

Trans-Central

I've been single, married, divorced (twice), monogamous and open. I've been kink, I've been vanilla – I've been to sex and Tupperware parties. I've tried relentlessly to find my place within the binary gender structure. But it's not happening. It's just not happening. I want to live my life freely and weightless outside of a performed frame. I want – no, I need – to own every millimetre of my trans body, I want trans-ecstasy. I want to be trans and to be free.

By the end of my last book, *Queer Sex*, I'd come to a conclusion that was troubling and deeply unexpected. I realised through the process of interviewing brilliant and inspiring people that I absolutely had to give away three words in order to start down the road to comfort and pleasure in my body.

The words 'real', 'woman' and 'vagina'.

Words I have spent the greater part of my life struggling to own, inhabit and use.

I struggled to hold onto the word 'woman' at the start of my transition as people all around me told me I'd be ugly and unconvincing and that no one would believe I was a woman. I fought for the word 'woman' when people were telling me I needed to get voice coaching, walking and sitting coaching, eating coaching (I kid you not), and that in order to be seen as a 'real' woman I'd need to get the whole of my face and parts of my body de-masculinised. Would I consider, for example, removing ribs, chin bones and having my Adam's apple shaved, even though people had always made fun of me for never having one. Kids at school said, 'You can't be a boy, you don't have an apple.' I daydreamed about having an Adam's apple removed that was never there. That's some kind of deep dysphoric shit.

I struggled to hold onto the word 'woman' as I lined up with

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every other trans person in the ever-increasing line for surgery. I struggled to inhabit the word 'woman' when the letters H, I and V seemed to take hold of everything in my life and placed gender realignment surgery way out of my reach. I struggled for the word 'woman' with my cock and balls between my legs, and then I struggled some more for the word 'woman' when the cock and balls had been refashioned into a thing they called a 'vagina', my sweet cave. I struggled for days after the surgery when the surgeon came round and pushed a speculum deep inside my newly created cavity, just so he could tell me my cunt-depth, my fuckability. That day, inside my head I shucked the word 'woman' as it quite literally meant 'no-power' in a patriarchal world; or to be more precise, this patriarchal ward.

I was advised by 'friends' in those very early days of my 'coming-into-being' not to transition as I'd be laughed at and that no one in the world would ever desire me as 'unconvincing woman'. I would be alone, they said, the HIV positive trans woman alone.

Those words of advice slipped insidiously under my skin and became some kind of self-stigmatising, unwitting truth. I believed I was beyond touch. I still have the trace of that legacy now, I'm ashamed to admit, despite U=U (undetectable equals untransmittable), despite an undetectable viral load, I still suffer from feeling that I am too much responsibility for anyone to bear. Too trans, too HIV. Look away, for fuck sake, look away.

But that negative advice, or the way it made me feel, isn't the reason why I have to give those words, 'woman', 'real' and 'vagina', away. Words that will leave me temporarily, or perhaps permanently, unable to simply explain myself or my body in this lifetime or this contemporary cultural frame(s) of reference.

Those words for me and my body don't fit or feel appropriate

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anymore. I don't feel connected in any constructive way to the set gender binaries. I want to detach what little binary memory or actuality remains, not reattach it, through my transition, to the other side. I want only to be known as trans; not woman, not man. Woman or man, for me, muddies my transness. Femme or masculine muddies my transness.

Trans is empowerment and autonomy – inhabiting my frame and my frames of reference. It's being present in every part of me. There isn't a shred or sliver of regret about my convoluted journey. I adore being here in my life. I shouldn't have to say it but I will for those who, perhaps rightfully or demandingly, need to hear it:

'I have no regrets at all, not a single moment of regret.'

My cock and balls make complete sense, now inverted to create a cave: my cock head and shaft whittled down to form a kind of clitoral stand-in, a comedy clit [boom, boom]; sections of my scrotal sac stitched to my cock skin to form the cave (quite a shallow cave but deep enough nonetheless for sexual exploration).

I have no desire to achieve an acceptable 'binary-balance' for the world to be able to pigeon hole me as a 'trans woman who looks and acts woman enough to be allowed in'. The word 'woman' was unhelpful for me in almost every way going. It didn't land and contain me anymore than the word 'man' did.

I don't want an X on my passport – X marks the spot for what?

I want a **T**, a great fucking fat zinging **T**, with bells on and a fanfare.

A proud **T** that stands alone without qualification. A proud **T** that is built on a plethora of genitalia and different genital configuration models. A proud **T** presence is usually defined as an object of promiscuity, as if, as a body, it wants all

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options open. I do. I want to feel alive and promiscuous, like an installation artist who can utilise and use all of the materials in the world, not just the oil or acrylic paint. I want my body to have a plethora of options and routes. I'm not talking about being sexually promiscuous in this instance but rather promiscuous in the sense of losing the forced patterns of gender and becoming much more open and loose to my shifting feelings and emotions. Trans represents freedom to me, not just a place to stay put in a borrowed surface or on borrowed time.

I'm not lamenting the loss of male or female defining words or masculine or feminine terms; in fact, quite the opposite. I'm ecstatic about the words that work for me: 'trans' and 'queer'. Neither of them fall down on the side of femininity or masculinity, and neither of them have to adopt an oppositional position, an anti-position. I wish I could simply say 'I'm nonbinary' but I'm tired of being in direct opposition to something I don't even believe in.

If I am walking away from the binary, then I walk away from both sides towards my trans centre. It is a positive space, not oppositional. I'm no longer even sure if there is any purchase in my describing myself as 'trans-femme' or 'nonbinary femme', as it confuses me. Why would femme be any more pertinent than masculine if I am trying to reject such constructs as flimsy and judgemental?

I want to smash the patriarchy, not uphold or cherry pick parts of it. We can all play with the binaries to our hearts' content if it makes us happy, but we can do that without having to affix our value to one side or the other, by naming and renaming. Why do we allow the 'net worth' to still exist within binary spaces, when it's so reductive?