

**“Skin is anything but skin deep”:
Contemporary Transsexual and Transgendered Body Narratives**

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ABSTRACT

“Skin is anything but skin deep”:
Contemporary Transsexual and Transgendered Body Narratives

Veronica A. Tunzi

An investigation of late twentieth-century transsexual and transgendered narratives, this thesis considers the role of embodiment in the development of trans identities. Because transsexuals and transgendered people do not adhere to the hegemonic sex/gender binary, they allow a critical view of subjectivity as they challenge essentializing accounts of identity, insisting instead that the self can continually change and unfold throughout one’s lifespan. A comparison is made between written, autobiographical accounts of transsexual and transgendered subjectivities and photographic ones, in an attempt to understand how different media articulate trans struggles with the body.

Through an analysis of Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* and Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, two autobiographical texts, the first chapter examines the relationship between embodiment, gender identity and sexual desire. In exploring a textual mode of self-representation, the chapter attempts to understand how language impedes an articulation of trans bodies and sexual desires but also offers the potential for these emerging identities to be named.

In the second chapter, two photographic works are analyzed—Loren Cameron’s *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits* and Del LaGrace Volcano’s *Sublime Mutations*. These texts are used to consider how photography differs from writing in its presentation of trans embodiment, specifically because photography is credited with revealing the “real” and is capable of showing bodies that cannot be named. The potential for bodies to be transformed via sex-reassignment surgery and other types of body modifications is also discussed in relation to the forging of trans identities.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Invisible Lives*, Viviane Namaste argues that transsexuals and transgendered people¹ are too often rendered invisible in contemporary theory, rhetoric and discourse (3). She claims that “[a]lthough the violation of compulsory sex/gender relations is one of the topics most frequently addressed within queer theory, this body of knowledge rarely considers the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for the people who have defied it, who live outside it, or who have been killed because of it” (Namaste 9). While individuals who oppose or transgress conventional gender boundaries still continue to battle for a viable existence, contemporary transsexual and transgendered writers and photographers are beginning to create a space in which their voices can be heard.

Kate Bornstein, Leslie Feinberg, Loren Cameron, and Del LaGrace Volcano are examples of such trans writers and photographers who are producing work that challenges heteronormativity and transphobia. In writing about or photographing transsexual and transgendered subjects, Bornstein’s, Feinberg’s, Cameron’s, and LaGrace Volcano’s narratives “queer the Western binaries of body-equals-sex-equals-gender-equals-identity” (Cromwell 122). They prompt us to think about how trans subjects do not adhere to the prevailing binary sex/gender ideology, which claims that only two biological sexes exist—male and female—and that two genders correspond with these sexes—masculine and feminine. A central issue that surfaces in these works is that of embodiment. I would like to explore these narratives with specific attention to how embodiment is portrayed therein and, more specifically, how embodiment is dealt with in a written, autobiographic form and in a photographic medium.

¹ The distinction between transsexual and transgendered will be clarified below.

Because this thesis explores both transsexual and transgendered subjectivities, it is necessary to map out some of the similarities and differences between these two identities. The difficulty in writing about both transsexual and transgendered subjectivities arises from the desire to avoid conflating the two positionalities. Jason Cromwell notes that “[a]lthough transgender has begun to emerge in medico-psychological discourses, it still is not recognized as a diagnostic category. Frequently, these discourses read as if ‘transgender’ is the same as ‘transsexual’” (21). It is necessary to identify the key concepts that operate within transsexual and transgendered identities because it will not only allow us to recognize how these identities differ but will also point to reasons why transsexuals and transgendered people can ally with each other. As Jay Prosser claims, “[o]ne cannot affiliate without recognizing difference” (“Exceptional Locations” 88).

Although it is necessary to differentiate transsexuality from transgenderism, it is always difficult to “define” an identity, especially because such categorization places limits on individuals and belies individuals’ complex negotiations of identity. Consequently, I will not attempt to *define* “transsexual” and “transgendered” but, instead, will delineate some of the ways in which the two diverge. Often, the term “transgender” comes to serve as an umbrella term that describes transsexuals, cross-dressers, and intersexed people, as well as anyone who transgresses gender boundaries. However, here I will attempt to clearly demarcate how transgender can serve as its own category, separate from transsexual, cross-dresser, or intersexed. In my discussion of the key differences between transsexuality and transgenderism, it is not my intention to privilege one over the other or to pit these two identities against each other. The purpose of this

investigation is, rather, to acknowledge and explore how these identities raise various (and sometimes overlapping) concerns about sex, gender, and embodiment. I also do not wish to suggest that transsexuality and transgenderism are fixed, static identities. Within each of these identities, there is always the potential for movement of some sort based on a redefinition of the self.

An ever-expanding discourse broaches the question of what it means to be transsexual or transgendered. In the broadest sense, transsexuality “remains invested in the sexed body as home,” while transgender “locates in an interstitial space between the sexes” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 201). The body is most often employed to draw distinctions between transsexuals and transgendered people. Anatomical sex is integral to the transsexual’s identity. Commenting on transsexual men’s identities, Henry Rubin argues that “[t]ranssexual men have a body consciousness, a body image, that is at odds with their second-level bodies, their physical bodies. They are, in Sartrean terms, alienated bodies” (29). Thus, for transsexuals, the materiality of the body does not match their sense of self. Patricia Elliot concurs with Rubin’s remarks when she argues that “[n]either a disease nor a personality trait, transsexuality is a *transition one undergoes to alter a deeply felt conflict between body and image of self*” (“A Psychoanalytic” 299; emphasis in original). If we pay close attention to Elliot’s definition, we note that she locates transsexuality as a transitory state—thus, not a permanent identity that one can claim. The idea, then, is that one is only a transsexual when one is in the process of transitioning, that once one has reached a state of embodiment that matches “real” male or female anatomy, one can shed one’s transsexual identity. Not everyone agrees with this view. For instance, Prosser argues that while transsexuality used to be conceived of

as a “transitional phase to pass through once the transsexual can pass and assimilate as nontranssexual,” transsexuals are now “refusing to pass *through* transsexuality” and “are speaking en masse as transsexuals” (*Second Skins* 11). Thus, transsexuals are claiming a transsexual subjectivity as viable and not merely ephemeral.

Transsexuality is frequently associated with passing. Sandy Stone claims that “[t]he essence of transsexualism is the act of passing” (299). Because passing will be discussed in further detail in the second chapter of this thesis, I will refrain from a full-fledged analysis at this time. In brief, I will state that many transsexuals devote significant energy to ensuring that they can pass as the gender of their choice because “[f]or the transsexual, passing is becoming, a step toward home, a relief and a release: it aligns inner gender identity with social identity; one is ‘taken’ in the world for who one feels oneself to be” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 184). Because of its concern with passing and embodiment, transsexuality is often criticized as replicating and fostering sexual difference. It is for this reason that Stone posits the identity of post-transsexual, an individual who agrees to “forgo passing, to be consciously ‘read,’ to read oneself aloud—and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written” (299). However, this notion of the post-transsexual is a contentious one that has been criticized by Prosser: “Even though a ‘post’ prefix is supposed to signify an interrogation into rather than a simple negation of what follows, implicit in ‘post’ is always that notion of a throwing off, a departure from, and some element of dismissal of, its suffix. [...] In Stone’s posttranssexuality there is no space for transsexuality as a progressive narrative” (*Second Skins* 203). It should be clarified, then, that transsexuality is not a simple rearticulation of the binary male and female sexes. In

the very changing of their anatomical sexes, transsexuals are challenging the supposed permanency of one's birth sex. For this reason, and many others, transsexuality is not outdated or regressive.

Stone's post-transsexual closely aligns with a transgendered subjectivity. In discussing the etymology of "transgenderist," Prosser explains how the term initially served to distinguish the transgenderist from the transsexual, the cross-dresser, or the drag queen: "In contradistinction to the transsexual, the transgenderist crossed the lines of gender but not those of sex; in contradistinction to the drag queen, the transgenderist's feminine gender expression was not intrinsically bound up with a homosexual identity nor could its livedness be made sense of through drag's performativity" (*Second Skins* 176). Thus, a transgendered identity is neither about biological sex, nor sexual desire. The basis for this identity is founded on the concept of gender. Transgenderists, then, "live the majority of their lives in a gender that opposes their biological sex" (Cromwell 22).

Transgenderism seeks to blur the dividing line between masculine and feminine, calling into question the notions of sex and gender: "not all transgendered people wish to make a complete transition into a new sex; some straddle the gender line and challenge us to create a new social category that recognizes the dignity and rights of those who blend gender in such a way that they are not easy to label as men or women" (Califia, *Sex Changes* 188). Transgenderists "may or may not identify as men or women, and they may identify as either/or, neither/nor, or both/and" (Cromwell 22). Transgender, then, involves not only questioning sex and gender but also refusing to adhere to restrictive categorization. Transgenderists are generally less concerned with embodiment, or less

interested in sex-reassignment surgery², than transsexuals: “Transgender describes a gender identity that is at least partially defined by transitivity but that may well stop short of transsexual surgery” (Halberstam 161). It is important to note that transgendered people are not the same as preoperative transsexuals—transsexuals who have not yet undergone surgery: “[t]ransgenderists who have no intention of having surgery do not view themselves as transsexuals, preoperative transsexuals, or transvestites. [...] Transgendered identification offers a more specific reference to people who live as social men or social women but neither desire nor have sex reassignment surgery” (Cromwell 22-23). Thus, transgender is not a body-based definition, but a socially-based one (Cromwell 23). Although transgenderists often seek to blur the line between genders and exist somewhere outside of the binary sex/gender model, this does not mean that they seek to completely dissolve the categories of “man” and “woman” as identities or chastise those who identify as such. Rather, transgendered people wish to add on to the existing gender categories and seek the recognition of “the nonmale and nonfemale genders already in circulation and presently under construction” (Halberstam 162).

Because transsexuals and transgendered people exist outside of the normalized sex/gender binary, their voices are continually muted and their identities are most often ignored and oppressed. However, as individuals who challenge the binary of sex and gender, transsexuals and transgendered people offer a privileged site for an exploration of

² Some contention exists regarding the term “sex-reassignment surgery.” Cromwell articulates some of the issues surrounding this terminology: “Rather than ‘sex reassignment,’ some transpeople prefer ‘gender assignment,’ or ‘sex confirmation,’ or ‘gender confirmation,’ or ‘genital reassignment’ surgery. Others, however, like myself, do not believe they are changing or confirming genders, nor that changing or confirming sex is possible. For some transpeople, a more appropriate terminology might be ‘sex and/or gender congruence surgery’ (i.e., making gender congruent with sex as much as is possible given current medical technology)” (Cromwell 20-21). While I choose to use “sex-reassignment surgery” throughout this text, I do this recognizing the inherent problems attached to the term, and realize that this term may not apply to all trans subjects.

the workings of subjectivity and the means by which subjects whose sexes, genders, bodies, and sexual desires do not conform to conventional norms come to attain recognition.

Given that this thesis is devoted to investigating transsexuals and transgendered people as subjects of the hegemonic sex/gender ideology, a discussion of a few important concepts pertaining to subjectivity need to be outlined. In addressing the relationship between power and subjectivity, Michel Foucault provides two meanings for the word “subject”: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (*Subject and Power* 212). Because the relationship between power and subjectivity cannot be severed, Foucault argues for “a new economy of power relations” (*Subject and Power* 210). His approach “consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point [...], using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, [and ...] analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies” (*Subject and Power* 211). He offers examples to clarify his point: “to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity” and “what we mean by legality in the field of illegality” (*Subject and Power* 211). In the same way, perhaps we need to look at transsexuals and transgendered people to decipher what western society means by gender.

While subjectivity is bound to power, it is also contingent upon ideology. As Louis Althusser claims, because ideologies need subjects, individuals are then subjected by a particular ideology. Althusser explains that “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (162; emphasis in original). Thus, in the case

of the sex/gender ideology, the moment a child is born, one of two claims is made: it's a boy, or, it's a girl. At that moment of interpellation, the individual becomes a subject.

Althusser argues that

ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (163)

When an individual responds to the hailing—that is, really recognizes that s/he is being addressed—s/he becomes a subject. In the case of sex and gender then, when an individual recognizes that he or she is either a man or a woman and adopts a masculine or feminine gender, he or she has been interpellated and becomes a subject of the sex/gender ideology.

However, while it may appear that subjects are consciously formed, Althusser explains that "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*" (164; emphasis in original). Thus, there is no need for individuals to think about and recognize their compliance with the binary sex/gender system in order to become subjects. We always-already comply with the ideology because there are no sex and gender identities other than the two offered by the binary system and because sex/gender is not presented as a *choice*, but is naturalized.

Because transsexuals and transgendered people challenge the dominant gender paradigm, they complicate the functioning of Althusser's interpellation. For this reason, an understanding of the workings of human agency is necessary for my exploration of transsexual and transgendered subjectivity. Althusser assumes that all subjects will be "good subjects." Consequently, as Paul Smith points out, Althusser "leaves little room for an elaboration of a theory of human agency" (17). In his critique of Althusser's theory, Smith defines the human agent as characterized by "resistance to the ideological" (xxxv). For Smith the agent is "a form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context)" (xxxv).

Althusser assumes that subjects "work all by themselves" (169) and will comply with the rules of ideology. Judith Butler notes that Althusser's scene of interpellation—the police officer hailing someone on the street—is "clearly a disciplinary one; the policeman's call is an effort to bring someone back in line" (*Psychic* 95). Althusser fails to recognize that, for various reasons, interpellation can fail. In exercising agency, the subject can contribute to this failure. Foucault asserts that subjects are always "faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (*Subject and Power* 221). As Butler clarifies, "the subject is itself a site of [the] ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the *effect* of a prior power and as the *condition of possibility* for a radically conditioned form of agency" (*Psychic* 14-15; emphasis in original). Agency, then, "is the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or

historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs” (Butler, *Psychic* 15; emphasis in original).

Within an Althusserian context, one example of subjective agency is evidenced when interpellation fails as a result of misrecognition: “If one misrecognizes that effort to produce the subject, the production itself falters. The one who is hailed may fail to hear, misread the call, turn the other way, answer to another name, insist on not being addressed that way” (Butler, *Psychic* 95). For trans subjects, who are hailed as either men or women, interpellation fails because they do not answer the call that is made. Trans subjects do, in fact, “answer to another name” or “insist on not being addressed that way.” They may even insist on identities that are altogether outside of those that are prescribed by the binary sex/gender ideology. Transsexuals or transgendered people then fail to be hailed because there are no names within hegemonic discourse that effectively and accurately interpellate them. Because the transsexual (and transgendered person) “occupies a position which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse” (Stone 295), he or she cannot engage with the dominant discourse because it does not allow a space for subjects in transition: “For a transsexual, *as a transsexual*, to generate a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible” (Stone 295). Thus, transsexuals and transgendered people are automatically outcasts who struggle and resist from the periphery.

Given that struggle and resistance are key factors in transsexual and transgendered subjectivity, these subjects continually exercise their agency. In making an analogy between trans people and butterflies, Kate Bornstein posits that struggle is a defining feature of transsexual and transgendered identities and is ultimately necessary in defining a self:

It seems that butterflies have a rough time of their transition from caterpillars. These li'l caterpillars weave weave weave and end up with a cocoon all around them, in which they're able to physically transform into a butterfly. Now that's a lot of work all by itself, but the interesting part comes next: they have to get out of the cocoon. The butterfly in the cocoon has to *really* struggle to get out of that thing. [...] It seems that Nature in hir wisdom has decided that the butterfly *needs* the struggle: the struggle itself triggers some sort of chemical process in the butterfly that allows it to live once it's out. (*Workbook 19*)

Thus, transsexual and transgendered subjectivity is marked by struggle—by resistance to a gender paradigm that does not include them.

A key distinction that arises between transsexual and transgendered subjectivities is that of embodiment, and it is this very concern that rests at the heart of my investigation. Prosser's assertion that "skin is anything but skin deep" (*Second Skins* 82) prompts us to ask several questions: why does the body matter when we think about biological sex and gender? How does the relationship to the body differ in transsexual and transgendered subjects? And how do trans writers and photographers approach embodiment in their works? The question of whether the body matters or whether the

focus should be on gendered performances points to the on-going debate between constructionists and essentialists: “People do feel that aspects of their being are essential (natural), yet they also know that what they feel is due in part to how the dominant society constructs (nurtures) ideologies seen as pertinent to being an embodied, sexed, gendered, and sexual being” (Cromwell 43). Rather than attempting to take sides, it may be more useful to speak to the different identity discourses with which this thesis engages.

For constructionists, like Butler, the body matters mainly because the dominant sex/gender ideology makes it matter. If Althusser contends that “ideology has a material existence” (155), in the case of the sex/gender ideology, the materiality of its discourse has been seen to reside in the body, in anatomical differences seen as constituting two sexes. Butler observes that the moment we enter the world, our bodies are read and we are interpellated and subjected:

The mark of gender appears to ‘qualify’ bodies as human bodies; the moment in which an infant becomes humanized is when the question, ‘is it a boy or girl?’ is answered. Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted.

(GT 142)

For the binary sex/gender ideology to persist, bodies need to be immediately marked at birth. And, as Butler notes, those bodies that do not clearly fit into either category are relegated as “other” and are then dealt with accordingly. Intersexed individuals, for instance, are almost always assigned a sex and operated on—a clear example of how the

body is formed and created by the dominant ideology. According to the “body politic (judicial, medical, and political systems),” limits are placed “on the uses of bodies, and on what types of bodies are considered legitimate” (Cromwell 32).

Corporeal legitimacy is produced by the dominant discourse, which insists that all bodies be clearly legible. Bodies that do not adhere to the binary sex/gender model take on an outlaw status and make clear the division between what kinds of bodies are legible and what kinds are not: “outlaw bodies sharpen a boundary not between men and women, male and female, or even transsexual and non, but between *abject* and *intelligible*” (Boyd 148; my emphasis). The notions of abjection and intelligibility are discussed by Butler. Borrowing from Julia Kristeva’s discussion of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, Butler states that

the ‘abject’ designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered ‘Other.’ This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the ‘not-me’ as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject. (GT 169).

Thus, abject bodies are not inherently “abnormal” or strange but are constituted as such by the very act of rejection. Furthermore, as Butler contends, “the operation of repulsion can consolidate ‘identities’ founded on the instituting of the ‘Other’ or a set of Others through exclusion and domination. What constitutes through division the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control” (GT 170). According to Silverman, legitimacy

is granted to some bodies and not others as a result of certain “representational coordinates” that are employed in the process of discerning any subject or object that we encounter: “when we apprehend another person or an object, we necessarily do so via that large, diverse, but ultimately finite range of representational coordinates which determine what and how the members of our culture see—how they process visual detail, and what meaning they give it” (*Threshold* 221). Thus, arguably, bodies would not be considered abject or unintelligible if their existence were more widely circulated and readily acknowledged within mainstream society:

just as certain words suggest themselves to us more readily than others, because they are the currency of daily use in our society, so certain representational coordinates propose themselves as more appropriate frames through which to apprehend the world than others, simply because they are subject within our society to a more frequent and emphatic articulation. (Silverman, *Threshold* 221)

In contradistinction to the abject, Butler explains how social regulation also produces intelligible bodies, which are accepted and normalized: “The rules that govern intelligible identities, i.e., that enable and restrict the intelligible assertion of an ‘I,’ rules that are partially structured along matrices of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, operate through *repetition*” (*GT* 185; emphasis in original). According to Butler, the subject is constituted by “*a regulated process of repetition*,” which means that intelligibility thus arises from repetition of identities which then become recognizable (*GT* 185; emphasis in original).

Butler's notion of regulated repetition is mirrored in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which he talks about the late eighteenth century soldier as something that could be carefully fashioned: "out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit" (135). This bodily regulation mirrors how sex and gender are constructed, how we learn gendered behaviours as we are forced to, and how our bodies are controlled and directed so that we may comply with the rules of our society. Foucault describes how the Ordinance of 1766, which details the exact steps and movements that soldiers must take in order to march correctly, becomes an external force that ultimately shapes the body: "it is rather a collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside; it is a 'programme'; it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the inside" (*Discipline* 151-2). Butler notes that when Foucault discusses the regulation of bodies within prisons, it becomes evident that "[t]he prison thus acts on the prisoner's body, but it does so by forcing the prisoner to approximate an ideal, a norm of behaviour, a model of obedience" (*Psychic* 85). The military and the prison then become metaphors for the sex/gender ideology that ensnares human bodies and attempts to force them into replicating the models laid out for them.

As the body is regulated, certain "appropriate" gendered behaviours and practices are attached to people's identities and their roles in society. As Althusser contends, a circular effect results: "where only a single subject [...] is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into*

material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (158; emphasis in original). Thus, if the body is said to be the basis of the binary sex/gender ideology, then subsequent actions, practices, and rituals are supposedly based on this biological "fact," which are supposed to confirm that binary anatomical differences are real and concrete. The power of ideology creates a kind of dependency, as we come to need particular discourses to fuel our existence:

power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms. What such an account fails to note, however, is that the 'we' who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for 'our' existence. [...] Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (Butler, *Psychic* 2)

Even if transsexual and transgendered subjects would prefer to abolish the sex/gender binary that currently defines parts of their identity, they are always (already) forced to work within those parameters because they are the only ones available and because they have always (already) been interpellated as subjects of that ideology. Thus, trying to fit the body into either male or female may sometimes arise because no other options are offered.

Some constructionists claim that part of the rift that transpeople feel between their gender and their sex is a consequence of the sex and gender ideology, which tells subjects that certain bodily features are male, and others are female. Cromwell argues that "[i]f

breasts were defined as male, transmen and FTMs [females-to-males] would not be dysphoric about them or have them removed. Because breasts are a sign of femininity, however, chest reconstructions are requested” (106). Thus, trans subjects may feel uncomfortable in their bodies and wish to transform them because they are under the influence of ideology and need to operate in a world where this ideology is dominant. For some transpeople, it is for reasons of safety and personal comfort in the world that these body modifications need to be made.

Given that the binary sex/gender ideology is based in the body, it is no wonder that embodiment is such a concern for transsexual and transgendered subjects, even as they attempt to undermine or subvert the binary system. In fact, when Rubin conducted a study of twenty-two FTMs, he concluded that the body does matter to these subjects:

My findings support the claim that bodies, especially secondary sex characteristics, facilitate intra- and inter-subjective recognition of a core (gendered) self. Bodies matter for subjects who are routinely misrecognized by others and whose bodies cause them great emotional and physical discomfort. One would do well to remember this when theorizing about the body. To get our heads around ‘the body,’ we must come to terms with the experiences that subjects have of their bodies.

(Self-Made 11; emphasis in original)

Some gender theorists, such as Kate Bornstein, have attempted to negate the importance of the body on identity formation. Bornstein asks: “Who says biology has the last word in determining someone’s identity anyway?” (*Workbook 27*). While placing exclusive emphasis on biology is troublesome (for fear of creating essentialist discourses), the main

problem with effacing any distinctions between sex as biology/body and gender as identity/roles is that it ignores the conflict that many transsexuals face regarding the body and gender. Arguing for the body's relevance to selfhood, Rubin states: "the move to collapse sex and gender ignores the defining tensions of transsexual narratives. In a scheme where sex and gender are equated, there is no room for individuals who experience an existential rift between their gender (identity and role) and their sex (bodies)" (*Self-Made* 19).

Rubin argues that "everyone has an internal identity [...] an internalized subjectivity that is sealed off from other subjects by virtue of being contained within the body" (*Self-Made* 13). While he also posits that we all have our own authenticities, he places this within a framework of phenomenology, which sees the body as the location for an essential self. However, within this framework is the recognition that the body can mutate or change: "Bodies are never static or reified. Phenomenology replaces the more naïve notion of fixed essences and identities that are familiar to us with a version of essences and identities that are always unfolding" (Rubin 26). Thus, while a core self may exist, it and the body in which it is harboured have the potential for change. Recognizing that the sexed body does matter makes it easier to understand why many transsexuals and transgendered people choose to modify their bodies.

Given that embodiment is a key factor in trans narratives, the question that I would like to pose is what difference does genre make in representing these bodily issues? Kaja Silverman suggests that "we are cognitively available to ourselves and others only in the guise of signifiers, such as proper names and first-person pronouns, or visual images, and consequently are for all intents and purposes synonymous with those

signifiers” (*Subject 18*). While the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a written text is arbitrary (Saussure 67), the signifier and signified share an iconic or indexical relationship in photography. If subjectivity is partly reliant upon signifiers, how do the signifiers that are located in written and photographic texts differ in representing the embodied trans subject? How do writing and photography serve the purposes of transsexuals and transgendered people who attempt to express their subjectivities?

Grounded in the investigation of transsexual and transgendered subjectivities, this thesis is divided into two chapters that explore written and photographic representations of trans embodiment. Chapter One looks at the formation of the subject through language, with specific focus on autobiography as a self-narrative. The chapter deals with two texts—Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* (1994) and Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* (1993)—and interrogates how transsexual and transgendered embodiment is presented via written narratives. Specifically, I explore the relationship between embodiment, gender identity and sexual desire in an attempt to understand how language, under the influence of the current sex/gender discourse, is not equipped to serve transsexual and transgendered people, as trans bodies do not adhere to conventional models of sex and gender. I also explore language’s potential to name subjectivities that are not currently articulated in the hegemonic discourse. Within this investigation, I compare Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s views on the body’s (in)significance to matters pertaining to sexual desire.

After considering written narratives in my first chapter, Chapter Two investigates photographic representations of trans selves. Through an analysis of Loren Cameron’s

Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits (1996) and Del LaGrace Volcano's *Sublime Mutations* (2000), I reflect upon how the body is portrayed in photography and how visual representation serves transsexual and transgendered embodiment differently than written narratives. I consider the notion that photography is credited with revealing the "real," how it raises issues of perceived versus actual embodiment, and how it is capable of showing bodies that cannot (yet) be named by language. I also explore how transsexual and transgendered bodies and identities are shaped and modified by surgery and other bodily transformations and how this is represented by Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photography. Cameron and LaGrace Volcano approach the hegemonic discourse by providing visual representations of the subjects who are excluded by the binary ideology. In this way, they are able to touch upon aspects of embodiment that are more visual—reading, passing, and body modifications. Their narratives provide visual proof that a new ideology needs to emerge, one that is more inclusive and representative of the myriad of bodies that we can see but cannot name.

CHAPTER ONE

Desiring Bodies: Gender Identity and Sexual Desire in *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues*

No one had turned to us and held out a handful of questions: How many ways are there to have the *sex* of girl, boy, man, woman? How many ways are there to have [sic] *gender*—from masculine to androgynous to feminine? Is there a connection between the *sexualities* of lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, between desire and liberation? No one told us: How many ways can the *body's sex* vary by chromosomes, hormones, genitals? How many ways can *gender expression* multiply—between home and work, at the computer and when you kiss someone, in your dreams and when you walk down the street? No one asked us: What is your dream of who you want to be?

--Minnie Bruce Pratt, *S/he* 15

In his introduction to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault identifies the discourse of sexual desire as one of those technologies of the self by/through which subjects are constituted and constitute themselves. Foucault thus clears a space for the investigation of “the practices by which individuals [have been] led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being” (*History of Sexuality* 5). Within the framework of normative heterosexuality that still dictates a great deal of Western thought, sexual desire is articulated within the binary of gender identity premised on perceived sexual (anatomical) difference. This creates a unique problem for transsexual and transgendered subjects, as their bodies and genders contest and defy this sex/gender matrix. Through an analysis of Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw* and Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, I intend to explore some of the differences between

transsexual and transgendered articulations of sexual desire, especially in terms of how the body figures in Bornstein's and Feinberg's representations of this particular facet of selfhood.

Both Bornstein and Feinberg recognize that, because of the influence of the dominant sex/gender discourse, embodiment plays an integral role in the development of gender identity and sexual desire. They also question the relationship between gender identity and sexual desire as they seek to articulate them outside of rigid binaries, and work towards creating viable trans identities. Invested in fostering a more fluid view of the body, Bornstein, a male-to-female transsexual, argues for re-imagining the body's status so that desire is situated in sexual acts and gender performativity rather than in some fabricated notion of biological sex. However, her approach is also marked by some contradictions—mainly that she does not address how her own altered embodied status has affected her views on gender. Thus, the inconsistencies in Bornstein's argument will also be examined. Like Bornstein, Feinberg wishes to problematize conventional views on embodiment, in hir case by exploring the difficulties that butch and transgendered FTM subjects face in relation to sexual desire³. Presenting a subject who occupies a position in the interstices, Feinberg examines how bodily and gender-related ambiguities are often coupled with complex sexual relationships, as both the transgendered person and his/her partner need to re-negotiate their identities.

Focusing on embodiment in relation to transsexual and transgendered desire, this chapter examines, more specifically, the ways in which *textual* modes of representation

³ Because of Feinberg's particular transgendered status and the lack of direct commentary on what gender pronoun s/he prefers to be labeled with, I have chosen to employ gender-neutral pronouns ("hir" and "s/he") whenever referring to Feinberg in this thesis. With all other subjects in this thesis, I have attempted to employ pronouns that seem most respectful of their chosen sexes/genders.

are used by Bornstein and Feinberg to explore the intersection of embodiment, gender identity, and sexual desire. Language names—interpellating subjects, bodies, sexes, genders, desires, relationships—and the texts by Bornstein and Feinberg document the disastrous consequences of hegemonic interpellations for transsexual and transgendered subjects. Because transsexual and transgendered subjects refuse the binary matrix of hegemonic sex/gender interpellations, their bodies, genders, and sexual desires become unnamable and thus go unvoiced. However, since signifier and signified share an arbitrary relationship, language also offers the *potential* for new words and meanings to be formed so that “new forms of subjectivity” may be articulated (Foucault, *Subject and Power* 216).

Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s identities are partly shaped by a particular intersection of embodiment, gender, and sexual desire. Bornstein describes herself as “a transsexual lesbian whose female lover is becoming a man” (GO 3). Her lesbian desire is as much a part of her identity as is her transsexuality. Rather than denying her past as a man and discarding her transsexual status, Bornstein claims her transsexuality as an integral component of her identity. When a neighbourhood child who has just seen Bornstein’s appearance on *The Donahue Show* asks, “So, are you a boy or a girl?” Bornstein replies, “I’m a girl who used to be a boy” (GO 9). Such fluidity also inflects Bornstein’s representation of her sexual desire:

I live my life *as* a woman in my day-to-day walking around, but I’m not under any illusion that I *am* a woman. I love people who live their lives as women in this world: I’m way attracted to people who do that, it’s in their direction that I want to push my support. But that doesn’t make me a

‘lesbian.’ [...] I’m living my life *as* a lesbian, with many similarities to some lesbians, but I’m not under the illusion that I *am* a lesbian. It’s the difference between *being* an identity and *having* an identity. The latter makes more room for individual growth, I think. (GO 243)

Here Bornstein questions any view of identity as essence (a lesbian *being*), suggesting instead that identity is a performative *having*. Within this framework, no identity is completely fixed as one can have many identities which flex and vary depending on circumstances. While transsexuals have sometimes been criticized for “reinforc[ing] a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification” (Stone 286), I would argue that Bornstein becomes a post-transsexual, since she is not only invested in creating a complex identity that questions the categories of male and female, straight and gay, but also allows herself to be read as a transsexual and attempts to move beyond sex and gender binaries.

In many ways, Feinberg’s situation is quite similar to Bornstein’s. Feinberg describes himself as “a masculine, lesbian, female-to-male cross-dresser and transgenderist” (*Trans Liberation* 19). The five components to Feinberg’s identity—“masculine,” “lesbian,” “female-to-male,” “cross-dresser,” and “transgenderist”—outline the complexity of hir gender and desire and encourage us to consider the relationship between these dimensions of the self. Feinberg creates a multifaceted transgendered identity that refuses simple binaries:

I am a masculine female. I am perceived as trying to look or act ‘like a man.’ I actually think that’s a very limiting concept that endangers the rights of any female or male to a range of gender choices. I actually feel

that on my own loom, weaving my internal weft against the warp of external pressure, I have created a tapestry far more intricate and complex.

(Trans Liberation 33)

Describing himself as a “masculine female”—and employing binary sex/gender labels to articulate his sense of identity—Feinberg identifies the parameters within which subjects of the dominant sex/gender discourse are forced to operate. However, like Bornstein, s/he clearly resists such limiting means of categorizing one’s sex and gender and, instead, presents a transgendered perspective in which gender is malleable and capable of continual reshaping.

While Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s perspectives are similar in many respects, their different reactions to their embodied selves provide a focal point for my reading of their texts. Simply stated, Bornstein chose to have sex-reassignment surgery while Feinberg chose not to undergo the procedure and chose to end hormone therapy. What difference do these decisions make in the authors’ views on anatomical sex, gender, and sexual desire and how do these differences materialize in their autobiographical narratives? How does Bornstein’s transsexuality (and post-transsexuality) influence her opinions on gender? How does Feinberg negotiate his body so that it corresponds with his transgendered outlook? In reading *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues*, we can then think about how Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s identities and ideologies are articulated within their autobiographical texts.

In discussing these autobiographical narratives, I will use Bornstein’s name to discuss her as author and as subject of her text since *Gender Outlaw* recounts her personal experiences and is explicitly presented as a self-narrative. In the case of

Feinberg, however, I will only refer to Feinberg when speaking of hir as author, and will distinguish hir from Jess Goldberg, the protagonist of *Stone Butch Blues*.

Why Autobiography?

How to read *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues* as narratives? In the simplest terms, *Gender Outlaw* can be classified as autobiography, while *Stone Butch Blues* seems to fall into the category of autobiographical fiction. *Gender Outlaw* is a non-linear account of Bornstein's efforts to develop a sexed and gendered self that feels like home. It tells the story of the multiple gendered selves that Bornstein has adopted throughout her life journey. The text is characterized by generic hybridity: it is a combination of polemical prose, interviews, excerpts from other people's works, photographs, and a play written by Bornstein. The layout is also unusual—a fragmented mix of different fonts, with blocks of texts arranged unconventionally on the page, often coupled with photographs of Bornstein at various stages in her life, mostly playing theatrical roles. As *Gender Outlaw* recounts Bornstein's life narrative, it also contains Bornstein's theories on gendered subjects of desire, specifically the role that gender plays in sexual desire.

Unlike *Gender Outlaw*, *Stone Butch Blues* is a work of fiction. It is a novel that tells the story of Jess, a stone butch who is born into a working class, Jewish family in Buffalo and who struggles with gender identity throughout her life. Set mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, the novel explores Jess's attempts to situate a gendered self with which she feels comfortable. Her journey involves locating a community, both at work and in the underground queer bar scene, while attempting to understand her body's relationship with gender identity and sexual desire, most prominently portrayed in her intense and

tumultuous relationship with a femme named Theresa. The story closely resembles Feinberg's own life and experiences as portrayed in *TransLiberation* and *Transgender Warriors*.

Given that the canon of autobiography has been historically a male genre, how do Bornstein and Feinberg employ the autobiographical mode to suit their trans identities? Like women's autobiography, transsexual and transgendered autobiographies have had to confront the canonical forms of the genre and the hegemonic terms of identity and authority. In *Autobiographics*, Leigh Gilmore asserts that "a profound renegotiation of the terms and forms of self-representation" is necessary because women's autobiography has not been given sufficient recognition within the canon (2). Gilmore argues that "women's autobiography cannot be recognized as 'autobiography' when it is written against the dominant representations of identity and authority as masculine" (*Autobiographics* 2). Faced with an exclusionary autobiographical tradition and the need to reshape life writing, women have produced what Gilmore calls "autobiographics": "Autobiographics, as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation" (*Autobiographics* 42). It seems that transsexual and transgendered self-narratives may also fall into this category, as they too seek to oppose the hegemonic patriarchal script that characterizes traditional autobiography (Smith, *A Poetics* 26), in order to create a new form of self-writing that would allow for the self's multiplicity. If this is in fact the case, what does this new form of self-representation look like, how is it manifested in *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues*, and how do these alternatives serve Bornstein's and Feinberg's trans intentions?

If *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues* revise the autobiographical mode, their main feature is that of resistance. Jacques Derrida posits that genres come with specific rules: “As soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: ‘Do,’ ‘Do not,’ says ‘genre,’ the word ‘genre,’ the figure, the voice, or the law of genre” (56). Employing Derrida’s argument to comment on the traditional definition of autobiography and the consequences of generic rigidity, Gilmore states:

The law of genre which defines much of traditional autobiography studies has been formulated in such a way as to exclude or make supplemental a discussion of gender. [...] once one has adopted figures such as ‘the law of genre’ to describe cultural production, the oppositional figure of the outlaw [...] must emerge [...] In short, the law of genre creates outlaws. (*Autobiographics* 21-2)

As gender outlaws and subjects of resistance, Bornstein and Feinberg break the law of genre. Written in a cut-and-paste, collage style, Bornstein’s text “rewrites the telic structure of conventional autobiographical narrative,” presenting a series of “disjointed vignettes” in which she “doesn’t so much narrativize her transsexual life as (a performance artist) she performs it” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 174). Bornstein resists the conventional autobiographical fashion and creates a transsexual style of self-representation that challenges the existing, patriarchal model. Within the first few pages of *Gender Outlaw*, Bornstein clearly identifies her “identity and fashion [as] based on collage. You know—a little bit from here, a little bit from there? Sort of cut-and-paste

thing” (3). Thus, the text mirrors Bornstein’s personal style, becoming another manifestation of who she is, and rendering her not only a gender outlaw but a *genre* outlaw as well.

Although Feinberg’s photograph appears on the covers of both the 1993 edition (published by Firebrand Books) and the 2003 edition (published by Alyson Books) of *Stone Butch Blues*, and while the novel’s plot closely matches Feinberg’s own life story, Feinberg denies that the text is autobiographical: “I am Jewish, and come from a working class factory background, but *SBB* is not my life story. I hope it captures the spirit of my life and the spirit of some others at that time. I decided to use fiction because it was a flexible vehicle” (Bowen 19). The full title of Feinberg’s text is *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel*. The subtitle complicates and actively refutes any attempt to classify the text as autobiography, ensuring that the story remains in a fictional realm. Why does Feinberg resist autobiographical readings of *Stone Butch Blues*? Does her insistence that *Stone Butch Blues* is a fictional work relate to traditional autobiography’s hegemonic, patriarchal tendencies? We can compare *Stone Butch Blues* with Gilmore’s discussion of Audre Lorde’s autobiographical *Zami*. Lorde refuses to label her text as autobiography, claiming it is a “biomythography” instead. Gilmore describes Lorde as “complexly positioned,” a subject who embodies several identities: lesbian, black, and working class (*Autobiographics* 32). Because of this identity complexity, autobiography does not serve Lorde’s purposes:

Lorde moves both within and against political ideologies that take the subject to have as single, primary identity: either lesbian *or* black *or* working class. I take the problem of Lorde’s subject positions to be

central to autobiography's law of the subject. [...] One is permitted to be a member of a group. [...] The absence of autobiographical categories to mirror the complexity of human life reveals, of course, autobiography's sustaining role in hegemony. (Gilmore, *Autobiographics* 32; emphasis in original)

If traditional autobiography does, in fact, disallow subjects from expressing their multiple identities, this may explain why Feinberg resists this labeling of *Stone Butch Blues*.

Feinberg explores several aspects of identity—gender and class being the most prominent—and perhaps refuses to employ a form that historically has not welcomed multifaceted subjects.

In taking on a fictional form while still incorporating aspects of the autobiographical, *Stone Butch Blues* subverts genre categorization. Reading *Stone Butch Blues* as a “fictional character's autobiography” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 190) invites us to consider how the work's genre ambiguity adds to the transgendered quality of the narrative: “This ambivalence in and around *Stone Butch Blues* over genre constructs the text as a form between fiction and autobiography, a trans- or intergeneric space. [...]

Feinberg produces an alternative generic form—a trans-genre: a text as between genres as its subject is between genders” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 191). Consequently, like Bornstein, Feinberg also manages to create a genre that parallels his identity. Just as the text escapes generic categorization, so does Feinberg escape facile sex/gender categorization.

But to what ends do Bornstein and Feinberg employ the autobiographical (more specifically, autobiographics) in their texts? *Autobiographics*, Gilmore argues, allows

one to avoid becoming the “object of representation,” becoming instead “both the agent and the subject of self-representation” (*Autobiographics 2*). With a history of being misrepresented and misunderstood, transsexuals and transgendered people employ autobiography to exercise their agency and articulate their subjectivity in their own words. Alluding to her multifaceted identity, Bornstein expresses the need to tell her own story. As an “S/M transsexual lesbian,” “ex-cult member,” “used-to-be-man,” “first mate on an ocean-going yacht,” “circumcised yuppie from the East Coast,” “dyke phone sex hostess,” “pagan Tarot reader,” “not-man, not always woman,” Bornstein knows “why no one was writing my story” (*GO* 143-4). In outlining the complexity of her identity, Bornstein conveys that autobiography is the only means to tell her story because existing models of self are neither available nor adequate for her identity.

Autobiography also allows for the telling of one’s story *in one’s own words*. In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess expresses the need to articulate her own experience using butch words: “I do need words, Frankie. Sometimes, I feel like I’m choking to death on what I’m feeling. I need to talk and I don’t even know how. Femmes always tried to teach me to talk about my feelings, but it was their words they used for their feelings. I needed my own words—butch words to talk about butch feelings” (275). Feinberg’s understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and language, articulated through Jess, resonates with Emile Benveniste’s theorization: “It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of ‘ego’ in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being” (224). Benveniste argues that in pronouncing oneself an “I,” one’s subjectivity is immediately articulated: “‘Ego’ is he who *says* ‘ego.’ That is where we see the foundation of ‘subjectivity,’ which is determined by the

linguistic status of ‘person’” (Benveniste 224). Only when Jess uses her own butch words is she able to voice her personal transgendered experience and forge an identity.

Furthermore, as autobiographies, Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s texts foreground the dual power of language to affirm an “I” but also invoke a “you,” to fashion a speaker and call forth an audience. As Benveniste argues, there cannot be an “I” without a “you”:

Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*. [...] Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to “me,” becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me. (224-5)

Thus, by positing an “I” and recognizing a “you,” autobiographers locate themselves in the world, recognizing that they are not solitary beings, that their selves are shaped by others around them. Through the autobiographical act, the transsexual or transgendered “I” articulates a self in relation to others. The “you” that accompanies the “I” in dialogue may be the hegemonic subject interpellating the “I” or a sympathetic community that the “I” tries to summon. For Bornstein, who uses the first person pronoun in *Gender Outlaw*, the “I” is shaped by the “you” of the binary sex/gender discourse that she battles as she attempts to locate a sense of self. I will also argue that while *Gender Outlaw* is the text that Bornstein writes to make claims for an “I,” *My Gender Workbook* (1998) is the book

she writes for others, for both the “you’s” against whom her “I” is defined, and the “you’s” who are invited to serve as allies. Because *My Gender Workbook* functions in dialogue with *Gender Outlaw*, there will be many instances in this chapter where I draw from it.

While the first person pronoun is a crucial aspect of autobiography, Feinberg uses the third person pronoun throughout *Stone Butch Blues*. Benveniste argues that “‘Person’ belongs only to *I/you* and is lacking in *he*” (217). However, Feinberg here aptly appropriates the third person pronoun for her exploration of subjectivity. Because the third person pronoun is a gendered pronoun, Feinberg’s choice to employ it throughout her text draws attention to the fact that for many transsexual and transgendered people, attempting to identify as either “he” or “she” is at the heart of their struggles with gender, and that being presented with only two options is often insufficient. While Benveniste privileges the first and second person pronouns when discussing subjectivity, Feinberg’s text demonstrates that for trans subjects, the gendered third person pronoun in English can serve to characterize both ambivalence and an exploratory, shifting identity.

For transsexuals and transgendered people, autobiography is even more pertinent, not only because these are stories which, by and large, have not been told, but because autobiography lends itself so well to the trans experience. Autobiography theorist Eakin observes:

when we look at life history from the perspective of neural Darwinism, it is fair to say that we are all becoming different persons all the time, we are not what we were, self and memory are emergent, in process, constantly evolving, and both are grounded in the body and the body image.

Responding to the flux of self-experience, we instinctively gravitate to identity-supporting structures: the notion of identity as continuous over time, and the use of autobiographical discourse to record its history. (20)

As subjects in transition, transsexuals and transgendered people can use autobiography as a kind of memory—a means of documenting their transition and evolution of the self. Prosser argues that every transsexual is, by necessity, an autobiographer, since telling stories about the self begins in the clinician's office. In order to receive whatever medical treatments they desire, transsexuals must explain that their transsexual identity was evident early on in life and has remained an enduring aspect of their selves (Prosser, *Second Skins* 101). They must produce and tell their stories so that they can become who they feel themselves to be.

Stone posits that transsexuality is, in itself, a genre, “a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored” (296; emphasis in original). Transsexuality allows for the problematizing of the sex/gender binary. However, within this disruption lies the possibility for synthesis. As Prosser further contends, autobiography allows for a fusion of past and present selves—a binding of the entire self:

In transsexual autobiography the split between the ‘I’ of the *bios* and the ‘I’ of the *graph*, the past self written and the present self writing, is heightened by the story of sex change. Autobiography brings into relief the split of the transsexual life; transsexual history brings into gendered relief the difference present in all autobiography between the subject of the enunciation and the subject enunciating. (*Second Skins* 102)

Autobiography then becomes almost necessary in creating a coherent self because, as Gilmore argues, it becomes a way of mapping the self (*Autobiographics* 6-7). The act of writing may actually allow for the production of a synthesized identity: “the self is as much producer as end product of representation. In this view, subjectivity is created and sustained through an ongoing, all-pervasive narrative process” (Freiwald 39). Thus, the very act of producing an autobiography aids in creating and defining the self, as it allows the autobiographer to locate him/herself in relation to other people’s locations and according to his/her reality.

Given their disruptive tendencies, Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s autobiographical texts may be read as postmodern and the authors as representatives of late-twentieth century autobiography. If, as Gilmore claims, “postmodernism calls all categorical thinking into question along with the modes by which categories are consolidated,” then postmodern autobiographies become “site[s] of identity production, [...] texts that both resist and produce cultural identities” (*The Mark* 4). For the late-twentieth century postmodern transsexual or transgendered subject, autobiography may provide a response and alternative to the mid-century transsexual autobiographies of Jan Morris, Christine Jorgensen, Renee Richards, and others, whose stories were often sensationalized by the media. Such sensationalism led readers to dismiss transsexuals and transgendered people as freakish anomalies. By reclaiming autobiography and refashioning it for their own purposes, Bornstein and Feinberg reclaim their subjectivities and present them in a more accurate manner.

Certainly, the complexity evident in Bornstein’s and Feinberg’s texts distances them from the autobiographies that were produced around mid-century. In such

autobiographies, “[b]esides the obvious complicity of these accounts in a Western white male definition of performative gender, the authors also reinforce a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification. They go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between” (Stone 286). Bornstein and Feinberg speak not only for the self in transition but also for the self that chooses to remain in a state of liminality. Identities are forged in the spaces *between* or *outside of* male and female. With its generic hybridity, *Gender Outlaw*, for instance, disrupts narrative conventions at the same time as it challenges the sex/gender binary:

Opposing transsexuality’s telic structure (that it has a gendered outcome at all) through fragmenting the telic conventions of narrative into Barthesian-like vignettes, *Gender Outlaw* is on both counts our first postmodern transsexual autobiography. But in virtually all other autobiographies the dynamic works the other way—from fragmentation to incorporation, where incorporation is both wholeness of narrative and embodiment of subject—and the narrative is driven by the attempt to make sense of the transition, to forge a cohesive story out of rupture. (Prosser, “Exceptional Locations” 90)

Rather than attempting to create a cohesive self through the production of a narrative, Bornstein and Feinberg create the story of a self that resists facile definition. They allow the self to exist in an interstitial space. In this way, their autobiographies become “tactic[s] of intervention” (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 45) that oppose the dominant discourse.

Untangling Gender Identity and Sexual Desire

Both *Gender Outlaw* and *Stone Butch Blues* explore the intricate and problematic relationship between gender identity and sexual desire in an attempt to untangle these elements of the self. The task is a difficult one, not because these two aspects of identity are inherently related but because, within the heterosexual matrix, they *need* to be related. In fact, heterosexual desire and the binary sex/gender paradigm are co-dependent:

The institution of a naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire. The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire. (Butler, *GT* 30-31)

Thus, for heterosexual desire to be normalized, the myth that there are only two genders and two sexes needs to be fostered. By the same token, the supposed normality of heterosexuality reinforces the binaries of sex and gender. All of this is further bolstered by the myth of sexual difference and the belief that only two types of bodies exist: male and female. In this sense, then, sexual desire becomes contingent upon the supposed materiality of the sexed body: “the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the ‘materiality’ of sex, and that ‘materiality’ is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony” (Butler, *BTM* 15). As a result, any bodies that do not fit into that binary—

namely here trans bodies—are ultimately rendered abject because these “delegitimated bodies fail to count as ‘bodies’” (Butler, *BTM* 15).

The attempt to destabilize the supposed relationship between gender identity and sexual desire can, however, be problematized. For instance, in an earlier stage of his self-definition, Califia has argued that gender identity and sexual desire can be correlated, especially in cases where sexual desire is based on the gender one wishes to portray: “My lesbianism is largely a product of my profound emotional and erotic involvement with other women. But it was also a strategy for reducing gender dysphoria, part of a search for a place where I could be more of a man, or at least a different sort of woman” (*Sex Changes* 3). As Califia points out, sexual desire can be strategic, especially when heteronormative models of desire still widely operate. The problem with this kind of logic, however, is its reliance on heteronormativity. For instance, why couldn’t Califia have felt like “more of a man” or a “different sort of woman” while engaging in a relationship with a man? Interestingly, since making these comments, Califia has transitioned from female to male, now writes under the name *Patrick* Califia (instead of the more ambiguously-gendered *Pat*), and identifies as a “bisexual transman” (Califia, *Suspect* n.p.). While Califia’s lesbianism may have, in the past, served to reduce gender dysphoria, his eventual sex/gender transition suggests that attempting to remedy a gender identity issue via sexual relationships may not necessarily be the best solution because gender identity and sexual desire are not interchangeable.

Gender Outlaw and *Stone Butch Blues* address the fact that gender identity and sexual desire need not be connected. In “Hidden: A Gender”—the play embedded within *Gender Outlaw*—Herman, the character who most closely resembles Bornstein, is

challenged with a question that exemplifies how gender identity and sexual desire are too often confused within the dominant discourse: “Herman, you may think you’re a woman—aren’t you really just a gay man who’s so afraid of being gay that the only way to have sex with men is to be a woman?” (Bornstein, *GO* 189). Here Bornstein has isolated an argument that is used against transpeople by individuals who fail to recognize the difference between gender identity and desire. Herman states his answer in the simplest terms: “My gender identity has nothing to do with my sexual preference. Gender identity for me answers the question of who I am. Sexual preference answers the question who do I want to be romantically or sexually involved with. My being a woman does not mean I must love men. These are two separate issues” (Bornstein, *GO* 191). Bornstein realizes that “despite the many variations possible, sexual orientation/preference remains culturally linked to our gender system (and by extension to gender identity) through the fact that it’s most usually based on the gender of one’s partner. This link probably accounts for much of the tangle between sex and gender” (*GO* 37). In some cases, when transpeople are involved in gay or lesbian relationships, their desire is interpreted as narcissistic: “[Bornstein’s] identity as not only a transsexual but as a lesbian has been intriguing to most people and problematic for some. On his show, Geraldo Rivera attempted to bait her with, ‘So you became the thing you loved,’ to which Bornstein replied, ‘Yes, and I loved what I became’” (Barnes 318). Bornstein avoids the trap by focusing on her need to achieve a sense of self with which she feels comfortable.

While trying to separate gender from desire, Bornstein also seeks to differentiate between the gay/lesbian communities and the trans community. Bornstein quotes David

Harrison who, when asked whether the transgendered community is like the gay/lesbian communities, responds that they are different because “the lesbian/gay communities are based on who one relates to, whereas the transgendered experience is different: it’s about identity—relating to oneself. It’s more an inward thing” (qtd. in Bornstein, *GO* 67).

Harrison’s sentiments need to be qualified since both gay/lesbian identities and transgendered/transsexual identities are about oneself and about who one relates to.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is about one’s *sexual* identity in relation to who one desires, whereas being transsexual or transgendered is about one’s *gender* identity and how it relates to the myriad gender identities around us.

In an attempt to trouble the relationship between gender identity and sexual desire as articulated within the heterosexual matrix, Bornstein asks: “If men are supposed to love women and women are supposed to love men, then what am I if I love women? And what are you if you are attracted to me? What are we if we become lovers, you and I? What is the nature of your desire?” (*GO* 98). In posing these questions and voicing her transsexual subjectivity, Bornstein confronts the dominant paradigm and exemplifies that transsexuals and transgendered people call into question the workings of the heterosexual model of desire.

Feinberg expresses similar concerns about the conflation of gender identity and sexual desire. S/he notes that “frequently gay, lesbian and bi trans people are only recognized for our oppressed sexuality. For example, at times when I’ve spoken to an audience largely made up of masculine, cross-dressing females, the media describes the audience as ‘predominantly lesbian’—rather than transgender—alluding only to their presumed sexual desire” (*Trans Liberation* 97). In assuming that trans people are gay or

lesbian, their subjectivity is erased as many gender transgressors simply “get lumped into gay” (Feinberg, *Stone* 267). This demonstrates how the word “gay” has become an umbrella term that is used because more specific and appropriate language has yet to be developed.

In *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess attempts to make the distinction between her gender identity and her desire. Theresa has difficulty understanding Jess’s position and attempts to wrangle her into a female lesbian position:

‘You’re a woman!’ Theresa shouted at breakfast. [...]

‘No I’m not,’ I yelled back at her. ‘I’m a he-she. That’s different.’

Theresa slapped the table in anger. ‘That’s a terrible word. They call you that to hurt you.’

I leaned forward. ‘But I’ve listened. They don’t call the Saturday-night butches he-shes. It means something. It’s a way we’re different. It doesn’t just mean we’re...lesbians.’

Theresa frowned. ‘What’s the matter?’

I shrugged. ‘Nothing, I just never said that word before. It sounds so easy when you say it. But to me it sounds too much like lezzie or lesbo. That’s a tough word for me to wrap my tongue around.’ (Feinberg, *Stone* 147-8)

Although Jess’s gender identity is separate from her sexual desire, she also reveals how the two are invariably intertwined. She demonstrates that, according to existing models of sexual attraction, one’s desire cannot be named if one’s gender is not unambiguously labeled. While the term “he-she” is used degradingly by transphobic people, Jess appropriates it in an attempt to distinguish her gender identity from that of a butch

lesbian. At the same time, “he-she” becomes the only replacement for the word “lesbian,” which Jess has difficulty saying not only because it does not accurately name her identity, but because, as the words “lezzie” and “lesbo” connote, she also seems to consider “lesbian” as a pejorative term in a way that parallels Theresa’s sense of “he-she” as pejorative. Her use of “lesbian” and “he-she” evidences the linguistic limitations of the dominant sex/gender discourse and mirrors Feinberg’s use of “masculine female” as a self-descriptor: “I prefer using the term *masculine female* instead of butch, because butch is assumed to mean lesbian. But what about masculine females who are bisexual? What about those who are heterosexual, some married to men who are attracted to them *because of their masculinity, not in spite of it?*” (*Trans Liberation* 59). One can argue that Feinberg’s attempt to separate gender from sexuality by employing the term “masculine female” only reinforces binary gender. However, it is more likely that Feinberg’s use of “masculine female” exemplifies how no other suitable terms exist to accurately convey hir gender.

The confusion between gender identity and sexual desire can be traced back to a requirement dictated by the heterosexual discourse that sexual desire be overdetermined by the anatomical body. Butler uses the example of transsexuals, who may feel a disjunction between their physical bodies and the sexual acts in which they would like to engage. To have the kind of sex and pleasure they would like, pre-operative transsexuals may have to imagine body parts that they do not actually possess:

the phantasmatic nature of desire reveals the body not as its ground or cause, but as its *occasion* and its *object*. The strategy of desire is in part the transfiguration of the desiring body itself. Indeed, in order to desire at

all it may be necessary to believe in an altered bodily ego which, within the gendered rules of the imaginary, might fit the requirements of a body capable of desire. This imaginary condition of desire always exceeds the physical body through or on which it works. (Butler, *GT* 90)

While this imagining of body parts is indicative of the subject's freedom to envision a body that s/he does not actually possess, the fact that this imagining is so often governed by the heterosexual imperative and its basis in "real" bodies is problematic. Because the notion of the real will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, here I will merely note that "real" bodies become the basis for heterosexual desire as "the limits of the 'real' are produced within the naturalized heterosexualization of bodies in which physical facts serve as causes and desires reflect the inexorable effects of that physicality" (Butler, *GT* 90). Thus, for some transsexuals, sexual desire becomes conflated with the real and the idea that "parts of the body, the 'literal' penis, the 'literal' vagina [...] cause pleasure and desire" (Butler, *GT* 90). Sexual desire becomes rooted in having a certain kind of body, as though only embodied "real" women or "real" men are "capable of desire."

To say that sexual desire is dependent upon sexed embodiment is troublesome because it not only reinforces the notion of the "real body" but also ignores that we live in an age where the potential to transform or adapt the body is almost limitless:

it is difficult to invest in terms such as 'castration anxiety' and 'penis envy' at a time when sex seems to be most obviously prosthetic and seems to operate according to a very different sexual economy: this may be the age of artificial genitalia in the wake of surgical reproduction, or a

posttranssexual era, and our sexual present is marked by bodies with multiple organs, virtual bodies, even posthuman bodies. (Halberstam 118)

Consider Jess's sexual encounter with Annie, a straight homophobic woman (Feinberg, *Stone* 190-92). Annie believes that Jess is a man and, through Jess's convincing use of a dildo during sex, Annie never questions Jess's anatomy. The encounter between Annie and Jess is a type of

'heterosexual' sex that is not penis-centred, that is focused on the woman's body. The scene's irony, of course, is derived from the fact that both of the participants are women (Jess never ceases to think of herself as a woman, even when she is passing). Feinberg effectively deconstructs, in this scene, both the naturalness of maleness, and hence its claim to universal subjectivity, and the authenticity of the penis. (Moses 89)

Thus, we need not be tethered to our bodies and we need not have a certain kind of body to engage in a certain kind of sexual act because we live in an age where bodies can be modified (through the use of dildos, for instance) or even imagined (as in a virtual reality context).

Feinberg's partner, Minnie Bruce Pratt, questions the relationship between embodiment, gender identity, and sexual desire in *S/he*, a collection of vignettes that provides accounts of gender in the life of a femme who has a relationship with an ambiguously-gendered individual. Pratt examines how we can distance the body from sexual desire, asking "If I could slip off the robe of my gender, my sex, who would I lie down with, naked?" (38). In asking this question, Pratt attempts to completely shed

gender and the sexed body, leaving her readers to contemplate what desire would be if we did not have sexed bodies.

An exploration of Bornstein's and Feinberg's approaches to embodiment will reveal the differing roles of the body in transsexual and transgendered identity formation. Attempting to make sense of their bodies, genders, and accompanying sexual desires, Bornstein and Feinberg present some of the difficulties with which trans subjects are confronted.

Bornstein: Re-Imagining the Body

Despite having undergone sex-reassignment surgery, Bornstein is wary of tethering gender and desire to the body. Throughout *Gender Outlaw*, she seeks to provide alternate models of sexual desire. In claiming that sexual desire can be attributed to performance and acts rather than essential selves, Bornstein distances herself from a particular labeling of the body and also argues for the role of language in trans subjectivity. When challenged to consider the relationship between desire, attraction, and gender—"How can you have desire with no gender?" (*GO* 38)—Bornstein asserts that desire can be based on a gender *role*, rather than an unwavering and permanent gender identity:

Given that most romantic or sexual involvements in this culture are defined by the genders of the partners, the *most* appropriate identity to have in a romantic relationship would be a gender identity, or something that passes for gender identity, like a gender role. A gender role might be butch, femme, top, and bottom—these are all methods of acting. So, even without a gender identity

per se, some workable identity can be called up and put into motion within a relationship, and when we play with our identities, we play with desire. (*GO* 39)

In positing gender roles, Bornstein is not insisting that these roles are innate or static. Rather, she believes that gender roles are malleable—that one can change roles depending on one’s mood or situation. In this way, the self can be shaped according to who one wishes to attract or the kind of sex one wishes to engage in. Although Bornstein believes that “some sort of identity is necessary for love, sex, and/or desire to exist” (*Workbook* 93), she emphasizes “*becom[ing]* whatever is necessary to attract the object of our desire” and deems “*attraction* as the key concept” (*Workbook* 93; emphasis in original). Crucial to Bornstein’s analysis is the notion of *becoming*, which comes to replace a more essentialist *being*. In privileging becoming over being, Bornstein distances herself from essentialist thoughts about the body and its place in desire. She asserts that, “[w]e need to differentiate between having an identity and being an identity” (*GO* 117). Because Bornstein is so invested in performance and play, she is able to underline how gender is merely a form of role-playing that can be used to entice the object of desire.

Bina Freiwald notes that play is a crucial component of Bornstein’s gender theories: “Play provides Bornstein with a model for having/being more, and so performance becomes both the practice of and trope for her becoming” (45). Certainly, as a prolific actor, Bornstein plays on stage; she also, however, plays in “real” life, since she performs many genders and many selves. Performance necessitates experimentation and practice. However, it seems that Bornstein is not interested in the

destination so much as in the *process* of becoming. For Bornstein, becoming is a process that should never cease, as we are all able to reinvent ourselves while at the same time attracting various types of sexual partners and engaging in many sorts of sexual activities. Several of the photographs included in *Gender Outlaw* show Bornstein as an actor performing different roles. By including these types of photographs in the autobiography, Bornstein underscores the importance and relevance of performance and play to her life.

Bornstein's depiction of phone sex combines acting/performance with bodily fluidity. Describing her experiences as a phone sex worker, she explains how identity becomes extremely malleable as both she and the caller can don whatever identities they wish: "When I was a phone sex hostess, I knew quite a few hostesses who were men. The actual gender of the hostesses didn't matter, as long as they could act. Phone sex was theater. The hostesses were playing their roles, for which they'd get paid, and the clients play their roles, for which opportunity they'd pay us" (Bornstein, *GO* 139). Bornstein also relates phone sex with online chatting and, in *My Gender Workbook*, even cites some of her personal online exchanges. In one instance, Bornstein's online partner wishes to know Bornstein's anatomical sex. However, Bornstein (who uses the name NiteGyrl) refuses to adhere to the male/female binary that is offered:

Angel Boy: Mistress, are you male or female?

NiteGyrl: ::deep, rumbling laughter:: What if I told you I was a man? [...]

Angel Boy: You're a man?

NiteGyrl: You never can tell, can you? (*Workbook* 220)

Both on the phone and online, the body becomes freed of certain constraints as sex and desire are placed in the realms of imagination and language. As desire is imagined and articulated, the importance of one's actual body is reduced. Perhaps phone sex is so lucrative for pre-operative transsexuals because the body that one currently inhabits can be re-envisioned and mentally replaced with the desired one. By discussing phone sex, Bornstein encourages us to question how much of desire involves imagination, role playing, and identity shifting, and prompts us to ask: how can the freedom allowed during phone sex teach us to be more flexible in person-to-person sexual encounters?

While promoting play and performance in an attempt to distance gender and sexual desire from embodiment, Bornstein places most emphasis on *sex acts*. Rejecting the commonly accepted notions that sex pertains to the biological categories of male and female, and gender to the social and performative categories of masculinity and femininity, Bornstein dismantles this relationship between sex and gender and posits something else. She claims that gender is “categorization. Anything that categorizes people is gender, whether it's appearance or mannerisms, biology or psychology, hormones, roles, genitals, whatever”; she proposes to replace it with sex understood as “fucking: any way, shape, or form, alone or with another or others” (*Workbook 26*). Bornstein acknowledges that sexual desire can stem from “genital preference” or from “the kind of *sex acts* one prefers,” and recognizes that “elaborate systems exist to distinguish just that, and to announce it to the world at large” (*GO 36*). She notes that sex has become contingent on the body—on the genders of the people involved in the sex act—and that these genders must fall into either one of two categories: man or woman.

We are only allowed to be attracted to a man or woman (or both) but are never given the option to be attracted to something else:

sex (the act) becomes hopelessly linked to gender (the category). And what about sexual attraction? That's linked to gender attribution. First we attribute a gender, then we decide if we want to be attracted to that person; but the first filter is almost always 'Is that person the right gender for me, sexually and romantically?' Finally, what we enjoy actually *doing* sexually, the sex act itself, often involves a specific sort of genital play, and as genitals have been gendered in this culture, so sex has become gendered. (Bornstein, *Workbook* 28-9)

Bornstein lists four recognizable models of desire—heterosexual, gay male, lesbian, and bisexual—and remarks that “*all these models depend on the gender of the partner*” which “results in minimizing, if not completely dismissing, other dynamic models of a relationship which could be more important than gender and are often more telling about the real nature of someone’s desire” (*GO* 33; emphasis in original). She then lists a plethora of other possible models of desire, such as butch/femme, top/bottom, butch/butch, femme/femme, triad, human/animal, adult/child, same-aged, parent/child, multiple partner, and able-bodied. This extensive listing is important: by articulating these types of desires (in language), she validates them and in turn begins to destabilize heterosexual normativity⁴. Her ultimate point is that “there’s more to sex (the act) than gender (one classification of identity)” (*GO* 35). In providing so many other models of

⁴ Some of Bornstein’s alternative models of desire may raise concern. Specifically, should all judgment be suspended in the case of adult/child or parent/child? Although Bornstein may be using these labels figuratively (so that consenting adults play the *roles* of parent and child), she does not clearly stipulate this, thus leaving room for ambiguity and misunderstanding.

desire, Bornstein questions why attraction or desire is almost always dependent on gender. She argues that there are many other reasons why people might be attracted to each other—age, power, number of partners—and that defining desire only according to embodied gender is limiting.

Bornstein's wish to evade a particular grid of embodiment complements a particular feature of her post-transsexual position: the recognition that when one is a subject in transition, attempts at rooting desire in the body are complicated:

I identify as neither male nor female, and now that my lover is going through his gender change, it turns out I'm neither straight nor gay. What I've found as a result of this borderline life is that the more fluid my identity has become, and the less demanding my own need to belong to the camps of male, female, gay or straight, the more playful and less dictatorial my fashion has become—as well as my style of self-expression.

(GO 4)

While Bornstein claims that a “borderline life” has brought about increased flexibility, her relationship with David (formerly Catherine) Harrison ends after he has female-to-male sex-reassignment surgery. Although Bornstein does not discuss the reasons for the breakup (and certainly there can be many reasons unrelated to gender issues), we can wonder whether it is telling of her sexual desire for a kind of body that Harrison no longer occupies, or his different desire now that he inhabits a different body.

Bornstein challenges her readers to consider what it would be like to be attracted to an androgynous person. She asks how we would name that desire and who we would be if we experienced that type of desire: “As an exercise, can you recall the last time you

saw someone whose gender was ambiguous? Was this person attractive to you? And if you knew they called themselves neither a man nor a woman, what would it make you if you're attracted to that person? And if you were to kiss? Make love? *What would you be?*" (GO 40; my emphasis). In challenging her readers with the question "What would you be?" Bornstein is pointing out how not only would the person's identity need to be reconsidered but that perhaps the dominant discourse does not offer a nameable category for this identity.

A means of asserting one's place and one's identity comes from the act of naming, especially since, as Butler argues, "the divine power of naming structures the theory of interpellation that accounts for the ideological constitution of the subject. Baptism exemplifies the linguistic means by which the subject is compelled into social being" (*Psychic* 110-111). Although the binary sex/gender discourse may at times not suffice to describe a transgendered or transsexual identity, language offers the potential for new words to be coined, and consequently new identities to be named: "I learned from working in the Women's Movement that one of the first steps in claiming power is to speak one's own voice: to name oneself. Having sorted out the culture's ideas of gender and sexuality, it's time to name the experience of stepping outside those ideas" (Bornstein, *GO* 53). More importantly, it is necessary to name oneself publicly, because it allows one to situate oneself amongst others: "it is never enough to name oneself by oneself in a private fantasy. Identity is always dependent upon others of whom a demand for recognition is made—paradoxically, in terms one calls one's own" (Tyler 215).

Bornstein's theories on sex, gender, and embodiment, do not come without their critics who make note of contradictions that surface throughout the text. Califia is

especially critical of some of Bornstein's ideas, articulating these concerns in *Sex Changes*. Califia claims that "Bornstein seems unwilling to acknowledge the physical facts upon which gender is based. There really are XX and XY sex chromosomes, penises and clits, testosterone and estrogen, a sex that impregnates and another that bears children" (*Sex Changes* 247). While Califia agrees that "our society has assigned meanings to these differences that go way beyond what pure biology would dictate," he disagrees with Bornstein's willingness to dismiss "the physiological and genetic realities that really do divide most of the human race into two very different groups of people" (*Sex Changes* 247). Califia seems to argue that male and female bodies *do* exist, even if they are joined by other kinds of bodies. Thus, we should not seek to eliminate the categories of male and female altogether but instead add on to these gender categories. Differentiating between the existence of bodies sexed as male or female and the oppressive sex/gender ideology is crucial: "Bornstein does not make a distinction between the sexist system of differential privilege and the potentially innocuous male and female categories on which that system is based" (Califia, *Sex Changes* 272).

Furthermore, although Bornstein claims to reject embodiment as the sole determining factor for gender identity and sexual desire, several aspects of *Gender Outlaw* fail to support this position. For instance, the inclusion of photographs in the text which depict Bornstein as a recognizably attractive "feminine" subject forces us to question whether she is able to play out this kind of femininity only as a result of her newfound comfort with her post-operative body. Is Bornstein able to celebrate her self and her ability to perform many selves only because she has attained a body that matches her sense of self? Elliot notes: "[w]hile there is certainly suffering in Bornstein's text,

there is also celebration. This celebration is not the euphoria of someone convinced that she is a woman, but a celebration of the recognition that acquiring sexed identification enables one to be a desiring subject, that is, free to experience one's own desire rather than enacting someone else's" (Elliot, "Some Critical Reflections" 18). Elliot argues against the need for surgery, claiming that Bornstein's surgery only prompts her to realize that she can never "be" a woman, that gender is always performed: "I have come to suspect that what Bornstein got with her SRS was not just a new body, but also, and more importantly, an embodied position as a woman from which to enact or perform her own desire. This gave her access to the knowledge that she always had been free to represent herself (symbolically) as a woman regardless of her anatomical makeup" (Elliot, "Some Critical Reflections" 16). Elliot then compares Bornstein with Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*: just as Dorothy always had the power to return home, so does Bornstein learn "that she has the power to live as a woman without asking the physician's permission or submitting to the knife" (Elliot, "Some Critical Reflections" 16). Elliot's skepticism is echoed by Califia, who questions Bornstein's decision to take on a more transgendered identity post-surgery: "It is impossible to avoid wondering if Bornstein's proud rejection of both sexes is not in part based on a *fait accompli*, being overwhelmed by the level of resistance she has experienced from ignorant and bigoted people who refuse to accept her as a woman" (*Sex Changes* 259). While it is true that surgery does not "make" Bornstein a woman, perhaps Bornstein's transsexuality—her sexed embodiment—is nonetheless necessary because it finally allows her to engage in play. With embodiment comes the freedom to become the desiring subject she feels herself to be and perhaps for transsexuals, embodiment is one of the final steps in becoming a desiring subject. The

inconsistency between Bornstein's post-surgical body and her claims that the body should be freed from the confines of limiting sexed binaries is never resolved. This inconsistency points to the fact that there are no definite answers to the quandary and that it may be unreasonable to expect consistency from a subject with a shifting identity.

Feinberg: Negotiating with Butch and FTM Bodies

Stone Butch Blues presents Jess, a subject who struggles with her gender identity and her body and attempts to negotiate between a butch identity and a transgendered one. Throughout her exploration, Jess grapples with the body's role in the understanding of her sexual identity. As Feinberg attempts to articulate the difference between butch and transgendered FTM, s/he investigates how gender identity and sexual desire may be different but are not necessarily mutually exclusive for these subjects. Adding to the complexity is Feinberg's presentation of the difficulties in defining and sustaining a romantic relationship when one is a subject in transition or in a perpetually liminal state.

As Jess tries to locate an identity that feels like home, she is faced with the task of isolating the differences between he-she, butch, stone butch, and FTM transgendered subjectivities. Part of the difficulty in distinguishing between these various selves rests in the fact that gender identity is often confused with sexuality. When Jess and Duffy are discussing Ethel and Laverne, two women who work at the plant, Duffy strives to understand how such masculine women can be married to men. Duffy asks Jess, "but aren't they butches?" to which Jess replies, "Well, they're he-shes, but they're not butches" (Feinberg, *Stone* 86). Jess's response implies that being a "he-she" is specifically about gender, while being butch is about *both* gender *and* sexual preference.

As Cat Moses observes, the butch is punished not only for gender transgression but also for “inappropriate” desire: “In the sixties and seventies, the period in which most of [*Stone Butch Blues*] is set, when a butch and a femme strolled down the street holding hands they suffered not only for the butch’s gender treachery, but also for embodying a desire that directly challenged normative heterosexuality” (78-9). Duffy and Jess’s conversation indicates that he-shes are often slotted into the category of “lesbian,” as their masculinity is read as sexual orientation, rather than gender.

In addressing butch identity, Feinberg challenges the heterosexual assumptions that often accompany butch sexuality by coupling two butches, Frankie and Johnny, and showing Jess’s rather confused reaction to the pair. Jess admits to Frankie that when she heard about the couple, “the first thing [she] wondered was, who’s the femme in bed?” (Feinberg, *Stone* 274). Frankie clarifies: “Neither of us were. What you meant was who does the fucking and who gets fucked? Who ran the fuck? That’s not the same as being butch or femme, Jess” (Feinberg, *Stone* 274). Influenced by heterosexist models of desire, Jess confuses gender identity with sexual acts and assumes that a certain gender presupposes a certain sex act. Butler notes that butch and femme relations are not mere replicas of heterosexual relationships:

The idea that butch and femme are in some sense ‘replicas’ or ‘copies’ of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of these identities as internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled. Lesbian femmes may recall the heterosexual scene, as it were, but also displace it at the same time. In both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or

natural identity is put into question; indeed, it is precisely that question as it is embodied in these identities that becomes one source of their erotic significance. (*GT* 157)

Thus, in combining both gender transgression with same-sex desire, the butch-femme model of desire subverts the sex/gender binary that fuels the heterosexual paradigm. As Butler further clarifies, the lesbian femme's attraction to the butch is based on the butch's gendered self: "the object [and clearly, there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay" (Butler, *GT* 156-7). What makes the butch such a peripheral identity (and perhaps such a desirable sexual partner) is her ability to unsettle the normative relationship between the body, gender, and sexuality.

While Feinberg seems to argue that a significant component of butch identity is about sexual desire in relation to gender, s/he also creates Jess as a character who wrestles with an identity that is about something more than sexuality, signaling that Jess may situate more accurately as transgendered or transsexual. When Jess recounts a dream she had, one in which she exists in an interstitial space between male and female, she claims that "in the dream it wasn't about being gay [...] I didn't feel like a woman or a man, and I liked how I was different" (Feinberg, *Stone* 143). Faced with locating a gendered sense of self within the binary options offered, Jess finds that a suitable identity is lacking: "I don't know. There's never been many other women in the world I could identify with. But I sure as hell don't feel like a guy, either. I don't know what I am. It makes me feel crazy" (Feinberg, *Stone* 217). Jess's gender "crisis" is partly a linguistic

conundrum because the binary gender discourse only allows her to choose between “man” and “woman.” When Jess states that she feels “crazy” as a result, Feinberg raises the issue of how gender transgressors have typically been pathologized within medical discourse. Instead of scrutinizing and revamping a limiting gender discourse, medical practice has taken to placing fault on subjects who do not fit into the models.

Jess’s uncertainty about her identity prompts the reader to consider the relationship between butch and FTM. Gayle Rubin claims that both differences and similarities can be found between these two identities:

Some butches are psychologically indistinguishable from female-to-male transsexuals, except for the identities they choose and the extent to which they are willing or able to alter their bodies. Many FTMs live as butches before adopting transsexual or male identities. Some individuals explore each identity before choosing one that is more meaningful for them, and others use both categories to interpret and organize their experience. The boundaries between the categories of butch and transsexual are permeable.

(473)

Prosser, however, questions Rubin’s assertion that the line between butch and FTM is indeterminate, seeking a more specific rationale behind these two locations: “If butch and FTM can be so ‘psychologically indistinguishable’, what drives the FTM to reconfigure his soma in ways that the butch does not? What resides in, what is the status of, that ‘exception’? What is specific to the transsexual’s transition, what to the butch’s location?” (“Exceptional Locations” 85). Using these questions to consider Jess’s

situation, we can contemplate why she initially wants to transition but ultimately chooses to end hormone therapy. How is her body related to her sense of self and to her desire?

As Jess tries to locate a sense of self, she contemplates the various kinds of butches that are part of her community. Edna, one of Jess's femme friends, identifies the variability among butches: "I don't think femmes ever see butches as one big group. After a while you see how many different ways there are for butches to be. You see them young and defiant, you see them change, you watch them harden up or be destroyed. Soft ones and bitter ones and troubled ones" (Feinberg, *Stone* 213). Amongst this array of butches lies the stone butch, whom Halberstam describes as

a dyke body placed somewhere on the boundary between female masculinity and transgender subjectivity and seems to provoke unwarranted outrage not only from a gender-conformist society that cannot comprehend stone butch gender or stone butch desire but also from within the dyke subculture, where the stone butch tends to be read as frigid, dysphoric, misogynist, repressed, or simply pretranssexual. (124)

The coupling of gender non-conformity with sexual deviance marks the stone butch as an outlaw who has the potential to be excluded from both the lesbian and straight communities.

An underlying component to stone butch identity is her need to remain untouched. Specifically during sex, the stone butch is eager to please her femme partner but is unwilling to allow her partner to sexually stimulate her in return. The deep-seated insistence to remain untouched is seen even when Jess has a vaginal infection but cannot allow the doctor to examine her: "I couldn't let her touch me there" (Feinberg, *Stone*

236). The stone butch's unwillingness to be touched signals a discomfort with her body which is similar to that of the transsexual. This untouchableness may result from the dissonance a stone butch feels between sexual desire, gender identity, and the body.

Halberstam claims that this dissonance is resolved by taking on a stone identity:

He-shes, women who are not received anywhere in society simply as women, cannot suddenly experience themselves as women within their private and personal emotional and sexual encounters. The burden of butchness manifests as sexual confusion that *is resolved* by the assumption of a stone sexual identity. To be stone, then, is not simply to have shut down and closed off to 'normal' sexual contact between women; it is a courageous and imaginative way of dealing with the contradictory demands and impulses of being a butch in a woman's body. (129)

Because the stone butch's complicated relationship to the body is in many ways comparable to that of the trans person, these two identities may become confused.

If we consider butches on a more general scale and attempt to distinguish them from FTMs, embodiment surfaces as a crucial defining feature. James, one of the FTM subjects that Henry Rubin interviews in *Self-Made Men*, claims that "[h]e knows the difference between an FTM and a lesbian because of the different ways they feel about their bodies. Where butches manage to stay in their bodies, FTMs cannot" (25).

Interestingly, the use of the word "lesbian" in the above quote implies that butch is always about sexual desire before it is about gender.

When Jess is asked how she knows that she is not transsexual, she responds:

"I've seen about it on TV. I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel

trapped” (Feinberg, *Stone* 158-9). Influenced by television and other mainstream views, Jess rearticulates a typical discourse about transsexuality—that a transsexual is trapped in the wrong body. Cromwell contends that

[t]he phrase *wrong body* inadequately describes the feeling that one’s body is not a part of one’s self. The body’s experience is incongruent with the mind’s. The insider within the body does not recognize the outside of the body as belonging. Attempts to describe this phenomenon, because of the limitations of language, seemingly lead back to the concept of wrong body. ‘Wrong body’ connotes surface understanding rather than depth of feeling. Using a language that cannot accurately hear or adequately interpret the individual experience of transness results in the discourse of the wrong body. (105)

As Jess modifies her body with hormones and begins to pass as man, she feels even more trapped because she is beginning to lose all sense of self: “As much as I loved my beard as part of my body, I felt trapped behind it. What I saw reflected in the mirror was not a man, but I couldn’t recognize the he-she. My face no longer revealed the contrasts of my gender. I could see my passing self, but even I could no longer see the more complicated me beneath my surface” (Feinberg, *Stone* 221-2). Inhabiting a body that can be read as male is threatening to Jess’s sense of self because, as much as Jess is not a woman, she is also not a man. Within these parameters, Jess feels limited: “I didn’t get to explore being a he-she [...] I simply became a he—a man without a past” (Feinberg, *Stone* 222). Jess feels restricted by the binary, not only in terms of the kind of body she can occupy but also with the available linguistic terms. She prefers the “he-she” designation even

though, ironically, the term was coined by people who sought to oppress her and others like her, and despite the fact that the word itself is a combination of the binary terms “he” and “she.”

Jess longs to occupy a body that exists outside of gender, not one that expresses either femininity or masculinity. As Moses points out,

The only time Jess feels trapped in the wrong body, then, is when she is passing as a man. This scene foregrounds Feinberg’s expressive hypothesis. Motivated by economic necessity, Jess’s performance as a man is parodic and unfulfilling. Feinberg privileges the expression of a self outside of gender, not the subversive performance of gender. It is implied that Jess will achieve fulfillment only when the performance of gender and the expression of self coincide. (91)

Jess learns that existing in a transitional space—even if it confuses others—is the best place for her. When she chooses to cease transitioning from female to male, “we see the insufficiency of binary gender rather than the solidity of transsexual identification” (Halberstam 148). Dissatisfied with the binary options, Jess rejects such simplistic attempts at gender categorization: “Who was I now—woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices; it could never be answered if it had to be asked” (Feinberg, *Stone* 222). Jess’s eventual decision to discontinue transitioning points to her difficulty in adopting a fixed gender and ultimately blurs the distinction between transsexual or transgendered: “Feinberg’s complication of the significance of transition prevents a simple distinction between transsexuality and transgender that would consolidate those binaries of contemporary theory by aligning

transgender and transsexuality with them: deliteralizing/literalizing; transgressive/reinscriptive” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 202).

Because transgendered bodies have been continually marginalized by the current sex/gender discourse, relationships involving trans subjects are difficult to name and are repeatedly ignored. As Califia points out, however, “the fact that there is no term for such an identity does not mean that it does not exist. They may be rare, but there are people (male, female, and other) who desire, enjoy, and prefer to be partnered with men or women who cross-dress or who are transgendered” (*Sex Changes* 207). Pratt expresses these feelings of desire for the liminal body:

As you take off your men’s clothes, I do not secretly want you to be a man so I can be saved from my desire for another woman. And when I unknot your tie and unbutton your shirt, as we lie down together naked, I say with a fearless caress that I love the man I am undressing, and I also know that a woman lies besides me, not a mirror to reflect me. When we reveal our selves in nakedness, how often you have been denied for your physical self how often I have been despised for my sexual self. You not looking like a proper woman, me not acting like a proper woman, we have wanted the body that is *and*, that is *both*. [...] And those years I was no obedient asexual girl, but a restless lover searching for the lost garden, that place of male woman and female man. (104)

In speaking about desiring the juxtaposition of masculine gender with female (or perhaps hybrid) embodiment, Pratt validates this kind of desire. She also demonstrates that the

transgendered person's partner becomes an outlaw too for loving the kind of body that hegemonic society has deemed unlovable.

As Feinberg demonstrates in *Stone Butch Blues*, the inability to name the relationship involving a trans person can cause great stress on the trans person's partner, as his or her own identity also needs to be renegotiated. Theresa's resistance to accepting Jess's gender identity stems from the necessary rethinking of her own identity. The partners of transsexuals and transgendered people are faced with the task of understanding how to label their own sexual desire and orientation. When addressing the partners of cross-dressing heterosexuals at the Texas T party, Feinberg acknowledges the many questions that arise for them: "What language is there for you? How do you deal with your gender preference for a masculine sexual partner, when your husband reveals a feminine side to you? How does that change the ways you express your sexuality? For you also it's important to have fresh ways to think about yourself and your bond of sexuality with your partner" (*Trans Liberation* 27). Pratt voices her own experience of redefining the self after falling in love with a transgendered person:

I had no language to talk about her or us together. I had to learn to say that I had fallen in love with a woman so *transgendered*, with such perceived contradictions between her birth sex and her gender expression, that someone at one end of a city block could call her 'Ma'am' and someone at the other end would call her 'Sir.' I was learning that I was more complicated than I'd had any idea. I was beginning to pull the thread of who *I* was out of the tangle of words: *woman* and *lesbian*, *femme* and *female*. (14; emphasis in original)

Thus, not only does language fail and complicate the transgendered person's identity, but the partner also needs to extricate words to articulate her own selfhood. There is a lack of language to articulate what is happening, what the partner's identity is, and what the relationship is called.

The views expressed in Feinberg's polemical work and in Pratt's autobiographical writing are mirrored in *Stone Butch Blues*. Theresa has great difficulty accepting Jess's liminal status, especially once Jess considers taking hormones (Feinberg, *Stone* 146-7). Partnering with a trans person can be especially difficult for those who politicize their sexual orientation. For instance, for a woman who is in a relationship with another woman, the relationship is read as a lesbian one. However, if the partner decides to transition, the couple can then pass as heterosexual. This may negate any political statement they may be making via their sexual orientation. When Jess mentions the idea of passing, Theresa is unresponsive, signaling her resistance to the change from being read as a lesbian to being read as a heterosexual woman. Theresa is unwilling to be part of a seemingly heterosexual couple because it counteracts the identity she has constructed for herself:

'I'm a woman, Jess. I love you because you're a woman too. I made up my mind when I was growing up that I was not going to betray my desire by resigning myself to marrying a dirt farmer or the boy at the service station. Do you understand?'

I shook my head sadly. 'Do you wish I wasn't a butch?'

She smiled. 'No. I love your butchness. I just don't want to be some man's wife, even if that man's a woman.' (Feinberg, *Stone* 148)

We can wonder whether Theresa is disturbed by the prospects of Jess's changing body or whether it is merely the categorization of the relationship. Would Theresa have been more accepting if there were a way of naming that relationship other than heterosexual, or if the relationship could be more clearly read as trans? How is Theresa's desire contingent upon people's perception of Jess's biological sex? Even though Jess claims that she would "still be a butch [...] Even with hormones" (Feinberg, *Stone* 151), Theresa's refusal to continue the relationship signals that she is more affected by social perception of Jess's identity than by Jess's actual sense of identity.

In desiring subjects who exist outside of the gendered divide, partners of transsexuals and transgendered people situate an unnamed desire—a desire that perhaps can only be called queer. Califia comments on Pratt's writing, stating that "Pratt fearlessly celebrates the rebellious and outcast nature of her relationship and situates it firmly on the map of queer passion" (*Sex Changes* 215). Although desire for a liminal body may remain unnamed in the dominant discourse, this kind of desire does, nonetheless, exist and awaits recognition. As Bornstein's and Feinberg's texts outline the complexities associated with trans bodies and trans desires, they force us to reconsider the ways that bodies, genders and sexualities are policed under the influence of the binary sex/gender discourse and encourage us to imagine the other selves that could emerge if that discourse ceased to be the dominant one.

CHAPTER TWO

Is That Real-ly You I See?: The Transsexual and Transgendered Photography of Cameron and LaGrace Volcano

What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance.

--Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 51

When he speaks of the incapacity to name, Barthes voices a concern that resonates with trans photography. Photography's advantage, as a visual medium, lies in its ability to show what cannot be articulated within the often limiting parameters of language. As Barthes proclaims, "[s]uch is the Photograph: it cannot *say* what it lets us see" (100). In Loren Cameron's *Body Alchemy* and Del LaGrace Volcano's *Sublime Mutations*, we find images that may prick or disturb because the bodies represented therein exist outside of the facile binary of male and female and the discourse that encourages this restrictive categorization. Looking at *Body Alchemy* and *Sublime Mutations*, we can investigate how photography, as a type of narrative, captures and documents transsexual and transgendered bodies. The focus of this chapter is on the bodily "real." If photography is alleged to capture reality, how does this coincide with the search for the real that informs much of trans discourse? In considering Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photographs, I will explore how the notion of the real factors into gendered passing and how it informs the reading of subjects' genders. Finally, further attention will be given to the pursuit of the real via sex-reassignment surgery, and how other body modifications serve as an alternative to surgery.

Before undertaking an exploration of *Body Alchemy* and *Sublime Mutations*, the form of each work and the ideological differences between Cameron and LaGrace Volcano need to be mapped out. As the subtitle of *Body Alchemy* indicates, Cameron's photographs are "transsexual portraits," and while Cameron does voice his intention to "embrace and include in this work those people who may identify more comfortably as 'transgender,' or 'gender transgressive,'" the weight of the book falls on transsexual men, especially since *Body Alchemy* claims to be "the first photodocumentation of transsexual men from within [the] community" (Cameron 12). This is not to suggest that Cameron is unsympathetic to transgendered concerns; it merely indicates that, within this particular collection, Cameron wishes to pay attention to the construction of the transsexual body. In the introduction to *Body Alchemy*, Cameron explains the uneasiness he felt with his body as a child and adolescent. A self-professed tomboy, Cameron spent his childhood playing army games and G.I. Joe. During his adolescence, he helped his father with farm work and eventually came to identify as a lesbian. However, by his mid-twenties, Cameron started to address his gender discomfort and began the process of transitioning from female to male.

Body Alchemy is divided into several sections. The first section contains Cameron's self-portraits. This is followed by a chapter called "The New Man Series," which features five female-to-male transsexual portraits accompanied by the subjects' own personal written accounts of their transformations and identities. Following this is a section called "Our Bodies," which contains several photographs of constructed penises, chest reconstruction, and alternative genital modification. In the next two chapters, "Fellas" and "Emergence," more FTM portraits are featured, all with written accounts,

some with pre-transition photographs next to later transition photos. The final section, “Duo,” features Cameron and his transgendered partner, Kayt, and contains photographs and written accounts of their identities and their relationship. Many of the photographs in *Body Alchemy* are accompanied by written passages which expand upon and complement the narratives offered in the photographs themselves. This “relational interfacing” allows the photographs and written text to interact with each other (Smith and Watson, *Interfaces* 22). As Smith and Watson note, when the visual and textual are weaved in this way, they “are not iterations of the *same* but versions gesturing toward a subjectivity neither can exhaustively articulate; they are in dialogue” (*Interfaces* 22; emphasis in original).

LaGrace Volcano’s *Sublime Mutations* locates itself predominantly within a transgendered framework rather than a transsexual one. The collection mirrors LaGrace Volcano’s own identity, as he resists attempts at definite categorization: “I’ve possessed and been possessed by a multitude of names, bodies and identities in my forty odd years. Change, mutation and migration are as natural to me as staying the same might be to you” (5). He claims, “I see myself as FTM. ‘Inter’ rather than ‘trans’ sexual. [...] I see myself as BOTH (male and female) rather than NEITHER (male nor female). In my case, the two add up to something non-numerical. I am simply gender-variant” (qtd. in Cromwell 126). LaGrace Volcano’s self-proclaimed status as “Gender Terrorist,” “Intentional Mutation” and “Intersex by Design” signals his refusal to adhere to an imposed binary gender system and to instead tear down the divide and question gender categories altogether (LaGrace Volcano 5). He acknowledges that “there are no hierarchies to transgression” and that “mutations come in many forms” (LaGrace

Volcano 5). He seems most interested in multiplicity—of genders, of bodies, of people—which aligns him with a transgendered approach rather than a transsexual orientation.

Sublime Mutations is a testament to this.

A retrospective of ten years' worth of LaGrace Volcano's work, *Sublime Mutations* depicts many bodies and many genders. The photographs in *Sublime Mutations* are prefaced by a brief introduction by LaGrace Volcano and placed between two essays—one by Prosser and another by Gerburg Treusch-Dieter. These texts frame the photographs and “set in motion certain readings of the image[s]” that accompany them (Smith and Watson, *Interfaces* 21). For instance, LaGrace Volcano's introduction gives some insight into the way he self-identifies. Prosser's and Treusch-Dieter's essays invite us to read the photographs through a particular lens, foregrounding the importance of photography in revealing the “real” or the role of sexual desire in LaGrace Volcano's collection. They hint to us how to read the photographs—Prosser's essay preparing us for what lies ahead, and Treusch-Dieter's essay inviting us to examine the photographs once again.

The chapters of *Sublime Mutations* are arranged thematically according to various issues pertaining to sexual desire, gender, or embodiment. For instance, the first chapter, “The Feminine Principle,” is dedicated to femmes, featuring such familiar faces as Susie Bright, Rita Lynch, and Kate Bornstein. Other chapters, like “Lesbian Boyz & Other Inverts,” deal with FTM individuals and subjects who occupy interstitial spaces. LaGrace Volcano does include several self-portraits in the collection—namely those found in “Hermaphrodyké: Self Portraits of Desire” and “Gender Optional”—and, thus, the collection becomes a documentation of LaGrace Volcano's own gender evolution as

well as of gender transgression in general. However, the bulk of the book is dedicated to other subjects, specifically those who transgress conventional gendered expectations. Like Cameron's work, LaGrace Volcano's photographs are also well-suited to a study of embodiment, first because they are portraits, and second because they zoom in on particular body parts. For instance, the chapter entitled "TransGenital Landscapes," which features close-ups of various genitalia, provides a particular look at the relevance of genitals in gendered identity.

The differences between Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's stances are evident in the titles of their books. The words "alchemy" and "mutations" conjure different images. Because alchemy was a process intended to produce gold, the word suggests the expectation of a much valued final product. In fact, just before the introduction to *Body Alchemy*, Cameron includes a quotation from Jeffrey Maitland in which he discusses philosophical alchemy as the "art of *transforming*," in that "it is not the willful attempt to change who and what we are, but the art of *becoming* who we are" (qtd. in Cameron 7; my emphasis). Maitland's choice of diction is telling: "transforming" and "becoming" suggest an arrival at a particular destination. The word "mutations," on the other hand, seems to imply that the focus is on the *process* of transformation, that what is being photographed is the transformation itself, without necessarily considering a goal: "Mutation' conjures up a change that is neither clear-cut nor complete. If the point of transition is to get over the change, mutation implies ongoing and unimaginable change, transmogrification not conversion. Moreover, since the process of modification is constant, mutations (mutants?) can always mutate into something else" (Prosser, "The Art of Ph/Autography" 6). Volcano presents an array of subjects with an array of

genders. He does not seem interested in photographing subjects who plan to arrive at a particular gender. His subjects seem more intent upon blurring gender and creating a self that is based on this blurring.

Given that Cameron identifies as a female-to-male transsexual and LaGrace Volcano as a female-to-male transgendered person, more attention will be paid in this chapter to the construction and embodiment of masculinity in FTM subjectivities than to MTF subjectivities.

Trans Photography: A Focus on the Self

Prosser contends that “[n]arrative is [...] a kind of second skin: the story of the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be ‘read’” (*Second Skins* 101). In transsexual and transgendered photography, we read bodies instead of a written text. As a visual medium, photography obviously lends itself to the visual aspects of transgendered and transsexual identities. In discussing hir own gender identity, Feinberg stresses the importance of the visual: “While there is as yet no language for who I have become, I articulate my gender—silent to the ear, but thunderous to the eye” (*TransLiberation* 33). How does photography serve to articulate this visual thunder? What story or narrative do transsexual or transgendered photographs relay or tell? How do we read the transsexual or transgendered body through photography? And how does this differ from reading a written text?

Some theorists have asserted that photography reveals all—that a photograph is able to tell the whole truth. For instance, John Berger has stated that once the camera gained popularity in the twentieth century, photography was seen as “offering direct

access to the real” (286). Photography may be touted as revealing the real because of “the camera’s intersection with the privilege that light and vision have long enjoyed as metaphors for truthful understanding” (McQuire 28). In fact, everyday language privileges light and vision over darkness and blindness: “Clear sightedness, clarity, enlightenment, and the ubiquity of the ‘I see’ find themselves opposed to the shadows of doubt, blindness and obscurity with a consistency that is frequently offered as that of nature itself” (McQuire 28). Moreover, unlike other forms of visual representation, photography is heralded as capturing truth and reality because a photograph is not a reproduction or imitation but an actual capturing of the referent. Berger claims that, “[u]nlike any other visual image, a photograph is not a rendering, an imitation or an interpretation of its subject, but actually a trace of it. No painting or drawing, however naturalist, *belongs* to its subject in the way that a photograph does” (287). Roland Barthes concurs by arguing that a photograph captures reality because the referent could not have been merely imagined but had to have existed in order for it to have been photographed:

I call ‘photographic referent’ not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph. Painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often ‘chimeras.’ Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. (76; emphasis in original)

Perhaps the insistence that photography captures the truth or reality is also rooted in the relationship between the signified and the signifier within this particular medium: “the photographic signifier often enjoys so intimate a relationship to its signified that it may seem almost superfluous to distinguish between them. It may seem like an exercise in hairsplitting to say, for instance, that the photographic image of a horse functions as a signifier for the mental image of a horse” (Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* 22).

While many have argued that the real can be located in a photograph, other critics have questioned this assumption. For instance, Prosser contends that “[p]hotographs don’t record reality: they change the very nature of reality—by representing it” (“A Palinode” 243). In exploring transsexual and transgendered subjects through photography, we are able to ask questions about representations of “real” sex and “real” gender. Photography depicting transsexual and transgendered subjects allows for the exploration of whether the camera does, in fact, record the real or merely represent the real and, in the process, add a new dimension to it. It further allows us to question whether the real can ever be captured and, in the case of transgendered and transsexual bodies, what is real after all?

Photography becomes especially useful in looking at transsexuals and transgendered people as subjects because it records a specific moment in the life of a transitioning subject: “What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (Barthes 4). Barthes’ contention resonates powerfully for transsexuals and transgendered people, whose bodies are often engaged in a process of radical, and irreversible, transformation. For this reason, photography can serve as a means of documenting this

life-altering process, the development and shaping of the body into one that more closely aligns with one's sense of gender identity. As Barthes claims, the photograph is not evidence of "*what is no longer*" but of "*what has been*" (85; emphasis in original). Barthes further argues that photography differs from writing because one cannot deny a photograph. If a photograph has been taken, it bears a sort of proof that no writing is capable of because it serves as a "certificate of presence" (87). The photograph's ability to document the past can serve both affirming and defeating purposes for trans people. On the one hand, photographs taken pre-transition can enable transsexuals and transgendered people to retain some sense of who they were in the past. Rather than completely obliterating their past selves, trans people can use photography to help them remember who they were and recognize that previously existing parts of their identities are still harboured in their current selves. On the other hand, photographs taken pre-transition can be problematic because many trans people feel that the bodies captured in those photographs were not theirs since those bodies do not correspond with who they feel themselves to be. Thus, while pre-transitional photographs may, theoretically, capture "the real," for some trans people, those photographs are lies because they capture bodies that are sites of oppression. Photographs that are taken post-transition, however, can serve to affirm trans people's presence in the world as well as their comfort in their new bodies.

Because transsexuals and transgendered people are marginalized within mainstream society, they are often ignored as subjects. Trans subjects are rendered invisible for two reasons: either because those who appear ambiguously gendered are assigned as either men *or* women and not read as transsexual or transgendered; or, if they

do convincingly pass, their trans status becomes invisible because they are read as either men or women. Transsexuals and transgendered people's marginal status is partly a product of their inability or refusal to conform to the ideals that are constructed by the dominant discourse. As Silverman suggests, "the subject who aspires to incarnate or embody the ideal most typically derives his or her definition of that ideal from normative representation" (*Threshold* 40). Critical of this normativity, Silverman challenges her readers to relate to and appreciate abject bodies:

while most of us are, in fact, quite peripatetic when it comes to narrative and structural positionalities, we are considerably less tractable when confronted with the possibility of bodily reconfiguration, especially when it would involve an identificatory alignment with what is socially disprized. Generally, we either cling to our own corporeal coordinates or aspire to assume ones which are more socially valorized. (*Threshold* 2)

Silverman seeks an "identificatory relation to despised bodies" (*Threshold* 2) in an attempt to discern "the conditions under which we might ethically love ourselves" (*Threshold* 4). How, then, might we learn to not merely accept but idealize and love trans bodies? Silverman suggests that this "gift of love" can only come about through "ceaseless textual intervention [which would] make it possible for us to identify both consciously and unconsciously with bodies which we would otherwise reject with horror and contempt" (*Threshold* 81).

In photographing trans people, Cameron and LaGrace Volcano perform a dual function. First, they seem to do what Susan Sontag believes art does: increase people's tolerance for what is originally perceived to be different. She writes:

Much of modern art is devoted to lowering the threshold of what is terrible. By getting us used to what, formerly, we could not bear to see or hear, because it was too shocking, painful, or embarrassing, art changes morals—that body of psychic custom and public sanctions that draws a vague boundary between what is emotionally and spontaneously intolerable and what is not. The gradual suppression of queasiness does bring us closer to a rather formal truth—that of the arbitrariness of the taboos constructed by art and morals. (40-1)

By photographing these marginalized transsexual and transgendered subjects, Cameron and LaGrace Volcano allow trans bodies to be looked at and contemplated. They draw attention to these bodies so that trans people are no longer tainted by inaccurate thoughts and imaginings. Their presence in the world is documented for everyone to look at. At the same time, while inviting us to look at transsexual and transgendered bodies, these photographs also render trans bodies beautiful and desirable, which parallels Silverman's "gift of love." Thus, we are not only looking at these bodies and tolerating them, but we may also be appreciating and idealizing these bodies for their transgressive positionalities.

One of the main benefits of being photographed is the attention that viewers bestow upon the photograph: "[t]he subject in the photograph enters into an accord: in exchange for being sacrificed to and absorbed by the camera, the viewing public (which may be as small as a family) offers significance to the subject" (Graham 11). Thus, in exchange for being photographed, the subject receives attention and recognition from others. This is especially pertinent for trans subjects, given their frequent invisibility.

Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photographs grant trans subjects attention and, because these are portraits, they focus specifically on the self and on the creation of an image of identity.

Several features of Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photographs lend themselves to an investigation of trans subjectivity. First, by photographing subjects who willingly pose in front of the camera, Cameron and LaGrace Volcano comment on subjective agency. As a form of expression, photography differs from writing because it is based upon the relationship between the photographed subject and the photographer. Within this interaction, the subject relinquishes control over the image that is produced. The only means of control that the subject does maintain is the pose that he or she offers. For this reason, the subject's pose is crucial. Barthes claims that "once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of 'posing,' I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image" (10). Thus, the control that the photographed subject possesses over the photograph is only in the pose, rendering the body a crucial element of the self: "In posing for a photograph, the sitter must 'write' with the body" (Graham 3). As the only aspect of the photograph that the subject can control, the pose then becomes the sole means of exercising agency.

A second example of how subjectivity is an integral component of Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photographs is evidenced by the presence of the shutter bulb in the self-portraits. Why choose to include this device in the self-portraits when photographers have the option of setting most cameras on automatic timer? Cameron comments on the intentionality of the shutter bulb's presence as it parallels his experience in creating a

transsexual body: “[the shutter bulb’s] presence serves as a metaphor: I am creating my own image alone, an act that reflects the transsexual experience as well” (Cameron 11). In *Sublime Mutations*, the only photographs that reveal the shutter bulb are those found in “Hermaphrodyké: Self Portraits of Desire.” The photographs depict LaGrace Volcano and his lover, Simo, engaging in various sexual acts. At times, with hands bound or occupied, LaGrace Volcano activates the shutter bulb with his mouth—drawing the spectator into the erotic act by employing the shutter bulb as a type of connective tissue between the mouth (an erotogenic zone) and the spectator. In this way, LaGrace Volcano comments on the ways in which a sexualized self is formed in relation to others and how sexuality is relational. More importantly, however, by placing the shutter bulb in his mouth, LaGrace Volcano suggests that having control over the shutter bulb is not something that he is willing to relinquish to another person or to a timed shutter release (Fig. 1). Using the mouth to activate the shutter bulb is especially telling in that it reflects how the camera is being used as a “mouthpiece” for LaGrace Volcano’s personal narrative. Rather than employing language to tell his story, LaGrace Volcano chooses photographic images and, even when his hands are occupied, he still chooses to show and tell his story himself. In both instances, the shutter bulb serves to underline the importance of agency in building a transsexual or transgendered identity.

In *Sublime Mutations*, identity-formation is further underscored by the many photographs that contain mirrors. Mirrors are instant indicators of the search for self. When we look in the mirror, one of the questions we want answered is, “Who am I?” In his discussion of the Mirror Stage, Jacques Lacan posits that a fundamental identity-

building moment occurs when an infant catches a glimpse of him/herself in the mirror and recognizes him/herself for the first time:

[t]his act, far from exhausting itself [...] once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him (Lacan 1).

Within this scenario, not only does the child develop a sense of self—an “I”—but s/he does this with the recognition that s/he exists in relation to the surrounding people and things. In this way, the self is formed in relation to the other. What serves as the basis of this self-identification is the *image* of the self: “We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (Lacan 2; emphasis in original). Lacan argues that the Mirror Stage is not unique to infancy and, in fact, occurs several times throughout one's life.

The Mirror Stage is especially relevant to the formation of transsexual and transgendered identities because these subjects are often in the process of solidifying a self. Lacan claims that “the *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic” (4). For trans subjects, who are often attempting to negotiate a self in relation to what may feel

like a “fragmented body,” the experience of looking in the mirror can be troubling but can also serve as an important tool in understanding who one is. While the actual site of dislocation for trans people may be in the body, the experiential site of dislocation is in the mirror. In fact, some trans people may not even recognize themselves in the mirror because who they feel themselves to be is not reflected in the image that appears before them. At the same time, however, by looking in the mirror, these subjects can try on different selves and view their bodies in totality. And, as subjects transition or shape their physical images so that they more closely align with their inner identities, mirrors, like photographs, capture these images which the subject can collect and use to solidify an identity.

Bearing in mind this Lacanian concept of the Mirror Stage, the mirrors in LaGrace Volcano’s photographs appear crucial to the theme of identity that pervades the text. In “The Man Has 3 Faces,” we witness a man—most likely an FTM—dressed in a suit, looking at himself in a three-paned dressing mirror (Fig. 2). The separate panes of glass produce three distinct reflections. The subject’s gaze is projected into the pane immediately in front of him. He looks directly at himself in the mirror. Is this a moment of recognition? Is a new self emerging? The picture hints at a scenario in which a man has had a suit custom tailored and is trying it on for the first time in the tailor’s shop. In that case, the subject *is* witnessing a new self—the self that materializes when he wears a new suit. In this particular instance, the subject is performing masculinity. As Butler argues, the subject is formed by repeated performances: the subject “is constituted in and through the iterability of its performance, a repetition which works at once to legitimate and delegitimate the realness norms by which it is produced” (*BTM* 131). In looking at

the mirror, the Man with Three Faces is performing what is construed as “real” masculinity, perhaps in an attempt to pass as a “real” man. With more and more practice, the image in the mirror may eventually correspond with the subject’s mental image of the man he wishes to become. Interestingly, with this three mirror set-up, in which the mirrors are placed at angles to each other, multiple reflections result. Thus, although LaGrace Volcano’s photograph only captures three faces, the Man with Three Faces, in fact, has more than three faces, since an infinite number of reflections can be produced with these three mirrors.

Although the subject in “The Man Has 3 Faces” looks directly at himself without hesitation, the subject in “Leather Boy” uses the mirror somewhat more hesitantly (Fig. 3). He looks at himself through his peripheral vision, as though he is stealing a glance of his leather-clad body. Is this a subject whose resistance to gender norms is still practiced with some uncertainty? The picture that follows, “Teddy Boy,” may indicate this subject’s still blossoming gender identity (Fig. 4). “Teddy Boy” portrays the same subject featured in “Leather Boy,” but in this photograph, the subject is sitting on his bed. The three stuffed toys that lay on the bed and night table nearby may signal the subject’s proximity to youth. He is still growing up, still trying to fashion a self that he can look at without hesitation.

In another photograph, LaGrace Volcano uses a mirror to reflect the gaze of the subject. This photograph (untitled, pictured on pages 164-5) is part of the “Shape Shifters” chapter and features a trans couple in an embrace (Fig. 5). One subject looks into a mirror but not at himself. Rather, his gaze is projected outward to the viewer of the photograph. As the gaze is filtered through the mirror, the subject demonstrates his

awareness of others, of those voyeurs who make of transsexuals and transgendered people a spectacle. There is the possibility that this subject expresses his feelings of always being on display for others—that his sex and gender makes him an object. This aligns with Barthes' assertion that “the Photograph [...] represents the very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object” (14).

This sense of being on display is well-captured by Cameron in the three photographs that comprise the “Distortions” series. In these photographs, Cameron's headshots are framed by a litany of trans-phobic remarks (Fig. 6). The commentary that frames Cameron's headshots and creates a portrait raises two issues. First, the presence of the words points to how the self is always formed within discourse and can never be separated from language. Second, it draws attention to the presence of others in the making of the self—because humans create discourse and because these particular words are being uttered by people who see Cameron and choose to comment on him. The framing words become a reminder of how the self is always formed in relation to others. In fact, in this instance, the gaze can serve as a means of hailing the trans subject. What Cameron captures here is how our own voyeurism factors into the element of gaze in transsexual photography: “Cameron's inscriptions of address to the viewer (‘You're so exotic! May I take your photograph...Do you have a penis?!’) literally frame the viewer's gaze, reflecting back, here, that look of fascination, objectification and desire s/he may cast. We can only look at the transsexual, then, if we look at how we look” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 230). Interestingly, photography of the self ends up revealing not only the self but others—those who view the transsexual or transgendered subjects and

their photographs. And, as Prosser claims, this photography urges us to contemplate the question: how do we look?:

More than the written text of transsexual autobiographies, the photographs bring into relief the reader's gaze. Asking us to consider what nuances of gender we see in these images in looking at the transsexual, they also ask: how do we look?—where 'look,' as Teresa de Lauretis has suggested in the context of lesbian and gay film theory, should be heard as both transitive and intransitive verb. That is, how do we look at the other and what look do our own bodies cast to the world? How is our reading of the transsexual invested in and produced by our own gendered and sexual subject positioning, our own identifications and desires? (*Second Skins* 223)

One effect of Cameron's and LaGrace Volcano's photography is that it forces us to look—at close-ups of genitals, for example. While the tendency may be to either stare at these subjects or to avert the eyes nervously, the trans photographs make it acceptable and necessary to look. They challenge us to examine ourselves in the act of looking and, by looking, we contribute to the constitution of the subject because looking signals recognition.

Reading, Passing, and the Perpetual Search for the Real

Looking at transsexual and transgendered subjects in a collection of photographs involves what Bornstein describes as “seeing through someone else's attempt at passing” (*GO* 128) and the transsexual subject's fear of being read: “The fear of being read as

transsexual weighs so heavily on an individual that it focuses even more attention on 'passing.' It's a conundrum, because more and better passing brings about an increased fear of being read" (*GO* 128). When a subject attempts to pass, s/he attempts to approximate "the real." If photography may provide access to truth and reality, how does this coincide with the notion of "the real" that circulates within trans discourse? In the context of gender, Butler argues, "realness is the ability to compel belief, to produce the naturalized effect. This effect is itself the result of an embodiment of norms, a reiteration of norms [...] a norm which is at once a figure, a figure of a body, which is no particular body, but a morphological ideal that remains the standard which regulates the performance, but which no performance fully approximates" (*BTM* 129).

Reading and passing share an intricate relationship; reading can only exist at the expense of passing, and vice versa. As Butler contends:

For a performance to work, then, means that a reading is no longer possible, or that reading, an interpretation, appears to be a kind of transparent seeing, where what appears and what it means coincide. On the contrary, when what appears and how it is 'read' diverge, the artifice of the performance can be read as artifice; the ideal splits off from its appropriation. But the impossibility of reading means that the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable. (*BTM* 129)

Body Alchemy and *Sublime Mutations* offer the possibility of investigating how and why some subjects are easily read while others are not. What is interesting about the transsexual and transgendered subjects in *Body Alchemy* and *Sublime Mutations* is that by

allowing themselves to be photographed and to appear in a public forum—books, art exhibits—those subjects who may normally pass in their daily lives are now (temporarily or permanently) un-doing their passing. Thus, by being photographed and put on display, they are giving themselves up to being read because they are allowing themselves to be photographed *as* transsexuals and transgendered people and in the context of a published trans photographic text. Allowing oneself to be read as transsexual or transgendered means claiming an outlaw identity as a viable one, rather than trying to neatly fit into the restrictive binary that is necessary when one passes.

It may be suggested that, in transsexual and transgendered photographs, the act of reading is equated with unveiling the punctum. According to Barthes, the punctum is “a detail” (43) in the photograph which “attracts or distresses” (40) the viewer. Barthes pairs this with the studium, which he defines as “the order of *liking*, not *loving*; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right’” (27). Barthes claims that the studium “allows me to discover the *Operator*, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them ‘in reverse,’ according to my will as a *Spectator*” (28). Unlike the studium, the punctum is the “wound” or “prick” (Barthes 26); it is “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes 27). For instance, when we look at the picture of Cameron, naked and lifting a barbell, we immediately see a man because most of the details in the photograph hint towards Cameron as “a man” (Fig. 7). However, when we look closer and discover that Cameron lacks a penis, we then have

discovered the punctum. The moment when we discover the punctum is simultaneous with the moment when we read Cameron as a transsexual.

As we consider this relationship between reading and passing, we can ask whether and why transgendered people do not have the same intense fear of being read or desire to pass as transsexuals do. Is this, in fact, a key difference between transgendered and transsexual subjectivities? Can transsexuality be defined as the desire to pass as either male or female, while transgenderism can be defined as the desire to be read as neither male nor female? Prosser argues that passing is perceived in differing ways by transsexuals and transgendered people:

For the transsexual, passing is becoming, a step toward home, a relief and a release: it aligns inner gender identity with social identity; one is 'taken' in the world for who one feels oneself to be. In the queer deployment of transgender, passing is conversely identity's unbecoming: passing deontologizes sex and gender, the 'doing' of gender profoundly destabilizing the reality of an 'is' (*Second Skins* 184-5)

Thus, passing is intertwined with identity—who we *feel* we are but also who we want people to *think* we are. For the transsexual, passing may solidify identity because it aligns the image one portrays with one's inner sense of self. For the transgendered person, on the other hand, passing may threaten identity because it limits the possibility of performing multiple genders or performing a gender that does not correspond with the binary of male and female.

These differences between transsexual and transgendered approaches to passing and reading manifest themselves in *Body Alchemy* and *Sublime Mutations* in that the

photographed transsexual bodies seem more intent upon passing, while the transgendered ones seem to be more freely offered up to be read. Despite perhaps occupying different ideological positions, both Cameron and LaGrace Volcano manage to explore the complex relationship between passing and being read. One aspect of this relationship is associated with the subject's history. Passing and being read involve a relationship with one's past—either denying or acknowledging one's previous gender. In the 1960s and 70s, when sex reassignment surgery was first being practiced, it was common for physicians and psychiatrists to encourage transsexuals to deny their past selves, to lie about their pasts and fabricate a new history. To pass thus meant to completely erase one's past and not allow oneself to be read as transsexual. Some contemporary approaches to transsexuality encourage the subject to acknowledge his/her past and to embrace this as part of his/her identity. This has a direct impact on the way the subject passes by allowing the subject to assert a self that includes a change in sex:

To deconstruct the necessity for passing implies that transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (Stone 298-9)

Cameron and LaGrace Volcano approach the past differently. Cameron allows for the recognition of the past by presenting old photographs of his subjects alongside more recent ones in which the subjects pass as the gender of their choice. His photographs depict a kind of before-and-after take on transsexuality. Conversely,

LaGrace Volcano's photographs depict transformations in process. As a retrospective of LaGrace Volcano's work, *Sublime Mutations* serves as its own personal history, documenting LaGrace Volcano's photographic evolution. A certain fluidity exists amongst the photographs in that they are not arranged chronologically but rather thematically. Thus, older photos sit alongside ones that are more recent. This might be one way in which LaGrace Volcano acknowledges the past and resists categorizing it as outdated or irrelevant. We get the sense that personal evolution is gradual and that who one is today also includes who one used to be. Because LaGrace Volcano's past is as much a part of him as his present, this reinforces his proclaimed identity as a perpetually mutating subject.

The ability to pass or the ability to be read (or purposely allow oneself to be read) is determined by several factors. We read someone's gender according to certain gendered signals, such as clothing, make-up, amount of body hair and muscle, and the absence or presence of breasts or a bulge in the genital area. Passing sometimes involves a manipulation of these subtle bodily details that are equated with either maleness or femaleness. The bulge in men's pants is one critical sign of manhood, as is explained by Cameron's "Metoidioplasty Subject 1"(Fig. 8): "I have to wear two pairs of trunks at the swimming pool because I don't think the bulge in my pants is big enough. It's really obvious when my clothing is wet. Without a larger phallus, the testicle implants alone just don't give the look I want" (qtd. in Cameron 46). This subject wants to pass as a real man, not an imitation of a man. Realness is equated with the phallus—a large phallus that bulges. If the phallus is not easily visible underneath the pants, then the man's authenticity is in question. The men featured in *Body Alchemy* mostly display signs that

are equated with maleness. It is evident that these subjects do not want to risk ambiguity, clearly seeking to pass as men. With the exception of Cameron's self-portraits and the genital close-ups featured in "Our Bodies," *Body Alchemy* features mostly clothed FTM subjects. Perhaps Cameron chooses this because, other than people we know intimately, we most often see people clothed and most often attempt to locate gender based on clothed bodies. All of Cameron's subjects look like "real" men. And, if their goal is to pass as men, they have succeeded.

On the other hand, many of LaGrace Volcano's subjects seem to convey a more malleable gender presentation. The picture of "Manuella Kay," for instance, highlights the complexity of the gendered subjects that fill the pages of *Sublime Mutations* (Fig. 9). The juxtaposition of butchness (signaled by elements like the subject's short hair and her pose on the motorcycle) with the more typically "feminine" signs (cleavage and bra exposed through the open button-down shirt) suggests that this subject is not necessarily interested in passing as a man. She seems more interested in being read as a butch woman—a reading that is contingent upon her weaving of various genders. Interestingly, our reading of Manuella Kay's sex is greatly informed by her breasts, evidence of the importance of the chest in determining sex.

LaGrace Volcano explores chests and backs in his chapter "Lesbian Boyz & Other Inverts," which begins with six photos of subjects' chests and backs. "Sailor Boy," for instance, is shown with his/her back to us. With short cropped hair and wearing only a sailor's hat and white pants, the muscular subject could easily be read as male. However, within the context of the chapter, we are able to question the subject's sex. The subject is rendered ambiguous by the coupling of the visual cues offered by the

photograph with the words “lesbian” and “inverts” in the chapter title. Following this photo are three photos of a subject dressed in army fatigues. The first, “GI Jax,” with arms crossed over chest, wears a helmet, t-shirt, and camouflage pants, and looks like a young male army recruit (Fig. 10). This is followed by “Jax Back,” in which the same subject has his/her back towards us, this time with t-shirt in hand, helmet off, and wearing only the camouflage pants (Fig. 11). The broad, muscular shoulders and shaved head again are indicators of masculinity, urging us to read this subject as male. However, in the next photo, titled “Torso,” the subject’s front is exposed, as s/he is in the process of removing his/her t-shirt (Fig. 12). The t-shirt covers the subject’s eyes (as it is being removed). The exposed chest reveals small breasts. This, apparently, is the main gendered difference between “Jax Back” and “Torso.” Like the bulging penis underneath a man’s pants that becomes an instant marker of maleness, visible breasts unambiguously mark femaleness. But why do LaGrace Volcano and the photographed subject foreground the breasts? When all the other signs—clothes, shaved head, muscular shoulders—point to maleness, why is the subject’s biological sex still so intently pursued by outside observers (and perhaps even by the subject and the photographer)? When the breasts are covered, the subject can pass as male. However, as soon as that one crucial body part is revealed, we read this subject as female. What the naked breasts may allow that the naked back does not is the subject’s desire to be read as *both male and female*.

The mixing of gendered signs evident in LaGrace Volcano’s “The Boy Lee” is also telling of the body’s role in passing and reading (Fig. 13). The subject displays many features that are typically assigned as feminine—small build, slender arms, blunt haircut, thin lips, head tilted downward (almost demurely)—yet the flat chest and bulging

crotch are explicit indicators of his maleness. We can wonder whether this person would be able to convincingly pass as a woman were he fully clothed in typical women's clothing. Because the subject is almost fully naked, the photograph suggests the importance of clothing in gender presentation. With clothes removed, it appears as though the subject's body (namely, his flat chest and bulging crotch) becomes largely responsible for his inability to pass as female.

Certainly, the body is most often credited with revealing the real. In fact, the entire concept of sexed realness operates under two assumptions: that the real is located in the body, and that sexual difference is real. Critics of transsexuality are invested in arguing for sexual difference as real, as Catherine Millot argues: "In the final analysis, sexual difference, which owes much to symbolic dualisms, belongs to the register of the *real*. It constitutes an insuperable barrier, an irreducible wall against which one can bang one's head indefinitely. Can transsexuality change the nature of this *real*?" (15). The skepticism evident in Millot's rhetoric is rooted in the investment in keeping bodies "real." However, as Bornstein discusses in *Gender Outlaw*, while the idea of purity in relation to identity is often used as a means of facilitating belonging and securing membership to a certain identity, it also needs to be questioned: "What is purity anyway? Who gets to decide? Members of the same club assume *they're* pure, and it's only us outsiders who wonder what we have to do in order to be allowed in" (*GO* 105). Medical discourse has taught us that a real boy has certain bodily and chromosomal features, while a real girl has different ones. The problem with this type of thinking is that it overrides socialization and culture and ignores intersexuality. Roy Boyne speaks of this type of discourse as demonstrating the "increasing importance of genetic definitions of

selfhood and identity [...] an increasing reliance on hard evidence, on citability and a lessening of importance of social definitions of self, let alone the kind of personal definition which the existentialist might champion” (218).

For transsexuals, embodiment is indeed crucial to a sense of self:

For these [transsexual] men, the body is an expression, possibly *the* expression of manhood. The male body is more important to them than a gendered role. These men make a distinction between maleness and masculinity. They believe that all men are male-bodied, but not necessarily masculine. The body is the crucial focus for these men, not only in how they define what it means to be a man, but also in how they fit into this definition. (Rubin, *Self-Made* 145-6)

The obvious problem with this kind of rhetoric is that it can insinuate that there *is* a certain kind of body that is a male body. What does it mean to be “male-bodied”? Doesn’t this kind of thinking only reinforce the notion that there is one kind of masculine real and one of kind of feminine real? How do Cameron’s and LaGrace Volcano’s photographs disrupt and offer new alternatives to conventional notions of the real?

If realness is supposedly rooted in the body, some of Cameron’s subjects do express anxiety or concern with their bodies in relation to their sexed and gendered realness. For instance, for Metoidioplasty Subject 1 (Fig. 8), realness is associated with penis size and function: “I’m not convinced that most women are concerned with the size of a man’s penis (even a guy with a small dick can do a lot of stuff), but I can’t even ejaculate, much less penetrate! [...] If I were pressed to call it an enlarged clitoris, I would have to admit that that’s what it is. It just can’t function exactly like a penis” (qtd.

in Cameron 46). Associating penis size and function with a man's worth and realness, the subject feels that he is lacking as a "real man." His "enlarged clitoris" is unsatisfactory if only because it is not a penis. The subject does not discuss the pleasure he can still receive from his genitals. He only describes his inability to penetrate or ejaculate, associating this with realness because that is what a "real" penis does. Metoidioplasty Subject 2 (Fig. 14) is not bothered by the lack of bulge under his pants but admits that "in terms of presenting myself to a potential partner, having genitalia *that look somewhat like they're supposed to* helps me feel confident" (qtd. in Cameron 49; my emphasis). His words point to the underlying idea that genitalia are supposed to look a certain way in order to be real or authentic. Anything other than that is a mere model that does not live up to the real thing.

As Cameron's subjects voice a lack or failure as real men, they actually articulate what Prosser posits as the transsexual real: "This failure to be real *is* the transsexual real" ("A Palinode" 252). As Prosser points out, transsexuals can only get close to the real by having surgery, but once they do this, their bodies are no longer real ("A Palinode" 252). However, what stops us from identifying transsexual bodies as an alternate real? Why must there be a fixed number of real kinds of bodies (namely, only two: male and female)? Is it not possible that the real is rooted in something other than the body—in emotions, for instance? And, how is it that trans bodies—that are supposedly real by virtue of being photographed (as Barthes argues)—are not actually considered real despite being photographed?

Cameron's photographs, particularly his self-portraits, further address the bodily real as they focus on the naked body, prompting us to ask whether we are most real when

we are naked. In the case of the female-to-male transsexual, photographing naked subjects allows for the revelation of what is *not* there, which Prosser believes “is the transsexual real, what’s not there, what can’t be represented because indeed it’s not achievable” (“A Palinode” 256). Cameron’s self-portraits illustrate this absence. We look at him with beard, body hair, bulging muscles—all the signs of manhood. But when we look at his genital area we witness what is missing from this otherwise complete picture of conventional maleness. Despite all the other manly features, this one absence marks Cameron’s body as real-ly a transsexual body.

Juxtaposed with Cameron’s portraits of the transsexual bodily real is another kind of real—an emotional one influenced by hormone injections, anger, frustration, sadness, and depression. These aspects of transsexuality are all features of the transsexual experience, although they are often overlooked. Cameron presents another facet of transsexual realness, as some of his photographs situate gendered realness in one’s feelings about one’s sex and gender (Fig. 15). Inherent in this emotional real is the need to act “real,” as is evidenced by the Stanford gender clinic: “Stanford recognized that gender roles could be learned (to an extent). Their involvement with the grooming clinics was an effort to produce not simply anatomically legible females, but *women...i.e., gendered females*” (Stone 291). The Stanford clinic recognizes what Cameron’s photographs recognize as well: if you want to pass as a real woman or man, you not only need to look like one but *feel* and *act* like one too. Perhaps this is what James Green, one of Cameron’s subjects, alludes to when he speaks of his experiences in the male drumming circle: “Being in the [men’s spiritual drumming] group accelerated my acceptance of myself as a man. I went into this place that had concentrated male

energy, dealt with male issues and never had my own masculine identity questioned or challenged. This experience in itself solidified my feeling that my masculinity was just fine the way it was” (qtd. in Cameron 38). Green’s ability to feel like a man is contingent upon his ability to act like one and to blend in with other men in a men’s-only activity. Green’s need for social approval of his masculinity is indicative of an ever-present fear and threat that his masculinity may not be good enough or that his manhood is not “real” enough.

While Cameron’s subjects seem intent on arriving at a particular sexed and gendered location, many of LaGrace Volcano’s subjects locate themselves in the interstices between (or outside of) male and female. Perhaps LaGrace Volcano wants to show that the body in transition or in a state of gender ambiguity *is* real, just as real as a body that is definitely sexed according to standard sex/gender models. In photographing a variety of subjects with various bodies, sexes, and genders, LaGrace Volcano posits that all of these bodies are real because all of these *people* are real:

Who looks more real, the butch who smiles confidently while stripping down and exposing her muscular female torso or the shy hormone-taking female-to-male transgenderist next to her who is a good deal more hesitant? (Who has more to hide?) What is more real—the transsexual man’s unpenis-like “transcock” or the rubber prosthesis that replicates a penis as worn by the butch dyke? If LaGrace Volcano’s images reveal the corporeal real, they do so to transmute its value. (Prosser, “The Art of Ph/Autography” 7)

For LaGrace Volcano, the only thing that is real is transformation. He seems to argue that no one will be one real anything for his/her entire lifetime because the self is ever changing.

In his introduction to *Sublime Mutations*, LaGrace Volcano states this intention behind his work: “Sublime Mutations are the transformations that are produced by age, accident, illness, or design. The motto is: Mutate and survive or stagnate and perish” (5). Indeed, LaGrace Volcano presents us with photographs of people who are crossing borders—most often gender borders. This exploration appears to be partly influenced by his own identity, which he describes as shifting and malleable. Bodies and identities then become things that can be fashioned and re-fashioned over time. LaGrace Volcano advocates change as the only means of survival—a kind of Darwinian approach. But what do we make of the subjects in *Sublime Mutations*? How do we read their bodies and identities? If photographs are supposed to uncover the real and if we read *Sublime Mutations* as a transgendered narrative, LaGrace Volcano’s photographs may present the transgendered real as that of the mutating self. Indeed LaGrace Volcano’s photographs appear as a means of capturing the metamorphosing self at various stages. As Sontag claims, photography has the ability to capture and freeze a particular moment in the self’s lifetime of transition: “All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (15). Interestingly, most of the photos in *Sublime Mutations* are dated. While this may be common practice for many photographers, it is especially imperative for

photography involving trans subjects because these photographs are records of radical transformations.

The transgendered quality of *Sublime Mutations* is further strengthened by the recurring theme of threes, which may symbolize the concept of the third gender. In “The Man Has 3 Faces,” LaGrace Volcano’s title hints at the notion of a person with three selves since the face is almost always the easiest way to recognize a person, an immediate indicator of identity. While “The Man Has 3 Faces” captures a single subject casting several identities, numerous photographs in the collection contain three subjects who engage with each other. If we consider two photographs simultaneously—“Triad” (Fig. 16) and “The 3 Graces” (Fig. 17), which appear on opposing pages—we can begin to uncover some of the relevance of these threesomes. Each group consists of three women who are bald and naked. They are locked in an embrace but in both photographs one of the subjects is more central than the other two. In “Triad,” it is the subject whose head is highest in the photograph. The other two subjects are placing their tongues on her lips, almost as though they are drinking from a fountain, drawing out a life-giving substance. In “The 3 Graces,” the subject in the centre of the photograph draws more attention than the other two women who stand on each side of her. The woman on the left of the photo looks directly at the central figure, while the woman on the right looks at the woman on the left. A circular effect is achieved, especially as the women on the left and right place their hands on the central figure’s belly and thigh. The photograph seems to interrogate the common notion that gender is a spectrum with male on one end and female on the other. In using circular imagery, LaGrace Volcano asserts that gender is cyclical with no beginning or end.

This playing with and blurring of gender is especially evident in the chapter entitled “Gender Optional,” which features LaGrace Volcano’s self-portraits. In these portraits, LaGrace Volcano adopts two main identities: Delboy—a more masculine Del—and Debby—a more feminine Del. However, even while taking on these two identities, Del is not typically masculine or feminine at any time. For instance, while “Delboy Grrr” (Fig. 18) may portray Del as tough and masculine, wearing a black denim vest that reveals tattoos on his belly and arms, he also wears a long skirt, which undercuts any unequivocal masculinity. Similarly, dressed as Debby, Del wears a dress, makeup, and long red hair. However, these “feminine” accoutrements are juxtaposed with hints of masculinity. For instance, in “Debby’s Muscles” (Fig. 19), while Del may be dressed as a woman, his hairy legs and muscled pose render him less than typically feminine. These portraits explore Del’s many selves and reveal how the self is multifaceted. Which is the real Del? They all are.

Surgery and other Body Modifications

Because so much of one’s sense of self can be dependent on the body, sex-reassignment surgery and other body modifications offer trans people the possibility of making their bodies feel like home. As Rubin explains, body modifications may render subjects more easily recognizable as the gender of their choice but “the purpose of body modification is also to be recognizable to themselves” (*Self-Made* 151). Sex-reassignment surgery can feel like the shedding of an unsuitable skin: “For transsexuals surgery is a fantasy of restoring the body to the self enacted on the surface of the body. If the dominant body image pretransition is that of being trapped within an extraneous

‘other’ skin, sex reassignment surgery is figured as bringing release from this skin” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 82). In fact, Judith Shapiro even goes so far as to compare the body to a set of clothes that can be put on or taken off:

There is a story about two small children in a museum standing in front of a painting of Adam and Eve. One child asks the other, ‘Which is the man and which is the lady?’ The other child answers, ‘I can’t tell—they don’t have clothes on.’ A story to delight those favouring the social constructionist view of gender. An even better story would be one in which the body itself becomes a set of clothes that can be put on. (248)

To a certain degree, we have reached an age where the body can be modified and reconstructed to suit our desires and reflect who we feel ourselves to be. Plastic surgeries of sundry sorts are performed regularly on noses, chins, eyebrows, and stomachs to name a few body parts, and are considered “mere self improvement” whereas sex-reassignment surgery “represents the dislocation of everything we conventionally ‘know’ or believe about gender identities and gender roles, ‘male’ and ‘female’ subjectivities” (Garber 106). If surgery is an attempt to come closer to a self that one feels comfortable with, why does the bodily site of the surgery matter? Why is transforming one’s genitals associated with a radical identity shift, whereas a nose job is viewed as a minor adjustment? Sex-reassignment surgery is perceived as bodily disfigurement, a type of “non-functional” surgery (Prosser, *Second Skins* 81). But subjects who have had phalloplasty, for instance, would undoubtedly argue that their surgery is quite functional. In fact, of the six close-up photographs of surgically altered or otherwise modified genitals that appear in *Body Alchemy*, two of the photos depict a newly-constructed penis

functioning in ways that a penis does: urinating or having an erection (Fig. 20). Why photograph these actions? Why photograph the post-surgical transsexual body at all?

On a few levels, surgery and photography operate in similar ways and can both be implicated in self-creation. Cameron, for instance, employs both media in his self-realization. By using photography alongside surgery, Cameron's "body is a construction of his own will and medical technology. On more than one level, he is creating his own image" (Hill n.p.). Just as surgery functions to allow the transsexual to achieve a particular image of him/herself, so does photography (specifically, self-portraiture) serve to create a desired image of the self. Thus, while Cameron's actual surgery may have been out of his hands, the photographs he takes of his newly formed body are the product of his own workmanship. Surgery and photography are paralleled in another way: "The hope is that surgery will provide us immediate access to the real—like photography" (Prosser, "A Palinode" 251). However, as Prosser goes on to note, even though both photography and sex reassignment surgery attempt to achieve the real, they are unsuccessful in this attempt: "What's painful about photography and gender reassignment surgery both is that, in spite of how close they come to reproducing the real, to making contact with it (and I emphasize that they are our best means for approximating the real), they ultimately fail" ("A Palinode" 251). The failure stems from the fact that photography and surgery only produce a representation of the real thing, rather than the thing itself. In the case of genitals, however, this insinuates that constructed genitals are not real, that only genitals that appear at birth are "real." Ironically, however, in the case of intersexed individuals who are born with genitals that do not strictly adhere to those normally designated as either male or female, doctors often

have no qualms about operating on the genitals because they believe they are “fixing” a “problem” and transforming the individual into what a “real” male or female looks like.

While the post-surgical transsexual body may aim to pass as non-transsexual, some evidence of transsexuality always remains. An inescapable effect of surgery—specifically chest reconstruction—is scarring (Fig. 21). For the FTM, chest scars become a part of the transsexual body, marking the body as transsexual and serving as a reminder of the transsexual’s history. Like photographs, they are a record—an inscription that appears on the body rather than on paper. They become the body’s way of recording the transformation—the body’s way of remembering what used to exist. Thus, as Cameron’s self-portraits document his transsexual self and his transsexual experience, the scars further document and remind. They are an alternate memory source. And, while “scars make evident the constructedness of transsexuality” (Prosser, “A Palinode” 252), Cameron’s photography also plays with the theme of constructedness, especially since these are portraits that have been set up and intentionally taken.

In *Sublime Mutations*, scars seem to serve a different role. The central figure in “The 3 Graces” merits attention because her breasts are scarred. The breasts—markers of female embodiment—are marked with three scars each. While some transsexual men may choose to surgically remove their breasts, it is possible that this subject’s gender has manifested itself differently—through the scarification of the breasts. The three scars may denote the concept of the third sex or third gender and, as such, they may alter the significance of the breasts. Are these no longer a *woman’s* breasts? Are the scarred breasts now genderless?

Conversely, the scars we see on Kathy Acker's chest after her mastectomy (Fig. 22) and the one that appears on Simo's stomach signal bodily transformations prompted by disease or accident. LaGrace Volcano's inclusion of these two particular subjects in this collection is noteworthy since both Acker and Simo are gender outlaws but their scarred bodies are not a result of this component of their identities. Acker's post-mastectomy chest invites the viewer to compare this kind of surgery with the chest reconstructions that some trans men seek out. LaGrace Volcano appears to intentionally draw a comparison between scars that have been garnered because of disease or accident and those that result from self-chosen body modification. The comparison draws our attention to the way a hierarchy of scars exists within mainstream culture. Scars attained by disease, for instance, may garner sympathy, while veterans may show their war wounds with heroic pride. Trans people's surgical scars, on the other hand, do not receive sympathy or admiration. In including Acker's and Simo's scarred bodies into his work, LaGrace Volcano allies these subjects with transsexual and transgendered ones, perhaps underlying the humanity of them all.

Besides scars, tattoos and piercings can also be integral components of transsexual and transgendered embodiment. They can serve as an addition or alternative to surgery, marking the body in a unique way that signals one's individuality. Tattoos can make the "body bear/bare the true self hidden within," serving as an "authentic signature" (Prosser, *Second Skins* 74). They also allow the transsexual or transgendered subject to create a home in his/her body: "Such acts of marking the body's surface in an effort to feel belonging in it prefigure the surgical inscriptions of sex reassignment: on a larger and of course medically officiated scale, the transsexual's way of (re)making the

body/skin in order to feel at home in it” (Prosser, *Second Skins* 74). Tattoos can become one of the only permanent aspects of an otherwise mutating body. Consider Cameron’s tattoos: if we look at his “before” photo (Fig. 23) and then at his post-transition ones, the one feature that allows the viewer to know for certain that this is the same person are the tattoos which mark his arms and chest. In this way, the subject is able to retain some sense of self, some element of continuity as the body radically transforms.

Body Alchemy also features one photograph of alternative genital modification, in which the subject who is taking testosterone has opted to employ piercings to achieve the look he wants (Fig. 24). It seems that subjects who opt for this kind of genital modification may be less concerned with achieving genitals that unambiguously fit into a binary model. In fact, alternative genital modification is just that—an *alternative* to surgery and not a mere evasion. These types of genital modifications seem to produce trans-genitals and probably align best with a transgender subjectivity, as the subjects “are displaying a relation to their bodies that is interventionist and unfixed, artful rather than natural” (Dugaw 10). We witness this in Harry, who appears on the cover and within *Sublime Mutations*. Tattooed, pierced, and with what appears to be a testosterone-induced enlarged clitoris, Harry seems to have crafted a body that resides outside of the sexed binary (Fig. 25). His body becomes unnameable or unlabelable because it does not consistently conform to a particular sex. Similarly, the genitals that appear in “TransGenital Landscapes” come to represent the transgendered or gender variant. In photographing these genitals close-up, LaGrace Volcano not only provides an intimate look but also allows his viewers to witness the variation in genitals, underscoring the fact that genitals can come in many different forms, shapes, and sizes.

When transsexuals or transgendered people opt to inhabit bodies that are modified—either through surgery, tattoos, piercings, or self-inflicted scarring—their bodies become sites of resistance. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses the ways in which eighteenth century institutions—armies, schools, hospitals—aimed to control and correct the body “by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods” (136). Eighteenth century society wished to control the body and mould it into an effective, exploitable machine:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. (Foucault, *Discipline* 138)

The aim of such control was to produce docile bodies: “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, *Discipline* 136). In fashioning their own bodies according to their own models, Cameron’s and LaGrace Volcano’s subjects evade docility. It is in this way that these two photographers’ works converge, as the bodies photographed in *Body Alchemy* and *Sublime Mutations* are not docile bodies but actively resisting ones. And, as these bodies visually articulate their resistance, they fight to garner a much-deserved legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

As narratives that depict transsexual and transgendered bodies, *Gender Outlaw*, *Stone Butch Blues*, *Body Alchemy*, and *Sublime Mutations* have allowed us to examine the workings of the dominant sex/gender discourse and its effects on subjects. Trans narratives allow a critical view of subjectivity as they challenge essentializing accounts of identity, insisting instead that the self can continually change and unfold throughout one's lifespan. Consequently, these narratives force us to recognize and evaluate how construction factors into *all* subjectivities—how the construction of subjectivity arises and how it is lived. My intention in this thesis has been to delineate how transsexual and transgendered identities raise unique concerns and undertake the act of subversion in different manners. While transsexuals question the fixity of sexed embodiment, transgendered people challenge the supposed need to belong to one of either male or female sexes/genders. The study of transsexual and transgendered subjectivities within a literary domain has facilitated the exploration of how *narratives* allow us to investigate a construction of subjectivity in terms of interpellation and agency. By looking at written autobiographies, I was able to identify both the ways in which the current sex/gender discourse disallows trans bodies, sexual desires, and relationships to be named, and the various means by which language offers the potential for trans subjectivities to be articulated. My investigation of trans photography pursued an analysis of visual representations of trans bodies, ascertaining how bodies can be constructed and modified to suit transsexual and transgendered purposes, thus challenging the notion of a “real”

body. My exploration has become, therefore, not only a study of gender, but of *genre* as well.

As is evidenced by these narratives, the body is an integral component of the sexed/gendered self and, while bodies cannot be altogether shed, they can be transformed or negotiated with so they more closely reflect a subject's sense of self. The narratives prompt us to reconsider the relationship between sexed/gendered bodies and sexual desire as well as the confines placed on "real" bodies, arguing for a wider range of bodies that are deemed acceptable. Silverman calls for "aesthetic works which will make it possible for us to idealize, and, so, to identify with bodies we would otherwise repudiate" (*Threshold 2*). While Bornstein's, Feinberg's, Cameron's, and LaGrace Volcano's narratives do not consistently present ideal representations of trans lives, they do affirm these identities as viable, and, in turn, celebrate these bodies. In many respects, as these trans bodies transform, mutate, or remain the same, they reflect Silverman's notion of the "good enough," which she privileges "over and against the binarisms 'sufficiency/insufficiency' or 'ideal/failure'" (*Threshold 225*). Although transsexual and transgendered voices and bodies are still muted and obscured within mainstream society, the autobiographic and photographic works discussed here have demonstrated how these forms of self-representation can and should be exploited to articulate transsexual and transgendered selfhoods both linguistically and visually.

By looking at bodies that challenge the dominant male/female binary, we can begin to re-evaluate and dismantle an oppressive sex/gender discourse. Cromwell offers up transdiscourses as an alternative to the dominant discourse: "Transdiscourses are nonmedical, nonpathological, and noncolonizing. They are affirming, empowering,

positive, and reflective of trans experiences and the lives people choose to live” (Cromwell 19). With Cromwell’s suggestion in mind, we are urged to create a discourse that is more inclusive—one that does not privilege certain identities and bodies over others, whether that be based on sex/gender, ability/disability, race, class, or some other facet of the self. We need a discourse that allows for new subjectivities to emerge alongside the already existing ones. Feinberg’s call for “trans liberation” (*TransLiberation* 132) invites us to consider what such liberation might involve and summons transsexuals, transgendered people, and their allies to begin the process of change.

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APPENDIX

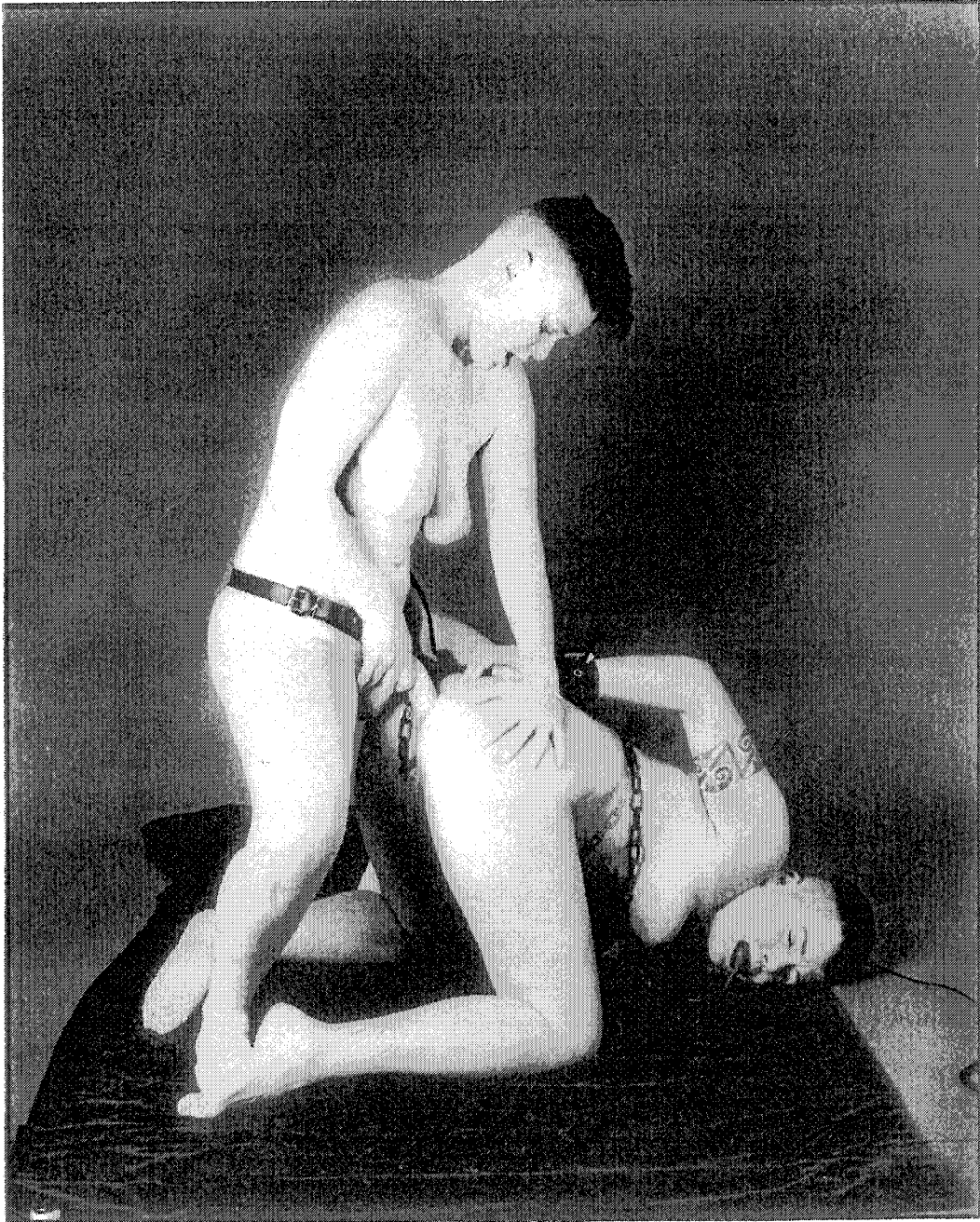


Fig. 1: On My Knees, London 1995
Reprinted with permission of Del LaGrace Volcano



Fig. 2: The Man Has 3 Faces, Berlin 1997
Reprinted with permission of Del LaGrace Volcano

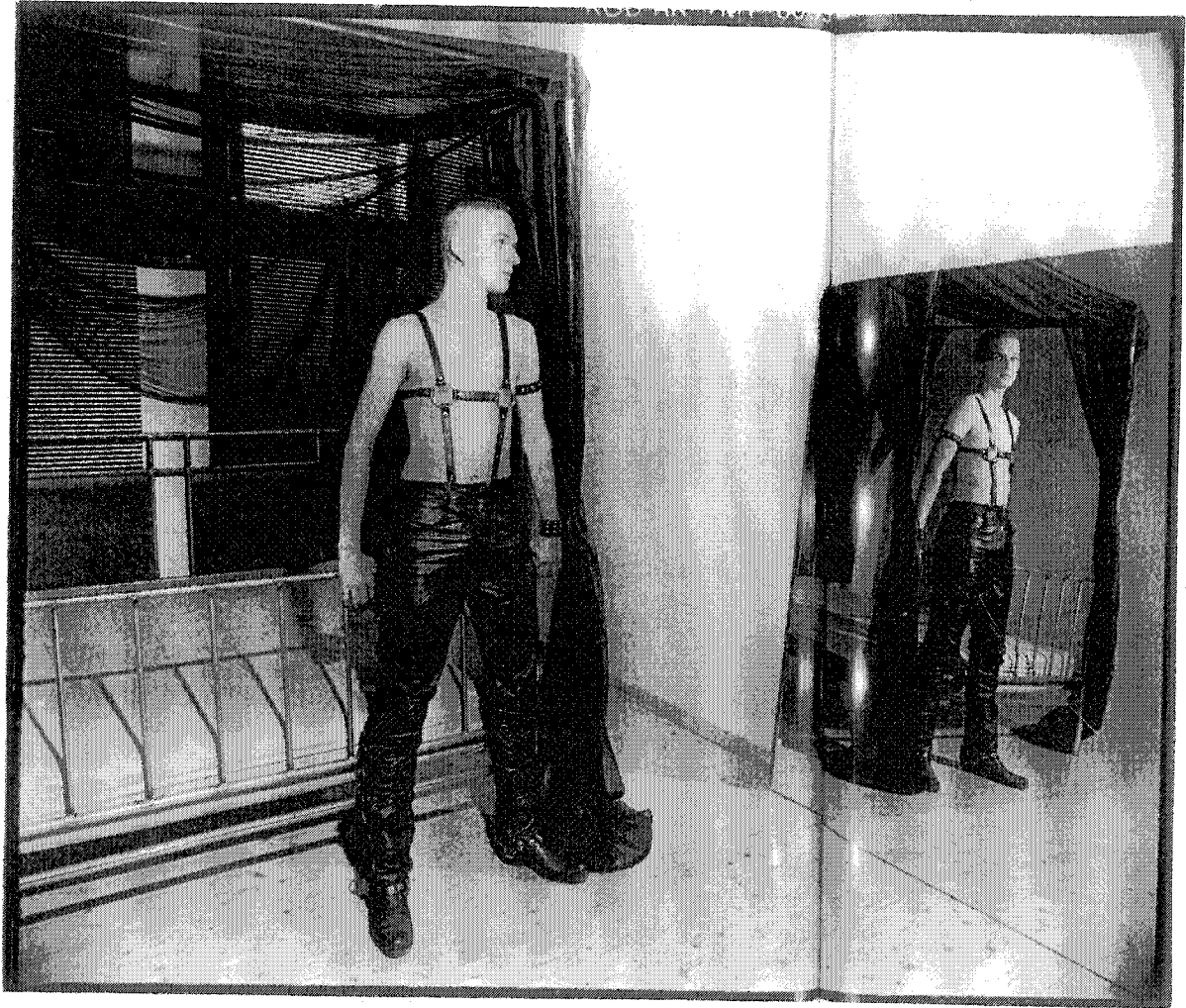


Fig. 3: Leather Boy, Berlin 1998
Reprinted with permission of Del LaGrace Volcano



Fig. 4: Teddy Boy, Berlin 1998
Reprinted with permission of Del LaGrace Volcano

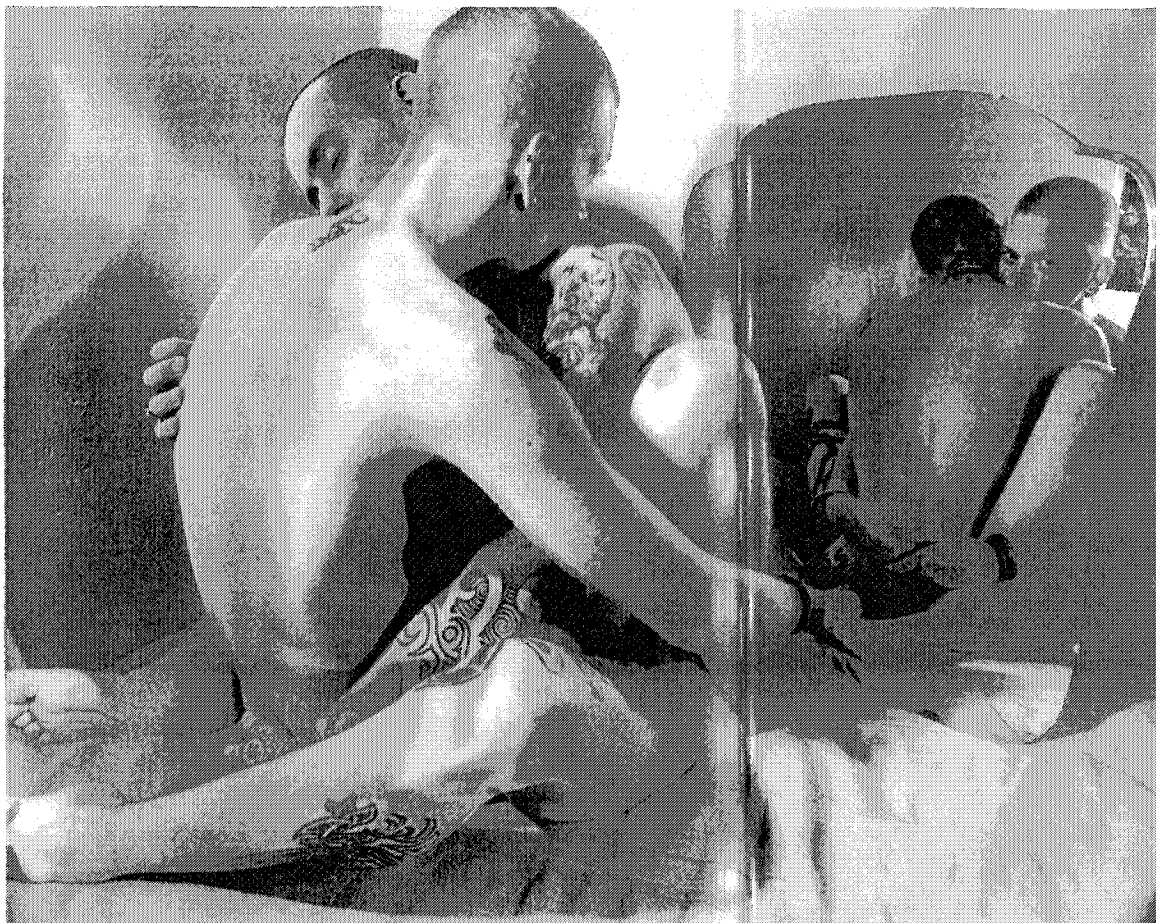


Fig. 5: Untitled, London 2000
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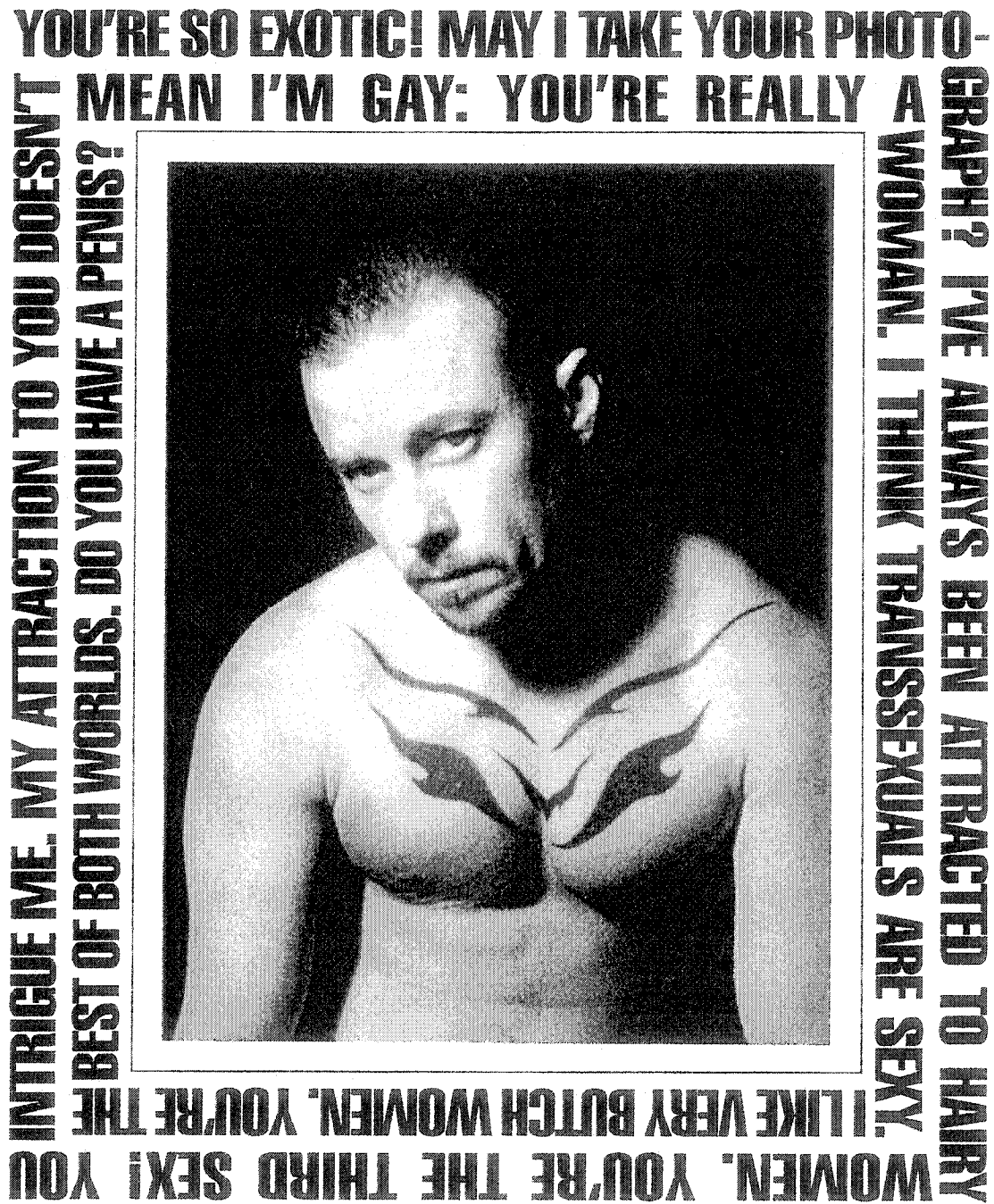


Fig. 6: Triptych, 1993
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Fig. 7: God's Will, 1995
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Fig. 8: Metoidioplasty: Subject 1, 1996
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Fig. 9: Manuela Kay, Berlin 1997
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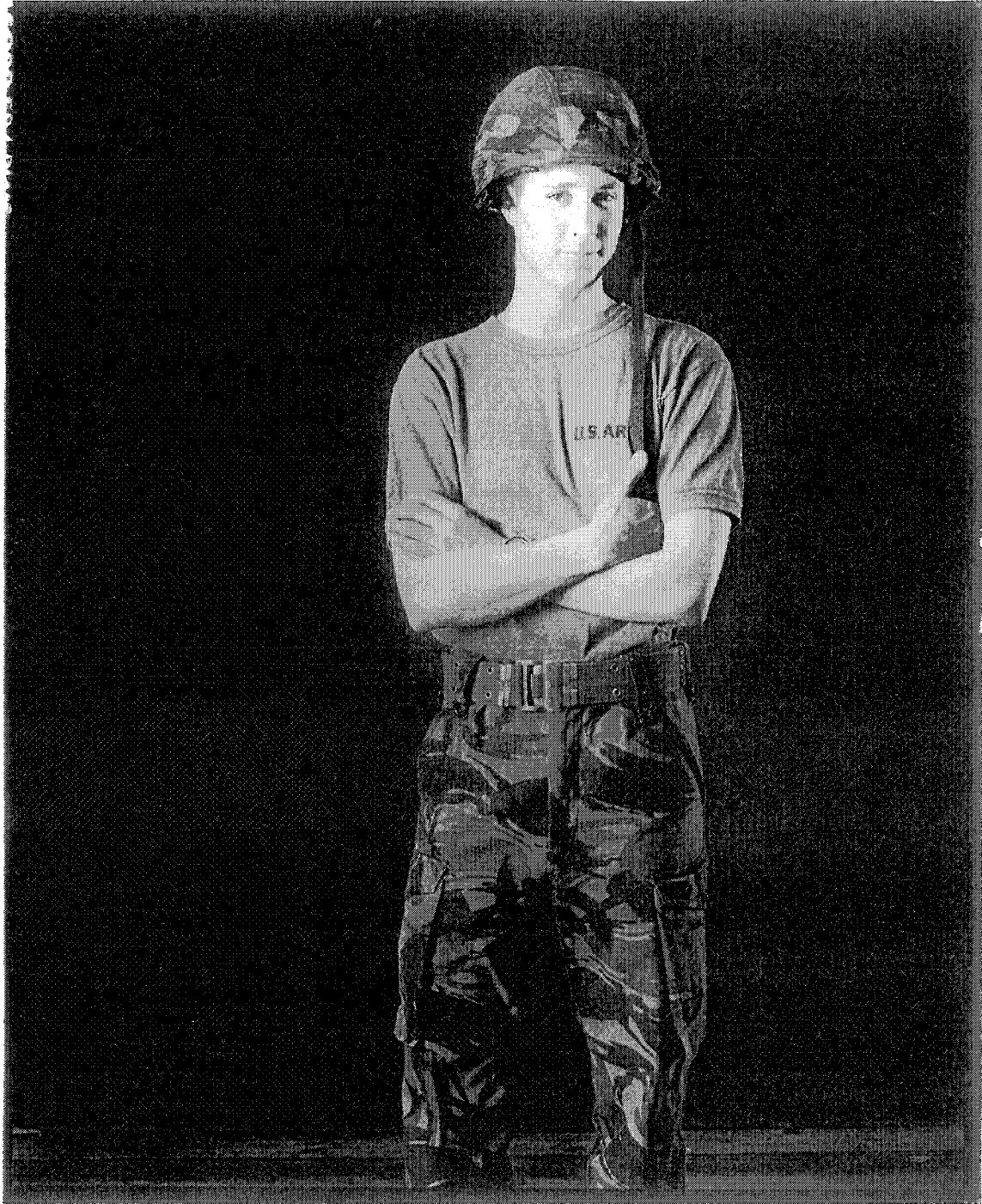


Fig. 10: GI Jax, London 1991
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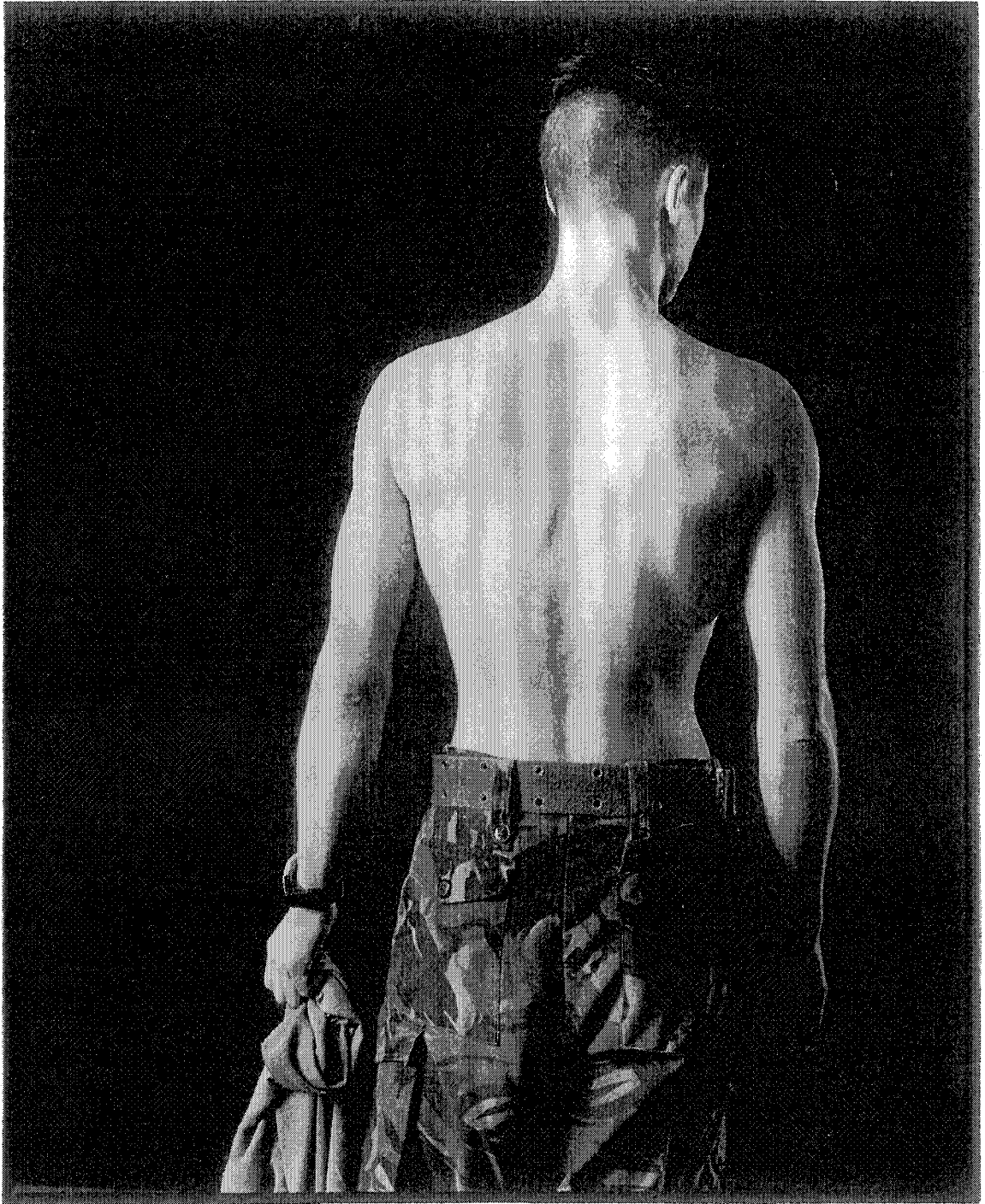


Fig. 11: Jax Back, London 1991
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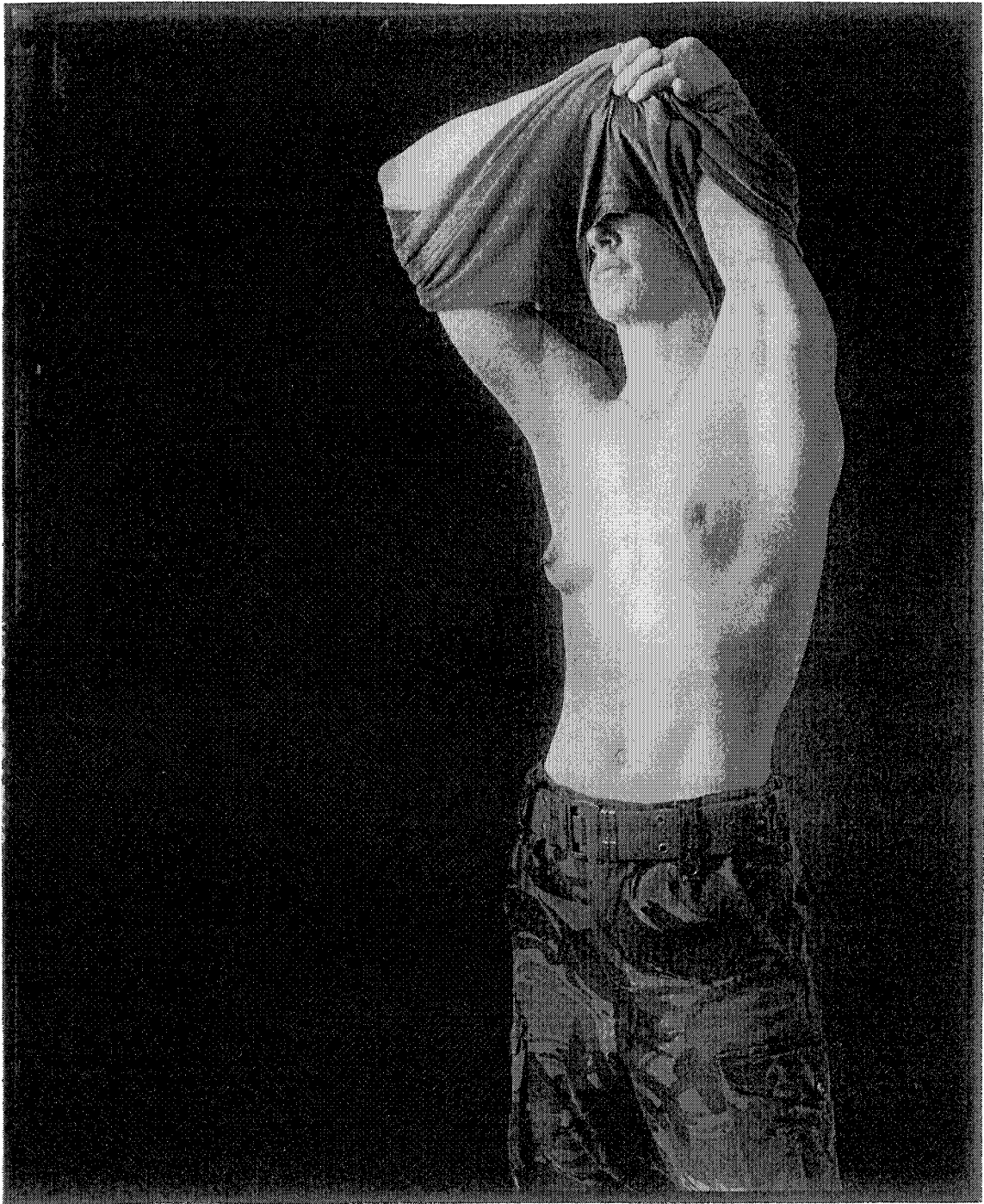


Fig. 12: Torso, London 1991
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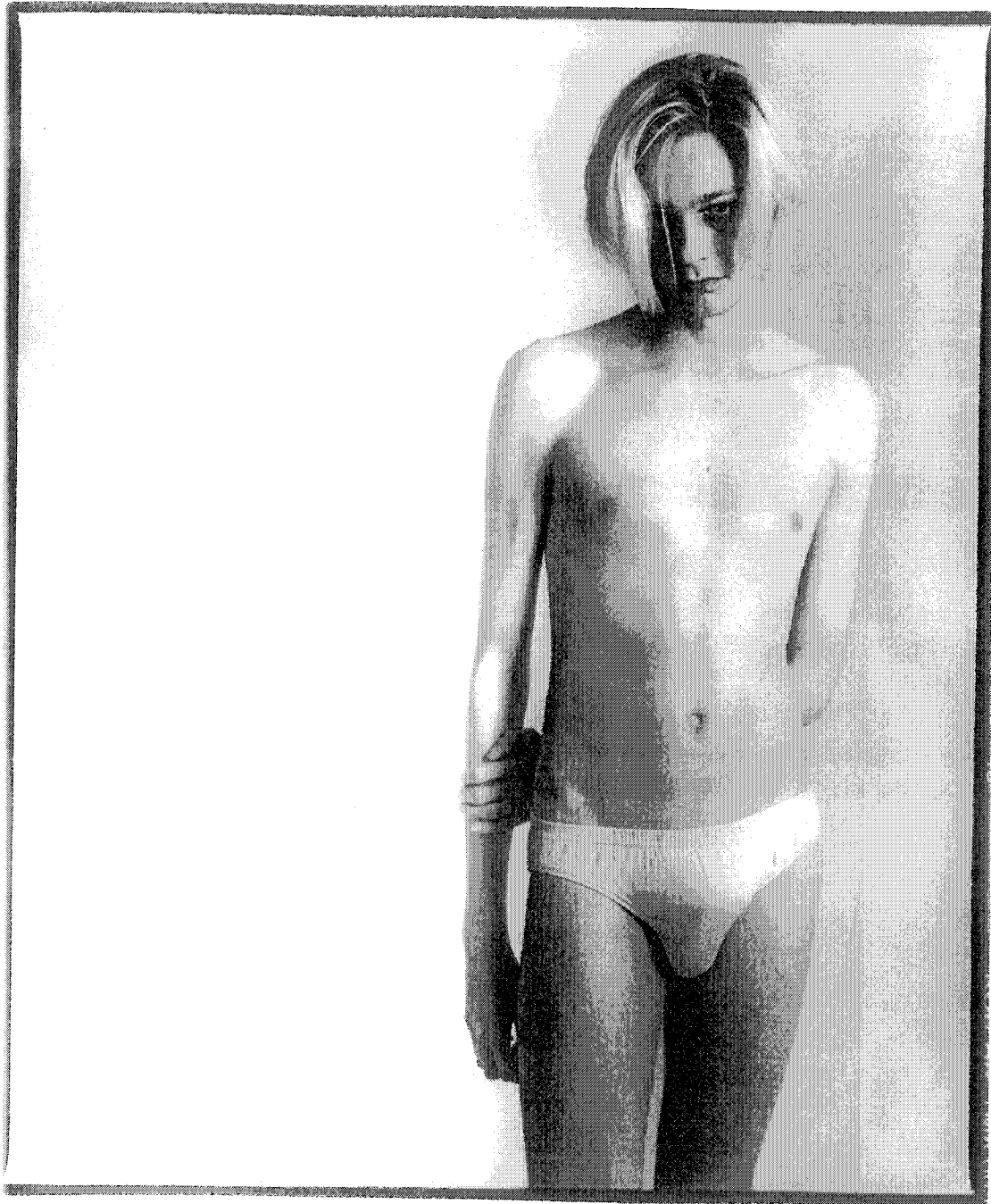


Fig. 13: The Boy Lee, London 1995
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Fig. 14: Metoidioplasty: Subject 2, 1996
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Fig. 15: De Profundis, 1996
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Fig. 16: Triad
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Fig. 17: The 3 Graces
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Delboy Grr

Fig. 18: Delboy Grrr, London 2000
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©Debby's Muscles

Fig. 19: Debby's Muscles, London 2000
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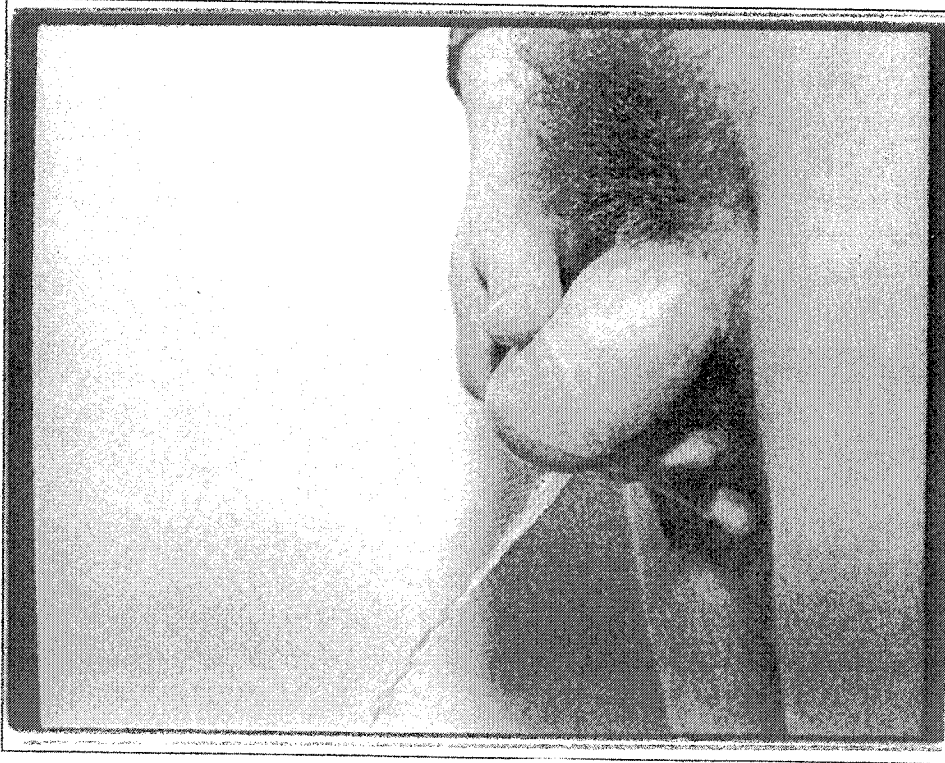


Fig. 20: Phalloplasty: Subject 1, Urinating, 1995
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Fig. 21: Chest Reconstruction: Subject 1, 1996
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Fig. 22: Twirl
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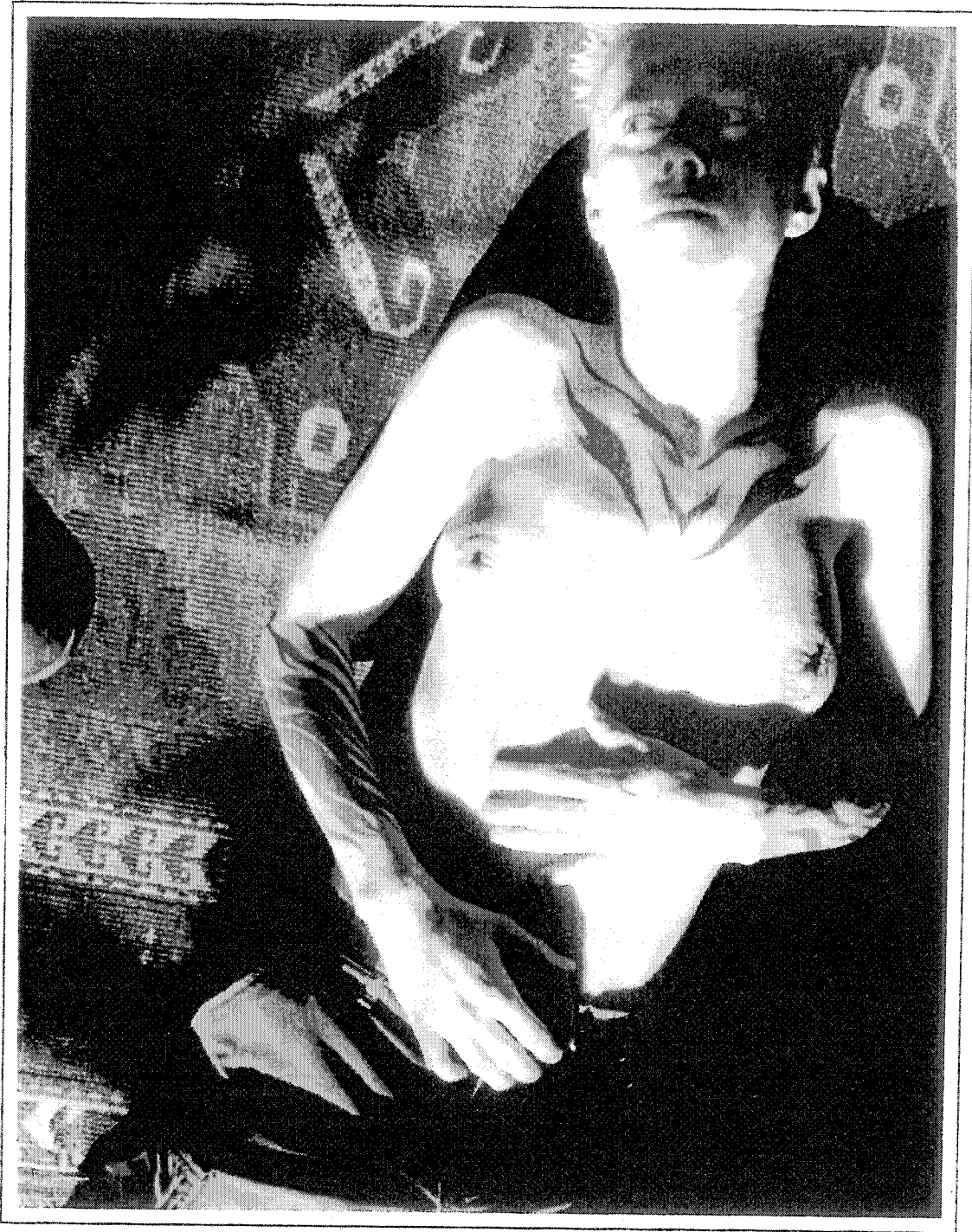


Fig. 23: Loren Cameron: Before Sex Reassignment
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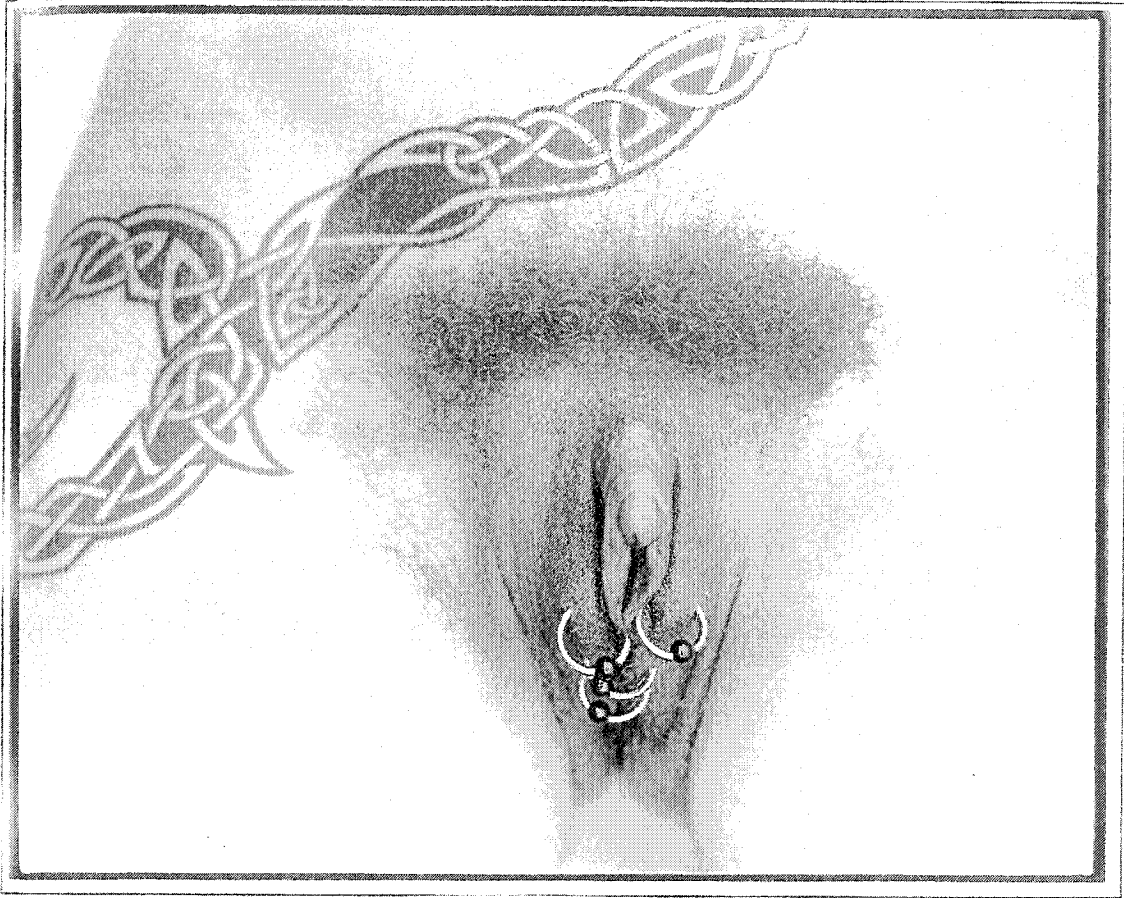


Fig. 24: Alternative Genital Modification, 1996
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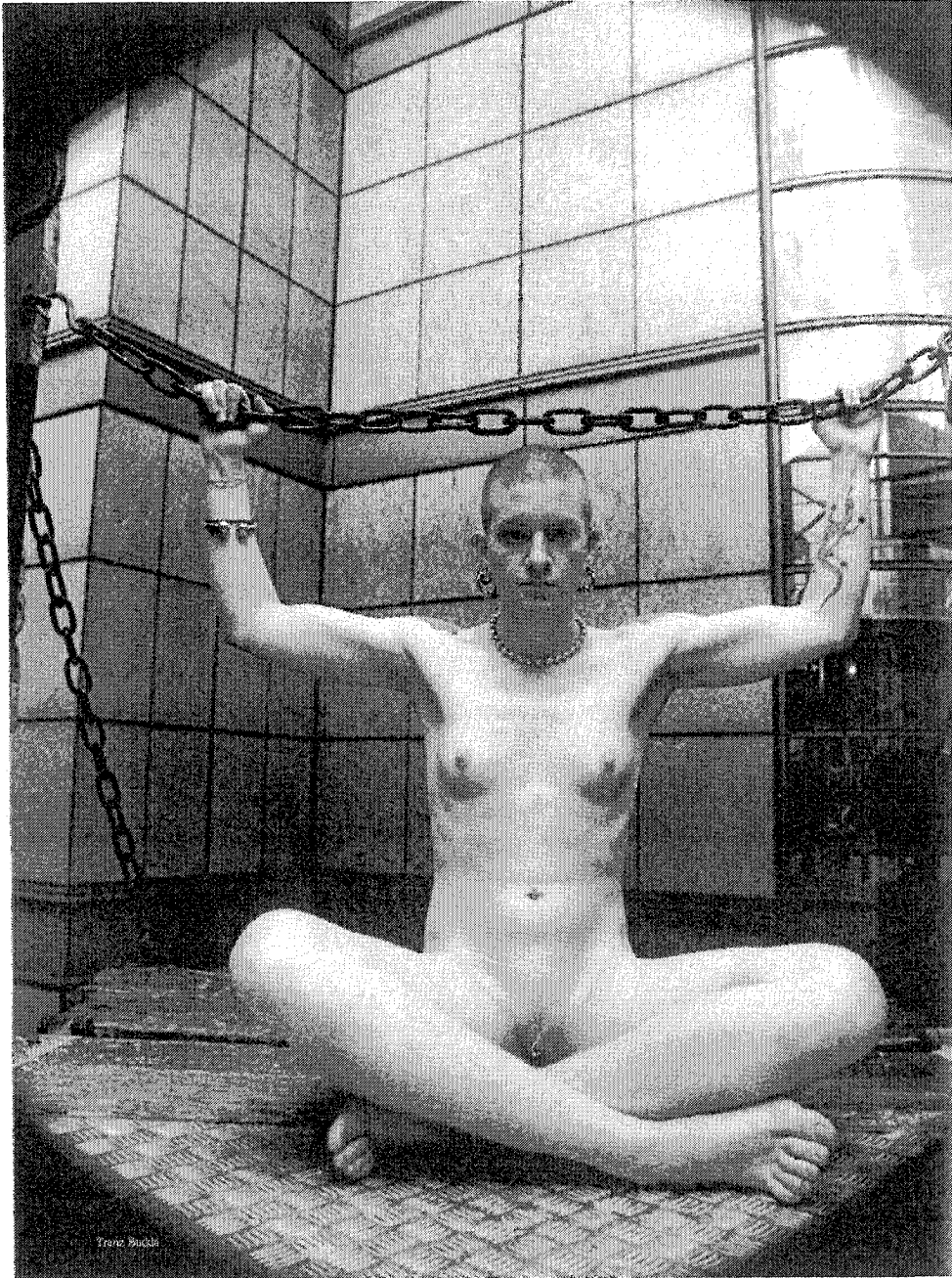


Fig. 25: Tranz Budda, London 1999
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