

MIND THE GAP: BUCK ANGEL AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSGENDER
MALE IN/VISIBILITY

by

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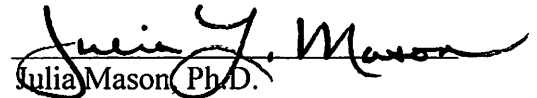
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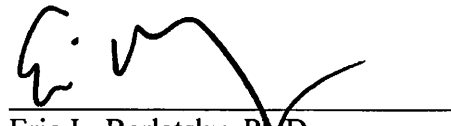
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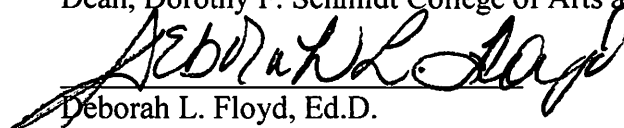

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the implications of visibility and invisibility of transgender people, their constructed bodies, and how these bodies are used for both personal empowerment and education. By using various gender theorists for support, I argue that the transgender male body obtains power through visibility. Despite the many obstacles transgender males face, putting their bodies in a space of visibility gives them both personal power and the power to educate others about their bodies and sexuality. In doing a study of the human body and the different definitions applied to it, I show how we, as a society, are restricted by gender binaries and how the transgender body serves as a gap between the socially-constructed terms. Ultimately, transgender people are able to break through these barriers by subverting the definitions and meaning of “male” and “female.”

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my advisor, professor, and biggest supporter, Dr. Barclay Barrios. Thank you for never giving up on me. I am eternally grateful.

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INTRODUCTION.

MINDING THE GAP

Marc Quinn, an artist well known for his tendency to produce pieces that generate debate about the non-normative human body, has recently added another specimen to his collection: forthcoming in Quinn’s “White Cube” exhibition, the “brilliantly detailed” bronze statue is of “a woman [...] having sex with a man from behind. At first sight, it’s a simple conceit, a reversal of traditional gender roles. Only when you look underneath the bronze couple do you [realize] there’s something more going on” (“Marc Quinn”).

The models described above and pictured on the following page (see Figure 1) are Allannah Starr and Buck Angel; both are established stars in the pornographic world, and the “something more going on” is that Allannah has a penis, and Buck — a vagina (“Marc Quinn”). Quinn is not alone in his fascination with the surgically-constructed human body; according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, over 10.2 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures were performed in the United States in 2008 alone, and the trend is continuing to rise (“Cosmetic Plastic Surgery Statistics”).

However, the real topic of controversy surrounding Quinn’s current display stems from the ongoing discourse about gender, sex, sexuality, and the evolution of the transgender body. And by “evolution,” I mean both material (surgical advancements), and social — its movement into a more visible space. The body has become an important site for rethinking masculinity and femininity, gender and sex, the public and the private, and the

cultural and the natural (*Tattoo 3*). By putting Allanah and Buck's bodies on display through the medium of sculpture, Quinn is contributing to the visibility of the transgender body by encouraging people to "rethink" these gender and sex binaries; more importantly, he is providing a public space for this discussion to occur.



Fig. 1. Buck and Allanah. Source: <http://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/2010-marc-quinn-white-cube/2073>

Quinn's "White Cube" exhibit influenced my thesis and the answers that came up while doing research on the transgender body, as well as how transgender people are perceived in today's society. I wanted to figure out what "more" was going on with this body and its role in polarizing people and causing such varied reactions. I also wanted to learn how these reactions affect transgender people emotionally and physically. In my thesis, I explore the implications of visibility/invisibility of transgender people, their

constructed bodies, and how these bodies are used for both personal empowerment and education.

Definitions

Before I can begin to delve into more theoretical and detailed analysis, it is important to note that I will be using very specific vocabulary. The terms I chose to use in this thesis are critical in presenting the sensitive topics I discuss and are contested both within and outside of academia. These terms are still changing in context and meaning, but they are used as specified below in my thesis.

The first term to define is “queer,” as the people discussed in this thesis are all on the queer end of the gender spectrum: from female-to-male transgender porn stars, activists, and “regular” folk, to the members of the self-identifying “genderqueer” community.

The next term is “genderqueer,” which, according to JAC Stringer, is “a term that may be used to describe those with non-normative gender, either as an umbrella term or a stand-alone identity, typically encompassing those who are in one, or more, of these six categories:

- both man and woman (example: androgyne)
- neither man nor woman (agender, neutrois, non-gendered)
- moving between two or more genders (gender fluid)
- third gendered or other-gendered (includes those who prefer “genderqueer” or “non-binary” to describe their gender without labeling it otherwise)

- having an overlap or blur of gender and orientation and/or sex (girlfags and guydykes)
- those who “queer” gender, in presentation or otherwise, who may or may not see themselves as non-binary or having a gender that is queer; this category may also include those who are consciously political or radical in their understanding of being genderqueer.

The conceptions of sex and gender are still limited by a society that insists there are only two sexes and genders: male/female and masculinity/femininity. Because of these dualities, every person can be said to have a “true” sex, as well as a “true” gender. Although, according to Butler, no unambiguously proven causal links exist between sex, gender, and gender presentation (no essential links, anyway) (Butler, *Trouble* 25), sexologists, sociologists, psychologists, and medical doctors all have “attempted to maintain links to impose order on the inherently disorderly universe of gender and sexual behavior” (Irvine 33). Because of this societal need for “order,” the terms “female” and “male” are still strictly used in relation to the human body. Although these terms become more complicated as the layers of transgenderism are considered, I will be using them for practical purposes in this project due to a lack of more accurate vocabulary at this time.

Like “gender” and “sex,” “body” is also a socially constructed label. It is a term that should not be privileged as a natural category due to its readability as a fluid and amorphous text. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that “the body appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriate and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself” (*Cultural Studies* 347). The body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of

cultural meanings are only externally related. Taking Butler's statement into consideration, and the implications of the body itself as an "instrument" or "medium," the transgender body is a particularly important one to explore. As an instrument, the transgender body serves as a channel for new discourse; it is a direct, physical example of the fluidity of gender, or, more precisely, the fluidity between genders. If approached as a medium, however, the implications are a little more interesting: yes, a medium is an agency through which something can be conveyed, but it is also "something which is intermediate between two degrees, amounts, qualities, or classes; a middle state" ("medium").

The transgender body represents both of the above two definitions: it is an agency through which the inner and outer gender(s) have communication, and, at the same time, represents a space "between" genders. An argument that may be presented here in opposition to this idea is that, more often than not, transgender individuals tend to transition into a hyperbolized version of the gender into which they belong. For example, both Allannah Starr and Buck Angel have transitioned into their respective ultra-feminine and -masculine bodies: Allannah has supersized breast implants and an especially curvaceous body, while Buck has transitioned into a male bodybuilder's physique and has rid himself of all typically "female" curves. Their transgender bodies are used as the medium: both Allannah and Buck have moved into the opposite gender by significantly altering their physical appearance. However, transitioning into an ultra-feminine or masculine opposite gender creates more visibility, which Allannah and Buck are both attempting to do. In his discussion of the grotesque body, Bakhtin defines it as "a figure

symbolic of unruly biological and social exchange” (*Rabelais* 46). Bakhtin’s definition is particularly applicable to not only my thesis, but to the transgender body itself.

Susan Stryker, in her book *Transgender History*, defines “transgender” as “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition” (1). Stryker’s definition is particularly fascinating, especially when considering the implications of the meaning of the prefix “trans”: “across,” “beyond,” or “on the opposite side.” It is indeed a movement, continuous throughout a person’s life, with no set end-point or destination; and because “transgender” is a term that has only entered academic discourse in the past couple of decades, the nuances of its definition are also still in transition. For this project, the movement “across” or “beyond” is more applicable than to “the opposite side,” especially considering the problems of socially constructed gender dimorphism and the reality of a movement towards a more fluid notion of gender. I also use the term “female-to-male” and its acronym, “FTM,” quite frequently and interchangeably with “transman” and “transmale.”

Another word that I use throughout this thesis to refer to people who are not transgender is “cisgender,” which is defined as “people who identify as the gender that matches the sex they were assigned at birth” (*Queer Dictionary*). Therefore, when a person’s assigned sex and gender match, that person is cisgender; however, when the gender and sex do not match and vary from what is considered “natural” by societal standards, then a person is considered to be transgender.

Transgender Ripple: The Feminist Break

The reason I have to define the above terms is because most of them have been problematic to academia, but particularly to feminism. Because of people like Buck — and, arguably, there are not many in such high visibility — the reaction of some people in the radical feminist community has been an attempt to limit the inclusion of transgender people. This exclusion has become known as “transphobia,” and is “the result of the tensions between gender ambiguity, homosexual identity, and passing” (GL vs. BT). Early on, transsexuals, and later transgender people, were criticized because some were “passing” as straight through embodiment of stereotypes of gendered behavior and of heterosexual practices and privilege by identifying their “same-sex” practices as heterosexuality, thus rejecting homosexual identity (*History* 114). This practice of “heterosexuality” has been problematic for both GL and radical feminist groups for several decades and has resulted in ostracization of transgender individuals from communities otherwise known for their non-normative approaches to sexuality.

One such person who caused a huge ripple in both GL and feminist communities was Christine Jorgensen, a born male who had genital reconstruction surgery in 1952 in order to achieve her “true” gender (*History* 45). Jorgensen’s surgery caused a sensation in post-World War II America. This was a particularly tense time for women, who were once again trying to figure out their domestic roles after having worked outside of the home, and a time when term “transgender” was still unintelligible to 1950s American society. Following Jorgensen’s very public outing as a transgender person, conflicts began to arise in the 1960s and 1970s due to the division of feminisms: the need for there to be an essentialist understanding of gender so that women could have equal rights, and

a more inclusive “feminism,” which included women, gays, lesbians, and transgender people fighting for a unified cause (Heyes 74).

In her controversial 1979 essay, “Sappho By Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist,” radical feminist Janice G. Raymond identifies the practice of transsexuality with rape; she states that “[a]ll transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves” (*Transgender* 134); she also asserts that the mere presence of male-to-female transsexuals in women’s space “violates women’s sexuality and spirit” (134). Rape, she claims, “is usually accomplished by force, but it can also be accomplished by deception”: male-to-female transsexuals who seek to be involved in women’s and feminist communities “merely cut off the most obvious means of invading women,” but they continue to rape women (134). Raymond’s belief that transsexuals are “so alienated from their bodies that they think little of mutilating them,” and that accepting transsexual people as members of the social genders they live in and are perceived to be by others amounts to collusion with a “falsification of reality” (134) speaks volumes about the thought of some radical feminists towards transgender people. If, as Raymond stipulates, transgender people are “falsifying” reality, then there is no space for them to exist, she believes, within the radical feminist community. Men who “become” women are not real; rather, they are using their “false” gender to further invade female territory and continue patriarchal control over females. By literally constructing a new sex through surgery and claiming a new gender identity, transgender people are considered to be “skewing reality” to their own liking—a reality that is considered to be regressive for gays and lesbians who are fighting for acceptance and equal rights in the still heteronormatively-dictated society.

Buck Angel, for example, lives his “real” life in a heterosexual relationship: although he still has a vagina, Buck considers himself to be fully male and his relationship with his wife resides in a heteronormative space.

Although all schools of feminism believe that biological sex must not determine roles in society, there is a distinct split between feminisms: some believe that only “womyn-born-womyn” can be true feminists, while others include gender variation as part of the larger feminist umbrella (*Transgender* 236). The debate in the United States is decades-old, as seen from Raymond’s view above. Today, groups such as Gender Identity Watch (GIW), who are labeled Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs), continue to support the anti-transgender movement within the radical feminist community. According to Cathy Brennan, leader of the GIW, transgender people, specifically transwomen, should be excluded from “female-only” spaces. In a 2011 letter to the United Nations, Brennan writes

The proliferation of legislation designed to protect “gender identity” and “gender expression” undermines legal protections for females vis-a-vis sex segregated spaces, such as female-only clubs, public restrooms, public showers, and other spaces designated as “female only.” Females require sex-segregated facilities for number of reasons, chief among them the documented frequency of male sexual violence against females and the uniquely female consequence of unwanted impregnation resulting from this relatively common form of violence. (*GenderIdentityWatch.com*)

Comments such as these further propagate the idea that radical feminists still have the stance that transwomen will rape them; in this case, figuratively. Although the idea of rape by transwomen is different from Raymond’s more metaphorical stance, the fact

remains that TERFs then, and now, continue to believe they are violated by the mere presence of biologically-born men who identify as women.

Although not all radical feminists believe that transwomen will cause them emotional or physical harm, it is quite common for most people within the community to want to separate themselves from transgender people. Radical feminism at its core is essentialist, and the belief that biology overrules all continues to this day. The belief of radical feminists is that

If women are oppressed specifically because of the reproductive organs they are born with, rather than a deeper social-economic source of gender inequality, then transwomen can't be part of the club. Accepting the sisterhood of non-biological females challenges the very basis of radical feminism (*radicalwomen.org*). Thus, if one is not born biologically female, then she can't ever be a woman. What does this mean for people who are intersex and where they belong? Are also not "allowed" to identify as women (or men) because of their ambiguous genitalia? Although some radical feminists will argue that they are not "essentialist," the bottom line is that they believe "Sex is relevant= is not essentialism: it's reality" (*womenofthepatriarchy.wordpress.com*).

In *Whipping Girl*, Julia Serano uses the expression "trans-misogyny" to identify the discrimination that pertains to transwomen's perceptions of their own femininity (13). In Serano's view, such representations derive largely on not only the tendency to view femininity as artificial, but also a sexist focus on the feminine presentation of transwomen. (43–44). Rahila Gupta, in her article, "Transgender: The Challenge to Feminist politics," expresses that some radical feminists have the view that trans women never lose the male privilege they were raised with and that is the major, unavoidable

difference between born females and trans women. This stance renders trans women "not-women" and calls for their exclusion from women's spaces.

Too Queer for Queers

The gender issue is not limited to feminism and feminist theory; transgender individuals are also rejected by some gay and lesbian communities for being "too queer" and not fulfilling gender roles which will enable the aforementioned communities to progress as a whole. Queer itself is a problematic term because queerness covers all that does not fall under the umbrella of intelligibility. According to Michel Foucault "[t]he homosexual of the 19th century became a person: a past, a history and an adolescence, a personality, a life style; also a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mystical physiology. Nothing of his full personality escapes his sexuality" (*History* 47). As Foucault posits, although the homosexual did not technically exist as an entity until the 19th century, the gender-ambiguous person did. Foucault illustrates this in the introduction to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*; in it, he states that

it was a very long time before the postulate that a hermaphrodite must have a sex – a single, true sex – was formulated. For centuries, it was quite simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two. Were they terror-inspiring monsters, calling for legal tortures? In fact, things were much more complicated. It is true that there is evidence of a number of executions, both in ancient times and the Middle Ages. But there is also an abundance of court decisions of a completely different type. In the Middle Ages, the rules of both canon and civil law were very clear on this point: the

designation “hermaphrodite” was given to those in whom the two sexes were juxtaposed, in proportions that might be variable. In these cases, it was the role of the father or the godfather (thus of those who “named” the child) to determine at the time of baptism which sex was going to be retained one was advised to choose the sex that seemed to have the better of the other, being “the most vigorous” or “the warmest.” But later, on the threshold of adulthood, when the time came for them to marry, hermaphrodites were free to decide for themselves if they wished to go on being of the sex which had been assigned to them, or if they preferred the other. (*Herculine* viii)

Although hermaphrodites and transgender people are not of the same ilk, it is interesting to see how these people were treated and how much freedom was given to the gender ambiguous individuals before the “invention” of homosexuality came about.

The essentialist gay and lesbian and radical feminist communities continue to exclude transgender people because they are both “too queer,” in that they further blur lines between gender and sexuality, and “not queer enough,” in that transgender people tend to take on hyperbolized masculine or feminine traits. In the article, “Not Gay Enough: Closing the Closet Door on Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Individuals,” Abby Kopf writes that “the core of the LGBT community is clearly gays and lesbians, partly because they are greater in number or perhaps visibility, but also because they’ve established themselves as the only viable alternative to heterosexuality” (*beamsandstruts.com*). Transgender people are not only considered non-normative by general society, but are also excluded from groups who have fought their own struggles

for centuries and do not want to see the progress they have made be undermined by people who are not outwardly clear of where they belong. The exclusion from most “acceptable” communities has caused a need for the queer umbrella to expand and create a new space for transgender people.

Much like the term “queer,” “transgender” was initially “used as an umbrella term referring to transvestites, crossdressers, transsexuals, and other gender-variant people” (“GL vs. BT”). Originally, the term “transgender” was intended to refer only to certain non-operative transsexuals, but later mutated to refer to anyone whose gender performance varied from the norm (“GL vs. BT”). Because of this variance from the “norm,” some members of the gay and lesbian community have qualms with transgender individuals’ tendency to “pass” as “heterosexuals and rejection of homosexual identity by calling their sexual relations heterosexual”; the failure to embrace the gender into which they were born and live their lives as homosexuals enrages some; one of the problems with this attack on transgender individuals is that they are not homosexual (“GL vs. BT”). Buck Angel, for example, is in a heterosexual relationship—he is legally married to a woman and has been in an intimate relationship with her for many years. Yes, Buck was born a female, but always felt male and lives his life as such. There is no argument that would qualify him as a lesbian, because he is simply not female.

Transgender Theory: Intersecting Identities

As these brief explorations of feminist and queer theories show, transgenderism needed its own theory, thus it emerged in the early 1990s as a result of the lack of feminist and queer theories to acknowledge the experiences of transgender and transsexual people. As Julie L. Nagoshi states in her article, “Transgender Theory:

Embodying Research and Practice,” transgender theory is “distinct in emphasizing the importance of physical embodiment in gender and sexual identity” (1). Unlike queer and feminist theories, transgender theory focuses specifically on transgender and transsexual people and their experiences as people with “intersecting identities” (Nagoshi 1).

Transgender theory is central to my thesis and threads through all of the other theories I rely on in that it specifically focuses on the physical embodiment of gender and sexuality and deals with people who are unable (and, at times, unwilling) to fit into any one specific gender. Like the concept of breach I discuss later and how transgender people are able to act as a gap in society’s understanding of sex and gender, the “intersecting identity” Nagoshi discusses fits into this very definition.

Susan Stryker states in her article, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” that “if queer theory was born of the union of sexuality studies and feminism, transgender studies can be considered queer theory’s evil twin: it has the same parentage but willfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels (like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) over the gender categories (like man and woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim” (212). This parentage comes from a long line of suppression and eventual emergence of feminist, sexuality, and then queer theories.

As Butler posits, the body itself “is a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects [and that] bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender” (*Trouble* 12). Based on this assertion, it can be assumed that the body is colonized by cultural rules and its gender socially imprinted; its status as a natural symbol is “conterminously intertwined with its

function as a cultural symbol” (Mascia-Lees 34). Due to its constant movement and change, the transgender body, therefore, is unique in that its corporeality is indefinable and cannot be culturally colonized.

As is the case with Buck, he is literally a “man with a pussy” – a concept which is unintelligible for many people because they cannot conceive of a person being both genders simultaneously. Although Buck identifies himself as male, the fact that he still has a vagina is one of the factors which prevents him from being socially accepted as such. In order to carve a space for himself and others like him, Buck uses his constructed body to educate and empower other transgender people, as well as to breach the gap of understanding that cisgender people may have about the transgender body.

The Grotesque Body, the Uncanny Valley, and the Abject

In his discussion of the grotesque body, Mikhail Bakhtin posits that “next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth through which enters the world to be swallowed up [and that] all these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is with them that the borders between one’s own and other bodies and between the body and the world are breached” (*Rabelais* 303). One definition of “breach” is “a temporary gap in continuity,” which is interesting when thinking about the transgender body (*Merriam-Webster*). Specifically, the process of transitioning from one gender to another is still unintelligible for mainstream society and that, for many people, being exposed to such a non-normative body causes a feeling of being thrown off balance – the “gap” in the continuity of understanding what it means to be “male” or “female.” The above definition of breach can also be approached through another definition of medium, which is: “an intervening agency, means, or instrument by which something is conveyed

or accomplished” (“medium”). The “intervening agency” in this case is the transgender body, because it “intervenes” in the established gender binary for people who can only comprehend it as such.

If, as Bakhtin states, human orifices are the locus for breaching the borders between bodies, as well as what we know of the world, then female-to-male transgender pornographic actor Buck Angel’s body is the perfect text to prove this claim. By commodifying his body through various means, Buck Angel is “breaching” societal beliefs on corporeal limits and thus creating a visible space for the liminal body—a body that is a symbol of a future where everything, including current perceptions of both gender and sexuality, is headed towards an indefinable, gray area.

Closely related to this notion of the grotesque is the uncanny valley hypothesis. The uncanny valley hypothesis is generally applied to the reaction people have when they come into contact with life-like robots, but I will be using it to parallel the reactions some cisgender people may have when encountering a transgender person, someone they may consider to be in the gray area of gender. Similarly, the uncanny valley hypothesis can be aligned with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject. Both theories are applicable to the transgender body when it is viewed by a cisgender person in that the reaction, revulsion, is a response to the “facsimile” of gender in that a transgender person very closely resembles the gender that he or she is portraying, but there is something “off” which causes cognitive dissonance in the cis gender person. Of course, this reaction is not applicable to all cisgender people, nor are all transgender people attempting to pass as a specific gender. However, the uncanny valley hypothesis and the abject can be used to explain some of the more adverse reactions.

The most applicable explanation of the “uncanny valley” hypothesis I have found is from the article “The Truth About Robots and the Uncanny Valley: Analysis.” Author Erik Sofge states that

The uncanny valley hypothesis holds that when robots and other facsimiles of humans look and act almost like actual humans, it causes a response of revulsion among human observers. The “valley” in question is a dip in a proposed graph of the positivity of human reaction as a function of a robot’s lifelikeness. As a robot is made more humanlike in its appearance and motion, the emotional response from a human being to the robot will become increasingly positive and empathic, until a point is reached beyond which the response quickly becomes that of strong repulsion. However, as the appearance and motion continue to become less distinguishable from a human being, the emotional response becomes positive once more and approaches human-to-human empathy levels.

(Popular Mechanics)

In the second chapter, I will discuss how this definition of the uncanny valley can be applied to variations in gender and gender acceptability by the general population. For example, Buck Angel is easily able to pass as a man because he has literally built his masculine body (see Figure 2) and, in fact, lives his life as a heterosexual male: he is married to a woman and they have an outwardly conventional marriage.

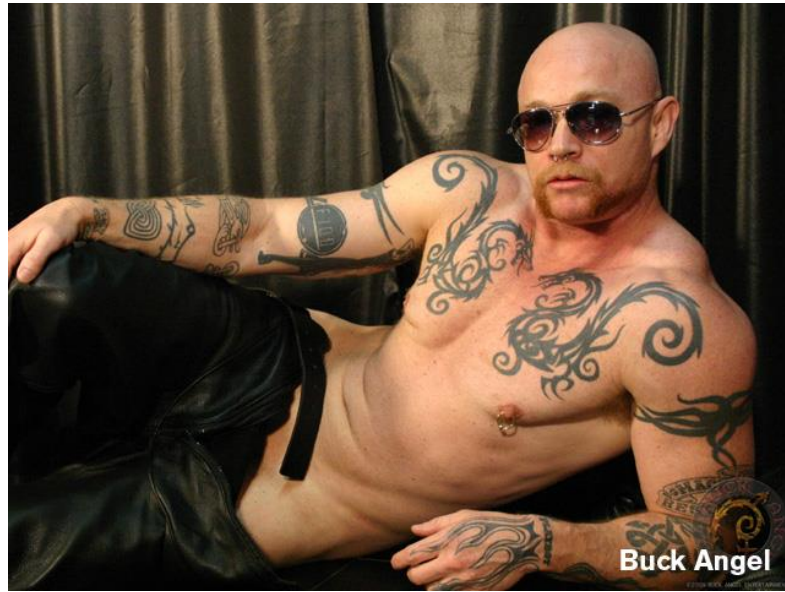


Fig. 2. Buck Angel. Source: <http://www.buckangel.com>

Kate Bornstein discusses the revulsion versus desire aspect in “Gender Terror, Gender Rage” from *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*:

Anything that undermines confidence in the scheme of classification on which people base their lives sickens them as though the very ground on which they stood precipitously dropped away. The vertigo produced by the loss of cognitive orientation is similar to that produced by the loss of physical orientation. Philosophic nausea, certain forms of schizophrenia, moral revulsion, negative experience, the horror of having violated a taboo, and the feeling of having been polluted are all manifestations of this mental mal de mer, occasioned by the sudden shipwreck of cognitive orientation which casts one adrift in a world without structure. (36)

People will regard any phenomenon that produces this disorientation as “disgusting” or “dirty.” To be so regarded, however, the phenomenon must threaten to

destroy not only one of their fundamental categories but their whole cognitive system (*Transgender* 237).

Bornstein relates the above passage to a scene from the film *The Crying Game*, specifically to the transgender character, Dil's, exposure as a woman with a penis and the reaction of another lead character: vomiting at the sight of the penis. This act of revulsion is a physical reaction to being exposed to something which is unintelligible – gender ambiguity. The “uncanny valley” of the aforementioned robots parallels this reaction to a body that is presented as one thing to an individual, and then exposed as something else altogether. The revulsion experienced by the viewer, whether it be to a life-like robot or a transman or woman, is the deepest internal reaction – cognitive dissonance – to something that is unintelligible. By using Bornstein's analysis of the scene from *The Crying Game* mirrored with Jean Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal, I will show in my thesis how the transgender body causes a similar “loss of cognitive orientation” and results in violent reactions.

The uncanny valley and/or revulsion can be attributed to the continuous physical and mental abuse that most transgender people experience. Buck Angel, for example, receives multiple hate mails every day ranging from jeers to actual murder threats. These reactions are known to come from a deep-seated mixture of both desire and revulsion, but most definitely stemming from unintelligible sexual attraction. Bornstein addresses this dissonance by stating that *The Crying Game's* Fergus's “vomiting can be seen not so much as a sign of revulsion as an admission of attraction, and the consequential upheaval of his gender identity and sexual orientation” (*Trans* 237). Bornstein brings up a valid point here: if people are in fact cognitively unable to “deal” with their attraction to non-

normative bodies, then their own bodies response is to throw up – the momentary “gap” in continuity.

This physical reaction can be paralleled with Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, as presented in *Powers of Horror*. As Kristeva posits, “since the abject is situated outside the symbolic order, being forced to face it is an inherently traumatic experience” (*Powers* 8). Much like Kristeva’s example of a person’s reaction when faced with a corpse – a human being that looks alive and should be alive, a part of the symbolic order — the person is in fact no longer and an eerily life-like body is representative of what should be. Because the corpse is not alive and no longer human, the person subjected to it cannot control his or her physical reaction to it and vomits due to this dissonance. Similarly, many people do not know how to react to being faced with a transgender individual: he or she looks like something familiar and a part of the “ordered” world, but an exposure to genitals (or something else?) results in a reaction of revulsion and the vomit becomes the symbol for this internal dissonance. The transgender body is, largely, not considered to be a “natural” one due to its post-birth physical — and literal — construction. People feel “fooled” by transgender or transsexual people “passing” as the gender into which they were not born.

Susan Stryker discusses this abjection in “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix” by stating that

the transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual

woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist. (*Trans* 245)

Stryker's own surgically-constructed body, and others like hers, is, at this point in time, still somewhat unintelligible to most people. People cannot understand how one can be a male and "turn into" a female; likewise, how a person can be born male and then live his life as a female? Julia Serano, in an excerpt from *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, addresses this very issue: exactly why is the concept of transitioning from one gender into another so difficult to comprehend? Why do people incessantly ask for before and after pictures? I will admit here that I was intrigued by Buck Angel's transition from a successful female model to the "man with a pussy," but I did not realize why I had to see the before pictures. The change in Buck is so tremendous that I felt the need to see that he was, in fact, truly a woman before the transition. Serano points out that the fascination with before and after pictures is not contained to only transgender people, but to any extreme body modification. For example, Serano addresses that individuals who have undergone gastric bypass surgery, as well as cosmetic surgery to "improve" their looks, experience similar requests for before pictures, as if they do not really exist in their new bodies, but are only their former selves living in new and improved shells. Serano points out the need for people to see before pictures as a way for them to justify the surgically-"enhanced" individuals' class, as well as body, transitions (*Whipping* 54). Serano argues that "the

major reason that plastic surgeries, gastric bypasses, and sex reassignments are all given similar sensationalistic treatments is because the subjects cross what is normally considered an impenetrable class boundary: from unattractive to beautiful, from fat to thin, and in the case of transsexuals, from male to female, or from female to male” (*Whipping* 57). The class-boundary penetration is, according to Serano, the real reason behind the fascination with extreme body modification and to see the before pictures reassures the viewer that the person belongs to a lower class despite his or her attempt to join in the higher “ranks.” The person is only able to attain passage into a higher class through artificial means and does not “naturally” belong there, a hypothesis that further supports the existence of class barriers and differences in attractiveness and gender.

Building Bodies: The Reality of Female to Male Transformation and Implications of In/Visibility

The first chapter discusses in detail the implications of both visibility and invisibility on the transgender male body. I look at the case of Robert Eads, a transman from rural Georgia who eventually lost his life to cervical cancer due to both self-imposed invisibility and the ignorance of the doctors who treated him. I also discuss the case of David Reimer and the visibility and invisibility that both played a huge impact on his life and self-esteem. Taking these two cases into consideration, I argue that Buck Angel subverts invisibility and takes the transmale body into higher visibility, and, in turn, uses this visibility to educate not only transgender people about their bodies, but cisgender people as well.

To help my argument, I refer to Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity and her analysis of the David Reimer case.

The Space Between: Buck Angel’s Pussy and the Spreading Popularity of Queer Porn

Following the discussion in the first chapter, I expand on the positive implications of visibility and argue that pornography has been a successful tool in getting the transmale body into higher visibility. I discuss Buck Angel’s role as the pioneer of the FTM porn industry and how, through his work, he has successfully opened the doors for many other gender-variant people, including the ever-growing “genderqueer” community.

Pornographic films starring performers who refuse to be categorized as any gender, including transgender, are becoming more popular by the day. Although people are still confused by the array of genders and bodies in this budding genre, pornography is not only very personal, but also widely-distributed. The rising popularity of the “queer” sector in the porn world is further contributing to the eroticism and acceptance of the gender-variant body, which is, in turn, furthering people’s spectrum of acceptability. By using the most explicitly personal tool – sexuality – transpeople are gaining more acceptance from the bottom up.

In this chapter, I will be discussing the visible transgender body and the implications of this visibility by using notions of the uncanny valley and the abject. I will also be using Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque body and its specific definition as a “figure symbolic of unruly biological and social exchange” (*Rabelais* 46) in order to show how some transgender people use their bodies through pornography to act as symbols unruliness in order to put their bodies into higher visibility and inflict change.

CHAPTER 1.
BUILDING BODIES: THE REALITY OF FEMALE TO MALE
TRANSFORMATION AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF IN/VISIBILITY

Truths and Lies¹

I have been told
that I am a figment
of my own imagination
that what I am cannot be,
that my truths are lies
and their lies are truths.

But I know that I am
and that my truths are not lies
and their lies are not truths.

They may keep me
outside the boundaries
of their imaginations,
but I refuse to be invisible

The relationship between visibility and invisibility and the implications of both for the transgender body are a central theme in this thesis. In this chapter, I analyze both from a societal perspective and discuss how the transgender person views, or doesn't view, himself. I argue that both visibility and invisibility play significant roles in how both society and the transgender person are affected, and what these implications mean for the transgender person.

In this chapter, I show that by putting the female-to-male body into high visibility, Buck is changing the conception and perception/knowledge/understanding of gender and

¹ Jason Cromwell

creating a new space for this type of discourse. Although Buck Angel has been working at creating such a space for several years, he began by pioneering the female-to-male (FTM) pornographic genre and has more recently moved into educating not only other transmen, but also the general public, about the transgender body. Buck has used his own body as a medium, previously defined as “an agency through which something can be conveyed,” between the transgender community and mainstream society as a means to educate about eroticism and the unavoidable physical realities of the trans body.

Southern Discomfort: Robert Eads and the Consequences of Transgender Invisibility

Invisibility is not simply a matter of gender identity or performance; rather, it has very real, and sometimes tragic consequences, as is the case with Robert Eads. Eads, a transman from rural Georgia who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, is a prime example of a transgender person who lost his life due to his invisibility in the eyes of the doctors who treated him, and, to an extent, his own self-imposed invisibility in failing to recognize his genitalia. By the time he finally learned he had cancer, it was too late for him to get treatment and he passed away. Although Eads died in 1999, society’s views on transgender people have not drastically improved and there are still many FTMs who endure abuse and neglect on part of their communities. Female reproductive cancers (cervical, ovarian, uterine) are especially dangerous for transmen. Some transmen have a difficult time accepting the biological fact that they still have female reproductive parts and do not go in for regular check-ups and end up not knowing that they are ill until it is too late. Also, the long-term impact of hormone use and the high rates of smoking and alcohol consumption among trans people are thought to be contributors to cancer (“Trans

People and Cancer”). If these check-ups are skipped, then possibly fatal consequences may occur, as was the sad case with Robert Eads.

As documented in the film about his life, *Southern Comfort*, Robert Eads was turned away by more than two dozen doctors who feared that taking on a transgender patient might harm their reputation in the medical community. Eads’s case is yet another example of invisibility. Due to the discrimination on part of the doctors who refused to treat him, Eads died at the age of fifty-three from a cancer that could have been easily treated in its early stages. Because Eads did not undergo a sex change operation until he was well into his forties, doctors advised him not to get a hysterectomy. Since he was considered “too old” for a hysterectomy, Eads “had no choice but to keep his female reproductive parts” (“Story About Robert Eads”). And, since his femininity was well hidden within the confines of his uterus, it was understandably easy for him to forget that this one last part still existed (*Southern Comfort*). As much as the doctors played a role in Eads’s invisibility, he himself did not fully acknowledge that his female parts, although invisible, remained within his body.

In another clip from *Southern Comfort*, Eads states: “I wish I could understand why they did what they did, why they had to feel that way... And I know in a way they’ve contributed to my dying here. But I can’t hate them. I don’t hate them. I feel sorry for them. What makes me most sad is they probably felt like they did the right thing.” Although *Southern Comfort*, places the transman body into higher visibility and serves as an educational tool for the FTM, as well as cissexual, communities, there are still many FTMs who are either refused treatment or do not want to endure the embarrassment of being further subjected to the penetrative discriminatory gaze

(thetransitionalmale.com). Despite the visibility that Eads's death brought for the transman, a lot more work has to be done by the community in order for transgender people to recognize their own roles in furthering this visibility and coming to terms with their own genitalia.

A hysterectomy is a way for a transman to really rid himself of female parts and hormones, but it is also a surgery which requires a full commitment and is irreversible. The hormone production following a full hysterectomy is significantly increased and requires additional hormone treatments – especially for those transitioning into men. In addition to a long recovery from the procedure, some transmen find the entire pre-operational process difficult in that they feel scrutiny from the medical professionals, including their own doctors.. As one transman, “Nick,” states,

[t]here are so many Transmen out there who cannot find an understanding OB-GYN to give them a break; to perform a much desired and much needed operation without suffering the humiliation of being turned away especially after being subjected to ‘the feet in stirrups’ probing. Not to mention enduring the horrified or judgmental reactions by others for daring to walk into an OB’s office alone looking male.

(thetransitionalmale.com)

Nick is not alone in his sentiments; many transmen experience similar types of discrimination by others and the discomfort of being probed and end up forgoing annual medical exams that women have to have in order to be healthy. Thus, the trans body remains invisible and people continue to lose their lives due to this invisibility.

The blurry area between genders is covered quite nicely by Jason Cromwell in *Transmen & FTMs: Identities, Bodies, Genders, & Sexualities*. In the chapter “Making the Visible Invisible,” Cromwell details the four levels of marginalization and invisibility for female-to-male transgender people:

1. Female-bodied transpeople are signified as invisible by virtue of having been born with female bodies and being assigned to the female sex. As with other female-bodied people in society, invisibility occurs “through the stories not told” (Gilmore 1994: 8) “truth is in the female body.”

2. Medical and popular discourses make female-bodied transpeople visible as well as invisible as pathological women. Women (because they are females) or homosexuals (because of their sexual orientation) are no longer allowed to be pathologized by medical or popular discourses and practices because doing so constitutes discriminatory treatment.

Transgendered people continue to be pathologized.

3. Female-bodied transpeople are or become invisible by living as men. Gilmore provides an astute explanation of how that obtains: “Gender is interpretable through a formalist logic by which the sex one can *see* becomes the sex one must *be*. According to the formalist logic of gender, the binary of sex (which there are only two: male and female) is the ‘natural’ ground on which gender as a cultural construction is layered” (1994: emphasis in original).

4. To be discovered or revealed as FTMs/transmen is often to be treated as less than real, or artificial. That can and does result in the loss of jobs,

opportunities for advancement, and often the end of relationships, regardless of their duration. Thus, becoming invisible as transmen/FTMs and only visible as men is precarious and dependent on how out someone is. There is always some risk of being found out and marginalized as a result. Often when discovered, regardless of how and irrespective of the duration of their lives as men, they are turned back into women and again made invisible. (*Transmen* 11)

Cromwell states that “female-bodied transpeople are signified as invisible” because of the simple reason of having been born with female bodies. As a result, Cromwell posits, along “with other female-bodied people in society, invisibility occurs” (22).

Along with the societally-predetermined invisibility of women, and, undeniably, transpeople, there is a much darker side to this fact. Invisibility on its own is difficult for most transpeople, but it also carries dire consequences for some. Female-to-male transgender people not only have a difficult time presenting themselves as male in everyday life, but have a constant biological reminder that they were not born male.

Abnormalities of the female reproductive system are only found through regular gynecological exams. These exams are always uncomfortable and too many women do not go in for regular check-ups (annual for women over the age of eighteen), or forgo them altogether. Women, for the most part, dread going in to get their private parts probed by a cold, steel apparatus being held by the person who knows their vagina better than they do. The recently re-monikered “women’s wellness exam” is uncomfortable, at the least, by women who live their lives as such – and traumatizing for those who have

transitioned emotionally, mentally, and socially to male, but whose biology prevents them from taking the transition all the way through. FTMs have an especially difficult time going through the process of stripping down, both physically, as well as emotionally (by letting their female-ness be exposed), in front of someone who may or may not be sympathetic. Unfortunately, most FTMs have found their gynecological exams extremely trying in that the inevitability of biology has to be confronted and their most intimate parts have to be penetrated by the cold steel – this experience is an extra reminder that their vaginas are there to stay.

The High Stakes of Visibility: *YouTube* and the “Public Cervix Announcement”

Given the discursive, social, and real invisibility of the transgender body, putting that body into higher visibility is essential to both transgender and cisgender society. In the article, “More Bang for Your Buck: Reviving the Vadge—A Public Cervix Announcement,” Buck Angel begins by stating that “[b]eing a man with a vagina is not easy” (*edenfantasy.com*). Although Buck lives his life as a man, he is fully aware that he does, indeed, still have female reproductive organs and that it is the responsibility of the transman to take care of himself and his “vadge.” Buck’s “Public Cervix Announcement” is available on his *YouTube* channel; in the video, Buck is positioned on his back – his lower body is covered by a sheet and his feet in stirrups – a typical gynecological exam position experienced by most women above the age of eighteen. Buck, while re-enacting this gynecological exam looks at the camera and states “for men like me, gynecological problems are still a reality” and ends it with “own it, use it, or lose it” (*YouTube.com*). The message here is clear: take care of your vagina, or lose your life. Buck’s message

clearly states that invisibility, in this case self-imposed, may have very serious consequences.

The primary reason for the “Public Cervix Announcement” is to educate transgender males on the importance of getting regular medical check-ups, but, inadvertently or not, Buck also creates a higher visibility for the trans body through this message. Because most transgender males retain their internal female reproductive organs, it is crucial that they go in for regular check-ups for female gynecological diseases. Buck’s method of delivering this very important message is done in a way that will draw attention. By allowing his very masculine upper body to stay uncovered during the “exam,” Buck immediately confuses the viewer as to why a man is positioned for a gynecological exam. Buck’s bottom area remains covered with a sheet and the concealment of his genitals is significant for several reasons (See Figure 3). Of course, *YouTube* does not allow any nudity or material that could be viewed as “obscene” and he has to keep it covered. YouTube’s regulations serve a greater purpose in this instance in the play on concealment and in/visibility. By keeping his vagina covered and invisible, Buck creates more intrigue and thus creates visibility for his male vagina and the dialogue around it. In this case, invisibility creates visibility.



Fig. 3. “Public Cervix Announcement.” Source: <http://www.slingshow.com>

By putting the “Public Cervix Announcement” on such a highly frequented website as *YouTube*, Buck is providing a place for education on the realities of the transman, and, in turn, creating more visibility for the transman. Along with his *YouTube* channel, “Bucking the System” (in which he has a sign-language interpreter/translator next to him to reach an even wider audience) Buck has been using his new-found visibility and educating people in various spaces, including social websites such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as partaking in educational lectures at universities across the United States. He recently participated in a panel discussion, “Sex, Gender, & Pornography,” at Yale University’s “Sex Week” event. Buck was on a panel with other adult entertainers during which they discussed “how gender has influenced their roles and aspirations within the adult film industry” (sexweekatyale.com). Along with educational lectures and informational online videos, Buck is also currently working on a documentary film about the transman experience. *Making Love to a Transman* is a project “that examines the intimate lives of transmen and the people who love them [with which] hopes to dispel all the myths about trans guys as manufactured by popular culture or mass media” (buckangelentertainment.com).

By constructing a space of such high visibility for himself, Buck Angel has exposed the heteronormative world to the various nuances of the FTM community--both the erotic appeal and the “normal” everyday activities of the transgender individual. Although Buck has used the recognition from his pornographic career to catapult him from the backdoor of society into a relatively significant mainstream exposure, there is still a long way to go before the transman gender is fully accepted by our heteronormative social order. For every Buck Angel (and, arguably, there are not many) out there, there is a Robert Eads who will not be able to get proper treatment due to discrimination, and a Brandon Teena who fears for his because of the hatred directed towards those who are “abnormal.” Buck is fighting for those who are invisible and “stuck outside the boundaries” of visibility. Although FTM transpeople such as Buck Angel live their lives as males, they still have to deal with the inescapable realities of their female biology: along with bi-weekly testosterone injections, Buck has to make regular visits to the gynecologist and deal with other “female” issues. Buck has made a point to educate the FTM community on the importance of regular medical check-ups and the realities of cervical cancer through his YouTube video, Public Cervix Announcement (PCA).

Without knowing Buck’s background, a viewer of this video would most likely be quite confused as to why a man is in need of a gynecological examination. Buck, with his bald head, muscular chest, and multiple tattoos looks very much like a man. With all of the hyperbolized markings he has, Buck’s appearance is ultra-masculine and there is no confusion that he is male. When the sheet is lifted, however, another story unfolds.

The confusion caused by Buck's very masculine appearance seems to be prevalent based on viewer comments. One person, il0veporn55, asks, "Do you really have a Woman part? I am not sure..."; another, ryan moore, asks, "Is this a guy or a girl? I heard he/she has a Vagina, meaning this is a girl." These two people seem genuinely confused and cannot reconcile that Buck is a man with a vagina. As TheNomdeguerre states, "from a straight male's perspective, gender identity is definitely binary." He is not alone in this sentiment, as many people continue to believe that gender identity is, indeed, binary and that anything outside of this binary cannot exist in society, thus it becomes invisible.

Perhaps unintentionally, the Public Cervix Announcement educates people who are not knowledgeable about the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Perhaps this was not Buck's initial plan, but, based on the viewer comments, it appears that he has spread knowledge to an audience that may never have been exposed to the transgender male body, therefore creating a much higher visibility for a body that is too often invisible. And, because of this visibility, the uncanny valley hypothesis comes into play: Buck's "grotesque" body, which appears to be all-too-male, doesn't quite make the cut. His hidden female genitalia elicits a feeling of revulsion in some of the viewers, which is evident by their negative comments.

The concealment of Buck's genitals very blatantly enforces that just because you cannot see something, it does not mean that it is not there. Transgender men work hard to construct a male body in order to reflect their gender, but certain female hormones and body parts can never be completely erased, but they can be covered up and ignored. Viewer Richard Muir states, "Thanks for doing public service announcements like this. I

have a lot of trans friends and they often like to let checkups like this slide, even when I help them find doctors who are very trans friendly.” Richard’s comment shows that educational videos like this are crucial to the transgender community because it is so easy to “let checkups like this slide” and, in turn, for the genitalia to remain invisible.

David Reimer: A Body Deconstructed

In her article, “Doing Justice to Someone,” Judith Butler recounts the “John/Joan” case of David Reimer and his corporeal transformation from male to female, and back to “male.” David’s case is particularly fascinating in that his body is constructed, and then re-constructed, so that he may return to a more “natural” state: his body is literally built into the two sexes over the course of his life. David was born a male and had a botched circumcision operation that left him without a penis. Because penile reconstruction surgery was so primitive at the time, a sexologist at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. John Money, convinced Reimer’s parents to raise him as a girl. Reimer had his penis completely removed and reconstructed into a vagina, and David was raised as a girl. David lived uncomfortably as a female until he found out, at the age of 14, what had happened to him and made the decision to transform his body back into a male one (“Justice” 627).

Because David’s sex was reassigned shortly after birth, he was raised female and never felt quite right in his assigned gender. During adolescence, David first began to realize that he was “different” and did not feel “female”; he claims that

There were little things from early on. I began to see how different I felt and was, from what I was supposed to be. But I didn’t know what it meant. I thought I was a freak or something . . . I looked at myself and said I don’t

like this type of clothing, I don't like the types of toys I was always being given. I like hanging around with the guys and climbing trees and stuff like that and girls don't like any of that stuff. ("Justice" 632)

The problem that Butler has with David's statement (a quarrel she would also presumably have with Buck's description of himself) is that even though "these are the words by which this individual gives himself to be understood [...] we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves" ("Justice" 632). Because the language for male/female, boy/girl already exists, how can it be assumed that either Buck or David, these self-made "men," are being indeed "true" to their "inner essence"? Butler argues that David's inner sex "required a transsexual corporeal transformation in order for him to achieve a sense of 'naturalness,'" and to ensure that his outer body accords with his inner truth ("Justice" 630).

In order for the inner nature/outer corporeal representation to comply often requires physical augmentation; the body becomes "a site for medical and technological intervention for those who wish to be in better compliance with the gender they are and/or want to be" ("Justice" 360). Because the human body and sex/gender are not static, nor do they fit into two neatly labeled categories, surgical intervention is an option for those who wish to achieve a body that is more fitting; or, as in David's case, a body that the medical community found fitting for him. Jamison Green states of his own transformation from female to male that "I could never grow up to be a woman. . . the risks of social and economic loss, the health risks of hormonal changes, and the surgical risks of mutilation or even death . . . no longer seemed as dangerous as a life unfulfilled"

(*Invisible* 42). David Reimer's own life was a constant battle of ups and downs which eventually led to his suicide at the age of 38. John Colapinto, author of *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised As a Girl*, writes that "most suicides [. . .] have multiple motives, which come together in a perfect storm of misery" ("Gender Gap" 1) and, in David's case, this statement resonates. David was never able to have full sexual function as a male and felt "inadequate" as a husband. He also had recently become unemployed and his twin brother had died of an overdose ("Gender Gap" 1). All of these factors surely contributed to his depression and eventual suicide, but his experiences in changing genders must have had a huge impact on his emotional and mental well-being. He was a man that had his gender taken away from him and spent a childhood in the wrong body until he was finally able to claim himself back.

David's case is unique in regards to this chapter because he is a natural-born male whose body was constructed without his consent into a female one and then eventually reconstructed into a masculine form. Buck Angel, on the other hand, knowingly and willingly constructed his body into an ultra-masculine shape.

David's life is a tragic case of how both visibility and invisibility impacted him in negative ways. His lack of genitalia became an object of study and manipulation for the doctors involved in his case: the missing penis became the most visible part of David. Later, despite having a surgically-constructed penis, David could not forget about its inadequacy and failure in making him function fully as a male. Although the two started out in different bodies, they ultimately ended up in similar ones: David, although eventually regaining a more masculine figure, was unable to have a fully functional phallus constructed and ended up with a hybrid phallus/vagina; Buck is opting out of

getting genital reconstruction and using the invisibility of a phallus to make his vagina more visible.

Building the Transgender Male

As a biologically-born female, Buck Angel has a similar narrative to David's, although his body was reconstructed by choice. Buck states

I was born female and lived many years as such. I would say I was not really “feminine” but more on the tomboy/butch side. I was always hanging out with guys doing guy things. I loved to drink beer and get into fights, work on cars, and stuff like that. I never felt like a girl and none of my friends ever treated me that way either. I was always perceived as a guy by everyone—even my family. But in those times sex change operations were not really talked about, so I just suffered “in the wrong body.” (buckangel.com, “About”)

Buck, like David Reimer, felt intrinsically male and suffered “in the wrong body” for most of his adolescence/early adulthood; he also did not know that a sex change operation was a real option for him to escape the “horrible” (*SEE Magazine*) feeling of entrapment. After many years of coping with corporeal entrapment, Buck transitioned into a typically male shape, and, through this transition, Buck has created visibility for not only the FTM body, but all bodies.

Although Buck's “pussy” has been used to bring the transmale body into higher visibility for health and educational reasons, he has also successfully opened the doors for many other gender-variant people, including the ever-growing “genderqueer” community, by pioneering the female-to-male transgender porn industry. Although

people are still confused by the array of genders and bodies in this budding genre, pornography is not only very personal, but also widely-distributed. The rising popularity of the “queer” sector in the porn world is further contributing to the eroticism and acceptance of the gender-variant body, which is, in turn, furthering people’s spectrum of acceptability. By using the most explicitly personal tool – sexuality – transpeople are gaining more acceptance from the bottom up and gaining higher visibility.

CHAPTER 2.

THE SPACE BETWEEN: BUCK ANGEL'S PUSSY AND THE SPREADING POPULARITY OF QUEER PORN

“The image of the body is related to carnival time, which is free and becoming, because it shares the carnival's set toward space as something free, unconfined, constantly overcoming limits.”

-Mikhail Bakhtin

Buck Angel, whose body is the main text on which I focus this chapter, has been working at creating a space, which Mikhail Bakhtin defines as “something free, unconfined, constantly overcoming limits” (*Rabelais* 303). Buck began by pioneering the FTM (female-to-male) pornographic genre and has more recently moved into educating not only other transmen, but also the general public, about the various nuances of the transgender body. Buck has used his own body as a medium between the transgender and cisgender communities as means to educate both on the eroticism and the unavoidable physical realities of the transgender body. As discussed in my last chapter, Buck is changing the conception and perception/knowledge/understanding of gender and creating a new space for this type of discourse.

Because pornography featuring transgender men is relatively new in the realm of adult entertainment, this chapter will explain how pornography, specifically queer pornography, is both a hyperreal medium and a variation of *écriture feminine*. Buck Angel uses his own body to subvert these two approaches and, in turn, creates a new

voice for the queer body. Through this queer voice, pornographic actors of all genders are able to speak with their bodies and show the viewer that sexuality is not limited to assigned gender roles. The new voice flows between genders and creates a variety of outlets for non-normative sexuality.

The Porn Debates

Before discussing Buck Angel's work in the pornography industry, it is important to consider pornography's place within feminism. Aside from the transphobia on the part of the gay and lesbian communities discussed in the introduction, Buck Angel's career as a porn actor is problematic on many levels, including the feminist split in the so-called "porn wars." Women who act in pornographic films are considered traitors to feminism because, according to the self-monikered "anti-porn feminists," by displaying their surgically-enhanced bodies and participating in sexual activities on screen, these actresses are further supporting male oppression of the female body. In an argument against academic discourse on pornography, Gail Dines states that

Men may differ in how pornography leaks into their sexual relationships, but leak it does. Women have talked about being forced by their partners to watch the pornography so they can learn how to dress, fuck, suck, moan, talk, gasp, lick, cry, or scream like the woman in pornography. The carefully constructed images on the screen or on the page are read as "ideal types," and should his partner fail to live up to the ideal, then there is often hell to pay. (*Pornography* 82)

This “hell” that is “often [paid]” comes in the form of “rape, battery, torture, and murder of women in the real world” (Dines 163). Based on the assumption that most men are unable to separate fantasy from reality, critics such as Dines are adamantly against any form of pornography; according to them, the on-screen actions will most often lead a man attempting to live out the particular actions acted out on screen. Looking at Dines’s argument from the “male gaze” perspective, it can be said that the eroticization of the feminine is a result of the male gaze and its need to put the female character in her typical societal position: that of the “bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning” as Laura Mulvey suggests in her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (58). As Mulvey’s statement proposes, females seldom find themselves in the role of spectator or in a position of control.

Although the view that pornography will inevitably lead to violence for women, all anti-porn feminists agree that: women are harmed by pornography because everything that happens on screen actually happened to the woman playing it out; pornography reinforces male supremacy and that men are entitled to sexual access to women’s bodies; and that pornography promotes misogynistic beauty standards (*antipornfeminists.wordpress.com*). The bottom line here is that pornography always hurts women and it should not exist in any traditional capacity.

On the other side of the debate on pornography, Lynne Segal argues that “the idea that pornographic material causes men’s violence tends to excuse the behavior of the men who are sexually coercive and violent by removing the blame on to pornography; [that] men who rape, murder, and commit other violent sex crimes against women, children or other men may (or may not) have an interest in violent pornography” (*Dirty Looks* 17).

Although Dines and other anti-porn activists present valid points in that some men do actually end up trying to live out the fantasies they see on screen and are abusive towards women, it cannot be concluded that pornography is the cause behind such atrocities. Since Dines only addresses traditional male/female pornography in her book, I cannot conclusively say that her stance would be the same on non-traditional porn and whether that would also affect the viewer so violently.

As Segal states in her article, “False Promises: Anti-Pornography Feminism,” “[in] the end, anti-pornography campaigns, feminist or not, can only enlist today, as they invariably enlisted before, centuries of guilt and anxiety around sex, as well as lifetimes of confusion and complexity in our personal experiences of sexual arousal and activity” (12). Although we do live in a world that is slowly moving forward in acceptance of non-traditional gender roles and approaches to sex, people still do not have the freedom to explore their own sexuality openly. With porn, however, everyone is able to experience sexual pleasure in the privacy of their own home and without judgment. By having access to a variety of pornographic films, viewers are able to live out their fantasies vicariously and learn more about non-traditional, non-heteronormative sexuality.

The on-going pro-/anti- porn debate, although on a seemingly unrelated topic, is reminiscent of the inability of some members of the radical feminist community, specifically Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs), to accept both the male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) transgender body. There is the attitude in the feminist community that because they were born into the privileged male body, MTFs cannot ever know what it's like to have a "true" female experience; similarly, FTMs are cast off because they have decided to trade in their oppressed female bodies and join the

repressive boys' club; thus, they are traitors to femininity. Does someone like Buck Angel, a man with a genetic female history, further propagate the oppression of the female body by having sex with male-to-female transsexuals on screen, or would someone like Dines not accept his “manhood,” and therefore still consider him to be exploitative of the gender he was born into (female)? Perhaps these questions are unanswerable at the moment because Buck cannot clearly (and socially) be categorized as either gender. If that is the case, then Buck’s budding visibility is indeed contributing to the changing notions of gender and sexuality and providing further movement towards gender fluidity. By bringing his gender ambiguous body to the forefront of the pornography debate, Buck further complicates the seemingly dimorphic distinctions of what is and is not oppressive to women. Moreover, because anti-porn activists such as Dines address pornography in terms of the male/female dichotomy, it is left up for debate as to where the FTM transgender body fits into their viewpoint.

As I discussed in the introduction, other problematic spaces for transgender people are the radical feminist and the more conservative gay and lesbian communities. There is the attitude in the radical feminist community that because they were born into the privileged male body, MTFs (male-to-female) cannot ever know what it's like to have a "true," or essential, female experience; similarly, FTMs are cast off because they have decided to trade in their oppressed female bodies and join the repressive boys' club; thus, they are traitors to femininity (Halberstam 12). If the gender lines are blurred and the visually male body has a vagina and the female body a penis, pornography opponents cannot rely on their feminist arguments precisely because these bodies escape the definitions they are using. Perhaps it is easier to argue against pornography when using

heteronormative gender pairings, but if the argument that pornography propagates violence is to be upheld, then Dines et al. need to redefine their targets.

For purposes of context, it is important to note here that, according to Julie Bindel, Dines is known as “the world’s leading anti-pornography campaigner” whose main argument is that because most men are unable to separate fantasy from reality, they will most likely be influenced to act out what they have seen in porn films on unwilling females (“The Truth About the Porn Industry”). The other side of the porn debate is that women are empowered through pornography. By bringing his “gender ambiguous” body to the forefront of the pornography debate, Buck further complicates the seemingly dimorphic distinctions of what is and is not oppressive to women

In “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies,” Judith Halberstam offers an alternative position; she asserts that “[t]he gender-ambiguous individual today represents a very different set of assumptions about gender than the gender-inverted subject of the early twentieth century; and as a model of gender inversion recedes into anachronism, the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility” (18). Halberstam’s postulation that the gender ambiguous (or transgender) body is a representation of the futuristic corporeal model is especially intriguing when considering an individual such as Buck Angel. Not only does Buck self-identify (and self-promote) as “The Man with a Pussy,” but he is a pioneer in the field of female-to-male pornography, which in itself is in the chrysalis stage. Halberstam’s view offers us a new way of viewing the very sensitive and polarizing field of pornography in feminism and queer theory. If the transgender body is, as according to Halberstam, the future, then what better way to showcase all of its

varieties than through pornography? People will have access to all of the hidden parts that are normally covered by clothing and will be able to learn about different body types and what pleases them.

Baudrillard, Pornography, and the Hyperreal

In an excerpt from “The Precession of Simulacra,” Jean Baudrillard considers hyperreality to be “no longer enveloped by an imaginary, [...] no longer real at all; [rather, it is] the product of an irradiating synthesis in a hyperspace without atmosphere” (1733). This view of the hyperreal can be applied to almost everything in today’s world: from the staged reality of “reality” television, to pictures of models in magazines that have been touched up with a computer, to something as subtle as a well-manicured lawn. The world is filled with images that are more real than the real thing; symbols of an imagined reality that have become reality itself. Baudrillard’s definition of the hyperreal is especially applicable to online pornography, which itself exists in a (hyper)space without atmosphere.

The pornography industry is filled with hyperbolic representations of the human body and the act of sex: women with enormous, silicone-filled breasts and lips and men with larger-than-life penises come together on screen to have sex in various ways. And, in the queer pornography world, these physical traits can be applied to undefined bodies and genders for an even more surreal experience. Despite the fact that pornography is only the depiction of the act of sex, rather than the act itself, the viewer begins to live in this non-existent world where the reality of “sex” also becomes non-existent (“sex,” in this case, with another person because the masturbatory experience is real). The people

projected on the screen are inflated versions of real people and live in a hyperspace of constant reproductions of fantasy: a space where sex is at the forefront and nothing else matters.

Like hyperreality, hyperspace is reproduced and reduplicated; it is an endless parade of sexual acts where the participants are always willing and able. The viewer loses him/herself in this hyperreal world and, as Gail Dines postulates, is unable to distinguish reality from fantasy; sex on screen becomes the real thing, resulting in real-life sex becoming the next-best thing (*Pornography* 82). Like Baudrillard's allegory of the Empire, where "the map precedes the territory," pornography is the "representational imaginary" and precedes the act of sex itself ("Simulacra" 1733). Sex on screen becomes the model for more adventurous positions and people are able to experience different types of sex before they try on their own in real life.

The hyperspace in which pornography exists has become all-encompassing and is available to the public through most mediums: television, literature, paintings, film, and the Internet. Although pornography and depictions of sex are as old as civilization, the internet has helped to distribute video and images from one corner of the world to another in mere seconds; people are able to get their fix very quickly. Taking Baudrillard's view that society "has become so reliant on simulacra that it has lost contact with the real world on which the simulacra is based" ("Simulacra" 1732) into consideration, this virtual "reality" of sex has crossed into new territory.

In the past several years, there has been an incline in demand for animated and computer-generated pornographic films; yet another step away from reality. Hentai, a

form of animated pornography originating in Japan, has gained widespread popularity in the Western world. A simple Google search of the word now brings up over 300 million results compared to 178 million in 2011 (*isismagazine.or.uk*). People are now able to freely watch what would be considered illegal in the almost boundary-less world of pornography. Taboo subjects, such as child pornography, have found their way into these animated films and people are able to watch them almost guilt-free; since there are no “real” actors, then the acts aren’t really happening. These animated and computer-generated actors and films are yet another step away, or deeper into, the hyperspace of pornography.

Baudrillard’s view on the hyperreal is becoming more and more applicable as society continues to develop new ways in which people can interact with one another. Without physical encounters, the online world has given people instant access to others around the globe with the click of a button. The world of pornography has expanded beyond mere dirty photographs and sexy films—sex is available in multiple mediums and people have access to it from many angles. Due to its accessibility, pornography has come to represent the real sexual fantasy: people can get whatever they want, whenever they want. Real sex has been replaced by the depiction of the act played out by hyperbolic versions of real people, and Baudrillard’s hyperreal now truly thrives in a space “without atmosphere.”

Conversely, Baudrillard maintains that the real never takes place, therefore everything we see and experience is never experienced in real time and makes things “distant or absent” from even themselves. He explores this concept in *The Perfect Crime*:

The objective illusion is the physical fact that in this universe no things coexist in real time--not sexes, stars, this glass, this table, or myself and all that surrounds me. By the fact of dispersal and the relative speed of light, all things exist only on a recorded version, in an unutterable disorder of time-scales, at an inescapable distance from each other. And so they are never truly present to each other, nor are they, therefore, "real" for each other. The fact that when I perceive this star it has perhaps already disappeared--a relationship that can be extended, relatively speaking, to any physical object or living being--this is the ultimate foundation, the material definition...of illusion. (52)

The objective illusion Baudrillard discusses above can be mirrored with the uncanny valley hypothesis. In Kate Bornstein's example of *The Crying Game*, the lead character Fergus is sexually attracted to Dil (the woman) and when he sees her penis, his body literally goes into convulsions (*Transgender* 37); the exposure to something both so erotic and unexpected causes a deep physical reaction within him and presents itself as a "gap" in the continuity of his perception in that he is physically shaken from his senses. The visceral reaction to Dil's transgender body causes Fergus to step outside of what he considers to be "real," as he enters an unknown space that is distant and absent from his understanding of female and male, and, thus, becomes an illusion and break from "real time." Fergus no longer knows what is real or not real because the person he thought he knew is now someone completely different: an objective illusion.

Communication and the (Fe)male Body as Text: *Écriture Feminine* and Invaginated Space

In order to move past such visceral, abject reactions to the transgender body, the concepts of *écriture féminine* and invaginated space can be applied. In her essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous states that a “woman’s body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor [...] will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language” (2049). The other ways of speaking to which Cixous refers can be approached from several different angles, including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “invaginated space” from within which she writes. Both Cixous and Spivak’s concepts suggest a way for women try to overcome the masculine shape of communication by trying to “write” with their bodies, but both of these concepts can also be applied the transgender body, specifically in pornography.

Communication can loosely be defined as the transfer of an intended message, which can be divided into two broad stages: transmission and reception, a process of transferring information from one entity to another. This rudimentary definition of communication applies to the typical linear progression of male dominated discourse, a discourse which Spivak, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” claims is a “narrative of reality [...] established as the normative one” (2198). In this normative, and linear, model of communication, the “transmission” (message) should be clear and allow for a direct interpretation by the receiver. As stated, the actual process of transference of information entails an exchange from one entity to another. Thus, it can be inferred that communication itself implies penetration: the source of information must “give it” to the receiver. Communication is a method which requires self-control, determination, and

emotional discipline. If the pointed and linear shape of this transference of information is taken into consideration, the “embodiment” of communication appears to be very much masculine in shape.

In an attempt to present a way to evade the phallic realm of communication, Helene Cixous, introduces the concept of *écriture féminine* in her essay, “The Laugh of the Medusa.” Cixous posits that a “feminine” writing (*écriture féminine*), which “places experience before language and privileges non-linear, cyclical writing” (8) must be used in order to evade “the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system” (8). Because the embodiment of communication is not a gender-neutral form, Cixous posits that it “functions as an instrument of patriarchal expression” (9) and proposes a way to escape this patriarchal domination by implementing a strictly “feminine” discourse. Such a discourse, according to Cixous, “can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours” (9). Such an allusion to this type of discourse seems to imply a feminine form--if the language “keep[s] going,” this means that it is without end, or cyclical, which is reminiscent of the typical female shape: round and full of contours.

Inspired by this *écriture féminine*, Spivak briefly mentions that her own writing takes place within an “invaginated” space. Although she seemingly glazes over this detail, the message is there for those who want to see it—she clues the audience in that her own writing is veiled within a very private, and essentially feminine, space. This invaginated space from within which she writes is described as a “method which folds together various arguments rather than laying them out in a linear progression” (2203). Such a “folding” method is reminiscent of the very folds and contours of the vagina itself and brings to mind the secretive, dark, and very personal place of a woman’s body. This

invaginated writing also implies that it comes from a place of gestation where arguments grow and take shape over time and are, in a sense, birthed rather than being blatantly stated as they would be in the more masculine linear progression of communication. Thus, *écriture féminine* and invaginated “writing” are alternatives to both the male-dominated discourse and phallic shape of communication itself and can be directly applies to transgender pornography in that it, too, is an alternative to the male-dominated, penetrative, and heterosexual genre that makes up most of the films in the industry.

In her essay, “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity,” Susan Bordo posits that “[f]emininity is ideology inscribed on the body” and that the “body is not only a text of culture, but a direct locus of social control” (2362). Being at the center of social control is what Michel Foucault refers to as the “docile body”: one that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved (*Discipline* 42). With the transgender body, however, the gaze is distorted, and thus, subverted, due to a lack of clear categorizations of gender and gender roles. Much like *écriture féminine* and its twisty, windy language, the transgender body is also able to retain secrets and “speak” in a coded language that the traditional male gaze cannot decipher. These blurred gender lines are confusing to some, but they may bring up previously unknown sexual feelings in the viewer and, ultimately, trigger a new way of enjoying sexuality. By subverting the gaze in this way, the transgender body evades and confuses the Panoptic gaze. To further this claim, Karen Sichler states that “queer bodies hover outside the power structure of society” due to their perceived lack of “realness” or “originality” within the heteronormative social structure (“Post Queerness” 46), and to over-perform gender would move them further from reality and thus expand the pleasure of the pornographic experience for the viewer.

“Chick with a Dick” Screws the “Man with a Pussy”: Activism through Porn

Taking into account Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the gap (*Rabelais* 303), the transgender body can once again be thought of as the breach, or gap, between what is clear and what is coded, especially when it comes to pornography. By using their bodies and orifices in a very public way, transgender porn actors become the very locus of the change in language and perspective and create new spaces for people to learn about differences in gender and sexuality. Genitals that don’t traditionally belong with a body are caressed and penetrated and stir up feelings of both lust and confusion in the viewer, subverting socially-constructed ideas about what sexuality is. From a Bakhtinian perspective, Buck’s body can truly be viewed as “grotesque” since he is precisely “a figure symbolic of unruly biological and social exchange” (*Rabelais* 46). It remains to be seen, however, whether the usually-progressive adult entertainment industry will come up with a new category for transgender porn (perhaps “intergender”?) that will truly fit the transgender male body.

One film that exemplifies both a true example of the grotesque body, as discussed in the previous paragraph, as well as invaginated space is *Allanah Starr’s Big Boob Adventures*. *Big Boob Adventures* is a pornographic film starring MTF transgender actress Allanah Starr and Buck Angel. In it, the two actors take part in the first MTF/FTM sex scene ever filmed in in pornography (*BuckAngel.com*). Although the two had both had sex with men and women, Allanah had never had sex with a FTM transgender person. In their scene, Allanah proclaims that she’s a “chick with a dick” by pulling her genitals out from beneath a short skirt and proceeding to stimulate Buck’s vagina with her fingers and then penetrating him (*Big Boob Adventures*). Allanah and

Buck create an invaginated space by using their bodies as text: a female reveals her penis and uses it to penetrate a male vagina. Although the intercourse itself is physically linear – penis into vagina – the bodies that take part in this specific act are what make the space an invaginated one. Allannah and Buck’s gender-swapped bodies are true examples of subverting the male gaze and providing a space for the viewer to explore his or her own sexuality in a way that is different from the norm.

Like *écriture féminine*, scenes such as the one between Allannah and Buck create a new space for non-mainstream sexuality to exist and disrupt “the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system” (Cixous 8). By using their bodies, and by showing obvious pleasure during their interaction, Allannah and Buck are able to show the viewer that both sexuality and gender are fluid, which is the very goal of *écriture féminine*. This fluidity transitions into a new space for sex and subversion of the norm, thus creating a hyperreal atmosphere for their viewers. The viewer has been forced to let go of expectation as genders have been subverted, and thus he (or she) is thrust into a new realm of understanding of what “real” sex is and “real” bodies are.

Redefining Gender: The New Queer

In redefining what “real” means in terms of gender and sexuality, Buck has opened the doors for many other gender-variant people. Buck’s activism has blossomed from pornography into the role of an educator and motivational speaker on sexuality and gender expression. In “Pornographic Activism: The Rebranding of Buck Angel,” writer Logan Lynn inquires as to how exactly pornography is activism and how Buck got into that particular trade, Buck states

My activism work didn't come until about three or four years into it. Then I started to see how I was changing people's attitudes toward gender and sexuality. I sort of stepped back and realized "Gosh, I'm doing something that's bigger than porn." I used to say "This isn't a political statement. I'm just making porn." But it evolved into activism. I never thought my porn was powerful in the beginning. Ten years ago I came to my wife and said "You know, Elayne, I have this idea to create this porn called 'The Man With A Pussy' and she was like 'Oh my God, Buck. You have to do it. You're gonna change the world.'" (1)

Buck's porn career ended up becoming a vehicle for his eventual activism and moving the transgender body into higher visibility. By putting his body on display in such a vulnerable way, Buck is able to show people the various ways in which sexuality and gender can mix, and how it can be pleasurable for the viewer on a much deeper level. By exposing himself and showing that the transgender body is just as sexual, and sexy, as the "normal" cisgender body, Buck has spoken from within his own space and indirectly presented the true message he is wanted to convey. The emergence of Buck, and his subsequent success, has potentially paved the way for the production of not only more and more porn starring transgender actors.

Pornographic films starring Jiz Lee, Syd Blakovich (See Figure 4), and others who refuse to be categorized as any gender (including transgender), are gaining in popularity and creating more choices for people who aren't necessarily into mainstream pornography, including transgender films in which there are still traditional male and female actors, despite their genitalia. Jiz Lee, a born female, has made a splash in the world of queer porn and has used this new-found exposure to educate people on the

fluidity of gender. Jiz, whose “[p]referred pronouns include ‘They/Them’ (because they is gender-fuck and grammar-fuck, too!) or no pronoun at all”, considers “them”-self to be “queer genderqueer gender-variant trans fag androgynous erotic model pornstar dykestar sex worker artist activist instigator sweetheart lover polyamorous non-monogamous hippie punk leftist past-vegan sex positive nympho slut dyke darling juicy geek” (*jizlee.com*).



Fig. 4. Jiz and Syd. Source: <http://www.jizlee.com>

Jiz is far from alone in the movement toward a more fluid notion of gender, as well as the world of queer pornography. Websites such as *NoFauxxx.com* whose array of models/actors includes: “straight, lesbian, gay, queer, and bisexual couples and groups, girls, boys, transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, or gender-bending models, and disabled and non-disabled folks” (*NoFauxxx.com*) and *NennaPresents.com*, which is geared towards “queer women of color,” are exposing people to vast amounts of erotic

material and creating a high visibility for the “queer” body; a faction of the pornographic industry that has not yet been fully accepted into the mainstream. Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal becomes even more applicable in that not only has gender been overturned, but viewers are now getting sexually stimulated by watching gender ambiguous individuals explore the outer edges of sexuality.

Although mainstream culture seems to be moving toward a better acceptance of gender fluidity, it is still a fact that "we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves" (Butler, *Trouble* 69). At this moment in history, the inescapability of predisposed notions of gender and sexuality and the discourse(s) surrounding them are very much a debilitating factor in a movement towards a full acceptability of the transgender/genderqueer body by our still heteronormatively-dictated society, but perhaps a person such as Buck Angel is a promising sign of things to come.

CONCLUSION.

THE HIGH STAKES OF VISIBILITY

This project began with a simple fascination: Buck Angel, FTM porn star. I knew that I somehow had to incorporate Buck into my thesis without even knowing at the time what the project would be about. By the time I started actually doing the research I saw that, although a lot had been written about the transgender body in relation to visibility, no one had yet done a full reading of the implications of how this visibility is attained and what that means for the FTM body in today's society. Additionally, I could not find any clear evidence of how invisibility may be used as a tool by which to acquire more visibility. By using various theoretical texts in combination with real-life cases, pornographic and documentary films, I was able to answer some of the main questions I had going into this project regarding the implications of visibility and invisibility on the transgender body.

As discussed in earlier chapters, various medical professionals have attempted to “impose order on the inherently disorderly universe of gender and sexual behavior” (Irvine 33). Of course, it is not the medical professionals autonomously assigning this order; rather, it is our nature as human beings to make order from chaos. By allowing for only two genders, people can ideally be assigned into the proper category and follow a natural, heteronormative existence. But we know this is not how it works,

and stepping outside of these assigned boundaries sometimes evokes misunderstanding in people and causes them to react violently to that which is different.

There have been many changes in the trans world since I began this project, that I feel some of the concepts I deal with are going to be somewhat irrelevant. For example, in 2013, Germany became the first European country to allow for an “indeterminate” gender on the birth certificate (*bbc.uk*). This shift, although seemingly minor in the big picture, is a step towards acceptance and understanding of those who do not fit within our socially-imposed binary of sex and gender. However, I do know that it is impossible to be up-to-date on a topic that is in a constant state of change, much like the people I write about, and that transgender people still have a long way to go on the road to visibility and acceptance.

The reality of invisibility and visibility for transgender people is a vital issue. As discussed in previous chapters, by ignoring what biology has handed out in the form of physical attributes, many transgender males allow themselves to forgo medical checkups and they run the risk of losing their lives to female gynecological problems that are, unfortunately, still a reality for transformed men. Also, by living in darkness and never properly dealing with emotions and addiction issues that come with the traumatic experience of changing a body’s sex, many transgender people allow themselves to fall into depression and many of them are not able to get out. There is still a lot of work that must be done in order for transgender people to have access to all of the resources they need to come out and be secure with themselves, and for the rest of society to be accepting of all those who do not fit within the ascribed heteronormative boundaries. I

touch on some of these aspects in my thesis, but the reality of the situation is so immense that I am, unfortunately, unable to go into as much detail as I would have liked.

The theories I employ to make my case are helpful in the sense that they provide me with a great foundation from which I can read and analyze the transgender body as text, but applications to reality are much harder to read through this lens. The theories I chose to use provided me with great background, but I had to do a lot of research online and use various blogs, newspapers, and social media for information. Such is the reality of constant change in that the topic I chose to write on hasn't been explored in as much detail until recently, so all of the books I had to work from were somewhat outdated.

Although some things have changed and gotten better regarding the flexibility and understanding of gender since I started this thesis, there is still, unfortunately, a lot left to be desired. Buck Angel's visibility, although very helpful in educating transgender people about their health, as well as providing cisgender people with a new way to enjoy pornography and learn about their own bodies, brings with it some unfortunate consequences. In a January 2014 interview with online magazine *Hook*, Buck discusses the death threats he gets and "people telling [him] shit all the time that they're going to kill [him] if they see [him]" (*hook-online*). He also talks about one of the "most hateful death threat emails" he's ever received that people need to be held accountable for how they treat others. This is the said death threat, reposted on Buck's personal *tumblr*:

YOU'VE BEEN WARNED:

You are a disgusting waste of air. You should have been an abortion. If you can't appreciate with what God gave you, then you don't deserve a

life. You say you never felt like a girl, but yet you have pictures of yourself fucking men and eating out their assholes. You are scum. I would rather die a thousand deaths than come within 10 feet of your disgusting pathetic existence.

I hope you die of aids you freak of society. I'd like to shoot you in the face myself.

There are starving people in third world countries who would do ANYTHING to be born in America, boy or girl. And you're so selfish and arrogant and disgusting, that you have to change your sex, trying to play god.

I swear if I ever cross paths with you, I will have a gun, and it's going in your face.

GET HELP YOU FUCKING FREAK!! -Ashley Prattly-FACEBOOK NAME?? (*buckangel.tumblr.com*)

There are many more instances of the dangers of visibility for transgender people, and one of the best-known ones ended with the gruesome murder of young Nebraskan transgender man, Brandon Teena (*All She Wanted*). Although visibility has many positive aspects for transgender people, I don't think it'll come without consequences until the whole of society shifts its view towards people who are not within our narrowly-construed idea of what gender should look like.

Because the transgender body is more fluid and does not fall within any precise gender category, at least according to current societal standards, the transgender person is responsible for projecting whatever gender they feel to be most accurate. As

discussed throughout the thesis, many transgender males choose not to have genital reconstructive surgery and still live their lives as men. However, projecting a male gender still falls within the gender binary and continues to solidify that we all have to either be male or female. Although this may be true from a societal perspective, transgender people do not truly fit within any one category, so bringing higher visibility to transmen can be somewhat complicated.

Alternately, people like Jiz Lee and Syd Blakovich are working to erase gender by putting the genderqueer body into higher visibility. By refusing to identify as either male or female, genderqueer people are creating a new space for a third gender to exist. This, too, is complicated since people are still in a place where it is difficult, at best, to acknowledge and reconcile that which does not fit within what they know. If more countries take after the example of countries like Germany, then, one day, society may become more tolerant and allow people to choose to which gender they belong.

In writing this thesis, I started out knowing very little about the transgender body and even less about the implications that both visibility and invisibility have on it. Although I have spent a long time researching and writing, I feel that I will never truly know the answers to the questions I bring up. Living in a society that is ever-changing with people who are ever-changing, it is better to never close the book any of these topics. Although some small changes have occurred in the past couple of years, we are still very far from being a society that accepts that which we do not know and I have nothing but the utmost respect for people like Buck Angel who are working tirelessly to provide visibility and acceptance for those who do not fit into the gender binary.

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