

## CHAPTER 2

### DELINEATING 'PORNOGRAPHY'

It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes in a state's constitution. The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new.

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

#### 2.1 Introduction

There is seemingly no place, in this age of Postmodernism, for finite truth and fixed meaning. As a result, empirical definitions are also made redundant. The deconstruction of meaning is perhaps more constructive than it sounds, since it presumes the unmasking of polarity and power struggles in linguistics. But the question that concerns this chapter is whether power is to be found in the act of defining, or whether an equal amount of power resides in the denial of definition. This study is concerned with *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (GQ) and not with pornography as such, as the term is understood in contemporary western culture. The supposition that GQ constitutes a kind of pornography or operates as pornography, does, however, require a brief investigation of what pornography is believed to be. This chapter investigates the term pornography – its history and current status in western culture – as a foundation for the 'real' subject of this study, namely the critical investigation of 'gentlemen's pornography' in GQ magazine.

Pornography is a billion dollar industry, one of the most profitable industries in the world. The manufacturers, marketers, buyers and users of pornography know exactly what it is, but the impression that pornography is somehow indefinable, and that defining it for purposes of legislation is difficult or impossible, still exists. When the United States Supreme Court judge, Justice Potter Stewart apathetically proclaimed in 1964 "I can't define pornography, but I know it when I see it", he provided an excuse for all those who stood to lose from the censorship that a definition might invoke (in Itzin 1992:435). Even now that pornography has been 'defined', both inside and outside of the law, social 'intuition' is still heavily relied upon to set the standards of acceptability, and therefore the grounds for censorship.

The mass-media, for instance, provide the perfect platform for apologists to echo the judge's stupor. The confusion surrounding issues of sex, art, politics and censorship in mass-media is con-

sidered by many to be a strategic incentive on the part of the pornography industry.<sup>1</sup> Exactly who relies on whom is difficult to determine, but it is clear that the pornography industry and mass-media have become bedfellows in their bid to protect the representation of 'sex' from censorship. It is in both their interests to limit external or statutory control over pornography to the minimum, or perhaps to want to dispense with it completely. Certainly one does not want to present the confusion surrounding the various definitions of pornography as a conspiracy on the part of the pornography industry, but the amateur days of pornography are over.<sup>2</sup>

Once removed from the realms of intuition and morality, and positioned in the context of commerce and structures of power, pornography is not inherently indefinable. As Catherine Itzin (1992:435) points out, "[t]he task of looking and describing what exists – had just not, until recently, been undertaken, arguably because no one wanted it done." This chapter presents the views of some of the leading voices who have contributed to existing definitions of pornography in recent history, including the voices of legal discourse, feminism and art history. This chapter also examines the social justifications behind certain definitions, implying, therefore, that pornography as a category is a cultural construct (with a well-established iconography that *GQ* draws from). The next section traces the history and politicised signification of the term pornography.

## 2.2 Tracing the term 'pornography'

There is something obstinate and irreducible about pornography that demands immediate recognition; irreducible because it is by its nature already reduced to its bare essentials: the body as sexual parts and sex as "mechanics and hydraulics" (Tang 1999:23). It is this perception that pornography forms a fixed, incontestable, instantly recognisable category, however, which ostensibly tempts society to perceive pornography as firmly situated outside of culture. In tracing the history of the term 'pornography', one is struck by precisely the opposite notion; while it seems to be situated at the margins of culture, pornography is in fact "constructed at its centre ... at the intersections of sexuality, religion, politics, art and law" (Tang 1999:23). This section briefly traces the history of the term pornography, which was coined in the nineteenth century to describe a collection of 'erotic' objects from the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, in order to demonstrate its power in western culture.

Pornography, as the term is understood today, is a legislative, categorical description, and as such may be a relatively modern locution. The term still, however, conveys the 'obscene' connotations

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<sup>1</sup> See Griffin (1981); van Rensburg (1985).

<sup>2</sup> The pornography industry makes an estimated ten billion dollars each year in America (Dine 1995:254), a figure not far from that of the tobacco trade, and surely the mock ignorance and nebulous euphemism employed by the tobacco industry cannot be denied.

of its Greek linguistic predecessors, *pornatheia* (59 AD) and *pornographoi* (second century), and as such offers a social warning about the potentially harmful nature of the material it describes.<sup>3</sup> 'Obscenity', itself a polemical term, is simultaneously anchored in the Latin *ob caenum*, "from filth" and *ob scena*, meaning "off or to one side of the stage" (Tang 1999:29), and is thus related to the notion of pornography as prurient and 'off scene'. This section suggests that the significance of the link between 'pornography' and GQ, presented by this study, is rooted in the prurient or 'obscene' connotations that have been historically inscribed into this term. The focus of this section is, thus, the historically prurient (licentious, lewd or obscene)<sup>4</sup> connotations of the *term* pornography and not the historical existence of 'pornographic' materials.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps, as Foucault (1980) has suggested, the history of pornography is the history of society, or at least of society's dealing with sexuality. This premise leads one to the realisation that although it is a cultural construct, pornography is not a modern construct. An examination of the sexualised imagery of previous ages (whether the 'obscene' relics of ancient Rome or sixteenth century nudes by Titian), quickly refutes the popular concept that pornography, as an *entity*, has its origin in the nineteenth century. Tang (1999:23-43) argues that since the connotations of 'obscenity' associated with the term 'pornography' did not exist prior to the nineteenth century, pornography as an entity did not exist before this date (see 4.1). This section contends that associations of 'obscenity' were in fact inscribed in the term pornography (*pornographos* or *pornatheia*) since the term was first used, presumably around 1866. *Pan and the Goat* (figure 2) is a marble sculpture from the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum. It represents in graphic detail the god Pan, of questionable descent himself, in an act of sexual intercourse with a goat. Not only is the representation 'pornographic' in its violent depiction of bestiality, but the explicitness of the image is also indicative of the often demonstrative nature of pornography. Clearly in certain places and eras sexualised subject matter is more acceptable than in others, but it nevertheless seems true that similar 'obscene' or 'pornographic' imagery can be found in most epochs and cultures throughout western history. The question is whether these can be described as pornography if they were not considered prurient or 'obscene' by the cultures in which they were produced.

The contemporary understanding of the term pornography is as a taxonomical device, and perhaps ironically, has its origin in the Victorian period, an era typically associated with sexual prudery. In *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, Walter Kendrick (1978) examines the

<sup>3</sup> The contexts and presumed meanings of the terms *pornatheia* and *pornographoi* are explained later in this section.

<sup>4</sup> The word 'prurient', in its application to obscenity legislation, means "tending to excite lasciviousness" (Ginnow & Gordon 1978:29).

<sup>5</sup> The existence of 'pornographic' material (as stipulated by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance 1985) prior to the existence of the term pornography, as it is understood today, will, however, be sketched through the example of *Pan and the Goat*, an ancient Roman sculpture (figure 1). This example is referred to throughout the study as an example of the 'pornographic' objects from the classical world that caught the fancy of nineteenth century society.

way nineteenth century society furtively handled the erotic assault from the ancient Romans, in the form of the 'obscene' relics unearthed from the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, by creating a new material and social space: a 'secret museum'. Although the Italian Government had commenced excavations on the sites of Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1763, it was only really in the 1800s that the European public started to take an interest in their findings (Kendrick 1987:4-11). Giuseppe Fiorelli, the head of the excavations, soon realised that the volcanic matter that buried the cities and suffocated their people had ironically also caused their preservation.<sup>6</sup> He devised a method by which plaster was used to cast the attire and attitudes in which the people of Pompeii had died. The detailed preservation of everyday activity, contrasted with the dramatic irony of a gruesome fate, became a kind of interactive horror 'show,' made all the worse by the fact that it was true. The western world was captivated by the discovery of this lost civilisation and the fateful instant that wiped it out. As a result, the artefacts and remnants from Pompeii and Herculaneum became tourist attractions in nineteenth century society's ongoing fascination with classical culture.

No one, however, seemed fully prepared for the abundance of sexual imagery that was excavated from Pompeii, or the apparent prominence of these images in classical society (in spite of the popular and timely literature on the subject, such as Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788) and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). Representations of the phallus, for instance, were found everywhere in ancient Rome, prompting the question of what to do with this "forest of phalluses" (Kendrick 1987:9) in nineteenth century Europe.<sup>7</sup> The explicit array of sculptures and paintings could not be put on public display, but neither, in the interest of archaeology, could they be destroyed (Tang 1999:29). The excavators and curators thus resolved to hide them away. In 1866 the 'obscene' artefacts, confined to a single room in the Museum of Naples, were systematically catalogued under the title, "Pornographic Collection" (Kendrick 1987:13). This "secret museum", as Kendrick calls it, was a place designed to preserve knowledge and public morality; a space where inappropriate objects could be separated and set aside, with access restricted to educated men of a mature age and genteel stature, since they were thought to be 'incorruptible' (Goldhill in Tang 1999:30).<sup>8</sup> *Musée Secret* or *Museum Secretum* was a popular nineteenth century euphemism for such closeted collections, while the term used to describe their contents was 'pornography' (Kendrick 1987:13-15).

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<sup>6</sup> See Benario (1979).

<sup>7</sup> Many of the Victorian cataloguers of Pompeii attempted to justify the jumble of lascivious display in various ways that today may seem comically naive. Although not relevant to this study, Kendrick (1987:9-10) offers more on this subject.

<sup>8</sup> Similar collections were opened in Florence, Dresden and Madrid. The British Museum in London had already established a *Museum Secretum* in 1865, along with a "Private Case" for books (Kendrick 1987:243). In each of these collections access was restricted to educated 'gentlemen', who had obtained permission from the custodians of the collection and could afford the entrance fee (see 4.1).

The choice of the term pornography was not random; it had appeared briefly, in different forms, in western history, and always with the implied connotation of prurience or immorality. The apostle Paul, for instance, wrote to the church in Corinth around 59 AD: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 5: 1 King James Version). The aim of his letter was plainly to chastise the Corinthians for their "sexual immorality". What in English translations of the Bible is written up as "immorality", is "*pornatheia*" in the Greek (Porteous 2001).

The second century Greek historical compiler, Athenaeus, used the term *pornographoi* ("whore-painters") to describe those who produced representations of prostitutes (Kendrick 1987:11). This term was in turn appropriated by the German art historian, CO Müller in 1850, who alluded to "the great number of *obscene* representations ... to which ... mythology gave frequent occasion" [emphasis added] (in Kendrick 1987:11); Müller dubbed the creators of such representations 'pornographers' (*pornographen*). Between the second century and 1850 traces of the term seem to disappear from view, but 'obscene' or pornographic material was, nevertheless, present in western society and, in fact, started to feature in a more openly political arena. Lynn Hunt (1993:10) explains that before the nineteenth century, pornography was "almost always an adjunct to something else ... a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticise religious and political authorities". Historian Rachel Weil (1996:125-157) writes that in seventeenth century Restoration England, for example, it was hard to draw a distinct line between slander and pornography. (It is possible that the term used to slander politicians or other prominent members of society was akin to the term pornography).

The first dictionary definition of pornography appears in a medical dictionary in 1857: "a description of prostitutes or of prostitution, as a matter of public hygiene" (in Kendrick 1987:1). Although not directly linked to prurient sentiments, the definition does represent prostitution as something that is unsavoury. A later definition (1909), provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, delineated pornography as a "[d]escription of the life, manners, etc., of prostitutes and their patrons: hence, the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste subjects in literature or art" (in Kendrick 1987:2). The outmoded terms "obscene" and "unchaste" hint at the moral justification behind this nineteenth century definition. The etymology of the term (*pornotheia* and *pornographoi*), however, refutes the idea that the connotation of prurience has its origin in nineteenth century culture. The various traces and 'definitions' of the term pornography are ambiguous, but they all seem to imply a moralistic tone, and therein may lie their coherence. Whether used to describe immoral behaviour, as in the apostle Paul's use of the term, or the documenting of prostitutes' activities, as in

Athenaeus's use of the term, the underlying implication is an interest in prurient matters. The common thread that seems to run through the various traces of the term pornography seems to be a kind of warning about the activity or material being described.<sup>9</sup>

Foucault (1980) is clearly right in suggesting that the history of the term pornography is the history of western society's relationship to sex, a history of the acceptance or repression of sex. In keeping with this perception, it seems the term pornography was used in the context of the secret museum to indicate that these collections portrayed the deviant<sup>10</sup> behaviour of classical society, rather than to create the impression that this kind of sexual display was the norm of the glorified Roman Empire. The term pornography was, in other words, used more as a social rebuke than a mere anthropological category. In the distinction between acceptability and what Foucault terms, "repression" lies the latent power to condone or discredit, either an individual or a society, on the grounds of sexuality.

Assuming the history of the term 'pornography' is the history of western society's comfort or discomfort with sexuality, two questions arise. The first is whether pornography is not merely synonymous with 'just sex'. The second is whether pornography, assuming there is such a thing, has changed at all within contemporary culture. Martin Roth (1982:3) articulates his perceptions:

The emphasis and exaggeration of certain old themes and the entry of a number of new ones in modern pornography call for a reappraisal of its psychological and social effects in the contemporary world. [There is] a change in contemporary erotica which has gradually substituted sadism, violence and the humiliation of women for the ordinary or tender representation of sexual love that was the central feature of the pornography of the past.

The extent to which the 'pornography' of Pompeii is "ordinary" or "tender" is debatable, but what is less contestable is the fact that 'pornography', as the term is understood today, and has arguably always existed (*pornatheia*), is not 'just sex'. The presence of sadism, violence and the humiliation of women in an image is perhaps what renders it 'obscene' in the social consciousness, as opposed to being 'merely' labelled 'erotic'. The prurient connotations that have been the focus of this section are encapsulated in the term obscenity. Possibly for this reason, obscenity as a notion is frequently considered politically incorrect in contemporary western culture, because it implies deviance, lasciviousness, things dirty and off-scene. Foucault (1980) blames the prurient or obscene connotations associated with pornography on

<sup>9</sup> In the fourth century BC, Plato's *Republic* mapped out the governance of an ideal state. The laws of this state included careful management over all forms of representation, written, pictorial and dramatic (Kendrick 1987:35). In a similar vein, Socrates, commenting on the early education of citizens, "strongly objected to the 'ugly and immoral' stories told by Hesiod and Homer" (Kendrick 1987:35). In both these cases, certain representation (sexualised or violent, for instance) was sketched as having a potentially harmful or corrupting influence on the viewer, confirming that concern about the influence of representation is not a modern phenomenon.

<sup>10</sup> Contemporary books on Pompeii and Herculaneum still entitle chapters on the sexual display of these communities as 'deviant'. One such example is Chapter Five of Ray Laurence's *Roman Pompeii* (1994), entitled "Deviant behaviour".

the sexual "repression" of nineteenth century western society, while Tang (1999:23-43) argues that pornography simply did not exist prior to pre-Christian concerns about obscenity. What Foucault and Tang regard as a scourge on sexualised representation, however, may in fact be the protection of it, because such connotations 'warn' the viewer about the potentially harmful nature of pornographic material, without censoring or regulating it. In this way, the connotations of obscenity associated with pornography may function, more effectively than legislation, like a social warning about the harm of pornographic material.

Conversely, it is also true that connotations of prurience or obscenity have in the past led to the restriction of expression or the gathering of knowledge, as was the case in early nineteenth century western society.<sup>11</sup> Unjustified censorship is, however, a more rare occurrence in contemporary western culture, with concerns about discrimination and freedom of expression out-weighting those of prurience or obscenity. The 'erotic' is a complex, much contested notion that has not faded from social discourse and inevitably draws from public perceptions on obscenity. In contemporary art historical discussions the erotic is frequently positioned as the antithesis of obscenity, which seems to be, under these circumstances, equated with the pornographic. Nead (1992:103) comments that "[e]rotic art' is the term that defines the degree of sexuality that is permissible within the category of the aesthetic." In other words, the erotic, as a category, seems to represent the legitimisation of sexual representation within the boundaries of 'high' culture.

This legitimisation must surely, however, be lent credibility by an inherent difference between art and pornography, between the acceptable and the obscene, and it is herein that the ambiguity lies. Theorists differ regarding what it is that distinguishes erotic art from pornography, but most seem to agree upon the fact that there is a difference. Scruton believes the difference lies in the viewpoint – the pornographic point of view is voyeuristic, it simulates a keyhole, whereas the erotic point of view places the viewer in the imaginary sexualised situation represented (in Nead 1992:104).<sup>12</sup> Rembar (1969:467) argues it is "social-value" (or "importance") that distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic, and thus uses a "social-value-test" to distinguish the one from the other.<sup>13</sup> According to Rembar's (1969:467) social-

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<sup>11</sup> See Johns (1982) for a discussion on the negative impact that the secret museum and 'Private Case' may have had on scholarship, and Rembar (1969) for an investigation of the censorship of literature in the nineteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> This distinction, however, does not broach the question of arousal in the viewer. Clark (1956:6) reasons that "no nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse in the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling ... and if it does not do so, it is bad art and false morals". Curiously, this statement bears traces of the *American Heritage Dictionary's* 1975 definition of pornography as "written, graphic, or other forms of communication intended to excite lascivious feelings" (in Kendrick 1987:1).

<sup>13</sup> Rembar was one of the lawyers involved in defending *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Tropic of Cancer* and *Fanny Hill* from obscenity legislation in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. His defence of these books was based on the United States Supreme Court's 1957 definition of obscenity as "utterly without redeeming social importance" (in Kendrick 1987:209). Rembar emphasised the "utterly" and changed the word "importance" to "value", arguing that "[s]ome value"

value-test, the value of, for instance, Manet's *Olympia* (1863) is as an artistic statement, a "turning point" (Berger 1972:63) in authorial representation, as opposed to GQ, which offers no critical insight or contribution of its own (see 4.3.2.1 for a discussion of 'popular press'). The nudity of the woman in Manet's painting, it may be argued, serves a purpose other than 'visual pleasure', whereas the apparently random or unjustified nudity in GQ situates the woman in a phallogentric context.<sup>14</sup>

Rembar's victories in part echoed the 'public good defence' argument of the British Obscene Publications Act 1959. The Society of Authors and other similar bodies in the United Kingdom had since approximately the 1850s been demanding that the law of obscene libel should be reformed to exclude material with artistic merit. The British Obscene Publications Act 1959 dealt with this issue through the "public good defence" (in Williams 1979:51). The Act concedes that even in cases where material has the power to deprave and corrupt, it may avoid prosecution if it is found to be for the public good due to its literary, artistic or scientific value. (The Act became quite controversial after it was used successfully by the defence in the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.)

The difficulty of such seemingly finite distinctions (Scruton's 'point of view', Rembar's 'social-value-test', and the 'public good defence' proviso) is that they presume erotic art and pornography are absolute or fixed entities. This assumption seems naïve when one is confronted by the diversity of the theme of eroticism, as it appears in the work of Titian, Manet, DH Lawrence, Mel Ramos, Robert Mapplethorpe and Cindy Sherman. These may all qualify as art, and can be labelled erotic, but this finite categorisation may tempt the viewer to ignore the very complex influence that their respective contexts and contents should exert on their status as erotic art. The issues of intentionality, visual pleasure, arousal, power, aestheticisation and ideology notwithstanding, it similarly seems myopic to attempt a study of GQ and its visual appropriation from 'erotic' art, without an in-depth investigation of the notion of the erotic. This is, however, an issue that is somewhat neglected in this study, since the emphasis here falls on GQ, a form of popular media, and not on the ostensibly more lofty category of erotic art.<sup>15</sup> The author does not, however, intend to negate erotic art (or the minefield of discourse that surrounds it), nor conflate all art that may be erotic. Rather, it is presumed, as Helen McDonald (2001:4) has suggested, that all "art is ambiguous, never one thing or another".<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the assumption is made that since visual art, particularly

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might not be too hard to prove; while "some importance" was considerably more difficult to prove (Kendrick 1987:209; Rembar 1969:467).

<sup>14</sup> The 'integrity' of artistic statements is difficult to prove, further problematising the 'erotic'.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the subject of erotic art see Susanne Kappeler's *The Pornography of Representation* (in particular Chapter Four, entitled "Porn vs Erotica", 1986).

<sup>16</sup> It seems fair to 'stretch' McDonald's statement to include *erotic* art, which is as idiosyncratic as 'other' art.

that representing the body, is a point of intersection between one body and another (artist and spectator, subject and object, the 'looker' and the 'looked at'), and is therefore a mediator of sexual relations, "art is also always erotic" (McDonald 2001:4).<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, pornography stands with one foot inside culture and the other at its margin. For visual art, the female nude is situated both at the centre and at the margins:

It is at the centre because within art historical discourse paintings of the female body are seen as the visual culmination of Renaissance and Enlightenment aesthetics, but this authority is nevertheless always under threat, for the female nude also stands at the edge of the art category, where it risks losing its respectability and spilling out and over into the pornographic (Nead 1992:103).

Perhaps art and pornography are not mutually exclusive concepts, but rather ambiguous and sometimes overlapping taxonomies.

The word pornography is still used to classify, warn or even rebuke, and as such is a useful point of departure for an investigation of the parallels between GQ and canonical 'erotic art', such as Manet's *Olympia* (1863). On the surface, GQ attempts to avoid an aesthetic association with pornography, presumably because of its obscene connotations, while nonetheless drawing from the objectifying visual traditions of pornography. This 'disguise' is achieved by appropriating the sexualised aesthetic codes of canonical erotic art (see 2.5). In this way, GQ seems to be situated somewhere between erotic art and pornography, between the acceptable and the obscene (see 4.3.1). In contemporary society 'obscenity' as a concept seems less and less finite, perhaps because sexualised representation and pornography seem more common-place. Since the nineteenth century, the law has stepped into the arena of polemical modern sexuality to attempt to define what is acceptable and what is not. Visual art is not the only arena of ambiguity, since the legal delineation of pornography has proved equally trying, because unlike art history, which can boldly claim ambiguity as part of the identity of art, the legal system *must* define the seemingly indefinable. The process, precision and effectiveness of this decision is the topic under discussion in the following section.

### 2.3 Ambiguity in the legal delineation of pornography

Chapters Three and Four employ the definition of pornography, as delineated by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance<sup>18</sup> in 1985, since this is the definition referred to in most discussions on

<sup>17</sup> Adding to this assumption, Clark (1956:6) comments, "[t]he desire to grasp and be united with another human body is so fundamental a part of our nature, that our judgement of what is known as 'pure form' is inevitably influenced by it".

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of convenience, this is hereafter referred to as the Civil Rights Ordinance.

sexualised representation.<sup>19</sup> The Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography, in fact, serves as a kind of template for most later definitions of pornographic material in the western world, including current South African obscenity legislation (Act 65 of 1996). This section chronicles the rise of the British Obscene Publications Act (1959) and the development of a workable definition for pornography in the Civil Rights Ordinance (1985). This historical background is given in order to explain the way in which sexual representation has, since the nineteenth century at least, been divided into material that is perceived to be socially 'acceptable' and that which is considered 'obscene'. Since this study deals with a 'grey' area in terms of obscenity legislation, namely material that represents sex, subordination and violence but is not explicit, it is useful to demonstrate the 'greyness' of early obscenity legislation on which later definitions of pornography depend. This section, therefore, first examines the British Obscene Publications Act (and the phrases 'deprave and corrupt' and 'indecent and obscene'), and then the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985).

'Pornography' is not a word used in legislative documents, probably because of its inherently ideologically loaded and ambiguous nature. Rather, the statutory misdemeanour of publishing 'obscene' matter (whether sexual or other) is known to lawyers internationally as 'obscene libel.' The statute that has been central to this field, is the British Obscene Publications Act 1959. There were, of course, a number of laws dealing with obscenity before 1959, but the particular importance of the British Obscene Publications Act 1959 lies in the fact that it was the first statute to articulate the offence of publishing obscene articles. Prior to 1959, offences that related to obscenity rested on the common law, implying that the law had been founded and fixed by the British courts. It was in 1727 that the common law offence of obscene libel was first established, but it does not seem to have been frequently prosecuted until the nineteenth century. Society had, in fact, to wait until 1868 for the definitive test of obscenity to be laid down in the Queen versus Hicklin case.<sup>20</sup> In this case, Chief Justice Cockburn defined obscenity, in the now clichéd phrase, as the "tendency to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall" (in Williams 1979:9).<sup>21</sup>

Although this was the first credible attempt at clarifying or defining obscenity, the 'deprave and corrupt test' did little to solve the ambiguity that had come to mark obscenity law. The subjective nature of the words 'deprave' and 'corrupt', together with the euphemistic tone of the phrase 'tendency to,' was ample cause for confusion. The confusion did not, however, end there, since Cockburn's test was not the only one used by British law to decide what was obscene. Material

<sup>19</sup> See Dworkin and McKinnon (1988), Itzin (1992), Paglia (1995), and Soble (1986).

<sup>20</sup> The case involved an anti-Catholic pamphlet, described by Rembar (1969:19) as "more libelous than obscene".

<sup>21</sup> The historical information relating to obscenity legislation in this section is derived from the *British Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship*, chaired by B Williams in 1979.

banned from importation under the Customs Acts, for instance, was tried under an entirely different set of criteria. In these cases, the Acts prohibit articles that are “indecent or obscene”, but again the interpretation of these words was left unqualified (Williams 1979:12). The British Obscene Publications Act therefore operates at two distinct levels: whereas the phrase ‘deprave and corrupt’ was used as a test for material being published and sold, the phrase ‘indecent or obscene’ was used as a test for material being imported, displayed publicly or sent through the post.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, however, the problem was the variable nature of these words.

In those cases tried at the British Crown Court, it was usually left up to the jury to decide whether certain material had the ‘tendency to deprave and corrupt’ or could be classified as ‘indecent and obscene.’ In most cases, this was done without any guidance from the judge regarding what a word meant. Various meanings were, nevertheless, attached to the words in different cases over the years. In the Hicklin case itself, for example, Chief Justice Cockburn referred to the offending pamphlet as one which would evoke in people’s minds, “thought of a most impure and libidinous character” (in Williams 1979:10). The famous case involving DH Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was brought before the courts in 1961. Here the judge guided the jury’s interpretation of these terms by reading from the dictionary that “to ‘deprave’ means to make morally bad, to pervert, to debase or corrupt morally. To ‘corrupt’ means to render unsound or rotten, to destroy the moral purity or chastity of, to pervert or ruin a good quality, to debase, to defile” (in Williams 1979:10).

Even when dictionary definitions were relied upon, however, the intended meaning of ‘deprave and corrupt’ was still not adequately outlined. The implication of the test and of the judicial comments on it seemed to indicate that for material to be classified as obscene, a court (whether jury or magistrate) should be convinced that it was likely to have some kind of harmful effect on an individual, even if the specific nature of that effect were hard to pinpoint. In the 1979 British *Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship*,<sup>23</sup> the comment was made that “the obscenity laws [had] in recent years left unchecked an increasingly wider range of material” (in Williams 1979:12). So far as the ‘deprave and corrupt’ test was concerned, it would appear that obscenity legislation was still ineffective.

The separate test of ‘indecent or obscene’ (found in the British Customs Acts, the Post Office Acts and the Acts pertaining to public displays), established the legal parameters at quite a different point from that set by the British Obscene Publications Act. This is apparent in the obvious inclu-

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<sup>22</sup> This category is currently under much scrutiny, both in the United Kingdom and United States, because of the novel complexities the Internet has brought with it. Although not within the scope of this study, there is a great deal of interesting and relevant research being done pertaining to censorship, obscenity law and the Internet.

<sup>23</sup> Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by command of Her Majesty, November 1979.

sion of the word 'indecent', which is still used to mean a lesser version of 'obscene'. The general effect of the 'indecent or obscene' test was thus much wider than the 'deprave and corrupt' test, and therefore it escaped much of the criticism pronounced over Cockburn's test.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the 'indecent or obscene' test was far simpler to apply is, nevertheless, because the interpretation of this phrase is perhaps more open-ended; whether this is salutary is questionable, since such terms are clearly dependant on social convention.<sup>25</sup>

The relativity of public perception is a complex phenomenon that brings into question the flexibility of the law. The practice of setting a precedent that may be invoked as legal justification for or against a certain ruling, is in itself the cause of dispute. Rembar (1969:27) questions the relevance of legal precedents: "are they not the dead hand of the past?" The precept to which Rembar objects is known as *stare decisis* (to stand by matters decided on).<sup>26</sup> The phrase implies a fixedness that demonstrates society's belief that general societal understandings of right and wrong do not change. Pornography, however, has become progressively more explicit in contemporary culture, as publications strive to show 'more' than their competitors. Since yesterday's notion of obscenity is today quite acceptable, a new, more outrageous obscenity must be found to please the market. The trade in obscene materials is an example of supply and demand. Against the backdrop of an analysis of the late 1950s British anti-obscenity legislation, Rembar (1969:493) raises the timely point that changes in society may make obsolete the term 'obscene':

There will always, so long as there is society, be indelicate violations of social convention (though future convention may seem strange to us). And there will always be things obscene in a deeper sense, things that have a special kind of ugly evil. But obscenity as the new term has been commonly understood – the impermissible description of sex in literature – approaches its end. So far as writing is concerned, I have said there is no longer any law of obscenity. I would go farther and add, so far as writing is concerned, that not only our law but in our culture, obscenity will soon be gone.

The relevance of Rembar's statement lies in the assertion that an understanding of obscenity relies on changing societal and contextual norms. Pornography is, at any point in western history, a fairly credible reflection of general social positions about the obscene.

Pornography is not indefinable. The challenge simply has been how to formulate a legal definition that is limited to pornography, in other words, "does not implicate art and other forms of cultural expression" (Mirzoeff 1998:482). In 1985 The United States Civil Rights Ordinance made major

<sup>24</sup> Apart from the variable or relative nature of these tests ('deprave and corrupt' and 'indecent or obscene'), the other problem was that these tests did not make allowance for material that should, justifiably, not be banned because of its artistic merit. This is addressed earlier in this Chapter (see 2.2) and in Chapter Four (see 4.3.1).

<sup>25</sup> It is anyone's guess what Emily Post (1873-1960), Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) and Madonna (1960-) would answer if called upon to define 'indecent', but what can be said, with relative certainty is that their answers would differ. In other words, indecency is a subjective judgement, not indifferent to the influences of time and social context.

<sup>26</sup> Rembar explains this notion within the context of the case against *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in his book entitled *The End of Obscenity* (1969).

progress in the struggle to define pornography, by conceptualising it as “a practice of sex discrimination which sexualises the subordination of women and which eroticises violence against women” (in Itzin 1992:435), or as Catherine Mackinnon (in Itzin 1992:435)<sup>27</sup> argues, the “political practice of power and powerlessness [that] eroticises dominance and submission”. What makes this particular definition so groundbreaking, is the objective, yet almost indifferent tone of its wording, as well as the inclusion of violence as part of the definition for pornography.<sup>28</sup> Clearly this is a *description* of pornography, without the moralising euphemisms of past attempts. Pornography is clearly defined as depicting the sexualised subordination of women.<sup>29</sup>

According to the United States Civil Rights Ordinance definition, material would have to be *simultaneously* graphic *and* sexually explicit *and* subordinate women in order to qualify as pornography. It would *also* have to include one or more of the specific itemised characteristics, as well as to have been proved to harm someone (figure 3) (Itzin 1992:436). The emphasis was no longer on depictions of ‘just sex,’ but rather on including the “sadism, violence and humiliation of women” that theorists such as Martin Roth (1982:2) have articulated as part of the criterion for pornography. Thus this definition acknowledges material in which women are violently dehumanised (bound, battered, tortured, harassed or raped), but it also includes the depiction of women in glossy men’s magazines where they are ‘merely’ objectified for the sexual pleasure of the viewer. “In practice this definition has been drafted sometimes to include only violent pornography, sometimes both sexually violent and other violating and sexually objectifying materials” (Itzin 1992:427), depending on the state or country in which it occurs. The practical solution provided by this definition is, nonetheless, that it is both wide enough to include subtly ‘harmful’ material, and narrow enough to exclude simply sexy material.

The decision regarding whether material is pornographic or not is still not equally simple in all cases. Particularly when re-evaluating images from the past, the terms ‘sexually explicit,’ ‘subordinate’ and ‘sexual objectification’ seem relative to the context in which they are used, and therefore less empirical. In the same way, the ‘proof of harm’ clause is problematic when weighed against the concept of ‘public good defence’, as is the case in many sexually explicit artworks. What would contemporary legislators make of *Pan and the Goat* (figure 1), for instance? Even the *artistic* merits of this work, assuming they relate to skill and composition, are wholly focussed on what Isabel

<sup>27</sup> See MacKinnon’s *The Roar on the Other Side of Silence* (1997).

<sup>28</sup> In 1956, Lord Lambton introduced an Obscene Publications Bill in Britain. In addition to the ‘deprave and corrupt’ condition, he also included the proviso that “whether or not related to any sexual context”, the said material could “unduly exploit horror, cruelty, or violence” (Bozman 1965:368). Even though the Bill was withdrawn, the inclusion of violence as a possible criterion for obscenity implicated a pivotal mind shift: the idea that the term ‘obscenity’ often implies a relationship between sex and violence.

<sup>29</sup> In the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985), it is stated that the word ‘women’ is interchangeable with ‘men’ or ‘children’. Later ‘obscene libel’ (such as the South African Films and Publications Act of 1996), refers to ‘persons’ not ‘women’.

Tang (1999:26) calls “the detailed and meticulous rendering of the act of penetration by the phallus.” This may account for the sexually explicit nature of the image, but one must look a little higher up to answer the question of implied subordination and violence. The goat, although not the meekest of creatures (and this may be part of the appeal), is being held down by the god Pan, who has his one hand on the goat’s leg and with the other is gripping her by her chin hairs. The violence of the image is most apparent in the contrasting facial expressions of these two characters. While the nanny goat has an expression of complaisance (in so far as that is possible), Pan’s gaze is filled with the aggression and dominance of a rapist. Certainly the overt bestiality of the image is enough cause to label the image as pornographic, but it is the less obvious nuances of the sculpture that prove more interesting, since *Pan and the Goat* lacks the poetry and romance of Michaelangelo’s *Leda and the Swan* (figure 4).

Perhaps the decision whether an image or article is pornographic or not does not so much reside in the tone of the image, as in the implied effect of this tone. The ‘proof of harm’ test was designed to separate ‘real’ pornography from erotica and other sexually charged art in as objective a way as possible.<sup>30</sup> Ironically, the ‘proof of harm’ test has been the Achilles heel of the Civil Rights Ordinance. Whereas the terms ‘sex’ and ‘violence’ are relatively fixed, even within different cultures, the degree to which an image is considered ‘harmful’ is entirely dependent on the value system of a society or era. ‘Proof of harm’ is a phrase now found in most obscenity law; for the most part it functions, as intended, as a final check on prejudiced judgements. On the other hand, it has also been used to justify politically motivated censorship under the guise of paternalistic protection, as in South Africa. Prior to 1963, censorship in South Africa was imposed by a variety of statutes. A Board of Censors was established by the Entertainments (Censorship) Act of 1931 to approve all local and imported films. The Customs Act gave customs authorities the licence to prohibit imported publications that were deemed to be “indecent or obscene or on any grounds whatsoever objectionable” (in Dugard 1978:193-195). Under the Customs Act, a great many foreign publications were implacably banned, including J Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*, DH Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and works by John Steinbeck, Richard Wright and Henry Miller. New obscenity legislation was introduced in 1963 and again in 1974; this too claimed to uphold a “Christian view of life”, and under this concern banned many political (especially Marxist) works. *Political* expression in South Africa during Apartheid was presumably restricted to protect the cause of white supremacy. *Artistic* and *literary* expression were seemingly restricted to protect the ruling Afrikaner oligarchy from the presumed permissiveness of contemporary global culture. Act 42 of 1974 articulated the standard

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<sup>30</sup> As is argued throughout this study, the terms ‘pornographic’ and ‘erotic’ are not as finite as they may seem. Al Goldstein, the publisher of *Screw*, is frequently quoted as having said, “Pornography is what turns *you* on. Eroticism is what turns *me* on”[emphasis in original] (in Slade 1989:958).

for obscenity as “undesirability”. Any publication, object, film or public entertainment fitting this description was thus illegal (See Boesak 1983; Dugard 1978; Du Toit 1998).<sup>31</sup>

Pornography (excluding child pornography and bestiality) has been ‘legal’ in South Africa since 1997, when the Film and Publications Act (Act 65 of 1996) was approved.<sup>32</sup> Although pornographic material was widely available before 1997, this Act signalled the end of an era in South African history, when pornographic material was subject to stringent censorship. South African legislation, therefore, does not include a definition of pornography (other than child pornography) or ‘obscene’ publications, but it does stipulate grounds for prosecution of material which “degrades” someone. Within the context of the Film and Publications Act, “degrade” means to “advocate a particular form of hatred which is based on gender” (Act 65 of 1996). In South African legislation, in other words, the emphasis does not fall on the explicit nature of sexual representation, but rather on the misogynist tone thereof. Even in the stipulations for the attribution of age restrictions to films and publications, the incentive seems to be to protect viewers from material that contains “explicit sexual conduct which degrades a person and which constitutes incitement to cause harm” (Act 34 of 1999). If seen in its totality, the Film and Publications Act (Act 65 of 1996) does include references to the representation of ‘sex’, ‘subordination’ (or degradation), ‘violence’ and ‘harm’, but nowhere are all these criteria placed together to clarify what constitutes pornography, since there is seemingly no need for such a definition within South African legislation.

South African legislation is among the most recent in western society, and is therefore frequently perceived as among the most open-ended. This may be advantageous in terms of interpreting the ‘grey’ areas and nuances of sexualised representation, but it may also make it easier for potentially harmful material to ‘slip through the cracks’. The purpose of this study is to examine GQ against existing definitions of pornography in order to demonstrate that GQ, like pornography, subordinates women. For this purpose, the definition provided by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985), instead of the fragmented South African obscenity legislation, seems the most appropriate point of departure, not only because it is the most widely referred to in the discourse surrounding pornography, but also because of its ground-breaking role within this discourse. Throughout the remainder of this study, the term pornography thus refers to “a practice of sex discrimination which sexualises the subordination of women and which eroticises violence against women” as stipulated by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (in Itzin 1992:235). The following

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<sup>31</sup> In America in the mid-1950s laws prohibiting ‘obscenity’ were attacked as unconstitutional on the grounds that they abridged freedom of expression. The attacks were rebuffed by the United States Supreme Court with the contention that freedom of expression does not extend to expression that is obscene. The need for legislation that conveys freedom of expression on the one hand and grounds for criminal prosecution on the other is a polemical tug of war that delineates all discussions on the legality of pornography and therefore the need for a definition.

<sup>32</sup> See Kobus van Rooyen’s essay entitled, ‘Drafting a new Film and Publications Bill for South Africa’ (Chapter Eight of Duncan 1996).

section sketches the various feminist positions that have influenced this definition or have commented on it, whether deliberately or indirectly, in order to clarify the feminist underpinning of this discussion.

## 2.4 Feminist positions on pornography

Whether a legal or feminist incentive dominates, the act of defining is an act of finite ideological commitment. The categorisation implied by a choice of certain words and a rejection of others, for example, is a significant clue in terms of ideological positioning. In so far as language is a carrier of bias, whether social, cultural or gendered, *definitions* of pornography are signifiers of *positions* on pornography. These positions are often quite political. In 1991 Lynn Hunt edited a book entitled *Eroticism and the Body Politic*. At the time it seemed a strange alignment since “eroticism” and “the body politic” are in Hunt’s (1991:1) words, “an uncomfortable pair”. In so far as sex and politics are both related to power, however, they are not quite such unusual bedfellows. This section, therefore, presents the ideological perspectives held by different feminists or feminist groupings. It is certainly not a thorough investigation of feminist disquisitions on pornography, but rather a summation of relevant feminist positions on pornography, in order to establish the interpretative framework for the analysis of GQ in this study.

The unified voice of feminists in the 1960s and 1970s against the objectification of women afforded pornography a prominent position in academic discourse. The key feminist voices on obscenity are today more divided and are best explained by their respective understandings of the politics of power, and thus their subsequent definitions or understandings of pornography. Recent feminist interest in pornography may be divided into three areas, each dependant on a theoretical point of departure. Firstly, art historians like Hunt (1991, 1993), Nead (1982, 1992), Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981), and Marcia Pointon (1990) approach pornography via their investigation into the historical and political context of representation. Their interest in pornographic representation is a mere extension of their interest in sexualised representation of all kinds, and therefore “explores the enabling as well as the repressive aspects of power in representation” (Pointon 1990:i). The taxonomies of ‘erotic’ or ‘obscene’ are therefore not the primary concern of their research, but form part of the fabric of social history, which is. Secondly, theorists such as Laura Mulvey (1975, 1987, 1989) focus on aspects of popular culture (such as film and psychoanalysis), and as such their interest in pornographic representation originates from their interest in so-called visual pleasure. This category draws from the other two for its ideological positioning. Mulvey’s (1975) analyses of the gendering of technology and the construction of the woman within (masculinised) media, for instance, echoes the interests of feminist art historians in representation and the concerns of (radical) feminists, who critique disenfranchising gender stereotypes. Phallogentrism,

male gaze and the visual colonisation of the female body thus form the primary concern of feminists such as Mulvey who theorise visual pleasure.

The third area of feminist discourse includes feminists who have a particular interest in pornography. Theorists such as Andrea Dworkin (1983, 1988, 1993), Catherine MacKinnon (1977, 1988, 1993) and Camile Paglia (1992, 1995) investigate the process of defining pornography (and whether there is such a thing), the nature of pornography, and the affect that it may have on western society. This third category is itself, however, divided into two poles: those who affirm the 'harm' of pornography and those who claim it is empowering. The so-called radical feminists are fronted by Dworkin and MacKinnon, who since the 1970s have argued that pornography subordinates women through objectification.<sup>33</sup> In 1985, Mackinnon postulated that pornography does not merely consist of words and images, both of which would be protected by the United States First Amendment (which stipulates the constitutional right to freedom of speech). Instead, she regarded pornography to be, in and of itself, an act of sexual violence (see MacKinnon 1993). This assertion epitomises the radical feminist position that women are not only subordinated in pornographic representations as such, but also in the production of these images.

At the opposite end of the polemic concerning pornography, Paglia (1995:65), a so-called liberal feminist, describes pornography in typically euphoric fashion as a "self-enclosed world of pure imagination", and therefore designates it as empowering rather than harmful. Under the leadership of Paglia, feminists who are labelled 'pro-sex', have subsequently asserted a woman's right to choose whether or not she will participate in or consume pornography. Some of these women are current or former sex-workers who champion the conviction that posing for pornography is an uncoerced, potentially empowering choice. Pro-sex feminists re-affirm a more or less consonant belief in the fundamental "a woman's body, a woman's right." They insist that, as Wendy McElroy (2001) argues, "every peaceful choice a woman makes with her own body must be accorded full legal protection, if not respect".<sup>34</sup> The Marxist notion held by radical feminists, namely that the production of pornography involves the exploitation of women, is combated by the pro-sex belief that sex-work and sexual representation place women in a position of control over their bodies, and are thus empowering for them. Paglia (1995:57) comments on the subject of prostitution: "Feminists profess solidarity with 'sex workers' themselves but denounce prostitution as a system of male exploitation and enslavement. I protest this trivialising of the world's oldest profession. I respect and honour the prostitute, ruler of the sexual realm, which men must pay to enter".

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<sup>33</sup> The vehemence with which Dworkin and MacKinnon approach the production of pornography has frequently placed them under fire from liberal feminists. In particular, Dworkin's (1983:223) statements that "pornography is the central problem facing women" and "one cannot be a feminist and support pornography", and any defence of it is "anti-feminist contempt for women", have been hotly contested (see Soble 1986:151-156).

<sup>34</sup> In answer to the liberal feminist mantra of the freedom of choice, (particularly in reference to sadistic pornography), Itzin (1992: 445) replies, "what does it mean ... to define one's freedom and liberation in terms of violence?"

The primary objection that radical feminists like Dworkin, Mackinnon, Brownmiller and Joanne Fedler<sup>35</sup> have against pornography is that it supports sexism. Alan Soble (1986:150) accordingly argues that “pornography perpetuates sexual stereotypes, undermines the quality of sexual relationships and promotes a social climate in which assault is tolerated.” To this notion Paglia (1995:65) replies,

Idiotic statements like ‘Pornography degrades women’ or ‘Pornography is the subordination of women’ are only credible if you never look at pornography. Preachers, senators, and feminist zealots carry on about materials they have no direct contact with ... Most pornography shows women in as many dominant as subordinate postures, with the latter usually steamily consensual.

It may be true that pornography frequently represents women as sexual aggressors, but perhaps the problem does not lie in a certain kind of stereotype, but rather in the presence of stereotype itself. Certainly, the representation of women as literally subordinate to men, whether through narrative or aesthetic mythology, may be considered harmful, but so too may representations of women as “high priestess[es] of a pagan paradise garden” (Paglia 1995:66). Both depictions are reductionist and generalised, both are stereotypical (see 4.3.3).<sup>36</sup> In other words, no matter how empowering pornography may be to some, if it is harmful to others (through its sexism, for example) then it may be defined as harmful. Catherine Itzin (1992:444) explains:

That women – and particularly lesbians, and even more particularly feminists – defend sadistic pornography is used as an excuse for its continued existence: because if women want it, it must be all right, and it would be oppressive to say to women, ‘No, you can’t have this’ ... Are we to accept harmful materials just because some women want them when we would not accept men’s addiction to sexual violence as an argument in its favour? Harm is still harm when done by women to women or men to men.

‘Harm’ is clearly the point of division between radical and liberal (and pro-sex) feminists. If Paglia is right, however, and pornography is a self-enclosed fantasy realm, then no representation, no matter how violent or subordinating, should have any impact on social reality or the way men perceive women.<sup>37</sup> Psychological theorists such as Baker (1992), Donnerstein (1984), Einsiedel (1992), Eysenck (1984), Itzin (1992), Malamuth (1984), Nelson (1982), Soble (1986) and Yaffe (1982) oppose the notion of pornography as a self-enclosed fantasy realm (and therefore harmless), by affirming that “men [in general] find no difficulty in accepting pornography’s make believe world and its false assumptions about men and women” (Baker 1992:126). Baker reminds the

<sup>35</sup> See Duncan (1996) and Fedler (2001).

<sup>36</sup> As mentioned previously, Mulvey (1989), similarly questions the role of women in the media as objectified constructs of visual pleasure, and therefore of the male gaze. Mulvey (1989:523) comments that in the classic Hollywood film, female characters, “[f]unctioned as the locus of masculine erotic desire, a spectacle to be looked at by both male characters and spectators, the latter, whatever their actual gender, being ... addressed as male by the operations of the film.”

<sup>37</sup> If pornography is a self-enclosed realm of the imagination, then radical feminists may question who is constructing this fantasy world, and for whom. Paglia’s (1995:6) statement may even prompt the question whether the act of imagining, especially where visually ‘guided,’ may lead to action. If the imagination may lead to action, then pornography can no longer be described as “self-enclosed” (Paglia 1995:6).

readers and writers of the pornography debate that no matter how abstract the analysis of this industry and its output may be, it is still a trade situated in 'reality', and thus has 'real' consequences.<sup>38</sup>

Most feminists fall somewhere between the two extremes fronted by Dworkin and Paglia. Even liberal feminists are divided as to whether they are merely anti-censorship or actually pro-pornography.<sup>39</sup> The general view of the feminist protest against pornography is that it is a *reluctant* protest. Soble (1986:151) muses, feminists are perhaps reluctant because some pornography does advance the sexual liberation of women, because condemning pornography is easily perceived as prudery (and feminism ought not to be reduced to mere anti-sexual conservatism), and because calling for the censorship of pornography could backfire to the detriment of the literature of the women's movement.

In that a definition is a description, the process of defining pornography is, as stated previously, anchored in one's political position on pornography. It is probably for this reason that so few feminists have actually attempted to construct a definition of pornography. Rather, feminists comment on or deconstruct the already existing definitions put in place by the law, since it is these definitions, after all, that directly impact on the production, distribution and daily functioning of pornography. For the same reason, the argumentation of this study is centred around the definition of pornography put forward by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance 1985, since this is the definition most commonly referred to in legal, academic and feminist discussions on pornography (see 2.3). Since it is presumed by the author that GQ objectifies and subordinates women and is therefore harmful to society, this study supports the anti-pornography politics of radical feminism. The various other feminist positions on pornography will, however, be revisited throughout the study in order to situate each argument within the broader arena of the cultural, social and political discourse that surrounds the sexualised representation of the body.

At the centre of the alliance between sexualised representation and the body politic, as postulated by Hunt's *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (1991), is the question of women's place. Nowhere is this more sumptuously demonstrated than in the now canonised genre of 'erotic' art. The following section examines the extent to which canonical erotic art such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538)

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<sup>38</sup> Baker's findings are contrary to those of the controversial United States Johnston Commission, which attempted to negate a causal relationship between exposure to explicit sexual material and crime, delinquency or sexual deviancy (United States Johnston Commission 1970:57).

<sup>39</sup> Added to this, localised debates may take on a cultural perspective – in South Africa, for instance, Karin van Marle (1995:16) attempts an "ethical feminist perspective". The aim of such a perspective, she asserts is, "A critique that focuses on the transformation of society to create a society in which there is an openness toward the other, where the experience of self can be fluid, where gender identities can be reinterpreted and where women and the feminine are not fixed concepts, but impossible to define" (van Marle 1995:16).

and Manet's *Olympia* (1863) established the codes of 'erotic' sexuality within the broader trope of the pornographic gaze, in order to later establish a link between canonical 'erotic' art and GQ.

## 2.5 Gentlemen's pornography: the prototypes of GQ

From the previous discussion of *Pan and the Goat*, a sculpture retrieved from the ruins of Herculaneum, it is clear that pornography,<sup>40</sup> whether subtle or explicit, is not a contemporary phenomenon, and it has a long and politically diverse history (see 2.2). Since the erotic has similarly existed throughout human history, it too may seem to be a transhistorical concept. It was specifically in the nineteenth century, however, that the pornographic was categorised as separate and distinct from the erotic, and it is in this apparently aesthetic distinction that commodified obscenity would find its reprieve. The canonised paintings today lauded as erotic art are the ironic articulators of the codes of display that frequently form the visual markers of contemporary gentlemen's pornography. GQ is, in other words, merely a new gloss on an old theme, that of sex and materialism as a commercially profitable alliance. This section examines the manner in which GQ repeats the aesthetic 'traditions' established in canonical erotic art. Specific examples of erotic art - Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), Goya's *Maya desnuda* and *Maya vestida* (1798-1805), Ingres' *La Grand Odalisque* (1814), Delacroix's *Woman with a Parrot* (1827) and Manet's *Olympia* (1863) - are referred to because of their significance in art historical discussions of erotic art (see Berger 1972; Clark 1956; Nead 1992; Pointon 1990; Pollock 1992),<sup>41</sup> and the obvious manner in which they established a template of 'acceptable' sexualised display.

The aesthetic codes or visual prototypes established by artworks such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (figure 5) and Manet's *Olympia* (figure 6), have been extensively mimicked since the invention of the camera, and early erotic photography introduced this genre into humbler, but more far-reaching markets. Today, these codes persist primarily in two areas: firstly, visual art frequently pastiches erotic codes in order to comment on eroticism or objectification,<sup>42</sup> and secondly, these codes appear in pornographic publications that may benefit from an ennobling association with art. The appropriation employed by the pornography trade is occasionally tongue-in-cheek, but 'classical' poses, gimmicky props and the trope of exoticism are usually used to elevate objectifying representations to the status of 'erotic art'.

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<sup>40</sup> The term pornography is used here and will subsequently be used to designate 'pornography' as defined by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance 1985 (unless otherwise stated) (see 2.3).

<sup>41</sup> None of these authors refer to all of these paintings, but they do refer to the general aesthetic trends found in these artworks.

<sup>42</sup> Such as Sally Swain's *Mrs Manet Entertains in the Garden* (1988), one of many paintings parodying Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*.

Although complex and varied, these codes may for present purposes be narrowed down to three rudimentary conventions, here referred to as 'form,' 'fetish' and 'gaze'. 'Form' refers to the 'classical pose' of the reclining nude that is an apparent common denominator between the artworks mentioned above. The fetishistic manner in which the trope of exoticism is hinted at in all of these paintings is implied by the term 'fetish', while the authoritative 'stare' of each of the models in the relevant canonical paintings, echoing the 'gaze' of the viewer, is encapsulated in the term 'gaze'. This section examines each of these codes separately in an attempt to demonstrate the visual mythology which GQ appropriates.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.5.1 Significant form and the reclining nude

The reclining nude, once iconic of 'high' erotic art, has been appropriated by pornographic publications (from nineteenth century 'home-made' daguerreotypes to twenty-first century glossy men's magazines) to such an extent that it is now indicative of a kind of pornographic pose. Although reminiscent of classical Greek art and therefore seemingly popularly associated with the erotic, the 'reclining nude' as a formalist code is hardly innocent of gendered and sexualised visual display. The reclining nude has two predominant effects: firstly, it presents the viewer with optimal viewing pleasure (in terms of showing the body). Berger (1972:55) maintains that the reclining nude displays the female body for the "man looking at the picture. This [pose] is made to appeal to *his* sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality" (emphasis in original). Secondly, it communicates, through historical traces, an air of affluence, exclusivity and condoned sexualised display. The legacy of iconic, classical sculpture and the mythology of the nude inscribe in the reclining nude figure the gloss of exclusivity, wealth and decadence, and in so doing forms an ennobling screen through which the objectification of woman is perceived.<sup>44</sup>

This section examines the reclining nude as a compositional code. The history and implied meaning of the reclining nude are explored as a platform from which to investigate the purpose of this code in GQ later in this study (see 4.3.1). Marcia Pointon (1990:11), among others, has indicated the importance of "guarding against generalisations about matters that are historically specific", and yet it is the general similarities between the artworks discussed in this section, and not the subtle contextual differences that support the argument of this section, and therefore some generalisations are risked. The term 'reclining nude', like that of 'nude' is extensive in its meaning. Kenneth Clark (1956:1-26, 76) espouses the notion of the nude as emblematic of art, particularly

<sup>43</sup> The reasons for this appropriation and the implications thereof for consumers are postulated in Chapter Four.

<sup>44</sup> This is not true of all artworks that make use of the reclining nude. The contemporary artist, Lucien Freud, for instance, while grappling with nudity and sexuality, frequently represents the reclining nude without apparently employing the objectifying codes of sexual display typically associated with this subject.

in the nineteenth century when classical "smooth white marble nudes ... were considered symbolic of art". Clark (1956:3–4) furthermore resolves the difference between 'naked' and 'the nude':

It is widely supposed that the naked human body is in itself an object upon which the eye dwells with pleasure and which we are glad to see depicted. But anyone who has frequented art schools and seen the shapeless, pitiful model which the students are industriously drawing, will know that this is an illusion ... We do not wish to imitate, we wish to perfect. We become, in the physical sphere, like Diogenes with his lantern looking for an honest man; and, like him, we may never be rewarded.

Lynda Nead (1992:14) elaborates on this point by saying that the body without clothing is naked, whereas the body clothed by art is a nude; "[t]he transformation from the naked to the nude is thus the shift from the ideal – the move from a perception of unformed, corporeal matter to the recognition of unity and constraint, the regulated economy of art."<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the term 'nude' appears in the phrase 'reclining nude' is therefore not coincidental, for in the same way that 'nude' encapsulates art, 'reclining nude' is similarly a rhetorical device indicative of ideologically charged erotic status within what Pointon (1990:14) terms the "grammar of representation". In spite of the various historically specific nuances of this form, the reclining nude, therefore, presumes a certain timelessness in terms of its articulation and reading. This timeless quality is most evident when tracing the historical development of the reclining nude.

Fifth century Greek sculpture, such as the *Cnidian Venus* by Praxiteles (figure 7) forms some of the earliest examples of what would later develop into the reclining nude figure. Clark (1956:76) bemoans the consequences of this appropriation: "[t]he classical nude, which Praxiteles invented, became, in less sensitive hands, the conventional nude". Clark (1956:76) explains that it is in the geometrical harmony, and the harmonious calm, even gentleness of her whole bearing that the *Cnidian Venus*' beauty lies. Clark (1956:76) compares Praxiteles' "ideal creation" to the Hellenistic *Capitoline Venus* (figure 8), which he describes as "the pose known to history as the Venus Pudica, the Venus of Modesty", apparently because of the way she attempts (vainly) to cover her breasts (Clark 1956:76).

The 'reclining nude' composition that Clark believes arose out of classical art, is ostensibly a combination of these two forms. Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538, figure 5), Ingres' *La Grand Odalisque* (1814, figure 9), and Manet's *Olympia* (1863, figure 6) all mimic the "compactness and stability" of the *Capitoline Venus*, as well as her "self-conscious" (Clark 1956:79, 76) pose.<sup>46</sup> Manet's *Olympia*

<sup>45</sup> Pointon also stresses the ways in which the nude has come to encapsulate art in the popular and academic consciousness (see Pointon 1990:12-15). Berger (1972) also addresses the commodified nude.

<sup>46</sup> Nochlin (1991:35) demonstrates the mystifying power of controlling what the viewer may see through an analysis of Gérôme's *Snake Charmer* (late 1860s), in which the viewer is only permitted a "beguiling rear view" of the naked boy holding the snake. Nochlin's belief in the power of mystifying an image by withholding certain sensational details is

covers her genitals with her hand in a pose that simultaneously pays homage to the tradition of the Venus of Modesty and mocks it.<sup>47</sup> She, unlike Ingres' *Odalisque* and Titian's *Venus*, is not an exotic 'other' or an abstract deity, she is a prostitute, and yet through the seemingly insignificant gesture of her hand she encapsulates art. The *Venus of Urbino*, similarly, both covers herself and touches or pleasures herself, while Ingres' *Odalisque* first turns her back on the viewer and then teases him with an inviting glance. These are women of erotic contradiction and it is their pose that communicates this. As reclining nudes, however, these figures are more gracious and imposing than the seemingly conflicted *Venus of Modesty*, and in terms of their bearing reflect the "harmonious calm [and] gentleness" (Clark 1956:76) of Praxiteles' *Cnidian Venus*. Unlike the *Venus of Modesty*, whose reticence defines her, the *Cnidian Venus* seems more proud and 'natural'. One might say, in the now trite words of contemporary popular culture, that she seems more 'comfortable with her sexuality', a characteristic evident in Titian, Ingres and Manet's reclining nudes.

In spite of the "manifold disguises and the elevated obscurantism of their classical, historical or literary" contexts, all of these reclining nudes represent the female body (Parker & Pollock 1981:116). The classical form and arrangement of the reclining nude allows for justified and elevated voyeuristic enjoyment of woman's body. Despite the varying contexts within which Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, and Manet's *Olympia* were painted, the commonalities between these images are more obvious than the differences. By representing the reclining nude, these paintings support the male/female power relations in terms of the ideological language of western art. Woman is present as the image, but as such is subject to "specific connotations of body and nature" contained within the rhetoric of the reclining nude (Parker & Pollock 1981:116).<sup>48</sup> In other words she is "passive, available, possessable, powerless" (Parker & Pollock 1981:116). Man, conversely, may be absent from the paintings, but it is "his speech, his view, his position of dominance which the images signify" (Parker & Pollock 1981:116). Parker and Pollock (1981:116) elucidate this point by arguing that the "individual artist does not simply express himself but is rather the privileged user of the language of his culture which pre-exists him as a series of historically reinforced codes, signs and meanings".

In her 1974 essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", Sherry Ortner asked the question: "could women's pan-cultural second-class status be accounted for simply by postulating that

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equally evident in the more sexualised context of the reclining nude. The fact that Ingres' *Odalisque* has her back to the viewer serves to mystify and sensationalise her nudity.

<sup>47</sup> *Olympia's* nudity does not perfectly mimic the classical nudity of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* or Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, but seems more like a parody of this genre. Her masculinised body is possibly Manet's attempt to expose the indolence and sexuality that was always present but often ignored in the reclining nudes of the previous two centuries. Through the immediacy of *Olympia* and her context, Manet, in short, put the sex back into nudity (this masculinisation of the female body is touched on again in 4.3.3).

<sup>48</sup> Parker and Pollock (1981:116) make this point about art in general, but it is here applied to the reclining nude in particular.

women are being identified as symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men who are identified with culture?" (in Pointon 1990:18-19). Pointon (1990:19) builds on this question by positing the painting of the female nude in western post-medieval culture as an institution that reinforces and reproduces woman's intermediate role between nature and culture (as described by Ortner). Within the parameters of western post-medieval culture it therefore seems plausible to assume that if the nakedness of the female subject acts as a symbol of her closeness to nature,<sup>49</sup> then the historically encoded 'reclining nude' may act as a symbol of the male artist's closeness to culture. The same formal codes (such as the 'reclining nude') that confer the status of art on an image may thus engender sexual difference. Clark (1956:3) surmises that "the nude is not the subject of art, but a form of art". According to the art historical theory referred to in this section (Berger 1972; Clark 1956; Hudson 1982; Nead 1992; Parker & Pollock 1981; Pointon 1990), one might describe Art as a language informed by patriarchal ideology and the reclining nude as a rhetorical device within this linguistic structure.

Today the common quality or 'essence' peculiar to all things known as 'art' is generally believed to be indefinable, impractical and irrelevant. For Clive Bell (1928), as for so many before him, the question of a common denominator in all things 'art' was an incessant and relevant one. His answer was 'Significant Form.' Bell (1928) maintains, 'Significant Form' is the one quality common to all works of visual art; more importantly, it is the one quality that evokes 'aesthetic emotion.' The wider and perhaps less 'accurate' interpretation of these terms is that form in a specific state may trigger emotion.

Bell's theory is, perhaps ironically, *not* so far removed from that of Erwin Panofsky; what Bell calls aesthetic emotion Panofsky (1955) contentiously calls 'aesthetic choice.' The implication of seeing, Panofsky (1955) writes, is the process of interpretation of what is seen. Man makes choices by virtue of his mental powers. The aesthetic choice is a psychological process that becomes the expression of a certain mental attitude to the visual world. Manet's *Olympia* is not just an expression of line, composition and colour, but also a carrier (and therefore a trigger) of meaning. The reclining pose of the model, Victorine Meurend, is not merely the continuation of an aesthetic tradition, wielded by artists like Titian and Ingres, but also the continuation of an iconographic tradition.

The notions that reality is constructed and that meaning is mediated are today almost conventional. The question facing critics now is to what extent meaning is variable. Can the *Sinn*<sup>50</sup> (essence of things) of *Olympia*'s pose be compared to that of a Penthouse Pet, or is the context and

<sup>49</sup> See Berger (1972:47-49), Clark (1956:114-115) and Hudson (1982:52) on the female/male, nature/culture binaries as well as Nead's (1992:18) discussion of woman (Eve) as both *mater* (mother) and *materia* (matter), in other words, as "pure nature transmuted, through the forms of art, into pure culture".

<sup>50</sup> Frequently used in Panofsky's German writings, the word *Sinn*, means the 'essence of things' and is probably derived from Kant (Bialostocki 1962:12-13).

therefore level of interpretation, too different? The 'codes' and 'myths' of Roland Barthes clearly indicate that where meaning is collectively or largely customary, interpretation is less a matter of 'choice' and more a case of habit. Naturally the creation of 'accepted' and 'understood' codes is a process aided by repetition and consistency in terms of time. Whatever meaning or *Sinn* there is embedded in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* may subsequently also be 'read' in that of Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* and Manet's *Olympia*, whether intentional on the part of the artist, or not. Although not strictly speaking the 'Significant Form' that Bell speaks of, the draped pose of the reclining nude may, in other words, like particular aesthetic forms, trigger connotations of deeper resonance in the viewer.

Even the shapes of their bodies, the Venus feminine and voluptuous, the Odalisque soft and manipulated, and Olympia naive yet developed, rather than *present* the world, *re-present* it. Through their mediated and contrived positions the viewer is reminded that these 'women,' whether goddesses or *faubouriennes*, are constructs on display and therefore even these seemingly naturalistic representations are ideologically charged.<sup>51</sup> Whether intended as a sexually objectifying image or not, the artist's choice of this formal convention inscribes particular meaning into the image, that of the "female nude as the privileged object of a particular form of capitalist connoisseurial voyeurism" (Pointon 1990:11). The manner in which the trope of exoticism further fetishizes the reclining nude is examined in the following section.

## 2.5.2 The fetish of the foreign

Orientalism, as an art historical term, generally relates to the paintings of a particular group of nineteenth century, predominantly French artists, who focussed on North Africa and the Middle East as their subject matter (MacKenzie 1995:43). A re-examination of Orientalist painting during the past fifteen years has extended the meaning of the term to include the numerous artists who depicted the Orient (including South Asia and the Far East) between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries (MacKenzie 1995:43). Whereas the term was once used in quite a complimentary sense, it has become more negatively nuanced where art historical interpretation draws from Edward Said's literary model (MacKenzie 1995:43).<sup>52</sup> This section examines the traces of an Orientalist influence that typically accompany the reclining nude in order to demonstrate how the trope of the exotic may connote sexual difference. John MacKenzie (1995:47) points out that Orientalism

<sup>51</sup> There are paintings such as Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863) that, it has been argued, employ the nude in a manner that is "neither social nor allegorical ... where there are no meanings, only the signs of absent meanings", but these works are not the subject of this section (Pointon 1990:114). The form of the reclining nude, referred to in this section, is (perhaps mistakenly) more easily or confidently 'read' and therefore interpreted by the viewer.

<sup>52</sup> In line with Said's thinking, Linda Nochlin (1983), for instance, argues that Orientalist art should be interpreted within the framework of imperialist ideology. MacKenzie (1995), in turn, attempts to critique some of the more radical assumptions shared by Said and Nochlin.

“seeks to combine visual beauty with moral disapprobation”. In a similar manner the trope of exoticism, often found in sexualised representations of woman, simultaneously (aesthetically) idealises and (morally) stigmatises woman as ‘other’. For this reason, references to the exotic or foreign become fetishistic signifiers of sexual difference.

Projecting specific characteristics onto ‘foreign’ cultures, furthermore, makes room for the discussion of otherwise taboo subject matter. Root (1996:41) claims that “[v]iolence, primitivism, sublimity, and sexuality are reformulated within an aesthetic of cultural difference and displaced onto specific communities in order to legitimize them as an area of interest for Europeans.” To demonstrate this point, Root (1996:41) refers to nineteenth-century European paintings, in which themes of a sexual or erotic nature were permissible in antiquated or Orientalist contexts, but not in contemporary settings. The paintings referred to in this section are treated in an imprecise and undifferentiated manner, something MacKenzie (1995:47) warns against, but the intention is to merely highlight the trope of exoticism as an erotic device frequently employed in paintings of the reclining nude, since it is in this generalised, clichéd, almost indiscriminate way that GQ appropriates the trope of exoticism.

Thomas Aquinas’s theory on the ‘aesthetics of the organism’ aptly addresses the notion of a generalised and commonly understood meaning that may be represented by symbolic forms (Eco 1986:74). Umberto Eco (1986:52), referring to Aquinas, writes of the Medieval tendency to understand the world in terms of symbol and allegory. Huizinga comments on this, and adds that it is a tendency which people continue to share even today: “The Middle Ages never forgot that all things would be absurd, if their meaning were exhausted in their function and their place in the phenomenal world, if by their essence they did not reach into a world beyond this. The idea of a deeper significance [or signification] in ordinary things is familiar to us as well ... as an indefinite feeling which may be called up at any moment” (in Eco 1986:52).

The fetishized exotic symbols associated with the canonical reclining nude function in a manner similar to those described by Eco and Huizinga from the Middle Ages. Eco (1986:52) explains that the Medieval penchant for myth and symbol might be seen as a kind of populist flight from reality. So, too, the traces of Orientalism in Ingres’ *La Grand Odalisque*, Delacroix’s *Woman and a Parrot* (1827, figure 10), and Manet’s *Olympia*, echo a perhaps generalised western perception of the exoticised other. The meaning of Orientalism in these paintings is subsequently two fold: firstly, symbols such as the rich fabrics and head-dress of Ingres’ *Odalisque* and the significantly placed Hibiscus flower behind Olympia’s ear are not only the indicators of luxury and sensuality, but of the luxury and sensuality associated with the *exotic*. As mentioned previously, Nochlin (1983) perceives Orientalist art as suspect because she views it as an imperialist tool. It is possible, as

MacKenzie (1995:46) has argued, that Nochlin overestimates the significance of cultural 'othering' in Orientalist art, but it is also possible that the representation of woman in this aestheticised, sexualised and exoticised context has some imperialist intentions (such as possession and power) at its core.<sup>53</sup> The trope of exoticism, in other words, succours sexual difference through the representation of cultural difference. (It is the combination of sexual and cultural difference that is ideologically suspicious, not merely one or the other.)

Secondly, since most of the exotic traces in Ingres, Delacroix and Manet's reclining nudes seem to be superficial props inserted into a 'western' composition, they tend to be fetishistic tokens rather than 'authentic' cultural signifiers. The parrot in Delacroix's *Woman and a Parrot*, as well as the peacock-feather fan in Ingres' *La Grand Odalisque*, by their very arbitrary triviality, become codes of sexualised visual pleasure or fetish. The nudity of each model is furthermore exoticised by trinkets (such as a bracelet, flower or head-dress) that simultaneously sexualise and trivialise women. Whether intentional or not, each of these artists employs and therefore strengthens the codes of fetish, and in particular the fetish of the foreign. The visual motifs that appear in the reclining nudes of Ingres, Delacroix, and Manet are not to be interpreted as coincidence, but rather should be examined as the establishment and continuation of an iconographic tradition.

In each of these paintings the juxtapositioning of luscious femininity with overt exoticism serve as an unmistakably erotic code. By themselves, however, the various exotic codes and signs are meaningless, it is their strategic placement that imbues them with signification.<sup>54</sup> The outlandish print and rich embroidery of the fabrics around the models, for instance, is only significant and exciting if one recognises the traditional association of femininity located in drapery. Émile Blavet, a late nineteenth-century opponent of men's wear for women, argued that because of her physical makeup, woman is made to be draped, not to be moulded (Matlock 1995:162). Blavet remarked that "[a]nything that deviates from the drape ... is anti artistic" (in Matlock 1995:162). The draped shawl on which Manet's Olympia reclines, as well as the satin fabrics beneath Ingres' Odalisque, while foreign in origin, are thus comfortably familiar in terms of their symbolism.

Flowers are a typical visual motif in studies of the reclining nude and may connote the ideas of woman as the embodiment of nature, and beauty as fleeting or vain (open blossoms are often indicative of female genitalia, as in the work of Georgia O'Keefe). Titian's *Venus of Urbino* fingers dark red, velvety flowers in her left hand. This seemingly insignificant detail represents 'nature' in

<sup>53</sup> In this way, exotic symbolism may also reflect the conflicted relationship that many male nineteenth-century artists had with woman. Pointon (1990:59-83) examines this question with reference to Delacroix.

<sup>54</sup> The power of this fetishistic gimmickry is not located in the objects themselves, but in their owners' apparent comfort with them. It is the confidence and comfort of Olympia's gaze, for instance, that lends an 'authenticity' to her surroundings. Because of this she seems less like a model in a studio and more like a mistress in her boudoir, and therefore the experience of seeing her is all the more voyeuristic.

an otherwise 'cultured' setting. In Manet's painting, the flower behind Olympia's ear is echoed in the embroidery on her scarf and the wallpaper behind her bed. The bouquet of flowers, presented to her by her black maid, remind the viewer that it is exoticism and otherness that underpins this image.<sup>55</sup> In Ingres' *Odalisque* the peacock-feather fan suggests the same symbolism, that of the sexualised woman as other. Nochlin (1991:37) describes the perspective of the white, western, male viewer as a "controlling gaze, the gaze which brings the Oriental world into being, the gaze for which it is ultimately intended". The exotic adornments surrounding the Venus, *Odalisques* and Olympia, thus inscribe woman as visual pleasure.

Apart from the exotic props like the opium pipe and gold belt in Ingres' *Odalisque*, it is the sumptuous colours and textures of these paintings (Ingres' *La Grand Odalisque*, Delacroix's *Woman and a Parrot*, and Manet's *Olympia*) that imply an oriental influence. MacKenzie (1995:60) describes this visual appropriation as a kind of sexualised commercialism: "[w]hen artists turned their attention from God to Mammon, from religion, learning and the desert to the market, they displayed their fascination with the pattern, colour and texture of the materials of eastern crafts." MacKenzie (1995:63) furthermore believes that it was the theatricality of exotic settings that provided industrial Europe with the ultimate form of escapism. The 'licked finish' of, in particular, Ingres' painting, furthermore, becomes an "illusory device presenting ideologically charged iconic images as an objective reality" and would, therefore, have been all the more sensational to nineteenth century society (MacKenzie 1995:46) (see 3.2).

Each item of adornment or display in Ingres, Delacroix and Manet's paintings hints at the narrative imaginings of scandal and mystery that nineteenth and early twentieth century western society associated with the foreign. Nochlin (1983) and Root (1996) maintain that the visual encoding and subsequent interpretation of the 'other' as indicative of mystery and sexual 'deviance' is continued in contemporary western popular culture (see Chapter Four). The relevance of tracing Orientalist influences in eighteenth to twentieth century art to this study is as a semantic precursor to contemporary popular culture, and in particular to *GQ*. Since *GQ* employs visual and cultural tropes to construct meaning and build its brand identity, the link between this magazine and Ingres or Manet is perhaps not such a far-fetched one. The following section introduces the gaze, both the viewer's and the subject's, into the discussion of visual motifs in gentlemen's pornography, and in particular the visual heritage of *GQ*.

### 2.5.3 Who is gazing at whom?

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<sup>55</sup> Pollock (1992:20) observes that the reclining nude figure is often accompanied by another woman, "who functions as the foil to her beauty, the crone to her youth, 'death' to her 'sex'". This may be seen in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* as well as Manet's *Olympia*, but is not immediately relevant and will therefore be explored in 3.2.2.

In *Vision and Difference*, Pollock (1988:87) posits that the sexual politics of looking operate from an ideological regime which divides into the binary oppositions activity/passivity, looking/being seen, voyeur/exhibitionist, and subject/object. This representational polarity may, furthermore, extend to the articulation of space, positioning of the viewer, choice of narrative setting, style and facture (Pollock 1988:87). Within the iconography of eighteenth to twentieth century painting, private space, for instance, is generally represented as a site of femininity (where, however, the male eye is given "solitary freedom"), while public space, associated with freedom and autonomy, is indicative of masculine culture (Pollock 1988:68-70). Pollock (1988:87) remarks that the representation of private space in the painting of this era thus becomes the primary setting to evoke a "mastering gaze". The female subject in paintings such as Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* (1814, figure 5) and Manet's *Olympia* (1863, figure 6) are reduced to objects of a voyeuristic gaze because of their context, nudity and facial expression. It is the combined effect of these factors (context or setting, nudity and facial expression) that are addressed in this section, since these are vital contributors to the genre of 'justified' sexual objectification of woman.

In addition to the much theorised 'male gaze' of the spectator,<sup>56</sup> all of the paintings mentioned in this section have another gaze in common, that of the apparently indifferent stare of the female subject.<sup>57</sup> The 'gaze' of the female subjects in all of these paintings functions like the arbitrary addition of decorative slippers in Manet's painting; in other words, it rules out any question of accidental voyeurism and further emphasises the deliberate aesthetic display of these women.<sup>58</sup> The effect is, as George Hamilton (in Gilman 1985:239) states, that they are "obviously naked rather than conventionally nude." In Ingres and Manet's paintings, especially, the phlegmatic facial expression of the models interrupts the (insatiable) gaze of the male viewer and threatens, momentarily, to challenge his authority.<sup>59</sup> Mulvey (1987:127-131) posits that there is fear hidden behind men's supposedly unproblematic enjoyment of the sight of woman's body, and thus the hint of defiance particularly in *Olympia's* eyes may be seen as a reflection of the artist's fear of castration, whether figurative or literal.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> 'Male gaze' is a term that connotes a particular way of seeing, rather than the gender of the viewer. Berger (1972:64) maintains that whether in nineteenth century western art or contemporary western popular culture, "the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him". 'Male gaze' refers to the sexualised screen through which the female subject is subsequently perceived (see Gammon & Marshment 1987; Hess & Nochlin 1972). Male gaze is in some ways similar to the "controlling gaze" (Nochlin 1991:37) of the white, western male viewer looking at an Orientalist painting.

<sup>57</sup> The reclining nude's facial expression is described as a 'gaze' in order to remind the reader that this expression is not her own, but merely reflects the male gaze of the viewer. Her gaze, in other words, forms part of her constructedness. (This is addressed more fully in 3.3.1.1).

<sup>58</sup> *Olympia's* gaze is simultaneously engaging and defiant, a notion addressed further on in this section. The extent to which this seeming complexity is fetishistic accounts for the fact that her gaze is, nevertheless, 'indifferent'.

<sup>59</sup> The reason the gaze of the male viewer is described as "insatiable" is because it can never be satisfied. Christy Junkerman (2001:1) argues that in the *Venus of Urbino*, Titian is both aware of the power of his image to seduce and the impossibility of possession: "[t]he image will always remain an object of desire and must always remain out of reach." Junkerman (2001:1) contends that it is the act of painting that has the power in images like this one, and not woman.

<sup>60</sup> In spite of the differences between these works it is *Olympia's* stare which most succinctly connects her with Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, Goya's *Maya desnuda* (figure 11), Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque* and the sexualised representations of

This fear, however, seems to be a faint undertone, merely evident through psychoanalytic processes, whereas the predominant tone of the image is that of female objectification, willingly offered up by the female subjects themselves. In his often referred to comparison of the facial expressions of Ingres' *Odalisque* and a model from a 1970s pornography magazine, Berger (1972:55) describes their almost identical facial expressions as "the expression of a woman responding with calculated charm to the man whom she imagines looking at her – although she doesn't know him." He argues that through the facial expressions of these women, they offer up their femininity as the surveyed (Berger 1972:55).

This simultaneous sense of fear and power, possession and loss is encapsulated in Root's (1996:27) notion of "luxurious ambivalence", a term she uses to describe the nature of exoticism. Gaze is a complex phenomenon that most frequently involves ambivalent valorisations. Olympia's inimically indifferent expression mimics that of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, and Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, and yet, like the women in these paintings, she is objectified by the male gaze of the artist who constructed her and the viewer for whom she exists.

Eduard Manet is now considered the father of modern painting, and his *Olympia* is a canonical work in the hallmark passages of art history, but when *Olympia* was 'debuted' at the Salon of 1865, it was thought to be so scandalous that the authorities were forced to put two armed guards on either side of the painting to protect it (Wallace 2000:1). Although, as Wallace (2000:1) remarks, Olympia's contemporary location and common origin lend a certain immediacy to the painting not characteristic of its predecessors, this alone is not an adequate reason for the "frontal assault" which it represented to nineteenth century society. For an answer to her shock value, one must, in addition to the social immediacy of the painting, also recognise the audacity of her gaze, the confidence with which she simultaneously challenges and invites her viewer to look at her. The dichotomy, or 'luxurious ambivalence' of Titian's *Venus*, Ingres' *La Grand Odalisque* and Manet's *Olympia*, is that they have both the coy grace associated with classical virgins and the confident indifference of women of experience. Their glance is at once dismissive and engaging, and is the seat of their sensuality.

In the same year that he painted *Olympia* (1863), Manet also painted *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (figure 12). In this work two young men, fully clad in frock coats, are enjoying a picnic in a park with a naked model, again Victorine Meurend. While the men chatter on, the woman glances over at the viewer, in a way that overtly disrupts the 'suspension of disbelief.' It is a work that sorely offended

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woman in GQ. The fact that Manet masculinises Olympia's body may, furthermore, be related to Mulvey's (1987:129) belief that Allen Jones' masculinised representation of woman is indicative of male fear. (This comparison is explained more clearly in 3.3.3.1).

contemporary sensibility by juxtaposing the naked and attired figures in an outdoor setting, the more so since as Janson (1992:379) states, "the noncommittal title offered no 'higher' significance". The poses of the figures are so formal that it seems a fair assumption to suggest that Manet did not intend to represent an actual reality.<sup>61</sup> Rather, it seems that Manet's intention was precisely the denial of plausibility, since the scene subscribes neither to everyday reality, nor to that of allegory (see Pointon 1990:113-135). *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* is an aesthetic manifesto of artistic licence (Janson 1992:379); it asserts the (male) artist's privilege to put together elements, even where unreal, for, among other reasons, the visual pleasure of the male gaze.

If one were to compare Manet's two paintings with those of Gauguin in the late 1800s, the value of the female subject's stare is made more obvious. Many of Gauguin's representations of young Tahitian women, odes to the exotic with which he seemed infatuated, are in tone quite different from that of Manet's *Olympia* or *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* precisely because they lack the reciprocal gaze of the female subject. In *Are you jealous?* (1892, figure 13) for instance, Gauguin creates a postcard-like souvenir of foreign pleasure, but the two women in the painting, though clearly the constructs of visual pleasure, are oblivious to the voyeuristic male gaze of the viewer and therefore seem less involved in the 'action' or imaginary narrative.<sup>62</sup> The inclusion of the 'knowing gaze' of the female subject, in other words, lends a different (less voyeuristic and more consensual) tone to the sexualised representation of woman.<sup>63</sup> By the same token, nudity alone is not sensational. Goya's *Maya* has the same eerie power over the viewer, whether she is clothed or not (1798-1805, figures 11 & 14). Her awareness of her nudity is far more provocative than the fact that she is naked. The lasting sensationalism of Titians *Venus of Urbino*, Ingres' *La Grand Odalisques* and Manet's *Olympia* is in the silent exhibitionism of their knowing gaze.

As Berger (1972:56) has noted, the 'knowing gaze' of these canonical reclining nudes has been widely appropriated in pornographic images since the invention of the camera (and possibly before this). GQ is no exception, and because of the more subtle sexualisation of woman in the magazine, it relies quite heavily on the provocative gaze of the model to visually stimulate its readers (see 3.3.1 & 4.3.3). This section has briefly traced the presence and power of the facial expression typical to Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*, and Manet's *Olympia* in an attempt to demonstrate the manner in which this expression might be employed by GQ to represent woman as naturally available for the visual gratification of male desire. In Chapter Four this code,

<sup>61</sup> Photography brought with it a host of practical and philosophical implications for the arts. Among these was the dichotomous representation of reality. On the one hand the camera became a 'documenter' of truth, and on the other it revealed the subjectivity of perspective. The power of photography, and in particular photography of the body, was that each image evoked a startling immediacy that the sanctified medium of painting had lost. Manet's *Olympia* and *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* are possibly, in part, an attempt to recapture this power.

<sup>62</sup> Pollock (1992:17), similarly, considers Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau* (1892) to be a tribute to Manet's *Olympia* (she does not, however, address the fact that in Gauguin's painting the female figure looks away from the viewer).

<sup>63</sup> This is a valuable point that will be picked up later (see 4.3.3.2).

namely the 'knowing gaze', as well as that of the reclining nude and the fetish of the foreign, are analysed as they manifest in *GQ*.

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the focus of this dissertation is not art and sexualised representation, it is *GQ*, popular culture and sexualised representation. The discussion of the specific trope of sexualised representation established by the reclining nudes of Titian, Ingres, Manet and other such artists, serves to highlight the iconographic traditions of acceptable sexualised representation in western culture of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The ideological positioning of these constructs is here not so much the issue, since these will be examined further in Chapter Four. The aim of this section has rather been to provide the backdrop for the establishment of a visual habit. In the following chapters it will become clear how these iconographic traditions are appropriated by *GQ*, presumably to ennoble the sexualised content of the magazine, thereby increasing its social acceptability. To some extent the similarities between the reclining nudes of Titian, Ingres and Manet and the glossy men's magazine, *GQ*, support the idea that these seemingly diverse genres may both, superficially at least, be described as gentlemen's pornography.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In the 1700s the term 'pornography' was used by art critics and connoisseurs to criticise an artwork for its sexual content (Weil 1996:125-157). In an ironic twist, almost three centuries later, the pornography trade, somewhat unconsciously salutes the sexualised representations of Titian, Ingres and Manet in many of their images. But mutual appropriation alone does not make art and pornography comparable. To some they are separate and opposite in every sense. For Steven Marcus (in Nead 1999:487), the pleasures of pornography are defined in terms of motivation, promiscuity and commodification, whereas the pleasures of art are located in their opposing values, in other words, in contemplation, discrimination and transcendent value. This binary understanding of art and pornography has been reflected in legal definitions of obscenity since the 1880s (see 2.3).

In the current Postmodern, electronic age of mass commodification, the worlds of art and commerce are seemingly still segregated. The unspoken social divide between those who support art and those who support pornography is probably more aesthetic than real, but even if only in appearance, the divide is still there. It is for this reason that the entrance of glossy men's magazine's, with their topical information bytes and refined aesthetic, into the supposedly 'dirty' or 'gritty' realm of pornography, is of significant interest. *GQ*, like the canonical erotic art that it alludes to, forms a bridgehead between the gritty and the glamorous, the obscene and the acceptable.

This chapter has focussed on what pornography is and is not, and the importance of defining pornography, not only legislatively, but also in terms of social, feminist and art historical discourse. It has traced the history of this process of finding a workable definition for pornography, and in so doing, has highlighted the ideological circumstances that eventually gave rise to the United States Civil Rights Ordinance's 1985 definition of pornography. In addressing so many diverse angles on pornography, this chapter has remained somewhat superficial in its analysis of this definition. The following chapter critically investigates GQ against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Ordinance's 1985 definition of pornography. The aim of Chapter Three, in other words, is to unravel the meaning of this definition and subsequently ascertain the extent to which GQ may, according to the United States Civil Rights Ordinance, be described as pornography.