

CHAPTER 3

GQ: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

These are times of chaos; opinions are a scramble; parties are a jumble; the language of new ideas has not been created; nothing is more difficult than to give a good definition of oneself in religion, in philosophy, in politics. One feels, one knows, one lives and at need, one dies for one's cause, but one cannot name it. It is the problem of this time to classify things and men ... The world has jumbled its catalogue.

Alphonse de Lamartine, *Declaration of Principles* (in Harris 1971:1).

3.1 Introduction

The legal, feminist and art historical commentaries that form the discourse of pornography discussed in the previous chapter, are in themselves a kind of 'jumbled catalogue.' In part this is because the contributors to this 'catalogue' are often 'reluctant',¹ and therefore much of the content tends to be ambiguous, and difficult to sort. Another reason why the discourse on pornography is marked by confusion is because of its antithetical history, one that is charged with the polemics of morality, censorship and language. This chapter positions GQ in the established parlance of sexualised representation and the jumbled catalogue of discourse on pornography. Whereas the previous chapter was concerned with defining pornography (in the 'conventional' sense of the term) and canonical erotic art (as gentlemen's pornography), this chapter is focused on GQ as contemporary gentlemen's pornography. This discussion thus proposes that GQ is indeed similar enough to conventional pornography (in that it objectifies and stereotypes women) to be classed as a type of pornography, while recognising that it is distinct enough from conventional pornography to warrant a separate category (*i.e.*, gentlemen's pornography).²

In order to demonstrate the manner in which GQ functions akin to conventional pornography, it was necessary to trace the common threads between various legislative and academic understandings of the term pornography so that their core commonalities could be revealed (see 2.2-2.3). Since the United States Civil Rights Ordinance 1985 is generally referred to as a conceptual framework for what constitutes pornography (see Dworkin & MacKinnon 1997; Itzin 1992), this chapter examines the manner in which GQ represents or connotes the four concepts stipulated by the Civil Rights Ordinance as the criteria for pornography (see figure 3; also 2.2 & 2.3). This chapter, thus, strips pornography itself to the 'basic' notions of 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and

¹ Alan Soble (1986:151) has, rightly or wrongly, called the feminist commentary on pornography a "reluctant protest", meaning that many feminists are reluctant to contest pornography for fear of sounding censorial (see 2.4).

² There are two obvious (visual) differences between conventional pornography and GQ. The first is that GQ (and canonical erotic art) does not explicitly depict sex, and as such does not comply with any legislative definitions of

'harm', in an attempt to establish the similarities between GQ and conventional pornography, and to explore the 'harm' of GQ.

'Sex', 'subordination' and 'violence', are treated in one section (see 3.3) because they are all related to the ostensible content of GQ, while 'harm' is dealt with separately (see 3.4), since it relates to the effect of the material discussed. As an introduction to this investigation of sex, subordination, violence and harm in GQ, two aspects of representation are addressed. Firstly, the slippery nature of representation is emphasised, implying that the words 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and 'harm' are neither fixed, concrete criteria, nor objective devices of evaluation and that sexual images are imbued with (often hidden) social significance. Secondly, the relative 'real'-ness of signification in images where 'meaning' is only implied and not explicitly depicted is investigated. The content of this chapter may, thus, be broken down as follows:

- The relevant polemics of representation, both linguistic and visual, are related to the discussion of the 'real'-ness of 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence', and 'harm' in GQ (3.2).
- The representation of 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence' are each critically analysed as they appear in GQ (3.3).
- The 'harm'-fulness of GQ is discussed (3.4).

3.2 Representation and reality

Since the purpose here is to delineate the way GQ fits into the Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography, language (both verbal and visual) and the relative nuances of its ideological tone are the core of this chapter. The discussion of representation and reality (or 'language' and the 'reality' it represents), thus forms a backdrop to the critical analysis of the representation of 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence' in GQ. The process of linking an act (such as sexual objectification) and the sign that represents it (a word or an image) demonstrates that, individually, the concepts of 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence' are each constructed within the media in such a way that the 'represented' becomes a signifier of the 'real', or the referent. This perhaps obvious perception should be considered against the backdrop of the discourse on sexualised representations, where images that are 'subtle' (in other words, lacking in explicit details) tend to be thought of as less 'real', and therefore not 'harmful' (see 3.3). The history of the connection between the sexual paradigms of a society and the way these paradigms are put into language (verbal or visual), is, furthermore, integral to the broader argument that GQ or glossy men's magazines (and canonical erotic art) warrant the new title of gentlemen's pornography.

'pornography'. The second, and arguably more evasive difference, is aesthetic. Both of these distinctions are addressed in this chapter.

The luxurious ambivalence of language or text is approached from two angles: firstly, the verbal or linguistic fractures of language are briefly explored and secondly, the 'real'-ness of visual representation that is not (sexually) explicit, is considered.

3.2.1 Representation and reality: sex signified

This section highlights three aspects of sexualised representation:

- The manner in which language that is related to sex, and subsequently the act of sexual representation, has been loaded with sensational connotations in recent western history.
- The connection between written and 'image' language.
- The slippery ambivalence of representation (and culture as a system of interpretation).

Each of these topics is briefly sketched as part of the broader topic of representational 'reality'. The polemics of representational 'reality' are not resolved in this section, but merely presented as a backdrop for the critical analyses of 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and 'harm' in GQ that are the primary objective of this chapter.

The relationship between sex and how it is signified or constituted by language is difficult to trace conclusively, but it seems a fair assumption that since the act of sexual intercourse was first performed, a word, symbol, or sets of words or symbols were probably used to describe and represent it. Similarly, one might presume that the words or symbols that were chosen to represent sex were not innocent of ideological conviction as to whether sex was considered to be a 'good' or a 'bad' thing. The question remains, however, at which point the act of naming or discussing sex, became more sensational than the act itself. Michel Foucault (1980:17) ventures to state that it was at the beginning of the 1600s that sex gained the association of being base, and therefore became unfit subject matter for civilised society:

Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. And even these prohibitions, it seems, were afraid to name it.

The seventeenth century European rules of propriety, of which Foucault writes, imposed a silent censorship, which accordingly advised discretion and censured discussion. In the resultant western war on impropriety, language was the primary medium that constituted restraint. Subsequently, by the nineteenth century, discussion of sex and sexuality was considered unsuitable subject matter, unlike today where talk shows, magazines and tabloids are entirely dedicated to sex. The

notion of 'obscenity' enforced this code of conduct, and strategically defined the boundaries of public discourse between 1600 and the 1900s. Yet, it was possibly the same notion of obscenity that ensured the nineteenth and early twentieth century's level of interest in sexualised representation. While the politics of language imposed a "restrictive economy" in the drawing rooms and parlours of the 1800s and early 1900s (*i.e.*, upper-class, domestic environments), Foucault (1980:18) also points out that "[a]t the level of discourses and their domains ... practically the opposite phenomenon occurred." In other words, an increasing fascination developed within different discourses (particularly those legitimised by social institutions such as church or state), which Foucault (1980:17) describes as "a veritable discursive explosion".

There seem to be two reasons for this "discursive explosion"; the first, predictably, is to be found in humankind's taste for forbidden fruits. Mark Twain (1992:10) remarks that biblical Adam, "was but human ... He did not want the apple for the apple's sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden." Equally, because certain subject matter was socially and legislatively labelled as "illicit" within European society, it is not surprising that this subject matter held a popular appeal for it. Clearly, the same societal norms that make sex a forbidden subject to some, make it a necessary, and indeed sensational one, to others. As a reaction to the sensibilities and decorum of seventeenth and eighteenth century European culture, there might well have been a proliferation of indecent language among those who wished to distance themselves socially or politically from genteel society. Hence, this reason for 'breaking the silence' may be summed up as a *reaction* against elitist societal norms.

The second reason for the 'discursive explosion' is a little more abstruse and might for now be epitomised by the word *confession*. Foucault (1980:18) observes that from the seventeenth century to the present, the sectors that encouraged the explicit articulation of sexual narratives were those institutions that had the authority and credibility to exercise power, without the immediate need to justify ideological positioning. An example Foucault (1980:18) cites is that of the Roman Catholic pastoral³ and the sacrament of penance, particularly from the seventeenth century onwards. Foucault (1980:18) notes that if one looks at these documents from the seventeenth century, the formulation and language of the confession manuals may be veiled and vague, but the scope of the confession, especially that regarding the flesh, was on the rise. Foucault (1980:18) attributes the escalating importance of sexual confession in the seventeenth century to three strategic objectives of the Counter Reformation: firstly, the development of the annual confession in Roman Catholic countries; secondly, the exacting of painstaking rules of self-appraisal; and finally, the reinforcement of penance for the indiscretions of the flesh. In accordance with this, the new

³ The pastoral is typically in the form of a letter addressed by the bishop of a diocese to the whole body of clergy and the congregation under his jurisdiction. Often such letters were read out from the pulpit of each parish (Bozman 1965:655).

pastoral stipulated that: “sex must not be named imprudently, but its aspects, its correlations, and its effects must be pursued down to their slenderest ramifications: a shadow in a daydream, an image too slowly dispelled, a badly exorcised complicity between the body’s mechanics and the mind’s complacency: everything ha[s] to be told.”⁴

The pastoral thus ordained the imperative, for all Roman Catholics, of introducing every action, intention or thought concerned with sex, into the more finite realm of speech. Naturally, the vocabulary permissible in such confession lent an ethereal quality to the narrative that somehow served to abstract, and therefore morally justify, the whole exercise. Nonetheless, the meaning implicit in the discourse is hardly abstracted beyond the point of recognition, since this would defeat the purpose. Hence, when St Augustine (1965:70) opens *Book Three* of his *Confessions* (AD 400) with the words: “I came to Carthage, where there was, as it were, a frying pan full of flagitious loves, which crackled round about me on every side”, one might say the evasive nature of the language serves more to stimulate the imagination, than to neutralise it. The very constitution of pornography, too, is simultaneously fixed in the concept of seeing the ‘secret’, and the concept of acknowledging or confessing a common interest in the sexual, implicit in the act of buying and looking. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the word ‘pornography’ itself was initially used to mean writing about prostitutes, in other words it was a voyeuristic glimpse into the daily details of obscenity, tracked down and arrested by the written word. Thus, the ‘discursive explosion’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, argues Foucault (1980:17), may be linked to the increasing fascination of the Roman Catholic countries with sexual confession since the sixteenth century, because in both cases ‘sex’ is constructed discursively. For Foucault (1977:196), the relationship between repression and language is a political one. His attempt to “liberate subjugated knowledges” (Foucault 1977:196), is apparent in his discussion of sexual repression and the politics of language (Foucault 1980:1), but still leaves room for the questioning of the ‘realness’ of ‘sex’ that has been represented through language, a question that Roland Barthes (1967:4) also grapples with.

In *The Fashion System*, Barthes (1983:4) poses a similar question by querying the existence of an object or phenomenon until it is cemented in text. Barthes (1983:3) argues that within popular media, as with all representational ‘texts’ (even those of the seventeenth century), there are at least two distinct ‘realities.’ He explains by way of a contemporary example: On opening a fashion magazine, he sees two different garments represented on one page. The first garment is presented in a photographic form – this he calls “image-clothing” (Barthes 1983:3). A little to the left this same garment is described, and hence ‘translated’ into language: “a leather belt, with a rose stuck in it, worn above the waist, on a soft Shetland dress”; this description is the second garment, which he calls “written-clothing” (Barthes 1983:3). Both garments refer to the same referent (the

⁴ Extract from Paolo Segneri’s *L’Instruction du pénitent*, 1695, cited in Foucault (1980:19).

dress worn by the model at a particular time), yet because they are secured in divergent structures, they are very different. Image-clothing is anchored in photography and is therefore defined by the components of line, colour, texture and space. Written-clothing, being rooted in language, is articulated by the composition of words, sounds, logic and syntax. The first structure is plastic; the second is verbal (Barthes 1983:3). The relevance of Barthes' observations lies not in the disparity between image-clothing and written-clothing, but between both of these and the *real* garment. The uniquely encoded nature of both image-clothing and written-clothing lends each of these a level of signification that is removed from the 'real' or referent, which brings one back to the philosophical question of whether the real actually exists if it is not transcribed into language.⁵

The questioning of the relationship between the 'real' or referent and the represented seems all the more relevant in a commercially-based context like that of a fashion magazine or pornographic publication, where the symbolic relationship between image and written text is often taken for granted. The power of written obscenity within this context should not be overlooked, however, particularly since the discourse on pornography was only established once writers such as DH Lawrence transcribed the kinds of images that were already *passé* in the fine arts, into written language. The illicit scenes between Lady Chatterley and her game keeper Mellors are perhaps no more evocative than the many paintings derived from Michelangelo's *Leda and the Swan*⁶ (figure 4), but the written text lends a certain permanence and fixity to the meaning of what is being implied. Moreover, what distinguishes the written image from the painterly one is the sense of authority and credibility that, rightly or wrongly, is often associated with written language (as opposed to the more ethereal nature of the painterly image).

The emphasis that this study places on written text within the context of GQ (see 4.3.2.1) is in part because of the authority that the written word lends to the visual images in the magazine, but also because of the philosophical role that the written text plays in revealing the ideology behind a visual image. It would be possible to reason, notes Terry Eagleton (1980:149), that the intention of 'deconstructionist' criticism is to confront ideology with its own textuality. If ideology imposes an abundance of meaning (as is the case with the ideologically loaded visual imagery in GQ), then the awareness of 'textuality' (implied by the written text in the magazine) may serve to reveal the concealed areas of exaggeration.⁷ Textuality reveals, unravels, exposes and accosts what latent

⁵ Susan Sontag (1963:350) contends that "most contemporary expressions of concern that an image-world is replacing the real one continue to echo ... the Platonic depreciation of the image: true in so far as it resembles something real, sham because it is no more than a resemblance."

⁶ The original was destroyed as an obscenity (Tang 1999:81). There are only copies left in existence today (such as figure 4, dated 1868).

⁷ Eagleton (1980:149) continues this line of thought by suggesting that if ideology claims a stable hierarchy of meanings, then textuality will demonstrate how one signifier merely "displaces, redoubles, and stands in for" another. An example of this is the manner in which GQ replaces the female stereotypes associated with conventional pornography, with more progressive 'types' that are nonetheless still sexualised and two-dimensional, and therefore merely 'redoubles' the stereotypes (or exaggerations) of conventional pornography (see 4.3.3).

fissures there may be in the fabric of ideology. (Nonetheless, the attestations afforded by textuality may theoretically be read in many different ways, since it is the self-sufficiency of meaning that is denied.)

The systematic identification, categorisation and attribution of meaning, a process aimed at organising human experience, is usually designated as culture. Culture is a system that relies on shared understanding (or socialisation) for the communication of meaning. Subsequently, a text may be interpreted in many different ways within different social contexts. Nigel Harris (1971:36) explains this by means of a chair. A chair, he observes, is only a 'chair' in a system that acknowledges a broad spectrum of particular conventions, for example, those of sitting, or of social and domestic behaviour. Harris (1971:37) continues: "The question: 'What is a chair *really*?' is a meaningless one if it asks: 'What is a chair outside of any system?' For it is the system in which the concept of a chair is involved at any given time which renders it meaningful." Within the context of GQ one might ask "what does it mean to represent sex really?" or "what is a woman really?". In both cases the answer to these questions is dependant not only on the image within which "sex" or "woman" appear, but on the context or textuality presented by the magazine, which inevitably sets the tone in which these concepts are 'read' or framed. Essentially, meaning is both material and contextual, but the understanding of connotative meanings relies on the reader's prior familiarity with the language within which the *parole* or speech-act takes place (Eagleton 1980:155). Meaning is the product of discourses that are administered by, but not reducible to, language; meaning is the recognition of a specific site of signification within language itself.

What further problematises the interpretation of sexualised imagery (visual and written) in GQ, is what Yury Lotman (in Eagleton 1980:158) calls "semantic saturation". This is a term he uses to describe poetry, but is just as applicable to pornographic images: the poem or image simultaneously tries to limit meaning by over-determination, *and* to loosen meaning through multiple or ambivalent significations. This is an important observation, since so much significant semiotic theorising, particularly that with a claim to political relevance, locates ideological suppositions in discursive 'closure.' It is this "buttoning of language", as Eagleton (1980:156) so befittingly calls it, that neglects the ideological consequences caused precisely by "slippage, substitution and condensation" (Eagleton 1980:158) in favour of privileged signifiers.

The discussion of sexualised images in this chapter (see 3.3), will almost certainly step into this trap of simplifying, reducing and fixing, but at times this is necessary in order to demonstrate the probable 'core value' behind images (*i.e.*, the representation of 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence' in an image) and in so-doing, establish the commonalities between GQ and conventional pornography. Since language is a self-referential system "which coincides only tangentially with the ex-

perienced reality of things” (Tavor Bannet 1989:18-19), this kind of simplified conceptualisation of meaning through particular, representational words (in this case ‘sex’, ‘subordination’, ‘violence’ and ‘harm’) may result in a kind of alienation from reality, what Jacques Lacan (1981:196) has termed “an original murder of the thing”. It is too simplistic to isolate commonalities in definitions, since that denies their ‘real’ complexity. It is nonetheless useful to demystify or strip the structure (language) down to the ‘core value’ of each term (*parole*) in order to determine the intended ‘meaning’ of the definition, as a whole.

The following section investigates the impact style has as an interpretative strategy. It situates the discussion on representation and reality in the visual realm of nineteenth and twentieth century ‘pornographic’ representation.

3.2.2 Representation and ‘real’-ness: explicit reality versus innuendo

In so far as it is possible to read the minds of image-makers and determine the intention of their images, it seems a fair assumption to say that many images that have been described as, or at some point perceived as ‘pornographic’, are not pornography. This is to say, they do not comply with the United States Civil Rights Ordinance’s (1985) definition of pornography, and were not, seemingly, created as pornography. Similarly, there are images and publications that, although they do not comply with the Civil Rights Ordinance’s definition of pornography (see 2.3), were designed with the specific intention of arousing the viewer in a sexually violent, subordinating, (and therefore possibly harmful) way. As mentioned previously, *GQ* fits into this latter category. It does not represent sex, subordination or violence in an explicit way and therefore is not compliant with legislative definitions of pornography, but it connotes all of these indirectly, and may thus have a similar harmful effect on the viewer and society (see 3.4). This section examines the representational ‘real’-ness of *GQ* as a medium that relies on sexual innuendo as its communicative strategy.

It is difficult to pin down the experiential ‘reality’ (or interpretative ‘real’-ness) of *GQ* in the flux of ordinary life, especially if one recognises the “mutability and multidimensionality of categories like power, identity, representation, and ... sexuality” (Heartney 1997:114). It is, nevertheless, valuable to introduce some sense of the interpretative context of the contemporary western male reader into a discussion of ‘sex’, ‘subordination’, ‘violence’, and ‘harm’ in *GQ*, and thereby determine the interpretative ‘real’-ness with which these concepts are communicated in the magazine. Two notions are briefly highlighted as factors that may contribute to a hypothetical reading of the representational (and interpretative) ‘real’-ness of *GQ*. These may be delineated as follows:

- Pornography is popularly associated with the representation of explicit detail, a connection dating back to early pornographic daguerreotypes, and is, therefore, also typically associated with the 'real'. The subtlety of GQ's representational style and its lack of gratuitous 'close-ups', thus makes it less likely that readers will interpret it as 'pornography'.
- The representational subtlety of an image does not detract from the 'real'-ness of its meaning. (*i.e.*, an implied meaning can be as clear as a detailed or explicitly represented one, particularly in terms of sexual innuendo which relies on well established social myths or triggers).⁸

The 'real'-ness, or alternately the mythic abstraction of an image, seems to have contributed to the reading of eighteenth and nineteenth century images as either pornographic and 'obscene', or 'artistic' and 'acceptable'. This aesthetic reading of 'real'-ness may still exert some influence in the reading of contemporary images such as those in GQ (see 4.3.1). Glossy men's magazines are rooted in the foundational framework of early photographic representations of the body, and thus this phase in the history of sexualised representation is a valuable example of the encoding of 'realistic' or explicit representations as 'pornographic' (or 'obscene'), even though the representation of the body is obviously contextually different today. The manner in which nineteenth century photographic images of the naked female body were socially perceived as 'obscene', while similar painterly ones (often older than the photographs, and perhaps therefore more 'removed' from immediate reality) were considered acceptable, is believed to be related to the social association between photographic 'real'-ness and obscenity on the one hand, and painterly abstraction⁹ and artistry (or socially 'justified' sexualisation) on the other.

Tang (1999:97) demonstrates this point with an apposite comparison. Titian's *Venus Anadyomene*, painted around 1522 (figure 15), shows a nude female glancing to one side, with an arm crossed over her torso. *Augustine Guy*, a photograph attributed to M Darnay (1858, figure 16), is close in style, composition and content to that of Titian's work. The *Venus Anadyomene*, however, is lauded as a masterpiece, while Darnay's photograph was seized and confiscated by the Parisian Police. The distinction quite clearly lay in the nature of the medium; what the painterly medium transformed into 'art', the photographic transformed into the obscene.

For GQ the implication of this kind of aesthetic bias, albeit merely a faint 'memory' in the consciousness of contemporary western culture, is fundamental to establishing itself as separate and

⁸ It may seem that these two points contradict each other, but within the context of this argument this is not the case. They are not contradictory because it is possible for material like GQ to serve the same function as pornography (aid in male masturbation), and to do this in the same way as pornography (by sexualising, objectifying and subordinating women). But because of GQ's representational subtlety and sophisticated veneer, it can side-step the negative connotations (or social warning) associated with 'pornography'.

⁹ 'Abstraction' in this context is not merely meant to imply a stylistic tendency, but rather the fact that the painterly or sculptural mediums are more removed from the *immediate* 'reality' of photography possibly because they seem more obviously constructed, and may thus be described as more 'abstract'.

distinct from conventional pornography. The glamorous sets, high profile models and sophisticated design of *GQ* indicate an aesthetic image that is removed from the ostensibly haphazard style or immediate 'real'-ness of early sexualised photography. And yet, the aestheticised subtlety of *GQ* does not mean the reader cannot experience 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence' in the magazine, or that it is harmless.

It is often reasoned, that in so far as sexualised representations are explicit, the experience of these materials is more realistic (or 'real'), and that therefore, since the reader experiences greater identification with the camera, the potential for harm is greater (see Slade 1989).¹⁰ Another popular line of thought, is that the explicitness of pornographic sexualised representation is gratuitous and therefore primarily serves the purpose of reducing women to their sexual parts (see Itzin 1992; Mulvey 1989). According to this belief, the subordinating element of pornography is its explicitness. Although there is some truth to this reasoning (gratuitous close-ups of sexualised female genitals *do* subordinate women), it may equally be argued that pornography is not about explicitly showing sex; many images do this without being pornographic. Rather, at its core, pornography is about subordination, and what are objectification and stereotyping, even in their subtlest form, other than subordination?

The premise that implied meaning is effective at communicating concepts is a recurring theme in 'obscenity' legislation, contemporary popular culture, and the arts. (JD Rosenberg argues that "it is in [the] power of saying everything, and yet saying nothing too plainly, that the perfection of art ... consists" (in Hudson 1982:72)). It is, nevertheless, an intricate presumption to demonstrate, particularly in the area of sexual representation, where the depiction of 'sex' is ostensibly a clear-cut designation (*i.e.*, images either do or do not represent sexual intercourse). For this reason, the notion of explicit reality versus innuendo is revisited under the heading 'sex', but in fact forms the underlying premise throughout this chapter.

The following section examines the areas of obscenity legislation, popular culture, and art, in conjunction with visual examples from *GQ*, in order to demonstrate the manner in which the concepts of 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence' are communicated in *GQ*. The following section is, in other words, concerned with the characteristics that *GQ* and pornography (as defined by the Civil Rights Ordinance), have in common, in order to demonstrate that *GQ* may, in fact, be as 'harmful'.

3.3 A critical analysis of the terms 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence' in *GQ*

As mentioned previously, there are four recurring themes that are typically present throughout the discourse on pornography: 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and 'harm' (or 'proof of harm').

Catherine Itzin's (1992:436) visual representation of the components of the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (figure 3) is a summation of most contemporary western thinking regarding what constitutes 'pornography.' Itzin's five divisions are slightly more specific than the ones that are used here, but may essentially be reduced to four words: 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and 'harm.' This section examines each of the terms in more detail, as they relate to GQ. Whereas Itzin (1992:436) has justifiably placed "graphic" and "sexually explicit" as separate entities in their own right, they are here contracted to the single, generally contested, notion of 'sex' (this is explained further in 3.3.1). The "specific conditions of harm", as the agent of sexual objectification and/or sexual violence, are again simply contracted to another controversial term, 'violence.' These convenient contractions, hopefully make the discussion of 'sex' and 'violence' more lucid. Finally, Itzin's "proof of harm" is reduced simply to 'harm', to stave off the dubious impression that effects are only 'real' if they can be proved.

Naturally, the reduction of these highly complex concepts, mentioned above, to seemingly unproblematic terms, is problematic. However, it is an exercise that is executed with a determined awareness of the innate complications of any reductionist logic. Added to this is the quandary concerning what precisely it is that is under discussion. On one level, a single image in a magazine such as GQ may contain gestures or codes that signify 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence', and it thus functions as a sign of ideological 'meaning.' On another, more abstract level, the magazine as a whole has its own signification, and therefore its own ideological 'meaning', which in turn impacts on the reading of the individual images within it. From a theoretical perspective it is quite often necessary to isolate an image or extract it from its context in order to better analyse it, but this may alter its meaning somewhat. (Sexualised images from GQ, for instance, may be perceived to be 'harmless' or 'just sex', if isolated from the context of the magazine as a whole.) *The British Obscene Publications Act 1959*¹¹ stipulates that an article shall be treated as obscene, "if its effect or ... the effect of any one of its items is, *if taken as a whole*, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it" [emphasis added].

The point is thus, that all material found within a pornographic *context*, no matter how inexplicit it may seem, warrants some critical attention, for it may in fact have a similar effect on the viewer as pornography even if it cannot, legally speaking, be defined as such. It is a moot task to try and ar-

¹⁰ Joyce Nelson (1987) applies this notion of a connection between the 'real'-ness of an image and its harmfulness to television. The potential for viewer self-identification with relation to sexual imagery in GQ is addressed under the heading 'sex' (see 3.3.1).

¹¹ Quoted in the *Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (Williams 1979).

gue that all sexualised images in GQ are indeed representations of 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence', and can therefore be considered to be pornography. But, if one's point of departure is that GQ magazine is a site that represents the myths of 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence', this task becomes a little more manageable. Myth, as Barthes (1973:111) interprets it, implies a network of signs used to convey an ideological message about the world. In this way, each of the images discussed in the following sections (see 3.3.1 – 3.3.3), are individually the carriers of particular myths, while collectively supporting another, more far-reaching myth. The cultural symbolism of myth, whether in a specific sense like that of a stiletto heel, or in a grander sense like that of sexualised representation as a whole, is in fact quite real, in spite of it being largely abstract.

Another concept that is helpful to the process of discerning mythic meaning in GQ, is that of a 'trope'. Although this term is used throughout this study, it is particularly applicable to the thematic construction of 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence' in GQ, and is thus relied upon quite heavily in this section. The term 'trope' is used within the context of this section to imply that meaning in GQ is strategically constructed to draw from the ideological paradigms of visual culture.¹² Kenneth Burke's (1941:8) description of culture itself as "forms of symbolic action", is perhaps misleading in its bald neutrality. Symbols may embody the meaning people attribute to events or objects that are part of events, but Harris (1971:34) notes that it would be short-sighted to perceive symbols as being unreal reflections of a consciously constructed reality, a kind of alternate reality. For the reader can know no other reality than the one which presents itself to him in terms of culture or the symbols used to identify it. The next section (3.3.1 – 3.3.3), discusses the symbolic content of select images from GQ (2000) to show the manner in which the terms 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence' operate visually. Sections 3.3.1 to 3.3.3 therefore highlight the manner in which GQ supports and even extends the myths of 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence.'

3.3.1 'Sex' in GQ

Meaning in language is conventional as well as structural, or one might say 'performative' as well as 'constative' (Eagleton 1980:154). In other words, one does not need to say 'sex', in order to denote 'sex.' It is the premise of this section that the representation of 'sex' implies more than explicitly depicting sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse may, for instance, be hinted at as part of the broader narrative of a character represented, by 'dressing' the character in the trope of sex. The fact that 'sex' is implied in GQ, without being explicitly shown, is the focus of this section. The 'real'-ness of the denoted 'sex' in GQ, is furthermore examined against the backdrop of discussions on the 'real'-ness of the photographic image. In conclusion, this section examines the man-

¹² The notion of the 'trope', as conceptualised by Root (1996:34), is revisited in 3.2.3, when the tropes of violence and exoticism are discussed (see the list of terms).

ner in which GQ creates sexualised imagery that is real enough to seem risqué, but ostensibly subtle enough to avoid being overtly labelled as pornography. This is considered through the analysis of visual examples from GQ. In this way, it is argued, GQ simultaneously denotes objectifying, sexualised points of view, while remaining socially acceptable.

In the British *Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* (Williams 1979:10), the meaning of the 'deprave and corrupt' test is explained: "In the [R v] *Hicklin* case ... Chief Justice Cockburn referred to the ... pamphlet as one which would *suggest* to the minds of people 'thoughts of a most impure and libidinous character'" [emphasis added]. In 1972, another explanation was offered by the British House of Lords (Williams 1979:10), in which it was emphasised that the words 'deprave and corrupt' refer to the effect material may have on one's mind and emotions, and that it is not necessary that any 'real', physical or overt sexual activity should result. Presumably, the reason an image has an 'affect' on the viewer's mind and emotions, is because it suggests that real, physical or overt sexual activity may result.

The notoriously hair-raising shower scene from *Psycho* (1960) is even now considered to be a cinematic template for evoking fear in the viewer, yet the murder is never explicitly shown, it is simply suggested (by clever shadows and artificial blood running down the drain). Today, in a visual culture that spares no gratuitous details, Hitchcock is lauded for his faith in the human imagination. Why then, is there such an insatiable need on the part of contemporary audiences to 'see everything'? At what point, assuming for the moment that this is a contemporary concern, did the images of a more challenging (read: discreet) nature become side-lined by a demand for images (documentaries, books, 'surveillance' shows) that 'tell it all'? One answer may lie in the schematic truism that 'seeing is believing.' The immediacy of the information age, in which viewers may interact with or manipulate images, however, undermines this truism to some extent, by endorsing a visual culture in which seeing is no longer believing.

In *Ideals and Idols*, Gombrich (1979:253) grapples with the theoretical origins of the quandary of seeing and believing by means of a discussion of pictorial illusionism. Against the backdrop of this investigation, (Gombrich 1979:254) muses that all thinking involves arranging, sorting and categorising; all perceiving involves expectations, and therefore depends on comparisons. For a visually sophisticated contemporary viewer, one might thus surmise, the believability of an image is not necessarily related to the explicitness of that image. In other words, the contemporary viewer's awareness of digital illusionism refutes the direct link between seeing and believing, and may, in its place, encourage an increased faith in images that subtly imply a situation or event, rather than

explicitly showing it.¹³ By constructing meaning in a manner that is suggestive rather than explicit, GQ thus leaves more room for the workings of the reader's imagination, a desirable license within contemporary visual culture.

Such intuitive 'readings' are evidently dependant on the agreed upon cultural codes, or schemata, referred to in the previous chapter (see 2.5), and as such draw from a rich heritage of (hidden) meaning. Academic theorising of the past fifty years has been marked by the far-reaching tendency to replace theories of 'language' with theories of 'discourse.' This shift in emphasis is designed to deliberate the embeddedness of every syllable in its particular social contexts, instead of stressing the authority of abstract rules and systems (Bourdieu 1984:203).¹⁴ The notion of language as having an abstracted essential nature is, thus, refuted in favour of the understanding of language (and visual representation) as a wide and varied range of social games and practices.¹⁵ According to this reasoning, it becomes plausible to suggest that the representation of 'sex' is not reducible to a certain quota of explicitness, but rather, as in the case of GQ, may be suggested through a network of mythic connotations (*i.e.*, the trope of 'sex'). Three specific mythic codes are addressed in this section, namely the 'knowing gaze', modesty, and fetishistic props. These are examined because of their pervasive inclusion in images, both historical and contemporary, that connote sex without showing it explicitly.¹⁶

3.3.1.1 *The 'knowing gaze' and the trope of 'sex' in GQ*

The 'sex' of GQ images lies, as a rule, in their apparently being constructed by men, for men, and the models' overt awareness of this. The 'proof' of this premise lies not just in the male gaze that the images inspire, but more unexpectedly it is quite often found in the 'gaze' of their subjects (see 2.5.3). Each of the women in GQ is aware of her viewers, and is deemed "steamily consensual" (Paglia 1995:65) because of this. In places this is even reiterated by text, for example when Argentinean model Yamila is boldly quoted as saying "I am aware that men are going to look. Very aware indeed" (figure 17) (GQ October 2000:83). In each of the photographs of her, even where she is in very awkward (and unjustified) positions, careful attention is given to ensuring that her eyes remain on the camera: on the viewer, in other words (figure 18). In this way, the fantasy is lent some authenticity, some 'realness' in the unexpected, willing participation of this sexual icon.

¹³ In his discussion of style and medium in the motion pictures, Panofsky (1959:18) refers to the manner in which "mild pornography" (in television and film) feeds on the "pornographic instinct" of the viewer.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu (1984) offers a more in-depth meditation of this phenomenon in Chapter Eight (Renunciation and Sublimity: On Critical Modesty) of his seminal text, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

¹⁵ Probably the most persuasive articulation of this position is to be found in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Mikhail Bakhtin. Bourdieu (1984:203) refers to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1958) and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981).

¹⁶ This section, in other words, builds on the argumentation of 2.5, but demonstrates how the notions of fetish and gaze are employed by GQ to connote 'sex'.

The glossy, stylised aesthetic and articulate context remove the images from the gritty realm of the obscene, but not so far that the suggestion of 'sex' is indiscernible.

In the article adjacent to the images, author Jon Wilde (GQ 2000:80) relates the powerful history of the bikini, or what he terms "sex and its packaging". The emphasis of the argument is that the power of this garment is as a symbol of the sex that might follow (whether in the imagination of the viewer or in 'reality'). Wilde (2000:80) quotes Bobby Kennedy, who upon seeing Marilyn Monroe photographed in a bikini, reportedly turned to brother Jack and said "Now if you could just get past those two pieces of nylon, you would forget about the Presidency". In this notorious quote the point is made clear, that in the mind of the western male viewer, the bikini (or any fetishised item of clothing) is mythically connected to sex.¹⁷ The bikini alone does not signify the trope of sex, but when juxtaposed with Yamilla's contorted body and sweaty skin, as well as her consensual gaze, the reader may see 'sex'. Since sexual intercourse typically involves two people, it is not immediately obvious that an image, such as the one of Yamilla, which only depicts one person, might represent 'sex'. The 'steamily consensual' gaze of Yamilla, however, presents her as a willing participant in the trope of 'sex', thereby involving the viewer in the action of the image (as opposed to him being a 'mere' voyeur). This implied action between the subject and the object draws from the visual mythology of the trope of sex.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the power of Olympia's gaze is frequently ascribed to her acknowledged participation in the 'obscene'.¹⁸ But it seems naive to think that the 'obscene' here merely implies her nudity. Her nakedness alone is quite sensational, a fact compounded by the presumed presence of the artist while painting the model, but the thrill does not end there. The artist, who it must be said is first a man and second an artist, is inevitably implicated in the events that must follow. The idea of a clothed man painting a woman who lies a few feet away from him, naked, even today carries a rather erotic *ambiance*. Perhaps this is because for the layman it is difficult to believe that after the painting has been completed, the model, in this case Victorine Meurand, would merely get dressed and go home. The Romantic associations of virility and debauchery with the artistic genius, frame the image of artist and model in a sexual haze. As noted in the previous section, photography only extended this expectation into a less removed, or canonical context, thereby making the whole experience more real, or accessible.¹⁹ With the mass production of photographic pornography, the average man could buy into this experience, thereby affording him-

¹⁷ Wilde (2000:80) reiterates the point that the bikini is not an 'empty' symbol, by adding that Monroe later endangered the Presidency by "engaging in affairs with Bobby and Jack".

¹⁸ Hudson (1982:104-105) says of Olympia's stare that she "looks not so much at you as through you. It is this reciprocity, I think, that must have brought the idea of whoring so forcibly to mind [for nineteenth century audiences]".

¹⁹ In 'A Short History of Photography', Walter Benjamin writes, "In photography ... one encounters something strange and new ... something that is not to be silenced, something demanding the name of the person who had lived then, who even now is still real and will never entirely perish into *art*" [emphasis in original] (in Trachtenberg 1980:202).

self the right to 'relate' to the model. Gerald Needham (in Trachtenberg 1980:82) remarks of nineteenth century pornographic photographs, that "the erotic imagination [of the viewer] was especially stimulated by the thought that the photographs were posed by an actual woman, and not the purely fanciful figure of the erotic drawing".²⁰ The precise details of these 'relations' are of course impossible to define, since they depend largely on the imagination of the viewer. It might, however, be fair to assume that the reason such images sell, is not so much because of the obscenity they show, as for the potential obscenity that they suggest.

In the mythic trope of sex, the imagination of the viewer is not only supported by the sexualised presence (and seeming consensual participation) of the subject (model), but also by the customary absence of a male protagonist, which makes it easy for the viewer to project himself into the situation. The 'visual pleasure' of representation is often considered to be the opportunity that it presents for self-identification. It is on this Lacanian 'mirror stage' that the viewer may indulge in more than the mere scopophilic and voyeuristic pleasure of representation. Again, the fact that GQ employs photographic images is significant, because the photographic medium (more than the painterly or written mediums) makes the model represented seem more immediate or 'real' to the viewer, and thus strengthens the possibility for imaginary 'action' between these parties. Isabel Tang (1999:108) explains the significant power of photography:

The realm of painting allows an indeterminacy between the viewer and person viewed that the photograph does not. This is new and distinct. Photography is a medium that creates a different set of connections between the person who produces the work, the person who is present in the work and the person who sees the work ... / am looking at *this* person [emphasis in original].

Like Manet's painting of Olympia, the photographs of Yamilla, when seen in conjunction with the article by Wilde, create a familiar imaginary territory over which the viewer has full control. What makes pornography so appealing or 'sexy' for the viewer, in other words, is its simultaneous embodiment of escapism or fantasy, and relatedness to the 'real.'

3.3.1.2 Modesty and the trope of 'sex' in GQ

In Wilde's (GQ 2000:80) article, he refers to Bridget Bardot's appearance in a bikini in the film *And God Created Woman* (1956). According to Wilde (GQ 2000:80), what made Bardot's appearance in a bikini so "profoundly sexy was that she looked at once naïve and knowing." What Wilde (GQ 2000:80) terms the "virgin/whore paradox" is not the subject of this discussion (it is addressed in 4.3.3), the relevance of this observation to the current discussion, is that a superficial tension be-

²⁰ Needham considers nineteenth century pornographic photography as compelling inspiration for Manet's *Olympia* (in Trachtenberg 1980:80-89). This connection between 'erotic' art and pornographic photography is referred to in Chapter Four (4.3.1).

tween modesty and exhibitionism frequently forms part of the cultural encoding of 'sex'. The Hellenistic *Capitoline Venus* (figure 8), which Clark (1956:76) describes as "the Venus of Modesty", is an early example of the power of this tension, particularly in a sexualised context. The Venus of Modesty's vain attempts to cover her breasts have subsequently become iconic of the fetishised desirability of the *femme enfant* for the western male viewer. In the context of GQ, this fetish is sometimes depicted through child-like props such as teddy bears or lolly-pops. More often, however, this mythic contradiction is represented through coy mannerisms that simultaneously denote sexual ardour and bashful reticence.

The cover of the November GQ (2000, figure 19), seems by its very subtlety, modesty even, to be far-removed from any 'real' representation of sex. In what has now become a regular GQ-cover pose, the model, Charlize Theron, stands with her naked back to the viewer. Her one arm covers her breast while the other rests on her hip, in what might be described as an Odalisque-like composition of line. Like Yamilla, Charlize Theron is a sexual icon in contemporary popular media and, thus, her apparent 'shyness' initially seems to contradict to her sexualised media persona. The juxtapositioning of her modest pose and her sexualised media image, however, ironically betray the mythic artificiality of her apparent 'modesty' as a mere fetishistic gimmick. For this reason, the viewer can easily navigate his way through the social affectations of the image and 'see' the 'sex' in the image.

This cover, in other words, not only echoes the sumptuous paradoxes that are the stock in trade of GQ, but in a broader sense, builds on the 'virgin/whore' (lady/tramp, acceptable/obscene) paradoxes that are typical of images that attempt to represent 'sex' without doing so explicitly. The skin tight gold lamé pants (iconic of 1970s kitsch), for instance, are carefully subdued by a classically 'nude' back, while the coy mannerisms of fingers on lips and an arm in front of a breast are not unlike the bashful *Capitoline Venus* and *Venus of Urbino's* vain attempts to hide (emphasise?) their sexuality. An ornate gold earring becomes a fetishistic adornment when juxtaposed with a boyish haircut, while a childish pout is countered by Theron's 'knowing' gaze.

3.3.1.3 *Fetish and the trope of 'sex' in GQ*

The stylised contradictions, mentioned above, are not merely superficial paradoxes, rather they hint at *underlying* ideological fissures between art and obscenity. Although a complex and loaded issue, which will be given more attention in Chapter Four (see 4.3.1), it is valuable at this point to recognise the manner in which GQ situates itself on the fine line between so-called art and 'obscenity', class and kitsch, sex and 'smut'. This is a popular and therefore profitable position to be in, not least because it is both risqué (subversive, sensational) and playfully humorous, making it

seem more harmless. Thomas Hess (1972:224) comments that in commercially sexualised photographs, such as those in *GQ*,²¹ the traditional, painterly ('artistic') visual image is, in a sense, turned inside out:

What had been the painter's preoccupation – the expressive pose of the model and its translation to the plane of the canvas, the translation of the hue and value of flesh to the hue and value of pigment, the symbolizing of light and space – become passively accepted rules or prototypes for the maker of [pornographic] prints and photographs. The latter focuses on what the artist all but ignores or censors out of his work: the obsessive, the fetishistic, the pornographic.

It is questionable to what extent 'art' is void of fetishistic elements, but the point is that exotic tokens or fetishistic flowers, seem somehow less artificial or contrived in an Orientalist painting, than in a contemporary glossy men's magazine, and are therefore more fetishistic in the latter context. The manner in which *GQ*, almost self-referentially, hints at the genre of artificial, contrived pornographic photography, is most evident in the choice of props for each feature. Although never unpolished, photographs occasionally seem playfully 'tacky', and it is possible that this stylistic element triggers the "dreamlike fascination" (Hess 1972:225) of the trope of 'sex'.

A double-page spread for the feature 'Man's World' (*GQ* 2000:56-57, figure 20) is a photograph of model, Caprice, reclining on a blue velvet chair. It is debatable what the most fetishistic (or 'tacky') aspects of the image are. It is clear, however, that the fact that her red and black PVC bra matches her make-up, as well as the studded heart-shaped fan she is holding, serves the purpose of fetish, rather than mere aesthetic cohesiveness. Added to this, stockings and gold high-heel sandals seem iconically fetishistic. So too the use of a mirror image is iconographically loaded with the associations of female vanity and self-awareness. In an interview on the same page, Caprice paradoxically expresses the hope that people will start to see that there is "more to [her] than just the tits and the hips and the butt and the blonde hair" (*GQ* 2000:57). In this image, as in those of Yamilla and Theron, eloquent paradoxes prevail,²² and it is through these that the 'sex' in the image becomes evident. When Caprice is asked to comment on the image, she remarks that it is "definitely erotic. Because eroticism is always about sex" (*GQ* 2000:57).

The use of the 'knowing gaze', 'modesty' and fetish to connote 'sex' or the trope of 'sex' in the viewer's mind, is evident in each of the images referred to. The photographs of Yamilla, for instance, not only employ the 'knowing' gaze, but present the irony of 'modesty' in sexualised repre-

²¹ Hess (1972:223-237) makes this point about 1950s pinups, but the argument is equally applicable to *GQ*.

²² These paradoxes seem to be primarily concerned with the impracticality of the situation and thus the sense that it is 'purely' fetishistic. Such contradictions include the fact that Caprice is wearing stockings (that have coloured toes and heels) with open-toe sandals, that she holds a heart, but is alone, and that she wants to cover her genitals, but is not wearing panties.

sentation.²³ In the same image (figure 17), Yamilla's silver high-heels serve as fetishistic reminders of the theatrical props needed to evoke 'visual pleasure'. Each of the three codes consistently found in the images of Yamilla, Theron and Caprice, contribute to the construction of the trope of 'sex'. In the absence of explicit depiction or graphic detail, these codes are relied upon to trigger the association of 'sex' in the mind of the viewer; they, in other words, signify 'sex'.

The fact that the premise of this section rests on the shared understanding of the trope of sex by GQ's readers and thus their (the readers') potential for prompting sexualised fantasy, is not intended to negate the 'real'-ness of these images or their effects. On the contrary, as Catherine Itzin (1992:440) contends (about pornography): "The pictures are real, and the women in the pictures are real. The act of buying and looking is real, and whatever happens as a result is real." There are more graphic or explicit examples of the representation of 'sex' in GQ, and some of these are referred to later in this study, but the choice of examples that ostensibly do not represent sex, in the conventional sense of the word, was made in order to argue that even subtly sexualised images can represent 'sex' or the trope of sex. Finding images in GQ of explicit sex is, nevertheless, quite difficult. But to the extent that sexiness is sex-ness, it is hard to find a page without it. The question that follows is whether the images are representative of *'just sex.'*

3.3.2 Subordination in GQ

The social subordination of women is, in essence, an issue related to the non-recognition of women as persons in their own right. 'Subordination', as a topic of discussion, is a question of *personhood*, more than a question of 'simply' gender or culture. The polarisation of male and female within the popular media, sidelines the fundamentally *human* desire of both men and women to be acknowledged as persons in their own right, with the need to be represented beyond the predefined and 'given' characteristics of stereotyped classifications. Viljoen (1984:107) reasons that, "to situate the role of women in society in terms of stereotypical roles is to take the sex differences to extremes, to polarise them and, thereby, to perpetuate the 'battle of the sexes.'" While placing the emphasis on the personhood of the woman (meaning the individuality of a particular woman as opposed to 'woman' as a generic type), and taking into consideration the critical input of feminism, this section examines the stereotyping, and thus subordination, of women in GQ. In particular, this discussion focuses on three characteristics that contribute to the trope of subordination in GQ:

- The use of derogatory humour.²⁴

²³ Modesty is implied in Wilde's article and connoted through Yamilla's child-like pout and protective mannerisms (her leg covering her genitals and her hand, playing coyly with her hair).

²⁴ In the following section a brief discussion of the use of derogatory humour in Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, demonstrates how derogatory humour was used in sexualised art of the late nineteenth century. The tone of certain images in GQ tends to be quite similar to that of Manet and the work of his contemporaries (see 3.3.3.1).

- The implied concept of familiarity and sexualised ownership (particularly where models with a celebrity status are sexualised).
- The notion of constructedness implied by digitally enhanced images of women.²⁵

Each of these concepts is posited through the analysis of examples from *GQ* and its canonical predecessors such as Manet's *Olympia*.

'Just sex' is perhaps the most misleading phrase in the discourse on pornography. It is a defensive term that is used to represent the idea that images which are *merely* sexually explicit (as opposed to images which also subordinate and indicate violence), do not qualify as pornography. The problem with this kind of qualification is that everything in pornography is 'sex' to someone (it is for this reason, arguably, that the particular image or material exists). A fine and often moot line divides concepts such as 'sex', 'sexiness' and the 'sexually arousing', and is largely dependant on an individual's social, cultural and personal convictions. A distinction should be made, however, between material that is sexual, in a way that does not cause 'harm', and material that is sexual and harmful. Some material, of course, is simply sexually explicit ('just sex'), but this in itself does not make it pornography. Similarly, there is material that portrays women being subordinated that is not sexually explicit, and thus does not 'qualify' (according to United States legislation) as pornography either. The United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985) reserves the term pornography for material that is both sexually explicit and can be proven to subordinate women in its creation or use. But 'subordination', not unlike 'sexually explicit', is a term that perhaps demands further explanation.

Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988:37) define 'subordination' as the "active practice of placing someone in an unequal position or in a position of loss of power." Subordination is, thus typically considered to be the common denominator in all social inequality, and as such it includes objectification, hierarchy, forced submission, and violence. Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988:37) bring the concept of subordination into the sexualised context of pornography, by describing pornography as "sexual subordination for sexual pleasure".²⁶ Since *GQ* ostensibly aspires to the same goal as conventional pornography, namely the arousal of the viewer, it too subordinates, both in its production and in the end product, although this is usually done with greater subtlety. Specific examples from *GQ* are referred to in this section in order to substantiate the presence of visual subordination in the magazine. Each of the examples is characteristic of the tone and style of *GQ* as a whole. *GQ*

²⁵ The discussion of the female who is digitally constructed by the male, will be explored against the backdrop of the 'technologised woman', prevalent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

²⁶ Susan Cole (1989:64), elaborates on this interpretation, by arguing that not only can "pornography ... [not] exist without the subordination of women", but it is also "active in the subordination of women" – hence pornography realises subordination both in the product itself and in its social context.

occasionally makes use of humour in the form of outright jokes (inserted as 'fillers' between advertisements and information bytes), but more frequently and of significance to this discussion, humour is implied through the use of patronising commentary, facetious remarks and 'ridiculous' objectification and, therefore, it is this kind of subordination that is addressed first.

3.3.2.1 Humour as subversive form of subordination

Subordination is probably most overt, where women are reduced to their body parts. In *GQ* this usually takes the form of highly stylised and often random photography shoots that clearly serve no other purpose but 'visual pleasure', and therefore have an air of ridiculousness (or what might be termed 'humour') about them. "Who is Katie Richmond?" *GQ* asks with confrontational boldness (*GQ* October 2000:30, figure 21). The answer: "Whoever she is, she certainly looks good in a pair of boxing gloves." The caption below the photograph explains that she is a "feisty glamour model, who chose not to be a ring girl at a Mike Tyson fight because of his rape conviction", but the relative insignificance of this information in comparison with the full page spread of her "fine stuff" (in *GQ*'s words), indicates to the reader that *GQ*'s interest in Richmond has more to do with her appearance than her ethics. The humour of the image lies in the juxtapositioning of Richmond's serious convictions (and facial expression) with the openly undermining (objectifying) tone of the author. Richmond's powerlessness in the context of the feature (*i.e.*, the trivialising of her protest) is, furthermore, emphasised by the contrived or staged ridiculousness of her sexualised boxing gear (she seems to be out of her own context, 'all dressed up with nowhere to go' and, thus, ridiculous).

In each issue of *GQ*, 'new releases' in terms of the objectifying endeavours of artists, photographers or writers are promoted through tantalising reviews and extracts from their usually frivolous (and therefore humorous) exhibitions or books. The common thread throughout these publications is humorous (and therefore apparently harmless) subordination or trivialising of women. Through these 'reviews', *GQ* shifts the 'blame' of subordination to these parties, while reaping the benefits of blatant exhibitionism. One such example is the "Keeping abreast" insert (*GQ* March 2000:26, figure 22). This profiles photographer Marc Rivière's first book *Up & Down* in which he photographs "70 Parisian girls displaying their breasts outside of some of the most beautiful buildings in the city", even though in many of the images the buildings are not even clearly visible. But, cautions the author of the insert, Steve Hobbs "before anyone levels any accusations of smut in the direction of Monsieur Rivière, just remember: it's really about architecture" (*GQ* March 2000:26).

Hobbs's facetious tone is an apt example of the 'humour' employed by *GQ* to support the notion that everything is quite harmless. This is a titillating technique that has been used by those who

wish to simultaneously assuage the offensiveness of an image, and provoke the mind. For Manet this was encapsulated in the term '*blague*', a French word meaning a practical joke. What 'serious' criticism has frequently overlooked in *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (figure 12) and *Olympia* (figure 6) is the conceit of these works as erudite practical jokes or *blagues*. Manet makes use of the term *blague* at least six times throughout the written accounts of comments he made about his work, proof enough of his own consciousness of such a notion (Courthion in Nochlin 1991:13). In their *Manet Salomon*, the Goncourt brothers explain the *blague*²⁷ as: "The farcical Credo of scepticism, the Persian revolt of disillusionment, the light and boyish formula of blasphemy, the great modern form, impious and *charivaresque*, of universal doubt and national pyrrhonism; the *blague* of the nineteenth century, that great destroyer, that great revolutionary, that poisoner of faith, killer of respect ..." (in Nochlin 1991:14). "Light" and "boyish" they may be, but neither *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* nor *Olympia* can be described as unmediated or accidental; on the contrary, their power lies precisely in the ironic, almost farcical juxtapositioning of revolutionary content being portrayed with a sense of naturalising nonchalance. The fact that Manet represented his brother and brother-in-law-to-be as "nattily attired" (Gardner 1996:704), and model Victorine Meurand as naked in *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, is only shocking because not one of the three 'characters' seems to be aware of the absurdity of their circumstances.

By the same token, *Olympia*'s nudity is not half as sensational as her bored expression. The subversive spirit of both works is likely to elicit a wry smile from the viewer, quite similar to that prompted by Steve Hobbs, of the *Up & Down* review, in *GQ*. The more germane question, however, is at whose expense the joke is being made, for this is what lends the joke the tone of subordination. In the case of Hobbs' review it seems that he is implying that the women in Rivière's book have been taken for a ride. Rivière proffers how he seduced women to let him photograph them topless, while they happened to be passing by an architectural wonder. This narrative seems to hint at the traditional association of masculine virility or debauchery, preying on female vanity for artistic inspiration (the reminder of *GQ*'s connection to this more ennobled artistic context may, similarly, be quite humorous).

Another example of the way *GQ* relies on new releases for subversive humour is a minor insert featuring a website dedicated to Lara Croft (naked). The Tomb Raider character, Lara Croft, was the first female lead to successfully enter the male arena of computer games. Notwithstanding her sexy attire, she quickly became a symbol of contemporary 'girl power.' Young boys playing the game were 'forced' to take on a female persona, in what significantly amounted to a switching of gender roles within cyber culture. It was probably the deftness of her movements, and the ease with which she handles a gun, that established her as the icon of contemporary culture. Hence,

²⁷ Nochlin (1991:13-14) investigates the role of *blagues* in Manet's work more thoroughly in *The Politics of Vision*.

because of her role-model status, there has been some sensitivity about the sexualised nuances of her image. Against this backdrop, GQ (Millennium 2000:32) ran an insert featuring websites that show Croft “in the buff”. Underneath a rather explicit image of a topless Croft, there is the bold invitation: “See Lara Croft Naked!” (figure 23); note the use of the word ‘naked’, not ‘nude.’

A topless Lara Croft may seem like a trivial example of subordination, but that is exactly the point, that through this representation, she becomes ‘trivial.’ While Croft is not a real woman, even as a ‘virtual’ woman she has power in her ability to kick down doors, kill demons and raid tombs, in other words, she is an empowered woman. Topless, she is reduced to a pair of breasts, she is awkwardly naked.²⁸ The sense of exclusivity invoked by all jokes contributes to the feeling that if one does not follow group thinking, one may seem provincial, petty, ignorant or small-minded. As with the emperor’s new clothing, humiliation or subordination is at its most effective when invisible. Perhaps it is even fair to say that invisibility is the consequence of all naturalising practices. According to Carol Smart, the “pornographic genre succeeds by transforming the meaning of domination into (natural) sex and thereby making it invisible” (in Itzin 1992:439). With this as her premise, Smart defines pornography as “the dominant, persuasive, and routine regime or representation which sexualises and limits women” (in Itzin 1992:439). Through this seemingly insignificant insert in GQ, Croft is, in other words, placed in “an unequal position or a position of loss of power” (Dworkin & MacKinnon 1988:37).

It would be simplistic and colourless to argue that all humorous representations subordinate the person being represented. Even if this were the case, however, this notion would only become politically problematic (or socially harmful) when the ‘humour’ of a publication consistently positions one social group or gender as power-full and another as power-less. In this sense, the ‘humour’ or jokes in GQ subordinate women by encouraging sexual difference or, in the words of Viljoen (1984:107), “situat[ing] the role of women in society in terms of stereotypical roles [, ... taking] the sex differences to extremes ... and, thereby, perpetuat[ing] the ‘battle of the sexes’”.

3.3.2.2 *‘Familiarity’, ‘ownership’ and the naturalising of subordination*

The frequent utilisation of familiarity contributes to the subtly naturalising effects of GQ. A joke made about some anonymous character is never as funny as a joke that involves a person one knows. Part of the appeal of seeing Lara Croft naked, rather than just a random ‘cyber babe’, is that she is a personality who is familiar to the reader. The increased sense of voyeurism that familiarity may bring to a sexualised image is quite obvious in every issue of GQ magazine. It is

²⁸ “Loss of dignity” may seem like a sentimental complaint, but the legal equivalent, “defamation of character”, is a more objective example of the gravity of robbing someone of their power, standing or dignity.

quite possibly the defining or differentiating feature of GQ, and indeed of glossy men's magazines. Where *Penthouse* has its "Penthouse Pets", GQ shows Penelope Cruz, Jennifer Aniston and Candice Hillebrand, recognisable celebrities who the reader 'knows', virtually naked.²⁹

Rebecca Romijn Stamos, for instance, is a high-profile model who is married to the equally well-known actor and musician John Stamos. In GQ (March 2000:134-137) she is featured under the guise of an in-depth interview with James Ryan, that focusses on the art of buying female affection. The article is entitled "Present Perfect" and the by-line reads: "Think diamonds, rubies and rabbits. Model Rebecca Romijn Stamos talks about the tradition of giving ... a lot" (figure 24). The threadbare text, one feels, is merely an excuse for the glamorous photographs that form the real substance of the feature (figure 25). In true GQ style, Stamos is rather implausibly photographed "around the house",³⁰ wearing hot pants and stiletto heels. The ridiculousness of her fetishistic attire reduces this familiar persona to a sexual object. In a similar vein, another issue of GQ (October 2000:18-19) features photographs by Steven Meisel of Latino artist Jennifer Lopez. A two-page spread shows Lopez dancing on the tables with sensational abandon (figure 26). The iconic status of the Latino goddess is cleverly juxtaposed with the cheeky stares of anonymous fans, as they gaze at her objectified body parts. This image is made all the more gratifying because of the way its composition includes the viewer. The camera, and thus the viewer, is positioned as the mirror of the male onlookers, and therefore shares their voyeuristic point of view. Unlike in most films, where the viewer usually only vicariously 'interacts' with the leading lady through the leading man, in this case the camera is the ego ideal, allowing the viewer easy 'access' to the said goddess. A sense of familiarity with Lopez is, in other words, facilitated by the point-of-view of the camera, possibly in order to heighten the sensationalism of objectification in this feature.

In addition to the expected visual pleasure of the camera, the text accompanying a photo shoot in GQ typically supports the sense of familiarity created around otherwise remote superstars. South African model Teresa de Klerk is best known as the model behind the Wonderbra advertising campaign. For GQ's first anniversary issue (December 2000:150-155) they asked "South Africa's sexiest to present you [the viewer] with more memorable images of lift and bounce" (figure 27). The viewer is forced to 'participate' in these images through the hypnotic gaze of De Klerk and the enticing display of her pose, but the fact that the author directly addresses the reader ("You know her name. You know her bra") also contributes to the involvement of the viewer. In addition to

²⁹ The use of celebrities in sexualised imagery is not a new phenomenon, nor one unique to glossy men's magazines. In the eighteenth century sexualised images sold on the streets of Paris frequently represented Marie Antoinette. In a similar vein, today's pornographic magazines such as *Penthouse* quite often feature film stars and various other celebrities for their centerfolds and photographic shoots. What makes GQ different to conventional pornography, is that the use of models, in sexualised photographs, who are not celebrities, is quite rare. In GQ, celebrity models are the rule, not the exception.

³⁰ This is the kind of shoot that in women's magazines (such as *Fairlady* or *Marie Claire*) would typically include images of the celebrity, on the couch with her children, or at the breakfast table with a newspaper.

these familiarising techniques, Denis Carvernelis, the author of the interview, positions himself with the reader to heighten the inclusivity of his experience. In his first question to De Klerk he asks, “Why did you leave us, Teresa?” His playfully wounded tone mimics the flirtatious interactions of old acquaintances. On the next page, above a small photograph of the Wonderbra advertisement, GQ proudly boasts “our girl”, in bold red letters above the image. This time, the connotation of familiarity is accompanied by a sense of ownership, a theme that repeatedly emerges in GQ. The September issue of GQ (2000:126-131), demonstrates that it fosters a sense of ownership, on behalf of the reader, with other models too. In this issue, Kerry McGregor is referred to as “our girl”. Although she was a model before she appeared on the first cover of *GQ South Africa*, within the context of the magazine, she is seen as a GQ ‘discovery.’

Encouraging this notion of familiarity has a two-fold function. Firstly, it heightens sensationalism. As mentioned previously, a joke is funnier when it involves someone one knows. In the same way, nudity is less abstract when the person in the image is recognisable, or ‘known’. In a sense, familiarity prompts the experiential shift from nude to naked. In other words, the ‘reader’ of the image becomes an active participant in the objectification of the woman because of his ‘involvement’ with her. Secondly, familiarity naturalises subordination. The person at whose expense a joke is made, generally laughs with the others in order to be seen as a ‘good sport’ and to be included in the ‘fun.’ The fact that most of the sexualised imagery in GQ is accompanied by familiarising interviews and anecdotes, not to mention the fact that most of the ‘models’ are already well-known, further creates the impression of ‘good, clean fun’, of a joke being made amongst friends. Ironically, constructing familiarity in this way subverts the otherwise fixed power relations between the general public and the celebrities they deify, particularly since the sense of familiarity that results is ultimately false. Rebecca Romijn-Stamos and Teresa de Klerk may be accomplished celebrities and icons of male desire (and therefore seemingly powerful), but when photographed wearing hot pants and high heels, or crawling on all fours in a snake-skin bikini, they become the target of a *blague*. Subordination, in other words, may be quite subtly implied through the tone or wording of an insert. In this way, even seemingly insignificant inserts contribute to the overall ‘trope’ of subordination present in GQ.³¹

The following section demonstrates some of the historical and contemporary perceptions that may be inscribed into the Western understanding of ‘subordination’. In particular, this section ‘jumps’ between the subject/object relationship implied by much Enlightenment reasoning and the subject/viewer relationship prompted by much contemporary technology (such as television and the Internet).

3.3.2.3 *Technologised constructedness and the trope of subordination*

In so far as the object/subject relationship remains the *modus operandus* of investigation, the trope of subordination, within western culture, may date back to Enlightenment authors such as Voltaire (1694-1778), D Hume (1711-1776), J-J Rousseau (1712-1778), and I Kant (1724-1804). The object/subject relationship, abetted by these authors, as well as the empirical approach of such writings as Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1747-72), is continued in the popular media today, where the microscope is replaced by the television, computer screen, or camera lens. In areas defined by the camera lens, such as photography and film, power resides with the 'looker', who has figurative, if not literal control, over the person being 'looked at'. Laura Mulvey (1975:17) posits that women in film are signs signifying "to-be-looked-at-ness". The male protagonist, on the other hand, is typically the holder of the viewer's look, and like the viewer is capable of gazing at the sexualised image of the woman. Hence, through the viewer's identification with the male protagonist, the viewer is given the "imaginary sense of controlling the action" (Bignell 1997:185). In GQ, as in film, the camera lens may replace the male characters in the narrative, so that the viewer is directly involved in, or responsible for, the 'action'.³² In the case of GQ, the 'action' is more often implied, rather than explicit, but whether directly or indirectly, the sense of 'action' is quite often supported by the overriding sense that everything in the magazine is a male construct designed for the pleasure of men.³³

As is the case in most contemporary glossy magazines, all of the images in GQ are digitally touched up or 'improved'. The difference is that, while in most magazines 'touch ups' are subtly disguised so as not to disrupt the illusion of 'natural' beauty (of the person represented), in GQ obvious digital intervention is often a part of the fetish of the image. The 'pinup' image that accompanies the regular "Man's World" feature,³⁴ for instance, is generally an example of the overt plastic-

³¹ In so far as subordination is implied rather than explicit, the representation thereof, in other words, draws from a wide frame of reference, common to its readers. For this reason the word 'trope' is used to imply the wider scope of a subordinating technique.

³² In film, viewer 'identification' occurs both through the viewer's identification with the male characters (aided by the sense of familiarity created in most shoots), and through the viewer's identification with the camera lens. In GQ, viewer identification occurs mostly through the viewer's identification with the camera lens (as with conventional pornography), but also through the viewer's identification with the male writers in the magazine (see 4.3.2.1).

³³ In so far as designing something is controlling it, the male construction of women may also imply masculine control over women. Nead (1992:75) observes that the issue of the "control of identity through the control of the image" is a topic that emerges again and again in discussions on Feminist art. Nead (1992:75) further remarks: "The image of the female body may never be free of contradiction but patriarchal traditions of representation can be sufficiently disturbed to create new and different associations and values". These "new and different associations and values" imply the 'personhood' referred to in the introduction of this section (3.3.2). The obvious constructedness of the women in GQ, thus intersects with the denial of their 'personhood'.

³⁴ Within the context of GQ, "Man's World", is the modern equivalent of the drawing-room – a place for 'gentlemen' to retreat into, a realm that emblazons all things masculine. The by-line reads: "Man's world: girls, cars, sports, business". Each "Man's World" is celebrated with a two-page 'spread' that presumably represents the first of this list of masculine interests.

ity of the female body in GQ. (In this way, GQ mimics the assertion of 'artistic licence' as in Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia*).

The March "Man's World" (GQ 2000:56-57) features Daniela Pestova, a Czech super-model exotically positioned on a gold leather and Perspex couch (figure 28). The 'subordination' in this image resides in the constructedness of Pestova within the context of the magazine's wider trope of subordination. Pestova, in this case, is both sexually objectified (through her nakedness and fetishistic gaze) and cloaked in the ennobling veneer of aesthetic construction, particularly evident in the smooth finish of her Odalisque-like back (an obvious reference to Boucher's *Mlle O' Murphy* 1752).³⁵ Through the combined effect of sexualised display and stylistic 'treatment', the objectification and subordination in the image are conflated (camouflaged). The question of whether she is naked or nude, for instance, is not clear-cut: The familiarity of Pestova as a model is endorsed by the admission (above the image) that she had to "slug a shot of vodka before filming her first commercial". This very human disclosure perhaps implies the understanding that she is indeed naked. At the same time, the unmistakably stylised aesthetic of the image negates any interpretation that 'reads' the image as 'innocent' or 'real', and therefore renders her more nude than naked. It is nevertheless this very 'treatment' (digital finish, constructedness, stylisation) that constitutes the 'subordination' in the image, since it is 'merely' another form of stereotyping and dehumanising women.

The constructedness of the image is, furthermore, apparent in the lack of explicit 'detail' that seems intended to align the image iconographically with art rather than pornography.³⁶ The sensationalism of seeing female genitalia up-close has been part of the *oeuvre* of pornography for centuries, but it was only with the invention of photography that this voyeuristic desire manifested in the more mainstream commercial market.³⁷ The camera, with all its endless possibilities for fragmentation, was remarkably suited to this objectifying function. In 1861, one irate member of the European public noted, "[p]eople do not only sell obscene photographs – they do better than that. They sell them with a magnifying glass whereby you can search for microscopic details" (McCauley in Tang 1999:114-115). Whereas in paintings, drawings and prints an extreme close-up only yields abstract lines and shadow, the photograph tends to reveal more explicit information

³⁵ According to John Mastro, the product manager of *Playboy*, "quality", presumably meaning airbrushed, soft-focus images and expensive paper, "takes some of the shock off nudity" (in Dine 1995:255).

³⁶ An association with art is apparent in the fact that many readers would recognise the pose of Pestova as an appropriation of Boucher's *Mlle O'Murphy*.

³⁷ While Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866) is an apt demonstration of the painter's voyeuristic fascination with female genitalia, unlike similar photographic representations of the 1800s, it is not an image that could be seen by the public at the time.

(Tang 1999:114-115). The few details of female anatomy found in GQ are not 'real', but are air-brushed, and therefore represent the ideal of male fantasy.³⁸

GQ does not generally cater for the need to see details, but the manner in which all sexualised images in GQ are overtly 'reworked', implies the same objectified, microscopic perspective with which a viewer is 'forced' to see decontextualised genitalia. In this way, the object/subject relationship of pornography is reiterated without the explicit representation of details. Real women (Charlize Theron, Penelope Cruise, Candice Hildebrand) are represented with unreal perfection, and are thus no longer 'real', but fetishistically constructed. The object/subject relationship is here enacted in such a way that the subject/scientist/author/photographer/viewer intervenes in the representation of the object, to the point where it becomes an extension of his own effort. The viewer's awareness of this kind of subordination is possibly part of the eventual sex appeal of GQ. Like Manet's admission of *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* being a *blague*, the fact that GQ announces Pestova's reluctance to be displayed, contrasts blatantly with the contented image of her below this confession. In other words, she is ultimately a male construct, and all the more appealing for it.

By the end of the nineteenth century, writers focussed on prostitution and 'erotica' as examples of the commercialisation of all human relations (Hunt 1991:10). Brooks (1984:143), for instance, notes that through the works of Emile Zola and Manet, the female body becomes an explicit signifier for the machinery of commerce and industrialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similar to the way in which Zola and Manet related the female body to the capitalist concerns of technology, GQ represents the female body as a commercially constructed product. The view of the female body as emblematic of a mechanised and highly sexualised economy has analogies in a variety of other domains,³⁹ and supports the notion that the constructed 'woman' conventionally signifies abstractions such as (masculinised) technological progress. French philosopher Michel Serres has highlighted the way in which the steam engine became the feminised metaphor for the industrial age, starting in the eighteenth century, and possibly continuing into the early twentieth century (in Hedges 1991:122). For Serres, the metaphor is most apparent in the works of authors, philosophers and artists, such as Zola, Henri Bergson, and William Turner, who are all seduced by the notion of the 'technologised woman'. She is simultaneously sensationally threatening and implicitly powerless, since she is arguably a male myth (and therefore under 'his' control). The manner in which GQ currently wraps sexualised representations in a technologised veneer might relate to the nineteenth and early twentieth century notion of the sexualised woman as a symbol of commercial and technological progress. Figures 28 and 29 (GQ March 2000:56-57, 109) demon-

³⁸ As the male artist may improve on his model, so too GQ 'improves' the contours, blemishes or colouring of the models in each image, through digital enhancement (in some images the technologised veneer of the model is accentuated by positioning her next to a machine) (see figure 29).

³⁹ Such as in cyberculture or the feminising of electronic hardware.

strate the constructedness or 'plastic' quality of the models after they have been 'touched up.' In each of these cases, the women's bodies seem almost prefabricated and, thus, both (technologically) threatening *and* powerless. The fetishistic value of these images, in other words, lies in their technologised constructedness, ostensibly by men for men.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes (1973), postulates that modern-day myths are symptomatic of commonly held beliefs in Western society. In accordance with this idea, Inez Hedges (1991:122-123) reflects that Serres could well have included cinema as a new artistic medium brought to fruition by the imaginings of the nineteenth century. Photography and film soon became the primary synthesisers and reflectors of myth and, as such, echoed the unconscious fears of society. The mechanised notion of the feminine is clearly present in films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), where the female character is represented as a machine or automaton against which the masculine could define itself.⁴⁰ The fembot, Maria (played by Brigitte Helm), is an image that in many ways realises *fin de siècle* fears that people would have less and less control over an increasingly mechanised environment. The 'technologised' woman is also said to have represented a union between science and nature – two entities that, since the seventeenth century, had been positioned as binary opposites. Evelyn Fox Keller explains that the escalating authority of mechanical philosophy was expressed in terms of the masculine domination of science over nature, which was represented as feminine (in Hedges 1991:123). Keller avers that: "The goal of the new science is not metaphysical intercourse but domination ... the triumph of those who have been generally grouped together as 'mechanical philosophers' represented a decisive defeat of the view of nature and woman as godly, as of a science which would accordingly have guaranteed to both at least a modicum of respect" (in Hedges 1991:123). Almost eighty years after *Metropolis* was released, GQ still constructs the feminine with much the same signification. Through an obviously mediated (stylised and airbrushed) representation, women are not represented as 'real', but as created, improved, perfected, even technologised, and this is probably understood, and even expected, by the viewer.⁴¹ Therefore, in a 'Man's world' she falls into the same category as cars and steam engines.

Subordination, as Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988:37) define it, places someone in a "position of loss of power". GQ is not an overt example of oppression, but it does subtly subordinate by placing women in a position of powerlessness. GQ aims to sexualise real women such as Charlize Theron and Daniela Pestova in a way that renders them quite unreal. In a sense, such glamorised and enhanced images create the perception of glorification rather than subordination, but to the extent

⁴⁰ The connection between women and machinery is encouraged in GQ by the use of predictable phrases such as "get her motor going" (GQ Millennium 2000:83). See Andreas Huyssen's (1986) *After the Great Divide* (in particular Chapter Four, entitled 'The vamp and the machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*').

⁴¹ Nead (1992:77) refers to this "perfectability of the body" within contemporary advertising as "body fascism". Within the glamorised context of GQ, the "image of the female body that does not conform to these ideals is both transgressive and disruptive" (Nead 1992:77).

that 'improving' on an image connotes its flawed-ness, GQ presents women as imperfect. The very glossy or stylised aesthetic of GQ lends a sophistication to sexualised representations, but also encourages the perception that women, in their ideal form, are male constructs. By placing women in a position where they are either the butt of a joke or the embodiment of male fantasy, GQ actively subordinates women. This section has examined the manner in which a sense of 'humour' and 'familiarity' as well as technologised constructedness form part of the trope of subordination in GQ. The question that is examined in the next section is whether this process of subordination can be described as violent.

3.3.3 Violence in GQ

A dictionary definition of violence includes the following:

vi'olence *n.* Quality of being violent; violent conduct or treatment, outrage, injury, (do ~ to, act contrary to, outrage); (Law) unlawful exercise of physical force, intimidation by exhibition of this (Sykes 1979:1298).

Turning women into objects and dehumanising them, in other words, subordination, is a precondition for overt violence, since it is easier to hurt someone who seems "less human" (Itzin 1992:437). In visual representation the point at which subordination becomes violent (if not 'violence') is as indistinct as subordination itself, and yet it does exist since most subordination is unsolicited (*i.e.*, forceful or violent).⁴² The problem of defining or recognising violent subordination in GQ, is rooted in the more capacious problem of distinguishing 'violence' in the fabric of contemporary culture. The compelling role that violence plays in today's popular media, whether in soap operas or music lyrics, is in part responsible for the general viewer's silent desensitisation to violence. The various sub-cultures that have appropriated the aesthetic of sado-masochism, for instance, indicates that violence is often associated by contemporary western culture with a style or 'look', rather than an active practice. It is difficult to define to what extent an attraction to a 'violent' stylistic, such as the whips and spikes that are the accessories of the Alternative 'Perv' culture, are directly related to or consciously connected with the *practice* of violence. What is apparent, however, is that part of the attraction of violence, within the popular media, is that it has been sexualised since the Marquis de Sade, at least.

GQ does not represent explicit violence. It does not, in other words, represent one person hitting or killing another person. The position taken by this section, however, is that although GQ does not represent acts of violence, the representation of women in GQ is framed by a subtly violent air. This section, in other words, is concerned with the subtle network of complex and often ambivalent

signifiers that connote a sense of 'violence' in GQ (such as misogynist imagery and imagery implying 'force'). It is possibly farfetched to argue that images that seem to glorify women may at the same time be implicitly violent. It may, furthermore, be an unnecessary argument, in the light of the fact that most obscenity legislation does not include violence as a criterion of pornography, but since the United States Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography is the one referred to in this chapter, the presence of violent undertones in GQ is explored. The following paragraphs briefly discuss the link between violence and pornography and the popular media, as an introduction to the discussion of violence in GQ.

The United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985) stipulates that, in order for material to be considered pornographic, it must, among other things, include one or more of the specific conditions of harm (figure 3). Many of these specified 'markers' are essentially violent (rape and mutilation), but some are more ambiguously harmful, and therefore seem less violent (acts of submission, degradation, humiliation, and objectification). Various legal definitions of pornography have been drafted internationally, and not all of them include violence as a prerequisite for the category of pornography. In the United States alone different variations of the Civil Rights Ordinance place emphasis on different areas. The Minneapolis Ordinance includes material that is 'objectifying' as well as material that is violent. In Minneapolis, therefore, material that presents women "dehumanised as sex objects, things, or commodities" is considered pornography (Itzen 1992:437). The Indianapolis Ordinance, on the other hand, excludes this clause and restricts the category of pornography to material that is degrading *and* violent (Itzin 1992:437). The connection between violence and pornography is often considered a feminist one, since violence has long been a common concern of feminist discourse. Alan Soble (1986:152) contends that many Feminists have been forced to condemn pornography, almost against their initial sentiments to the contrary, because they perceived (rightly or wrongly) that pornography had become more violent and abusive. Peter Gay adds to this idea: "The fury of Feminists at pornography is easy to understand; in recent years the number and imaginative fervour of cruel acts against women in these publications seem to have greatly increased" (in Soble 1986:152).⁴³

The belief that audiences have become increasingly desensitised towards violence contributes to subtly harmful representations in the popular media being read as harmless. Rolfe (1997:sp) points out that in the popular media violent themes have revealed a "consistent progression over the years toward more explicit violence and bizarre behaviour in an apparent attempt to evoke some level of emotional reaction" in the viewer. In "filmed portrayals [and one might add magazine

⁴² This point becomes more tenuous in the context of GQ, where models are not the passive 'victims' of subordination, but to some extent participate in their own objectification, and thus subordination. It may, nevertheless, be argued that the context, tone and post-production digital effects of GQ frame these women in the trope of violence.

pictures], unlike [in] real life, violence and sex can be experienced without direct involvement or risk[, which, inevitably, results in a] desensitisation process as it occurs in the central nervous system” (McQuivey 2001:sp).⁴⁴ Even though the primary target of feminist protest may be described as ‘violent pornography’, the fact that violence is a relative and variable term, makes it arduous to pin down, particularly in the less explicit popular media.⁴⁵ With ‘sex’ at least one can describe or define some tangible effect. The depiction of sex or even implied sex will almost inevitably cause “that definite stirring between the legs” (Itzin 1992:437). An image or representation that prompts that ‘stirring’, may thus be perceived as ‘sex’ to someone. But how does one determine what violence is?

Since the shade of ‘violence’ in GQ is implied rather than overt, this is referred to as the trope of violence.⁴⁶ According to Root (1996:34), tropes differ from stereotypes because of their very ambiguity, and therefore tropes have the ability “to do so many things at once”. The trope of violence in GQ, similarly, originates from the ambiguous construction of such binaries as active/passive, and power-full/power-less. In the sexualised context of GQ these binaries are inevitably gendered so that masculinity is equated with active power or control, and femininity with passivity or loss of power. The combination of sexualised representation, obviously fetishised for male visual pleasure, and ‘action’ features that connect masculinity with action, aggression and ‘force’, create a filter of subtle, sexualised violence throughout the magazine. Because tropes are “multifarious and draw from a variety of sources,” they are, furthermore, also harder to challenge than stereotypes (Root 1996:34). For this reason the gendering of deviance as a symbol of female passivity, and action, aggression or force as symbols of masculine active-ness, are categorised as part of the wider rubric of violence in GQ. These binary codes, it is argued, function as ‘slippery’ tropes that, in spite of their ambivalence, continue to (falsely) structure the viewer’s perception of sexual difference, and are therefore perceived to be harmful.

⁴³There are feminists such as Kathleen Barry, who criticise pornography because it depicts sex without love or intimacy, who take on all pornography, and not just that which represents violence (Soble 1986:152).

⁴⁴With the increased explicitness of violence in the popular media, the average viewer has become desensitised to (and therefore possibly bored with) traditional forms of violence (such as murder or rape supported by a narrative structure) (see McQuivey 2001:sp). In contemporary popular culture, therefore, violence assumes many shapes and disguises, making it all the more difficult to identify as harmful. One of the most graphic examples is that of the cartoons found on the music video channel, MTV. Inserts such as the *Itchy and Scratchy Show* often started out as experimental student productions on MTV and went on to become internationally syndicated television programmes aimed at a child and teenage audience. The latest MTV craze is *Jackass*, a programme that originated from the underground skateboard culture in the United States. In this programme young men are filmed inflicting pain on themselves – shooting themselves with BB guns, riding off cliffs in shopping carts, etc.

⁴⁵The *Concise Oxford Dictionary’s* (1979:1298) definition of violence seems largely inadequate in terms of the varied and subtly nuanced forms that violence takes in popular culture. Carnie (2001:121) comments in *Big Brother* magazine, “[t]he explosion of violence and sleaze in popular entertainment has raised widespread concern over its effects on American culture in general and America’s children in particular. Increasingly the problem appears to extend across the spectrum of popular entertainment, regardless of the format in which it is packaged.”

⁴⁶In other words, this section does not address the question of whether the *production* of GQ may involve subordination or the active practice of violence. This section rather, is focused on ‘violent’ intonation within the final product.

Through a discussion of these apparently oppositional binaries, (*i.e.*, deviance as symbolic of female passivity and aggression as symbolic of male active-ness), this section examines the trope of violence as it appears in *GQ*. The visual genealogy of sexualised violence is referred to in places in order to demonstrate the particular pertinence of gendering deviance, force and action within the trope of violence.

3.3.3.1 *'Deviance', othering and woman as passive in GQ*

Since deviance is a concept that is generally accepted to imply negative social connotations,⁴⁷ it may contribute to what Root (1996:34) calls the tropes of difference. The term deviance is used in the context of this section to mean oddity, strangeness and the abnormal (these are charged terms, with their own social and theoretical underpinnings), and to refer to the wider trope of exoticism, within which these terms might occur. In the absence of a more accurate word, deviance is used as a collective term that indicates the wide range of exotic and therefore curious or 'deviant' phenomena that frequently appear in sexualised representations, and may thus form part of the trope of sexualised violence. The notion that 'deviance' is related to gendered difference is supported (and complicated) by Root's (1996:34) argument that "because exoticism works by generating excitement and delirium precisely from the viewer's ambivalent relation to difference, qualities that in one context are classified as negative ... [such as deviance] can with the proper distance produce delight, desire, and, of course, the edge of danger and ambiguity that supplies an added frisson." The 'violence' that may result from this kind of process relates to the extent to which exoticism or deviance implies 'othering'.⁴⁸

The western trope of exoticism is also a trope of invasion, domination and categorisation. Through the process of labelling something as exotic one also labels it as other and therefore, potentially as deviant. The implications of the trope of the exotic for gender studies is that woman is frequently represented as exotic, and therefore, other and deviant. By contrast, the male is associated with the conquest and exploration of the other. In this section, the polarised gender encoding of the trope of the exotic is presented as essentially violent in its representation, since it implies deviance on the part of women. The trope of violence is implied in the representations of deviance in *GQ*, and is analysed in the form of exotic and sado-masochist undertones. Visual and narrative representation of the exoticised woman and the conquering/exploring male are analysed as they appear in *GQ*. The theoretical context of the term deviance is first outlined.

⁴⁷ See Haslam (1988).

⁴⁸ Although this study does not deny the differences between men and women (physiological or hormonal, for instance), it does, however, maintain that to define women as 'other' to men, is to deem men higher, or more powerful than women, a premise that is false.

Through the critical analysis of the binaries male/female and homo/hetero, theorists have moved beyond taxonomies of deviance to grasp the cultural, historical, and textual foundations of these idea systems (Hostetler 1998:sp).⁴⁹ Against this backdrop, deviance is a problematic and contested term, not least because it is frequently used to imply polarised notions of sexuality. The term deviance is useful to this discussion, precisely because of the layered and polemical associations that it connotes (such as abnormality, monstrosity, immorality, and, ultimately, exclusion). Through such charged connotations, the term deviance reminds readers of the social and discursive complexity of all sexual subject matter. This is particularly pertinent in view of the fact that this section cannot provide a sufficiently complicated explanation of the presence of implied deviance within GQ. The manner in which GQ genders and hints at subtly sexualised 'deviance' is the focus of this section, since it is through the representation of women as other and the sexualising of this otherness that GQ frames itself in the trope of violence. GQ typically employs seemingly trivial features or inserts to hint at otherness. The references to oddity or the unusual in GQ, therefore, frequently take the form of quirky 'did-you-know?' information bytes.⁵⁰

This interest in the curious or unusual may be linked to pornography, since as Richard Dyer (1998:49) argues, pornography is exciting because of what it offers "in terms of seeing what we normally do not".⁵¹ Sexualised representations in GQ, by extension, are all the more exciting when they incorporate some aspect of the foreign, the bizarre or the unusual. The link between deviance and violence is perhaps only credible within a sexualised context, for it is in this context that hegemonic sexual difference is enacted. Through the forceful imposition of sexualised hegemony, an otherwise merely exotic or unusual image may gain an overtone of deviance or otherness, and in so doing be incorporated into the trope of violence. There are many illustrations of this complex notion in GQ, ranging from features on female mutant heroes to expeditions to find giant squid (both of these examples will be addressed later in this section). In each example, the narrative or

⁴⁹ Andrew Hostetler (1998:sp) notes that Foucault's post-structuralist critique of sexual paradigms and discourses has formed the springboard from which lesbian, gay, and feminist theorists could contest the "essential, intrinsic, or universal character of sexual identities".

⁵⁰ "GQ Talk" is a regular feature that includes everything from sought after gadgets, games and CDs to "Online oddities", a segment that previews websites on topics such as incest (www.cousincouples.com), rotting meat (www.stinkmeat.net), mutants (www.mutantwatch.com), and Anna Kournikouva's bra-size (www.berlei.com). Presumably, the majority of readers will never actually visit these sites, but are merely entertained (excited?) by the sheer absurdity of the topics and their contextual dissonance.

⁵¹ When *Penthouse* published the first images of women urinating, for example, the emphasis was entirely on showing what had not been seen before. The founder of *Penthouse*, Bob Guccione explains: "Today *Penthouse* is completely explicit. It's totally X-rated. We even introduced the first pictures of women peeing and no one's ever seen this before" (in Tang 1999:116). This is hardly a new phenomenon; images of women urinating can be found in early nineteenth century photography and indeed, is even present in seventeenth century engravings (Tang 1999:116). This phenomenon may be related to the graphic descriptions of female sexual organs utilised in GQ. In GQ, ironically, it is more often female authors such as Kate Taylor, who make use of explicit language to describe female body parts. Again, part of the sensationalism is in the awareness and voluntary exhibitionism of these women. The willingness to be exhibited, demonstrated by the women in the 'urinating photographs' is not unlike Kate Taylor's blatant use of graphic language in this seemingly sophisticated context (see 4.2.3). Although neither of these examples may be described as 'exotic', they do contribute to the sense of otherness with which women are portrayed.

image alone is not violent, it is merely intriguingly strange and unusual. Within the sexualised context of GQ, however, each of these features is transcribed into the language of sexual difference. The metaphorical combination of unusual or vaguely deviant visuals with underlying sexual hegemony is what prompts readers to interpret the women in the images as passively other (exotic/deviant), and the men in the images as explorers and adventurers. The narrative of a feature may similarly encourage the reader to decode exotic or 'other' imagery as part of the sexualised trope of violence.

The understanding of sexual deviance as part of the trope of violence, is demonstrated in GQ's fascination with mutant female beings. Although coupling deviant sexuality with supernatural beings is an increasingly common phenomenon in contemporary popular culture (particularly in comic strips, films and television programmes), it is by no means a new one. GQ's fascination with mutant woman is, perhaps, a fetishist continuation of an older western mythic preoccupation with sexualised deviance and other-worldly beings. Henri Fuseli's various paintings of incubi raping sleeping beauties (1791, figure 30), are a convenient historical example of this phenomenon because of the similarity visual representations of the demons and contemporary mutants, such as Mystique and the various mutant females from the Play Station games, featured in GQ.⁵² The particular pertinence of images dealing with demonic rape, is the implied undertone of sado-masochism, since it is herein that the connotation of 'deviance' lies. In spite of the seemingly violent acts being committed, the 'victims' in Fuseli's artworks seem to be experiencing pleasure. Whether women are raped by incubi, as in Fuseli's paintings, or men are raped by succubi, the signification is that of sexual pleasure being derived from deviant, violent behaviour.⁵³

The November "GQ Talk" (2000:33) features one of the many female mutant characters from Sony's Play Station I and II, while October's "GQ Talk" (2000:24) dedicates a page to Mystique, the exotic mutant character played by Rebecca Romijn-Stamos in the film version of *The X-Men* (figure 32). As the villainous Mystique, Stamos is 'clad' in a leathery, scaly body covering, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the incubi of fourteenth century images (figure 31) and, one might add, the leather cat-suits that are the stock in trade of sado-masochism. The aggressive gaze of Mystique reminds the viewer that she is a *femme fatale* or, as GQ (October 2000:24) coyly avers, "she is a very bad lady". This reaffirms the notion of the demonic or mutant woman (or suc-

⁵² Romantics, such as Fuseli, were drawing from the religious iconography of the Middle Ages, when the religious association of sexual impropriety with sin led to the perception of most forms of sexual deviance gaining a devilish persona in the popular psyche. The incubi (male demons) and succubi (female demons) were believed to have sexual intercourse with men and woman as they slept (figure 31). A social connection between the supernaturally strange and the sexual arose, probably dating back to Greek mythology, which frequently connected gods and mortals in sexual interactions.

⁵³ The notion of a human being raped by a demon is, within this context, described as deviant and violent because, after all, it is rape (and therefore it is forceful and uninvited).

cubus) as a threat. Since she is a sexualised construct, however, whatever threat she may pose is somewhat diminished through the male gaze, though not at the expense of her fetishized 'power'.

As a symbol of the combined appeal of 'sex' and deviance (she is exotic and other), the female mutant being may support the mythic, Medieval connection between death and woman. Hans Baldung Grien's sixteenth century painting *Death and the Maiden* (1517, figure 33) possibly hints at the understanding of woman as a deadly seducer, and therefore as an incarnation of death.⁵⁴ Images in *GQ* seldom represent this notion in any visually explicit form. Rather, the relationship between female sexuality and death is implied through the contextual and metaphorical alignment of these two concepts. The photographs of Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, topless in high heels (*GQ* March 2000:134-137, figures 24-25), are for instance, preceded by an article on the apparently death-defying feat of hunting giant squid (figure 34). "The Hunt for the Giant Squid" (*GQ* March 2000:130-133) is an article featured in the section of *GQ* entitled "Expedition." The article recounts scientist and squid expert Clyde Roper's recurring dream, in which his one-man submarine is attacked by a giant squid – "A dream so disturbing and claustrophobic that he gasps his way to consciousness" (*GQ* March 2000:130).⁵⁵ At first, the curvaceous red and black writing that covers the first two pages of the story, seems a little out of place – perhaps a little too feminine for such an aggressive topic. But juxtaposed with the concurrent feature on Victoria's Secrets model Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, the seductive font does not seem quite so out of place.⁵⁶ The power of *GQ* magazine is its overall consonance, the fact that articles on (exotic) squid hunting expeditions seem perfectly appropriate next to images of (exotic) fetishized models. Through the juxtapositioning of these articles, 'sex' and 'death' are made bedfellows, which is yet another example of the way *GQ* naturalises the position of deviant sexuality within the trope of violence.

Another example that relies on the combination of deviance with sexuality, and hints at the threat that 'woman' poses to men, is the manner in which *GQ* employs the visual codes of sado-masochism to convey fetishized sexual difference. As with the definition of rape, which is much more complex than it seems at first (Eysenck 1984:316), pain as a stimulus for sexual arousal, is a complex notion that manifests itself in apparently contradictory ways. The clinical evidence for the association of sexual satisfaction with undergoing certain types of physical pain and degradation is extensive, though not conclusive (Eysenck 1984:316). The psychiatric researcher Eysenck

⁵⁴ Although threatening, the notion of sexualised women being a metaphor for death, implicates them as the ultimate signifiers of passivity.

⁵⁵ The article boasts that Roper "has been attacked by [squid] long and aggressive enough to kill – even eat – a man" (*GQ* March 2000:130). In this way, the article presents masculinity as associated with seeking out and conquering death, while the feminine is oppositionally situated as the passive signifier of death.

⁵⁶ Contextual positioning can be a powerful conveyor of meaning. Through the placement of individuals, words, or articles next to one another, the meaning of each may be subtly affected. Goya's *Bandits Stripping a Woman Naked* (1808, figure 35), for instance, the sensationalism of the image is not that the woman is naked, but that she is naked and standing next to bandits.

(1984:316) relates that this type of association between pain and sexual pleasure is more frequently noted in women than in men, “although clearly not absent in the latter either, as illustrated by the widespread activities of dominatrixes”. It would be easy to suggest, he muses, that masochists can be grouped as entirely separate from ‘normal’ persons and qualitatively different from them, but this kind of perception is rather untenable, instead he proposes “a continuum or dimension with many intermediate types” (Eysenck 1984:316). The implication of Eysenck’s statement, for this study, is that it acknowledges even the most subtle imagery as being positioned somewhere on this continuum of masochist pleasure. Within the seemingly ‘normal’ context of *GQ*, references to sado-masochism become exotic, furthermore, in that they represent the unusual and the sexual in conjunction. Sado-masochism also relates to the exotic in the paradoxical way it signifies danger and pleasure simultaneously.

The images in *GQ* that hint at sadomasochism rely quite heavily on what Mulvey (1987:130) refers to as the “paradoxes of fetishism”. To understand the paradoxes of fetishism, she notes that it is necessary to refer to the theories of Sigmund Freud (Mulvey 1987:130). Mulvey (1987:130) explains: “Fetishism, Freud first pointed out, involves displacing the sight of woman’s imaginary castration onto a variety of reassuring but often surprising objects – shoes, corsets, rubber goods, belts, knickers, etc – which serve as signs for the lost penis but have no direct connection with it”. It is man’s narcissistic fear of losing his phallus, furthermore, which causes him to feel shock and exhilaration when he sees the female genitals or, alternatively (as in *GQ*), the fetishistic bid to conceal or draw attention away from them (Mulvey 1987:130).

Many visual examples of the sensual appeal of seemingly aberrant behaviour can be found in both popular culture and art. Most of these images present the woman as a symbol of the phallus, as well as a symbol of castration, and she therefore becomes a simultaneous representation of pleasure and pain. Mulvey’s (1987:130) discussion of fetish, centres around the work of Allen Jones, in which she argues that Jones’s highly contentious paintings and sculptures of women are “not about women at all, but illustrates [his] male fears”. The ‘power’ of Jones’ representations of women is in their paradoxical signification as both threatening (because they mimic the *femme fatale*) and passive, since they are indelibly impotent. A similar argument might be made about the “Present Perfect” feature in *GQ* (March 2000:134–137, figures 24-25). These images are almost as aesthetically constructed as those of Jones, and are a similar representation of the woman as phallic symbol. In the last image (figure 25), the model (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos) hides her breasts (arguably the symbol of her femininity) with her arms, drawing the viewer’s attention to her stiletto-heeled shoes. The shiny, hard, black leather of her shoes form a chiaroscuro-like contrast with the light background of the image and her soft pink skin, again accentuating the phallic heel of her right shoe. In the previous image (figure 24), Stamos stands erect, balancing on the balls of

her toes – here the implied phallus is more obvious. Her provocative glance, black lace negligee, and her stance – legs spread apart – all contribute to the sexual assertiveness, even dominance, with which she is seemingly portrayed. The strong, black, vertical and horizontal lines of the balcony and door, however, form a kind of enclosed space that hints at bondage.⁵⁷

The images of Stamos in *GQ* (March 2000:134-137) are perhaps more subtle than those described by Mulvey and Freud, but the principle remains that of woman as the fetishized representation of male fear. Such images represent a double innuendo; not only is castration, even where merely hinted at, violent, but the female image has been requisitioned and recreated into a passively fetishised image for man, in itself a violent act. A seemingly 'normal' or 'ordinary' set of images may, in this way, hint at the other, transgression, angst and castration, thereby creating a sense of deviance, and alluding to the trope of violence.

Deviance is a strong word to describe the connotations implied in *GQ*. But *GQ* does not function on its own, it forms part of the broader historical and social encoding of the trope of violence, which ideologically inscribes sexuality with gendered difference. The western understanding of sexuality is by no means a singular, homogeneous reading, but at the same time there are thematic threads that are continuous and pervasive. The notion of deviance (exotic othering) as a recurrent motif in the trope of sexualised violence is one such theme. The notion of masculinity being related to force and action, is another ubiquitous motif in the trope of sexualised violence, and is examined under the terms force and action in the next section.

3.3.3.2 Force and action as mythically male attributes in *GQ*

The presence of force in *GQ*, is often implied through the visual passivity of female models and subjects rather than through the explicit portrayal of aggression or force on the part of men. In this way, *GQ* 'defines' the man by positioning him as opposite to passive, sexualised women. Within the sexualised context of *GQ*, 'force' is the tacit or implied consequence of representing women as "visual pleasure" and does not merely exist as a physical act. Gayle S Rubin (1993:4) explains that "the realm of sexuality ... has its own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression ... [It is] imbued with conflicts of interest and political maneuverings, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense sex is always political." Rubin's (1993:44) understanding of sexuality is rooted in her belief that sexuality, like politics, is organised into systems of power, which reward and support certain

⁵⁷ Mulvey (1987:128) terms this contradiction an "ambiguous tension". An ambiguous tension may be present in symbols such as a whip, which can simultaneously be a substitute phallus and an instrument of punishment. In a similar vein, Mulvey (1987:128) explains that the "high heel on high-heeled shoes, a classical fetishist image, is both a phallic extension and a means of discomfort and constriction".

groups and activities, while disciplining and subjugating others.⁵⁸ In a similar fashion, Root (1996:38) observes that passivity as a thematic motif, is frequently used as a signifier of “inferiority and stasis”. Against the backdrop of Root’s explanation of passivity (as significations of inferiority and stasis) and Rubin’s interpretation of sexuality (as related to hegemonic inequity), it becomes possible to investigate the occurrence of ‘force’ and ‘action’ as emblematic of masculinity in GQ, in spite of the absence of images that detail physical acts of violence or force. This section examines the manner in which GQ represents force or power, and action as masculine, and passivity as feminine, thereby inscribing the trope of violence into the magazine.⁵⁹

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Fowler & Fowler 1911:1298) defines ‘violent’ as “[i]nvolving a great physical force” or “Involving unlawful exercise of force”. Force may, thus, generally be understood as an overstepping of social boundaries in a physical rather than an ideological sense. In GQ, however, force is implied in two more subtle ways: firstly, force is presented as the opposite of feminised passivity. In a linguistic sense, the opposite of ‘passive’ is ‘active’, but the fact that GQ represents women as passive *and* overtly constructed (*i.e.*, changed, manipulated), renders the counterfoil as not merely male ‘active’-ness, but male ‘force’. The female body is pacified and altered, either to ‘improve’ it (by erasing its ‘flaws’) or to modify it for sexual pleasure (by ‘stripping’ woman and ‘arranging’ her position or expression).⁶⁰ In other words, the ‘plastic’ texture of Pestova’s body or the rubbery tightness of ‘Jane Honda’s’, strips these women of their ‘real’ humanness or personhood (notions that are invariably undermined by digital perfection), and thus implicates the male viewer (for whom the women are ‘stripped’) as forceful (see 3.3.2.3).⁶¹

Secondly, force is implied in the way a camera angle or the layout of a page guide the viewer to gaze at, and even perhaps mentally undress the acquiescent woman represented. This is a technique that draws from the broader context of canonical images that position women as passive and men as active. The violence implied in Goya’s *Bandits Stripping a Woman Naked* (1808, figure 35), for instance, is not so much in the visual representation itself, but rather in the title, for it is here that it is stated that the bandits forcefully ‘stripped’ the woman. Even more telling is the typically passive pose of the sexualised model – a practice quite typical of the visual arts. In GQ there are countless examples of this sexualised passivity (figures 17-20, 24-29). Photographic ‘spreads’ of high-profile models are usually situated in studios where the model is instructed on how to pose

⁵⁸ Rubin (1993:44) further remarks that if the political conflict between, for instance “labour and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged”.

⁵⁹ The discussion on ‘action’ follows the discussion on ‘force’, although as part of the same trope of violence they should not be seen as independent from each other.

⁶⁰ Nead (1992:75-76) comments that since the 1970s theorists in the women’s movement have suggested that “under patriarchy the female body cannot be represented – that it cannot be shown without being appropriated for the dominant ideologies of gender and sexual difference ... [For] within patriarchy [representations of] the female body [become] ‘obscene’”.

⁶¹ This point is not the focus of this section since it has already been argued in 3.3.2.3.

for the camera. The awkward or uncomfortable-looking positions in which models are frequently photographed, initially seem to imply a kind of artificial action, but ultimately connote a sense of statuesque (static) visual pleasure (figure 18).⁶² 'Force' may, thus, be read in the images based purely on the passive positioning of the woman as opposed to the active role that readers assume by looking, reading and enjoying. The camera lens in these cases, is another initiator of force, since the photographic medium exerts a kind of 'authority' over its subject. Susan Sontag (1963:350) argues that photographic images are able to usurp reality because they are not only interpretations of the real (in the sense that paintings might be); but are also traces of reality, like a footprint or a death mask. In this sense, a *photograph* of an awkwardly positioned model may usurp the reality of her personhood by presenting itself as evidence of the real-ness of her constructed and sexualised identity.⁶³

Force is hence implied in GQ through both the first technique (*i.e.*, the constructedness and plasticity of the woman's body, stripping her of her 'real'-ness), and the second (*i.e.*, the male gaze of the camera that renders women as passive and the male viewer as active). This is further complicated in GQ by the pornographic convention of aligning implied 'force' with mythic, softening techniques such as the consensual smile or expression of the woman (figures 17, 18, 25, 27). This softening technique too has mythic artistic roots.⁶⁴ Semiotician Jonathan Bignell (1997:23) explains the manner in which these softening mythic techniques may strip the woman of 'real' meaning: "What myth does is to hollow out the signs it uses, leaving only part of their meaning, and then subsequently invests them with new signification which directs the viewer to read them in one way and not another." (In other words, the model is read as passive, not active, even where she is photographed in an 'active' pose.)

In this way, GQ's sexualised photographic shoots may be interpreted as a definite signifier of the archetypal relations between male and female, force and pleasure, active and passive. Even the more subtle and trivial examples of 'female' passivity in GQ, although difficult to pin down, support these archetypal oppositions, precisely because of their triviality and therefore seeming harmlessness. Wendy Shalit (1999) contends that in the show-it-all culture of explicit visual 'sharing', sex

⁶² Clark (1956:144) believes that the reason Ingres preferred painting women in 'unnatural' positions was because he found these more formalistically and sensually satisfying. Perhaps the GQ photographers are similarly unsatisfied with a "natural-looking pose" (Clark 1956:144).

⁶³ The pleasure that the model may experience by being 'looked at' or photographed is not addressed here. Since most of the sexualised representations in GQ depict the model as gaining pleasure from her display, it is difficult to determine in which of the images this sentiment is real and in which it is constructed. Even where her 'pleasure' may be real, however, it does not negate the fact that GQ represents this model's pleasure as generic and stereotyped rather than individual.

⁶⁴ Hudson (1982:104), for instance, postulates that what makes Manet's *Olympia* so provocative and contentious is her "stare", since through this she can "appraise while being appraised" (see 2.5.3). *Olympia's* passivity, in other words, is hidden behind the pretence of her confronting the viewer with her gaze, while in 'reality' her 'gaze' is rendered passive by virtue of the fact that it is a fetishistic gimmick that, in effect, contributes to the visual pleasure of the image.

(even violent sex) is commonplace.⁶⁵ Shalit's answer to the boredom of contemporary society is to return to modesty. Ironically, GQ is in apparent agreement, and therefore opts for a kind of 'modest', 'soft' or trivialised 'violence'. Rita Barnard (2000:347) thus proposes that a critical reader of culture should "prick up her ears when a text, idea, or practice is habitually and as a matter of course dismissed as silly, uninteresting, or *passé*; for it is in the fertile loam of the marginal that we may find the structures of power revealed in peculiarly fascinating ways".

Overtly violent imagery would probably not be accepted by the supposedly sophisticated readership of GQ, but the seemingly harmless images of aestheticised constructedness (manipulation), stereotyping, and male gaze might.⁶⁶ The extent to which these practices are accepted by readers of GQ, may depend on the manner in which such force is 'disguised' and therefore naturalised (see 4.2). The question, however, is whether 'force' as an implied idea may lead to action on the part of the reader.

'Action' as it appears in GQ, is a term loaded with the associations of conquest (or power over the 'exotic'), competitiveness (or dominance), and sexual difference. The term 'action' is used in this section in the same way that it is employed in GQ, namely to indicate the essence of masculinity, as GQ constructs it. This section, therefore, is not so much concerned with the sexualised 'action' typical in conventional pornography (in that specific sexual acts are demonstrated), rather the focus here is on action that is apparently innocent of 'obscenity' or violence. This kind of action is typically represented by GQ through articles on adventure, exploration, and extreme sports. The same connotations of masculinity apply here, however, since action is charged with the sexualised tone of adjacent articles and photographic shoots.

"GQ Active" is a monthly feature almost entirely dedicated to extreme sports. It is an insert which, in the absence of naked women, seems to extol 'good clean fun', but the overtones of dominance and aggression, coupled with the fact that it is framed by highly sexualised images, nullifies any pretence of innocence. Many of the "GQ Active" photographic shoots take place in exotic landscapes, further developing the notions of conquest, adventure, and exploitation. The October "GQ Active X-treme" (2000:147-153) explores rock climbing sites in Corsica, Tasmania (figure 36),⁶⁷ South Africa, Great Britain and Italy. Each location is represented as dangerous, awe-inspiring and exotic, again implying a link between the tropes of exoticism and sublimity. Root (1996:36) exam-

⁶⁵ Berger (1980:54-55) explains the show-it-all nature of contemporary Western society through what he terms the opportunism of the camera, which "turns everything ... into spectacle". In this context even graphic sexual representations will become humdrum sooner or later.

⁶⁶ Force is implied by representing the woman as an object of male fantasy, thereby 'forcing' her into a two-dimensional or stereotypical role (such as bimbo or dominatrix).

⁶⁷ In the photograph of Tasmanian rock climbing, the Totem Pole, being climbed, is a phallic reminder of the masculine drive ostensibly needed for this kind of 'conquest'.

ines violence as a component of the trope of exoticism, but it is possible that the converse may also operate. Root (1996:38) explains that the perception of sex (and by extension the representation thereof) as being more interesting in a colonial setting, particularly if accompanied by “accoutrements the Westerner finds unusual” such as exotic locals and fetishistic ornaments, is prevalent in the popular media. This attraction to the exotic within the framework of sexual arousal, links up in fairly apparent ways to the manner in which authority is articulated in representations of colonial situations (Root 1996:40). Wherever the ‘exotic’ is represented within a western context, it seems that “difference equals danger equals excitement, but still the colonist remains in control” (Root 1996:40). If one bears in mind the self-referentiality of power, the excitement for Western men seems to be more about a connoted sense of being in power than a desire for exotic women (Root 1996:40). In other words, all manner of dominance may act as a “mood enhancement” (Root 1996:41) or sexual trigger within the context of *GQ*.

In the technologised urban environment of the western world, the reader finds vicarious relief in the extreme escapism and exertion of “*GQ* Active X-treme”. The countless tales and images of self-inflicted physical trials in *GQ* stretch across every aspect of land, water, fire, and air, and against this backdrop often acquire a larger than life, metaphysical tone.⁶⁸ In each example the notion of masculinity as a force larger than life is used to elicit maximum identification from the reader.⁶⁹ Similarly, the majority of sports features in *GQ* are constructed in such a way that they equate action, aggression and speed with masculinity. As in the discussion of deviance, pain and pleasure are aligned as catalysts of masculine arousal to establish sexual difference. The context of sport is used to emphasise the implied connection between masculinity and aggressive action. The style of rugby player Robbie Fleck is, for instance, lauded as being “all aggression and speed” (*GQ* March 2000:59) (the words “aggression and speed” are highlighted in red), while three young South African boxers are featured in an article entitled “Smack It!” (*GQ* September 2000:108-113, figure 37). In keeping with the aggressive black and white photographs and offensive typography of the “Smack It!” article, specific quotes from each boxer that ennoble boxing as the essential male sport, are highlighted. Jeffrey Mthebula (“96 fights – 94 wins”) is quoted as saying: “Boxing is about proving you are a man. I am one” (*GQ* September 2000:108).

⁶⁸ An article on extreme air sports is published under the title, “Air power” (*GQ* Millennium 2000:197). The caption under the title is: “Kiting can hurtle you across the earth, propel you into the ocean, and toss you high into the sky. The rush is addictive, the experience meditative” (Millennium 2000:197). A “Sports classic” (*GQ* March 2000:184) shows Dutch Formula One driver Jos Verstappen, who survived the blazing fire that occurred when fuel was spilled on the engine of his Benetton Ford at a pit stop at the 1994 German Grand Prix. The bold print reads: “I was frozen with fear. It’s a miracle I wasn’t roasted alive” (*GQ* March 2000:184, figure 38).

⁶⁹ “Is there a mad man in all of us?” asks an article entitled “Addicted to Risk” (*GQ* November 2000:160-161).

One wonders how the average male reader responds to these limited definitions of masculinity based on action. In an article on testosterone,⁷⁰ John Sedgwick (GQ December 2000:160) notes that in various sports “testosterone rises not only for the winning players, but also for the winning fans”. This leads one to wonder whether *readers* of GQ, like spectators of soccer, might not experience the same sense of action or aggression. After paging through various representations of the trope of violence (ranging from an article such as “Smack It” to photographs of burning racing car drivers), might the many sexualised images of women be read with an increased sense of aggression or violence? At this point, these notions are mere speculation, and if subordination could be represented without it leading to violence (whether implied or realised), then it would be pointless speculation. But in many cases visual subordination is a precursor for visual violence; after Goya painted *Bandits Stripping a Woman Naked*, he painted *Bandits Murdering a Woman* (1810), where he demonstrates the now cinematically mythologized notion that stripping often leads to stabbing.

The aim of this section was not to prove that GQ is as ‘violent’ as conventional pornography; it is not. GQ does, however, in various subtle ways, refer to the broader trope of sexualised violence through the implied notion of deviance, force and ‘action’ (as opposed to feminised passivity) as key components of masculine sexuality. This is not necessarily a deliberate message by the magazine, but is the result of the combined effect of images and articles representing the concepts of sex, power, force, action and sexual difference, that function as syntagms in the same publication. Thus far the argument has been guided by the belief that the message communicated (for example, that deviance, force and action are components of masculine sexuality), may be critical in determining the effects of messages (Malamuth & Donnerstein 1984:xvi). The following section attempts to address the final criterion of the United States Civil Rights Ordinance of 1985, namely the question of “proof of harm”. It is through the criterion of ‘harm’ that the emphasis of obscenity law has shifted from the publication itself to the affect that the publication may have, both on society and on individuals. The following section situates the various positions on ‘harm’ within the context of GQ.

⁷⁰ Testosterone is treated with some reverence in GQ, particularly since the postulation of testosterone as a commonality between all men, encourages readers to identify with the implied taste culture. The article on testosterone, by Sedgwick, is entitled “I am a man” and states the following: “Testosterone. Even the word sounds manly, high-octane, full of balls. It’s the *eau de l’homme*, the source of the highly mighty male river ... The testes (that’s balls to you) ... [crank] out the testosterone that, in turn, is responsible for just about everything that distinguishes our gender” (GQ December 2000:156-160, figure 39). By encouraging a sense of group identification, GQ implicates the reader in whatever representational practices the magazine may employ, and thus the reader is more likely to defend or not ‘see’ the violence in images. This is particularly evident where testosterone is aligned with action and domination as supposedly uniquely male attributes (again invoking the passivity of the female). According to Sedgwick (GQ December 2000:156), testosterone “impels you towards seeking dominance in everything you do”. Furthermore, the almost comedic apotheosising of testosterone is occasionally implemented to gloss over violent or subordinating representations of women. The notions of force and action are, therefore, not only linked to masculinity, but are also connected to the mythic status that is given to testosterone in GQ.

3.4 Issues of 'harm' in GQ

The supposed harmful effects of GQ are, at this stage, more subjectively understood than scientifically justified. A great deal of research has been focused on the impact that exposure to pornography (long term and short term) may have on an individual.⁷¹ Relatively little attention has, however, been given to magazines such as GQ, presumably because of the lack of explicit or graphic sexual content. Indeed, most critical discourses seem to be more concerned with the nature and impact of sexualised billboards and advertising campaigns, than with glossy men's magazines. This section consequently examines the relevance of the terms 'harm' and 'harmfulness' to a discussion of GQ.

Against the backdrop of a visual culture that uses sex to sell everything from situation comedies to cigarettes, it is perhaps difficult to 'see' or recognise the subversive quality of GQ. Compared to conventional pornography and the sexualised content of the media, GQ seems to be relatively harmless. Within a legislative context, as in public and academic spheres, the concept of harm is a fickle and sometimes ambiguous one. The problem that harm poses for the law is that it must be related to an active practice. When Bernard Williams (1979:50) therefore asks, "what sort of conduct may the law properly seek to suppress?" the answer most commonly given is that "no conduct should be suppressed by law, unless it can be shown to harm someone". (Hence virtually all legislation on pornography uses the language of harm and, therefore, accepts the condition that harm be proved). The United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985) describes the harm inherent in pornography as "the *practice* of sex discrimination" [emphasis added]. Within this definition, people are free to think, believe or say that women are inferior or subordinate, and even that they should be raped or discriminated against, but they are not free to "subordinate, sexually violate or discriminate in the form of pornography" (Itzin 1992:439). In other words, "[a]nyone who [brings] a case under the Ordinance [has] to *prove* that the challenged materials actually subordinat[e] women in their making or use in order to show that the materials [are] pornography" [emphasis added] (Dworkin & MacKinnon 1988:39). The Ordinance therefore admits two ways in which pornography may be defined as a "practice of sex discrimination": firstly, by means of material that subordinates (*e.g.*, demeaning representations), and secondly, by means of material that causes subordination (as an active practice).

The ways in which pornography is a form of sex discrimination and subordination are numerous. According to Itzin (1992:439), women in pornography may be treated as sexual objects, sexually

⁷¹ The results of such studies generally seem to point towards three specific psychological effects that exposure to conventional pornography results in: firstly, increased aggression in the viewer; secondly, an exaggerated sexual experience of inappropriate environments, such as the work place; and thirdly, desensitisation to violent crimes against women (see Baker 1992; Einseidel 1992; Malamuth & Donnerstein 1984).

objectified, subordinated, sexualised, reduced to sexual parts, represented as objects of sexual use and abuse or pieces of meat, or objectified for male desire. Sexual objectification is thus an act which dehumanises, degrades and denies women their humanity. There is a fine line between the explicit representation of an *act* of sex discrimination, which is required by legislation to qualify material as 'harmful', and the more subtly demeaning messages of GQ. Pornography is frequently described as conveying messages of misogyny. But, according to legislation, its messages are not what make pornography discriminatory. It is the opinion expressed in this study, however, that pornography "instils the values of male dominance and female subordination" by sexualising male power (Cole 1989:102), and that this is also true of GQ. Itzin (1992:440) explains that "[s]exual subordination is what is done to women in and through pornography, and in and through pornography men learn how to do it", and perhaps the same may be said of GQ.

The harmfulness of GQ is a question of representation, since it is directly related to the manner in which women are represented on its pages. This refers both to the material presence (or absence) of women, and to the contextual positioning of women within the masculinised spaces of GQ and gentlemen's pornography. In GQ, therefore, the masculine construction of sexualised women consumes and overrides even 'fair', or 'realistic' representations of women as sexual beings. This representational consumption is symptomatic of the larger iconographical construction of the female within visual culture. Women are either present as fetishized sexual stereotypes, or as asexual blanks.⁷² The degree to which such binary images formulate the male and female understanding of femininity, is thus the degree to which this imagery is harmful.

As this chapter shows, GQ does not depict the kind of openly violent or subordinating imagery that obscenity legislation refers to. GQ relies on subtlety and visual sophistication for its commercial differentiation from pornography, and it therefore employs representational techniques such as allegory to disguise the 'subordination' that operates in the magazine. The character and complexion of this 'disguise' will be examined in the next chapter, but in this section, the point is that where women are used allegorically (of male sexual fear, for instance), they are stripped of both their "poetic aura"⁷³ and the complexity of what has been termed their personhood. Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1986:227) contends that the harm of allegory lies in its ability to simultaneously destroy and demystify the real in its neat, organised totality. Through what she calls its "destructive intent", Buci-Glucksmann (1986:227) explains that "allegory strips the real by fragmenting it: reality appears as a ruin". Women are thus subordinated in GQ, through objectifying stereotypes that fragment the feminine and strip women of their inherent 'real'-ness. (This is partly achieved

⁷² See Gilman (1985), Mulvey (1975, 1987) and Warner (1985).

⁷³ The 'massification' of women, as Buci-Glucksmann (1986:222) describes it, is a process that renders women mass-produced, widely available commodities. They thus lose their 'natural' qualities ("a feminine essence, a nature

through the implied association that the reality or real-ness of women is not 'good' enough, it must be fragmented, stripped, and stereotyped in order for it to be attractive to the male reader.)

By placing emphasis on an *act* of sex discrimination, most obscenity legislation excludes GQ. It is an understandable position that makes no provision for *implied* sex discrimination, and ignores the fact that most visually sophisticated audiences do not need to have sexual violence spelt out for them in order to 'read' an image as subordinating. The power of representations to *move* their viewers, explains Nead (1992:88), has long been the subject of concern within western culture. For Plato, all representations are perverted since they deflect attention away from the real world, which is itself only a shadow of the ideal. For Aristotle, the spectator's engagement with a representation is an isolated, cathartic experience. Fear and pity may be experienced by the audience of a tragedy, but these emotions are spent within the timeframe of the play, and do not extend beyond the narrative of the drama (Nead 1992:88). Thus, the question whether or not GQ has a harmful effect on its viewers, is part of a much larger and older debate concerning the power of representation in general (Nead 1992:88).

Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains that the shift from the representation of explicit action to implied action is one that has its origin in photography (in Tang 1999:115). The new technology of the camera brought with it a new kind of pornography. With the invention of the camera, images of female genitalia (fragmented from the body and identity of the woman), became the glory of early pornography. Solomon-Godeau elucidates that this kind of decontextualised image indicates "a shift from sexuality as an activity to sexuality as a forbidden sight" (in Tang 1999:115).

Sexualised imagery may simply be a 'sight', but the reason this sign is "forbidden" is because it implies active sexual subordination. The potential of the reader to pick up on these cues should not be underestimated, for they are what the pornographer relies on. Psychologist Alan Soble (1986:157) warns against considering the effects of pornography to be perfunctory:

Sexual arousal is not accomplished by pornography mechanistically; we should not think of a casual chain beginning with the photograph, which reflects light to the eye-ball and retina, which sends electrical impulses to the brain and then down to the crotch and hand. The response to pornography is not a reflex, but is mediated by consciousness, including beliefs and expectations, a consciousness filled with social meanings and an understanding of socially defined sexual cues.

Since the reading of sexualised images is often conscious and meditative, it may draw on the imagination or the visual myths of popular culture in such a way that the actual image need only function as a prompt or cue. Legislation and feminist discourse make very little allowance for this

determined by child-bearing") and their "poetic aura", a characteristic Buci-Glucksmann (1986:222) defines as "beauty as the sublimating idealisation".

phenomenon; the inclusion or exclusion of violence in definitions of pornography is a case in point. As mentioned previously, in the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985), many of the items in the specified characteristics of pornography refer to violence. Some, however, 'merely' refer to "acts of submission, degradation, humiliation and objectification" (Itzin 1992:436). Since these acts have fallen into the nebulous area of 'just sex', it is no wonder that the harm, violation, and violence inherent in these acts have not been recognised as harm (Itzin 1992:436). Furthermore, because the consumers of pornography derive sexual pleasure from the material, and read the submission and objectification of women as both natural and 'sexy', the harm may be obscured to them. This is in spite of the fact that non-violent, yet sexualised materials are also known to be harmful – "for instance in their use by rapists and child molesters, in increasing the acceptability of forced sex, and in diminishing men's vision of the desirability and possibility of sex equality" (Itzin 1992:437).

While *GQ* does not represent 'explicit' or graphic sex, subordination or violence, the fact that it hints at each of these within the space of one magazine, naturalises the pornographic alliance between sex, subordination and violence. In a sense, the 'real' harm of *GQ* is possibly situated in its pretended 'harmlessness'. 'Real' or conventional pornography is known to be harmful, and as such the consumer must make a conscious decision to go through the 'effort' of purchasing it (going to the right kind of shop, taking it off a high shelf, possibly facing embarrassment at the till, and tearing open the plastic cover). *GQ* provides none of these societal obstacles – it is displayed at eye level, next to *Car*, *Fairlady* and *Time* magazines – and thus insinuates 'harmlessness'.

The ostensible harmlessness of *GQ* leads one to question the lawfulness and intentionality of both its makers and consumers. It is relatively plausible that one might come across pornography without looking for it; the question is whether the same is true of *GQ*. If one assumes, for instance, that pornography is illegal, like carrying an unlicensed fire arm, then if one can prove ignorance – either that one did not know the fire arm was unlicensed (or the material was pornographic) – then there are mitigating circumstances under which to effect a defence. In a sense, *GQ* provides the subtlety and sophistication needed to plead ignorance. *GQ* simply bends the rules or conventions of pornography so that it is recognisable enough for those who want it to be pornography, yet subtle enough for those who want to believe it is not. This is part of the allure of *GQ*, that it *plays* with social notions of obscenity and acceptability. Fiske (1989:234) comments on the appeal of this kind of 'play': "One of the pleasures of play is its ability to explore the relationship between rules and freedom. Rules are the means by which social control is exercised, and results in social order that works to control the disruptive, anarchic forces of nature. Play enacts the opposition between freedom and control, between nature and culture." Play underpins the humour, wit and objectifying practice of *GQ*. The just-a-joke tone of interviews, captions, and images conveys a superficial

sense of laughing with the subject, rather than laughing at her. Closer readings of the visual '*blague*', however, typically reveal the object/subject relations of old.

Ironically, it is the playfulness of *GQ* that makes it difficult to prove harm, since the little overt visual harm there is, usually seems coincidental, and therefore unintentional. The fact that 'harm' in *GQ* (such as a sexually objectifying statement or image), may be seen as coincidental and therefore unintentional, creates the impression that where a potentially harmful act is unintentional, it does not cause harm. This kind of puerile reasoning occurs in a number of areas (particularly within sub-cultures) where pleasure is derived from transgressive or harmful behaviour. Levy-Leboyer (1984:1) confronts similar arguments in studying public vandalism. For him, intentionality or unintentionality as a defence for harm may be a ruse, yet it does make the study thereof more problematic:

[T]he fact that vandalism is often described as 'unmotivated behaviour' constitutes a challenge for the social sciences. In reality, no behaviour occurs without motivation. The fact is that it is difficult to expose and analyse the motivations behind vandalistic behaviour because they are often unconscious or not immediately apparent, such behaviour may also be the, at first sight, illogical outcome of a number of conflicting motivations.

Finally, the perception that *GQ* is harmless because it is more subtle than conventional pornography, is a flawed one. This is a perception that is the outcome of the public notion that the extent to which sexualised material is harmful should be measured in terms of the amount it 'shows', instead of the message it communicates. The harmfulness of xxx-rated pornography, for instance, is perceived to be more than the harmfulness of x-rated pornography because it 'shows' more. This chapter has suggested that both are harmful, since they represent 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence'. *GQ*, as has been explained, differs from conventional pornography in a number of ways (aesthetically, for instance), but the message that it conveys is essentially the same: that women are objects of sexual pleasure. The extent to which this message is 'harmful' within conventional pornography, is the extent to which it is harmful in *GQ* and other glossy men's magazines. As long as the message is understood by the reader, no matter how subtle or explicit the visuals may be, the 'harm' is done.

Against the backdrop of this recognition that *GQ* represents 'sex', 'subordination' and 'violence', and may therefore be considered 'harmful', the sophisticated aesthetic and naturalising context of the magazine seems more like a disguise for its message of sexual subordination. The following chapter examines how *GQ* maintains its position on the dividing line between obscenity and acceptability; in other words, the manner in which *GQ* presents the appeal of obscenity while assuming the veneer of acceptability.