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**FROM MANET TO GQ: A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION OF
'GENTLEMEN'S PORNOGRAPHY'**

by

ESTELLA VILJOEN

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SUPERVISER: PROF J VAN EEDEN

CO-SUPERVISER: DR AA DU PREEZ

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I declare that **From Manet to GQ: a critical investigation of 'gentlemen's pornography'** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Ms Stella Viljoen

30 May 2003

“This is it then. At last, a classy, intelligent magazine for South African men ... [O]nce you're looking great, real style is about how you choose to live. And which magazine you read”.

Daniel Ford, Editor of *GQ South Africa* (*GQ Millennium* 2000:14).

“For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face”.

Corinthians 13:12

SUMMARY

Title: From Manet to *GQ*: a critical investigation of 'gentlemen's pornography'
By: Stella Viljoen
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Co-promoter: Dr AA du Preez

Summary:

This thesis offers a reading of *GQ South Africa* 2000, the first glossy men's magazine to be launched in South Africa (in 2000). It traces the possible iconographical genealogy of glossy men's magazines to canonical erotic artworks and examines the aesthetic conventions used by *GQ* to elevate its contents through an implied association with art. This thesis, furthermore, investigates the commonalities between *GQ*, a 'mainstream' publication, and 'pornography' (as defined by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance 1985). In this way, the fluid impermanence of 'art', 'pornography' and 'popular culture' as typologies is highlighted. The new taxonomy of 'gentlemen's pornography' is introduced in order to counter the notion that material that has the gloss of 'high culture' and is deemed socially acceptable, cannot be pornographic. This thesis submits that a critical reading of glossy men's magazines from an interdisciplinary perspective is imperative in order to reveal their ideological assumptions.

The ideological position that informs this study is the radical feminist belief that pornography objectifies and subordinates women and is, therefore, harmful. The thesis is simultaneously grounded in the theoretical methodologies of visual culture and art history, and as such assumes the intonation of these disciplines. From a Postmodern point-of-view, popular visual culture not only wields power in terms of generalising (capitalist and sexist) western paradigms, but is also skilful at masking its significant influence in doing so. For this reason, this dissertation endeavours to raise a critical dialogue concerning the ideological 'message' of glossy men's magazines.

The sometimes antithetical nature of discourse critically centered on gender representation in visual culture may be attributed to the pervasiveness of familiar (and therefore seemingly harmless) female

objectification in the popular media. This thesis examines the iconography of gendered stereotypes against the erotic/pornographic, high culture/low culture object/subject binaries, and, furthermore, situates these types in the wider dialectic of 'obscene' (off-scene) versus 'acceptable' culture. The glossy men's magazines that form the interest of this study are a trade situated in the alliance of social elitism and representational control over the female body, and, thus, this thesis marks the point of intersection between consumer culture and the politics of display.

Key terms:

GQ; gentlemen's pornography; representational discourse; erotic; obscene; subordination; gaze; objectification; fetish; tropes of violence and sex; aspirational branding; mechanisms of disguise; aesthetic experience; cultivation; authorship; female empowerment; simulacra.

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LIST OF TERMS¹

Ben-day: “In printing, a process using screens of different dot patterns to produce shading effects mechanically, named from its inventor, Benjamin Day (1838 –1916)” (Elspass 1984:17).

Brand: The market image of a product (such as GQ magazine) or corporation is known as its ‘brand identity’; “[t]he value-creating capacity of the brand has become the subject of much attention in recent years, a point underlined by the fact that there are many investment trusts today that are limited exclusively to companies with strong brands” (Melin 2002:109). Melin (2002:109) comments that in contemporary western culture, the brand is no longer limited to being one of the tactical aids of the product manager in the context of sales, but has a key strategic role in many companies. “A brand can be said to work, among other things, as an information carrier, a guarantee, a catalyst and an image creator” (Melin 2002:110). Aspirational branding, by extension, is the phrase used to refer to brands that are built on the social and fiscal aspirations of their target market.

Femme garçon:² This term is used to refer to a recurring female stereotype within contemporary popular culture. The *femme garçon* epitomises the trend within glossy men’s magazines of fetishistically encoding sexualised women with the gloss of tomboyish sexiness. This stereotype aligns the juvenile naivety of the archetypal *femme enfant* stereotype with the veneer of danger and sexuality associated with the *femme fatale* (see 4.3.3.2).

Gentlemen’s pornography: A term used, within the context of this study, to refer to the manner in which glossy men’s magazines, such as GQ, draw from the visual mythology of canonical erotic artworks in order to legitimise their sexualised content. This phrase includes canonical erotic artworks and contemporary glossy men’s magazines. This problematic conflation is an experimental taxonomy, designed to draw attention to the similarities between these genres, even at the expense of understating their obvious differences. Although the use of the word ‘pornography’ seems to imply that the canonical erotic artworks (such as Manet’s *Olympia*) are pornographic, this is not necessarily the intention of the phrase. Gentlemen’s pornography does not comply with the United States Civil Rights Ordinance’s (1985) definition of pornography and, thus, the term is rather meant to couple elitist ideals

¹ The following definitions represent the manner in which each term is used in this study, and are not necessarily the most accurate denotative descriptions. The definitions represented here are the summation of both acknowledged theoretical positions, as well as the author’s own interpretations. They may, therefore, be nuanced in a convenient manner for this study.

² The terms *femme garçon* and ‘Gentlemen’s pornography’ are coined by the author for the purposes of this study.

and sexualised representation in an ironic manner. The term is not intended to be functional outside the context of this study.

Glossy men's magazines: This is Andrea Dworkin and Catherine A MacKinnon's (1988:138) term for expensive (therefore 'glossy'), up-market magazines aimed at a male readership, in which the content is sexually focussed. It does not include overtly pornographic magazines such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*.

Obscene: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* refers to Chief Justice Cockburn's 1868 delineation of 'obscenity' in order to define 'obscene', namely as "tending to deprave and corrupt" (in Sykes 1976:753). In addition, this term may imply the indecent, lewd, generally offensive or immoral (see Chambers 1992:262; Rembar 1969; Williams 1979:12).

Phallogentric: "[T]he practice of describing things associated with women as if they were deviant from a male norm" (Mills 1995:45).

Pornography: A "practice of sex discrimination which sexualises the subordination of women and which eroticises violence against women" (The United States Civil Rights Ordinance of 1985, in Itzin 1992:435)

Prurient: The word 'prurient', in its application to obscenity legislation, means "tending to excite lasciviousness" (Ginnow & Gordon 1978:29). The words 'prurient' and 'shameful' are coupled in the United States obscenity statute since the 1960s "to focus on material which exploits or caters to unhealthy, anti-social attitudes towards nudity, sex or excretion" (Ginnow & Gordon 1978:29). When this term is employed in this study it is meant to reflect this legislative concern for the general health of society and, thus, also the moralistic tone of most obscenity legislation.

Significant form: The phrase coined by Modernist theorist, Clive Bell in the early twentieth century to refer to the formal characteristics that distinguish works of art and trigger the experience of aesthetic emotion in the viewer (see Werhane 1984:99).

Simulacrum: According to Michael Camille (1996:31), 'simulacrum' as a concept, subverts the dichotomy of model and copy, original and reproduction, image and likeness. Within theories of representation, Camille (1996:31) describes simulacrum as more than "just a useless image, it is a deviation and perversion of imitation itself – a false likeness." The notion of simulacrum, often applied

to Postmodern artistic practises, is useful, within the context of this study, in examining the *leitmotifs* common to canonical erotic artworks and GQ.

Soft-core pornography: In popular terminology 'soft-core' is the term used to describe pornographic magazines that include 'lifestyle' features and are less sexually explicit; the oldest and most successful of these being *Playboy* and *Penthouse*. (Because of their iconic status, *Playboy* and *Penthouse* are occasionally referred to in this study as representative of the soft-core genre. There are, however, many other examples of soft-core pornography magazines). Gail Dines (1995:254) reflects that hard-core pornography magazines "advertise the woman (via the codes and conventions of pornographic representation) as the commodity on offer, whereas [soft-core pornography magazines] offer a 'lifestyle' that involves the consumption of numerous upmarket commodities as a way of capturing the ultimate prized commodity; lots and lots of attractive, young, big-breasted women". Soft-core magazines also tend to represent less sexual violence (and are cheaper) than those referred to as hard-core (such as *Hustler XXX* and *Barely Legal*).

Trope: Deborah Root (1996) uses the term 'trope' (for example, 'tropes of difference' and 'tropes of exoticism') in her discussion of the western consumption of the Other. Root (1996:34) borrows the term from literary theory to indicate a "conceptual mechanism that ... binds together or organizes diverse concepts, symbols, and associations into one idea".

Venus Naturalis: This phrase is used by Kenneth Clark (1956) to encapsulate the practice of representing the nude woman as the personification of nature, thereby justifying her nakedness as 'natural'. Clark (1956:115) cites Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* as the "first great celebration of Natural Venus in Venice" and Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* as one of the last depictions of this type.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aims of study

It can perhaps be reasoned that much of the shock value of explicit sexual representation has been dissipated. As the body politic in western society becomes more politically correct and visually sophisticated, images must be artful in order to seduce convincingly and appeal to a visually literate audience.¹ Thus the trade in 'obscene' (namely sexualised and objectifying) material circumvents the public stigma and snobbery associated with pornography through the invention of a kind of quasi-porn such as glossy men's magazines.² This seemingly new genre of pornography, echoes the entrance of 'soft' pornographic publications (most notably Hugh Hefner's 1953 'men's entertainment' magazine, *Playboy*) into the western market place - a phenomenon Gail Dines (1995:254) refers to as "bringing pornography out of the closet and onto the coffee table". Glossy men's magazines merely mimic this 'tasteful' or 'soft-core' pornography and softens it further to be acceptable to a wider audience.³ The rising popularity of glossy men's magazines in South Africa is all too clear with the emergence of the South African issues of *Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ)*, *For Him Magazine (FHM)*, *Men's Health* and *Maxim* in the last few years, at the time of writing.⁴ The elitist gloss and pecuniary, sexualised nature of all three these publications supports the notion that sex sells – not only magazines, and ideology, but also itself.

The aestheticised objectification of women for an elitist male market is not a contemporary phenomenon. Since at least the seventeenth century, sexualised artworks have canonised the objectified female body as an icon of 'acceptable' sexual representation, thus legitimising the display of female nudity for a selected male market. The glossy men's magazines that form the interest of this study are a trade situated in the alliance of social elitism and representational control over the female body, an alliance quintessential of canonical erotic artworks.⁵ For this reason, artworks

¹ GQ, the focus of this study, does not represent explicit sex, rather it employs what Panofsky (1959:22) terms "judicious pruning" in order to hint at sex without fully representing it.

² This term does not include overtly pornographic magazines such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* (see list of terms).

³ Although broadly analogous to glossy men's magazines, the widely theorised class of soft core pornography such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* is not the subject of this study (for more on soft-core pornography see Dines 1995; Elshtain; Pritchard 1993). In order to emphasise the commonality of 'soft' and 'hard' core pornography, as well as its relation to glossy men's magazines, the conflation of these genres under the general notion of pornography, is often risked in this study.

⁴ The international trade in glossy men's magazines is wide and varied (apart from *GQ*, *FHM*, *Men's Health* and *Maxim* which have South African editions, there are also magazines such as *Loaded* and *Stuff*).

⁵ The polemics of the term 'erotic' are examined in Chapter 2.

such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Manet's *Olympia*⁶ are compared to *GQ*, in order to demonstrate that in both painting and popular magazines, women are objectified for visual consumption.

As an established and reputable publication that brands itself as a "gentlemen's" (hence elitist and exclusive) quarterly, *GQ* forms an apposite site for the investigation of glossy men's magazines.⁷ In addition, the genre of canonical erotic art that consciously or unconsciously informs the iconography of glossy men's magazines, is a seminal component of this inquiry. The object of this study is, thus, to critically analyse *GQ* and the manner in which it draws inspiration from the canonical erotic art of such artists as Titian and Manet.⁸ The link between glossy men's magazines and canonical erotic art is necessarily a contrived one, except for the fact that in both cases female sexuality is generally constructed for commercial consumption by the male. To the extent that *GQ* and Manet's *Olympia*, for instance, are both commodified entities, aimed at an up-market male audience, and are veiled in the ennobling cloak of high culture, they are thus both believed to constitute 'gentleman's pornography'.

This dissertation furthermore proposes a new taxonomy situated somewhere between pornography and erotic art, which implicitly reveals both the 'pornographic' (objectifying, subordinating) and 'erotic' (stylised, intellectualised, 'artistic') strains of glossy men's magazines.⁹ 'Gentlemen's pornography', as the new taxonomy is called, is introduced into the established parlance of sexual representation, to refer to both canonical erotic paintings of women (such as Manet's *Olympia*) and to contemporary glossy men's magazines (such as *GQ*). The aims of this study are therefore:

- To introduce the taxonomy of gentlemen's pornography and, in so doing, investigate the visual and ideological mythology of canonical erotic art from which *GQ* almost certainly draws inspiration.
- To chronicle the historical construction of 'pornography' as a taxonomy in order to expose the ideological sentiments behind this 'judgement', and to strip the legislative concept of pornography down to its 'essential' meaning (*i.e.*, to arrive at the 1985 United States Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography).

⁶ Artworks from before approximately 1940 are referred to since these are considered to be part of the visual frame of reference of glossy men's magazines.

⁷ *GQ* is singled out for both its up-market branding and artistic aesthetic, since both of these attributes are employed to veil the sexualised content of the magazine, thereby deeming it more socially acceptable. (*Men's Health* seems, perhaps misleadingly, too innocuous to demonstrate this connection, while *FHM* seems too lewd.) In this way, *GQ* is akin to many exclusively niched artworks.

⁸ Manet is referred to in the title of this dissertation because of the iconic role of *Olympia* (1863) and *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863) in discourses related to ennobled commodification and sexualised display (see Nochlin 1991; Parker & Pollock 1981). John Berger (1972:63) perceives *Olympia* as a meeting point between the classical tradition of sexualised display (the reclining nude) and the iconoclastic modernity of commercial culture. Manet's *Olympia* is thus emblematic of two primary concerns for this study, namely canonical erotic display and the commodification of sexuality by commercial culture.

- To highlight the commonalities between gentlemen's pornography and 'conventional' pornography (*i.e.*, to suggest that GQ represents sex, subordination and violence, and in so doing causes harm).¹⁰
- To expose and demystify the mechanisms of disguise employed by GQ to ennoble its objectifying practices in the gloss of the artistic; it is suggested that it is precisely this that differentiates its brand identity from that of conventional pornography.

This study rests on the assumption that popular visual culture influences the paradigmatic perceptions, attitudes and ideologies of the society in which it is situated (see, among others, Barthes 1973, 1983; Foucault 1977, 1980 & Berger 1972, 1980). Against the contemporary backdrop of commercially driven visual display, popular culture is experienced more as an omnipotent reality than as an area that needs public control. Social critiques within the powerful arena of sexual representation are particularly tenuous, because of the dialectical role of anti-censorship sentiment versus anti-obscenity discourse. The object of this study is not, however, to plead for more elaborate obscenity legislation, but rather to invoke further critical investigation into glossy men's magazines.¹¹

The author argues in this study that GQ stereotypes and objectifies women, and uncovers the manner in which glossy men's magazines could therefore be considered harmful to society.¹² This study, in other words, aims to demonstrate the manner in which GQ continues to construct and encode the feminine for the recreation and consumption by the male.

1.2 Theoretical framework and methodology of study

The connection between canonical artworks and GQ is the thread that runs throughout the dissertation, thus situating the study within the dual disciplines of art history and (popular) visual culture.¹³ The theoretical framework within which argumentation takes place, is largely related to the discourse surrounding representation, which is a critical concern of both art history and (popular) visual culture. The other theories that could have formed the point of departure for this study –

⁹ The extent to which popular culture and high culture borrow from each other, particularly within a contemporary context, is perceived as largely dependant on the economic incentive motivating such an exchange.

¹⁰ The term 'harm', appropriated from legislative discourse, seems crude in the context of a discussion on GQ and canonical erotic art. Some of the terms used in this study (most notably, 'harm' and 'obscene') may seem out of place because they are appropriated from obscenity legislation. This dissonance, however, serves the purpose of highlighting the 'uncomfortable' nature of comparing visual art, pornography and popular culture.

¹¹ It does not seem like a plausible or constructive goal to prohibit or regulate glossy men's magazines through the law, since this would infringe on the freedom of expression that is generally deemed integral to modern democracy.

¹² This position is not equally evident at all points in the dissertation, since various sides of the discourse must be presented, but is ultimately the goal that validates each idea as it is introduced.

¹³ Figure 1 is a timeline of events, artworks and publications pertaining to this study. Most of the relevant milestones from art history and popular visual culture are noted in this timeline in order to create an impression of the (historical and theoretical) breadth of phenomena integral to the study of gentlemen's pornography.

such as Marxism, formalism, or semiotics – inevitably feature as *leitmotifs* throughout the dissertation, but do not form the primary incentive of the argument. Since the premise of this study is that GQ objectifies and subordinates women, the argumentation is positioned within the anti-pornography politics of radical feminism. This is a fragile, tentative alignment, however, since the tone of this study is not the resolute, decisive one characteristic of radical feminism (marked by figures such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon). The dissertation thus echoes the principles of radical feminism rather than its Dworkinian demeanour.

Specific, key theorists and theories from the relevant disciplines (art history, visual culture, feminist theory, psychology, and to a lesser extent, western legislative discourse) are highlighted in an attempt to form a continuous discursive narrative throughout the argumentation. These theorists have been chosen as much for their seminal status within their fields as for their particular relevance to the study of gentlemen's pornography and GQ. These germinal sources are explicated below.

While they are not art historians, Michel Foucault (1980), Walter Kendrick (1987), and Isabel Tang (1999) have proved invaluable sources in tracing the history of so-called obscene art, and the ideologically loaded categorisation of this within western culture. Similarly, Lynn Hunt's (1993) investigations into the "invention of pornography" provide a point of departure from which this study can investigate the contemporary taxonomy of pornography. Art historians Kenneth Clark (1956) and Marcia Pointon (1990) are repeatedly referred to because of their germane investigations into, respectively, nudity and gender in canonical fine art. The gendered conceptualisation of modernity, fundamental to the Modernist movement, is explored by Rozsika Parker (1981) and Griselda Pollock (1981, 1988, 1992), and exerts a considerable influence on this study.

Linda Nochlin's (1978, 1991) research on gender politics and Carol Duncan (1993) and Lynda Nead's (1982, 1992) writings on sexual representation and obscenity, are the principle discourses drawn from feminist art historical quarters. All three of these authors prove helpful in establishing a theoretical link between the art historical perspectives on canonical fine art and contemporary discourses on visual culture, such as Laura Mulvey's (1975, 1989) writings on 'visual pleasure' in film. In a similar vein, John Berger (1972, 1980) and Deborah Root (1996) are useful because of the connections they make between art and popular culture. Since much contemporary commentary on sexualised imagery is rooted in feminist objections to early Modernist art, the primary relevance of art historical criticism to this study is for the feminist critiques of Modernist artworks. These critiques of Modernist art include the critical analyses of Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1986) and Marsha Pointon (1990) of Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863) respectively.

As mentioned previously, radical feminist authors such as Dworkin (1983, 1988) and MacKinnon (1985, 1993) establish much of the ideological premise of the study. The writings of psychologists such as Peter Baker (1992), Alan Soble (1986) and Catherine Itzin (1992) are employed to substantiate the anti-pornography positions of these feminists, by means of clinical evidence of the 'harmfulness' of sexually objectifying practices. As a counterfoil to the radical feminist position, Camille Paglia's (1992, 1995) pro-sex politics is related in places.

Building on the critical principles of authors such as Roland Barthes (1973, 1983) and Michel Foucault (1977, 1980), contemporary theorists are increasingly raising their voices to question the effects of popular culture in shaping society. Towards this end, authors such as John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman (1997) and Wendy Shalit (2000) are re-evaluating the role of, for instance, modesty in the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. D'Emilio and Freedman question the presumed sexual freedom of contemporary western women, in a world dominated by prescriptive sexualised imagery, while Shalit questions the impact of the sexual revolution on such concepts as shame, modesty and the erotic. This study, similarly, considers the notion of 'modesty' within the representational sphere, from the hallowed gallery spaces and salons of the past two centuries, to the equally exclusive glossy men's magazines of today.

The methodology of this dissertation is, therefore, essentially an interdisciplinary interrogation of visual and textual representations that fall under the phrase 'gentlemen's pornography'. It thus has two broad methodological incentives: firstly, this study is a literature study that tests the argumentation of the dissertation against relevant theoretical texts¹⁴ and secondly, it is a descriptive critical interpretation of *GQ*¹⁵ and specific canonical erotic artworks. No empirical testing of viewer responses is undertaken, and therefore the study rests on certain assumptions and remains speculative and exploratory in nature. Examples of *GQ South Africa*¹⁶ from the year 2000 are referred to in order to ensure that the reader gains a sense of the magazine as a whole (continuity in tone, style, features, and regular contributors), and to show that the examples chosen represent the norm, rather than the extreme.¹⁷

¹⁴ As a critical component of a literature study, certain texts are problematised and de-naturalised.

¹⁵ Diverse theorists such as Terry Eagleton (1980), Sara Mills (1995) and John Fiske (1987, 1989) form part of the pluralistic methodology employed by this study in the analysis of *GQ*.

¹⁶ Each of the *GQ* publications is named after the country in which it is published, hence the title '*GQ South Africa*' appears as the 'header' on each *GQ* published in South Africa. For the sake of brevity, *GQ South Africa* is henceforth referred to as *GQ*, since no other editions are referred to in this study.

¹⁷ Since this study investigates *GQ* as a whole, and not just the more obviously sexualised imagery within the magazine, it may, in places, seem to invert centre and margin. It re-examines images that are well-known and initiates less familiar ones, moving between those made as art and those made as advertisements or sales tools.

The length of the dissertation prevents the author from investigating other areas of popular visual culture that may demonstrate the same characteristics as those of *GQ* (i.e., that objectify and subordinate women under the aestheticised veneer of 'high culture'). Although this is not articulated in the study, the argument may, however, be applied to the broader context of glossy men's magazines, glossy women's magazines, music videos, films and various other examples of popular visual culture. The author, thus wishes to demonstrate how the disciplines of art history and the politics of representation enunciated by (visual) cultural studies can be applied to the investigation of popular culture.

The South African context is not the prime focus of this dissertation. Although issues of race and gender may take on a slightly different sociological slant within different countries (such as the use of black models in South Africa), *GQ* is an international magazine that repeatedly asserts its position in the global village. As such, the content and format of its various editions tends to be fairly standardised.¹⁸ *GQ* is referred to as the primary source concerning glossy men's magazines, but the argument is believed to be a universal one.

1.3 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One has introduced the main aim of the study, namely to critically investigate *GQ* against the backdrop of similar investigations into canonical erotic fine art and legislative definitions of pornography, and has positioned the study within the relevant theoretical frameworks that underpin the investigation. This chapter has articulated the position of the author as being critical of gentlemen's pornography, holding the belief that *GQ* objectifies and subordinates women and is thus potentially harmful to women.

Chapter Two focuses on the politicised process of *defining* pornography, since when sex is being sold, the attention of both legal and academic worlds is implicated. For both legal and academic discourse the interest lies in the term 'pornography', for in order to write about, talk about, prohibit or defend pornography, there must be a definition or a common understanding of what it is. This chapter first traces the historical developments in defining pornography and then the legal problems associated with this process. Some feminist and art historical perspectives concerning pornography or 'obscene' representation are briefly sketched in order to later situate *GQ* within the broader discourse on sexualised representation.

¹⁸ Typically, articles on international figures, such as Richard Branson or Ernie Els, are shared between different editions in different countries, but a more customised local flavour does filter through from time to time.

Chapter Three introduces and explains the concept of gentlemen's pornography as a new taxonomy in sexualised representation. Since the United States Civil Rights Ordinance (1985) is generally thought to have made the first (and most influential) breakthrough in defining pornography legally, its conceptualisation of pornography is used as a platform from which to examine GQ. Four of the key criteria set by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography – sex, subordination, violence, and harm – are explored within the context of gentlemen's pornography and GQ. In so doing, the author postulates that GQ does, to some degree, fit the requirements of the term pornography.

Chapter Four focuses on the fine line between what is publicly perceived to be 'obscene' or 'acceptable'. It also investigates some of the commercial customs and consequences that these nuances imply. Whether intentionally or not, sexualised imagery is often disguised through the use of various tasteful techniques such as the use of text, which softens the impact of the material. By analysing these softening devices, one might arrive at the conclusion that GQ nonetheless objectifies and subordinates women.¹⁹ This chapter investigates these so-called mechanisms of disguise in so far as they are relevant to the consumption of GQ and its acceptability within contemporary society.

The concluding chapter summarises the preceding chapters. It considers the contributions of this study as well as its limitations. Chapter five, furthermore, posits suggestions for further research that have become apparent during the course of this study.

1.4 In conclusion

With the increasing awareness of the ways in which power is lodged and synthesised in dominant forms of discourse, criticism has frequently "caught its own hands in the till and been forced to convict itself of participation in the same or similar conjunctures of knowledge, power and language as it investigates" (Bourdieu 1984:203). There is no neutral ground in the study of pornography. The acts of studying it, collecting it, writing about it, or even condemning it, are not free from the "act of looking that implicates the student, collector, writer, or critic" (Tang 1999:101). The author can only "view culture from within it" (Harris 1971:31), and therefore whatever generalisations are risked for the benefit of lucid and expedient explanation, are made with an awareness of the author's cultural relativity and personal bias. In this vein, for instance, it is difficult to argue the harm of gentlemen's pornography to someone who has never, even in a small way, been seduced by it.

¹⁹ For this reason it is not the intention of this study to examine the role of pornography within culture so much as to uncover its presence, even where it is denied.

The following chapter sketches the broad discourse that informs all discussions on pornography, and forms the framework of this study on gentlemen's pornography. In a sense, this study has failed before it has even started, for by investigating *GQ* and then capturing this process in writing, one is removing the magazine from the very real context in which it is made and distributed (the studio, factory, newsagent, home, and so on). Language, nevertheless, plays a critical role in invoking public awareness and responsibility (in terms of the content of popular culture). In order to stress this role, the emphasis of Chapter Two is on the process of defining pornography that has burdened legislative, feminist and art historical theory during the past century.

CHAPTER 2

DELINEATING 'PORNOGRAPHY'

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

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 Tracing the term 'pornography'

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

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

¹ See Griffin (1981); van Rensburg (1985).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ See Benario (1979).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Foucault (1980) is clearly right in suggesting that the history of the term pornography is the history of western society's relationship to sex, a history of the acceptance or repression of sex. In keeping with this perception, it seems the term pornography was used in the context of the secret museum to indicate that these collections portrayed the deviant¹⁰ behaviour of classical society, rather than to create the impression that this kind of sexual display was the norm of the glorified Roman Empire. The term pornography was, in other words, used more as a social rebuke than a mere anthropological category. In the distinction between acceptability and what Foucault terms, "repression" lies the latent power to condone or discredit, either an individual or a society, on the grounds of sexuality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 Ambiguity in the legal delineation of pornography

Chapters Three and Four employ the definition of pornography, as delineated by the United States Civil Rights Ordinance¹⁸ in 1985, since this is the definition referred to in most discussions on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 Feminist positions on pornography

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The primary objection that radical feminists like Dworkin, Mackinnon, Brownmiller and Joanne Fedler³⁵ have against pornography is that it supports sexism. Alan Soble (1986:150) accordingly argues that “pornography perpetuates sexual stereotypes, undermines the quality of sexual relationships and promotes a social climate in which assault is tolerated.” To this notion Paglia (1995:65) replies,

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

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

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

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

³⁵ See Duncan (1996) and Fedler (2001).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5 Gentlemen's pornography: the prototypes of GQ

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5.1 Significant form and the reclining nude

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5.2 The fetish of the foreign

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.5.3 Who is gazing at whom?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 Conclusion

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

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

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

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 censored 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 ob-
sessional, 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 implausably 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.

CHAPTER 4

GQ: OBSCENITY AND ACCEPTABILITY

Thus I learned to battle the canvas, to come to know it as a being resisting my wish (dream) and to bend it forcibly to this wish. At first it stands there like a pure chaste virgin ... and then comes the wilful brush which first here, then there, gradually conquers it with all the energy peculiar to it, like a European colonist.

Wassily Kandinsky (in Doy 1995:55).

What is a playboy? Is he simply a wastrel, ne'er-do-well, a fashionable bum? Far from it. He can be a sharp minded young business executive, a worker in the arts, a university professor, an architect or an engineer. He can be many things, provided he possess a certain kind of view. He must see life not as a vale of tears, but as a happy time; ... he must be an alert man, a man of taste, a man sensitive to pleasure, a man who – without acquiring the stigma of voluptuary or dilettante – can live life to the hilt. This is the sort of man we mean when we use the word playboy.

Hugh Hefner (in Dines 1995:256).

4.1 Introduction

Since GQ is neither completely 'obscene' nor completely 'acceptable', it occupies a polemical space in terms of the critical discourse that surrounds sexualised imagery. It is partly this ambiguous location that renders it so akin to both the secret museum and the 'erotic' art commissioned by genteel society in previous centuries. Although there were always people who objected to sexualised representations, it is argued in this study that the secret museum, sexualised canonical art, and glossy men's magazine's form an acceptable showcase for material that is often 'obscene' (*i.e.*, objectifying or subordinating sexualised representations).¹ This chapter investigates the tension between 'obscenity' and 'acceptability' that is the defining feature of gentlemen's pornography. The problematic concepts obscenity and acceptability are briefly positioned within a historical and, where possible, legal framework in order to grapple with their meaning. The aim is to suggest that GQ consciously creates visual associations with canonical art in order to veil the obscenity in the magazine in a shroud of ennobled acceptability. In this way, GQ may be delineated as gentlemen's pornography, since it is *both* socially acceptable and 'obscene'.

¹ The term 'obscenity' is used in this section to refer to material that represents sex, subordination and violence, as discussed in Chapter 3. The reason the term 'obscene' is used as opposed to 'pornographic', is because of the former's antithetical position in terms of 'acceptability'. The 'obscene' is a harsh, abrasive term that seems too strong for GQ, and thus it is useful in this context as a word that exposes the harmful nature or effect of GQ, in spite of its seeming social acceptability.

Section 4.2 investigates the concept of 'obscenity' in order to trace the background of contemporary western interpretations of this 'judgement'. This serves as an introduction to the discussion of the notions of mainstream versus margin, 'high' culture versus 'low' culture, and obscenity versus acceptability. The process of 'disguise' that is believed to occur in GQ is examined against the backdrop of mid-Victorian mores, ethics and beliefs, since so much of the discourse surrounding art and obscenity seems to return to that point in western history. The next section (4.3) investigates the manner in which GQ veils 'obscene' content in a cloak of acceptability by, firstly, appropriating the aesthetics of canonical artworks and photography, and secondly, using an intellectualised tone (these mechanisms of disguise are analysed under the terms 'aesthetics' and 'cultivation'). Thirdly, by replacing the clichéd female stereotypes associated with conventional pornography (such as the bimbo and dominatrix) with more seemingly progressive types, GQ legitimises (disguises) the objectifying content of the magazine. In so far as GQ imposes its own two-dimensional constructs, it is argued that the magazine is, nevertheless, derogatory and objectifying (this notion is explored under the appropriation of 'empowerment').

The conclusion to this chapter (4.4) confronts the perception that pornography exists 'outside' of mainstream culture. Since gentlemen's pornography is treated as part of popular culture (and is deemed 'acceptable' enough to be sold in supermarkets and stationery shops, for instance), it may subsequently be perceived to be 'safe' from the negative connotations generally associated with pornography. This section examines the way GQ maintains an air of acceptability while, simultaneously, representing women in a potentially harmful (obscene) way. GQ is, thus, presented as an example of mainstream popular culture that sells harmful (subordinating, objectifying and stereotyping) imagery and content.

4.2 'Obscenity': morality, materialism and Victorian mores

The Victorian fascination with sexuality is marked by two, apparently discrete spaces. The gallery space was seemingly the most public one within which high culture could find expression, and thus by extension, art was a signifier of things lofty or 'high'. The proverbial 'streets' of a city, on the other hand, tend to represent traffic, trade, poverty, the common, and all things plebeian or base. The illicit Victorian trade in obscene materials was fixed in the latter arena, ratifying the perceived polarity between art and obscenity. Nead (1992:25) presents the frame as a metaphor for the 'staging' of art, as opposed to non-art or the obscene. As noted previously, she uses the etymology of the term 'obscene' to cement this tenet – 'obscene', she notes, may derive from the Latin *scene*, literally meaning that which is off, or to one side. Within the Victorian context, the art/obscenity tension signifies that which may be seen, and that which should not be seen. Nead (1992:25) posits that the female nude marks both the internal limit of art and the external limit of

obscenity. The iconographical importance of the nude is, therefore, that it forms the “internal structural link” (Nead 1992:25) that binds art and obscenity and an entire system of meaning together. From a legislative perspective, however, there is little indication of the complex system of intertextual references that may be associated with the obscene.

According to Ginnow and Gordon (1978:29), the authoritative legal definition of obscene material in the United States of America is “material which deals with sex in a manner appealing to prurient interest”. It is furthermore understood that material is obscene if, “considered as a whole, its predominant appeal is to prurient interest, in other words, a shameful or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion, and it goes substantially beyond customary limits of candour in description or representation of matters” (Ginnow & Gordon 1978:29). Various other definitions of obscenity have been rendered by the judicial system (see 2.3), and the term has been used in different contexts, but always with the general sense of meaning “offensive to morality or chastity, indecent, or nasty” (as in *King v Commonwealth*).² Obscenity is often seen as synonymous with the terms “indecent and immoral” (*King v Commonwealth*), or “lewd, lascivious, and indecent” (*Connecticut State v Le Witt*).³ As Ginnow and Gordon (1978:30) point out, however, the concept of obscenity is a fluid one because it depends on the gradual development of generally accepted notions of decency. The definition of obscenity is not designed to embalm the precise morals of an age or place, but rather the understanding of the word ‘obscene’ should mark the contemporary position of that critical point “between candour and shame at which the community has arrived” (*NY-People v Fritch*).

In other words, in much the same way that an understanding of ‘indecent’ requires an understanding of its antithesis, decency, the notion of obscenity is dependant on a shared interpretation of what is acceptable. Gen Doy (1995:72) points out that by the late nineteenth century, “the formulation of medical and psychological bases for bourgeois ‘norms’ of ... sexual behaviour were increasingly developed to extend ‘ideal’ models of sexual behaviour to a wider range of society”. It is possible that a social understanding of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, is not merely an ideological tool, but in fact a warning against ‘harm’. Whether in ancient Greece, Victorian England or contemporary America, in a democratic climate, where the freedom to do, print or publish what one wants is largely protected, ‘obscenity’ as a taxonomy is often dismissed (or frowned upon) rather than respected as a social protector. A shared understanding of obscenity is, nevertheless, closely related to the notion of ‘harm’, since the classification of material as ‘obscene’ may limit its distribution and, therefore, decrease the amount of harm it causes.

² The various quotes from court cases in this paragraph are taken from Ginnow and Gordon’s 1978 restatement of the entire American law (1978:30).

The more pertinent question, for this section, is at which point pornographic or sexually explicit material became known as 'obscene'. This is a question that evokes varying responses, depending on the partisanship of the respective person or group. Cultural theorists and sociologists like Isabel Tang (1999), following the path delineated by Foucault, assert that the understanding of pornography as material that is lewd and licentious (indecent and obscene or likely to deprave and corrupt), is a construct of Victorian fear and repression. Pornography as a category, it is postulated, has its origins in the inception of the secret museum. Following this logic, any argument that implies that *Pan and the Goat* (figure 2) is not pornography, would probably be based on the premise that within the context in which it was made, this sculpture did not carry the connotations of obscenity. The content of the sculpture - whether or not it represents explicit sex, subordination and violence - would not be relevant to such a position. Thus, according to Tang (1999:23-43), no artefact from Pompeii is pornographic, until it is placed in the secret museum. Whether this is the definitive moment in the historical creation of pornography as a classificatory term (*i.e.*, the creation of the secret museum) is debatable (see 2.2); the relevant idea here is that it was at that point in recent history that pornography went 'underground'.

Elizabeth Anne McCauley's investigation of the archives of the Paris Préfecture offers an enlightening glimpse of the prolific trade in obscene materials that was prevalent in nineteenth century Paris (in Tang 1999:109). According to McCauley's research, the pornography trade was clearly flourishing in spite of (or because of?) Victorian prudery. Perhaps when Chief Justice Cockburn (1868) defined obscene material as that which has a tendency to "deprave and corrupt", he did not succeed in abolishing obscene matter, merely moving it off-scene. Foucault (1980:3) reflects that at the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness regarding sex (and thus 'obscenity') was still common in Europe, since there was little need to cloak sexual practices in secrecy. Similarly, language was not regulated, neither was conduct, whether coarse or otherwise, concealed. Foucault (1980:3) remarks that society had

a tolerant familiarity with the illicit, but twilight soon fell upon this bright day, followed by the monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule.

Foucault's rather polarised explanation demonstrates the localising, or privatising of Victorian sexuality, taking it off the streets and into the home. From McCauley's findings it is evident that this was not the reality. Perhaps the most damning feature of Victorian bourgeois practice was not the ideal of mystifying sexuality,⁴ domesticating it, but believing that this might somehow be achieved if

³ The frequent appearance of the word 'indecent' in matters referring to obscenity presumes a common understanding of decency as the antithesis of indecency, further demonstrating the binary positions of obscenity and acceptability in social consciousness.

⁴ The mystification of sexuality is an ideal, which critics such as Wendy Shalit (1999) have subsequently suggested has its merits.

sexuality (whether obscene or acceptable) were repressed. For Foucault (1980:4), silence and denial are the characteristic features of repression, and it is these characteristics that distinguish repression from the prohibitions of penal law: “repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know”.⁵

Some years after Justice Cockburn’s pronouncement noted above, Charles Rembar (1969:492), in his examination of obscenity law and literature, observed, “[t]he long refusal to permit honest treatment of sexual subjects has conditioned a nation of voyeurs”. His statement was certainly true of the Victorians, who visited the *Museum Secutum* in Italy. The idea of the secret museum was so popular that it was appropriated by museums all over Europe, who constructed their own restricted collections, from the *l’Enfer* in Paris to the Private Case of the British Library in London. As already noted (see 2.2), Walter Kendrick (1987:6) explains that only “gentlemen with appropriate demeanour (and ready cash for the custodian) would be admitted to the locked chamber where controversial interns lurked; [In other words,] women, children, and the poor of both sexes and all ages were excluded”.

For Foucault (1980) the relationship between sex and power is characterised by Victorian, moralistic repression. Foucault bases this supposition on the emergence of a capitalist, production-orientated, bourgeois society, precisely that sector who would be allowed into a secret museum. The notion of a capitalist incentive for repression is one that Foucault explores throughout his seminal text, *The History of Sexuality* (1980). Two primary points are used to support this line of thinking: firstly, the fact that the chronicle of sex holds new potential when transposed into the production-orientated era, and secondly, Foucault maintains that sex was perceived as incompatible with an intensive work ethic that would, as such, diminish productivity. Thus, from the materialist position, sexual repression was the buttress of the ruling class.

Foucault’s argument provides some justification for the double standards of Victorian repression that have baffled art historians like Edward Lucie-Smith: whereas sex was forbidden in the streets, it seemed to be perfectly permissible in public galleries (in Tang 1999:66). Lucie-Smith comments on the use of religious subject matter or classical mythology as thinly veiled excuses for nudity or even transgressive sexuality (in Tang 1999:65). These were, seemingly, seen as ‘high art’, and part of ‘high culture’, and therefore became “unquestioned conveyors of suitable culture” (Tang 1999:66). Perhaps it was believed that those who frequented museums were too refined to be

⁵ Tang (1999:111) comments on the continuation of repression in the twentieth century. She notes that, although the trade in pornographic photographs was booming in the nineteenth century, written history has allowed the early pornographic photograph to simply drop out of sight. “Numerous books on photography barely touch on it, or perhaps,

negatively influenced or even aroused by the classical display of the 'erotic'. Foucault might argue that those patrons of the museums were not typically part of the work force, and would, thus, not need the 'righteous protection' of paternalism. Nevertheless, the explicit sexuality of many of the paintings in public galleries could not be denied. The nineteenth century author, Mark Twain, remarked of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538, figure 5):

You enter [the Uffizi] and proceed to that most-visited little gallery that exists in the world – the Tribune – and there, against the wall, without obstructing rag or leaf, you may look your fill upon the foulest, the vilest, the obscenest picture the world possesses – Titian's *Venus*. I saw a young girl stealing furtive glances at her; I saw young men gazing long and absorbedly at her; I saw aged infirm men hang upon her charms with a pathetic interest ... Without any question it was painted for a bagnio and it was probably refused because it was a trifle too strong. In truth, it is a trifle too strong for any place but a public art gallery (in Tang 1999:67-68).

DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was similarly canonised as a work of art in the test case of the British Obscene Publications Act of 1959 (see 2.3). Not only did this ruling establish the concept of the pornographic as something likely to deprave and corrupt, but also implied that the erotic was something more refined minds could enjoy without risk (Tang 1999:13). By the time of the trial in 1961, the primary concern was not the content of the novel, but rather the constituency of its audience. During his summary of the proceedings, Judge Griffith-Jones expressed his concern that the book ought not to fall into the *wrong* hands, a possibility exacerbated by cheap printing methods and public libraries: "[O]nce a book goes into circulation it does not spend its time in the rarefied atmosphere of some academic institution ... it finds its way into the bookshops and on to bookstalls at 3s 6d a time, into the public libraries where it is available to all and sundry" (in Nead 1992:489). The emphasis is clearly on those supposedly more morally vulnerable members of society who might have access to the book in the public sphere. Towards the end of the trial, Judge Griffith-Jones requested the jury to ask themselves the following: "Would you approve of your young sons, young daughters – because girls can read as well as boys – reading this book? Is it a book you would have lying around in your own house? Is it a book that you would even want your wife or your servants to read?" (in Nead 1992:489). The judge's concern with the susceptibility of women, children and the poor reads much like the 'list' of individuals prohibited from entering the secret museum. Only gentlemen were allowed to see the array of licentious artefacts, because they were supposedly "incorruptible" (Kendrick 1987:6), while the poor and women were lumped together as the so-called morally weaker populace. Since the only apparent differentiating factor between wealthy men and poor men is money, the implied reasoning is simple: money equals morality, or at least an immunity to corruption or whatever harm may be conveyed by pornography. Perhaps the logic behind such reasoning is that with financial status comes education and that this, in turn, allows intelligent moral discernment and objectivity. This argument too is a flawed

more accurately, avert their gaze ... They were certainly ... seen and commented upon in the nineteenth century [particularly in countless court cases], yet they have disappeared from view in the twentieth" (Tang 1999:111).

one, since even educated women of high social standing were not admitted to the secret museum, and education hardly equals morality.

Perhaps the opposite logic is also true, namely that if only upper class men may see the obscene, then viewing the obscene may become a rite of passage, separating male from female, and rich from poor. Edward Said (1993:17) places the western male's quest for social status within the discourse of imperialism, and quotes the French advocate of colonialism, Jules Harmand, as saying in 1910:

It is necessary ... to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognising that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. Material power is nothing but a means to that end.

Morality is thus employed as a justification for the procurement and upkeep of cultural, as well as social, hegemony. In this way (and countless others), masculinity and materialism are aligned, in a symbiotic relationship that oddly enough seems to be bolstered by a belief in genteel morality.

The Victorian principle of affiliating morality and integrity with class (and subsequently with gentlemen), is alluded to in GQ, but is likewise a kind of 'empty', aesthetic type. By situating masculinity within a lifestyle of consumption, GQ continues the relational tradition between masculinity and materialism. On the one hand, GQ is filled with articles on testosterone, sexual conquest and extreme sports; on the other, it offers a 'how to' guide to contemporary corporate culture, gendered etiquette, and the desirable accoutrements of the modern man. Subtlety, discretion, and humour create a sense of dignified, 'genteel' responsibility and maturity that seems to recall the Victorian notion of bourgeois masculinity. But the tone of presumed harmlessness in GQ is used to soften the indulgent display of the sexual and the unusual. In this way, GQ functions like a kind of modern-day secret museum, where right of access is restricted to those who can afford it, understand it and enjoy it, without supposedly being corrupted by it. In the secret museum of glossy men's magazines, "the drawers full of phalluses from Pompeii" are replaced with four-page catalogues of breasts of all shapes and sizes (figure 40), and the gaze-inducing, locked glass case is replaced by the restrictive plastic cover, implying that what is inside, is for certain eyes only.

GQ functions on that precarious line between the obscene and the acceptable (and between pornography and popular culture), but maintaining this position in a fast-paced, ever-changing consumer culture involves strategic *trompe l'oeil*. The next section investigates the 'mechanisms of disguise' used in GQ to soften the content and offensive potential of the magazine.

4.3 Mechanisms of disguise: aesthetics, cultivation and the appropriation of empowerment

Quite often, it seems, the general western public perceives material that has made it past the loopholes of governmental or constitutional censorship and into the sphere of popular culture to be relatively harmless. Since *GQ* has been accepted by mainstream popular culture, it might be reasoned, and so many people read it, it cannot be too pathogenic. For the ideological game that is consumer culture, presenting a product as part of popular culture usually means presenting it as generally acceptable to or accepted by society in general.⁶ In other words, disguising the obscene as acceptable is a commercially profitable endeavour.

There are many ways of building the notion of social acceptability into a brand.⁷ In *GQ* this is done in three ways: firstly, by framing the magazine – photography, layout and overall style – in an artistic aesthetic, the explicit sexuality of its tone is softened and veiled. Since art is largely exempt from censorship and social stigmatisation, this association furthers the perception of acceptability. Secondly, appealing to the reader's presumably refined sense of taste – whether in grooming, cooking or choosing a woman – re-emphasises the elitist ideal and aspirational branding of the magazine. Witty word play and erudite intertextuality insinuate a certain amount of sophistication, education, and social status on the part of the magazine's readership. Subtle references to the genteel customs of old (hunting and hand-tailored suits) remind the reader that 'gentlemen' are their target market, and, as the legacy of the secret museum implies, gentlemen are incorruptible.⁸ Thirdly, *GQ* typically reverses the gendered power roles for which conventional pornography is criticised. As previously noted, one of the primary arguments against pornography is that it belittles, disempowers or subordinates women (see 3.3.2). *GQ* apparently counters this phenomenon by presenting most of the women in the magazine as seemingly empowered. These three 'mechanisms of disguise' are examined under the rubrics of 'aesthetics', 'cultivation' and 'the appropriation of empowerment'.

⁶ This statement is a generalisation, but in so far as something is popular (and therefore a part of popular culture), it seems fair to say that it is supported by or acceptable to society in general.

⁷ The term 'brand', as opposed to 'image', is used in this context to imply that the process of constructing *GQ*'s identity in the market place is a strategic and financially motivated process. In an interview with the author, Shaun Couvés (2002), *GQ South Africa's* Marketing Manager at the time of writing, explained that the more socially 'acceptable' *GQ* seems to be in the public perception, the more likely the magazine is to procure up-market advertisers like BMW and Tag Huer. The financial profitability of the magazine, in other words, depends on the gloss of social acceptability inscribed into the brand (see list or terms).

⁸ In saying that it is gentlemen who are their target market, this does not mean that they only cater for a certain social sector. Rather, the magazine becomes a 'how to' guide. Today gentility does not depend on birthright, but on personal branding (in other words a person's occupation, possessions, and image). This is touched on further in section 4.3.2.

Barthes (1977:32-51) believes that there are two functions that linguistic text fulfil to 'support' the visual image. He calls these "anchorage" and "relay". Barthes (1977:32-51) describes all images as polysemous, meaning that "they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others". Anchorage refers to the way in which written language (the caption beneath an image, for instance) directs and limits the reader's interpretation of the image. In a similar, but "lazier" image, written text may be used to *relay* the meaning of the image more clearly. In this case, the text 'supports' images that are already quite limited in terms of their meaning (Barthes uses the example of comic strips to demonstrate the manner in which meaning is relayed). Barthes' theory surrounding anchored and relayed meaning may be extended beyond the image/text symbiosis to include the manner in which stereotypes, codes and myths direct the ideological message communicated by an image (or publication). In GQ the so-called mechanisms of disguise may be seen as "subtle dispatches" that "remote contro[l the reader] towards a meaning chosen in advance", in this case, that of social acceptability (Barthes 1977:40).

Each of the three mechanisms of disguise, employed by GQ, draw from a legacy of already established societal and social codes that anchor and relay the notion of acceptability, while maintaining a sense of the sexually *risqué*. Much like the Orientalist or early Modernist representations of women, GQ relies on persistent visual motifs that occur in visual culture and that carry meaning that is immutable and predictable (*i.e.*, anchored by visual 'tradition'). These motifs may simultaneously synthesise new meaning and relay significations from the past into the present. The manner in which the notions of 'aesthetics', 'cultivation' and 'empowerment' are iconographically supported and manipulated to communicate acceptability, forms the focus of the following section. Each of these concepts is addressed separately in an attempt to uncover some of the 'mechanisms of disguise' that occur in GQ.

4.3.1 Aesthetics

The man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these. To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book have an alien and forbidding air, much like gay equipage, and seem to say like that, 'who are you, sir?' Yet they are all his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession. The picture waits for my verdict: it is not to commend me, but I am to settle its claims to praise.

Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (in Dowling 1996:1).

André Brink (1983:37) refers to the territory on which the private and the social meet as a "highly charged magnetic field". In his essay, "Censorship and Literature" (1983), Brink, himself an artist, ponders the relationship between personal expression and public acceptance. In popular culture, public acceptance is both the purpose and means for existence. The techniques that potentially

generate public approval and popularity are, thus, commercially valuable to all forms of popular culture. As mentioned earlier (see 2.3 and 4.3), the obscene may therefore be disguised as art to make it seem acceptable, since the artistic carries connotations of cultural significance and intellectual worth that, it may be argued, fall under the “public good defence” (British Obscene Publications Act 1959, see 2.2). The process of ennobling contemporary ‘obscene’ imagery or publications is, for example, achieved by associating them (by means of visual or textual codes) with canonical visual art. This section firstly investigates the manner in which GQ, as a form of popular culture, masks its ‘obscenity’ through visually associating itself with the ‘artistic’, and examines the role that the photographic plays in this process (4.3.1.1). Secondly, it examines the manner in which GQ attempts to evoke an ‘aesthetic experience’ in its readers by using stylised sexual representation (4.3.1.2). Finally, it questions the role that ‘beauty’ and the trope of sublimity plays in further masking obscenity in GQ (4.3.1.3). As in the previous section (4.2), these discussions are influenced by eighteenth to nineteenth century western viewpoints on obscenity and acceptability.

4.3.1.1 Art by association: from brushstroke to Ben-day dot

The taxonomy of ‘gentlemen’s pornography’ places GQ in the more socially ‘acceptable’, aestheticised and legitimised domain of erotic art and literature, as opposed to that of conventional pornography, which is popularly associated with a ‘low-budget’ aesthetic and overtly sexualised or ‘base’ subject matter. While GQ brands or positions itself as an ‘aesthetic’ publication (*i.e.*, ‘high’, valuable, complex, abstract and ‘for public good’), conventional pornography is frequently branded by the media as ‘base’ (*i.e.*, low, common, ignoble, crude and abject).⁹ In reality, this distinction is a dubious one, since contemporary conventional (soft) pornography such as *Playboy*, is as aestheticised as GQ, and sometimes offers more in the line of ‘service features’ to legitimise its otherwise sexualised content. It is the difference in the public perception of these brands, however, and not the similarity of their content, which fuels GQ’s brand identity, since public acceptability separates it from conventional pornography (and qualifies it as gentlemen’s pornography). Since this distinction between the public personas of GQ and *Playboy* is more related to image than content, one might assume that this distinction is grounded in the contrary historical backgrounds of gentlemen’s pornography and conventional pornography (see 2.2). This section examines the apparently antithetical styles of early conventional pornography and contemporary GQ in order to unveil the historical paradigms that support GQ’s more genteel, socially accepted and sophisticated brand identity.

⁹ Hollywood frequently employs pornographic magazines in order to characterise teenage males (to re-emphasise the ignominious status of these magazines, they are generally kept under the character’s bed).

The origins of pornography as a linguistic and substantive category are rooted in the secret rooms of art and science, since in art galleries and natural history museums artefacts of a supposedly obscene nature could be silently observed by a select few.¹⁰ Even before the advent of such clandestine spaces as the secret museum, however, public galleries served as a naturalising context for various kinds of things that may be deemed 'obscene'. In an interview with Tang (1999:69), Lucie-Smith explains that the power of an image to sexually arouse is seen to be more relevant to pornography than to art (at least, since the 1900s): "Art and pornography are seen as mutually exclusive, at opposite ends of the spectrum. One is high, contemplative and transcendent; one is low, designed to arouse and base". From a modern perspective, therefore, the paintings of Titian, Delacroix, or Manet are difficult to perceive as anything other than examples of high art, and are therefore the personification of 'high' culture. Such respected artists and artworks are part of the canon of western culture and are, consequently, unquestioned conveyors of worthy, decent, and suitable social signification.

Lucie-Smith, however, counters the notion of the museum as a place of decency and respectability (in Tang 1999:67). He muses that any close inspection of the history of art reveals that art is, and has always been, an outward expression of the transgressive and the outrageous (in Tang 1999:67). Renaissance Venuses, for example, may be overtly symbolic of the transgressive and erotic, but this has been smoothed over by the perceptual framing of the museum. Lucie-Smith comments: "I think that we have a curious kind of consensus in our society to ignore the pornographic content of images which are considered classics" (in Tang 1999:67). As a specific example he highlights the blatant paedophilia and implied incest in Agnolo Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* (1540-50):

I sometimes wonder what those people who lead school parties around the National Gallery actually have to say about this picture. What do they tell the kids? It's deliberately transgressive. Here you have a female nude, Venus, who is about to be French-kissed by an adolescent who is in fact her son. And Cupid's bottom is struck out in a most provocative way: it's almost as if he's offering himself for a sexual act (in Tang 1999:67).

Within the confines of 'art', the 'obscene' and the 'acceptable' thus become likely bedfellows. Presumably this may be related to the sophisticated aesthetic and intellectual complexity that are perceived to be part of the nature of art, or to the supposed ennobling associations of wealth and power that typically describe the custodians of art. The question is whether these associations would survive the iconoclastic technological advancement of the 1800s.

¹⁰ Foucault (1980:51-73) refers to the display of "knowledge of the sexual" within the context of natural history museums as *scientia sexualis*.

When Daguerre introduced the daguerreotype to the public in 1839, he inaugurated the egalitarian age of the photograph. Photography employed (albeit somewhat unconvincingly) the codes of 'high culture' to sell aestheticised obscenity to those who otherwise would have no rightful or natural access to it. Art had been that authoritative arena of discernment and taste that permitted the privileged classes to segregate themselves from the 'lower' classes. The camera lens, however, proved less adept at differentiating the patrician from the plebian, since hypothetically anybody could have access to a camera. The camera thus became an instant symbol of the modern age: the medium's associations with modernity and progress serving as the entrance into the modern economic endeavour of mass representation and mass production.¹¹

As with the paintbrush and chisel, the camera was from the outset subject to ideological positioning. In much the same way that the traditional artistic media had articulated the male gaze, photography became the primary conveyor of the gendered and erotic body (Pultz 1995:7-11). The affect photographic representations had on the general public, however, seems to indicate that the very 'realness' of the photographic medium struck society as signifying the antithesis of art. The precision and detail of each image seemed to push photography beyond the line of decency. Prior to the 1900s, for instance, paintings of nude women usually omitted pubic hair in favour of supposedly modest representations. Photographic images of naked women, not only included discreet references to pubic hair, but even seemed to glory in the graphic display thereof, thus rendering it fetishistic (as opposed to 'merely real'). The realness and rawness of photography made it so seductive precisely because hidden in the 'ugly' (or 'real') details of this medium was the beauty of modernity. The seemingly unmediated aesthetic of photography lent an air of the progressive and the liberal to early photographic pornography.

In light of the progressive appeal of photography, it is ironic that the photographic construction of the feminine during the late 1800s was manifested largely in images that were created with an apparently artistic, rather than a documentary intent (although the line between these two seemed deliberately vague). The seemingly 'artistic' gloss of these photographs was probably more of a strategic business decision than an attempt at creating art; a fact sorely evident in the theatricality of the images themselves (a theatricality that, significantly, still marks much conventional pornography). The earliest nude images in Paris that were, legally speaking, acceptable were the so-called *académies*. These were designed to be artistic aids from which artists could paint the human figure with anatomical accuracy and without the expense of a model. They could, in other words, be legitimately and respectably sold as an *aide-mémoire*. In reality, however, the *académies* were everything but academic, and functioned rather like a kind of justifiable pornography. As

¹¹ Although the daguerreotype was still relatively expensive and could not be mass-produced, it was the first taste of things to come. By the 1850s, the development of the wet plate process made it possible to produce any number of

Abigail Solomon-Godeau comments: "Once you start seeing all these props, the stockings, the garters, the shoes, the jewellery, it's perfectly evident that the body is being coded for its erotic appeal. These are codes that make the viewer aware that this is a body that is intended for erotic consumption" (in Tang 1999:100). By far the majority of photographs that represent naked women employed the symbolic tone of art, presumably to evoke nostalgia in the viewer. This resulted in the often clumsy appropriation of classical visual references such as vases of flowers, pillars and draperies (figure 41). The codes that western art had devised to contain the erotic within the accepted boundaries of art, were now being reproduced at staggering speeds to meet the demand of a growing mass market.¹²

There are two apparent reasons that might be called upon to explain the mimetic stylisation of early sexualised photography. The first is related to the censorship of obscene material. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the primary battles about obscenity were focussed on literature, not photography. The only effective defence, in terms of the law, proved to be the assertion that literary works such as DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had artistic merit, and were thus for the 'public good'. The implication of this ruling for photography was that in order to avoid being labelled obscene, material needed to be redeemed by the more ennobling associations with art and intellect (Pultz 1995; Nead 1992; Tang 1999).¹³

The second factor that possibly instigated the photographic appropriation of artistic codes was the fact that many of the pioneer photographers were motivated in their choice of style and subject matter by the ideal of establishing photography as a new artistic medium. In order to do so, it may have seemed appropriate to gain the status of art, if only by association. At first this was done by means of pretentious titles that often referred to the style or art of a known artist, such as Thomas Eakins' photograph entitled *Nude in Style of Velazquez* (1880, figure 42). Subsequently, the exact composition and subject matter of artworks were reproduced in the photographic medium (figures 43-44). Conventional thinking during the late 1800s and early 1900s suggested that the distinguishing factor between a documentary work and an artistic one was to be found in the style. John Pultz (1995:37) elaborates:

[P]hotographs made as documents are realistic, transparent, and innocent of style; those made with an explicit intention to be art have style, which is tantamount to saying that they are somehow less truthful, less realistic, less factually accurate. They derive

prints from one set of negatives (Tang 1999:95-98).

¹² In the early 1850s, photographers such as Eugène Durieu, Auguste Belloc, Félix-Jacques-Antoine Moulin, and Julienn Vallou de Villeneuve, produced countless photographs of unclothed women (Pultz 1995). According to Pultz (1995:38), the sales figures of the time seem to indicate that it was not just art scholars who bought the *académies*.

¹³ The manner in which the association of intellectuality and class played a role in justifying potentially obscene material, is discussed under the term 'cultivation' (4.3.2).

their meaning less from their accurate transcription of factual reality than from their expressive, suggestive powers.¹⁴

Pultz (1995:39) argues that the particular role of photography in the production of visual pornography is inseparable from the arguments about documentation and truthfulness that surrounded nineteenth century photography.¹⁵ What made nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs of sexualised women pornographic, for instance, was, among other things, their apparent realism.¹⁶ In this section the nuanced differences between 'painterly' sexualised representation and 'printed' (technologised) sexualised representation has been emphasised in an attempt to reveal the differences and similarities between these two mediums in the public perception. The apparently shocking 'realness' of nineteenth century sexualised photography in comparison to its painted predecessors, echoes the (false) contemporary perception that pornography crudely 'shows all', while 'art' subtly arranges and conceals.

GQ mimics the stylised, polished aesthetic of *painted* sexualised representations as opposed to the more explicit yet servile effigy associated with early *photographic* (printed) pornography. By aestheticising, arranging and concealing (*i.e.*, controlling what is 'revealed') the sexualised woman, GQ avoids the explicitness and realness that are the tell-tale signs of conventional pornography (*i.e.*, it avoids being visually categorised as pornography), and asserts its own artistry (in so far as art making is a process of aestheticising, arranging, concealing or revealing).

GQ presents the female subject as both 'real' (*i.e.*, sexually aware and not merely 'blank') and constructed or artistically mediated. In the image of Kristy Hinze (GQ November:42, figure 45), for instance, the classical reclining nude becomes the seated nude, while Orientalist props such as the peacock-feather fan in *La Grande Odalisque* and hibiscus flower in *Olympia* are replaced with a more subtle wolf-skin rug, fingered sensually by Hinze. These affected iconographic devices (equally present in conventional pornography) are subdued and revived in GQ to contribute to the general hue of slick or *aestheticised* sexual difference that is the brand identity of glossy men's magazines. Yet the image is more 'real' than a painting because it is a photograph. The photographic imagery in GQ can, in other words, as Barthes (1981:119) argues, be "mad" or "tame". It is tame in that "its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits"; it is "mad [since] this realism is absolute", and thus evokes "photographic *ecstasy*" (Barthes 1981:119). This

¹⁴ Ironically, in an attempt to capture the expression and style of the master artists, these early pictorialist photographers seemed to overlook the unique and perhaps more authentic style inherent in the medium itself.

¹⁵ The same codes that established photographs as evidence of reality, signified 'real-ness' in the context of sexualised photographs; "pornographic photographs did not satisfy through narrative richness, as had written texts, but by their apparent truthfulness" (Pultz 1995:39).

¹⁶ W Gass refers to the camera as a "disconcertingly literal instrument" (in Hudson 1992:149). Nead (1992:52) explains that the "immediacy and accuracy of the photographic image is invested with a pornographic intent; whereas the abstraction and mediation of artistic methods such as painting and drawing are believed to be contrary to the relentless realism of the pornographic project."

experience is perhaps closely related to C Bell's notion of 'aesthetic emotion', TS Eliot's 'aesthetic pleasure' (see Werhane 1984:100), and the conception of sexual arousal as an emotional *and* aesthetic experience.

Furthermore, GQ uses captions, interviews and recognisable personalities (models and photographers) in each photographic spread, to testify to the 'real'-ness of the photographic set-up. The viewer's recognition of the various parties involved in creating each image, at once ratifies the sense of titillating 'real'-ness and artistic constructedness. In this way, GQ draws from the legacies of nineteenth century photographic pornography and canonical (painterly), sexualised art. The next section traces GQ's appropriation from Modernist photography, as the first photographic genre to be accepted in the hallways of high culture, and thus continues the theme of GQ's aesthetic.

4.3.1.2 *Aesthetic experience and stylised sex*

The 'artistic' may offer some cloak of acceptability (or 'taming' quality in the Barthesian sense) to sexualised representations, but clearly it is an elusive trait to capture; in order to 'fabricate' the 'artistic', one should at least have an understanding of what it is. But what precisely qualifies something as 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' is almost impossible to say. What invokes an 'aesthetic experience' in the viewer is, furthermore, an ethereal notion, which is compounded in its complexity by the fact that popular culture frequently attempts to mimic 'great' art in order to capitalise on this association. The industries responsible for sexualised imagery stand to gain from the association with art for a number of different reasons (legal and financial), and therefore, form the most obvious site for the production or re-production of whatever quality is socially perceived to be 'artistic'. As mentioned above, the general interpretation of something as 'artistic', largely resides in the perceived style of that material, since it is *style* that is typically perceived to differentiate art from pornography.

Since the 1800s, pornography has typically been associated with the tawdry and the tasteless, even when it attempts to imitate art.¹⁷ Art, by contrast, is aligned with 'significant form', originality and modernity, the buzzwords of the *avant-garde*. The best illustration of this alignment is the Purist style that elevated photography to the status of the new artistic medium that Daguerre had hoped it would be. Maholy-Nagy, Man Ray, and Brassai achieved the status of 'art' for their photo-

¹⁷ These associations are not only value judgements, but also material ones, since early pornographic photographs were printed on low-cost (low grade) paper with inexpensive inks that smudged easily. The models and props also had an air of low-cost convenience to them, and indeed police records show that quite often the wives and daughters of pornographers were their models. So ingrained is the association of pornography with the cheap and the dirty, that in the *Chambers Thesaurus* (1992:97) the word pornographic appears as a synonym for the adjective 'dirty' ("dirty – blue, filthy, foul, grimy, grubby, indecent, messy, miry, mucky, muddy, nasty, obscene, polluted, pornographic, scurvy, shabby, smutty, soiled, sordid, squalid, unclean, vulgar, yucky").

graphs by pursuing the Modernist ideals of form, originality and modernity in their celebration of what they termed the 'photographic' (as opposed to the painterly). This new aesthetic involved extreme close-ups that abstracted objects to the point where they served more as embodiments of light, rhythm and form, than of narrative codes. This style soon became encoded with its own semantic ideals of progress, minimalism and the plethora of associations that involve something being interpreted as *avant-garde* (such as artistry and masculine authorship). Nowhere is this style more obvious than in Maholy-Nagy, Man Ray and Brassai's photographs of the female body (figures 46-48). In order to strip the body of its obscene history these artists refused the sexual charge of the mythic gaze and fetishized accessories and, instead, abstracted the body.¹⁸ 'Messy' details (nipples and pubic hair) were mostly omitted, and the intimacy of seeing a naked woman's face was circumvented by cropping or blurring her head. These images were generally perceived to be so tasteful, so effective at communicating style, modernity, and elitism, that the images and aesthetic are still employed in marketing campaigns to communicate precisely these notions.¹⁹ In an ironic twist, even GQ now makes use of the style of Modernist or Purist photography to veil explicit sexuality and convey a tone of sophistication (The GQ 2000 calendar demonstrates this point and is discussed shortly).

GQ can never wholly imitate art, because then it might lose the scent of obscenity ('real'-ness and 'truth'-fullness) that, paradoxically, seems to be part of its commercial appeal. The intention is hardly to mimic a recognisable artwork, but rather to hint at its mythologized tone²⁰ or form and thereby appropriate the signification and aesthetic experience of the artwork. Donald Kuspit (2000) describes this play between signification and understandable mythology as the "dialectic of decadence". Decadence, remarks Kuspit (2000:91), is always with us, a consistent inevitable in art and life, and perhaps most insidiously, in the dialectic between them. He explains that decadence "is an expression of narcissism, a form of self-congratulation and self-glorification ... Decadence is ... a deliberate short-sightedness, making one's art seem more significant, original and ultimate than it is" (Kuspit 2000:92).

¹⁸ Words such as 'aesthetic' or 'stylised' are typically understood to refer to external appearance, thus implying the way in which the artwork or image is *experienced*. The abstraction favoured by the Purist photographers implies a particular aesthetic experience (possibly more reasoned and reticent than the experience evoked by pictorialist photography), which is revisited under 4.3.1.3. It may at this point be noted, however, that, as mentioned previously, abstract art is frequently thought to evoke a more 'abstract' aesthetic experience, while pictorialist art or imagery is thought to evoke a more empathetic aesthetic designed to aid the viewer in "losing [himself]" (Worringer 1967:24). Worringer's notions of 'abstraction' and 'empathy' are helpful in explaining these experiences.

¹⁹ Most notably the Purist or Straight photographic style has been employed in the marketing campaigns of Calvin Klein, BMW and Gucci.

²⁰ The 'mythologized tone' of canonical art is related to the manner in which this art typically relays traces and codes as part of the visual mythology of 'art'. Not all artists make use of these codes, only those that wish to anchor their work in the iconographic traditions of canonical art. Most of the photographic shoots in GQ relay the mythologized tone of these vague, yet familiar codes. This is particularly evident in the GQ 2000 calendar.

GQ hovers somewhere between the acceptable and the obscene, the modest and the decadent. It discreetly appropriates the classical codes of art and the 'artful' techniques of Modernist photography, and commodifies and sexualises these to engender a precarious balance between sexualised images and their aestheticised veneer. The GQ calendar is an example of this. It is a pin-up style calendar not unlike those of *Pirelli* or *Sports Illustrated* but for its affected 'artistic' flair. For the 2000 calendar, twelve *auteur*²¹ photographers photographed a model in their particular signature style. The images in the calendar are very diverse, except for an underlying stylisation. This aestheticised stylistic is perhaps akin to the 'expressive' trope of early attempts at photographic art, when photographers were swayed by the idea that the artistry of an image lay in its expressive style. The element that is, subsequently, most important in terms of communicating *artistic* sexual representation²² in the calendar, is the ease with which each image draws from the canonical "language of desire" (Mulvey 1975:8).

The January pin-up is Lucy Liu, a popular icon of aggressive sexuality and self-righteous sarcasm inscribed by her role in the 1990s soap opera, *Ally McBeal* (figure 49). Her usually sleek Asian hair is teased out to an unkempt coiffure. The wildness of her hair and eyes ostensibly contradict the modesty with which she covers her breasts. Liu is situated in a landscape and pose reminiscent of a Pre-Raphaelite painting.²³ Despite this setting, she reminds one more of Munch's provocative Madonnas than placid Pre-Raphaelite beauties. (In particular, Liu is positioned much like Munch's lithograph, tellingly entitled, *Sin* (1901), figure 50).²⁴ Noelle Hoeppe's February photograph (GQ 2000, figure 51) continues the early Modernist tradition (seen in the works of Matisse, Gauguin and Picasso) of raising the woman's arms, presumably for the sake of 'significant form', and obscuring her face (figures 46-48). As in Hoeppe's version, Modernist Purist images of the female body are photographed without hands, feet and distracting backgrounds, so that the body's contours become a pure expression of line and form. In contrast to the simplistic minimalism of the February shoot, the March pin-up is more overtly sexual (figure 52). The model stares directly at the viewer in the classical syntax of sexualised odalisques, simultaneously confident and self-aware.²⁵ Her pubescent appearance and the modesty with which she covers her genitals are in stark contrast with the loud neon tones projected onto her. The subversive tone of the image – the

²¹ The term 'auteur' is used in this context to connote the authorial renown of these photographers. The term is appropriated from the *politique des auteurs* or auteur theory, conceived by Francois Truffaut in relation to film in the 1950s.

²² Whether the images in the GQ 2000 calendar are art or not is not the point. The images merely need to be perceived as 'artistic' in order for the magazine to differentiate itself from conventional pornography. Imagery that simultaneously represents the sexual and the artistic is typically described as 'erotic'.

²³ The landscape behind Liu associates her with Clark's (1956:115) notion of the *Venus Naturalis* (see list of terms).

²⁴ These are merely some of the connections that may be 'relayed' through this photograph. The convoluted intertextuality of the images in the GQ calendar could be teased out *ad infinitum*.

²⁵ Just like Manet's Olympia, Caitlin, the March model "appraise[s] while being appraised" (Hudson 1982:105) (see 3.3.1.1).

model is, after all, represented as both childlike and sexualised – is reminiscent of Munch's *Pu-berty* (1895, figure 53).

The April image of model and actress, Milla Jovovich, seems deliberately nostalgic in its appropriation of the 1920s flapper-style shift and shoes (figure 54). The contrast in light and dark created by her luminous body against the dark background is typical of 1920s experimental photography. The photographer Peter Lindbergh, unlike the Purists, however, accentuates the sexual through the classic codes of the pout and nipple. Her raised arm and draped shift are trademarks of the Greco-Roman nude. Hence Lindbergh succeeds in showing just enough of her body to excite the viewer, while not breaking the semblance of sophistication.

For the June pin-up illustrator Mats Gustafson represents the fine arts (figure 55). In this image the model touches herself and throws back her head in ecstasy. Once more, the emphasis falls on her torso, and not on her face, possibly in order to elevate the image to the status of art. August and October revert to the typically Modernist black and white medium and each makes use of the experimental techniques of pioneer photography. Koto Bolofo's photograph (figure 56) for the August pin-up, refers to the plants and flowers used by early photographers to create a diversity of shapes and shadows, like the photograms of Francis Talbot. Bolofo presents the female body as an expression of nature as feminine; the body thus becomes a landscape, the contemporary extension of the *Venus Naturalis*, in much the same way that Man Ray and Brassai represented it (1933, figure 57).

The most obvious appropriation is photographer Albert Watson's image for December (figure 58). It seems unlikely that Watson was not deliberately paying homage to Man Ray's renowned *Prayer* (1930, figure 59). Watson, however, aptly exchanges the serene nakedness of Man Ray's image for a pair of lacy knickers and stiletto heeled shoes, both black.²⁶ In each of these aestheticised pin-ups, as in Manet's *Olympia*, the male viewer is reminded of the "traditional boundary between the artistic and the literal world of their everyday appetites and curiosities which they are now in a position to breach" (Hudson 1982:107). The images do not breach it themselves, they merely allude to the possibility (Hudson 1982:107). In the GQ calendar, the assertive stare (January), black pubic hair²⁷ (February), sexualised innocence (March), representation of the female body as 'significant form' (June and August), and pornographic fetish (December), "resonate on one another, and combine to shift the luckless spectator from a posture of comfortable immunity to one of

²⁶ Not all of the images in the GQ 2000 calendar are quite so 'artistic', some are quite obviously designed to refer to the codes of conventional pornography (well endowed models and tacky props in full colour). The juxtapositioning of such contrary images is quite typical of the general genre of glossy men's magazines and would, thus, not seem too strange to the viewer. Some of the more overtly 'kitsch' or 'common' pin-ups will be discussed later (see 4.3.3).

²⁷ Berger (1972:55) writes, "[h]air is associated with sexual power, with passion", and thus it functions fetishistically.

choice and risk” (Hudson 1982:107). In so far as these codes represent the ‘language of desire’, they are both specifically meaningful and well disguised.

In GQ itself, images generally appear to be less overtly ‘staged’ and more ‘naturally’ aesthetic than in the more openly contrived arena of the calendar. The aesthetic of GQ presents a paradoxical pose that pretends to be unaffected, while being artfully composed. The ‘natural’ settings such as the beach (figure 60) and the home (figure 25) contribute to the authenticity of the aesthetic (as opposed to the more contrived backdrops and sets of pornography). Colour is arranged with cohesive integrity, taste is sophisticated and subtle, with occasional witty intertextuality.²⁸ Furthermore, whereas in pornography models often seem to be left ‘as they are’, in GQ models are obviously retouched, improved on, and aesthetised, reminding the viewer that the female has been ‘made’, constructed and artfully authored by a male figure. Much like Ingres’ *La Grande Odalisque* (1814), whose elongated spine testifies of her made-ness, the images (and women) in GQ are constructed to stimulate an aesthetic experience, and in so doing possibly revel in the constructedness of the trope of beauty.

4.3.1.3 *The bold and the beautiful*

It is possible that the western ideas of the beautiful and the ugly are simply an extension of the ideological mechanism of subjection.²⁹ An obvious consequence of the exactness of early photography, for instance, was its inability to idealise convincingly. In spite of props and gimmicks, the blemishes and imperfections of the represented figure were difficult to disguise. According to Tang (1999:106), “[i]nstead of alabaster skins, there were blemished ones; instead of idealized limbs, there were awkward, foreshortened ones; nymph’s breasts would be replaced by disappointing real ones.” “As ugly as a daguerreotype” reputedly became a common phrase (Tang 1999:106). One writer lamented regarding photographic ‘nudes’: “They seldom or ever include any female who approaches in the remotest degree to a Venus” (in Tang 1999:106). Roman Catholic commentator Louis Veuillot commented in *Les Odeurs de Paris* (1867):

I am talking about the simple offence to the eye. The assemblages that aren’t content to have ugly faces, most to the point of abjection; they are at the same time generally and in diverse ways extremely badly built; knock-kneed, heavy yowled, potbellied, bent over, bony, impudent and gauche, knowing neither how to walk nor stand up (in Tang 1999:106).³⁰

²⁸ In the beach shoot with supermodel Heide Klum, for instance, horizontal and vertical lines are simply juxtaposed in a beautifully aesthetic composition that celebrates the female form (figure 60). The only vibrant splash of colour is the red triangle of her bikini bottom.

²⁹ The ‘beauty’, in so far as this is a culturally agreed upon phenomenon, of a GQ image (including the model, milieu and style of the image), for example, seems to play a significant role in determining whether this image may be read as art.

³⁰ The question is whether Veuillot’s objections were blackened by superciliousness. Photography embodied not only an aesthetic revolution, but also a social one, or as Matthew Arnold (1869:117) expressed, “the assertion of personal liberty”. More than this, photography heralded a shift in societal connections, it heralded the vulgarisation of visual media

Although current conventional pornography may be more polished, the ideological connotations of baseness and 'ugliness' (or aesthetic crudeness) persist in the social consciousness (see 4.2). GQ separates itself from these associations through an almost obsessive preoccupation with perfection, evident in the many 'plastic', touched up, perfected women that adorn the magazine and might be described as 'beautiful' (precisely because they are less 'real').

GQ's reliance on western codes of sensuality and beauty make the magazine seem beautiful in a generally agreed upon, even universal, sense³¹ – an assumption that can perhaps be traced to earlier moral and aesthetic theories that claimed that the capacity to respond to beauty is universal (Burke 1990:104). Umberto Eco (1986:57) explains this in the context of the Medieval understanding of Neo-Platonic beauty as ethereal rather than material.³² The most obvious and pervasive symbolic representation of the kinship between godliness and beauty was thus light. The perception of light as the embodiment of "theophanic harmony, primordial causes, [and] of the Divine Persons", in Eco's (1986:57) words, is complemented by the archetypal understanding of evil and subversion as dark.³³ When the first mainstream pornographic magazines came out, the overriding atmosphere of the photographs was dark. This may simply have been the result of unsophisticated technology, but soon dingy lighting became synonymous with the clandestine. By contrast, GQ goes out of its way to create a 'lightness of being' so to speak. With the exception of the occasional thematic shoot, most of the photographs are deliberately made light (figure 61).³⁴ GQ is hardly a conscious attempt at conjuring a Medieval appreciation for light as spiritual, but the images seem to want to create a metaphorical link between beauty, goodness and harmlessness.

The role of the aesthetic is obviously different today in a commercially driven materialist culture, than in Medieval and Victorian times. Beauty in a purely metaphysical or spiritual sense was typically perceived as investing meaning in the beauty of objects, whereas, in contemporary culture, the opposite is true. Nowadays, feeling, sublimity, and emotion are stimulated by objects and images and an ever-ready consumer culture is anxious to invest in whatever product will stimulate, most effectively, the desired

and, therefore, such representations were tainted with the 'common'. The notions of class and aesthetic elitism are addressed under the term 'cultivation', in the following section (4.3.2).

³¹ It is difficult to prove empirically that GQ attempts to be art. But, when paging through an issue of GQ, one cannot help but be struck by its aesthetic: the layout, composition, choice of fonts and colours, and models are all 'beautiful'. Although beauty is a subjective and relative concept, it seems fair to say that the images being referred to coincide with contemporary western notions of what is tasteful, and therefore may be described as beautiful.

³² Eco (1986:57) credits John Scotus Eriugena with providing the Middle Ages with a formulation of metaphysical symbolism, and subsequently invoking the belief that God manifests Himself through earthly beauty. Eriugena wrote, "[i]n my judgement there is nothing among visible and corporeal things which does not signify something incorporeal and intelligible" (in Eco 1986:57). The belief that beauty is ethereal is still evident in contemporary popular culture. A typical manifestation of this notion is the ironic beauty pageant mantra, that beauty 'shines' from within.

³³ When Lady Macbeth calls on the "forces of darkness" no further association of evil is needed. Nor does the threat of Luke Skywalker turning to 'the dark side' need clarification.

³⁴ In this image lightness is connoted by the studio backdrop and lighting, the mirror-like sculpture and McGregor as an 'Aryan beauty'.

emotion.³⁵ In most cases, the more acute and impassioned (and even antithetical) the sensations roused by a product, the more likely it is to sell. For GQ, the challenge is to differentiate itself from the predictable promises of conventional pornographic magazines by offering a layered (subversive, contradictory, complex?) range of exciting and empathetic encounters. From the designed-to-attract cover to the lucrative back page advertisement, the GQ reader may in one issue expect to feel confidence, camaraderie, trust, lust, envy, greed, aggression, and control. The implication of GQ's antithetical emotional charge is that the seeming complexity of the magazine's content further serves to mask its commodification of women. The potentially varied responses that the magazine evokes (lust and insecurity, for instance) may even fool the reader into seeing the magazine as less stereotypical or more truthful. Terry Eagleton (1980:155), however, remarks that "in one interesting sense, literary texts never 'mean what they say' because they are fiction". In the same sense, GQ creates a realistic (trustworthy?) fabrication, while benefiting from the status of being artfully constructed. Like Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1863, figure 12), GQ is realistic in style, imaginative in content, and perceived to be aesthetically authored.³⁶

Intimately related to the question of reality or truth in aesthetic composition is the gendering of aesthetics, and in particular the notion that woman conventionally signifies abstractions such as Truth and Justice. (Rampley 2000:78).³⁷ The allegorical significance of the woman as a symbol of Truth has significant bearing on Modernist aesthetic theory that involves a so-called 'masculinisation' of aesthetics, as opposed to the so-called 'feminised' (empathetic or emotionalised) aesthetics of the spectator. In so far as this archetypal 'feminising' of the audience is related to the level of empathy or sensational emotion that the viewer may experience in looking at an art work, the feminine, according to Rampley (2000:78) functions as a metonym of Truth. In other words, the feminine presence (or an aesthetic association therewith) impacts on the viewer's perception of the relationship between art and truth. Pornography, typically, utilises a so-called 'feminised' (loud, hysterical, uncontrolled, messy) aesthetic to heighten the sense of reality (truth), and therefore sensationalism with which the images are received.³⁸ GQ opts for a so-called

³⁵ See Root (1996:37-38) for an examination of the trope of sublimity (and exoticism) within contemporary advertising.

³⁶ In *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, Manet employs a 'realistic' (or naturalistic) style. The 'insertion' of the naked Victorine Merand into the otherwise conventional picnic scene, however, disrupts the suspension of disbelief in the image, thereby reminding the viewer that what they are seeing is 'plastic' (made, authored) art. Through this Brechtian technique, the image gains a kind of Surreal or imaginary tone.

³⁷ Warner (1985:xix) investigates the female form as an expression of "desiderata and virtues". She theorises the manner in which gendered difference ("aligning the female with carnality, weakness and nature, with 'womanishness', and the male with spirituality, strength, and mind or reason"), is established in the iconography of western visual culture (Warner 1985:63). Warner's articulation of archetypal 'womanishness' may be extended into the notion of aesthetic style. In the context of western representation, hence, a more 'organic', curvilinear style and 'emotionalised', sentimental subject matter has gained the archetypal signification of femininity, whilst a more angular, geometric style and empirical or political subject matter has gained the association of being 'masculine'. There is little justification for this gendering of representational style other than to reinforce hegemonically motivated sexual difference. What follows is the author's application of Rampley and Warner's positions to the particular stylistic found in GQ. The idea of a 'masculine' or 'feminine' aesthetic is not one supported by the author, but is nonetheless helpful in identifying the strategic incentive that might underpin GQ's seemingly superficial (random) stylistic veneer.

³⁸ So effective is this process that, initially, pornographic daguerreotypes were thought of as too accurate, realistic or 'ugly', as mentioned previously.

masculinised (weighty, controlled, reticent, cognitive) aesthetic that, like *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, places the feminine, as a symbol of truth, within the framework of the masculine.³⁹

For Barthes (198:21), photography is about *affect*, “the ‘pathos’ of which, from the first glance, [a photograph] consists.” Spectators explore photography, “not as a question (a theme) but as a wound” (Barthes 1981:21). The man-made image cannot be created independently from man’s desire, repulsion, nostalgia or euphoria, and for this reason it frequently invokes empathy. The varying degrees to which photographs may affect or excite viewers, account for the difference between conventional pornography and GQ. Conventional pornography, according to Barthes (1981:41) is unary: “it emphatically transforms ‘reality’ without doubling it, without making it vacillate”, it is “completely constituted by the presentation of only one thing: sex”. The manner in which pornography simultaneously evokes empathy and restricts the duplicity of that empathy, is tied up in its unary nature. The banality of conventional pornography is related to this, “‘unity’ of composition being the first rule of vulgar ... rhetoric” (Barthes 1981:41). GQ, by contrast, may, because of its elevated aesthetic and cognitive tone, be equated with Wilhelm Worringer’s (1967) notion of ‘abstraction’.⁴⁰ The appeal of elitist signification is that it affords the viewer distance from the concerns of pedestrian life. GQ is not, however, without affect; the reader’s responses to the magazine are presumed to be cognitive and reasoned aesthetic experiences, as well as empathetic ones. The glamorous *mise en scène* and canonical aesthetic codes thus serve as the articulation of the vision and desire that define GQ, what Chantal Ackerman calls “*la jouissance du voir*” (the ecstasy of seeing) (in Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis 1992:182).

This section examined the aesthetic code used by GQ to elevate its contents through an implied association with art. GQ’s artistic or stylised *savoir faire*, it was argued, not only obscures the obscenity of the magazine (through its association with art), but also heightens the empathetic experience of the reader, thereby mimicking ‘aesthetic experience’. The cheap paper, make-shift studios, bad lighting, home-made props and ‘street-corner models’ that were initially the repercussions of a commercial endeavour that wanted to cut costs, are now the constituent code of the

³⁹ Foucault further endorses the relationship between the aesthetic and the ideological (in Pultz 1995:9). For Foucault there is no vantage point from which one can make an objective observation; all perspectives (even those described as ‘truthful’) are affected by power (in Pultz 1995:9). If interpretation and power are indivisible, then the ‘knowledge’ or emotive understanding invoked by a photograph cannot be disinterested, purely cognitive, or neutral. Rather, the knowledge or emotion evoked by an image comprises what Antonio Gramsci calls an “apparatus of ideology” (in Pultz 1995:9). The stylised aesthetic of GQ may, in other words, be perceived as ‘neutral’ by the reader, but is in fact an effective hegemonic tool.

⁴⁰ Wilhelm Worringer (1967) theorises the principle of ‘abstract’ or ‘empathetic’ aesthetic experience, phrases he uses to distinguish the Classical/Romantic aesthetic dialectic. Although an unusual connection in terms of this study, Worringer’s binaries are helpful in explicating the manner in which conventional pornography (empathetic) and glossy men’s magazines (abstracted) are thought to employ opposite aesthetic styles. The notion that an ‘abstract’ aesthetic evokes an abstract response in the viewer and an empathetic aesthetic an empathetic response, links with the polarised conception of a masculine and feminine aesthetic. GQ capitalises on the stereotypical assumption that men are more reasoned and spiritual (abstract) and that a masculine aesthetic, therefore, evokes a more abstract response in the viewer. This connection serves to distinguish GQ from conventional pornography, which traditionally employs a more sensational or empathetic (‘feminine’) stylistic. ‘Abstraction’ and ‘empathy’ are used to explain the interpretative strategy of GQ as opposed to that of conventional pornography in the following section (4.3.2.1).

pornographic. On a superficial level, the public seems to determine what is and is not pornographic, based on the aesthetic of the material they are confronted with. The ostensible difference between what is typically deemed to be 'pornography' and what is, for instance, considered to be 'fine art', may in effect be a difference in medium: the distinction between a painting and a mass-printed publication (a difference that might be described as the contrast between the brushstroke and the Ben-day dot).⁴¹

The sexualised imagery in *GQ*, however, embodies the best of both worlds, for in a sense it assumes the aesthetic language of the arts, while being printed and sold *en masse*. The sophisticated mien of *GQ*, which is the bedrock of its brand identity, serves to disguise the otherwise pornographic content of this magazine. In a sense, *GQ* is the 'high art' of the pornography industry, an area of relative sophistication in a vast landscape of kitsch. The following section examines the way 'knowledge' and the ambitious register of *GQ* function to enhance the aspirational branding of the genre, ultimately leading the reader to perceive *GQ* as 'acceptable'.

4.3.2 Cultivation

"I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think"

Barthes (1981:21).

Cultivation, like beauty, is a relative term that is socially constructed and, therefore, varies in meaning, depending on the context and user of the term. In the context of this discussion it is used, in the absence of a better term, to refer to the gloss of 'cultivated', 'reasoned' and 'cultured' intelligence that *GQ* seems to employ in constructing its brand identity. This sense of 'cultivation' encapsulates the notions of class and cultural distinction, and serves a two-fold function in *GQ*: firstly, a cultivated tone is helpful in distinguishing *GQ*'s brand identity from that of pornography, which is generally not perceived to be part of 'high' culture.⁴² Secondly, since 'cultivation' (being informed) is an asset in corporate culture, a cultivated brand identity may attract readers to *GQ* who hope to gain cultivation from reading the magazine.

⁴¹ Even today, the distinctions of 'high art' and 'low art' are present. Art in a photographic or printed media rarely fetches the same prices as the canonical mediums such as oil on canvas. In South Africa, galleries are hesitant to book photographic exhibitions because the public is apparently less likely to buy photographic art. Gallery owner and curator Michelle Nigrini (2002), speculates that this might have something to do with the public perception of 'art' being equated with painting and sculpture.

⁴² The trope of 'cultivation' is also referred to by (soft-core) conventional pornography magazines to differentiate themselves from so-called hard-core pornography, which does not employ these 'softening' devices. *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, for instance, are not simply made up of sexualised photographs but also include 'service' features on luxury products, interviews with celebrities, film reviews, cartoons, short stories (often by notable authors), and advice columns (Dines 1995:255).

The advantages of being perceived as 'cultivated' are, in other words, considerable, both for the reader, who may be striving for self actualisation and status, and for the magazine, which depends on the perception of cultivated content for its brand identity, as well as a mantle for the 'obscene'.⁴³ What exactly defines a person or publication as 'cultivated' is perhaps less dependant on how much they actually know, for this is difficult to prove, and more on the societal codes that communicate culture, informed-ness and status. It is, thus, not necessary for GQ to be 'really' cultivated, whatever this may mean, in order for it to reap the benefits of a cultivated brand identity, it can merely appropriate the gloss of cultivation as it exists in high culture. The process by which GQ might be defined as belonging to a cultivated genre is the subject of this section. Since this process is rooted in societal structures and paradigms, it seems a fitting start to examine the modes of communication that are believed to exert a powerful influence on societal paradigms.⁴⁴

It seems a fair claim that every culture tends to be greatly influenced by its dominant forms or modes of communication. Neil Postman (1982:264) builds on this assumption, with his further assertion that such modes of communication will have their greatest impact on the *intellectual* habits and predispositions of a people. In other words, the concepts of knowledge and patterns of thinking most prevalent in a society, are guided by the forms of communication in which that society is immersed. A pertinent example is the intellectual impact of the printing press on the western mind. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, literacy virtually disappeared. With the return of literacy in the sixteenth century, its impetus was so far-reaching that within the span of a hundred years it "helped to break apart the monopoly of the Catholic Church; it enlarged the concept of individualism; and it nurtured the growth of nationalism, capitalism, and inductive science" (Postman 1982:264). As a gateway to enlightenment, literacy itself (and not just literary material) became imbued with the signification of light, truth, and cultivation. This conviction had converse implications too, since it gave rise to the credence that illiteracy is tantamount to immorality. Enlightenment society, in general, had such a high regard for informed-ness (equated with cultivation), that it perhaps perversely imbued knowledge with moral sanctity (Scruton 1998:21-27),⁴⁵ a persuasion demonstrated in secret museums all over Europe.

Secret museums catered for wealthy male gentlemen with the understanding that this population was somehow exempt from moral debasement. With the advent of photography and the mass printing of pornographic photographs, the face of pornography changed – it was now a product aimed at the so-called working class male. With the change in its market demographic, the 'obscene' stepped out from under the socially acceptable cover of intellectualised art and cultural

⁴³ The manner in which 'cultivation' cloaks obscenity is explained in this section.

⁴⁴ McLuhan (1964), Murphy (1977), Postman (1982) and Stevenson (1995) reflect on the social impact of modes of communication.

⁴⁵ Hence, Kant defines Enlightenment as "mankind's exit from self-incurred immaturity" (1784:58).

heritage. The pornographic was no longer something to be 'appreciated', but rather something to be consumed. This conception of pornography as a general consumable, and of high culture as something to be appreciated by a cultivated few, is still evident in contemporary western culture. In a contemporary context, *GQ* reinstates the principle of the secret museum by displaying the pornographic to men who are supposedly not susceptible to its corrupting influence. Presumably, this 'immunity' is because the up-market readership of *GQ* are associated with maturity, knowledge and worldly experience, what might be called the reader's 'cultivation'.

Based on his investigation into language and knowledge, Arthur Bentley (1935:141) comments that "[n]othing is found that can safely be taken as wholly independent of knowledge or of experience or of fact or of language". To show that *GQ* presents itself as a medium for the *sophisticated* consumption of obscenity is only possible once the strategic communicative systems between the 'writer' and 'reader' are revealed. According to Bentley (1935:143), cultivation (maturity and knowledgeability) is evidenced or made manifest, wherever there is an organising of experience through linguistic means or, as in *GQ*, it may be evidenced in the visual. There is no set standard of knowledge or cultivation required to purchase *GQ*, or even to enjoy it. Nor does this imply that only ignorant men buy *Penthouse* or *Hustler*. Rather, the assumption is that in order to assume an air of acceptability, *GQ* presents itself as a cultivated, knowledgeable text, the thinking man's magazine, or what John Storey (1996:76) calls, "quality press". Quality press is a term coined to represent that sector of published material that sees itself as the antithesis of popular culture and the popular press. In other words, the 'serious' newspapers, magazines⁴⁶ and journals that target upper middle-class markets as opposed to the tabloid press that are typically associated with 'blue collar' readers. (Whether this is truly the demographic that they reach, is irrelevant.)

The distinction between so-called quality press and popular press is a vague one that generally serves the populist or 'anti-elitist' (so-called low culture) cause of those who bemoan 'commercialism' and 'vulgarity' (so-called high culture) (Gripsrud in Storey 1996:75). The distinction is, however, a classificatory device that is quite useful in demonstrating the way *GQ* is marketed toward an 'elitist' audience.⁴⁷ Figure 62 is a comparative table that in a simplified manner compares the essential characteristics of 'quality press' and 'popular press'; it is loosely based on the assumptions of Peter Dahlgren (in Storey 1996), John Fiske (1989), and John Storey (1996), although slightly modified to the visual genre of *GQ* and 'traditional' photography. The obvious assumption is that *GQ* fits into the category of quality press, while pornography is more likely to be considered

⁴⁶ The earliest 'glossy', 'quality' magazines were *Life*, *Time* and *National Geographic*. Today magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *George*, *De Kat*, and arguably *GQ*, also form part of this category.

⁴⁷ Most glossy magazines, including *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, are marketed towards an upwardly mobile audience, since the disposable income of this group attracts high-paying advertisers.

as popular press.⁴⁸ This is, in fact, not entirely true, for in so far as these are actually separate categories, GQ is more likely to fall within the classification of popular press than quality press. In part this is because of the visual and commodified nature of the magazine, but it is also related to the lack of critical articles in GQ. In other words, GQ creates the impression of being quality press (glossy pages, high profile journalists, etc.) so that it can be considered acceptable (and charge more per magazine), but the actual content of the magazine is light-weight and escapist, and never really challenges mainstream ideology (in the manner that quality press is supposed to).

What is of interest here, is simply this process of pretence or mimicry that allows GQ and other such magazines to pass themselves off as 'quality' fare aimed at an informed, elitist (*i.e.*, 'cultivated') male market. The functioning of GQ is dependant on so-called aspirational branding that encourages the reader to feel he is gaining entrance into a privileged social order, a class where artistry and authorship shroud the obscene. In order to do this, GQ appropriates many of the textual, semantic and visual codes of the quality press and, by means of this, quite convincingly coaxes the reader to interpret it as 'quality' and, therefore, secure from the accusation of the obscene. The charge that popular culture impersonates and, subsequently, strips or debases high culture is an expected one, since popular culture has, from its inception, drawn from the canonised catalogues of high culture (usually because of an economic incentive), and as a result has been blamed for bastardising high culture (Gans 1974:27).⁴⁹ This process of 'bastardisation', nevertheless, continues in a consumer culture eager to gain the gloss of informed-ness, but not prepared to spend the time becoming informed. It thus makes sense that in an egalitarian free market economy, the new 'aristocracy' would not depend on cultivation passed down from generation to generation, but on cultivation sold over the counter.

Storey's (1996) dissection of quality versus popular press is valuable to this study because of its effectiveness in unveiling the perceived polarity between popular culture and high culture, and the manner in which GQ capitalises on this perception in order to 'disguise' its operations. The following section examines some of the typical differences between quality press and popular press and demonstrates the way GQ appropriates the codes of quality press in order to be perceived as such. Since the distinction is largely dependant on public perception, the first aspect that is considered is the interpretative process that these contrasting texts require.

4.3.2.1 *The interpretative process*

⁴⁸ The secret of *Playboy's* success, however, is thought to be related to Hugh Hefner's insistence that it be marketed as a "quality" magazine (in Dine 1995:255).

⁴⁹ Incidentally, the opposite is also true; high culture has been known to turn to popular culture for its inspiration, the most obvious examples being Pop Art, and a great deal of Postmodern culture.

A lucid summation of the interpretive processes of the 'quality' and popular presses possibly resides in Worringer's linguistic devices 'abstraction' and 'empathy'. Whereas the 'quality' press generally aims to present information with an air of objective detachment, a kind of abstraction, the popular press typically hopes to appeal to their readership through a sense of self-identification, personal involvement, and empathy. Peter Dahlgren identifies two "modes of knowing": the analytic mode is marked by "referential information and logic" and is the preferred methodology of the 'quality' press, while the storytelling mode is defined as such because of its narratological configurations, which provide coherence via enplotment (in Storey 1996:75).⁵⁰ While all journalism aims to communicate information about the world, there is a stylistic difference between those publications that present information with apparent objectivity and those that encourage subjective involvement. Even when both make use of a "storytelling continuum", the form that these stories might take will differ (Dahlgren in Storey 1996:75). For Colin Sparks the intrinsic discrepancy between popular and so-called 'quality' press resides in the popular press's mobilisation of the 'personal' as an explanatory framework (in Storey 1996:76). In a study of news values, Sparks found that even when the popular press and the 'quality' press report on the same story, the treatment of these narratives is always different:

[Whereas the] 'quality' press presents a fragmented picture of the world in which the construction of coherence and totality is the work of the reader, the popular press embeds a form of immediacy and totality in its handling of public issues. In particular, this immediacy of explanation is achieved by means of a direct appeal to personal experience. The popular conception of the personal becomes the explanatory framework within which the social order is presented as transparent (in Storey 1996:76).

GQ involves its readers personally by addressing them in the first person or including them in a collective 'we' (amongst other things). The style and register of its articles, however, presumes a wide understanding of certain subjects without which the reader would find it difficult to construct meaning. In this way, GQ mimics the deciphered readings of quality press, as opposed to the 'found-truths' implied by the readings of popular press. An article in GQ (Millennium 2000:172-173) on the "virgin father", Richard Branson, opens with a quote from poet Henry Longfellow. Although Branson is undoubtedly an icon of popular culture, the article attempts to locate him "within a framework that contain[s] different kinds of information and knowledge" (Sparks in Storey 1996:76). The reader is invited to interpret Branson within the larger context of capitalist enterprise, commercial adventurism and literary ingenuity. Subsequently, the reader is navigated through the decipherment of a supposedly objective argument, a process typically associated with quality press.

⁵⁰ This section (4.3.2.1) is primarily based on Storey's (1996) discussion of the popular and quality presses. The authors quoted in this section are, therefore, referred to as they appear in Storey in order to avoid the assumption that the connections between these authors (Connell 1992, Fiske 1989, 1992, Dahlgren 1992, and Sparks 1992) were made by the author of this study.

The position that Fiske (in Storey 1996:77) takes towards the popular press is that “popular culture is potentially and often actually progressive”, but not radical. The distinction between progressive and radical, Fiske (in Storey 1996:77) explains as follows: “[p]opular texts may be progressive in that they can encourage the production of meanings that work to change or destabilise the social order, but ... they can never be radical in the sense that they can never oppose head on or overthrow that order”. Fiske differentiates the popular press from what he calls the official press and the alternative press and notes that it is despised by both (in Storey 1996:77). He adds that the popular press operates on that precarious line between public and private, and describes its tone as “sensational, sometimes sceptical, sometimes moralistically earnest; its tone is populist; its modality fluidly denies any stylistic difference between fiction and documentary, between news and entertainment” (Fiske in Storey 1996:77).

Fiske’s examination of the popular press starts from Stuart Hall’s allegation that the central political division in late capitalist societies is the ‘opposition’ (in Storey 1996:77): “[t]he people versus the power-bloc” is apparently a “shifting alliance of the forces of domination” (Storey 1996:77), which finds expression in and through public bodies such as the media, cultural industries, government, and the educational system. The ‘people’ also form a shifting alliance, and are always defined in terms of their historically specific opposition to the ‘power-bloc’ (Storey 1996:77). Fiske’s claim is that the official press or quality press articulate the interests of the power-bloc in a top-down flow of information (in Storey 1996:77). In this manner, he argues, the official press yield the information and knowledge necessary to ensure the maintenance of the prevailing structures of power (in Storey 1996:77). But, more significantly, the official press or ‘quality’ press produces what he calls a “believing subject”, and for Fiske (in Storey 1996:77-78), this is one of the most salient differences between the quality and popular press:

The last thing that tabloid journalism produces is a believing subject. One of its most characteristic tones of voice is that of a sceptical laughter which offers the pleasures of disbelief, the pleasures of not being taken in. This popular pleasure of ‘seeing through’ them (whoever constitutes the powerful *them* of the moment) is the historical result of centuries of subordination which the people have not allowed to develop into subjection.

In the presentation of “the opposition between popular knowledge and power-bloc knowledge”, in other words, “it is the opposition, not the knowledge itself, that matters” (Fiske in Storey 1996:78). For GQ, the incentive is quite different. It may use the language of the popular press, but instead of aligning itself with the ‘people’ by employing a tone that challenges or ‘sees through’ the power-bloc, it avoids this kind of distinguishing characteristic, and in so doing is affiliated with the power-bloc, by default. The popular press, by contrast, impugns the normalising ‘reality’ of the power-bloc, by, for example, the stock-in-trade stories of the rich and famous falling from grace:

Above all what these stories do is mount a populist challenge on privilege ... while these stories articulate neither a coherent political philosophy nor strategy, their splenetic outbursts do have, however, important political impact. What these stories do is bash the 'power-bloc' – or those representatives of it, whose attributes and actions can be most meaningfully represented for their readers (Connell in Storey 1996:80).

GQ incites an entirely different mentality in terms of the rich and famous. Rather than poke holes in the near perfect effigy of celebrity, GQ purports to chronicle the ascendancy of those who epitomise worldly success. In each issue of GQ detailed articles on burgeoning dot commers, millionaire golfers, and the fortune five hundred, function as a veritable manual on how to gain power and privilege. The form and phraseology of GQ is such, that it at once deifies power and privilege, *and* makes it curiously accessible.⁵¹ This is accomplished by including readers in the seemingly trivial aspects of privileged life, thus allowing them to feel 'in the know', or 'cultivated'. The voyeuristic wardrobe details of 'successful' men, frequently noted in GQ are, for instance, symptomatic of the capitalist philosophy that power and privilege are as much about the packaging of a product as the product itself, and therefore require the right know-how in order to construct the right look. A single issue of GQ may include articles on how to make money ("5 Ways to turn R1 000 into 100K", September 2000:104-105), Olympic boxers ("Smack it", September 2000:108-113, figure 37), the Mercedes V6 SLK and Springbok Mark Boucher (GQ September 2000), and Tom Cruise ("The Last Tom Cruise Story You'll Ever Need to Read", September 2000:132-137, figure 66).⁵² Clearly, this is not a magazine that "bash[es] the power-bloc" (Connell in Storey 1996:80); instead, GQ sexualises it.

One of the idiosyncrasies of a glossy 'quality' magazine that projects a kind of sexualised materialism is that the distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' (and this is a subtle distinction), is also implicitly a distinction between those who are sexually 'successful' and those who are not. GQ is rarely crude enough to flaunt the private details of a celebrity's romantic history; for the most part, articles on dot com millionaires or champion boxers focus on, for instance, business strategy and personal incentive. It must be said, however, that the glamorous photographs, powerful fonts and sexy use of colour (black and red have virtually become part of the branding), create an unmistakable air of power and masculinity (figures 37, 39, 64, 66). Coupled with the evoca-

⁵¹ There are a number of articles that demonstrate this in the September issue of GQ. The first, a spread called *Kids in the Picture* (GQ September 2000:18-19, figure 63), introduces seven of "Hollywood's Young Guns". The brassy young celebrities are apathetically positioned on black leather loungers in what appears to be a private screening room. In front of them leggy women are arranged with a little less apathy – the reader is never told *their* names. The image is altogether indicative of mounting dominion. Further in the magazine three South African 'dot com' millionaires are interviewed. Stylised photographs and overbearing quotations accompany each interview (September 2000:36-41, figure 64). A few pages on Emmanuel Lediga is spotlighted under the standard feature "GQ Success" (September 2000:56, figure 65). The by-line reads: "He was the first black dealer on the JSE and co-founded its first black-run firm. All before the age of 30. Here's how." Below the rise-to-fame success story is an insert entitled "Status symbols"; these "symbols" seem to evince Lediga's success: "Car: Bottle green BMW 328i; Suits: Only wears Armani, Dash, Versace, and Hugo Boss ..."

⁵² The caption to his photograph boasts: "Paid R140 million up front for *Mission: Impossible 2*, Tom Cruise can give anyone the finger and smile" (figure 66).

tive, sexy images of almost naked supermodels that dominate each issue, wealth, power and cultivation are masculinised and included in the trope of sexual difference. In other words, those 'in the know' will be financially *and* sexually powerful.⁵³

For every GQ insert and article, experts such as couturiers or sex columnists are consulted to lend authenticity and credibility to a suggested style or action. The affect of this technique, combined with the informal, often funny, and inclusive tone of GQ is a very marketable balance between abstraction and empathy, or between quality and popular press. Ultimately, GQ presents the ideal as attainable, and therefore offers a passage from popular culture to privileged culture. But it is a process that relies heavily on how successfully the sophistication or artistic integrity of the magazine is communicated. As in the arts, the credibility of GQ's style (read: know-how and 'cultivation') is largely conveyed through the notion that aesthetic sensitivity is 'authored', which is discussed in the next section.

4.3.2.2 *Aesthetics and authorship*

In reality, the popular press is not always as 'cheap' looking or tasteless as is often supposed. Quite often, the popular press makes use of high grade paper and full colour photographs that are just as glamorous and contrived, if not more so, than that of the 'quality press'. There is, however, a greater sense of immediacy in much of the rhetoric of the popular press. In order to heighten the sensationalism (and empathy) that the reader experiences, tabloid newspapers and magazines tend to situate stories in as immediate a situation as possible. Therefore, photographic shoots in such publications will rarely create the impression of meticulously constructed settings, rather the preferred aesthetic seems to be one in which props and costumes appear to be assembled at the last minute. The most blatant example of this is the back page spread of most pornographic magazines, which typically feature the 'home-made' pornography of its readers. Occasionally an entry will seem quite professional or even subtle in its aesthetic, but usually the photographs are garishly home-made, particularly in the lack of professional lighting (and models) and the assortment of make-shift props. It is the awkward immediacy of these images that makes them seem so real, so pornographic.

Instead of constructing images that are as 'real' as possible, like those found in conventional pornography, GQ aspires to capture or construct images that are 'ideal'. In much the same way that the 'quality' press relies on general knowledge or awareness in the reader, GQ draws from a leg-

⁵³ Even coincidental support for this principle creates a demand for instructional inserts that equip the reader for the acquisition of power and privilege. Hence, 'how-to' inserts range from advice on how to pick a suit (Millennium 2000:38 figure 67), and how to shave (September 2000:69), to advice on how to give a massage that "makes for easy access and friendly intercourse" (September 2000:92-97).

acy of classical art historical codes, that will be more accurately interpreted with prior understanding or knowledge. This does not mean that the images in *GQ* cannot be 'understood' without a *priori* knowledge of high culture; it simply means that the images hint at grand narratives and canonised artworks that in turn lend credibility to *GQ*. These hints and traces may merely be sensed without being consciously understood, but will still sufficiently communicate the message of the artistic. In the *GQ* calendar (2000) one does not, for example, need to know Man Ray's *Prayer* (1930, figure 59) in order to appreciate the combination of abstracted artistry and blatant sex-appeal communicated by the December pin-up (figure 58). Prior knowledge of the original is hardly mandatory, it merely contributes to the amount of pride (and cultivation) that the viewer might experience in appreciating the image.

The manner in which *GQ*'s layout, page design and typography repeatedly allude to famed design trends is another example of its intertextuality. The December "I am a Man" article on testosterone, effectively hints at the iconography of Russian Constructivism in the place of potentially incriminating ('macho') photographs (*GQ* December 2000:156-160, figure 39). Even if the viewer is not familiar with this movement, the readership of *GQ* is presumably visually literate enough to pick up on the connoted sense of strength, power and masculinity implied by the clean, uncomplicated aesthetic of Russian Constructivism. Comparable to this example, an article entitled "100 Ways to be a Gentleman" places the icons of genteel status – a pinstripe suit and leather briefcase – in Mondrianesque blocks adjacent to the text (*GQ* November 2000:128-139, figure 68). Whether every reader would immediately recognise the relevance of employing the aesthetic of the Modernist de Stijl style to 'frame' a 'how to' article on class, is doubtful, and perhaps irrelevant. More important is the fact that most readers would almost certainly recognise the image as a reference to some or other art movement or artist, and would quite possibly make the subconscious connection between appreciating (or even just recognising) art and 'class'.⁵⁴

Analogous to the use of familiar design, 'authorship' is employed to reiterate the credibility of the publication and challenge the range of the reader's knowledge and subsequent cultivation. What in this study is referred to as 'authorship' is not merely the acknowledgement in *GQ* of specific journalists, photographers, interviewers and other contributors (a practice frequently 'forgotten' by the popular press), but the actual featuring of famed authors to such an extent that the emphasis actually falls on authorship itself. The cult of the male 'genius', iconic of Modernism, is in some small way reincarnated by the 'quality' press of the twentieth century. Within this trade the name below the by-line is as *de rigueur* to the understanding of the article as is its closing argument. In every 'quality' publication ideological positioning frames meaning, and therefore understanding. The extent to which this process differs with the popular press (and it is only a matter of degree) depends

on the scope and depth of the reader's understanding, for it is this which dictates how an article or author will be 'read'.

Every issue of *GQ* calls on four new 'contributors' who bring their own renown and credibility to the particular issue. But, just in case their names do not speak for themselves, *GQ* provides a reminder of who they are just below or adjacent to the editorial.⁵⁵ The Millennium issue's contributors are Michael O'Neil – New York based photographer for *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Time* and so on; Amanda Gowing – former fashion editor of *GQ United Kingdom*, now fashion director of *GQ South Africa*; Shaun Johnson – Managing Director of *Independent Newspapers Cape*, former editor of, amongst others, *The Sunday Independent*, author of award-winning bestseller *Strange Pays Indeed*; and best-selling author and broadcaster Tony Parsons – the highest paid columnist in Britain (Millennium 2000:15). The various contributors lend an unmistakable air of authenticity, class and authorship to the magazine, making it somehow seem more 'above board' and acceptable. There are no 'nobodies' in *GQ* – every model, stylist, and journalist is credited, and as with most 'quality' publications, the regular contributors gain a familiar persona in the mind of the reader that again emphasises authorship, and thus the 'quality' or acceptability of the magazine. Whereas the popular press makes use of narrators and photographers who are "in touch with the goings-on of the elites, but who are [not] at one with them" (Connell in Storey 1996:81), *GQ* seeks out authors, editors, aesthetes, and photographers who are the embodiment of privilege and power.

Storey's (1996) analysis of 'quality' and popular press is not that far removed from Barthes' notion of what he calls "readerly" and "writerly" texts (and readings) (in Fiske 1989:103). For Barthes, readerly texts are relatively closed texts with fixed meaning that are generally easy to understand and are undemanding of the reader (in Fiske 1989:103). In contrast to this, writerly texts invite readers to engage in the construction of meaning (rewrite meaning), and critically search for wider frameworks within which to locate meaning. The readerly text is the more accessible and popular; the writerly the more complex, *avant-garde* and therefore exclusive in appeal. *GQ* does not wholly fit into either of these categories, but rather seems more suited to a third, appropriately christened by Fiske (1989:103) as the "producerly" text. The category of the producerly, he argues, is needed to describe the popular writerly text, a text whose reading is simple and predictable, yet also open to enlightened negotiation. Fiske (1989:104) further comments: "The producerly text has the accessibility of a readerly one, and can theoretically be read in that easy way by those of its readers who are comfortably accommodated within the dominant ideology ... but also has the openness of the writerly. The difference is that it does not *require* this writerly activity". *GQ* is perhaps most

⁵⁴ See Berger (1972) for more on the relationship between art, advertising and class.

⁵⁵ The same technique is employed in *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* (also *Condé Nast* publications).

suiting to this 'producerly' category because it both willingly surrenders itself to popular production and by its own admission strives to be a classy, thinking man's magazine (Ford in *GQ Millennium 2000*:14). In this way, *GQ* is the ultimate amalgamation of quality and popular press, writerly and readerly texts, high culture and popular culture. It is the perfect Postmodern medium for disguising the obscene in the perceived respectability of 'enlightened' interpretation (in the Kantian sense), aesthetics, and authorship.

Gentleman's Quarterly is not the only magazine that ennobles or disguises pornographic content in a lofty brand identity (*Playboy* was the first magazine to do this), but it is possibly the best example of the producerly text, because of its unabashed attempt at maintaining the social privilege and power of those who deem themselves 'cultivated', while offering instruction in terms of style and etiquette to those who aspire to be considered as such.⁵⁶ Through the authoritative 'voice' of *GQ* (discernible in the tone of articles, interviews and photographic shoots), privilege and power become accessible commodities available to all *GQ* readers. Control, authorship and power are, thus, masculinised by structuring the tropes of sex, exoticism and difference within commercial culture. *GQ* may represent women as consumables and its readers as (discerning) consumers, but in so far as consumer culture is considered 'acceptable' (within the western psyche), *GQ* too is perceived as acceptable.

Through the discussion of 'interpretation', aesthetics and authorship, this section has focussed on the manner in which *GQ* markets 'cultivation'⁵⁷ as an upper-class value and asserts its own cultural worth as a plea for 'public good defence'. Another mechanism of disguise is the manner in which women in the magazines are markedly represented as being power-full. This pretence of gendered empowerment is intimately related to both the aesthetic of *GQ* (4.3.1) and its claim to 'cultivation' (4.3.2), and is examined more closely in the following section.

4.3.3 The appropriation of empowerment

The history of western power relations reads, to some degree, like the history of the representation of the female body. Hunt (1991:2) argues that, in a very literal sense, the exclusive reproductive capacity of women involves the female body in the transmission of power to the extent that its presence in art and literature has, throughout history, been multivalent. In a more metaphoric

⁵⁶ Articles such as "100 Ways to be a Gentleman" (November, 2000:128-139), indicate *GQ*'s own awareness of its function as a conveyor of class and social etiquette. The article includes such advice as: "Invest in double-cuff shirts" and "Doors: Push – you go first. Pull – she goes first". In this article too, recognisable figures are called upon to define a gentleman by their standards. Helmut Lang muses, "A gentleman is a man in the best sense: traditional, but modern and unafraid".

⁵⁷ The 'cultivation' represented in *GQ* is largely commercial - it tells readers "what to wear, eat, drink, read and drive, how to furnish their homes, and listen to music, which nightclubs, restaurants, plays and films to attend" (Dines 1995:257).

sense, the power of the image of women in art and literature is, thus, in all probability, directly related to women's exclusive reproductive ability and the semblance of control that they appear to exert over consensual sex.⁵⁸ Subsequently, the notion that women, by implication, exert some control over male sexual pleasure is a constant theme in western culture from the Classical Greek comedy *Lysistrata* to the 1980s radical feminist mantra, "a woman's body, a woman's right".⁵⁹

GQ enters the contemporary world of Postmodern politics with an acute awareness of the political sensitivity concerning female empowerment. In this climate, obscenity takes on the 'new' meaning of political incorrectness and thus GQ must seem progressive to be 'acceptable'. If GQ is to brand itself towards a 'cultivated' readership (even if only in appearance), then clearly it cannot subordinate women in any obvious or overt way, since the subordination of women would be antithetical to a brand identity that purports progressive idealism as part of its modern, urbane appeal. Added to this concern is the fact that, as has been mentioned previously (see 2.3), the primary complaint against conventional pornography is the manner in which it stereotypes and subordinates women. For all of these reasons (to protect its progressive brand identity, appeal to readers who perceive themselves as 'cultivated', and avoid the taint of being labelled 'pornographic'), GQ, once again, seems to take its cue from canonical erotic art, which in many cases simultaneously 'glorifies', objectifies, and subordinates women in a manner that is frequently deemed acceptable.

In Manet's *Olympia*, for instance, Victorine Meurand is simultaneously represented as a "pagan goddess" (Paglia 1995:59), the flowers and jewellery in the painting serving as the indicators of male adoration, *and*, by her canonical reclining pose and formulaic nudity, is stripped of her 'real' personhood.⁶⁰ In this ironic way she is represented as a symbol of abstract meaning, an archetype of sexual 'empowerment', a process that simultaneously 'strips' her of her 'real' qualities and ennobles or disguises the sexualising of her body. In Manet's painting, *Olympia* is, thus, simultaneously 'glorified', objectified and subordinated.

Although GQ imitates the layered and antithetical representation of women expressed in Manet's *Olympia* and other canonical artworks, it also draws from more seemingly simplistic stereotypes such as the *femme fatale* and the *femme enfant*. The mythic iconography of these stereotypes was especially established during the Romantic period, when art and lit-

⁵⁸ The notion of sexual 'consent' is deeply related to the empowerment of women throughout western history and is addressed later in this section (4.3.3.2).

⁵⁹ It is debatable whether the notion of female control over male sexual pleasure is a fetishistic stereotype or whether it is justifiable (see Dworkin 1983). The point, however, is that it is a recurring theme throughout western visual culture.

⁶⁰ The 'real-ness' of a representation is a subjective and problematic interpretation that brings with it a plethora of related concerns. In so far as some representations are more stereotypical than other, however, it seems fair to say that certain representations may be more 'real', meaning less two-dimensional or simplistic. This notion is related to the discussion of GQ's representation of women as artificial or plastic-looking in Chapter Three (3.3.2.3).

erature (in particular the gothic novel) seemed to thrive on the polarised interpretation of femininity presented by these sensational sources. The booming 1950s cine-culture (in Europe and the United States), furthermore, propagated these types, ostensibly knitting them into the fabric of filmic narrative codes, and thereby ratified the *femme fatale* and *femme enfant* in the public psyche.⁶¹

Panofsky (1959:24) notes that the modern day stereotypes of the “Vamp” and the “Straight Girl”, derivatives of the *femme fatale* and *femme enfant* stereotypes, are in effect the continuation of the medieval personifications of the Vices and Virtues. According to Panofsky (1959:24), the “fixed iconography” of such types results in an uncomplicated ‘reading’, largely “without the complications of individual psychology”. The mythic motifs that Panofsky refers to, in other words, serve as indicators that inform spectators how they should interpret the characters in visual texts, whether they be girl bands or men’s magazines. This deeply encoded history possibly explains the mythic status of such obviously banal personas (as the Vamp and Straight Girl) in an era seemingly of gender sensitivity and political correctness.⁶²

Since the sexual revolution (1960s) at least, however, the types of the *femme fatale* and *femme enfant* have been merged, complexified and adapted in order to seem more like ‘real’ (individual) women.⁶³ In conjunction with this process, the gloss of female empowerment has emerged as a significant trend in popular culture. The last decade, in particular, has seen an increase within popular media in seemingly ‘empowered’ female stereotypes. These characters are, however, mainly two dimensional and represent a polarised perspective on ‘good’ and ‘evil’, a notion compounded by the fact that most of these personas originate from comic book characters.⁶⁴

Similarly, images of women in *GQ* are constructed to represent women in an empowered, ‘progressive’ position, since this may be more acceptable to their audience and because, in this way, their objectification (subordination?) is shrouded. Presumably to avoid the tone of female subordination, *GQ* (whether consciously or not), therefore, appropriates the so-called empowerment of women as it appears in the popular media of the past decade. In so doing, *GQ* endorses the idea

⁶¹ This section jumps between art historical, filmic and photographic codes that are all integrated in the network of gender constructs that have contributed to the encoding of the ‘Girl Power’ stereotype. In so-doing this section is guilty of a kind of historical leap-frog.

⁶² ‘Mythic’ and ‘banal’ are concepts that do not easily coincide, but to the extent that mythic types are reproduced *ad infinitum*, they become banal.

⁶³ The representation of ‘real’, less stereotyped women is evident in the ‘art-house’ films of many diverse contemporary directors such as Woody Allen (for example Annie Hall in *Annie Hall*, 1977), James Ivory (Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room With a View*, 1986) and Jane Campion (Ada in *The Piano*, 1993).

⁶⁴ These stereotypes seem to be indelibly linked to youth culture, therefore the most graphic examples are from media aimed at a young (often pre-adolescent) audience. Filmic types include *Tank Girl* and *Lara Croft* (originally from a computer game), while television has produced an abundance of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* spin-offs. The music industry has also capitalised on a youth culture apparently desirous of ‘empowered’ women with female acts such as Britney

that female empowerment is ultimately about taking control over female sexuality, and indeed sexual desirability. In supposedly trying to represent women as sexually assertive (and empowered), the magazine represents them as sexually attractive or desirable (to men), two separate notions that are always (confusingly) synonymous in GQ. The problematic conflation of sexual empowerment and sexual desirability informs the general construction of femininity in GQ.

Susan Brownmiller (1984:19) describes the ideal of fetishised femininity as “physical vulnerability that is reassuring (unthreatening) to men”, thereby echoing the sentiments of diverse feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (first wave feminist), Simone de Beauvoir (second wave) and Laura Mulvey (Postmodern feminist) who have bemoaned the culturalised limitations implied in western notions of femininity (such as restrictive clothing and ‘feminine’ behaviour). GQ, apparently aware of the taboo of representing women as vulnerable or reticent, opts for the more liberal (contemporary and politically correct) stereotype of women as sexually assertive. This precept is examined in this section with regard to two different, yet complementary, gendered ‘types’ that GQ has surely appropriated from popular culture.

The first is a patronising stereotype, which is the personification of the ‘Girl Power’ phenomenon. Although a pro-active, seemingly ‘empowered’ persona, ‘Girl Power’ is dressed in the mythic regalia of the *femme enfant* to neutralise the threat of ‘castration’ that she might otherwise pose. In terms of an archetypal underpinning, this stereotype, in other words, leans towards the notions of goodness and virtue as embodied in the *femme enfant*. The second type seems to be the contemporary reincarnation of the *femme fatale*⁶⁵ and is repeatedly portrayed as GQ’s ‘ideal woman’ (or ‘feminine ideal’). The *femme garçon*, as this type is termed in this study, is the embodiment of popular culture’s fetishised fascination with ‘tomboyishly’ sexy women. The *femme garçon*, in other words, is a hybrid (or mutant) form of the *femme fatale* and *femme enfant* stereotypes since she is both a fatal seductress (*i.e.*, sexually assertive), and emotionally child-like (impetuous, spoilt, boyish).

Each of these ‘types’ is examined with relation to their historic construction in the broader context of visual culture, and in their current form within GQ. (Stereotypical connotations such as vanity and consent are frequently implied in the images and articles in GQ and are therefore briefly explained where relevant.) Visual examples are used to justify the presence of these stereotypes in GQ. For the sake of brevity, these female types are encapsulated by the terms ‘Girl Power’ and ‘*femme garçon*’. Thereafter, the question of a ‘real’ female presence in GQ is addressed. The last

Spears, Christina Aguilera and Pink. Some of these are less artificial than others, but most are ‘packaged’ in a haze of sexual fetish.

section attempts to analyse the presence of gendered stereotypes in *GQ* and the resultant absence of 'real' women in this context, in order to better understand the way *GQ*'s readers may be led to interpret the female and participate in her objectification.

4.3.3.1 *Girl Power*

She knows exactly what to do with men like you,
 Inside out in her mind there's no doubt where you're coming from
 mystery will turn you on. This child has fallen from grace
 Naked
 Don't be afraid to stare she is only naked⁶⁶

Lyrics from 'Naked' by the *Spice Girls* (2000).

'Girl Power' is a phrase (oxymoron) coined in the 1990s to encapsulate the proliferation of young women who seemed to suddenly dominate popular visual culture in the latter part of the twentieth century. What made these women different from many of the female stars before them is related to the manner in which the Girl Power 'girls' appropriated the 'tone' of female empowerment (and post-feminism) without the critical potential implied by this pursuit.

The British Pop group, *Spice Girls*, is probably the most iconic of the Girl Power bands, not least because of the effective way that the group commercialised Girl Power. The relevance of the female stereotyping embodied by the *Spice Girls* is the manner in which these two-dimensional character types were constructed and supported by visual codes from popular culture.⁶⁷ In every music video and concert, for example, Posh appears in black Gucci-esque attire and high heels, while Baby wears pigtails and bobby socks, the instantly recognisable markers respectively of the 'bad girl' and the 'good girl' (or *femme fatale* and *femme enfant*). In this way, the Spice Girls not only commodify the notion of female empowerment, but in effect reduce this process to an aesthetic gloss, ironically that of seemingly out-dated sexist stereotypes.⁶⁸ The relevance of the Girl

⁶⁵ Although the 'Girl Power' stereotype frequently mimics the mythic codes of the *femme enfant*, and the *femme garçon* hints at many of the characteristic traits of the *femme fatale*, *GQ* treats these stereotypes (the *femme enfant* and *femme fatale*) as overlapping (see 4.3.3.1).

⁶⁶ The lyrics of this song, like the 'Girl Power' the band epitomises, represent a woman who is both a seductress and a child.

⁶⁷ Their endurance on the global 'top ten' charts alone, does not account for the *Spice Girls* frenzy that followed their first hit, since there had been other girl groups before them with perhaps more musical integrity, but not nearly as much popular appeal. The iconic success of the *Spice Girls* is probably due to the strategic inception of the group. The *Spice Girls* (like other 'boy' and 'girl' bands) are essentially a commercial product, founded and marketed by a record label to capitalise on the tweenie market. The differentiation of the *Spice Girls*, however, lay in the fact that each member of the group was marketed separately as a generic type. By 1996 Posh, Baby, Sporty, Scary and Ginger Spice had come to represent the various faces of the female prevalent in popular culture.

⁶⁸ Lisa Soccio (1999:7) argues that, unlike mainstream groups such as the *Spice Girls*, sub-cultural groups like *Riot Grrrl*, *Bikini Kill* and *L7* are progressive, feminist phenomena because their sub-cultural status generates "concrete opportunities for engagement and empowerment". Soccio (1999:7) argues that, conversely, the *Spice Girls* are "regressive [rather] than transgressive". Although not the concern of this study, the fissures in the 'empowerment' that is the ostensible goal of so-called contemporary girl culture are evident in the glossy men's magazines that fetishise this phenomenon.

Power phenomenon for GQ is that it presents the magazine with the convenient look of ‘empowerment’ without leaving room for the resistant readings that might result from actual empowerment. In much the same way that the *femme enfant* is a powerless signifier of the to-be-looked-at-ness of women (Mulvey 1975:7), the Girl Power stereotype in GQ ratifies the idea of woman-as-image.

The connection between the Girl Power stereotype and the *femme enfant* is a complex and layered one that is semiotically valorised by the many literary and filmic variations on these themes. One of these variations is the Lolita character, who arose out of Vladimir Nabokov’s 1955 novel of the same name. Nabokov’s novel chronicles, in scopophilic detail, the relationship between the young Lolita and her much older guardian, Humbert Humbert. Martin Amis (1992:sp) observes that “Lolita herself is such an anthology piece by now that even non-readers of the novel can close their eyes and see her on the tennis court or in the swimming pool or curled up in the car seat or the motel twin bed with her ‘ridiculous’ comics.” The Lolita persona, as appropriated by popular culture, is, in other words, not unlike the *femme enfant* and Girl Power stereotype, both a sexualised woman and a naive child. Lolita has subsequently become a stereotype, appropriated by contemporary popular visual culture to represent the sexualised child/woman. The complexity and individuality afforded Lolita as a literary character is stripped from her in popular culture, where she is reduced to an emblematic nymphet. In this vein, Villanueva (2003:sp) refers to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera as “media Lolita’s” who capitalise on their fetishised (sexualised) ‘innocence’. This seeming contradiction is the driving force behind the powerlessness of the Lolita stereotype, as well as the *femme enfant*, *femme fatale* and Girl Power stereotypes, because it seems to represent the women, shrouded in these personas, as complex and ‘real’, when they are in fact formulaic types.⁶⁹

In GQ, the complexity of individual personhood is mimicked by intergrating and overlapping the various stereotypes related to male visual pleasure mentioned above (Lolita, *femme enfant*, *femme fatale*, Girl Power). The sexual empowerment of women is, in other words, reduced to a combination of stereotypical codes, that all connote a false sense of female empowerment. As in the contemporary popular media, seemingly distinct types such as the *femme enfant* and *femme fatale* are conflated and cloaked in GQ in the haze of ‘Girl Power’. The November pin-up for the GQ 2000 calendar, for example, is a blonde model, Andrea Nemcova, photographed paradoxically in a ‘seductive’ silk gown with fur trim and ‘virginal’ white, cotton underwear (figure 69). The paradox is further ratified by the fact that she, on the one hand, projects the sexual ascendancy of an assertive *femme fatale* – fixed gaze,⁷⁰ legs splayed open, her right hand invitingly touching herself

⁶⁹ The (child/woman) ‘contradiction’ in this stereotype is, in other words, not ‘real’, but contrived as part of her fetishistic value.

⁷⁰ Nemcova’s stare mimics what Dyer (1998) refers to as “self-reflexive” pornography (*i.e.*, pornography that draws attention to its own artificiality and acknowledges the presence of the viewer (see Dyer 1988 and Mirzoeff 1988:483).

– and, on the other, that of a reticent *femme enfant*, in the way she clutches a big white bear under her arm.⁷¹ The visual encoding of the image, thus, implies a narrative of infantile sexuality framed. The belittling iconography of child-like innocence is, however, disguised by the sense of girl ‘power’ Nemcova projects. In querying the intention of such an obviously constructed visual message, one might arrive at the conclusion that it is arranged with the explicit intention of conveying a popular visual fetish, that of the sexualised child/woman. The visual pleasure inherent in the photograph of Nemcova is contained within its function as a pin-up, but elsewhere in *GQ* the signifiers of destabilising power are conveyed more subtly.

In certain features in *GQ*, the images connote a sense of visual empowerment (recalling the ‘Girl Power’ movement), but the articles or captions that accompany them, are patronising or belittling. Added to this, the style of a photographic shoot that accompanies a ‘Girl Power’ type feature frequently bears an undermining tone through the use of a ‘kitsch’ aesthetic.⁷² A subtle example of the undermining effect that the style and text of a feature may have in contrast to ‘empowering’ photographs is the November interview with World Wrestling Federation star, Rena Mero (*GQ* November 2000:140-145). It is a smug article that chronicles the “trash to cash” (in author Martin Deeson’s words) life of this “blonde wrestling babe”. The style of the photographs may perhaps be described as Trechikovian (figures 70-71), and in general seem to position the wrestler as vulnerable and exposed.⁷³ In figure 70 she is voyeuristically photographed looking away from the camera and ‘modestly’ covering her breasts, and in figure 71 her frame seems slight and ‘feminine’ because of the size and strength of the horse beneath her. In each case, portions of the interview are quoted that seem to belie her womanly exterior and make her seem awkwardly naive and child-like. “Why did you have implants?” asks Deeson (*GQ* November 2000:141); her reply, “Duh! Because I wanted to have fuller breasts.” The child-like is thus aligned with the ‘kitsch’ (or common), distancing the reader from the threat of her being sexually empowered since the woman is presented as ridiculous.⁷⁴ This ‘distance’ from fear, theorised by Mulvey (1987) as the male fear of emotional ‘castration’ (see 3.3.2), is clearly obtained by creating a sense of supercilious detach-

⁷¹ The coupling of seemingly contradictory (child/woman) codes in the Nemcova pin-up is similar to the codes used to position Lolita (lolly-pops and seductive pouts) and Britney Spears (pigtailed and cleavage) as sexualised icons of child sexuality or nymphets. These ‘women’ are, thus, presented as ‘empowered’ because of their sexual desirability and seductive charm.

⁷² As complex and problematic as the notion of ‘kitsch’ may be, it seems the only term capable of denoting both the referred to stylistic and its implied social connotation. The use of a kitsch aesthetic in *GQ* ties in with the magazine’s appropriation of ‘Girl Power’ from popular culture, where public sentiment dictates what is ‘kitsch’. It should be noted that in the ‘cultivated’ context of *GQ*, the appropriation of a kitsch or Girl Power aesthetic is done with a sense of ironic self-awareness that mimics the tone of ‘high’ art that borrows from popular culture. (The association between ‘kitsch’ and the notion of ‘feminine taste’ is also an interesting one, but is not addressed in this study.)

⁷³ As will be mentioned shortly, the photographs also represent Mero as sexually brazen, thereby forming a typical example of the paradoxical (and clichéd) attempt at stereotypical ‘complexity’.

⁷⁴ This connection between the sexualised child and a kitsch (or ‘vulgar’) aesthetic is also apparent in *Lolita*. While watching Lolita hoola-hoop in the first screen version of *Lolita* (Kubrik 1962), Humbert observes in his journal (voice-over): “what drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet, of every nymphet perhaps, this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eager vulgarity”.

ment on the part of the reader, as he perceives the woman through the eyes of the objectifying camera and the belittling interviewer.

In the feature on Sable (Rena Mero's stage name), for instance, Deeson's frequent comments on her lack of wit (he even says she should not be too worried about taking a few blows to the head, since she does not have that much to lose) are 'complemented' by the style of the photographs that accompany the article, as well as Deeson's detailed description of her home milieu: "The white shag pile is so deep you could ski through it, the picture frames are all gilt and over by the fireplace there's a life-sized china panther with gold detailing" (GQ November 2000:141). The patronising and demeaning (albeit occasionally funny) tone of this article is not to be found in blatantly subordinating or violent visuals, but in the combined effect of her naive responses and garish taste. With regard to both of these, Mero is sketched as a child in a magazine for adults. This is not, however, the impression that one gets from the opening page of the article. In this first photograph (figure 72), it is wrestling champion Sable and not 'bimbo' Reno Mero who is clearly depicted, as she poses with her trademark bow and arrow.⁷⁵ In spite of the obviously objectifying nature of the image, Sable's confident glare at the reader conveys nothing of the clumsy *femme enfant* Deeson describes in the article. Rather, instead of shy modesty or discomfort, the image projects a sense of willing display, seductive challenge, and even vanity.

Vanity is a theme that appears in most pornographic displays of the female body, perhaps as a consequence of the self-aware gaze that typifies the sexualised model. The confident, sexual self-awareness so powerful in the eyes of Manet's *Olympia*, for instance, could easily be read as vain display.⁷⁶ In a similar vein, Goya's naked Maya (1798-1800, figures 11, 14) seems somehow more self-absorbed than his clothed one. The notion that sensual self-absorption is somehow a female trait is perhaps appropriated from canonical erotic paintings such as *The Toilet of Venus* by Velazquez, in which mirrors, cherubs or adoring spectators are employed to draw attention to the woman's sexual(ised) vanity.⁷⁷ In GQ, the mental connection between sexualised representations of the body and vanity are less predictably implied than, for instance, the presence of a mirror. The Kerry McGregor shoot for the September issue is a case in point (GQ 2000:126-131, figure 61). McGregor is expressly posed on a metallic sculpture that mirrors the contours of her figure. The apparent ease with which she reclines against this reflective surface enfolds the reader's percep-

⁷⁵ Sable's bow and arrow, like Posh Spice's high heels are codes relayed (in the Barthesian sense) from the established mythology of western gender construction. The bow and arrow, for instance, may draw from the visual iconography of Artemis, the Greek goddess of hunting and fertility or Cupid, the Greek god of love.

⁷⁶ Alternately, *Olympia's* glare might be read as defiance.

⁷⁷ Early photography, similarly, defines the female body with relation to vanity. The images of nineteenth century photographer Lady Hawarden, for instance, used light and mirrors to connote 'feminine' sexuality (Pultz 1995:41). It is probably because of the iconic role of the coupling of the sexualised woman and mirrors, that early pictorialist photography, in an attempt to be seen as art, frequently represented 'nude' women with mirrors (like Edward Steichen's *In Memoriam*, 1904). Pultz (1995:41) reasons that the reflective quality of a mirror also suggests the role played in sexual fulfilment by vision and visuality, points at which photography and the body intersect.

tion of her femininity as veiled in vanity. (The image is, nevertheless, an empty one, void of any 'real'-ness, precisely because of its formulaic constructedness.) McGregor is represented as the *femme enfant*, at once empowered by the sexuality of her reflection, and chastised for the gaze of the camera.⁷⁸ And since she is "our girl" (GQ September:128-129) 'we', the viewers, are unavoidably included in a patriarchal point-of-view.⁷⁹

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1975:6) argues that "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured" visual form to the extent that the "socially established interpretation of sexual difference ... controls images, erotic ways of looking, and spectacle". Mulvey presents an interpretative use of psychoanalysis that will "reveal the ways in which every [visual] operation (and particularly those processes associated with the gaze – identification, voyeurism and fetishism) re-inscribes the subjective structures of patriarchy" (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis 1992:182). In GQ, similarly, the patriarchal camera objectifies and belittles, since it is the enforcer of the object/subject relationship, and therefore the 'power' of the women in GQ is undermined by the very medium that pretends to realise it. Within the psychoanalytic framework suggested by Mulvey, however, the signified woman also poses the threat of castration, potentially evoking a defensive response from the male viewer. As mentioned earlier in this section, GQ relies on two textual 'decoys' to avert the anxiety that may result from the woman's supposedly empowered image. The first is the 'Girl Power' stereotype, as broached above; the second is the sexualised 'tom boy' that is examined shortly. In both cases, the 'three looks' of cinema (the camera, the characters and the spectator) are employed to produce a specific, eroticised image of the woman, thereby naturalising the 'masculine' perspective of the viewer and the pleasure that results. Modes of photographic looking and identification, like modes of cinematic looking, thus automatically prescribe an objectifying point-of-view for the viewer, while the powerful sexual encoding of the woman's context, connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1975:7).

The fact that GQ's representation of female sexuality is *always* accompanied by the nuance of childlike-ness undermines any claim the magazine might have to representing women as empowered. From the financial success and pervasive presence of the Spice Girls, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, one might conclude that contemporary society 'buys into' the presumed 'em-

⁷⁸ Earlier in this section it was argued that the *femme enfant* is sexually powerless or 'harmless'. In keeping with this tenet, the 'empowerment' connoted by the sexuality of McGregor's reflection is undermined by the fact that it is a reflection (*i.e.*, the 'copy' and not the 'real').

⁷⁹ The patronising tone of the shoot is easier to discern in the random whimsy of the questions. The anonymous interviewer asks a number of arbitrary questions that seem more intent on emphasising McGregor's naivety than on the actual answers to the questions. These range from: "Tell us about an item of clothing that shaped your identity" to "Tell us five facts about Muhammad Ali". Amis (1992:sp) makes the point that Humbert Humbert's cruelty towards Lolita is partly related to the supercilious tone that he assumes in speaking to her. The link between Humbert's tone and GQ's is a forced one, but both position the woman as child-like, and the man as adult.

powerment' in Girl Power or finds comfort in the notion of female sexuality as type-cast.⁸⁰ Girl Power may be an attempt at popularising female empowerment but within the context of GQ, it functions like a gendered/sexual pacifier. The 'girl' in 'Girl Power', like the 'girl' in 'girlie magazine' is a telling indicator of who, in the carefully constructed domain of popular visual culture, is empowered.

4.3.3.2 The 'femme garçon'

"I've always loved getting dirty with the boys, then putting on a ball gown and earrings"
Charlize Theron (GQ November 2000:126).

Femme garçon is a phrase introduced in this section to relate GQ's depiction of their apparent feminine ideal. This character or phenomenon, a kind of variation on the 'Girl Power' theme, has become a favourite of contemporary popular media.⁸¹ In essence, this stereotype combines the sexual voracity of the *femme fatale* and the naïveté of the *femme enfant* with fetishistic boyishness. The 'insertion' of typically boyish or tom-boyish character traits into the already established popular mythology of female sexuality seems to be connected to the 'transgressive' appeal of this combination.⁸²

Soccio (1999:7) posits that Girl Power as a phenomenon can only be empowering as a sub-cultural manifestation, since this affiliation typically affords women the possibility of transgression. Although a loaded assumption, Soccio's position highlights the societal belief that empowered female 'types' are in some way transgressive.⁸³ GQ's *femme garçon*, through her masculinised persona, co-opts the transgressive nature of so-called hard-core (sub-cultural) girl culture, but commercialises and fetishises this, thereby undermining any transgressive potential that this type might have.⁸⁴ This section investigates the presence of the

⁸⁰ Although these performers target a youth market, the trend of Lolita-ing female sexuality is evident in 'adult' culture too.

⁸¹ The *femme garçon*'s genealogy may, however, be traced back to include older predecessors such as *la femme Nikita*, who represent both womanly sexuality and 'tomboyish' adventurism.

⁸² In the context of this section, the term 'transgressive' is used to refer to representations, stereotypes or codes that 'go beyond' or transgress the norms of contemporary western popular culture. In GQ the subtly transgressive nature of the *femme garçon* as a supposedly 'empowered' woman, thus, links with the notion of deviance as delineated in 3.3.3.1.

⁸³ Soccio's (1999:7) position, further, highlights the transgressive nature of all representations of woman that are 'truly' empowered (represented as individual persons) in masculinised media and through the 'male' lens of the camera. The Spice Girls are a powerful example of the fake 'transgressive' appeal of "unfeminine behaviour" such as picking their noses 'on camera' (Soccio 1999:7). Soccio (1999) argues that outside the context of political contestation, the Spice Girls' behaviour constitutes commercialised gimmickry, not transgressive protest.

⁸⁴ The ambiguities of Girl Power versus hard-core girl culture are not the subject of this study. The point is that GQ uses the tom-boyish fetish of the *femme garçon* to create a sense of 'transgression' in this stereotype, and thereby, 'add' the connotation of empowerment (and political acceptability) to the *femme garçon*. The link between the transgressiveness of a stereotype and its political correctness or acceptability may seem like a far-fetched one, but is in fact quite easy to make given the often 'transgressive' (anti-patriarchal) nature of feminism. The transgressive potential of girl culture may be related to Dworkin's (1983:61) premise that "[s]exual intelligence in women, that rarest intelligence in a male-supremacist world, is necessarily a *revolutionary* intelligence, the opposite of the pornographic (which simply reiterates

femme *garçon* in GQ as a disenfranchising stereotype of female sexuality. This section, furthermore, examines the manner in which GQ paradoxically presents this stereotype as both (consenting) adult and child-like, thereby undermining whatever 'power' she might have.⁸⁵

'Consent' is at the heart of the 'empowered' representation of women, since this presumably vitiates the accusation of masculine 'force' frequently aimed at violent sexualised representation (see 3.3.3.2). As mentioned earlier, in *Vamps and Tramps*, Camille Paglia (1995:65) articulates the now common belief that pornographic publications are 'harmless' or even empowering because the women in them are represented as 'steamily consensual':

Idiotic statements like 'pornography degrades women' or 'pornography is the subordination of women' are only credible if you never look at pornography. Preachers, senators, and Feminist zealots carry on about materials they have no direct contact with ... Most pornography shows women in as many dominant as subordinate postures, with the latter usually steamily consensual (see 2.3).

In order for GQ to represent women as empowered it would, in other words, have to first represent them as consenting adults. Sexualised imagery (both canonical art and contemporary pornography) typically presents 'consent' as antithetical to 'force', and genders force as masculine. GQ subverts the 'force' traditionally embodied by the male, by representing the female as force-full herself and desirous of being treated forcefully. This is argued in this section in two ways: firstly, by demonstrating the manner in which consent functions in sexualised art, and secondly, by examining the way 'consent' is built into the GQ stereotype of the 'tomboy'.

Paglia (1995:65) apparently takes the position that where there is 'consent', rape is not possible. By this reasoning, 'consent' is misleadingly represented as a very finite phenomenon, something which arguably is not the case.⁸⁶ It is important that the recurring themes of consent, invitation and force, remain ambiguous in pornography. Without the thin veil of ambiguity, pornography would probably not be quite as popular as it is, or, arguably, not have made it into quite so many main-

the world as it is for women), the opposite of the will to be used, the opposite of masochism and self-hatred, the opposite of 'good woman' and 'bad woman' both" [emphasis added]. The 'transgressiveness' of the *femme garçon* is not, however, the focal point of this section, it merely forms an introduction to the discussion of the *femme garçon* as an extension of the Girl Power phenomenon.

⁸⁵ In addition to raising the notion of consent, the paradoxical placement of the *femme garçon* between the status of goddess and child (boy), also falsely presents her as a complex and layered woman. The overriding tone of child-like ('boyish') impetuosity that defines this 'woman', however, clearly marks her as a powerless type that is only afforded the gloss of 'masculine' drive for its fetishistic value. In appropriating the *femme garçon* as its ideal women, GQ, in other words, perpetuates the sexist idea that women must be masculinised to be represented as 'empowered'.

⁸⁶ Consider for instance, an often overlooked sex scene in the film *Basic Instinct* (1991). The protagonist's prime suspect is a *femme fatale* author, played by Sharon Stone. After a frustrating day in which the main character (Michael Douglas) is reprimanded for his unorthodox detective skills and humiliated by the seductive charms of his prime suspect, he flees to the house of his psychiatrist ex-wife. Here he vents his anger and frustration by sexually attacking (he rips open her shirt and slams her against a wall) and sodomising her. Although she reciprocates his sexual gestures, she simultaneously protests by saying 'no' several times throughout the scene. The insignificance of the scene in terms of the narrative of the film naturalises and justifies this violent sexual act. It is, nevertheless, debatable whether his actions are really violent (in the sense of exerting force) since he possibly knows his ex-wife well enough to know when she

stream museums. In this sense, consent is positioned as antithetical to ‘force’, with the traditional gendering of force as masculine. Susanne Kappeler (1988) examines the relationship between art and literature, and pornography. She highlights an academic analysis of Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucretia*, which ‘interprets’ the rape of Lucretia as a “scenario of invitation and seduction, consensual sex and pleasure (hers as well as his, as she is supposedly smiling)” (in Itzin 1992:451). Kappeler then juxtaposes this analysis, which positions rape as belonging to “the sphere of discourses, not events”, with her own description of the painting:

Lucretia, half-sitting, half-lying on her bed, is naked bar a veil across her thigh and the jewellery around her neck and wrists. Tarquin, fully dressed, looms over her, his right knee thrust between her legs, his left arm holding off Lucretia’s arm, while his right arm holds a dagger about a yard from her face and chest, extended to strike with full swing. Lucretia’s face is focussed with an expression of fear on her attacker. Threat and intimidation are compounded and visually supplied out of the image’s internal resources, its means of visualizing the referential in power: the woman is faced by a man; she is naked while he is dressed, unarmed while he is armed; she is half-lying on her back, having lost her balance, while he is towering over her, knee firmly lodged on the edge of the bed; her one arm is made defenceless by his grip, her other cannot reach the arm that holds a knife over her, ready to strike. It is an unambiguous exhibition of force and defencelessness, of intimidation and fear, of violation of the woman’s privacy, integrity, selfhood and will. We are told we are seeing her consent (Kappeler in Itzin 1992:451).

Kappeler concludes that academic sophistry, just like the pornography industry, can deny rape by affirming the pornographic convention of the smile as indicative of pleasure and willing participation (in Itzin 1992:451). Her description further exposes the extent to which art can subordinate women by representing them as “enjoying pain, humiliation, and rape” (in Itzin 1992:451).⁸⁷ One of the most graphic examples of this combined representation of pain and pleasure is Fuseli’s *Nightmare* (1791, figure 30), as discussed in Chapter Three. The question with regard to this painting is whether Fuseli’s heroine, represented as ‘steamily consensual’, implies sexual empowerment or whether it fits into the trope of violent visual subordination?⁸⁸

Consent is perhaps a convenient justification for violent sexualised representations, because, theoretically, where there is mutual consent there should be no need for force or violence. Images can, nevertheless, be undeniably violent, in spite of the visual representation of consent. Moreover, when images are obviously constructed (as in artworks and all popular media), consent becomes a slippery and ambiguous issue. GQ seldom (if ever) represents violent sexuality, but it does build on the pornographic assumption that the representation of female consent, whether in a smile or a wink, negates any claim to female subordination. In a bid to cater for a more ‘enlight-

‘means’ to give her consent and when not. In view of her protestations throughout, however, ‘rape’ becomes a more plausible accusation. Clearly, ‘consent’ can be a polemical issue.

⁸⁷ See Kappeler’s *The Pornography of Representation* (1986) and *No Matter How Unreasonable* (1988).

ened' or progressive readership, magazines such as GQ no longer represent women merely as consenting adults, but instead as initiators and aggressors of sex.⁸⁹ In spite of these empowering representations, however, each article or photograph in which they appear ultimately undermines and subverts this female 'power' in one way or another. The message of female 'empowerment', that is the focus of this section, is commonly articulated by GQ in four ways:

- The representation of the sexualised woman as exotic and wild, tapping into the mythic western notion of exotic women being sexually voracious.
- The use of confessional-style narratives that implicate the woman as a 'tenacious tomboy' through 'masculine' language.
- The use of an 'expert' female to represent the female population, thereby simultaneously reducing women to the GQ stereotype and validating this construction.
- Typecasting the desirable woman as tomboyishly sexy, and therefore fetishizing these 'tomboyish' traits.

Each of these mechanisms demonstrates the manner in which visual and linguistic codes are used to construct GQ's ideal female type, identified by the author as a *femme garçon*. These mechanisms are discussed below.

The first technique is the appropriation and manipulation of the conventionalised fetishistic props and visual codes evident in artworks that teetered on the pornographic. The references to exotic animals, prevalent in the works of such artists as Ingres (peacock feathers in *La Grand Odalisque*) and Delacroix (the Amazonian parrot in *Woman with a Parrot*), for example, are cleverly continued in the lycra leopard print and exotic furs of many GQ shoots (figures 32, 45, 73).⁹⁰ The associations of the exotic, the wild and the untamed (dangerous) are as conspicuous to a contemporary reader as they might have been to their original audiences. And as with these art works, the aesthetic authorship of each GQ image (such as the photograph of Brenda Schad taken by Markus Klinko, figure 73) is but a thin veil for the 'wild' sexuality apparent in each model.⁹¹ Such mimicry can, however, steal from the credibility of an image, since it is often too obviously constructed and clichéd to have any real claim to truthfulness.

⁸⁸ The woman in Fuseli's painting, seems strangely willing to surrender herself to demonic penetration. The 'pleasure' of the experience, evident from the woman's facial expression, serves to undermine any reading of the image that does not tie in with the idea of consensual sex, thereby anchoring this interpretation in a more 'acceptable' tone.

⁸⁹ The idea of women as initiators of sex is neither unrealistic nor problematic, however, the extent to which GQ fetishizes this notion is. In GQ even the reticent *femme enfant* is a sexual aggressor, fostering the idea that all women respond to sex in the same way.

⁹⁰ Not only 'exotic' animals were represented in these artworks, domestic pets (such as the lap dog in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and the small cat in Manet's *Olympia*) were occasionally used to undermine the independence of such sexualised women and remind the viewer that they are, after all, 'kept' women.

⁹¹ The visual codes are supported by the captions beneath each image. Beneath figure 73, Brenda Schad is described as a "sloe-eyed, tousle-haired ... Native American beauty" (again a reminder of the exotic), while the caption below a photograph of Susan Ward in leopard print satin reads, "The best thing about sex? I can totally let go of all my inhibitions" (GQ Millennium, 2000:42-43).

More convincing, is the second type of representation – that of the literary or textual construction of such stereotypes. In *Feminist Stylistics*, Sara Mills (1995:45) investigates gendered language. She refers to the research of feminists such as Robin Lakoff (1975) and Dale Spender (1980), who attempted to show that women and men speak differently, owing to the power differences between males and females in western society. According to Mills (1995:45), Spender and Lakoff characterise the female genderlect or women's speech as: more hesitant, less fluent, less logical, less assertive than men's speech. Women, in their view, are more silent, interrupt less frequently than men, use tag questions and modal verbs more than men, use co-operative strategies in conversations rather than competitive ones, and so on. Although the idea of 'women's speech' seems contrived and even sexist, it is perhaps valid in a constructed and sexualised framework such as GQ.⁹² The isolated female writers who are included in GQ, seem to appropriate what Lakoff and Spender categorise as typically 'male' speech (in Mills 1995:45). This is probably intended to add to the sense of empowerment and assertiveness with which these 'women' are read, but, in fact, becomes fetishistic and predictable in the broader scope of the publication. The problem of 'real' female presence in GQ is therefore compounded by the artificial attempt, on the part of the magazine, to represent women as empowered because they are sexually (or linguistically) assertive.

GQ frequently makes use of narrative accounts to lend some authenticity to the representation of female sexual assertiveness. In much the same way that early pornography was the writing about prostitutes (the documenting of their occupational activities), GQ frequently publishes the kind of articles that offer a voyeuristic glimpse into 'actual' examples of female sexual appetite, and as the final stamp of authenticity, these are mostly authored by the women themselves. "Rough rider" is an article that chronicles the writer's first motorbike sex (GQ March 2000:108-109). The article (in part) reads:

As sex is all to do with power, clutch and having something throbbing manfully between your thighs, it's surprising more people don't choose to do it on a motorbike ... David told me how everything was possible on a motorcycle; how a girl had once perched herself on his erection as they came to a standstill at traffic lights ... Breathless with anticipation, I followed David into a heavily secured basement park ... 'That's it,' he said ... I looked down at a tiny red thing which didn't look capable of getting up anything, let alone speed. Did he seriously think I wanted to mount Jane Mansfield?

The writer's register seems quaintly reminiscent of the rhetoric of *Mills and Boon*-style novels, where phrases such as 'breathless anticipation' and 'hard, throbbing machine' construct the 'heroine' in relation to the male.⁹³ Her reliance on 'action' words (grinding, throbbing, cornering,

⁹² Although not pertinent to this study, Warner (1985:66) questions the effect of masculine and feminine gendering in language (for example in French and German) on the societal conceptualisation of male and female.

⁹³ In other words, the female protagonist is characterised through her interactions with or manner of relating to the men in the narrative. Monique Wittig (in Mills 1995:45) posits that "[t]here are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine; the masculine not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general."

dragging) and dogged preoccupation with size, however, seem more typical of masculine literary characterisation than the average paperback heroine. 'Honda's' speech is assertive and competitive and as such not only presents her as empowered, but also as 'masculine'. While her willing consent, adventurism and appetite support this association of empowerment, one is, ultimately, left with the sense that it was 'David' who decided the size, speed and style of their encounter, and thus seems to be in control. In addition to this situational control residing with the male, 'Honda's' objectifying tone is countered by the photograph that accompanies the article.⁹⁴ Despite appearances to the contrary, it is still the woman, and not the man, who is objectified and even mechanised in the manner of Fritz Lang's *femme fatale*, robot Maria. Honda's story is inevitably dominated by the Willy Camden photograph of a rather 'plastic' looking woman draped over a 996 demo Quattro motorcycle (figure 29). Beneath her the caption reads: "The ergonomics of a bike demands that a *girl* spread her legs ..." [emphasis added].

Probably the most convincing of the representative techniques is the third, that of the 'authoritative voice'. Most forms of media call on an 'expert' professional to represent the 'authoritative voice' of a particular field; glossy men's magazines generally make use of a doctor or sex therapist to discuss sexual trends, issues or problems. GQ has Kate Taylor as its sex columnist. She writes a torrid fiction serial for a United States magazine, features for *Wallpaper*, and makes regular appearances on television and radio; thus, she is a familiar persona, not only because of her continuity in the magazine, but also because of her outside status. As the only continuous female voice in the magazine, she supposedly represents the 'female population' and in each issue articulates how "we" feel about a particular topic. In one issue she reveals why "she holds a torch for torch-like tools" (GQ Millennium 2000:83). In another issue she writes an instructional guide to office sex entitled "Working Your Way Up" (GQ March 2000:81). The article sketches the corporate environment as a primal hunting ground for men, where "hordes of women go every morning ... scented, suited and heeled." Taylor includes a six step plan to ensure male 'success' – these include such banal suggestions as: "Clear your desk of all pictures of women immediately". As the only consistent female 'voice' in GQ, Taylor's generalisations acquire a ring of ambassadorial authenticity. In the absence of diverse female opinions, statements such as "Women love power - a successful man is a sexy man" (GQ March 2000:81) seem misleadingly trite.

In the November issue Taylor explores professional love – the by-line reads: "unfulfilled by all the amateur enthusiasts our oversexed scribe Kate Taylor decides to order an escort" (GQ November 2000:55). At first their interaction seems to be guided by *her* needs and desires ("Sod him! I was paying"), but soon the dynamic changes as Jason, her "sexual saviour" takes over. After they have

⁹⁴ As Berger (1972:7) points out, "[s]eeing comes before words", in other words visual images easily dominate textual narratives.

had sex, Taylor's persona and relation to her escort changes from aggressive customer to insecure child: "He'd give up his sordid life and become my slave. He'd love me. Marry me. Devote the rest of his life to me ... Which was where I was when he ... got his credit card machine out" (GQ March 2000:55). Whereas initially she had been the symbol of capitalist endeavour, he was now the one pulling out the credit card machine, while she was left dreaming about marriage. The language Taylor uses reflect a similar transition. The first half of the article is dominated by words such as "erection", "sucked", "clits" and "cock", arguably more 'masculine'-type words, while the second half is filled with words such as "beautiful", "loved", "devote" and "kissed", possibly indicative of the "more hesitant ... less assertive" (Mills 1995:45) feminine genderlect.

A superficial reading of Taylor's exploits, in other words, renders her care-free, daring and game for everything, but this perception only lasts until they have sex, thereafter David is the empowered one.⁹⁵ If one approaches Taylor as an example of the *femme fatale* in *film noir* – simultaneously devastating the lives of men and victim of her own lust for enjoyment, she seems more naïve than threatening. Slavoj Žižek (2000:535) explains that the aura of mystery that surrounds this kind of character is that she cannot be clearly located in the binary of master and slave: "When she seems permeated with intense pleasure, it suddenly becomes apparent that she suffers immensely ... Thus the deeply ambiguous character of those moments in *film noir* ... when the *femme fatale* breaks down and becomes the victim of her own game". The powerful/powerless dichotomy of the Kate Taylor persona in GQ is further emphasised by the antithetical relationship between her confident textual tone or 'male' voice and the objectifying photographs that appear above each of her articles (figure 74).

This simultaneously tenacious and timid person is a familiar one in GQ; in fact, after reading a few issues, the '*femme garçon*' or sexualised tomboy becomes embedded in the brand identity of GQ, since every woman in the magazine is sketched with the same sense of powerful/powerless-ness. Tempestuous, adventurous and dangerously sexy, GQ presents the prototype for the perfect woman, a twentieth-first century alignment of the *femme enfant* and the *femme fatale*. All the women in GQ are represented as having an inner tomboy. This is perhaps not the most accurate term for this contradictory character, but it is used here, because GQ itself frequently relies on this notion to support its construction of the 'empowered' woman. Occasionally this image of mischievous sexual assertiveness is only visually implied (a 'naughty' smile or a 'kinky' outfit), but most of the time it is supported by the accompanying text, as with the December shoot of Teresa de Klerk (GQ December 2000:150-155). Not only is de Klerk represented as boyishly sexy (short, tousled hair; a challenging glint in her eye, 'wildly' sexy snake skin bikini, and adventurous position), but

the caption reads: “I was a naughty girl. I got others up to no real good” (figure 75). In a similar vein, the November issue features Charlize Theron in a spread on “Men of the Year”, apparently because of her “services to mankind” (GQ November 2000:124-127). Adrian Deevoy, the interviewer, introduces her virile charms by articulating his mock dismay at her bawdiness. The article starts,

stubbing out her fifth Marlboro Red of the evening, Charlize Theron drains her vodka and shunts back her chair. ‘I hope this isn’t going to be too revolting for you’, she grins mischievously, then continues regardless. ‘Okay, this girl walks into a bar ...’ It’s not a joke one would expect from an ascending star, although the fags and booze came as a bit of a shock too (GQ November 2000:125).

Throughout the article, Deevoy proffers insightful compliments and articulate questions while Theron stuns and teases with her frank wit and uncouth language. It is not so much *Lady and the Tramp* as gentleman and the vamp, but the principle is the same – the chemistry of contrasting gender and class. Yet, it is a precarious balance – being a GQ goddess is not all about boorish bedside manners (adventurism?); as with Theron’s screen roles, one needs to “do tomboy, calculating crim[inial] and simmering sex-siren” (GQ November 2000:126)⁹⁶ simultaneously. According to Deeson (GQ November 2000:126), Theron clearly qualifies: “Charlize combines adolescent coltishness with the delicate sophistication of womanhood”.

In spite of the charismatic appeal of the typecast GQ female, there is something sadly formulaic about these representations. When paging through the many examples of vampish, vulnerable, tomboyish-sexy women, one cannot help but question the power positioning of each of these images. Does an airbrushed female body, draped provocatively over a motorcycle, no matter how ‘steamily consensual’, really represent an empowered woman? To look at GQ one might deduce that women exist in set stereotypes, and that ideal women are a mere combination of these. Female personas such as Jane Honda and Kate Taylor indicate that, evidently, even women buy into these stereotypes.

The ‘obscenity’ of GQ in the context of this discussion, thus resides in the representation of women as power-less and simplistic. In so far as the representational disenfranchisement of women is political discrimination and subordination, it is a kind of obscenity. The ‘disguise’ of this obscenity is as problematic as the obscenity itself, since it hides the problem of female stereotyping in further types that merely *seem* more progressive. The notion that female empowerment may be contained in stereotypes is typical of the reductionist logic of popular culture. The practice

⁹⁵ In both ‘Honda’s’ “Rough Rider” article and Taylor’s account of professional love, the ‘power’ of each woman seems to reside not only in her sexual appetite, but also in her ability to withhold sex from her partner. Once they have had sex, in other words, she becomes ‘power’-less.

⁹⁶ Theron’s ‘power’ in GQ clearly resides in her sexuality, as Deeson (GQ November 2000:126) coos, “she’s got lips you could lie on and a smile that makes proud men weep softly”.

whereby GQ reduces and simplifies female sexuality should not, however, be mistaken for mere coincidence. Since all of the women in GQ, without exception, are represented as sexualised, it seems a fair assumption that there is strategy behind the seamless synergy of the magazine's ideology. What makes the stereotypes in GQ misrepresentational, or even harmful, in other words, is that that they appear to be the only female 'voices' in GQ.

4.3.3.3 *The absence of presence*

In "Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern", Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1986) highlights different forms of 'modernity'. The one, she postulates, "rests not on the fullness of a meaning; of a unified, perfectly intelligible history, but on a loss, an emptiness, a lack: the power of an absence" (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:223). This "loss of love" as she calls it, is expressed in the new status of the 'feminine' and its modern allegories that arose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The feminine, within this context, is embodied "with all its violence and ambivalence" (Buci-Glucksmann 1986:223) in the figure of the sexualised woman, the prostitute.

A critical concern for feminist film criticism over the past fifty years has been the fact that 'women as women' are seldom represented in cinema. Subsequently, women have not had much of a voice, and the female point of view, in its diversity and complexity, has seldom been heard.⁹⁷ Although an increase in female directors (such as Jane Campion) and realist directors (such as Mike Leigh) in the past decade, has greatly contributed to the amount of believable, three-dimensional female screen characters, glossy men's magazines still seem largely dismissive of such candid representations. In GQ, the *femme enfant*, *femme fatale* and *femme garçon* own the sole rights to femininity. In themselves these stereotypes are only mildly problematic, but in the absence of all other female presence, these representations pretend to exemplify the totality of womanhood. Charlize Theron as a 'man of the year', and Kate Taylor as an 'expert' woman, represent, within the context of a supposedly enlightened and progressive magazine, what should be a moderate, fairly reliable representation of the female norm. Yet it is probable that many women do not identify with Theron's ribald celebrity, or Taylor's predatory suggestions to men in the workplace (nor with the patronising Girl Power of).

Stereotypes, short-cuts, two-dimensionality, and binary opposites are all ennobled by the glamorous 'power' of GQ representations. The naturalising effects of a sophisticated aesthetic and a bold

⁹⁷ Maria Marcus writes that in pornographic photography "the women are presented as nothing" (in Soble1986:156). Susan Griffin elaborates: "She spreads apart her thighs and stares into the camera. Her tongue licks her lips. Her eyes reflect back nothing: she is not human ... at each turn of her body, at each face or curvature exposed, we see nothing. For there is no person there" (in Soble 1986:156). Although the women represented in film and in GQ are more subtly objectified, it is still true that as deliberate sexualised constructs, these iconic representations lack the particular 'realness' that each woman (model) might have brought to them.

sexually assertive quote from the model (often out of context), can ironically be more misleading about woman-ness than the frank objectification of traditional pornography. Ultimately, even if an image is constructed in such a way that it allows the female to seem sexually empowered, the very nature and purpose of the medium undermines this. Since a magazine feature presents a 'pseudo-world' specially constructed to stimulate the reader; there are no autonomous meanings to the words and images, they are organised according to strategies of coherence (Hedges 1991:78). One such strategy is that of a controlling point of view. The French novelist, Alain Robbe-Gillet remarks that the film shot always implies a point of view: it must always be taken *from* somewhere (in Hedges 1991:78). Therefore, one might argue that GQ's point of view is relayed and anchored by the camera (Barthes 1977:51-73). Laura Mulvey (1975:17) supports this argument by examining the 'object' on which the camera is typically fixed. As mentioned earlier, Mulvey (1975:17) argues that women in film, and one might add GQ, "are signs which signify to-be-looked-at-ness".

An example of the overt use of the male gaze in the construction of GQ features, is the travel feature in the September issue of GQ magazine. Sixty prime travel destinations are listed next to glossy photographs of women in bathing suits (figure 76). While the women seem confident and in control of their own sexuality – certainly, one would not use words such as 'subordinate' or 'vulnerable' to describe them – the arbitrariness of their presence (much like the awkward positioning of Teresa de Klerk in figure 75) indicate that the women are present as objects of display and visual pleasure. Thus, in spite of the thin veil of narrative justification, the viewer cannot avoid participating in the male gaze of the camera, and thus in the objectification and subordination of these women.⁹⁸

Foucault (in Pultz 1995:9) unveils instruments of control in society, and suggests that photography is one such tool. Instead of a photographer exercising control over the medium of photography, Foucault (in Pultz 1995:9) suggests that photography controls the photographer, and by extension society. Furthermore, since everyone is subject to social control, all knowledge is the product of power, and not the other way around. In other words, for Foucault (in Pultz 1995:9), there is no viewpoint from which to make objective observations, all vantages are affected by power. Andrea Dworkin (1993:237) lends a gendered bias to Foucault's assertions on power, and argues, "we live in a system of power that is male-supremacist. This means that society is organized on the assumption that men are superior to women and that women are inferior to men". Dworkin's unbending avowal seems less *passé* against the backdrop of a booming pornography trade that still almost exclusively caters for a male market. In an interview with Isabel Tang (1999:117), Mark

⁹⁸ Since no men are represented in a similar vein anywhere in the magazine, the visual subordination extends to the female gender, and is not just applicable to these specific images, or these particular women.

Gabor, author of *The Pin Up: A Modest History*, explains the role that power plays in pornographic magazines:

Whether it's just for looking or for something like masturbation, the man has total control of the magazine. He can switch from pose to pose or model to model by the mere flipping of a page. He gets his control over the image, which is basically over the woman, which is what his fantasy is all about, which is manipulation and objectification of the woman.

The question is, to what extent the market for sexualised subordination is fuelled by the ideological positioning of a culture? One such connection, explored by Lynn Hunt (1991:3), is the connection between the origins of pornography and concern about the role of women in public life.

In 1769 Rétif de la Bretonne published a novel cum tract called *Le Pornographe*, which was tellingly subtitled *Idées d'un honnête homme sur un projet de règlement pour les prostituées, propre à prévenir les malheurs qu'occasionne le publicisme des femmes, avec des notes historiques et justificatives* (in Hunt 1991:3).⁹⁹ Rétif's subtitle reveals the now-hidden connection between the origins of a modern understanding of pornography and the eighteenth century's concern about women's participation in public life (Hunt 1991:3). Kendrick (1987:57) traces the development of a modern notion of pornography to the ideological concerns of eighteenth century society. Kendrick (1987:57) attributes the creation of a secret museum, as already noted, to the long-term societal concern with the prudent regulation of the consumption of the obscene so as to debar the lower classes and women. The eighteenth century era of egalitarian ideals brought with it the increase in education, and the rise in literacy engendered a 'need' for the expurgation of the classics. This custom, which was particularly prevalent in the Anglo-Saxon world, started in the early eighteenth century, climaxed in the nineteenth, and started to dissipate with the advent of World War I (Hunt 1991:3). Thus, reasons Kendrick (1987:57), the prospect of the careless and indiscriminate proliferation of representation of the obscene – “when it began to seem possible that anything at all might be shown to anybody” – generated the desire for barriers, catalogues, classifications, and hygienic censoring (Hunt 1991:3). Hunt (1991:3) concludes that the establishment of pornography as a category was in response to the perceived threat of the democratisation of culture, which included the participation of women in the consumption of culture.¹⁰⁰

It is possible that the barriers, catalogues, and hygienic censoring of the nineteenth century did more, in effect, to protect the equality of the woman – by chiding her objectification – than to undermine her role in public culture. Whether this was the case or not, Hunt's argument clearly demonstrates the fact that pornography in its entirety – its production, consumption *and* classification –

⁹⁹ “Ideas of an honest man on a project of regulations for prostitutes, suited to preventing the misfortunes caused by the publicising of women, with historical and justificatory notes” (free translation by Bronwyn Michler 2003).

is wholly related to power. The way in which GQ continues this theme is in its assertion of this power, the power of male exclusivity¹⁰¹ and sexualised construction and the unashamed acknowledgement of the male gaze. In this way it is no different from mainstream pornography (such as *Playboy* and *Hustler*), or from the sexualised representations of women in art.

As in the works of DH Lawrence, Titian and Manet, GQ is simultaneously obscene and socially acceptable. Since the notion of acceptability is dependant on popular sentiment, harmful components of popular culture may be perceived as 'acceptable' and therefore harmless, merely because of their popularity. The following section sketches the way in which GQ fits into popular culture, whilst representing an ambience of 'high' culture.

4.4 GQ: pornography or popular culture?

Nead (1992:100) contends that social control over obscenity in western culture takes the form of the regulation of the sites of cultural consumption: "[t]he pornographic oscillation between visibility and invisibility is reenacted in the social organization of its consumption." This section questions the binary positions that 'pornography' and 'popular culture' seem to occupy in contemporary western culture. It investigates the notion that 'art' is perceived by contemporary western culture to be a separate category of visual representation, discrete from the associations of 'pornography' or 'popular culture'. This section indicates the complex interaction between the seemingly self-enclosed categories of 'art', 'pornography' and 'popular culture'. The aim of this brief discussion is to demonstrate that GQ does not conclusively fall into one of these categories, but oscillates between all three, thereby deeming it both 'obscene' and 'acceptable'.

Art and pornography are constantly defined in terms of quality, ownership and access. Art supposedly avoids the vulgar necessity of being sold, since it is reserved for the pensive gaze of its sole owner. Pornography, on the other hand, is mostly seen as an "undifferentiated mass of impurity, bought and sold and wreaking havoc in the public domain" (Nead 1992:100). One might revisit Lord Campbell's assurances to British Parliament, at the passing of the Obscene Publications Act in 1857, that sexually explicit art in private collections, would not be affected by the Act: "The pictures in such collections were not intended for sale, but were kept for the owner's contemplation ... It was not against the master pieces of Correggio that the Bill was levelled, but against the mass of

¹⁰⁰ See Andreas Huyssen's (1986) *After the Great Divide* (in particular Chapter Three, entitled 'Mass culture as woman: Modernism's other').

¹⁰¹ Pornography as a category, whether as the secret museum or GQ, is largely aimed at a male audience and thus proudly aims to exclude women. (The 2001 *For Him Magazine* marketing campaign includes postcards in each issue, that boast: "FHM, now with no tampon ads.")

impure publications, which was poured forth on London, to the great injury of the youth of the country.”¹⁰²

Lord Campbell’s attempt to differentiate art from pornography led him to emphasise their differing natures in terms of quality, ownership and access. Adding to this notion, Nead (1992:100) observes that Campbell’s choice of words re-invoke the boundaries of the body: “Art is based on a model of continence, it is kept, held within the body, unlike pornography, which pours out beyond the body and into the city streets”. Whereas art appears to be controlled, pornography has the guise of being more chaotic and unbridled, at least in terms of nineteenth century sexual constructs. More specifically, this is a distinction between things sophisticated and things base, between the civilised and the uncivilised, between high culture and popular culture,¹⁰³ or between the expensive and the cheap. There are many cases in which art and pornography are not that different, since both are commercial endeavours, they merely fetch different prices (and even this is changing, with new trends in collector’s pornography). Hence the difference between art and pornography may be deemed largely superficial because this caters to public perception, which almost always favours binary opposites.

The anomaly of contemporary pornography is that it has remained obscene, while progressively being incorporated into popular culture. During the Victorian period pornography was taboo and was therefore perceived to be ‘off-scene’. Until at least the 1950s, pornography was hardly believed to be part of popular culture, since it was barely acknowledged or openly admitted to – it maintained the air of being secret, prurient and even deviant. With the advent of the sexual revolution, however, pornography slowly moved into the spotlight – sales soared, *Playboy* and *Penthouse* became household names, and even someone who had never opened a *Hustler*, knew the name was synonymous with the commercialisation of sex.¹⁰⁴ It is possible that American society’s interest in particular in social equality and sexual liberty in the 1960s was echoed in an interest in pornography. Today, in a post-millennium society, teenagers wear t-shirts that say ‘porn star’, and Hugh Hefner appears in family situation comedies on prime time television.¹⁰⁵ But while pornography may be sanitised by popular culture, it still maintains an air of the shameful. A person who uses pornography excessively is still frequently perceived as lacking in the social skills needed to engage in ‘real’ sexual relations (involving two people), and a taste for pornography is still per-

¹⁰² From the *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* of 1857.

¹⁰³ Note that ‘popular culture’, in this case, is not interchangeable with the term ‘consumer culture’ which would here be a misnomer, since both art and pornography are mostly products for sale.

¹⁰⁴ The first issue of *Playboy* was published in 1953. *Penthouse* started in 1969, while *Hustler*, targeting a more hard-core market, started a few years later (Dine 1995:260).

¹⁰⁵ Gail Dines (1995:255) notes that while most corporations avoid advertising in (‘hard-core’) magazines such as *Hustler* or *Tit Torture*, the more ‘soft-core’ magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* carry advertisements from companies such as Seagrams, Benson and Hedges, Mercedes and Sony. These advertisers are not only a sign of the “upscale readership and mainstream status” (Dines 1995:255) of these magazines, but also make them seem more socially acceptable to their readers.

ceived as something to be discouraged in one's children (Williams 1979:51). This is true in a wider social context too, as Bernard Williams (1979:51), the Chairman of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship in the United Kingdom notes: a society that is "extensively given to the consumption of pornography would tell one something about it, and something discouraging".¹⁰⁶

Pornography's move from margin to mainstream has mostly been an aesthetic one. The shaggy carpets, seedy lighting, and polished wood backdrops synonymous with 1970s pornography films may be popular with Calvin Klein and Fiona Apple,¹⁰⁷ but the association does not seem to go much further than the aesthetic appearance. When challenged about the message of his CK campaigns in 2000, Klein decided to withdraw the more *risqué* images, so as not to offend the public. Clearly, for Klein, the campaigns were about a 'look' more than a political or social statement (such as child sexuality or freedom from censorship). The 'look' is, nevertheless, appropriated from the pornographic genre and as such still carried connotations that seemed counter-cultural (presumably a positive connotation for Klein's street-wear brand). This 'porno' aesthetic is, in other words, desirable in some mainstream contexts and odious in others. Whether deemed acceptable or obscene, however, popular culture's primary interest in the 'pornographic' (whether in films, music videos or modelling shoots), seems to be aesthetic.

GQ enters the realm of fickle public perception with the commercial advantage of being perceived as both acceptable and obscene. It strives for the public acceptance afforded most popular culture (by 'disguising' the 'obscenity' in the magazine), while maintaining the air of obscenity that is the driving force behind pornography. GQ presents itself as innocent, subtle, and intelligent enough to be seen as harmless, and aesthetic enough to be seen as artistic rather than explicit. GQ is, furthermore, aimed largely at men in the above-average income group, who are perhaps perceived to be incorruptible. While it is generally accepted by the public, GQ remains exclusive enough to maintain the secrecy and 'off-sceneness' of pornography. In other words, it is both an obvious and accepted part of popular culture, and a natural subsidiary of 'obscene', or 'hidden' sexual culture (for instance, through the sealed plastic packet in which it is often sold). The axis on which this acceptable/obscene dialectic balances is money and the scent of acceptability which it buys. Aspirational branding is the driving force behind GQ since it sells to the reader a life of aesthetic refinement, corporate success, luxury brands and super models, 'arranged' for maximum visual pleasure.

¹⁰⁶ The South African pornography mogul and founder of *Loslyf*, Joe Theron is quick to note that his interest in pornography is solely financial (in du Toit 1998:98). In an interview in *Huisgenoot*, Theron comments that pornography has never appealed to him personally (in du Toit 1998:98). This statement seems to be related to the social perception that enjoying pornography is indicative of prurient behaviour (a car manufacturer or the editor of a newspaper would probably not distance themselves from their products in this manner).

¹⁰⁷ This is a style that has been pastiched by Klein in the marketing of his fashion label and Apple in her music videos.

Through the socially elevating mechanisms of an 'artistic' aesthetic, 'cultivated' rhetoric and the pretence of female empowerment, what has been called 'aesthetics', 'cultivation' and 'the appropriation of empowerment' in this study, GQ effectively turns the 'obscene' into the socially 'acceptable'. Moreover, within the context of GQ, the 'obscene' becomes a rite of passage into a higher social order, which is presumably as incorruptible as the gentlemen allowed into the nineteenth century secret museum. The fact that GQ appropriates the codes of sexualised display from canonical erotic art, and yet, as popular press, is anchored in popular culture, corrodes seemingly finite categorisations such as 'art', 'pornography' and 'popular culture', or equally 'acceptable' and 'obscene'. GQ's superficial appropriation of canonical erotic art probably unveils some pornographic qualities in this art, thereby demonstrating that art and pornography are not mutually exclusive categories, but slippery rhetorical devices, easily coaxed into one corner or another.

This Chapter has demonstrated the manner in which GQ differentiates itself from what GQ sales manager, Shaun Couves (2002) calls "smutty magazines". Whereas Chapter Three demonstrated the *similarities* between GQ and conventional pornography, Chapter Four emphasised their differences. The point, however, is that in spite of GQ being dressed up in a lofty brand identity, like conventional pornography, it objectifies and subordinates women, and in this way may be considered obscene.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of chapters

Chapter One primarily introduced the background and aims of this study. *GQ* was chosen as the focus of study because it epitomises the core characteristics of glossy men's magazines, namely an aspirational (up-market) brand identity and sexualised content (that objectifies and stereotypes women). The aestheticised veneer of the magazine, furthermore, made it an appropriate example of the manner in which glossy men's magazines appropriate codes of (acceptable) sexualised display from canonical erotic art. The tone of subordination and objectification that typifies glossy men's magazines (thereby rendering them akin to pornography) was sketched as the reason why *GQ* warrants critical interrogation. Chapter One also sketched the theoretical framework of the study as informed by art history and popular visual culture. The methodological framework of the dissertation was delineated as both a literature study and a critical analysis of *GQ* from the year 2000.

Chapter Two traced the ideological genealogy of 'pornography' as a categorical device, in order to demonstrate the extent to which the use of this term is delineated by societal positions on sexuality.¹ This investigation was done so that the essential characteristics of pornography may be identified, regardless of the ideological undercurrents of an era, which were subsequently compared to *GQ* in Chapter Three.² In a similar vein, the polemics of the legislative and feminist grapplings with this term were examined. Chapter Two, furthermore, highlighted three codes typical of canonical erotic art, which have seemingly become synonymous with the fetishistic representation of women in a manner that is deemed to be socially acceptable. The analysis of these codes served to demonstrate the manner in which art mystifies the sexualised representation of women, constituting a lexicon of visual codes used by glossy men's magazines that wish to ennoble their objectifying content. In order to highlight this process of appropriation, this Chapter introduced the term 'gentlemen's pornography' as a taxonomy that includes both canonical erotic artworks and glossy men's magazines. The overall historical delineation of pornography, in conjunction with relevant

¹ The writings of primarily Foucault (1980), Kendrick (1987) and Tang (1999) were relied upon to sketch the history of 'repressive' sexuality within western culture.

² It is difficult to separate the notion of 'pornography' from a context, but the idea was that by demonstrating the various political and social ideologies that inform the changing definitions of pornography, it may become apparent that there are also areas of commonality between all of the definitions. As mentioned in this Chapter, these commonalities would eventually become the basis for the United States Civil Rights Ordinance's (1985) definition of pornography, that formed the point of departure for Chapter Three.

discipline-specific positions, functioned as a point of departure from which both the similarities and differences between GQ, pornography and canonical erotic artworks were investigated.

Chapter Three investigated GQ against the United States Civil Rights Ordinance's (1985) definition of pornography. In this Chapter, four criteria, established by the Civil Rights Ordinance as components of pornography, were examined as they appear in both canonical erotic art and GQ. The discussion of these criteria was modelled on Itzin's (1992) exposition of the Civil Rights Ordinance. The Civil Rights Ordinance's definition of pornography was, in other words, reduced to the notions of 'sex', 'subordination', 'violence' and 'proof of harm', and each of these concepts was dealt with individually. The underlying assumption of this Chapter was that GQ represents 'sex', 'subordination', and 'violence', and is therefore potentially harmful. Although GQ is not explicit in its representation, it might, nonetheless, be described as a kind of pornography.

Chapter Four unravelled the ambiguous position of gentlemen's pornography as being situated somewhere between obscenity and acceptability in western society. The manner in which GQ positions itself as both 'obscene' and 'acceptable' was investigated, as well as the archetypal codes employed by the publication to achieve this brand identity. Towards this end, Chapter Four proposed three 'mechanisms of disguise' whereby GQ masks its sexually objectifying imagery or 'obscenity'. These ennobling devices were examined under the terms: 'aesthetics', 'cultivation' and 'the appropriation of empowerment'. Whereas Chapter Three emphasised the commonalities between GQ and pornography, Chapter Four highlighted their differences in order to demonstrate the manner in which the pornographic may be framed in acceptability in contemporary popular culture.

5.2 Contribution of study

The main assumption that validated and informed this study was that GQ objectifies and subordinates women and may, therefore, in spite of its aesthetic and intellectualised veneer, be deemed harmful. This study postulated that stereotypes, whether glorifying or degrading, are short-hand devices that reduce and contract (polemical) realities to an easily understood and represented symbol. The extent to which women are stereotyped in GQ, it was argued, is the extent to which GQ reduces woman-ness to various easily understood types. GQ's polished veneer and glamourised tone were stripped away to reveal that beneath these seemingly innocuous mechanisms of disguise, GQ still subordinates women. The prime tenet of the argumentation, in other words, was that GQ is harmful not because of the way it stereotypes women, but because this stereotyping denies the complex texture of women and female sexuality (and, by extension, of male desire).

On a more philosophical note, the need for the critical consideration of visual culture is at the heart of Postmodern thinking, yet is frequently (and appropriately) slowed down by the (political) complexity of this culture. The dialectics between criticism and culture are evident in the many diverse positions on art, pornography and popular culture, indicating that 'theory' has not forgotten the complexity of culture. Nead (1992) observes that "art and pornography are caught in a cycle of reciprocal definition, in which each depends on the other for its meaning, significance and status". This study added popular culture to the 'reciprocal' relationship between art and pornography, and in so doing, hopefully unveiled the manner in which GQ can slip between (dissolve?) the genres of art, pornography and popular culture. The taxonomy of gentlemen's pornography, as the uneasy platform of this study, served to highlight the slippery and overlapping qualities of art, pornography, and popular culture. In this way the author hopes to have sabotaged the easy relegation of sexualised representation to merely one of these categories.

In the literature study, this dissertation examined various theories centred around sexualised representation in order to test the assumptions of this study against the seminal theoretical positions on this subject. The critical analysis of GQ that is the backbone of this study complemented the literature study by demonstrating the manner in which GQ simultaneously appropriates the gloss of canonical erotic art, yet embodies the legislative components of pornography.

One of the foremost contributions of this study is, thus, methodological, since it presents a theoretical model that can be applied to other examples of popular culture. The comparative investigation of GQ and canonical erotic art, against the backdrop of legislative, feminist and art historical delineations of pornography, is a theoretical model that can be used in the investigation of other visual culture (such as women's magazines, fashion or advertising).³ These new models are necessary where old taxonomies such as 'art', 'pornography' and 'popular culture' have become outmoded and insufficient frameworks for investigating visual culture.

Although 'conventional' pornography (*Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Hustler*) has been extensively researched within various fields, glossy men's magazines are still a fairly under theorised area of popular visual culture. This study has opened up the field of glossy men's magazines to further research that draws from diverse areas such as legislative and feminist discourse, art history and popular visual culture.

The relevance and subsequent contribution of this study is therefore twofold:

³ Theorists such as MacRobbie (1996), Pritchard (1993), and Root (1996) have been seminal in articulating this new genre of investigation and the need for further research into the areas where high culture and popular culture meet (specifically with relation to gender and the politics of display).

- Firstly, this study drew attention to the objectifying and subordinating nature of GQ and the elevated, elitist tone it employs to 'disguise' its sexist content.
- Secondly, this study established a theoretical model by which other examples of popular visual culture might be investigated, particularly where the gender ideology of these examples is examined.

The author hopes that this thesis has delineated the need for a critical debate concerning glossy men's magazines in contemporary western culture, and further trusts that this debate would treat the categories, 'art', 'pornography' and 'popular culture' with skepticism, while not shying away from the notion that elements of visual culture need to be treated critically.

5.3 Limitations of study

Since the emphasis of the dissertation falls on GQ, other relevant areas of visual culture, referred to briefly in the argumentation, were not adequately investigated. Only specific examples of canonical erotic art were referred to, for instance, and even these were not always comprehensively analysed. In a similar vein, a number of potentially problematic connotations were risked throughout the text for the sake of brevity. (The worst of these include the conflation of so-called soft and hard-core pornography into the general category of 'conventional pornography', and the conflation of diverse artworks such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, and Manet's *Olympia* as examples of 'canonical erotic art'.)

A further limitation is the fact that GQ is virtually the only glossy men's magazine referred to, a consequence of keeping the study focussed and manageable. Although focused on *GQ South Africa* 2000, the argument is, nonetheless, believed to be representative of the wider genre of glossy men's magazines.

Other theoretical positions (Marxism and semiotics, for instance), might have been employed as a point of departure, in which case different dominant and oppositional positions may have been revealed. A relatively new medium or phenomenon such as glossy men's magazines, nevertheless, warrants the amalgamation of existing strategies of interpretation (as was the case in this study) and, thus, the negotiated reading that underpins this study seems fitting. The assumption that GQ subordinates and stereotypes women would, furthermore, be difficult to circumvent from whatever perspective the magazine is investigated and, thus, the findings of this study are believed to be valid.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

There are three areas, specifically, that are the natural extension of this study: Firstly, the premises of this study might be applicable to other publications or areas within the wider context of popular visual culture. Glossy women's magazines (such as *Cosmopolitan*), for instance, have been the subject of critical gender analysis for some time (see MacRobbie 1996), and might similarly be investigated against the backdrop of canonical erotic art, as well as legislative and feminist delineations of pornography.

Secondly, the South African context may lend a culturally nuanced tone to certain images in *GQ*, thereby warranting a more culturally orientated critique of the power roles within the publication. The inclusion or exclusion of black models in *GQ*, for instance, is an aspect that was not addressed in this dissertation. Whereas the ideological premises of this study are predominantly drawn from radical feminist discourse, an analysis centered on cultural stereotyping might rely more heavily on Post-colonial theory, especially concerning the stereotyping of the 'exotic'.

Thirdly, the sales demographic of glossy men's magazines might increasingly include women. (In the same way that the sales demographic of glossy women's magazines are generally believed to include men.) As mentioned previously, the effects of gender stereotyping in glossy men's magazines on male readership is relatively under theorised, but the implications of this stereotyping on female readers seems to be even more frequently overlooked by theoreticians.⁴ An analysis centered on the female readership of *GQ* seems a natural extension of an analysis of the manner in which *GQ* objectifies and subordinates women, for the one presumably influences the other.⁵

5.5 Concluding remarks

To some, pornography is a means of liberating repressed sexual fantasy and inspiring creative sexual expression; to others, it typecasts sexuality, objectifies the body and perpetuates gendered difference (Slade 1989:957). According to Slade (1989:957), "such polarization not only constantly reshapes the arena of the debate [concerning pornography], but also ensures that no single definition of pornography will satisfy everyone". *Gentlemen's* pornography is an even more difficult genre to classify ethically, because it moves fluidly between the categories of art, pornography and popular culture, without wholly resting in any of these. The study of glossy men's magazines, like-

⁴ The male stereotypes and construction of masculinity in *GQ* were, similarly, not addressed in this study and are an equally relevant aspect of the critique of glossy men's magazines.

⁵ Research on women's responses to pornography may prove helpful to this kind of study (see Shaw 1999; Pickard 1982).

wise, is fraught with ambiguity in terms of both the material being confronted and the position from which it is interpreted.

Such polemical ambiguities as the art/pornography relationship in glossy men's magazines make it easy to forget the object of these magazines. *GQ* is situated in the entertainment industry and, thus, whatever objectifying imagery it contains, forms part of the objective of entertaining. Neil Postman (1982:264) remarks that "American culture is being turned into one long, uninterrupted show business act", a process he terms the Las Vegasizing of America, and indeed, what better description could there be for pornography of any kind than 'show business'. In the show culture of the contemporary West, *GQ* has perfected the art of selling visual display without the association of unsubtle (kitsch, common, obscene) show business.

GQ and glossy men's magazines are but one manifestation of the much wider phenomena in visual culture of sexualised consumerism and commodified sexual display. Glamorised objectification is a larger than life reality in contemporary visual culture and, perhaps because of its ubiquitous presence, frequently prompts the art-imitates-life arguments of those who believe pornography to be the *reflection* of 'obscenity' (female objectification and subordination), not the cause of it. This position is largely convincing but for the fact that it presumes imitation (representation) is innocent, even where it reinforces and naturalises what it depicts. "Evil, mediocrity", observes Kierkegaard, "is never so dangerous as when it is dressed up as 'sincerity'" (1938:363). The fact that commodified sex saturates contemporary visual culture, like the 'harmfulness' of *GQ*, may seem self-evident to the point of triviality, but they possibly "belong to that kind of truth which, just because of [its] triviality, [is] easily forgotten or neglected" (Panofsky 1959:18).

In an attempt to guard against this kind of trivialising or forgetting, this study has drawn from discussions concerning art, pornography and popular culture that at one point or another featured on the acceptable/obscene continuum (and therefore pertain to the study of glossy men's magazines). In keeping with this over-the-shoulder revisionism, one might revisit what Charles Rembar (1969:491) in the 1960s termed the *sedutio ad absurdum* of consumer culture: "Books enter the best-seller list distinguished only by the fact that once they would have put their publishers in jail ... [while t]elevision commercials peddle sex with an idiot slyness". The same observation might be made of contemporary glossy magazines that use fashion and features on current affairs to soften the glare of aestheticised sex (and not the other way round, as is often assumed). Similarly, on contemporary television, shockumentaries allow viewers to enjoy sexual display under the guise of objective investigation, and sitcoms, such as *Sex and the City* – probably the best example of a 'show and tell' format – palm in media awards for explicitly grappling with (read: showing) contemporary sexuality.

The 'solution' to the *sedutio ad absurdum* of consumer culture does not seem to lie in expelling the obscene to the periphery of social culture, for here it merely acquires the powerful appeal of subversion. Conversely, where subversive acts and obscene (stereotyping and objectifying) representations are overlooked or accepted, they acquire the association of being exempt from 'plebeian' societal norms. In this vein, Titian's *Venus and the Organ Player* (1548, figure 77), has obtained a kind of iconic status for the flippancy with which the primly dressed organ player directly peers at the naked Venus' genitals.⁶ The obscenity of Titian's artwork, however, is framed by and, to some extent, hidden behind the canonical tone of the painting (reclining Venus, drapes, and cherub).

The complex role of sex in popular culture today is much like its role in the 'high' culture of the past centuries. In both of these cases, sex is both alarmingly public and surprisingly secret. The object of this dissertation, however, was not to side with the Citizens of Decent Literature,⁷ rather the author's objection to the vast majority of sexualised representations in contemporary media is, that like Rembar (1969:491), she considers such representations as ironically anti-sex. By way of explanation, one might postulate that the abundance of sexualised representations, whether subtle or not, in all areas of contemporary culture, indicates a society that is more comfortable with the stereotyped simulacrum of the represented than the (unpredictable) reality of the real.

The recent explosion of films, magazines, and television programmes that question the 'real'-ness of human experience and individual control (*Matrix*, *Fight Club*, *The X-Files*, etc.), testify to a society that senses the simulacral nature of popular culture. Even as a marginal indicator of this phenomenon, *GQ* is a powerful contributor to a culture that prefers the constructed to the real, whether with relation to culture, gender or sex.

Like Titian's painting, *GQ* masks its pornographic nature in the (commodified) artistry of privileged high culture. The harm of *GQ* lies in the prescriptive manner in which it commodifies and sexualises women as a part of the lifestyle of consumption that underpins glossy men's magazines. The manner in which *GQ* straddles obscenity and acceptability implicates the fickle nature of these judgements, whether in the hallowed sanctuaries of high culture or the proverbial streets of mass culture. Perhaps the social or taxonomical situation of *GQ*, however, is less important than the fact that behind the artistry of its design and its 'cultivated' tone, *GQ* reduces women to sexual objects.

⁶ In an interview with Tang (1999), Lucie-Smith adds to the theme of exemption associated with the painting by questioning the motives of Phillip II, who commissioned the painting. Lucie-Smith suggests that the King is flaunting his power by commissioning a painting that situates him above the norms of 'common' decency (in Tang 1999).

⁷ Quoted by Rembar (1969:491) in *The End of Obscenity* as one of many censorship bodies.

FIGURES¹

Figure 1. Timeline of events, artworks and publications pertaining to the study:

1538	Titian completes <i>The Venus of Urbino</i> (figure 5)
1700	
1727	Common law offence of obscene libel first established in the United Kingdom
1763	Italian government begins excavations on Pompeii
1776	<i>The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i> , Edward Gibbon
1800	
1814	Jean-August-Dominique Ingres completes <i>La Grande Odalisque</i> , his most “savagely criticised” work (figure 9, Clark 1956:145)
1819	The Museum of Naples establishes the first ‘Secret Museum’ for ‘sensitive’ artifacts from Herculaneum and Pompeii
1839	Louis Daguerre unveils the daguerreotype to the French public
1857	Obscene Publications Act enacted in the United Kingdom
1863	Edouard Manet completes <i>Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe</i> (figure 12) and <i>Olympia</i> (figure 6)
1864	Manet’s <i>Le Déjeuner sur l’Herbe</i> and <i>Olympia</i> cause a furore when exhibited at the Paris Salon (Hudson 1982:102)
1865	British Museum in London creates its own ‘Secret Museum’ for ‘obscene’ relics from the classical world
1868	Chief Justice Cockburn defines obscenity as the “tendency to deprave and corrupt” in the Queen versus Hicklin case in the United Kingdom
1869	<i>Culture and Anarchy</i> , Mathew Arnold
1892	Paul Gauguin completes <i>Are you jealous?</i> (figure 13)
1900	
1931	A board of censors is established in South Africa by the Entertainments (Censorship) Act to approve all local and imported films

¹ Complete information regarding figures has been supplied where possible.

- 1952 *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir
- 1953 First issue of *Playboy* founded and published by Hugh Hefner appears in the United States of America
- 1955 *Lolita*, Vladimir Nobikov
- 1959 Inception of the revised Obscene Publications Act in the United Kingdom
- 1959 David Herbert Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* profiled as test case of the Obscene Publication's Act in the United Kingdom. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is found to be "for public good"
- 1959 Unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* published in the United Kingdom
- 1964 United States Supreme Court judge, Justice Potter Stewart proclaims, "I can't define pornography, but I know it when I see it"
- 1967 Promulgation of the South African Films and Publications Act (Act 65 of 1996)
- 1969 *Playboy* has a monthly circulation of 4,500,00, a figure unmatched by competitors (Dine 1995:259)
- 1968 Robert Guccione founds and publishes *Penthouse* in the United States of America with an initial monthly circulation of 350,000 (Dine 1995:259)
- 1969 *The End of Obscenity*, Charles Rembar
- 1969 The monthly circulation of *Penthouse* increases to 500,000 (Dine 1995:259)
- 1970 Start of the so-called pink wars, marking the financial advantage of showing female genitalia in pornographic publications
- 1970 By the end of 1970 the monthly circulation of *Penthouse* is 1,500,000
- 1970 Johnston Commission initiated to investigate 'obscene publications' in United States
- 1971 *Penthouse* publishes the first full frontal centrefold
- 1972 In January *Playboy* publishes full frontal centrefold. By August *Playboy* breaks all previous circulation records by selling 7,012,000 copies

- 1972 *The Secret Museum*, Walter Kendrick
- 1975 Visual pleasure and narrative cinema, Laura Mulvey
- 1979 *Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship* presented to Parliament in the United Kingdom
- 1980 *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1*, Michel Foucault
- 1981 *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Andrea Dworkin
- 1985 United States Civil Rights Ordinance defines 'pornography'
- 1985 *Pornography, Civil Rights and Speech*, Catherine A MacKinnon
- 1988 GQ published for the first time in the United Kingdom
- 1991 *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, Lynn Hunt
- 1991 *Sexuality in Western Art*, Edward Lucie-Smith
- 1992 *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties*, Catherine Itzin
- 1993 *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500 – 1800*, Lynn Hunt
- 1996 *The People Versus Larry Flynt* is released, "a lionizing biopic of the founder of *Hustler* magazine" (Tang 1999:11)
- 1999 *Pornography, the Secret History of Civilisation*, Isabel Tang
- 2000 *Gentlemen's Quarterly South Africa*



Figure 2
Pan and the Goat, from the Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum. Marble (Tang 1999:24).

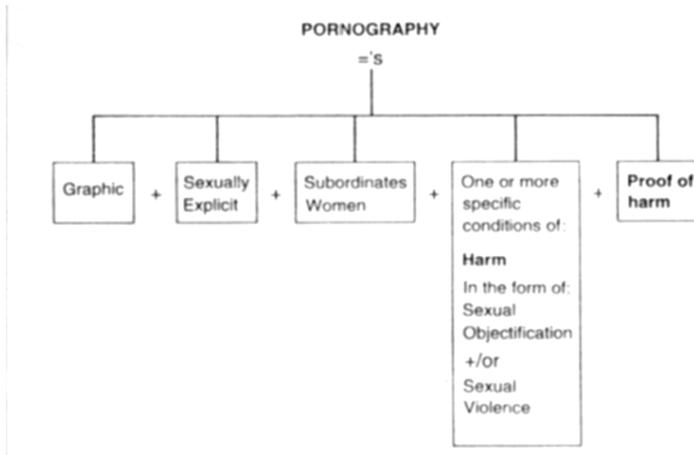


Figure 3
Legal definition of pornography. (Itzin 1992:436).



Figure 4
Leda and the Swan (after Michelangelo's *Leda and the Swan*), 1868. (Tang 1999:81).



Figure 5
TV Titian, *Venus of Urbino*,
1538, Oil on Canvas, 1.19
x 1.65m. Uffizi, Florence.
(Honour & Fleming
1999:498).

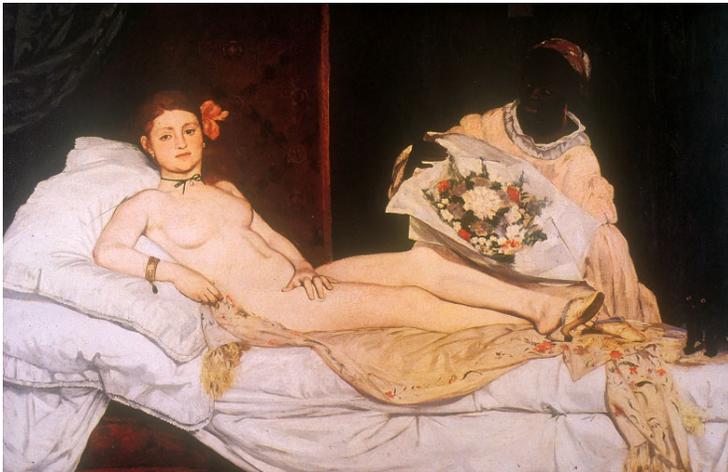


Figure 6
E Manet, *Olympia*, 1862-
1863, Oil on Canvas,
1.3 x 1.9m.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
(Honour & Fleming
1999:714).



Figure 7
Praxiteles, *Cnidian Venus*, 350B.C. Marble.
Vatican. (Clark 1956:78).



Figure 8
Hellenistic *Capitoline Venus*. Marble.
Rome. (Clark 1956:81).

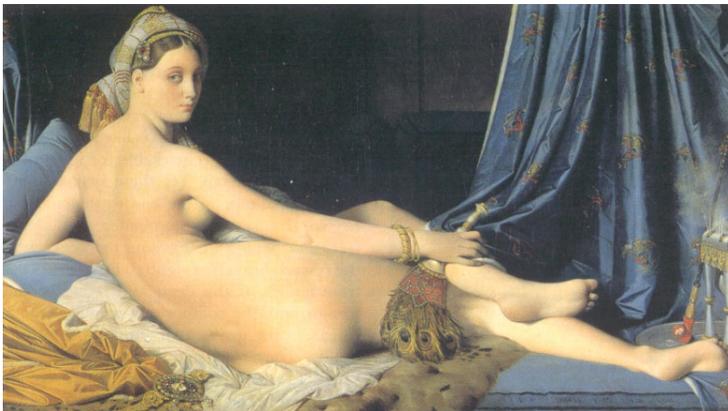


Figure 9
J.M.W. Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814. Oil on Canvas,
0.895 x 1.62 m.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.
(Janson 1992:358).



Figure 10
Eugène Delacroix, *Woman with a Parrot*,
1827. Oil on canvas, 0.25 x
0.375m. Musée des Beaux-Arts,
Lyons. (Lucie-Smith 1971:200).



Figure 11
F de Goya, *Maya desnuda*,
1798-1800. Oil on canvas.
Museo del Prado.
(Field 1981:86).



Figure 12
E Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur
l'Herbe*, 1863, Oil on
canvas, 2.14 x 2.79m.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
(Honour & Fleming
1999:677).



Figure 13
Paul Gauguin, *Are You
Jealous?* 1892. Oil on canvas.
0.66 x 0.89 m
The Pushkin Museum of Fine
Art, Moscow.
(University of Pretoria slide
archive).



Figure 14
F de Goya,
La Maya Vestida,
1798/1805. Oil on
canvas.
(University of Pretoria
slide archive).



Figure 15
TV Titian, *Venus Anadyomene*, 1522.
(Tang 1999:97).



Figure 16
M Darnay, *Augustine Guy*, 1858.
(Tang 1999:97).

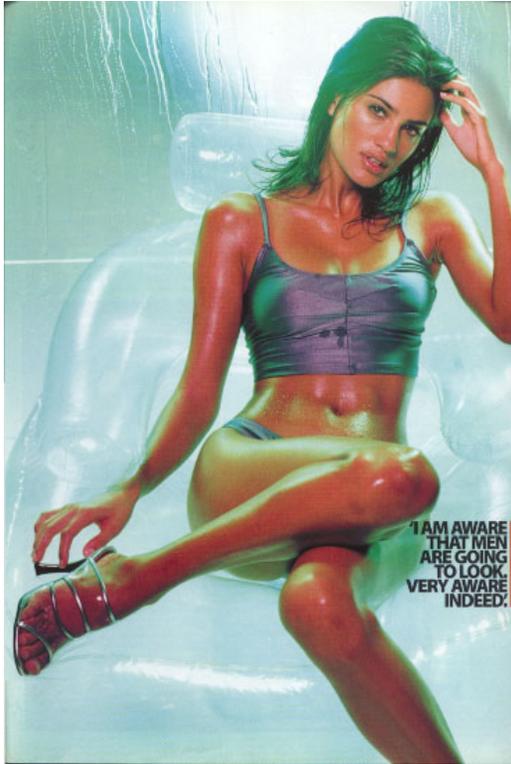


Figure 17
My Bikini.
(GQ October 2000:81).

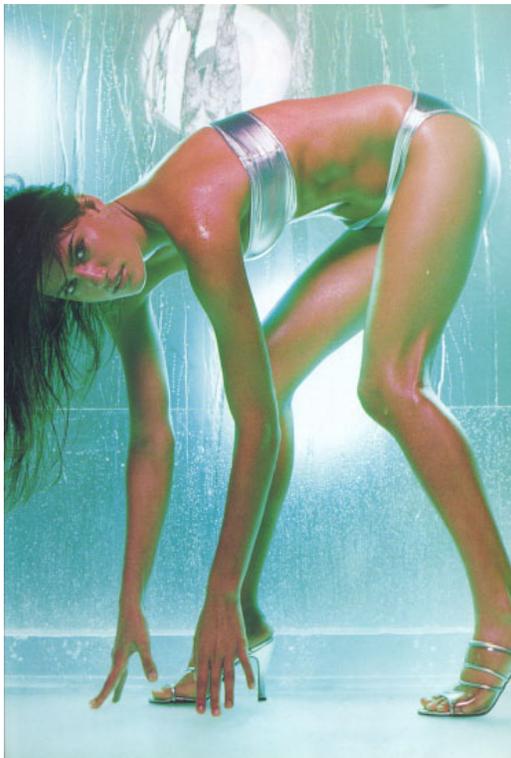


Figure 18
My Bikini.
(GQ October 2000:81).



Figure 19
GQ Cover.
(GQ November 2000).



Figure 20
Man's World.
(GQ Millennium 2000:56-57).



Figure 21
Who is Katie Richmond?
(GQ October 2000:30).



Figure 22
Keeping Abreast.
(GQ March 2000:26).

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EXTREME AURAL PLEASURE

GQTalk



See Lara Croft Naked!

The sight of Lara Croft in various stages of undress is nothing new to a particular set of sad but horny 'net surfers. The virtual sex symbol and heroine of the popular 2000 Action computer games can be found in the buff on sites all over the web. But the designers of the game put their boot down when a US soft-porn magazine published nude pictures of model **Neil Myles** – the 'real-life' incarnation of Ms Croft. The design company, Core Design, got an internetc against the magazine, saying Ms Croft's 'spacey-class' image would be irreversibly tarnished by association with the soft-porn mag. The publishers had to blink and the **Tomb Raider** and Ms Croft's name from 20 000 editions of the magazine.

www.lara_in_the_buff.com

- www.magazines.starz.com
- www.rockstar.com is a really way to get you to
- http://hustler.com/lejs
- www.tombraider.com, the official Lara Croft website.

'Once upon a blah blah blah'

Not willing to let UK drill sergeant David Chester die, Bahar Lypton Felson joins, for the event opening sentence of a novel. This is his sister: "Through the gathering gloom of a late October afternoon, along the grassy, matted pathing of the sky, sleek from the spume of the sky.

Stanley Haderthorp warily nudged up the hill from the cemetery where his wife, sister, brother and three children were all buried, and faced open the door of his deceiving house, blissfully unaware of the catastrophe that was soon to devastate his life. The end.

Figure 23
See Lara Croft Naked!
(GQ Millennium 2000:32).

Present perfect

Think diamonds, rubies and rabbits. Model Rebecca Romijn talks about the tradition of giving... a lot.

Do you ever receive gifts from distant relatives swept off their feet by the Victoria's Secret catalogue or the Sports Illustrated annual issue? I get lots of postcards. How says to present? And military academies I get lots of cards, but don't think I've ever received any gifts. What's the most extravagant gift you've ever received from your husband? The simple gift. Beautiful gifts. Well, my husband has come through with some really creative gifts that I love. We both stay about linear and for our first Christmas we got the same gift. We got a wrapped poster signed by John Travolta. He always had the poster and then he took it down. Travolta through his manager.

And what did you give him? Oh, that was probably the most memorable thing he ever gave. I had to compensate for it that night. What tops the list of gifts guys should shy away from? Some guys think the more they spend the better. I just think that's so wrong. A man who has to buy more extravagant gifts is trying to make up for a lack of attention or affection. What's the best present you remember getting on a child? He didn't have a lot of presents, but my dad was a woodworker. He made toys and sold them on the street in San Francisco. One year he made a beautiful doll's house. Another year it was a miniature supermarket. My mom spent all year collecting

rehabilitation and designed to put in it. In this day she'll still find stuff that she thinks belongs in that market. What's the most extravagant present you've given yourself? A beautiful face of the century riding along in their tank. What do you have trouble buying for yourself? I find it hard to buy lingerie. It's not extravagant to buy for yourself. I think men should buy what they want to see their women in. What could your boyfriend buy you to best show off your assets? I feel wrong in my underwear. Always so proud. There are long Calvin Klein ones. They're kind of like tank tops with legs. I don't know what they're called. I feel to wear just the underwear and nothing else.



Rebecca

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT BRIDGEMAN

Figure 24
Present Perfect.
(GQ March 2000:134-135).



Figure 25
Present Perfect.
(GQ March 2000:136-137).



Figure 26
Cell Girl.
(GQ October 2000:18-19).



Figure 29
Speed. Rough Rider.
(GQ March 2000:109).



Figure 30
H Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1791. Oil on
Canvas, 0.76 x 0.63 m.
Goethe Museum, Frankfurt-Am-Main.
(Vaughan 1978:49).

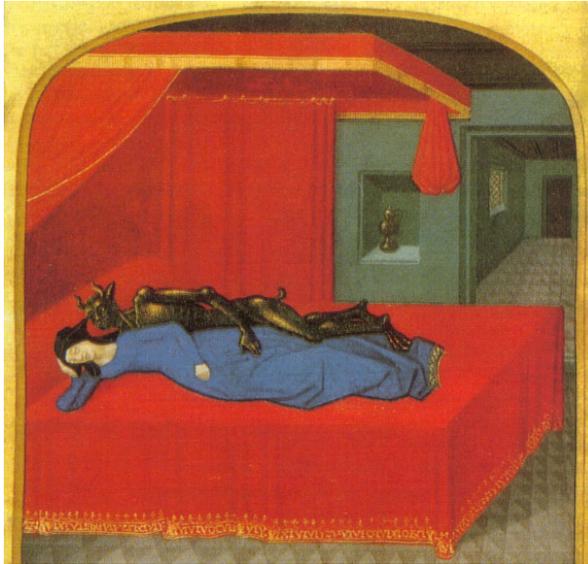


Figure 31
Histoire de Merlin, fourteenth-century, illumination. (Tang 1999:50).



Figure 32
The X-Factor.
(GQ October 2000:24).



Figure 33
H Baldung Grien, *Death and the Maiden*, 1517. (Tang 1999:54).



Figure 34
 Hunt for the Giant Squid.
 (GQ March 2000:130-132).



Figure 35
 F de Goya, *Bandits Stripping a Woman Naked*, 1808. Oil on canvas.
 (University of Pretoria archive).

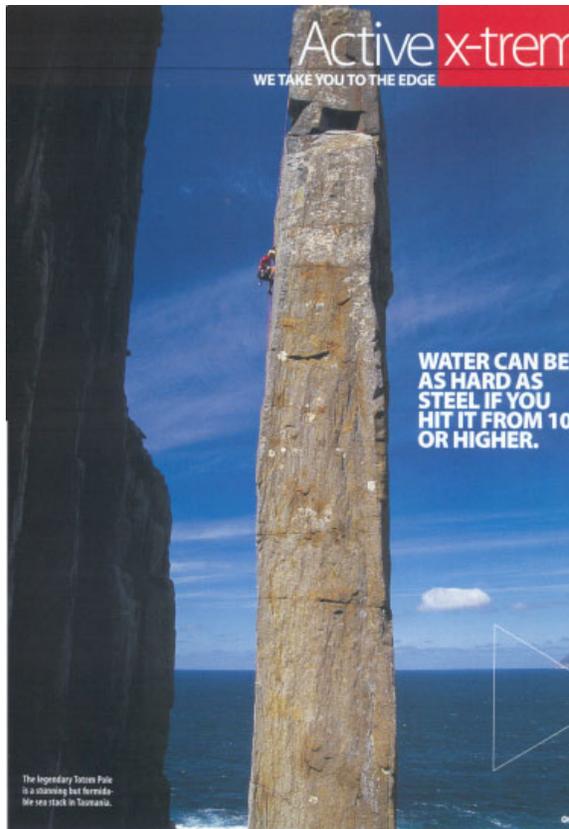


Figure 36
X-treme.
(GQ October 2000:149).



Figure 37
Smack It!
(GQ September 2000:108-109).



Figure 38
Sports Classic.
(GQ March 2000:184).



Figure 39
I am a Man.
(GQ December 2000:156-157).



Figure 40
Honk! Honk! (*FHM* June 2001:54-55).



Figure 41
B Braquehuis. *Academic Study - No 6*,
1854 (Tang 1999:101).



Figure 42
T Eakins, *Nude in the style of Velasquez*, 1880.
(University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 43
J Vermeer, *The Art of Painting*, 1670. Oil on Canvas,
1.2 x 1m. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
(Honour & Fleming 1999:610).



Figure 44
R Polack, *The Artist and his model*, 1914.
Platina print. RPS, Bath.
(University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 45
Man's World. Five Star.
(GQ November 2000:42).



Figure 46
L Maholy Nagy, *Nude*. 1931.
(University of Pretoria slide archive).

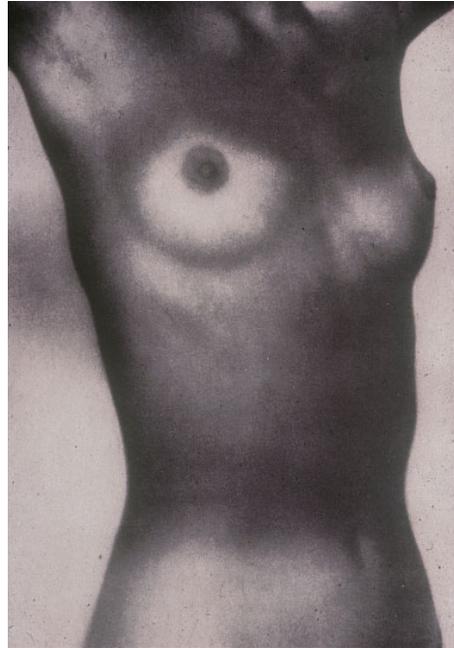


Figure 47
Man Ray, *Untitled*. 1933.
(University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 48
E Weston, *Nude*. (University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 49
GQ Calendar 2000. January.
(GQ Millennium 2000).



Figure 50
Munch, *Sin*, 1901. Lithograph. (University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 51
GQ Calendar 2000. February.
(GQ Millennium 2000).

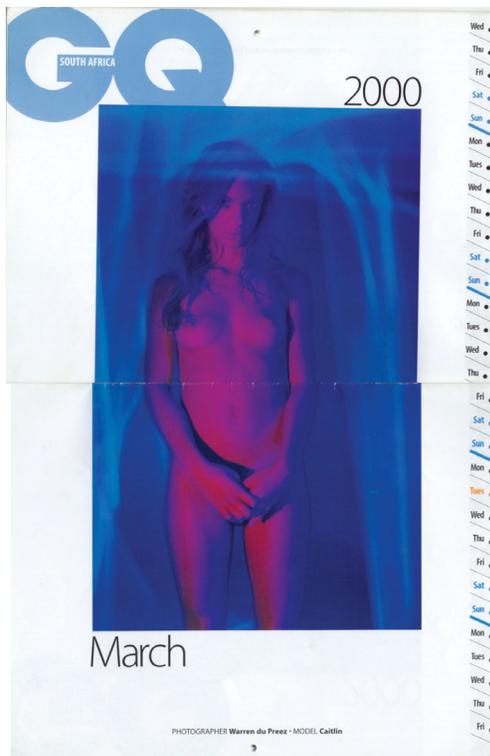


Figure 52
GQ Calendar 2000. March.
(GQ Millennium 2000).

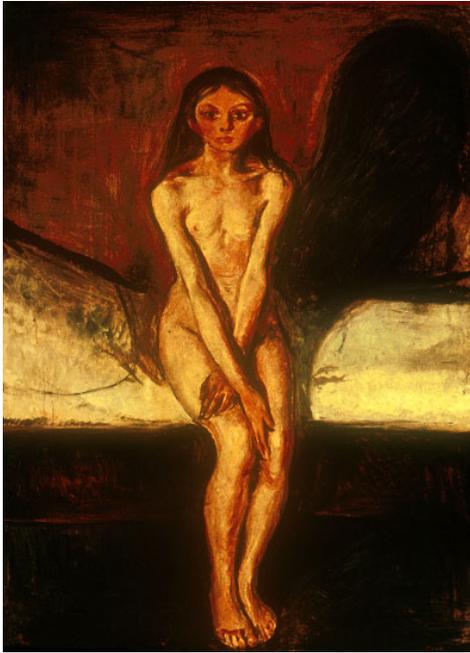


Figure 53
Munch, *Puberty*, 1895. Oil on Canvas,
1.52 x 1.1m. National Gallery, Oslo.
(Tansey 1996:1008).



Figure 54
GQ Calendar 2000. April.
(GQ Millennium 2000).



Figure 55
GQ Calendar 2000. June.
(GQ Millennium 2000).



Figure 56
GQ Calendar 2000. August.
(GQ Millennium 2000).

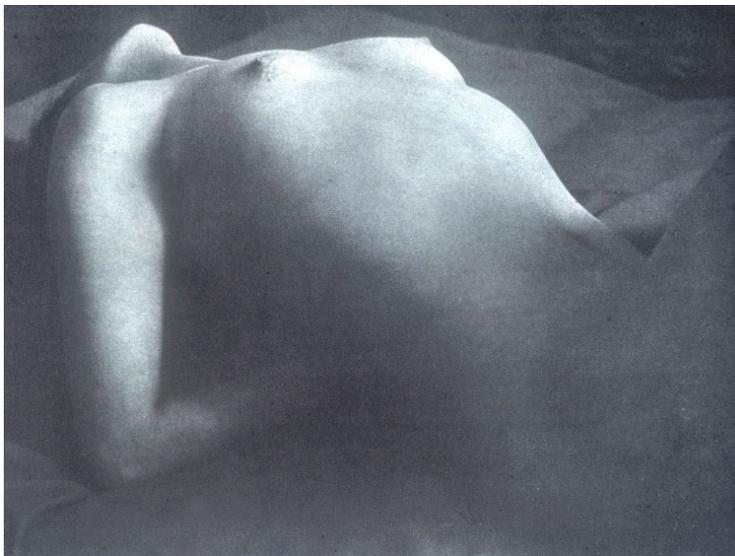


Figure 57
Brassai, *Nude*, appeared in
Minotaure, 1933.
(University of Pretoria slide
archive).



Figure 58
GQ Calendar 2000. December.
(GQ Millennium 2000).



Figure 59
Man Ray, *Prayer*, 1930.
Photograph. Lee Miller Archives, East
Sussex.
(University of Pretoria slide archive).



Figure 60
The Shape of Things to Come.
(GQ Millennium 2000:155).

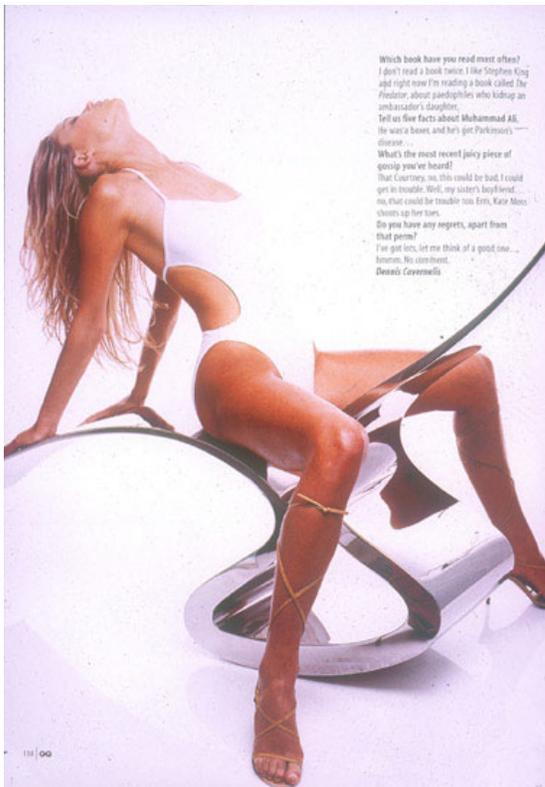


Figure 61
She's Our Girl.
(GQ September 2000:130).

	QUALITY PRESS	POPULAR PRESS	GQ
INTERPRETIVE PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employs a tone of objective detachment ('abstract') - presents a fragmented image or argument and expects the reader to construct cohesive meaning - relies on referential information on the part of the reader - employs truth and objectivity, which prompts readers to 'decipher' the text - 'decipherment' leads to the perception of acceptance and distanciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - invokes self-identification and personal involvement in reader ('empathetic') - creates immediacy by using the 'personal' as an explanatory framework - prefers a 'story-telling' narrative structure - uses unresolved contradictions, incomplete information, scepticism and parody, which prompts readers to 'read' the text - 'reading' is participatory, it involves the production of relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - style and register of articles presumes a wide understanding or referential knowledge of certain subjects (such as business, politics and cars) - personally involves the reader by addressing him in the first person and including him in a collective 'we'
IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may be 'radical' in that it has the potential to oppose or overthrow the social order - articulates the interests of the 'power-bloc' - wields the information and knowledge necessary to maintain prevailing power structures (ironically) produces a 'believing subject' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may be progressive, <i>i.e.</i> it may destabilise the social order (but never overthrow it) - creates a sense of polarisation between 'the people' and the power-bloc - encourages an antagonistic reading that is in opposition to the power-bloc - invokes disbelief and a sense of 'seeing through' the power-bloc - mounts a populist challenge on privilege by 'bashing' the power-bloc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifies itself with the 'power-bloc' through articles that chronicle the rise to success of the rich and famous (as opposed to the 'fall from grace' articles typical of the popular press) - sexualises materialism (and, subsequently, the power-bloc) - produces a 'believing subject' by supporting and affirming prevailing power structures (e.g. Capitalism, patriarchy and phallogentrism)

Figure 62
Loosely based on the assumptions of Peter Dahlgren (in Storey 1996), John Fiske (1989), and John Storey (1996).



Figure 63
Kids in the picture.
(GQ September 2000:18-19).



Figure 64
 South Africans.com.
 (GQ September 2000:36,41).



Figure 65
 Emmanuel Lediga.
 (GQ September 2000:56).



Figure 66
The last Tom Cruise story you'll ever read.
 (GQ September 2000:132-133).



Figure 67
How to...choose a suit.
 (GQ Millennium 2000:38).



Figure 68
100 Ways to be a Gentleman.
(GQ November 2000:128-129).



Figure 69
GQ Calendar 2000. November.
(GQ Millennium 2000).

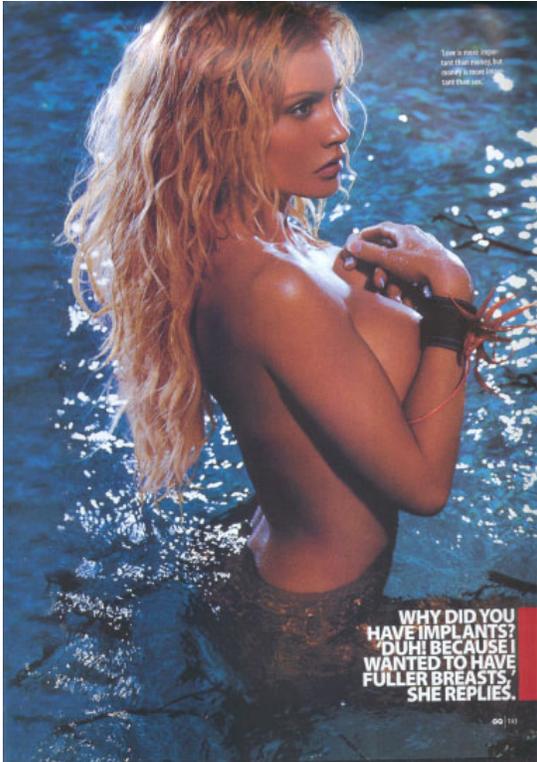


Figure 70
Grapple with me.
(GQ November 2000:143).

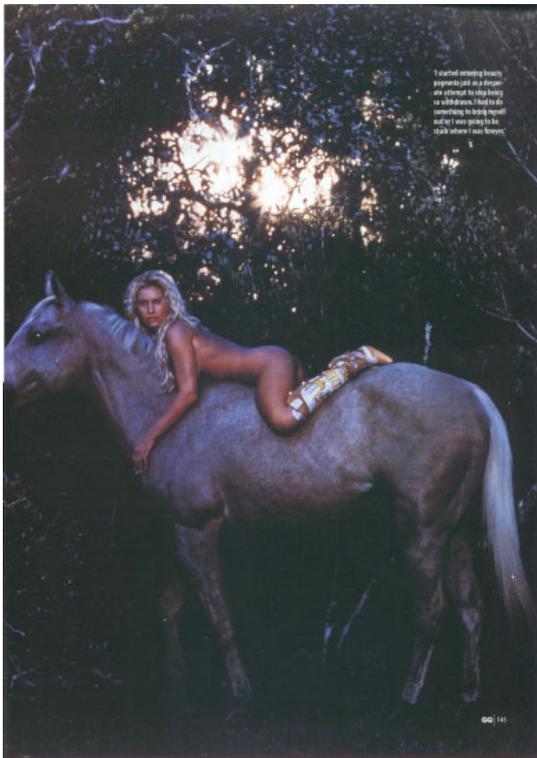


Figure 71
Grapple with me.
(GQ November 2000:145).

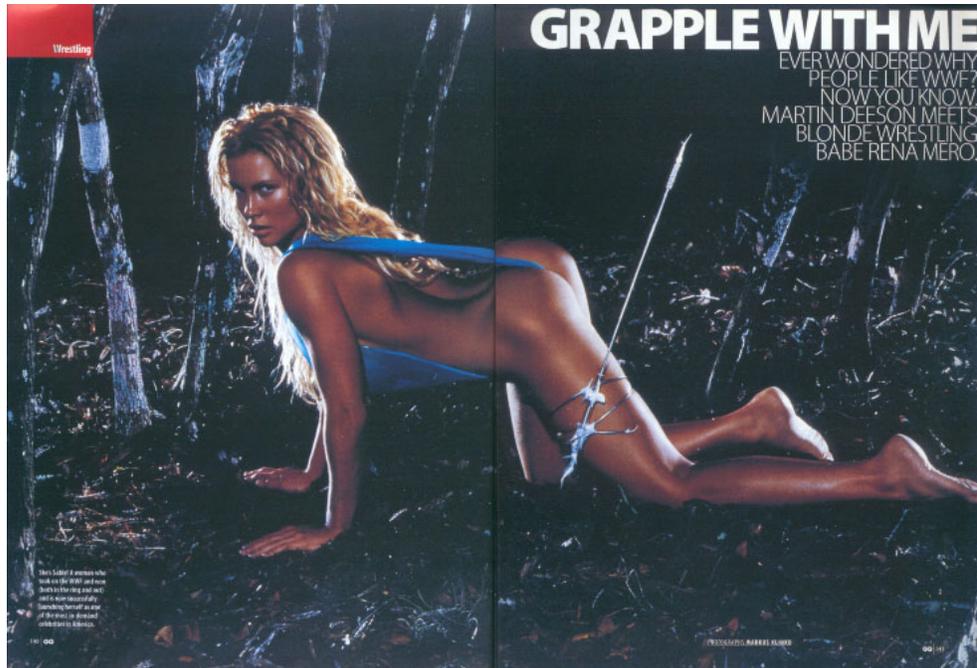


Figure 72
Grapple with me.
(GQ November 2000:140-141).

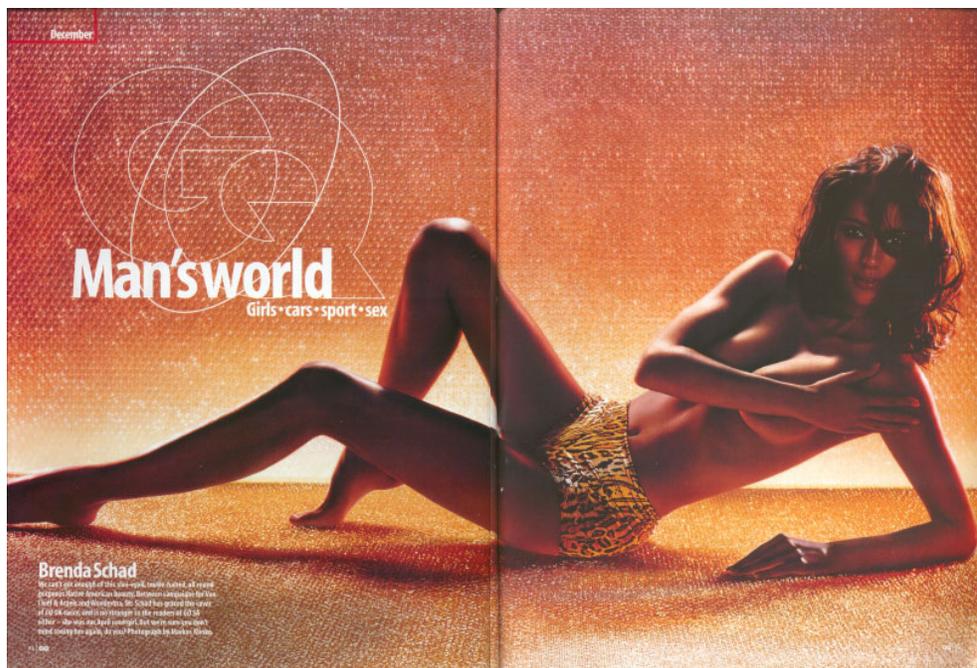


Figure 73
Man's World.
(GQ December 2000:42:43).



Figure 74
Time's Up, Miss.
(GQ November 2000:55).



Figure 75
Wonder Woman.
(GQ December 2000:154-155).



Figure 76
Meet me on the beach.
(GQ September 2000:156-157).



Figure 77
Titian, *Venus and the Organ Player*, 1550. Oil on canvas.
(Tang 1999:69).

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