how they'll react  
maybe i'm an experiment  
and you're up in heaven looking down on me  
taking notes as i tear myself apart in self-hatred  
tossing and turning in bed  
as if acting out my inevitable burning in hell

and at first  
my sins made me even more devout  
i'd lie awake each night  
clutching the glow-in-the-dark rosary beads  
that my grandmother gave me  
repeating the words that i once heard her say  
"blessed are those who have not seen yet believe"

and i want to believe  
but more and more it just feels  
like you're torturing me  
and i'm doing the best that i can  
to plug up all the holes  
in this disintegrating dam  
as my brain bleeds rivers of bad thoughts  
that pour out of my mouth and hands  
like wounds that won't clot  
and i can't understand  
why you won't help  
when i've asked you over and over again  
to please either turn me into a girl  
or else make these thoughts stop

the nuns say that you answer all prayers  
it's just that sometimes the answer is no  
well, i'm tired of praying to a god  
who only offers me





thou shalt not's  
 i'm tired from lack of sleep  
 from keeping secrets  
 that burn so much that they hollow me out  
 i am tired of hurting so much  
 that sometimes i pray  
 that i don't wake up  
 so forgive me father for i have sinned  
 i have dared to share  
 all of myself with you  
 forcing you to watch  
 one long sacrilegious prayer  
 within a prayer  
 within a prayer  
 within a prayer  
 like a serpent swallowing its own soul  
 like a serpent swallowing itself whole  
 and maybe tonight  
 i'll finally be cured of this sleeping-sickness  
 because the last few years  
 of living in absolute shame  
 and unbelievable pain  
 has made me fearless enough to finally say  
 amen.

## mix and match

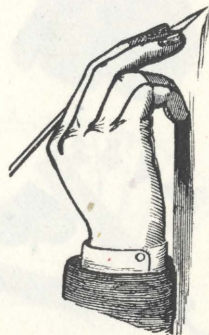
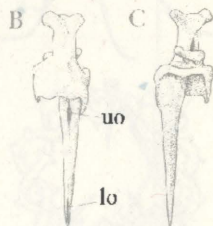
we are quite a pair  
 a year and a half ago  
 we were pronounced husband and wife  
 and you're still my wife  
 only now i'm your was-band  
 and when we first met five years ago  
 i was a pre-transition transsexual  
 and you were calling yourself bisexual  
 and we gallivanted around berkeley and oakland  
 disguised as a straight couple  
 we had so much fun  
 with the roles of boy and girl  
 we gave oscar winning performances

i wore the condoms  
and you wore the diaphragm  
and we'd ham it up in the sack  
no one else has ever made me laugh so much during sex

and afterwards  
we'd lay in that cliché post-coital pose  
you'd curl your body up along my side  
and i'd wrap my arm around you  
as if i was protecting you from something  
and these days when we strike the same pose  
your head rests on my developing breasts  
and when i cradle you in my arms  
i feel almost maternal

and if sometimes  
it's like i'm your mother  
then other times  
you're my obnoxious younger brother  
who knew that you  
a radical feminist dyke  
could get such eighth grader amusement  
out of snapping the backs of my bra straps  
or giving my breasts a quick squeeze  
the way harpo marx honks his horn  
and forgive the pun  
but it really does make me horny

and if sometimes  
you're my younger brother  
then other times  
you're my big sister  
guiding me with advice  
sharing all of the things that you learned  
having reached womanhood before me  
and if anyone were to ask this ex-boy  
what it's like to be in a lesbian relationship  
i would say that it feels kind of like  
being sisters  
best friends  
and lovers  
simultaneously





and i know that when most people  
 see a same-sexed couple  
 they always try to figure out  
 who's the butch  
 and who's the femme  
 as if all queer people were latent heterosexuals  
 more often than not  
 they base their impressions on hairstyle  
 but we keep them second-guessing  
 your short hair is dyed a fabulous bright red  
 and often accessorized with barrettes  
 too cute for most pre-schoolers  
 and i often wear my long curly hair  
 tied back in a practical ponytail  
 i guess i'm the femme tomboy  
 and you're the butch girlie-girl



and i know that when most people  
 think about lesbian sex  
 they imagine lots and lots  
 of cuddling  
 and we do some of that  
 in between the wrestling  
 and the tickling  
 and the biting  
 and the coming  
 and let's not forget  
 all of the musical numbers  
 comedy routines  
 and sex toys



and sometimes i wrap a strap-on  
 over my real mccooy  
 and i fuck you  
 with all of the sweetness of a girl  
 and the aggression of a boy  
 and sometimes  
 you like it when you're on top  
 and sometimes



you ask me to tie you up  
 and i'll never forget the time  
 that you turned bondage into a magic act  
 while i stepped out of the room for a minute

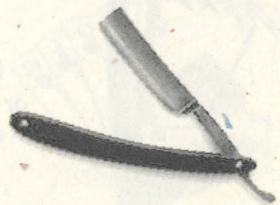


you un-did your knots  
and sprung to your feet like houdini  
shouting "ta-da!"  
like i said, when we have sex  
you crack me up

our love  
is like one long list  
of seemingly contradictory anecdotes  
before i transitioned  
our apartment doorbell  
was labeled with our names  
"tom serano and dani eurynome"  
but our landlord misspelled your name  
"D-A-N-N-Y"  
and we joked  
that we were secretly two gay boys

our love  
transcends  
all categories  
all orientations  
and all identities  
our love  
is not about me being this  
and you being that  
we are not merely each other's better half  
no, we are everything to each another

some people insist that opposites attract  
but i'm not so sure about that  
i'm no longer impressed with  
boy versus girl  
butch versus femme  
i've found that i can be any of those things  
it just depends on what mood i'm in  
and i used to be really into the idea  
of tops and bottoms  
dominants and submissives  
but these days  
i get off on the fact  
that we're both such perfect switches

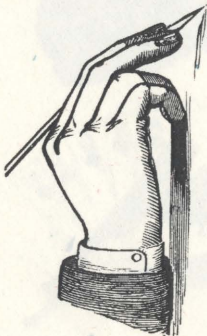
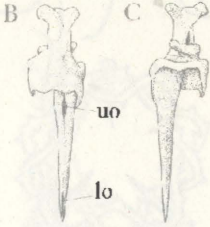


and no matter how you serve it  
our love  
is always delicious  
because we mix and match.

## opening analogy

i've learned more about race  
from performers at spoken word events  
then from any scientist, sociologist  
or my own personal experience  
because to understand any issue  
you need to listen to the people  
who deal with it day in and day out  
and i've heard first hand accounts  
from poets who struggle  
not with the color of their own skin  
but with the perceptions  
assumptions and expectations  
that other people place on them  
i've seen mixed raced poets  
deconstruct race right before my eyes  
daring anyone to define the line  
between black and white  
when they are both  
when they are so much more than either  
and these poets have taught me to see race  
as nothing more than an artificial construct  
that keeps us all locked up into imaginary boxes

so what if i told you  
that the same was true for gender  
and not in a "women can do anything men can"  
sort of way  
what if i were to say  
that gender differences don't really exist  
would you be skeptical?  
despite having seen  
butch women walk with macho swagger  
or drag queens projecting grace and glamour  
or perhaps you would call that imitation



and insist that there's a distinction  
 between authentic and simulation  
 well if so, then what if i told you  
 that i was born a boy  
 and that my chromosomes are XY  
 and that i lived for thirty-three years as a guy  
 and if this plot twist has taken you by surprise  
 then isn't it true that you have no clue  
 what gender any person in this room  
 has ever been or will be in the future?



and if i told you  
 that some boys see themselves as girls  
 and some girls see themselves as boys  
 would you call that insanity  
 if so, then tell me who gets to decide  
 whether your identities and life experiences  
 are to be taken seriously?



and if i told you  
 that some people are born  
 with genitals or sex chromosome combinations  
 that are not considered standard for male or female  
 would you re-think those categories  
 or would you hurl epithets like "birth defect"  
 at anybody who defies your theories?

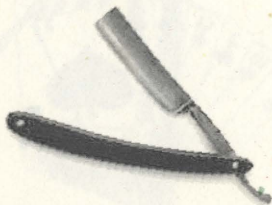
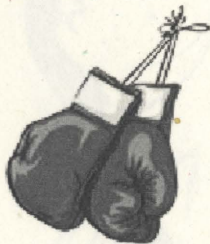
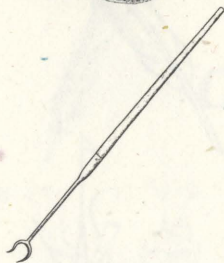


and if you believe that gender differences  
 come from our hormones  
 then what if i told you that the changes i felt  
 going from testosterone to estrogen  
 were nothing compared to the differences i've experienced  
 in the way people treat me  
 that my body has taken on a new shape  
 but mostly it's just taken on new meanings



and what if i told you  
 that when i was a boy  
 i acted pretty much just like this  
 yet none of my friends ever once  
 doubted my maleness  
 and many of them still have a hard time





thinking of me as a she  
while new people i meet  
can't believe that i ever could have been a he  
and if two people can look at me  
and simultaneously see two different genders  
then can either gender be based in reality?

and what if i deconstructed gender so well  
that it just vanished right before your eyes  
would that be like melting the glue  
that holds your universe together?  
tell me, what would you call yourself?  
and how would you know who to sleep with?  
and what to do on a date?  
what kind of love would you make  
if there were no pronouns  
acting as your chaperones?

and if everything i just said  
sounded foreign to you  
or too crazy to be true  
would you dismiss it as nonsense?  
if so, would that reaction  
be reasoning or reflex?  
and what if i were to return  
to my opening analogy and ask  
if you set out to deconstruct race  
for a room full of mainstream white people  
would you expect them to believe you?  
and if they didn't  
would that make your truth any less true?

i for one have seen poets deconstruct race  
right before my very eyes  
so tell me  
what have my words done for you?

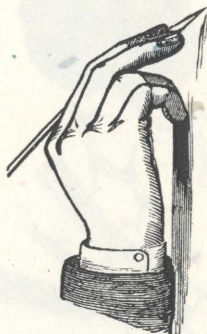
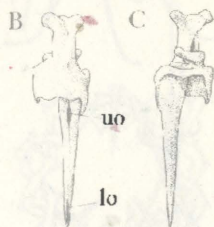
## endgame

i can't wait to get home from school  
and retreat to my bedroom

where it's safe to step  
 outside of my eleven year old body  
 and become someone else for an hour or two  
 to take on new shapes  
 and new names  
 explore imaginary landscapes  
 that seem to stretch to infinity  
 i am too young to understand  
 that the possibilities are not really endless  
 that there is such a thing as playing with fire  
 and if one is not careful  
 even innocent play  
 can take you over the edge of the world

this has become my favorite game  
 i've played it many times before  
 it begins when the bad guy turns me into a girl  
 and my bedroom becomes  
 a mountain range  
 a desert  
 the bottom of the ocean  
 as i search to the ends of the earth  
 for my nemesis  
 to capture him  
 so that he can be turn me back into a boy

but lately  
 i've been improvising  
 trying out new plot twists  
 exploring uncharted story lines  
 sometimes after being turned into a girl  
 our hero ignores her arch enemy  
 and goes off on her own adventure  
 with each day  
 she becomes more self-confident  
 her costumes become more elaborate  
 and sometimes she looks at herself in the bedroom mirror  
 impressed with the girl she sees staring back  
 while trying not to reflect on the fact  
 that she was a boy  
 just before this story's first act





one day  
 i dare to ask  
 the one question i've been avoiding  
 why is this my favorite game?

sitting on the edge of my bed  
 with a blanket wrapped around my torso  
 my fingers wrestling with one another  
 i have just solved a riddle  
 i had no idea that my life was a puzzle  
 until i put the pieces together  
 the truth is  
 this game has never been a game  
 suddenly i feel foolish  
 and scared  
 and very much alone.



## submissive streak



as a child i was sexually assaulted  
 but not by any particular person  
 it was my culture that had his way with me  
 and when he was through  
 he carved his name in my side  
 so that i'd always have something  
 to remember him by  
 it's the scar

that marks the spot where my self-esteem  
 was ripped right out of me  
 and now all that's left is a submissive streak  
 that's as wide and as deep as the grand canyon



and maybe i was born transgendered  
 my brain pre-programmed to see myself as female  
 despite the male body i was given at birth  
 but like every child  
 i turned to the rest of the world  
 to figure out who i was  
 and what i was worth  
 like a good little boy

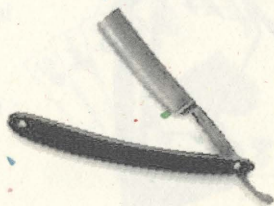


i picked up on all of the not-so-subliminal messages

that surrounded me  
 tv shows where father knows best  
 and a woman's place is in the home  
 fairy tales where helpless girls  
 await their handsome prince  
 cartoon super-men  
 who always save the damsel in distress  
 plus schoolyard taunts  
 like "sissy" and "fairy" and "pussy"  
 all taught me  
 to see feminine as a synonym for weakness  
 and nobody needed to tell me  
 that i should hate myself for wanting to be  
 what was so obviously the lesser sex

when i hit puberty  
 my newly found attraction to women  
 spilled into my dreams of becoming a girl  
 for me, sexuality became  
 a strange combination  
 of jealousy, self-loathing and lust  
 and when you isolate  
 an impressionable transgendered teen  
 and bombard her with billboard ads  
 baring bikini clad women  
 and boy's locker room trash talk  
 about this girl's tits and that girl's ass  
 then she will learn to turn  
 her gender identity into a fetish

so without ever having seen pulp fiction  
 or hard-core porn  
 my thirteen year old brain  
 started concocting scenarios  
 straight out of SM handbooks  
 every single one of my fantasies  
 began with my abduction  
 i'd turn to putty in the hands  
 of some twisted man  
 who would turn me into a woman  
 as part of his evil plan  
 it's called forced feminization

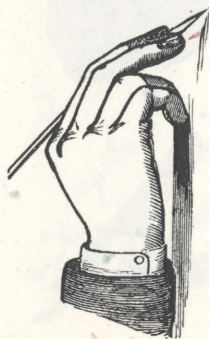
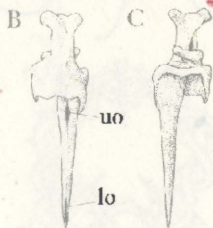


and it's not really about sex  
 it is about turning the humiliation you feel  
 into pleasure  
 transforming the loss of male privilege  
 into the best fuck ever

and while i never really believed the cliché  
 about women being good for only one thing  
 that sentiment kept creeping into my fantasies  
 i imagined myself being sold into sex slavery  
 and having strange men take advantage of me  
 it's not that i was attracted to men  
 but movies and magazines made it seem  
 that to be feminine  
 was to allow yourself to be dominated by them  
 in my mind

i've been pinned down  
 by bodies so large that they dwarfed me  
 felt the ghost pains  
 that accompany the unwanted groping  
 of body parts that did not yet belong to me  
 experienced the helplessness  
 of having some faceless john  
 stick his cock into the cunt  
 that i hated myself for wishing that i had  
 and with each make believe thrust  
 i felt simultaneous ecstasy and shame  
 my rape fantasies were bastard catholic sacraments  
 i absolved myself of guilt  
 by combining my unwanted desires  
 to be female  
 with self-inflicted penance  
 and punishment

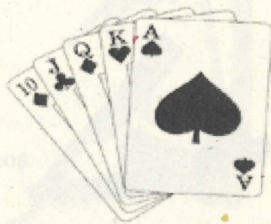
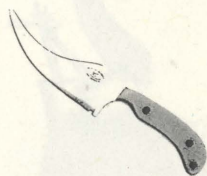
by my twenties  
 i had discovered role playing relationships  
 placing personal ads  
 in the wild side sections of weekly papers  
 conducting phone interviews  
 with potential tops  
 who got off on the idea of dominating  
 a small and passable crossdresser

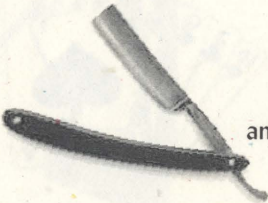
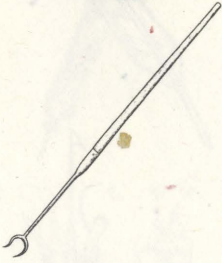


for them  
 i wore skimpy outfits and four inch heels  
 not because i thought it made me more of a woman  
 but because i spent so much of my life guarded  
 and making myself invisible  
 that it was a thrill to be so exhibitionistic  
 and vulnerable  
 i pretended to be their secretaries or call girls  
 roles that had as much to do with class  
 as they did with gender and sex  
 we were constructing fantasy worlds  
 out of real-life meanings and symbols  
 turning ourselves into caricatures of a culture  
 that denies its own infatuation  
 with hierarchies and pecking orders

sometimes the line  
 between fantasy and reality would blur  
 like the time i had a top  
 who refused to stop for safe words  
 when i finally thwarted his advances  
 he guilt-tripped me with fucked up lines  
 about how i had led him on  
 and how it was my fault  
 for being such a tease  
 when i got home  
 i sat in the shower for almost an hour  
 but i still felt dirty and diseased  
 and i didn't dare tell a soul  
 because on a subconscious level  
 i couldn't shake the feeling  
 that i had deserved what happened to me

at some point  
 all of us who identify as female  
 have to come face-to-face  
 with our own internalized misogyny  
 and when people ask me  
 what has been the hardest part  
 of being a transsexual  
 expecting me to say  
 that it was coming out to my family





or the growing pains  
of going through a second puberty  
i tell them that the hardest part by far  
has been unlearning lessons  
that were etched into my psyche  
before i ever set foot into kindergarten  
the hardest part has been  
learning how to take myself seriously  
when the entire world is constantly telling me  
that being feminine is always inferior to masculinity

these days  
i am an outspoken transgender activist  
and third wave feminist  
and most days i dress like a tomboy  
in striped shirts, jeans and converse high-tops  
and to most people  
i probably seem pretty self-confident  
but that's only because they can't see  
my submissive streak  
it's like a scar i keep hidden up my sleeve  
a scar that still sometimes opens up and bleeds  
and like a shark bite  
it literally tore me apart  
when it was first happening to me  
but these days my submissive streak  
is just another reminder  
of how i survived.

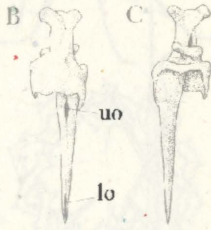
## kinky

i am tired of hearing people brag  
about how kinky they can get  
when more often than not  
their sexual exploits amount  
to lukewarm soft porn pseudo-erotica  
and i blame pop culture  
for watering down the word kinky  
changing it from a synonym for sexual deviance  
to a PG-13 adjective for slightly left of center sex  
and now everyone and their grandmother is convinced

that religiously watching "sex in the city"  
 makes you an expert on getting down and dirty  
 or that tantric yoga and the kama sutra  
 will turn you into a sexual guru  
 puh-lease!

this poem is kinky  
 but it's not about to massage you  
 with sensual body oils  
 this poem does not put on mood musack  
 or screw red and blue lightbulbs  
 into bedroom lamps  
 no, this poem does not eat edible underpants!  
 and this poem is on a mission  
 to take back the word kinky  
 from the folks who'd like to think of themselves  
 as sexually adventurous  
 but who are too chicken-shit  
 to flat out call themselves a pervert  
 because for an act to be kinky  
 sexual roles and societal rules  
 have to be transgressed  
 because kinky  
 is more than just a sexual experiment  
 kinky is another word for bent

and i may look like your typical girl next door  
 but i've been metaphorically  
 and metaphysically around the world  
 i am a girl who sleeps with girls  
 i've been a boy who's been with other boys  
 in fact, before i came out as transsexual  
 i even dabbled in being heterosexual  
 i've had anal sex orgasms  
 and role playing relationships  
 i've been a top, a bottom, a switch  
 a bitch, a butch, a femme  
 a fag, a dyke, and a tryke  
 i'm an L, a G, a B and a T  
 all rolled up into one  
 i have breasts and a penis for double the fun  
 plus i've had two sexual peaks





one at eighteen and one at thirty-five  
 i've tried gender-bending  
 crossdressing  
 B&D, D&S, S&M  
 come to think of it

i've gotten off on all the letters of the alphabet  
 and some of you might assume  
 that i'm simply sexually confused  
 but like anything in life  
 you have to try out a wide variety of things  
 in order to figure out  
 what you truly do and don't like



see, i didn't write this poem  
 to show off my sexual prowess  
 i wrote it because for most of my life  
 i was embarrassed by all of this  
 i used to keep all my sexual desires secret  
 crammed into the back of my closet  
 for fear of how my partners might react  
 or what names that would apply to me  
 if i dared to commit such acts



in order to pass as normal  
 i bought into all kinds of sexual bullshit  
 like using the word foreplay  
 as a pejorative way to dismiss  
 the infinite number of ways of having sex  
 that don't involve sticking a penis into something  
 i even used that stupid baseball metaphor  
 where there are only four bases  
 to getting it on



and where missionary position penetration sex  
 is called hitting a home run  
 because my whole life long  
 i was taught that everything on either side  
 of these two lines was "foul"



and now, i'm no longer concerned  
 with playing it safe  
 i've taken off my straight jacket  
 and slipped into something more comfortable  
 and i've learned that kinky

is the type of sex that you have  
when you chose to explore your own limitations  
rather than live up to other people's expectations  
and if you're not quite up to it just yet  
that's fine, go ahead  
cover your lover in strawberries and whipped cream  
and have yourself a vanilla sex sunday  
but just don't call it kinky  
because kinky is more than just a sexual experiment  
kinky is another word for bent.

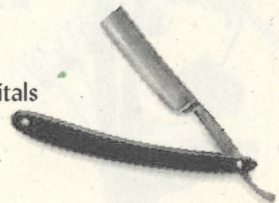


## self-deception

in 2002, teenager Gwen Araujo  
was brutally murdered by four men  
who bludgeoned her to death  
because she was born male  
because she was a transgendered woman  
but this is not another poem  
about the horrors of hate crimes  
or another desperate rant about  
violence, ignorance or prejudice  
no, this poem is about  
the myth of deception



a year and a half after her death  
three of Gwen's murderers stood on trial together  
the evidence demonstrated  
that they had plotted her murder a week in advance  
and normally premeditation ensures  
a first degree murder sentence  
but not in this case  
the trial ended with a hung jury  
a victory for defense lawyers who insisted  
that the murder was merely manslaughter  
because the defendants were somehow victims  
of Gwen's "sexual deceit"  
see, two of the killers had been intimate with her  
and their lawyers argued  
that when they later discovered that she had male genitals  
they were driven to commit a "crime of passion"



## deception

it's the noose that the narcissistic drape  
around the necks of transgendered women  
pseudo-feminist Janice Raymond

used the word deception  
over and over again in her thesis  
as a way to dismiss

transsexual women's femaleness  
so that she could call them men  
and accuse them of transitioning  
in order to "penetrate...women's space"  
and "rape women's bodies"

and pseudo-scientists  
who study animal mating behavior

often use the word deception  
to explain why the males of many species  
engage in courtship rituals with feminine males  
creatures the researchers dismiss as "female mimics"

to deny any possibility  
that the masculine males

choose to partner with feminine males willingly

see, behind every accusation of deception  
lies an unchallenged assumption  
in this case

that no male in his right mind  
could ever be attracted to  
someone who was feminine yet physically male  
this premise underlies

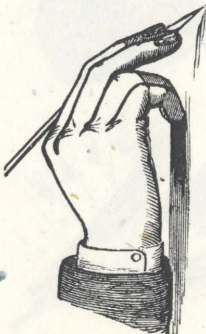
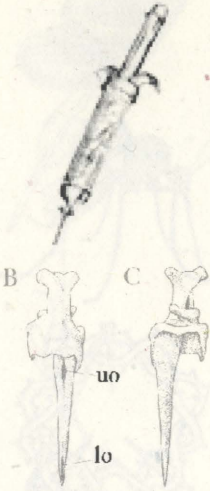
Jay Leno's infamous question to Hugh Grant:  
"what were you thinking?"

it's why Grant and fellow tranny chaser Eddy Murphy  
still continue to star in films for Disney

while the tranny prostitutes they sought out  
are reduced to cinematic novelties  
tasteless jokes in teen comedies

bad Lou Reed anecdotes  
in art films produced by Andy Warhol wannabes  
or as examples of urban decay  
in police dramas

set on sordid and seedy city streets



transgendered women  
are portrayed as deceivers  
so that rabid heterosexuals can turn a blind eye  
to the transsexual porn ads  
that litter the back of every men's magazine  
from Penthouse to Playboy  
so that mainstream movie-goers can watch the Crying Game  
and act surprised to find out  
that the woman who performs in the drag bar  
just so happens to have a penis  
earth to everybody in denial  
straight people don't lip synch  
they karaoke

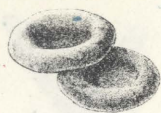


deception  
is the scarlet letter that trannies are made to wear  
so that everybody else can claim innocence

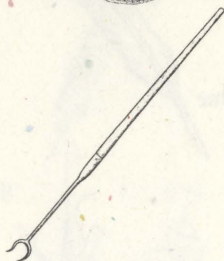


this is why the police, lawyers and press  
who worked on the Gwen Araujo case  
ignored the multiple sources who insisted  
that Gwen's killers  
knew she was transgendered to begin with  
it's why nobody ever questioned  
how next to impossible it would be  
for two of Gwen's killers to have had anal sex with her  
without ever coming across her genitals  
nobody was willing to even consider  
the possibility that Gwen's murderers  
knowingly had sex with her  
because why challenge  
our culture's myopic view of male sexuality  
when it's so easy to blame it all  
on one deceiving tranny  
and why question  
the psychotic paranoia  
with which many men defend their masculinity  
when it's so convenient to trash  
one young trans person's gender identity  
because the truth is  
the myth of transsexual deception  
is merely a ruse





a smoke screen  
devised by desperate heterosexuals  
in order to protect  
their own sense of themselves



most people want to believe  
that Gwen's murder was an isolated incident  
an egregious act committed  
by a handful of young men  
who were provoked into doing the unthinkable  
that way they need not confront the fact  
that half of a hung jury  
were more willing to identify  
with male homophobic hysteria  
than with an innocent transgendered teenager  
they need not examine



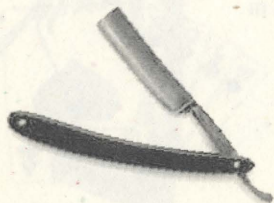
how the news coverage and commentary  
articles, editorials and analyses  
invariably chose to view this crime  
through the murderers' eyes  
or through a grieving mother's tears  
for fear of what might happen  
if they dared to imagine themselves as Gwen  
a young tranny



they so desperately wanted to believe  
was nothing like them  
everyone chose to tip-toe around the subject  
because they were too afraid to put themselves  
in Gwen Araujo's shoes  
if only for a moment to ask  
what the world looked like from her view

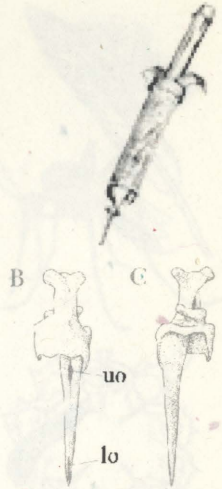


to imagine how frustrated you might be  
if you were unable to explore  
your own sexuality  
without having other people  
turn your body into a lightning rod  
for their own insecurities  
to imagine how unjust it would feel  
to be dismissed as a fraud  
despite being the only nineteen year old  
in your known universe



with the guts to truly be herself  
 to imagine how frail masculinity would seem to you  
 if you had seen  
 a pack of young men in their twenties  
 exude pure fear  
 over one feminine transgender teen  
 to imagine how flat-out foolish  
 those boys must have seemed  
 as they confronted you the question  
 "are you a woman or a man?"  
 and to picture the blank stares on their faces  
 when you replied "isn't it obvious?"  
 to imagine how hollow  
 accusations of deception would sound to you  
 if you understood that the real question  
 that needed to be asked  
 is "who's deceiving who?"

like i said  
 this poem is not about hate crimes  
 violence, ignorance or prejudice  
 it's about self-deception  
 it's about the assumptions  
 that people like me live with on a daily basis  
 because like Gwen  
 i was born male  
 i am a transgendered woman  
 and by waiting until the end of this piece  
 to share this information with you  
 did i commit an act of deception?  
 could you accuse me of telling a lie  
 if you saw what you wanted to see  
 with your own eyes  
 and i decided to simply keep quiet?  
 and if i were to presume things about you  
 that were not true  
 could i accuse you of misleading me too?  
 or perhaps we make  
 such careless accusations of deception  
 out of callous pride  
 as we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge  
 our own mistaken assumptions





the untold story behind Gwen's murder  
 is that she was only the tip of the iceberg  
 it is estimated that there are  
 at least 16,000 transgendered people  
 living in San Francisco alone  
 that's over two percent of the city's population  
 keep that in mind every time  
 you walk down the street  
 or flirt with a stranger  
 one in every fifty people you meet  
 either appears to be a sex  
 different from the one they were given at birth  
 or identifies as a gender  
 different from the one you assume them to be  
 and if these statistics make you feel uneasy  
 it is only because you choose  
 not to live in reality



i say, it is time to move  
 beyond pseudo-liberal sound-bites  
 about how we all need to accept  
 people who differ from us  
 mere tolerance is insufficient  
 if we are to learn any lesson  
 from Gwen Araujo's death  
 it should be that we each need  
 to take personal responsibility  
 for our own presumptions  
 and stop buying into the myth of deception  
 because the truth is  
 that everyday we are guilty of committing  
 countless acts of assumption.



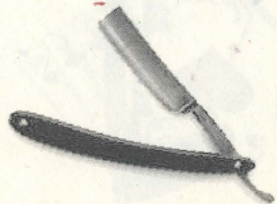
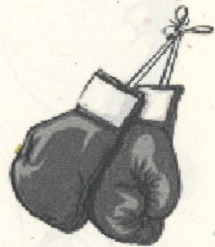
## calling a spade a spade

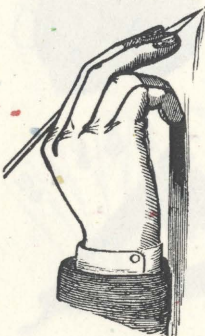
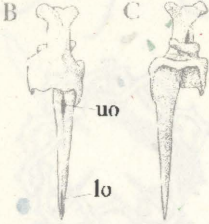
you don't care if you ruffle a few feathers  
 because you have the guts to tell it like it is  
 you are bold and brash  
 and so cutting edge  
 and you proudly call yourself  
 "politically incorrect"



and the rest of us are indebted to you  
 for the tough stance you take on free speech  
 reminding us that the first amendment  
 was invented to protect your right to tell the joke  
 about the midget, the fag and the jew  
 who all walk into a bar  
 and thank you for bringing to our attention  
 the plague of PC euphemisms  
 that are infecting our language  
 creating inefficiencies  
 in good old plain simple english  
 because you're right  
 crippled is so much easier to say than differently-abled  
 and why should you feel guilty  
 about calling someone black  
 when african-american has seven syllables  
 although come to think about it  
 "politically incorrect" has eight  
 so maybe we should investigate  
 why you choose to hide behind that euphemism  
 since politically incorrect  
 is such an unwieldy phrase  
 and you're so into calling a spade a spade  
 then why don't i simply call you a bigot  
 or would you take offense to that?  
 don't tell me that you're just a bully  
 who can dish it out but can't take it?

i know how badly you want to blame the rest of us  
 complaining that it's we who are too easily offended  
 but that's bullshit  
 i couldn't give a fuck about profanity  
 and i love to laugh at subversive satire  
 and blasphemy  
 but when you make jokes about other folks  
 simply because they're different from you  
 you don't seem funny to me  
 you just seem insecure  
 about your own place in the pecking order  
 and could it be a coincidence  
 that practically every person i've met  
 who calls themselves politically incorrect





also happens to be a straight, white male  
and i know you feel like the whole world  
is ganging up on you  
and nobody understands how difficult it is for you  
to be the occasional victim  
of male-bashing and reverse racism

...smallest violin in the world, dude

since you're so into calling a spade a spade  
then i am going to call your bluff  
because i am a lesbian transsexual  
which means that for most of my life  
people saw me as a straight, white male  
and you know something?  
it was pretty fucking easy wearing those shoes  
sorry to burst your bubble  
but i actually liked

being able to walk down a city street  
without having strangers shout out  
sexual innuendos and insults at me  
i miss having men take me seriously  
i miss kissing and holding hands  
with my wife in public  
for fear of being harassed  
or possibly even being beaten to death  
and being white  
well i haven't had to deal  
with much racial discrimination in my life  
but at least i'm honest enough with myself  
to recognize that as a privilege

so if you were really into calling a spade a spade  
then you would stop calling yourself  
politically incorrect  
because calling other people names  
is as politically mainstream as it gets  
why don't you stop kicking  
the people who are already down  
and take on the system for a change  
call out the idiots  
who call equality "special rights"

who call it the race card  
 only when it's played on someone who's white  
 who call upper class tax hikes class warfare  
 and welfare an entitlement  
 because you're right  
 there aren't enough people telling it like it is  
 but until you start owning up  
 to your own privileges  
 you're not being politically incorrect  
 you're just being a hypocrite.



## on being a woman

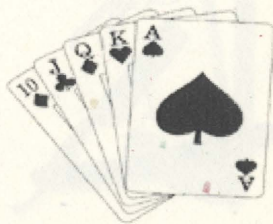
a friend of mine  
 was asked to write about being a femme  
 for a queer women's event  
 she wasn't quite sure where to begin  
 "it's hard to write about being a girl," she said  
 and i knew exactly what she meant

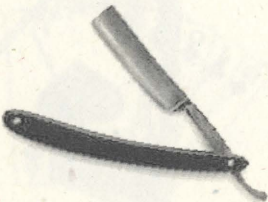
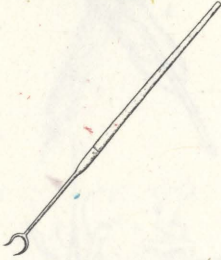
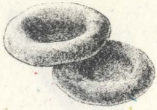


for some time  
 i've been trying to write my own poem  
 about what it means to be a woman  
 but every time i pick up my pen  
 i'm afraid that i'll paint myself into a corner  
 betrayed by words  
 forged from soft vowel sounds  
 and weak, diminutive connotations  
 words so delicate that they crumple  
 under any further introspection  
 i'm afraid that i may lose a part of myself  
 as i navigate my way  
 through the landmines  
 of other people's definitions and dogma



pop-culture tells us that a real woman  
 knows how to use her body  
 to get what she wants  
 wielding the power of attraction  
 seducing with her animal magnetism  
 but i ask how much power is there





in being a carrot on a stick  
that is dangled in front of someone?

and i can't help but notice  
that when men try to flatter us  
they often use words  
like "enchanted" and "mysterious"  
but to me, those words seem like  
a subconscious attempt by them  
to place some distance between us

so it bothers me when i hear women  
buy into a similar mysticism  
as they try to empower us  
by proclaiming that we are magical  
that we are mother earth  
with the ability to give birth  
bearing life cycles  
that follow the moon  
like the tides of the ocean  
but don't they see the danger  
in buying into the idea  
that we are supernatural beings  
for if we call ourselves goddesses  
then there is no need for anyone  
to treat us like human beings

i believe  
that this is where second wave feminism  
came to a grinding halt  
when we got caught up in the myth  
that women are special because of our biology  
because when we take pride  
in how fundamentally different we are from men  
we unknowingly engage  
in a dangerous game of opposites  
for if men are big  
then women must be small  
if men are strong  
then women must be soft  
and it becomes impossible  
to write a loud and proud poem

# draw blood

about what it means to be a woman  
without either ridiculing men  
or else pulling the rug out  
from under ourselves

and being a woman is contradiction enough  
without being both a transsexual  
and a dyke like myself

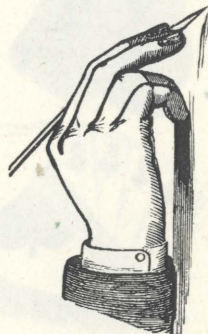
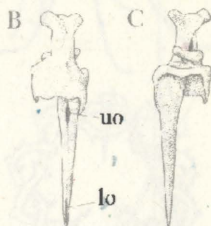
i often feel like the monkey in the middle  
on one side of me  
are lesbian separatists  
who insist that i am still a man  
as if being born male  
was some awful disease  
that has infected my blood  
and my bones  
permanently  
on the other side of me  
are younger dykes

who are infatuated with trans men and trannybois  
yet secretly confess to friends  
that they are disturbed by trans women  
because we act so "effeminate"  
i wonder how they can be  
so oblivious to their own arrogance  
for anyone who admires trans-men  
but dismisses trans-women  
is simply practicing  
another form of sexism

i used to think it was a contradiction  
that some dykes abhorred me for my masculinity  
while others hated me for my femininity  
until i realized that being a woman  
means that everyone has a stake  
in seeing what they want to see in me

my friend said

"it's hard to write about being a girl"  
i believe that's because the word "girl"  
doesn't really have a meaning of it's own  
it is always defined in opposition to boy





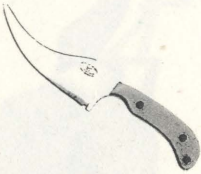
so when being butch  
is to make yourself rock solid  
then being femme becomes  
allowing yourself to be malleable  
and if being a man means  
taking control of your own situation  
then being a woman becomes  
living up to other people's expectations



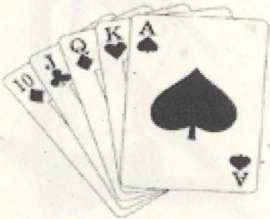
well i refuse to believe in this myth  
of opposites  
if we want to shatter the glass ceiling  
we must first learn to move beyond biology  
and give ourselves permission  
to become anything we want to be  
i say to set any standard  
that all women must meet  
is to commit an act of misogyny



i refuse to believe in the myth  
that all women share a common bond  
the truth is  
we are all very different from one another  
we each live with a different set  
of privileges and life experiences  
and once we acknowledge this fact  
it will become obvious  
that when we try to place all women  
into the same box  
we unintentionally suffocate ourselves



instead of pretending  
that all women share the same experience  
that we are one in the same  
let's make the word "woman"  
a perpetual agent of change  
instead of repeating history  
by chaining ourselves  
to one specific definition or concept  
let's make the word "woman"  
a celebration of each of our uniqueness.

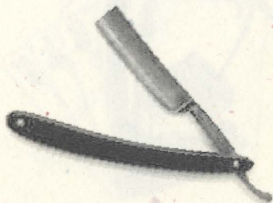


# period piece

i swear to god i am not on drugs!  
 it's a prescription  
 for a legitimate medical condition  
 that is if you think of my gender  
 as a birth defect  
 if you consider a transsexual woman  
 to be handicapped  
 and after spending  
 most of my life on testosterone  
 i can't tell you how different it feels  
 to finally be on female hormones  
 i find myself getting upset some times  
 and my friends will say  
 "you're so emotional these days"  
 and i reply  
 "this is not a fucking mood swing  
 i'm just pissed off  
 at the dismissive attitude i've been getting  
 since i started taking estrogen!"

back when i was a boy  
 when i would get upset  
 everyone would take me very seriously  
 but these days when i get just as upset  
 about the same exact thing  
 nobody even listens to me  
 they just try to console me  
 with soothing words and hugs  
 or they shove bottles of midol in my face  
 while completely ignoring the thing  
 that was bugging me in the first place

and when i decided to cycle my hormones  
 to simulate menstrual hormonal changes  
 i had friends who were flabbergasted  
 "why would you ever want to do that"  
 they'd ask  
 and when my doctor reluctantly gave me  
 my progesterone prescription

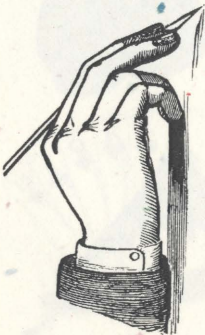
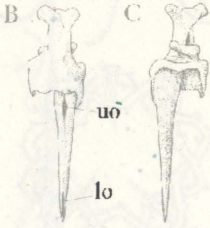


it came with a warning label that read  
 "may cause drowsiness or dizziness"  
 i swear i am not making this up  
 this is obviously the work of the same  
 male supremacist medical specialist  
 who derived the word hysterical  
 from the greek root for uterus

but i have news for you  
 female hormones are not drugs  
 and they don't have side effects  
 plenty of women operate heavy machinery  
 and some of us study  
 molecular biology  
 post-modern theory  
 and write kick ass slam poetry  
 and since when did men corner the market  
 on the practical department  
 fuck, i've met plenty of guys  
 who are best described  
 as emotionally repressed time bombs  
 set to go off at a moment's notice

so being one of the few people  
 who have been on both sides of the fence  
 allow me to put my two cents in  
 in my experience  
 testosterone felt like a thick curtain  
 that draped over my emotions  
 it deadened their intensity  
 made all of my feelings pale and vague  
 as if they were ghosts that would haunt me  
 but on estrogen

i have all of the same emotions  
 only now they come in crystal clear  
 i'm more aware of my surroundings  
 more sensitive to smells  
 and tastes  
 and touch  
 and of course  
 the orgasms are much much better  
 in fact, as far as i can tell

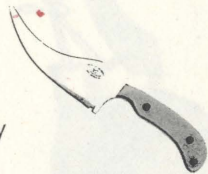


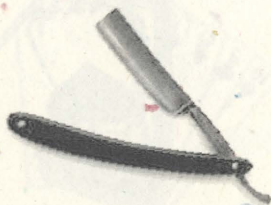
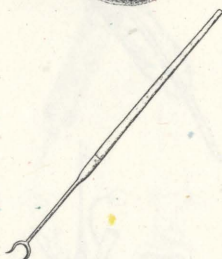
the only thing that sucks about being female  
 is that now people treat me  
 like i'm a little baby girl

but i'm not taking it anymore  
 and the next time i get  
 legitimately angry or upset  
 and some guy has the nerve to say  
 "damn girl, you must be on the rag",  
 i'll remind him that menstruation is when  
 a woman's testosterone levels  
 are at their highest  
 then i'll give him  
 a kung fu kick to the groin  
 and shout out  
 "now our cycles are in sync!"  
 because i am sick  
 of having my opinions dismissed  
 as mere symptoms  
 of my body chemistry  
 if you don't like what i have to say  
 then fine  
 i double dog dare you to debate me  
 just leave my hormones out of it!

## draw blood

i don't know what's worse  
 listening to billy ocean sing  
 "get outta my dreams  
 and get into my car"  
 or having a root canal  
 unfortunately, today i get to experience both simultaneously  
 re-living minor soft-rock pop-hits from the 80s  
 as the oral surgeon hovers over me  
 for those of you  
 who have never had a root canal  
 it's the only way to save teeth so badly damaged  
 that they feel pain incessantly  
 the doctor drills a hole in the tooth  
 down to the roots





removes all the nerve endings  
and fills it up with rubber cement  
so that the tooth no longer hurts  
it just sits in your mouth like a mannequin

the sound of the drill filling my skull  
stops for a second  
and the oral surgeon checks in with me  
"let me know if this hurts  
and i'll give you more novocain"  
i nod my head up and down  
and as he resumes his chiseling away at me  
i allow myself one of those awful thoughts  
that often slip their way into my brain  
"i wish i could feel the pain"  
and i'm reminded of all the marks on my body  
that no one can see

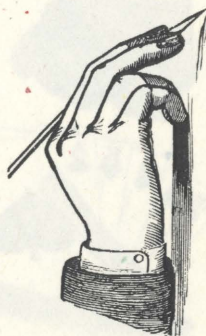
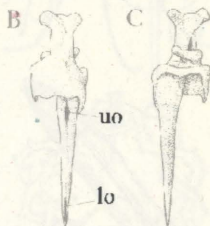
on my arms  
on my stomach  
temporary scars drawn in blue and black ink  
my body is covered in self-inflicted roschach blots  
and i'm not quite sure what all of them mean  
because when i press the pen to my skin  
i don't picture anything at all  
i just imagine that i'm drawing blood

these are the new secrets that i keep  
visions of placing my palms face down  
on hot stove burners  
walks where i imagine the world  
turned ninety degrees  
so that my forward motion becomes free falling  
i think about physical pain  
as a release  
as a way to turn off all the thoughts  
that bombard my brain  
words like "hate"  
and "dumb"  
and "dead"  
which drip through my head  
like a second-grader name-calling water torture  
from the inside out

and the only way i've found  
 to silence these desperate thoughts  
 is to write about what it was like  
 to grow up transgendered  
 to feel betrayed by my own body  
 to survive by splitting myself up into secrets  
 to later become the tornado  
 that turned my family's lives upside down  
 to be placed in the position  
 of having to explain myself over and over again  
 to absolute strangers  
 to feel obligated to smile  
 when others make insensitive comments  
 or try to make light of my situation

i used to make a really good punching bag  
 i was a sponge capable of soaking up  
 everyone else's uneasiness  
 but these days i feel the need to get up on stage  
 and wring myself out in public  
 so that my pain might finally have some witnesses  
 and when words are not enough  
 to alleviate these chronic aches  
 then i place the pen on my skin  
 and pretend that it's a razor blade  
 i am drawing blood  
 like cutting into a snake bite  
 in order to work the poison out of me  
 with black sharpie  
 i draw black holes all over my body  
 because i am trying to draw all my demons out of me  
 i use pens instead of needles or knives  
 because i'm not trying to take my own life  
 i'm just desperately trying to write myself  
 some kind of happy ending

and as the oral surgeon finishes up  
 i think about my tooth  
 which is now filled up with rubber cement  
 it sits in my mouth  
 sturdy and permanently numb  
 like a mannequin.



## deconstructive surgery



being an out trans-woman  
 there is one question  
 that follows me around where ever i go  
 inquiring minds want to know  
 have i "gone all the way"  
 you know, have i had "the surgery"



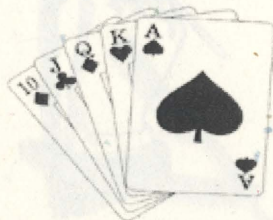
and to me, it feels like a no-win inquisition  
 if i tell the truth: "no, not yet"  
 then i get to deal  
 with everybody else's emotional baggage  
 because nothing makes people more paranoid  
 than a real life female with a phallus  
 straight men shake in their boots  
 at the possibility



that they might accidentally  
 become attracted to me  
 and those who patrol  
 the gates of women-only spaces  
 are often dead-set on discriminating against me  
 driven by the ridiculous belief  
 that my girly little estrogenized penis  
 is somehow still pulsating  
 with hyper-masculine energy



on the other hand  
 having the operation  
 has its own stigma attached to it  
 no medical methodology  
 induces as much fear and anxiety as SRS  
 sex reassignment surgery  
 a friend told me that he once saw SRS  
 on the video "faces of death"  
 sandwiched in between



real life shark attacks and murder attempts  
 some people go so far  
 as to call SRS a form of self-mutilation  
 conveniently ignoring the fact  
 that more common procedures

such as nose jobs and liposuction  
also involve the removal  
of a small amount  
of non-essential tissue



most people are surprised when i tell them  
that the surgeons don't really cut the penis off  
they just turn it inside out  
and move the nerve endings around  
to make a functional and realistic looking  
clitoris and vagina  
at that point, i am invariably asked if i want SRS  
so that i can have sex with a man  
and you should see the blank stares i get  
when i reply: "no, but i'm really looking forward  
to having my wife fuck me  
with a strap-on dildo"



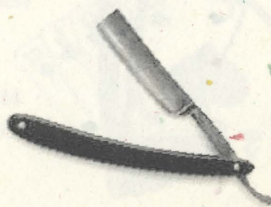
see, we live in a phallic-obsessed culture  
where we're all trained to believe  
that everything having to do  
with gender and sexuality  
somehow revolves around the penis  
that's why so many clueless straight guys  
come on to dykes  
with pick-up lines like  
"once you've had the real thing baby  
you won't ever go back"



they actually buy into that crap  
and it is also why most people can't even talk  
about transsexual women or SRS  
without centering the discussion  
around "the penis"

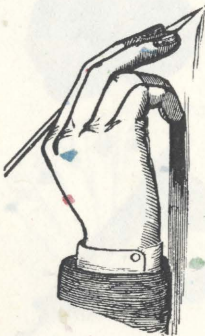
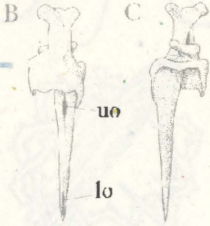


but the thing that nobody seems to get  
is that my desire to have SRS  
has absolutely nothing to do with my penis  
this is about me wanting to have  
a clitoris and vagina  
but we don't even have the language  
to describe this desire  
it's the ultimate freudian slip



we naturally assume  
 that all young girls suffer from penis envy  
 but we can't imagine that any boy  
 could possibly have its polar opposite  
 it's all in the words we use  
 when someone is bold or brave  
 we say they have "balls"  
 while words like "pussy" and "cunt"  
 are only ever spoken as insults  
 and while everyone seems to understand  
 how the penis works  
 we treat female genitalia  
 like they're a mysterious black box  
 most young women aren't even taught  
 the names of all their body parts  
 many people are unaware  
 that the clitoris even exists  
 and as for the vagina  
 well aren't we all taught  
 to see that as simply the hole  
 where the penis is supposed to go?

so it's no wonder that most people assume  
 that i must be mentally ill  
 because in this culture  
 wanting to be a woman  
 is something most people find literally unimaginable  
 and when i do have SRS  
 my surgically deconstructed genitals  
 will no doubt be seen by some  
 to be an abomination or blasphemy  
 because my cunt  
 will be the ultimate question mark  
 asking how powerful can the penis really be  
 if a sane and smart person like me  
 decides that she can do without it?  
 and if the world supposedly revolves around the penis  
 then my SRS will knock it off its axis  
 and phallic symbols everywhere  
 will come crashing down  
 like nothing more than a house of cards  
 after all, a cigar is always just a cigar



and i am simply me  
 and i refuse to let anyone project  
 their penis obsessions onto my body  
 as far as i'm concerned  
 if they can't fathom  
 why i might want to trade in my penis  
 for a clitoris and vagina  
 then they're the ones  
 who have the gender disorder.



## open letter to lisa vogel

[This piece was written shortly after I attended Camp Trans 2003, an annual protest that takes place just outside the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. The mission of Camp Trans is to end the festival's "womyn-born-womyn"-only policy, which was created specifically to exclude transgendered women from attending the event. Lisa Vogel is the sole proprietor of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.]



you call your festival  
 a "celebration of everything female"  
 well, as one of the tens of thousands of trans women  
 who are excluded from your event  
 i am writing to challenge your sense of entitlement  
 how dare you tell me that i am not a woman!  
 you draw lines in the sand  
 to mark where you believe woman begins and ends  
 but your definitions are distorted with contradictions  
 as they were designed specifically  
 to draw me out of the picture  
 tell me, how do you expect woman to grow  
 beyond her old boundaries and into new roles  
 when you are so set on patrolling her borders?



feminist critiques of western science  
 describe masculine perspectives as being reductionist  
 and feminist approaches as being holistic  
 so tell me, why do you revert to man-made labels  
 and define me based on my organs and chromosomes?

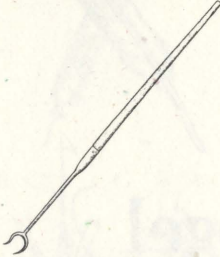


you, who no doubt cringes  
 every time a woman is objectified  
 every time a man fixates on her specific body parts  
 how easily you turn around and reduce me to my genitals!





and please tell me why a self-described feminist  
would insist on propagating the male myth  
that men's power and domination arises from the phallus?  
you choose to believe



that my penis is the ultimate symbol of maleness  
but the truth is, like the rest of my body  
she is merely flesh and blood, nothing more



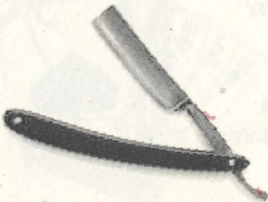
and every time you fixate on my male past  
or what's underneath my pants  
you deny every other aspect of my person  
i am a woman every time i walk down the street  
dealing with cat calls  
and jerks trying to railroad me off the sidewalk  
i am a woman every time my opinions are dismissed  
and every time i fight back to make sure  
that somebody doesn't get away with it  
and i am a woman every time my lesbian life partner and i  
dare to hold hands and kiss in public



you insist that all trans-women still have male energy  
but nobody ever senses it in me  
you falsely believe that you know the difference  
between woman and man  
but as someone who has transitioned from one to the other  
i can tell you first hand  
that when it comes to gender  
most people only ever see what they want to see



so the question is  
why do you choose to see me as a man?  
what feminist goal is served  
by lumping me into the same category  
as the alpha males that you call your oppressors?  
doesn't the fact that i've risked so much demonstrate  
that i believe woman is something worth fighting for?  
have you ever considered embracing me as living proof  
that a woman's fate is determined  
not by the limitations of her body  
but rather the expansiveness of her mind?  
and if most straight men are scared to death  
about what i represent

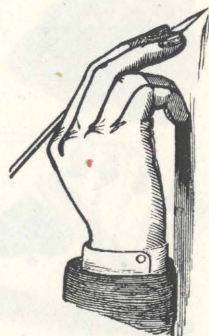
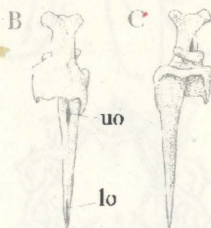


then tell me, as a feminist  
doesn't that mean that i'm doing something right?

we could be allies  
but instead of acceptance  
you only offer me excuses  
when i say i want to participate in women's space  
you announce that i've come to destroy it  
when i insist that i am a woman  
you play word games and declare  
that the michigan womyn's music festival  
is all about "girlhood"  
you say that i will bring violence onto the land  
but the truth is that trans women  
aren't any more violent than other women  
you worry about me flaunting my penis  
but the sad truth is that most of us trans women  
have been made to feel such societal shame about our bodies  
that we find it difficult to undress in front of others

and the most insulting excuse  
you use to exclude me from the festival  
is that my body might trigger abuse survivors  
when you make this callous claim  
you erase the fact that trans women  
are verbally and physically abused for being women too  
i know what it's like to have men  
force themselves upon me  
and there are no words in your second wave feminist lexicon  
to describe the way that i have been raped by male culture  
every trans woman is a survivor  
and we have triggers too  
they come in sets of two  
like pronouns and public restrooms  
designed to remind us of every time  
someone else has had the audacity  
to define our genders for us  
and "womyn-born-womyn" is one of my triggers too

"womyn-born-womyn"  
is your attempt to normalize yourself  
in opposition to me



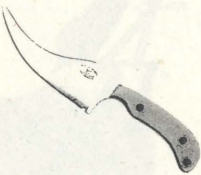


it is the same strategy that heterosexuals use  
when calling themselves "straight"  
and everyone else "queer"  
"womyn-born-womyn"

is your attempt to create another hierarchy  
another class system  
between "born" and trans women  
well i refuse to be a second class citizen  
and as far as i'm concerned  
this debate is no longer about my body  
it is about your bigotry  
your gender issues  
your contradictions  
your tired-ass thirty year old dogma



this debate is no longer about my male privilege  
i gave that up years ago  
this debate is about is your birth privilege  
and how you devalue woman  
by taking for granted that fact  
that people see you as female both inside and out  
it's your birth privilege  
that allows you to consider "don't ask don't tell"  
to be a reasonable festival policy  
it's your birth privilege  
that entitles you to hurl epithets at me  
without ever considering  
what it might be like to be in my shoes  
without ever imagining how angry you would be  
if someone thought they had the right  
to tell you that you are not a woman  
how frustrating it would be  
if every time you acted feminine  
it was dismissed as parody  
and every time you acted butch  
it was seen as a sign of your true male identity



i can't understand how any lesbian  
who has struggled against patriarchal ideals  
about what makes a "real" woman  
can turn around  
and use the word "real" against me



that is not feminism  
it is merely hypocrisy

i hear many women say that they are "tired of this debate"  
well unlike them, i don't have the luxury  
of being bored with this issue  
because it is me who is being discriminated against  
and since practically all of the discussions they have had  
about Michigan's "womyn-born-womyn"-only policy  
have taken place in the absence of trans women  
their claims that they have participated in a true debate  
are clearly illegitimate

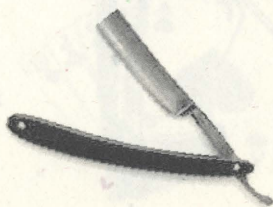
some of my queer women friends  
make apologies on your behalf  
they say they feel torn  
between respecting my identity as a woman  
and understanding your protectiveness of women's space  
but i tell my friends that they are not the ones who are torn  
i am the one who is being torn  
in half

stripped of my identity and all of my life experiences  
stripped of the person that i am  
and reduced to just my penis and male past

i tell my friends that they don't feel torn  
they just feel uncomfortable about the decision  
that every single one of them has to make  
they can either support a trans woman-phobic policy  
or call other women out on their prejudices  
because it is not feminist  
to ignore discrimination within your own community  
and no place can ever truly be called "women's space"  
until all self-identified women are included.

# fighting words

transsexual.  
transsexual, transsexual, transsexual  
transsexual, transsexual, transsexual  
transsexual!

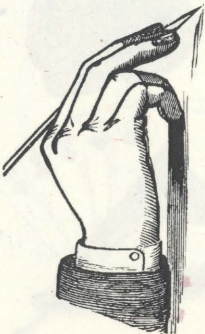
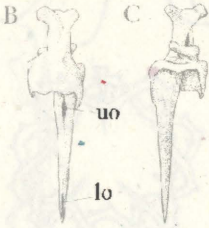


i can say it over and over again  
 but i can't change how that word sounds  
 transsexual is the most maligned word in the dictionary  
 it's the ten-thousand ton ugly assumption  
 that the world has dropped on top of me

because as far as most people are concerned  
 that transsexual is just a triple X spam email  
 advertising the one type of porn  
 that no one they know will admit to wacking off to  
 transsexual is a sure-fire one-liner  
 in a jay leno monologue  
 it's howard stern's second favorite word  
 after lesbian

i even heard that transsexual women  
 will be coming out to their boyfriends  
 yet again on this week's jerry springer  
 even psycho-babble hacks  
 like doctor laura and doctor phil  
 want in on the tranny action  
 well fuck all of them!  
 i want my fucking word back!  
 it's mine and you can't have it!

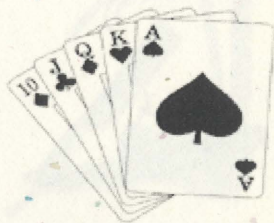
like the vast majority of transsexuals  
 i grew up closeted  
 but not by choice  
 i was intimidated into silence  
 as a child, i took every dumb ass joke  
 and ignorant hateful comment  
 that i heard about transsexuals  
 and turned them all in on myself  
 it felt like death by a million cuts  
 my developing brain bathed in self-hatred  
 as i learned at a young age  
 that the only way i'd be allowed to survive  
 was if i buried myself alive  
 i kept a twenty-seven year long secret  
 and for most of my life  
 i honestly would have killed myself  
 if i thought there was any chance  
 of having my family and friends find out



and that's exactly how  
 the world wanted me to feel  
 because most people  
 are like powder kegs  
 so full of insecurities  
 about their own gender and sexualities  
 that they've become scared to death of me  
 for simply being a spark  
 that they're afraid might set them off  
 so instead, they engage in an unspoken strategy  
 redirecting their fear back at me  
 because they realize  
 that if they can bully me into keeping quiet  
 then they will be free  
 to appropriate my identity  
 and say whatever the fuck they want about me  
 thus turning their worst nightmare  
 into a laughing stock  
 but that's all about to stop  
 because i'm out now  
 and i'm ready to go toe-to-toe  
 with every non-transgendered person  
 who is arrogant enough to assume  
 that they have even the slightest clue  
 of what i'm all about  
 i am calling the whole fucking world out

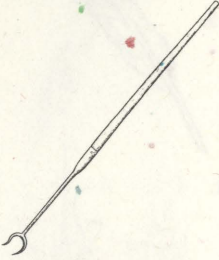
i'm calling out  
 every person who thinks  
 they've never met a transsexual before  
 because chances are you've met scores of us  
 you're just stupid enough to believe  
 that we'd be so different from you  
 that you would be able to notice us

i'm calling out  
 every person who assumes  
 that transsexuals must be delusional  
 because we don't conform to common sense  
 well fuck that  
 common sense is what tells us the world is flat





i'm calling out  
 every paranoid straight boy who assumes  
 that transsexual women  
 are out to deceive him  
 the fact that you are homophobic and conceited  
 doesn't give you the right  
 to take your fears of inadequacy  
 out on me!



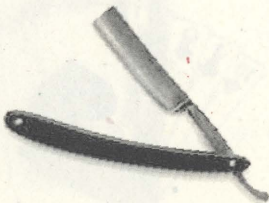
i'm calling out  
 every woman who believes  
 that being born female  
 makes her more of a woman than me  
 fuck, after spending most of your life  
 never quite measuring up  
 to our society's unrealistic expectations  
 about what a "real woman" should be  
 you have the nerve to turn around  
 and use that same bullshit on me?



i'm calling out  
 every person who has ever complained  
 about how difficult it is  
 to use the right pronouns with me  
 here's a helpful hint  
 why not try thinking before you speak



i'm calling out  
 every person who has ever called me courageous  
 because after hearing that a hundred times  
 it just sounds  
 like the nicest possible way of saying  
 "i'm glad i'm not in your shoes"



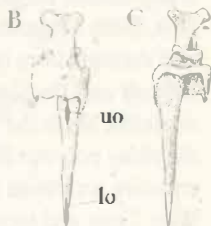
i'm calling out  
 every person who has offered me  
 back-handed compliments  
 like "wow, i never would have guessed"  
 or "you're so lucky you're able to pass"  
 oh, so i should be grateful  
 that i don't look like a transsexual?  
 well fuck that, i am a transsexual!

and while i'm at it  
i'm calling myself out  
for every time i pretended  
that being a transsexual was no big deal  
every time i played it down  
so that somebody else wouldn't feel  
so uncomfortable around me

fuck everyone  
who has ever felt  
uncomfortable around me!

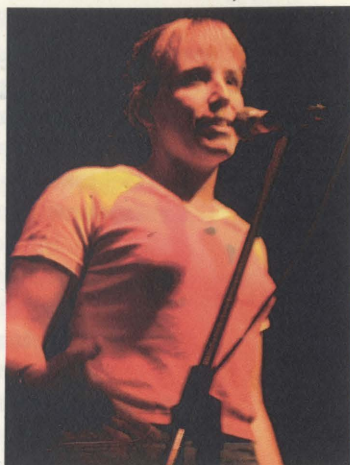
and fuck me  
for every time i tried  
to make the best  
of the role of circus freak  
jumping through everyone's hoops  
and juggling their false impressions of me  
fuck me  
for not having the guts  
to just be a bull dozer  
and run all their expectations  
right the fuck over

fuck me  
for every time i worried  
about what others might think  
when all along i should have been shouting out  
"shut the fuck up!"  
at the top of my lungs  
because the whole fucking world  
doesn't know what the fuck they're talking about  
everyone needs to stop  
talking about transsexuals  
and listen to what we have to say for once  
so shut the fuck up!  
because transsexual is our word  
and you can't have it anymore.



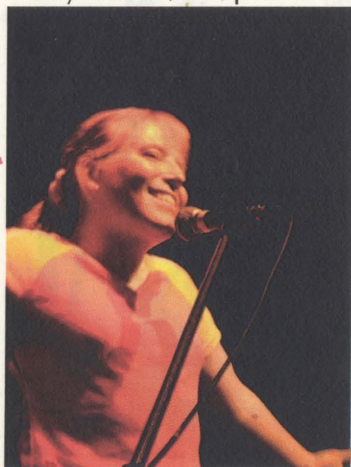
# bio

Julia Serano is an Oakland-based writer, musician, and spoken word artist. She is a poetry slam champion and a regular feature at San Francisco Bay Area spoken word and queer events. Julia has contributed articles and poems to queer, feminist, & pop culture magazines such as Clamor, Kitchen Sink, Bitch Magazine and Transgender Tapestry, and excerpts from her work have appeared in The Believer and the San Francisco Chronicle. As a musician, she is the lyricist-guitarist-vocalist for the noisy pop trio Bitesize, who have released two critically acclaimed CDs, toured up and down the West Coast and received college radio airplay nationwide. Between her work as a musician and as a performance poet, Julia has performed at such diverse events as the National Queer Arts Festival, San Francisco Pride's Main Stage & Dyke March Stage, Ladyfest Bay Area, the UC Berkeley production of The Vagina Monologues, the Berkeley, San Francisco & San Jose Poetry Slam Semi-finals & Finals, San Francisco Transgender Day of Remembrance, Folsom Street Fair, NXNW, Noise Pop, bEASTfest, and the Mission Creek Music Festival.



In addition to her work as a writer and performer, Julia is a trans-activist and events organizer. She is the host of GenderEnders, a trans/intersex/genderqueer-focused performance series and open mic. Julia also has been invited to give workshops, presentations, and to participate in discussion panels on the subjects of performance poetry, gender, and trans issues at numerous universities, conferences and festivals.

Early in 2005, Julia plans to release a DVD of her performance poetry (including several pieces in this collection) entitled "Six Small Words". She is also working on a one-woman show, tentatively titled "In Between Pictures", and a collection of poems & essays called "Hot Tranny Action". Her previous chapbooks, "Either/Or" and "Baby Chapbook", as well as Bitesize CDs and 7-inches, are available for purchase on her website: <http://www.juliaserano.com>



contact the author at: [hi@juliaserano.com](mailto:hi@juliaserano.com)  
PO Box 16158, Oakland, CA 94610

photos by dani eurynome  
whom i love!

excerpts of the poem

## **cocky**

have appeared previously in *The Believer* (2003)  
and the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2003)

## **sleeping sickness**

first appeared in *Clamor Magazine*  
issue #23, November/December 2003

## **mix and match**

first appeared in the zine *Holy Titclamps*  
issue #19, Summer, 2003

## **deconstructive surgery**

was written for the University of California at Berkeley  
production of *The Vagina Monologues*  
February 2004

## **fighting words**

was inspired by Carolyn Connelly's performance  
of her piece "Fuck You: A Poem For Monty"  
at Camp Trans, 2003

for more info about all of julia's various  
creative endeavors, be sure to check out  
the following websites:

[www.juliaserano.com](http://www.juliaserano.com)

to find out about julia's upcoming publications and shows,  
writings, MP3s, videos, interviews, and much much more...

[www.bitesize.net](http://www.bitesize.net)

to find out about Bitesize, the noisy pop band  
that julia plays in...

[www.genderenders.com](http://www.genderenders.com)

to find out about GenderEnders,  
the trans/intersex/genderqueer-focused performance show  
and open mic that julia organizes and emcees...

[www.switchhitter.net](http://www.switchhitter.net)

to view julia's coming out website...

and stay tuned for:

[www.hottrannyaction.org](http://www.hottrannyaction.org)

a trans woman activism site that is in the works...

**HOT  
TRANNY  
ACTION!**

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