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Marcel Barriault

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Bucking heteronormativity: Buck Angel as porn performer, producer and pedagogue

Marcel Barriault

Contact Centre, Library and Archives Canada, Canada

ABSTRACT

This article presents the work of Buck Angel, the self-styled ‘man with a pussy’, a female-to-male porn performer who has also carved a unique career path for himself as porn director, producer, and sex educator. The article focuses on Angel’s participation in the Titan Media production *Cirque Noir* (2005), since this work marked the first on-screen performance of a trans man in a porn film marketed specifically to a gay male audience. The text will make explicit how Buck’s performance in this film makes use of pedagogical strategies to educate the audience on their assumptions regarding gender identity, gender performance, gender binarism, and sexual orientation. The article measures the educational impact of Buck’s work on his audience by examining critically the comments members of his viewing public have left on the various online porn sites that welcome viewer feedback, as well as in the discursive space Angel has opened up for them by using several social media tools. It demonstrates how Angel’s work in porn has naturally presented new opportunities for him as advocate, social activist, and lecturer on the campus circuit. Finally, the article addresses some of the controversy Angel’s work has generated, particularly within the trans community.

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It’s not what’s between your legs that defines you! (Buck Angel¹)

The performer sits in a chair. He has striking blue eyes, a bald head and a ginger handlebar moustache. He is wearing camouflage pants and a white sleeveless t-shirt that exposes well-defined pectoral muscles and muscular arms adorned with elaborate tribal tattoos. He is self-assured but not cocky, sitting back in his chair, leisurely puffing on a cigar. He looks directly at the camera, and, despite his rough appearance, answers the off-screen interviewer’s questions in an affable manner. He introduces himself as Buck Angel, ‘the man with a pussy’.² When the interviewer asks to see his genitalia, Angel willingly stands, undoes his pants, and exposes his shaved vagina and very prominent clitoris. The obviously confused interviewer behind the camera marvels at the ‘big monster pussy’, and Angel explains that testosterone treatments have made his clitoris grow. This is a scene from one of Buck Angel’s very earliest commercially available porn films, *Buck’s Beaver* (Angel 2004), which he also happened to direct.

As the director of this landmark film in which he positioned himself as one of the world's first female-to-male (FTM) porn performers, Buck Angel had the creative freedom to decide how he and his body would be introduced to his audience. First and foremost, he created a space where his own voice could be heard. Although the film consists of four separate sex scenes involving four other performers – two scenes featuring Angel having sex with a man, and two scenes of him having sex with a woman – each scene is prefaced by Angel himself speaking candidly about his personal life journey, his gender identity and expression, and his sexual orientation. By keeping the interviewer off-screen and by addressing the camera directly, Buck Angel establishes a growing intimacy with his viewers. He successfully creates the illusion that he is engaging directly with them, answering their own questions about the unique body he has readily put on display for their enjoyment. It is in this context that Angel emphatically declares: 'I'm 100% male. I consider myself a man [...] except for the fact that I have a pussy, which I enjoy getting fucked'.³

This is an extraordinary statement for Angel to make. Although the primary intent can be interpreted variously as an attempt to titillate his intended audience, or to educate them about the sexuality of trans bodies, or even to shock them, Angel's statement is remarkable in two much more important ways. First, it articulates clearly the end result of a formative process of self-enfranchisement and of radical self-empowerment. Angel's statement bears witness to the fact that he has been able to transcend his gender dysphoria and has managed to transform his vagina from a locus of shame and disgust into a locus of pleasure and pride.⁴ However, Angel's statement is also extraordinary because it is couched in language that runs counter to acceptable semantics in the trans community. Many trans men refer to their genitalia as their 'dicks' or 'dicklets', or their 'holes' or 'manginas' (see, for example, Zimman 2014). By employing decidedly female referents that hearken back to his unchosen sex, like 'pussy' or 'cunt', Angel (perhaps unwittingly) positions himself politically outside the prescribed discourse, and in this way alienates himself from some members of the broader trans community. In this light, Angel's comment about his sexuality exemplifies the tension he has created, and continues to create, between those who see him chiefly as a ground-breaking and award-winning porn visionary, and those who see him as an exploiter of his body, purely for profit and personal advancement. In essence, this is what makes Buck Angel such a fascinatingly complex subject of critical inquiry into the dynamics of porn as labour. Angel commodifies his genitalia for profit, but at the same time he puts it to work as a pedagogical tool, instructing his audience on ways of seeing, expressing, and valuing bodies beyond gender binaries. Nonetheless, his reliance on sensationalism as a marketing tool, while serving him well for his career in porn, has had a deleterious effect on his credibility as an educator. His work is often controversial and frustrating to many in the trans community, signalling the tensions always present when porn seeks to be both commercially successful and ethically instructive.

This article considers Angel's work as an avant-garde porn performer and producer who has had the acumen to set up his own business model, and the foresight as a self-promoter to use his work in porn as a launching point for a career in sex education and motivational speaking. It focuses to a large extent on Angel's early breakthrough role in the Titan Media production *Cirque Noir* (Mills 2005), primarily because it marked the first on-screen appearance of a trans man in a commercial porn film aimed specifically at a gay audience. First,

I will provide a close reading of the film; then, I will offer a discourse analysis of content that his porn audience has left in the comments sections of various online porn sites and on the social media sites Buck Angel himself has created. These sites have been selected mainly because they are being monitored by Buck Angel himself, and he too has been contributing to the discussion on the sexuality of trans men in the online spaces he has opened up for his audience. This methodology will also afford a better understanding of how porn consumers, members of the trans community, and the general public itself have responded to Buck Angel's broader efforts to educate the public about trans issues by putting his own body to work.

The year after the release of *Buck's Beaver* (Angel 2004), one of the most important players in the gay porn industry, Titan Media, invited Buck Angel to appear in their latest film project, *Cirque Noir* (Mills 2005). For many gay men, Titan Media productions are synonymous with graphic depictions of safer sex (all of their models must wear condoms) and with a decided focus on the 'money shot'. In several Titan Media films, the moment a performer cums is usually captured by more than one camera, and from various vantage points. In editing, all three recorded angles of the cum shot are usually shown in succession, sometimes in slow-motion.⁵ Buck Angel's invitation to participate in a film by a company so consistently phallogentric problematizes constructed assumptions around gender identity, gender performance, gender binarism, sexual orientation, and gender and sexual politics. Chiefly for these reasons, a more detailed discussion of Angel's role in *Cirque Noir* is warranted here.

The film opens with a couple of men (played by Joey Russo and Noel DeLeon) who enter a circus tent and sit in the bleachers. They are eating popcorn and waiting for the show to begin. Two performers appear in the ring. They are known only as Ouchy the Clown (sometimes brandishing a whip, other times clutching a rubber chicken) and Rimjob the Klowen (with a forked tongue). Ouchy declares that for this scene they require a participant from the audience who has a high threshold for pain. He looks directly at the camera, presumably at the viewer, and suggests 'Maybe you'. This is the same technique that Buck Angel had successfully employed the year before in *Buck's Beaver* to invite his viewers in. Russo enters the ring, his face is then made up in clown paint, and he participates in a threesome with the clowns. The scene ends with the Titan Media trademark, notably the requisite 'money shots' from various angles.

By now, the stage has quite literally been set. The trope of the circus has been established to reinforce the idea that the viewer is about to engage in a side show of sexual freaks appearing in a depraved circus environment. The film continues with three acrobats (played by Cobalt, Stretch, and Spencer Quest) using podiums and trapezes. The third scene involves a fire-baton twirler (played by Ivan Grey) and two carnival roustabouts (Richie Rennt and Logan Steele). Finally, Buck Angel makes his appearance in the coveted final sequence of the film. He has been cast as the circus strongman, weightlifting what is most visibly a prop barbell. He is soon joined by stagehands (played by Tober Brandt and Logan Steele). All three of these performers are heavily tattooed and pierced. One of Buck Angel's own large tattoos on his upper back, between his shoulders, reads 'Pervert', and he is sporting a nipple ring. When one of the stagehands (Tober Brandt) appears to upstage Angel, he is wrestled into submission by the other two performers in this scene. While Logan Steele holds Tober Brandt's arms behind his back, Buck Angel spits in his co-star's face and mouth and punches his pecs. It is clear from the

outset that despite the violent nature of these acts, Brandt signals his consent to the rough sexual activity occurring on screen: he enthusiastically initiates oral contact with Steele's cock and armpit, and verbalizes his assent throughout the scene, notably when having his pecs punched ('Yeah, yeah!') and his ass eaten out ('Ah, fuck, deeper!'). When it is his turn to get sucked, he becomes dominantly aggressive, slapping Steele's shaved head and grunting 'Deeper! Fuck, swallow it! Come on!' Watching this scene is not unlike witnessing an intricate choreography, in which the performers read each other's cues in order to act or to react. While Logan Steele fucks Tober Brandt, Buck Angel undoes his fly and pulls out a realistic-looking dildo, which is obviously meant to be his own penis. He strokes it for the benefit of the other two performers as they have sex, and he even simulates an ejaculation. After Steele has pulled out, it is Angel's turn to fuck Brandt. Angel urges him to squeeze his ass muscles as he drives the ersatz penis into his ass. When he attempts to pull out, the penis remains firmly ensconced in Brandt's ass, and Angel exposes his own bald vagina for the first time. The other performers register surprise and consternation for a moment ('It's a pussy!'), undoubtedly meant to echo the viewers' reaction. But almost immediately they continue their sex play by exploring the new orifice presented to them. Angel has penetrative vaginal sex and is vocally dominant in his enjoyment of this situation ('Oh yeah, fuck that cunt!'). After Brandt and Steele cum, in the unexpurgated director's cut of this release, all three performers engage in water sports (sexual play involving urine), and then Angel penetrates Brandt and Steele's anuses simultaneously with his fists.

Clearly, Titan Media intended to make use of Buck Angel in *Cirque Noir* to increase the shock value of their film, and their commercial product was marketed in this way: 'And gasp when you see Buck Angel, The Man with a Pussy, double fist Logan Steele and Tober Brandt! *Cirque Noir* is one sexy, scary, sensationally twisted fuck of a movie. Be afraid, be very, very afraid'.⁶ For many viewers, this is troubling. Is the casting of Angel another instance of queer misogyny, with the pussy an object of fear and revulsion? Has Angel allowed himself to be cast as a sexual freak, invoking trans-misogyny as well? Viewers might even point to the way Logan Steele and Tober Brandt aggressively manhandle Angel into rough vaginal penetration as evidence of his submitting to heteronormative power relations. Although a literal reading of the text might suggest that Angel submits to rough, punitive vaginal penetration for having misled his sex partners into believing he had a penis, a closer examination of the film reveals something different. Throughout this scene, Angel gives Brandt and Steele his consent to participate in the rough sex play, with unequivocally inviting glances and gestures, and a demonstrated eagerness to take the lead in servicing his co-stars. He performs his role as a dominant participant in this action, espousing the classic gay porn archetype of the hungry power bottom, who actively challenges his top partners to satisfy his own needs, goading them on with aggressive, sexual talk ('Oh, fucking stab that fucking pussy!'). Reductively narrow readings of this crucial moment in the film appear to be based on the stereotypical sexual binary (active/passive, dominant/submissive, and top/bottom) which is an inherent part of the heteronormative sexual model, and which is also often replicated in the homonormative model as well (for a detailed discussion of this thesis, see Kendall 2004). This model holds that the person being penetrated is expected to be passive and to submit to an active, dominant sexual partner. What is clear in the film is that the performers playfully and deliberately blur these lines. With tongue firmly planted in cheek (and in the

occasional ass cheeks), they take turns slipping in and out of these dualistic roles. The result is what could be termed a sexual democratization, where participants enjoy interpenetrability or flip fucking. Somewhat paradoxically in the middle of this rough sex play, the fluidity of movement in the way the performers move seamlessly from one sexual role into the other is done in ways that explicitly convey mutual respect for each other's limits, concern for each other's pleasure, and, of course, consent, as demonstrated previously.

By subverting and even parodying traditionally normative sexual roles, this specific scene of *Cirque Noir*, in which the performers play even with the notion of power play, can effectively be seen as the praxis of Foucault's (1976) discourse on sex and power. In all of the power structures that are set up, attacked, subverted, destroyed, and reconfigured in this segment of the film, all three performers at any given moment in their sex play embody both power and resistance, echoing Foucault's assertion that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'. The performers themselves are part of the 'multiplicity of points of resistance' that 'are present everywhere in the power network', proving that 'there is consequently *no single locus of grand Refusal*' (1976, 125–126; original emphasis).⁷

It is important to remember at this point that Angel willingly appeared as a sexual freak in *Cirque Noir*. On several occasions, he has expressed delight at being considered and asked by Titan Media to be the first trans man to appear in a pornographic film aimed squarely at a gay male audience.⁸ The role, however complex, was a major stepping stone in his career, reinforcing his brand by giving him much wider exposure. The contrived and duplicitous way in which his body is initially presented on-screen in *Cirque Noir* is clearly intended to surprise his unsuspecting gay audience, yet by positioning him as the star performer – both of the film and of the circus – Titan Media grants him a privileged and even exalted status. In his brilliant essay on disability porn, Tim Dean speaks more broadly of 'anatomical forms that significantly diverge from normative embodiment. [...] Since pornography thrives on corporeal anomaly, it should not surprise us to discover that twenty-first-century porn scenes perpetuate viewing conventions established by nineteenth-century freak shows' (2014, 421). These freaks, that is to say in Dean's terms the 'extraordinarily embodied', when in juxtaposition, and in sexual contact, with the more normatively bodied, create 'the frisson of transgressing a boundary'. Consequently, Dean, quoting from Leslie Fielder, concludes that it is not only the spectacularization of the divergent body that is considered freaky, but also the feelings of desire this display may arouse amongst its viewers.⁹ Hence, by choosing to be cast as a sexual freak in this film, Buck Angel has the power to force his intended audience to engage directly with their feelings of freakishness, and to face head-on their own assumptions involving gender and sexual orientation. This starring role and the audience's reaction to it contributed significantly to Angel's growing realization that his body could be used for educational purposes in addition to being used as a tool for income.

With *Cirque Noir*, the 'frisson of transgressing a boundary' involves the clear intent to boldly go where no other porn film had gone before, by presenting a demonstrably masculine body endowed with a vagina – gay porn's final frontier. Vaginas have very seldom appeared in gay porn. The decision to redirect the viewer to a vagina, offered on screen as a site of pleasure and power, not revulsion and disgust, represents a fundamental shift in gay porn. It subversively presents the vagina as a viable site of pleasure for gay men. Even though Logan Reed and Tober Brandt engage in both cunnilingus and vaginal

penetration with Buck Angel, the sex play in this, their first scene together, is framed in the conventional Titan Media style, with a focus on the gay men's respective cum shots. Troublingly, little attention seems to be paid to the problem of depicting a trans man's orgasm on screen, and, as Edelman has noted (2015, 154), the film fails to make clear whether Angel himself has achieved climax. However, in the director's cut of the film, the three performers' later scenes together mark a gradual focal shift away from penises and orgasms. The next scene, for instance, shows all three performers engaging in sexual play with urine. The three are standing at different elevations, in an intricate positioning that is somehow evocative of a champagne-glass tower, with Angel in the middle trickle-down spot. Interestingly, the focus of this scene is no longer on the act of cumming, but on the act of pissing, which the film emphatically reminds its viewers is universal: everyone pisses.

The final scenes of *Cirque Noir* go even further in subverting phallic law, with Buck shifting the pleasure centre to the anus, in a graphic double-fisting scene that effectively redirects completely away from genital sex. While fisting is not a recent feature in gay porn, its appearance at this very moment in the film, situated as it is after the water sports sequence, serves to further accentuate this gradual shift away from the penis, on which much of the film had been previously centred. The camera lens is instead focused on the anus, one of the parts of the body that Wadiwel, quoting Brian Massumi, describes as not being 'subject to a traditional overcoding by gender' (Wadiwel 2009, 500). As philosopher Paul B. Preciado adds (2011, 19 and 27), the act of anal fisting moves beyond recognizing bodies as being gendered: because everyone has an anus, any person, regardless of sexual attributes, could potentially be fisted. In the very act of fisting, many binary opposites (male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, transgender/cis-gender) become subverted, if not irrelevant. Politically speaking, Preciado concludes that any counter-sexual act, like fisting, inverts the semantic axis of the hetero-centred system¹⁰ (which, one must reiterate, is all too often replicated in gay porn). Critics who contend that Titan Media only intended the fisting scene as just one more freakish sex act effectively deny Angel any authority over his performance. I contend that Angel's participation in this film, and his very deliberate addresses of dominance and consent in every scene, are actually shouting a loud 'fuck you' to normative sexual models and to the regulation of desire. It is an early instance of Angel's desire to mix commercial success with pedagogical intent – but one which is often read as subverting pedagogical responsibility with crass profiteering. Such a reading, I argue, erases the centrality of labour from Angel's craft, and his use of his body as both a marketing and an educational tool.

It is safe to assume that most viewers of *Cirque Noir* in general, and of Buck Angel's body in particular, are not as interested in the issues I raise here as they are in achieving sexual gratification. Nevertheless, it seems that Angel's audience cannot help but respond to his body in such a way that leads to a potential self-examination precisely because of the very deliberate and even confrontational way he presents it. The moment Buck Angel's penis falls off for the 'big reveal' becomes a critically important moment in the film, signalling on a symbolic level that the penis is about to be theoretically deconstructed. From that point onwards, the viewer is directly challenged to ponder how such a (hyper)masculine, dominant man can be as convincingly male as his two cisgendered counterparts and yet not possess a penis. The seeming paradox is heightened by the fact that Angel's body is inscribed with all of the semiotic coding required to mark its gender (male), its race

(Caucasian), and its class (blue collar): facial hair, muscles, tribal tattoos, piercings, and army boots. More importantly, the manner in which Angel performs his gender is as convincing as the ways his cisgendered sex partners perform theirs. So the unsuspecting viewer, who was most likely just looking to get off watching this movie, is suddenly confronted with the arbitrariness of the gender binary and the unexpected pleasure of its disruption.

One effective way of understanding how Angel's audience responds directly to his body is to examine the content his viewers have voluntarily left on the various online porn sites that welcome viewer feedback, and on the social media sites Angel himself has set up to enable this exchange. These comments have generally not been solicited, nor have they been filtered. Consequently, discourse analysis of a representative sampling of this material provides an insightful understanding of the viewing public's first-hand reactions to Angel's working body and to his body of work. Not surprisingly, many of Angel's first-time viewers register confusion, based on the numerous 'WTF?' comments recorded. Others completely misread Angel's body. One writes 'thats [*sic*] not a woman, all he did was chop his nuts off, and flip his cock upside down. thats [*sic*] gross',¹¹ while another laments 'I just find it sad to chop off your own cock. i [*sic*] love mine too much.'¹² Also quite predictably, a number of viewers (most of them self-identifying gay men) claim that Angel's reveal ruined the film for them: 'OMG he has a pussy! This movie was a total turn-on until that deflated me!'¹³ and 'What's with Titan and the vaginas? ENOUGH! Really, just ruined the whole thing. I stopped pleasuring myself and turned it off.'¹⁴

In many cases, the viewers' comments are couched in the confessional mode: the subjects are bringing their own innermost thoughts and affective responses to Buck Angel into discourse and placing these in the public arena for examination and for further discussion. As Foucault explains (1976, 82–84), the confessional mode leads to knowledge, in particular to knowledge about sex. How these specific subjects deal with this knowledge is worthy of attention. For some, there is an apparent ease in integrating their sexual response to Buck Angel within their own psyches. 'I'm gay and you turn me on in a very strange and curious way',¹⁵ one viewer is quoted as saying on Angel's Facebook page. 'I'm straight but I'd probably be down', writes another man.¹⁶ Other comments strike a more epiphanic tone: 'Buck Angel made me realize I'm attracted to masculinity more than I'm attracted to dick', writes one gay man.¹⁷ Another, commenting on a scene depicting Angel having sex with another trans man, exclaims 'wow, that was actually very pleasing despite the fact that technically that was 2 women [...] thank you buck [*sic*] for expanding my thoughts on sexual orientation'.¹⁸ In this way, Buck Angel functions as a catalyst for both pleasure and pedagogy. By strategically putting his body on display, he brings viewers on the journey he once made as a transitioning male, by having them ponder the fluidity of gender and sexual orientation. Ultimately, the porn Angel makes serves a very real pedagogical function, not only by providing instruction on the mechanics of how some trans men may choose to have sex, but also by leading viewers on a potentially affective and erratic/erotic journey of self-discovery. This is transgressive porn, yes, but also porn that can be conceptually introspective.

Clearly not everyone is comfortable with Angel's work, and the most vocal cling to the hegemonic gender binary and to rigidly categorized sexual identities in an overt attempt to police or to regulate what they consider to be subversive and perverse. One such viewer

pontificates: 'Men have dicks, period! Women have pussies. That's it, theres [sic] nothing to discuss.'¹⁹ Another viewer, commenting on a sex scene involving Buck Angel and Allanah Starr, a male-to-female transsexual, writes: 'This is the ultimate mind fuck. Who is it more gay to watch??? LOL.'²⁰ Despite the levity of his comment, it is evident that he is still self-policing his own response to the on-screen action. Both of these viewers try to be dismissive of Angel's presence in the porn they have just watched, one by using anger and the other ridicule. But whether they have wanted to or not, both of them have been engaged by Angel. The fact that they felt strongly enough about their own reaction to Angel's body to present their comments in writing in a public forum emphasizes once again Buck Angel's pedagogical power to open up a discussion on gender and sexuality, by putting his body on display to the public gaze.

Shortly after his appearance in *Cirque Noir*, Buck Angel took the steps required to gain greater control over his creative/pedagogical vision by founding his own production company, Buck Angel Entertainment. Under the aegis of his fledgling studio, Angel released in quick succession several porn films that punningly made reference to his own *nom de porn*, including *The Adventures of Buck Naked* (Angel 2006a), *The Buck Stops Here* (Angel 2006b), *Buck Off* (Angel 2006c), *Even More Bang For Your Buck* (Angel 2007b) and *Buckback Mountain* (Angel 2007a). His work began to earn him accolades from his colleagues in the industry: in 2007 he became the first trans man to win the Transsexual Performer of the Year award from American Video News,²¹ and the following year he was presented with the award for Boundary Breaker of the Year at the Feminist Porn Awards.²² While continuing to garner wider visibility and professional recognition among his porn peers, Angel became increasingly aware that his role in the porn industry was as much about education as it was about entertainment. He realized that he could parlay his work in porn into a bold business venture that would allow him to break new ground as an educator and motivational speaker, while continuing to produce the porn for which he came to be recognized.²³ This public work outside porn would also allow him to reach a much wider audience that could potentially include teens struggling with their own gender and sexual identities and members of the general public who might not be part of his porn audience. His production company, Buck Angel Entertainment, would prove to be an instrumental vehicle for greater public exposure. Most notably, it would enable him to produce short public service announcements on a variety of subjects aimed chiefly at the LGBTQ+ community, and more specifically at the trans community itself. Specific public service announcements have focused on such diverse subjects as HIV/AIDS prevention, family acceptance, fitness empowerment, self-expression, body expression, transgender bathroom laws, and transphobia. All of these videos are hosted primarily on his YouTube channel, with the relevant links on the Buck Angel Entertainment website.²⁴

As a strategic self-promoter, Angel has been able to harness the power of the internet to create a virtual space where the general public can engage in complicated, albeit not always safe, discussions on gender and sexuality. These discussions are informed by his work in porn, but they also extend beyond that arena into areas of sex education and the campus speaker circuit. In addition to monitoring the blogs on his websites²⁵ and the comments sections on several porn sites, Angel manages active accounts on Facebook,²⁶ Twitter,²⁷ Pinterest,²⁸ Instagram,²⁹ tumblr,³⁰ Google +,³¹ Blogger,³² and LinkedIn,³³ as well as the dedicated channel on YouTube. He has been able to use these social media

tools to showcase and to highlight excerpts from his speaking engagements at scholarly events like Sex Week at Yale University (2010), IdeaCity10 at the University of Toronto (2010), and the University of Guelph Sexuality Conference (2015). Through these means, he carries on a daily conversation with his public, thus becoming an extremely accessible public personality.

An examination of the various comment streams in these virtual arenas demonstrates the extent to which Angel remains a complex and polarizing figure, particularly among members of the trans men community. Many of them have voiced support for Angel's work and its foundational role in their identity-forming:

Buck, you're my hero. As a transman, it has taken me a long time to come to terms with my anatomy 'down south'. But I think your presence has helped in a MAJOR way for me. I'm actually becoming happy with my mangina [...] (201).³⁴

This type of conversation is mutually validating, both for Angel in seeing his work in porn as an important step in his career as a sex educator, and for trans men realizing there are venues for the pleasurable expression of their bodies. In a particularly sex-affirming response to viewer feedback, he states:

I have been so lucky in my journey to have learned to embrace and love my body, to have sex without feeling like a freak. This is why I have made the choice to work in the world of sex. Because I hope to inspire a whole new generation of free thinking around body and sexuality.³⁵

Not everyone is as positive about Angel's career and his messaging about trans men. Although his porn is widely held to be innovative and ground-breaking, some maintain that it is nonetheless narrow in scope. Some have accused him of perpetuating and celebrating a hegemonic form of masculinity on-screen, while others have pointed to the lack of cultural diversity in his work. Critiques like this have helped inform the porn that he produces, and Angel seems to have made an effort to be more inclusive and representative in his porn. In this way he continues to make important contributions to the porn industry, as performer, producer, and pedagogue. For instance, one of his most recent film projects, the critically-acclaimed *Sexing the Transman* series,³⁶ won him a second Feminist Porn award in 2012.³⁷ The series builds on the format he introduced in his early film *Buck's Beaver*, by featuring a host of FTM transsexuals who are given the opportunity to speak about themselves on film before filming sex scenes involving themselves alone or with a wide array of sexual partners (male, female, or intersex; transitioning or cisgendered; straight-identified, gay-identified, or bi-identified; and racially diverse), and even with Angel himself. The series allows for a plurality of trans voices to be heard, not just Angel's, and thus manages to present to viewers a more diverse representation of the trans man experience.

That being said, many in the trans community are conflicted when it comes to Angel's work: on the one hand, they are grateful for the increased visibility of their community; while, on the other, they remain condemnatory of the way it is being done.³⁸ They continue to take issue with Angel's acknowledged exploitation of his body as a freak and a sexual oddity, remembering, for instance, the time he stripped naked on the Jerry Springer show and rode a Sybian saddle to an on-air orgasm. As one of these trans men, Teddy Theodore, succinctly puts it:

I don't like that the most famous of any group of people are the most sensationalized. And transguys are no exception. Optimally, I'd like the public to think of us as just regular dudes, undetectable to people who don't know our 'secret'. But people like Buck Angel and the pregnant dude [Thomas Beatie] give us this kind of 'freak' label [...] But it just sucks sometimes because that extreme label gets shoved on ordinary dudes like me by people who aren't familiar with other transguys³⁹

In response to this comment, Angel attempts to defend his position with characteristic aplomb:

I do not represent the trans male community. I am not sure who or why people say that. I do not even identify as a trans man. I identify as a man. I also identify as a transexual not a trans-gender. So that said I think that there needs to be 100% more representation out there. [...] There is TONS of opportunity now with the internet. So go for it. Stop hating. That is not how you grow a community.⁴⁰

This exchange epitomizes the struggle Angel has had to face in attempting to reconcile his roles as porn performer and producer on the one hand, and as educator on the other. These roles require very different labour strategies, yet in espousing his new-found role as educator, Angel has not made any demonstrable change to his mode of self-representation. His ethos – to be oneself unapologetically and to profit unashamedly from it – is part of his brand, and it would appear that he does not want to mess with a marketing strategy that has served him so well in his porn career. His unwillingness to adapt inevitably leads to clashes with those who take issue with the more sensationalistic aspects of his work. When he declares 'I am exploiting it [his body], and that's my prerogative because it's mine and I own it' (in Hunt 2013), Angel fails to recognize the broader implications of the body politic: in the context of there being scarce representation of the naked trans body in the public eye, his own body offered to the public gaze is scrutinized more closely by members of the trans community who identify it with their own bodies being revealed to the public and their own lack of power in deciding how it will be presented.

But even more problematic are the many public statements Angel has made over the years that have been interpreted as reductionist, exclusionary, cis-sexist, and trans-misogynist. Among the many examples documented, Angel once posted a picture of a trans man's penis on one of his social media sites and stated that it was an example of butchery and an object of ridicule. He declared that trans women who did not disclose their trans status to prospective sex partners were responsible for the violence directed at them. He stated that trans men need to 'man up' and find a way to pay for their own surgery. He has been called out on these comments by members of the trans community, who have denounced the first comment as an example of bottom shaming, the second as being inspired by rape culture, and the third as evidence of classism, with no recognition that Angel himself enjoyed white privilege.⁴¹ In response to the comments he has made in the past, Angel writes on his Facebook page: 'I realize some people in our community have issues with things I have said over the years, Yes I HAVE SAID DUMB AND HURTFUL COMMENTS. I have made amends. Time to move on and help our community heal.'⁴² What complicates this stated intent to 'move on' is the fact that Angel has been known to post on his virtual news feeds private comments made by people who call him out on his actions and statements, even disclosing their identities. Ironically then,

Angel's public incitement to 'move on' has quite the opposite effect, leading to the emergence on his social media sites of polemical statements attacking those that dare critique Angel and his work. One of Angel's followers on Facebook goes so far as to declare: 'As for "calling out" it's shorthand for chucking poison at someone. Calling out achieves nothing.'⁴³ Disturbingly, the discursive space Angel has created, while also serving to enforce his brand as a catalyst for positive change, apparently serves as a platform to intimidate and denigrate those who would offer a critical perspective of him and his work. As a result, Angel's credibility as an educator is sometimes openly challenged, and his once expertly-crafted career is called into question.

In the same way he has consistently rejected rigidly dualistic categories to define his gender or sexuality, Angel has continued to eschew being pinned down professionally, and at various moments in his career has regularly transgressed these professional borders, letting roles flow freely into one another. His adoption of the roles of porn performer, producer, and educator is far from being the norm in the porn industry, and his contributions in each of these roles have been mutually dependent. Had he not instinctively recognized from the outset the pedagogical value of his work in porn, he would not have been able to bring this aspect to the forefront of his performances. Had he not owned the means of production from his very earliest film appearances, he would not have been able to frame his performances in quite the same educational way. Had he not had such shrewd business instincts, he would not have been able to give his body the marketability and brand recognition required to create new opportunities for himself as a sex educator on the campus circuit. Angel has charted a distinctly unique career trajectory that is worthy of critical examination, even though he has not always been successful in taking on each professional role flawlessly and without controversy. He remains a manifestly polarizing figure, at once lauded by some for his insistent call to be oneself no matter the circumstances, and vilified by others for failing to align his business model with trans politics. But despite the controversy, and even because of it, Angel's work as porn performer, producer, and pedagogue has opened up a discursive space to allow us to have discussions on trans bodies in pornography. This is arguably Angel's single-most important contribution to porn studies.

Notes

1. Accessed June 27, 2015. <http://buckangel.com>
2. Angel identifies as transsexual. It is important to note that I am not transsexual and do not pretend to speak with any authority on lived trans experiences. In the interest of establishing my positionality, I am a Caucasian, French-Canadian (Acadian), cisgendered man, who identifies as gay, and who was raised Catholic in a suburban, middle-class family in the 1970s.
3. 'Bucks (sic) Beaver – Scene 3.' Accessed 27 June, 2015. <http://www.tube8.com/shemale/hardcore/bucks-beaver—scene-3/20555021/>
4. For an autobiographical account of this psychological process, see Hunt (2013).
5. Several Titan Media productions, including *Cirque Noir*, add as a bonus feature a compilation review of cum shots from the film. In 2014, Titan Media even released a two-volume *TitanMen Cumshots* collection, showcasing more than 240 'money shots' from its 19-year film production. Mills, Cam and Creg (2014) and Mills and Cam (2014).
6. *Cirque Noir*, 'Movie Description.' TitanMen, Accessed November 3, 2015. <http://www.titanmen.com/dvds.php?id=138&single=1>

7. Consider also the complex interplay of key actors interacting with power and with each other in this specific Gidean *mise en abyme*: how porn performers, their viewers, the author of this text, and the readers of this text are themselves likewise engaging in/with power in their (co-) creation of knowledge.
8. See for instance 'Buck Angel – TitanMen – Cirque Noir Interview.' Accessed November 12, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKkeiOZQLKw>
9. It is imperative to note that Dean does not equate transsexuality with a disability but speaks more broadly of the 'extraordinarily embodied' who are presented in porn as freaks. Dean specifically references Buck Angel's appearance in *Cirque Noir* to demonstrate how 'gay feature length films [...] adapt freak-show conventions for their carnival sideshow and circus themes' (2014, 438).
10. My translation: '... *invierte el eje semántico del sistema heterocentrado*' (Preciado 2011, 49).
11. Comment from maxamilliongat19, circa 2009. 'FTM Buck Angel Juicy Manhole Action.' Accessed June 30, 2015. www.xtube.com/video-watch#FTM-BUCK-ANGEL-JUICY-MANHOLE-ACTION-817713
12. Comment from melonfucker, circa 2009. 'FTM Pornstar Buck Angel Fucked Manhole.' Accessed June 30, 2015. http://www.xtube.com/watch.php?v=6XCjU_G827_#.VZAugOs-AzU
13. Comment from Pagan, 10 March 2008. Quoted in Leap (2014, 143).
14. Comment from LDM, 13 March 2006. Quoted in Leap (2014, 143).
15. Quoted in Buck Angel's post, 18 May 2015. Accessed June 28, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel>
16. Comment from Joshua D. Pathfinder, 19 May 2015, in response to Buck Angel's post on 18 May 2015. Accessed June 28, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel>
17. James Nelson, 18 May 2015, in response to Buck Angel's post the on same day. Accessed June 28, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel>
18. Comment from nitcrawlernyc, circa 2009. 'Buck Angel With A Boy With A Cunt.' Accessed June 28, 2015. <http://www.xtube.com/watch.php?v=hgJUC-G524-#.VZAglOs-AzU>
19. Comment from redoctopus, circa 2009. 'FTM Pornstar Buck Angel Fucked Manhole.' Accessed June 28, 2015. http://www.xtube.com/watch.php?v=6XCjU_G827_#.VZAugOs-AzU
20. Comment from fishie4545, 23 June 2011. 'Allanah Starr and Buck Angel.' Accessed June 28, 2015. <https://www.tnaflix.com/fetish-videos/Allanah-Starr-and-Buck-Angel/video69662>
21. 'Buck Angel.' Accessed June 27, 2015. <http://buckangel.com>
22. '2008 Feminist Porn Award Winners.' The Feminist Porn Awards. Accessed June 30, 2015. <http://www.feministpornawards.com/2008-feminist-porn-awards-winners/>
23. See for instance Angel's comment: 'My mission, I think, is [...] to change the world. It was not my mission in the beginning: it was to make porn and to sort of change the porn business. I *do* enjoy making my porn, but I also feel like I did it, and I need to do something else now, and I need to reach a larger audience of people' (in Hunt 2013).
24. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcqbl7mdr74gqA-92muSMaw> and <http://buckangelentertainment.com>
25. For instance, Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://www.buck-angel.com>, <http://buckangel.com>, and <http://buckangelentertainment.com>
26. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel?fref=ts>
27. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://twitter.com/buckangel>
28. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.pinterest.com/buckangel/>
29. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://instagram.com/buckangel/?hl=en>
30. Accessed June 29, 2015. <http://buckangel.tumblr.com>
31. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://plus.google.com/+BuckAngelOfficial/videos>
32. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.blogger.com/profile/13068470860356787465>
33. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/buckangel>
34. Comment from Elentaurel, circa 2010. 'Buck Angel Mini Doc.' Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBIUjwl2xTA>
35. Buck Angel's post, 11 June 2015. Accessed June 28, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBIUjwl2xTA>

36. *Sexing the Transman* (Angel 2011); *Sexing the Transman 2* (Angel 2012); *Sexing the Transman 3* (Angel 2013); *Sexing the Transman 4* (Angel 2015).
37. '2012 Feminist Porn Award Winners.' The Feminist Porn Awards. Accessed June 30, 2015. <http://www.feministpornawards.com/2012-winners/>
38. See for instance 'Buck Angel??', posted by CaptainDL, 18 March 2014. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZRQFWtv4w8>
39. Comment circa 2014, 'Buck Angel??,' 18 March 2014. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZRQFWtv4w8>
40. Comment from Buck Angel, circa 2014, 'Buck Angel??,' 18 March 2014. Accessed June 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZRQFWtv4w8>
41. queerinsurrection. 'A List of Evidence @BuckAngel Putting Down Trans*/Queer Folks [TW: Racism, Sexism, Cissexist, Threats, etc.]' Accessed November 14, 2015. <http://queerinsurrection.tumblr.com/post/14697691084/a-list-of-evidence-of-buckangel-putting-down>
42. Buck Angel's post, 26 June 2015. Accessed November 14, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel/photos/a.123655821462.114812.49675671462/10152971317021463/>
43. Comment from D. C. Sheehan, 26 June 2015, in response to Buck Angel's post on the same day. Accessed November 14, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/officialbuckangel/photos/a.123655821462.114812.49675671462/10152971317021463/>

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