SCREEN

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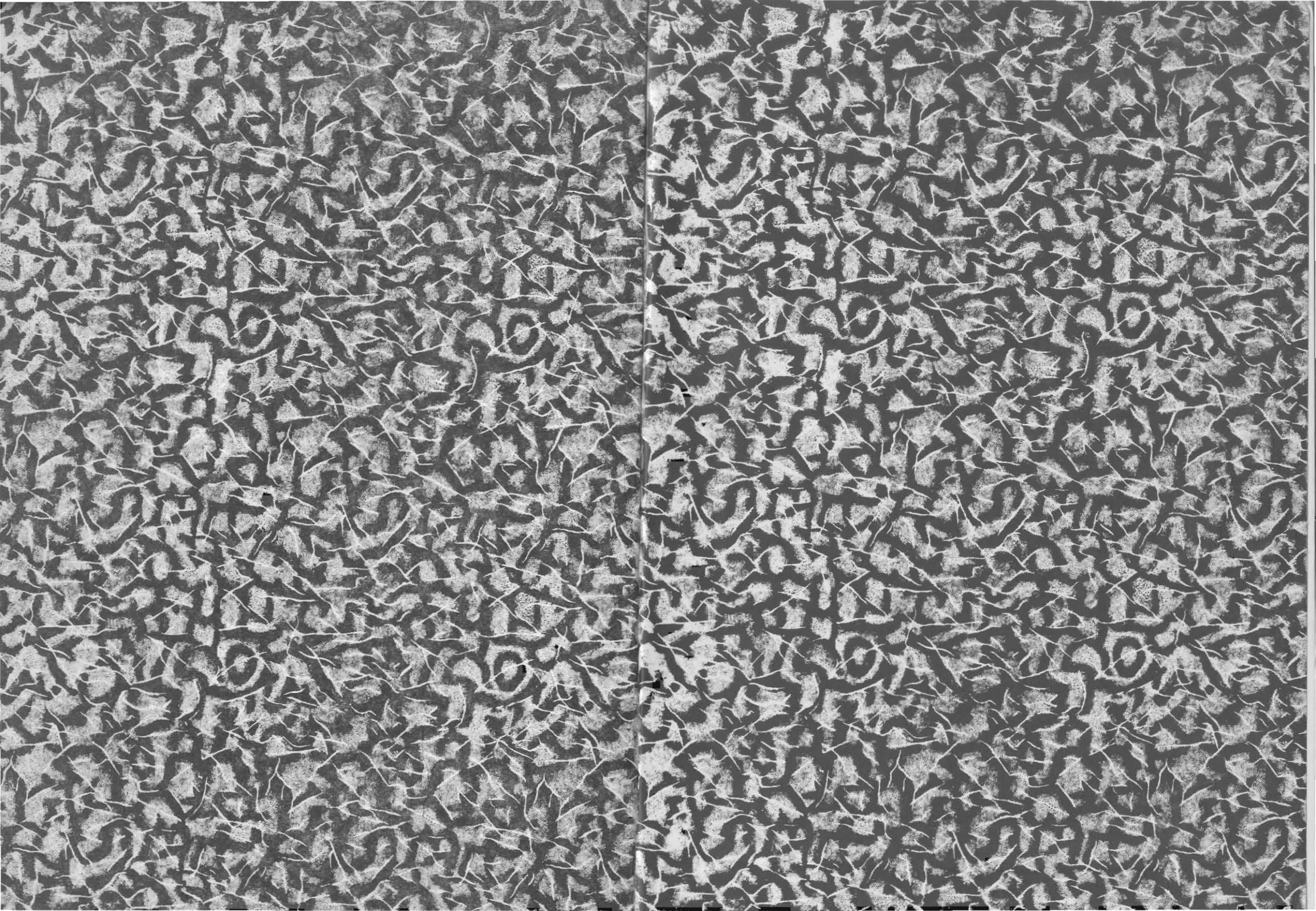
MANET'S 'OLYMPIA' IN 1865: TIM CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHY: VICTOR BURGIN
PORNOGRAPHY: JOHN ELLIS
HOLLYWOOD: GOMERY/EATON



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EDITORIAL

Screen's work on visual representations has displaced traditional criticism of the artistic text as an object 'from' which an inherent meaning can be deciphered, to concentrate on the regimes of looking allowed to the spectator by texts and their institutional placing. This displacement has been effected firstly by semiotic analysis which insisted on the artistic text as the product of a social practice rather than a naturalised representation of reality. The extended consideration of realism which followed *Screen*'s discussion of semiotics introduced the crucial area of extra-textual determination that has been central to recent debates in *Screen*. Secondly, the concern with psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic concepts raised the question of the semiotic status and functioning of the image itself — but so far this has been addressed in *Screen* only in terms of the sequencing of images, of film as system and process.

Consequently, a certain area of the ideology of the visual has remained unexamined, including a whole range of positions from notions of the image as an excess of signification, escaping narrative constraints, to an affect founded in pre-linguistic processes or as an extra-discursive phenomenological essence. Perhaps it is in the field of artistic practices which are not specifically cinematic that future issues of *Screen* can examine this area productively for film criticism and also continue our revised project to engage a wider sphere of cultural work.

While the articles by Clark, Burgin and Ellis in this issue deal with radically different codes of representation and institutional discourses, they are crucially related in a political

trajectory which questions received definitions of fine art, photography or pornography as discrete and self-referential systems. This is accomplished on the one hand by analysing the historical specificity of the critical discourses which construct these definitions, and on the other, by considering the specific relations of subjectivity that constitute a 'picture' in terms of the look it solicits and returns.

Tim Clark's article is the first of several to extend *Screen*'s concerns with visual representations into the area of artistic practice traditionally designated as fine art, but which is reconsidered here in terms of a critical discourse which examines the conditions of the work's readability as pictorial text. Clark analyses the ways two discourses (representations of women and of aesthetic judgement in France in the 1860s) created an unreadable text in Manet's painting *Olympia*. He maintains that the hostile response of the critics of the *Salon* of 1865 turned finally on the question of Olympia's ambiguous sexual identity (effected through the picture's uncertainty of address, the transgression of the codes of drawing and conventions of the nude). He also points to a changing recognition of possible representations of the body which have subsequently incorporated this avant-garde text into mainstream art history. Clark continues *Screen*'s discussion of the political effectivity of artistic practice and the sociohistorical determinants of their reading.

Victor Burgin gives extended consideration to the question of fetishism and argues that the understanding it gives of the viewers' implication in the object of their vision enables us to recast the continuing debates about the social role of photography and the possibilities of a progressive photographic practice. In drawing on debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s he argues for combining the formalist approach (disrupting the viewers' codes of reading — a position advocated by Rodchenko) with an approach privileging progressive content, while at the same time recognising that struggles for meaning occur within discursive formations, at the interface of text and subject. He also argues against a modernist discourse (instanced in the criticism of Greenberg and Szarkowski) which defines categories of 'art' in terms of a medium (material substrate) and calls for a consideration of representational practices within an 'intersemiotic and intertextual arena' (quoting Peter Wollen, 'Aesthetics and Photography', *Screen* vol 19 no 4).

The issue of pornography is raised for the first time in *Screen* in an article by John Ellis. Questions such as what connects representations classed as 'pornographic', of whether we can say anything about their social effects are made particularly relevant in the context of the current debate initiated by the Williams report. This Government commissioned study recommends the criterion of public acceptability in determining what materials should be on restricted or open sale. It differentiates between material media (writing/live performance/film) for which different criteria of potential harm come into play. Whereas writing is not regarded as harmful and therefore should not be subject to restrictions on availability, film's 'realism' is regarded as sufficiently potentially harmful that they argue for the continuation of film censorship. Ellis initiates a study of the 'institution' of pornography and argues that a fuller understanding of the psychoanalytic mechanism of fetishism can help us understand existing forms of representation of sexuality in the struggle to displace current forms with more progressive representations.

MARY KELLY
MARK NASH

ROLAND BARTHES died in Paris on 26 March 1980 as a result of injuries sustained when he was knocked down by a van one month earlier. He was 64.

His work covered many topics central to *Screen*'s interests and — from *Mythologies* to *Elements of Semiology* to *S/Z* — has been generally and decisively influential for our thinking, our projects. His last book, published almost simultaneously with the accident that was to cost him his life, was an essay on the photograph, *La Chambre claire*, in which certain of the ideas scattered in previous articles (notably 'The Third Meaning', the analysis of different levels of meaning in the response to some Eisenstein stills) are taken up and developed in relation to that concern for the individual, the particular terms of the subjective, which had been so important to him in recent years (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, *A Lover's Discourse*).

What we lose now with Barthes, above all and quite simply, is a voice, a writing, an existence that constantly opened new questions, proposed new forms of understanding, changed things for us.

MICK EATON

TASTE OF THE PAST - CINEMA HISTORY ON TELEVISION

It should be of no little interest to readers of *Screen* that in the past few months the Hollywood cinema has been the subject of a wide-ranging process of rehabilitation. A major Thames Television series on the early days of Hollywood (*Hollywood, the Pioneers*) has recently finished a 13 week run; the published spin-off from the series (same title, Collins, written by Kevin Brownlow, one of the producer/directors of the series) is in the hardback bestseller list and an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum on the 'Art of Hollywood', again presented by Thames Television, has also recently finished. The research for the series, conducted by Kevin Brownlow and his colleagues, has taken several years and no expense has been spared to acquire the best possible prints and to transfer them on to video at the speeds at which they should be shown. Given that the bulk of publications relating to the 'history' of the cinema available on the popular market are ill-researched, nostalgic fripperies merely perpetuating the myths about the growth of the industry, and given, also, that the knowledge of the silent cinema (not least among those who teach film) is often extremely poor, this task is a laudable one. Brownlow and his collaborators wish to set the record straight, to reinstate the silent cinema as an object of popular speculation. However, perhaps it is time to air a voice of dissent, to stand aside from the overwhelmingly uncritical reception of these projects by professional critics, and to interrogate them, if only briefly, from a position consonant with the inquiry into forms of cinematic representation articulated in the pages in *Screen* and elsewhere over the past few years.

Almost by necessity this process of rehabilitation is grounded on such undefined and ultimately indefinable values as 'technique', 'artistry' and 'quality'. The pioneers of the pre-sound cinema were not only achieving results henceforth unparalleled in the cinema, but the only reward they have received for these ground-breaking tasks is to have been forgotten. 'History' becomes a matter of finding forgotten films, forgotten technicians, and inserting them back into their position of prominence. What emerges, then, is nothing less than a perpetuation of the old myths of Hollywood with a slight change of emphasis and a somewhat larger roster

This article is a revision and expansion of an earlier draft written with Colin MacCabe.

of leading characters. No longer is it possible for us to dismiss the silent cinema. 'The magic of cinema' is enhanced, and our position as audience willingly implicated in the spectacles of Hollywood is confirmed. If anything we may even feel a tinge of nostalgic regret that those of us socialised to the cinematic experience through the humdrum dramas of more recent years may have missed out on the more intense pleasures of our grandparents in the picture palaces of yesteryear.

The V and A exhibition poses slightly different problems from those of the television series — problems which accrue around the apparently contradictory notions of authorship, and of film as a 'collaborative art'. Rather than attempting to introduce us to new possibilities of cinematic spec(tac)ularity, it took its audiences, assumed love of the cinema for granted, concentrating on tried and tested memories of contemporary film goers. So there were rooms dedicated to the movies that do good business in revival houses — the 1930's musicals, the *film noir* — as well as all-time classics of the screen — *Intolerance, Gone with the Wind* and *Citizen Kane*, for example. In these rooms we were enjoined to discover the talents of the art directors of Hollywood. In the pantheon of pleasure the names of such 'forgotten figures' as Richard Day, Anton Grot and Van Nest Polglase can be added to those of Griffith, Welles and Berkeley.

Perhaps it is too much to expect the walls of the V&A or a peak-time television slot to be the sites of any historical analysis of how the cinema in America moved from being a minor fairground attraction to a vertically integrated, effectively self-regulating major industry with an annual investment of about one and a half billion dollars, in a little less than twenty years. Perhaps it is also naïve and idealistic to expect a television company to inaugurate any but the most superficial examination of the mechanics of visual pleasure and specularity in the cinema. The ramifications of this might be felt not only in the ratings. Obviously, the history of Hollywood as an industry cannot be viewed in isolation from the whole history of finance capital in the USA. The investment in the possibility of pleasure that the banks and big business undertook in the early decades of this century had directly determining effects on the fictional forms produced by Hollywood. No simple relationship can of course exist between investments of capital and the pleasures of the audience. However, the way in which the Thames series continually skirts these issues does nothing to make public knowledge of the development of Hollywood any more 'historical' than it already is, and it is not merely bad faith or academic griping to insist on the necessity of the writing of this history.

Let us take a concrete example of error by omission. In the third programme of the series we were given an account of a series of scandals in Hollywood which led to the eventual formation of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, the appointment of Will Hays as the 'moral watchdog' of the industry, and the establishment of a code controlling the content of motion pictures. The show presents this as a simple ideological decision: public outcry at the excesses of the stars' private lives and the films' treatment of sex and violence results in the formation of an institution to curb these tendencies. The reality would, however, appear to be much more complicated. The major studios who formed the MPPDA welcomed the opportunity for self-regulation, as this provided effective security of investment and consolidation of control for the banks who by that time had gained the economic whip-hand in Hollywood. At the same time, profiting from the economic chaos in Europe after the first world war, Hollywood was supplying more and more films for the world market. The establishment of the Hays Code ensured the industry's freedom from outside censorship by either state or federal governments. Similarly, the establishment of the Code ensured that the studios acquired a stranglehold over the outlets for distribution throughout the States. The cinema becomes a much safer investment than, say, the press or radio.

Perhaps even more important are the effects the Hays Code had on the development of fictional forms. This is, of course, easily determined with reference to content — American films for the European market continue to be more sexually explicit, in terms of the exhibition of the female body, for example, than the versions released on the home market. Much more difficult to determine with any precision, and much more interesting, is the effect that, for example, the 'control of sexuality' exerted by the Code had on the organisation of narrative. We need only think of the tremendous weight given to marriage as an effective form of closure in the classic Hollywood film, and the narrative complexity generated by the repression of the erotic, focus of much of the progressive film theory generated in recent years.

It is in regard to the investment in and development of certain fictional forms, certain conventions of narrative organisation, that the series is lamentably deficient. In its incessant need to reclaim the silent cinema as a popular art which was at least, if not more, technically inventive, than its contemporary counterpart, the most pertinent questions are jettisoned in advance. What emerges is a familiar pattern: the 'natural' or 'universal' language of the cinema lies dormant, present from the start in the technology, merely waiting to be drawn out by the appropriate pioneer. The discovery of this natural language, 'Esperanto for the eyes' as Brownlow calls it, becomes a process of trial and error — the experiments of the pioneers are either sanctioned or not by the audience:

And if the experience took you out of yourself and enriched you, you talked about it to your friends, creating the precious 'word of mouth' publicity that the industry depended upon. You may have exaggerated a little, but the movies soon matched your hyperbole. They evolved to meet the demands of their audience. (Preface, p 7)

So one glaring omission of the series so far is the lack of any account of the development of the standard shot sequences to forms of narrative. Two brief examples will suffice. The famous sequence from *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) in which the gang-leader fires his gun directly out of screen is merely accompanied by the commentator's assurance that this shot made the audience feel more involved in the drama. So although 'primitive', Porter's work becomes 'pure cinema'. What is however much more interesting about this 'famous first' is the fact that it has no place in the narrative of the film at all. Rapidly the Hollywood cinema would develop conventional forms such as the 30-degree rule which would ensure that the possibility of breaking the spell of collusion between audience and diegesis would be severely curtailed. As Noël Burch makes clear in his discussion of Porter ('Porter, or Ambivalence', *Screen* Winter 1978/9 vol 19 no 4) rather than this shot being central in the development of the natural language of the cinema, it was in fact radically eccentric. So much so that the shot was delivered to exhibitors on a separate reel: 'it was up to the exhibitors to decide whether to stick it on at the beginning or end of the film.' Secondly, in the discussion of Griffith (p 62), Brownlow quotes from a Biograph advertisement:

Included in the innovations which he introduced and which are now generally

followed by the most advanced producers are: the use of large close-up figures, distant views, the 'switchback', sustained suspense, the 'fade-out' and restraint in expression, raising motion picture acting which has won for it recognition as a genuine art.

His comments on this well-known piece of hyperbole are as follows:

Griffith was not responsible for the close-up or the fade-out nor would it have made any difference if he had been. What counted was how such devices were used. Griffith used them efficiently, sometimes brilliantly, and the tendency is to credit him with everything possible in the cinema.

We have already been told why Griffith should have been the one to exploit this language. Griffiths' days as a touring ham actor in melodrama gave him a knowledge of audiences in the lower strata of American life. Karl Brown, Billy Bitzer's assistant cameraman is quoted as follows (p 41):

these same town-and-country yokels became the audience upon which the nickelodeons depended for their life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Griffith knew this. He also knew the psychology of the cheapest of cheap audiences as no New York producer ever could.

Once again the complex determinations operating on the development of narrative cinema become naturalised, the question of a simple transaction between audience and producer. The cinema remains a monolithic institution.

In a recent harangue against semiotic film criticism ('Cinematic Theology' — *New Statesman*, January 25, 1980 p 138) Brownlow expresses his desire to 'communicate to the outside world', castigating *Screen* and others for their apparently fascistic disregard for the necessity of clear communication. When we peer beneath the surface of de-contexualised fact and anecdote that forms the veneer of his own particular practice it becomes clearer that what he so disparages is any attempt to understand and to theorise the relationship between the changing forms of film (both fictional and non-fictional) and changes in the technology and institutional forms (methods of production and distribution) of the cinema. The unquestioning attitude to the forms of early cinema is reproduced in the use of the forms of television in the *Hollywood* series. From the use of the authenticating voice of the traditional commentator to the tantalising brevity of the film clips shown, and the use of interviews cut into fragments which only serve as a confirmation of what we have already seen and heard — every element of the programme serves to confirm the naturalness of the cinematic institution and our love of it remains uncompromised.

DOUGLAS GOMERY

REVIEW: 'THE MOVIE BRATS'

Michael Pye, and Lynda Myles, *The Movie Brats* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979)

Subtitled, 'How the film generation took over Hollywood,' this volume* chronicles and analyses the rise to power of Francis Coppola, George Lucas, Brian DePalma, John Milius, Martin Scorsese, and Steven Spielberg. These 'brats' created some of Hollywood's most spectacular box-office successes during the past decade (for example, *The Godfather* Part I and II, *Jaws*, and *Star Wars*). The bulk of this book consists of standard 'biographical/critical' analyses of how these six (versus many others who tried) were able to gain a measure of power within the current Hollywood economic system. Little new material exists here (c 1978). The authors gleaned their data from magazine articles in *American Film*, *Film Comment*, *Esquire*, and interviews. I shall not critique their approach or sources for this portion of the book; enough has been done with such methods in *Screen* and elsewhere (compare Pye/Myles' analysis of *Jaws* (pp 223-228) with Stephen Heath's review in *Framework* no 4, Summer 1976).

In the first quarter of their book Pye/Myles analyse how a new Hollywood economics replaced the classic studio system, in their own words 'how the playground opened'. Pye/Myles note that the US populace drifted away from the filmgoing habit after World War II, and then argue it took the six aforementioned 'brats' to bring the masses back into the cinemas. Pye/Myles attempt to refute the conventional wisdom that television, principally, and the 1948 US Supreme Court Paramount Case and, secondarily, the McCarthyite Red Scare, caused the old Hollywood economic order to crumble. The two authors then argue that a changing social structure gave rise to the shift away from the movies. With the end of World War II, the principle focus of most US citizens turned to raising a family and purchasing a single family dwelling. Pye/Myles assert that

The young and educated, the main audience for film, were concentrating their attention on home and marriage. Television, cunningly, offered shows in which the star seemed to visit your home, addressed you confidently, and made the experience of television a social act around the hearth. More important, sitting in a darkened cinema did not help place you in a community, as going to church did. It did not symbolize family. It did not, like spectator sports, offer a focus to male solidarity away from the family. To families in suburbia, the cinema served no purpose. (p 18)

Moreover the move to the suburbs took the new family units far from downtown first-run cinemas. For Pye/Myles the telling statistics indicate that film attendance declined drastically from 1946

to 1950, even though few families owned television receivers.

Subsequently, cinemas closed their doors, studios shuttered 'B' units, and banks began to invest their monies elsewhere. Pye/Myles go on to examine how television filled the 'B' film void. Samuel Arkoff of American International Pictures and Roger Corman began to create films for specialised audiences, and, the authors argue, supply the entry point for the children of suburbia ('the brats') into the Hollywood system. We also learn that fresh talent began to emerge from film schools. Special tax breaks and conglomerate ownership helped underwrite alternative sources for working capital. While all these effects are familiar to industry observers, Pye/Myles must be credited for seeking out an alternative causal explanation.

Yet I must temper any praise. I find several fundamental weaknesses in their arguments. First, the authors seem to provide no framework for analysis. Their goal is to take the reader

inside the 'private grammar' of the movies — to see how deals are assembled, how films are made, who has the power and how they use it. (p 5)

Here Pye, who asserts authorship of the 'historical, industrial, and sociological material' (p vii), reveals his empiricist/journalist origins. He desires to expose industry secrets and then the reader — with these facts — will know the truth. Nonetheless Pye/Myles do employ a more complicated economic model. They cite (in a bibliographic appendix) the unpublished Ph D dissertation of Henry Williams, 'Economic Changes in the Motion Picture Industry as Affected by Television and Other Factors,' (University of Indiana, 1968). Pye/Myles argue that for them Williams' work clarified

the correlation between television's rise and the apparent fall of Hollywood, and for [its] meticulous analysis of competition outside an orthodox price [theory] framework. (p 267)

Williams utilised the theory of monopolistic competition in his dissertation. For thirty years this theory has functioned as a part of neo-classical price theory. In fact one of Williams' theoretical touchstones is Milton Friedman, a Nobel laureate in economics and staunch defender of capitalism (see Williams, pp 142, 144). Pye/Myles' analysis never strays from orthodox (read non-marxist) economic theory.

Still Pye/Myles desire to ascertain relationships of power within the old and new Hollywood system. Unfortunately they accept the 'new mythology' of Hollywood economic power: the original movie mogols had at least some interest in film-making, and thus 'gain stature with distance' (p 5); the new entrepreneurs, formers lawyers and agents, seek *only* greater and greater profits. But, I would argue, Hollywood corporations have always been most interested in accumulating profits. Methods may have changed, but desire for amassing capital and power have not. Moreover, Pye/Myles do not understand that in US corporations, power flows from ownership and control. The celebrated mogols, Louis B Mayer or Harry Cohn, for example, functioned as autocratic factory managers. Corporate presidents, much less famous, possessed significantly more power: for example, Nicholas Schenck ran Loew's MGM from 1927 to 1955, Barney Balaban (Paramount, 1935-1962) or Harry Warner (Warner Bros, 1924-1956). Like their counterparts in other segments of US big business, these corporate executives let more flamboyant underlings capture public notoriety while they held dominion and accumulated enormous wealth. Here, as above, Pye/Myles need a model for analysing the creation and maintenance of economic power.

Pye/Myles underestimate the significance of distribution in the political economy of Hollywood. They argue that since the major studios had to sell their theatres, 'the risk in financing and producing of a motion picture has increased enormously.' (p 6) But the majors are still the majors because of their continuous hegemony in international distribution. Without a distribution contract, even a Francis Cappola could not distribute a film given present cost structures. The 'brats' may despise the current Hollywood system, but none has come close to accumulating enough capital and power to offer an alternative. As for the third branch of the Hollywood system, exhibition, Pye/Myles simply ignore several important industry phenomena. They neglect drive-ins. Many of the present giant US theatre chains began as regional circuits of drive-ins. More importantly, although Pye/Myles do note the decline of the Hollywood-owned chains, they ignore the present exhibitor monopolists: American Multi-Cinema, Commonwealth, General Cinema, Mann, and United Artists. (The latter is a separate corporation not connected to United Artists, the producer-distributor, owned by the conglomerate, Trans-America). Each controls several hundred multi-screen operations, located near or in colossal shopping malls. The US film industry today functions as a bi-lateral (symbiotic) oligopoly with six major producer-distributors, and a dozen nation-wide theatre circuits.

Finally I find it symptomatic of other more serious problems when Pye/Myles declare that all the Hollywood major firms 'were forced by court decisions under [US] antitrust law to sell *all* their theatres.' (p 6— my emphasis) More correctly, the court only could call for sale of US-based theatres. Vast foreign holdings were left intact. More generally, Pye/Myles posit no connection between the US movie industry and the state.

For example, the suburbs they find so important were subsidised, in part, through tax advantages for purchase of single family dwellings, special loans to veterans of World War II, and massive highway expenditures in the name of national defence. Pye/Myles themselves locate many examples throughout their book: conglomerates took over Hollywood producer-distributors for tax advantages (p 42); the US Internal Revenue Service subsidised much recent investment in motion pictures (pp 47-54); large government expenditures for World War II and the Vietnam War caused increased movie attendance (p 38). Pye/Myles dangle numerous examples, but only rarely do they provide any a causal relationship. In one passage they do assert that

the [US] tax man was accidently, *responsible for keeping the [Hollywood] machine running* (p 53 — my emphasis)

Certainly chance serves as one explanation of how and why the state and corporations interact in the United States, but hardly provides a satisfactory theory. Here Pye/Myles could have benefited enormously from the work of Marxist economists. For neo-classical economists like Henry Williams, state behaviour is treated as an exogenous variable; for Marxists such as Paul Sweezy or Ernest Mandel, the state performs important, hardly exogenous or random, functions in the modern capitalist nation-state.

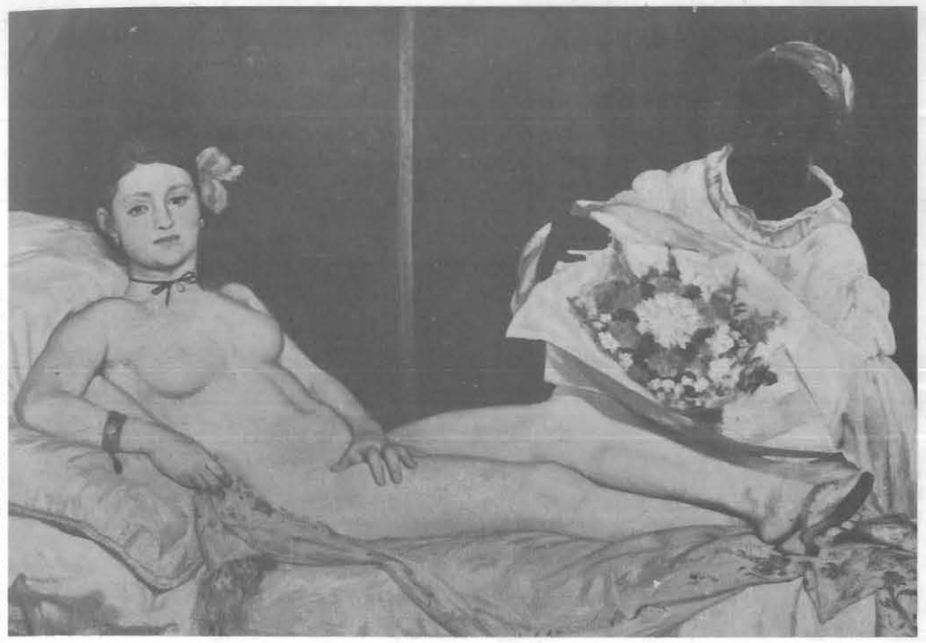
Others will find their own problems with the Pye/Myles volume: its blatant anti-union bias, the curious discussions of the role of bankers, or the confused, simple analysis of film and ideology. The lack of an index, any footnotes, and a conclusion further compound the problem. To their credit Pye/Myles have introduced into discussions of contemporary film history the importance of social and demographic changes. However, much more work remains to be done.

TIMOTHY J CLARK

PRELIMINARIES TO A POSSIBLE TREATMENT OF 'OLYMPIA' IN 1865

I

MANET WAS NOT in the habit of hesitating before trying to put his large-scale works on public exhibition; he most often sent them to the *Salon* the same year they were painted. But for reasons we can only guess at, he kept the picture entitled *Olympia* in his studio for almost two years, perhaps repainted it, and submitted it to the Jury in 1865 (Figure 1). It was accepted for showing, initially hung in a good position, and was the subject of excited public scrutiny and a great deal of writing in the daily newspapers and periodicals of the time. The 1860s were the heyday of the Parisian press, and a review of the *Salon* was established as a necessary feature of almost any journal; so that even a magazine called *La Mode de Paris*, which was little more than a set of covers for fold-out dressmaking patterns, carried two long letters from Dumas the Younger in its May and June issues, entitled 'A Propos du Salon. Alexandre Dumas à Edmond About'. The title — Edmond About was art critic of the *Petit Journal* — immediately suggests the degree of intertextuality involved. The 80-odd pieces of writing on the *Salon* in 1865, and the 60 or so which chose to mention Manet, were thoroughly aware of themselves as members of a family, jibing at each other's preferences, borrowing each other's turns of phrase, struggling for room (for 'originality') in a monotonous and constricting discourse.

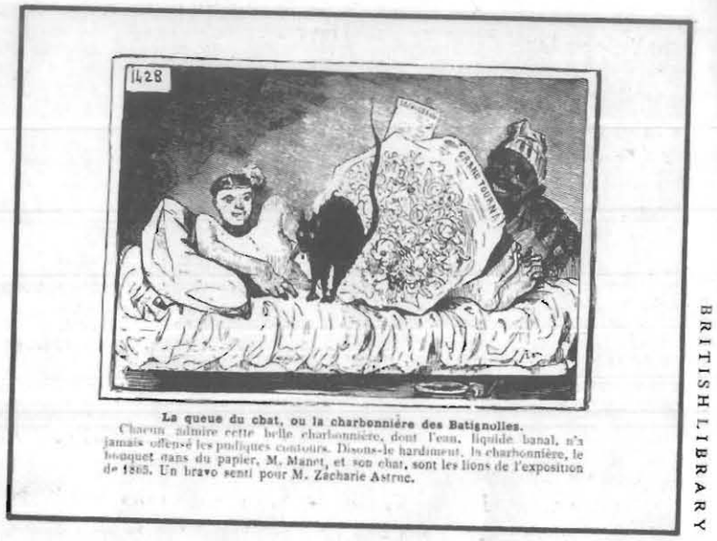


PHOTOGRAPHIE GIRAUDON

MANET *Olympia*, Paris,

BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE PARIS

BERTALL Caricature of *Olympia*, *Le Journal Amusant*, 27 May 1865



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BERTALL Caricature of *Olympia*, *L'Illustration*, 3 June 1865

If Manet's hesitation had to do with anxieties over what the papers would say, then what happened when the *Salon* opened was to prove his worst fears well-founded. The critical reaction to *Olympia* was decidedly negative. Only four critics out of sixty were favourably disposed to the picture, and that figure disguises the extremity of the situation: if we apply the test not merely of approval, but of some sustained description of the object in hand —some effort at controlled attention to particulars, some ordinary mobilisation of the resources of criticism in 1865—then a response to *Olympia* simply does not exist, except in a solitary text written by Jean Revenel. Although there is also, I believe, some real investigation of *Olympia* in three caricatures, each with elaborate captions, by Bertall and Cham (Figures 2, 3, 4). That caricatures can have truck with Manet's picture in a way which art criticism cannot, points to one aspect of the problem. Their success has to do, I suppose, with the possibilities provided by a very different set of discursive conventions — a discourse in which the unmentionable and indescribable, for art criticism, can be readily articulated in comic form. It was not, incidentally, that the art critics failed to try for comic effect at *Olympia*'s expense; they did so interminably; but jokes, in this case, were rarely productive of knowledge.

I believe this mass of disappointing art criticism can provide an opportunity to say more about the relation of a text to its spectators. I shall regularly use the words 'text' and 'spectator' in this article, for all their awkardness as applied to pictures. In the case of *Olympia* the vocabulary is not especially forced, since an important part of what spectators reacted to in 1865 was textual in the ordinary sense of the word: the perplexing title, the outlandish five lines of verse provided in the *Salon livret*:

Quand, lasse de rêver, Olympia s'éveille,
Le Printemps entre au bras du doux messager noir,
C'est l'esclave à la nuit amoureuse pareille,
Qui vient fleurir le jour délicieux à voir:
L'auguste jeune fille en qui la flamme veille.

(When, weary of dreaming, Olympia awakes, / Spring enters in the arms of a gentle black messenger, / It is the slave who, like the amorous night, / Comes in and makes the day delicious to see with flowers: / The august young woman in whom the flame [of passion] burns constantly.)

These verses greatly exercised the critics: they figured as one of the grounds for their contemptuous dislike.

A complete study of *Olympia* and its spectators would be cumbersome, and I am not going to present it here.[1] What I intend

1 The study will be published as Chapter 2 of *The Edge of the City: Modernist Painting and Paris 1860-1890*. Precedents for the comprehensive reading of *Salon* criticism of a of a particular work exist in T Crow, 'The Oath of the Horatii in 1785', *Art History*, vol 1 no 4, December 1978, and N Hadjinicolaou, *'La Liberté guidant le peuple* devant son premier public', *Actes de la Recherches en sciences sociales* no 28, 1979; also pp 130-54 of my *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, London 1973.

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CHAM Caricature of *Olympia*, *Charivari*, 14 May 1865

instead is to sketch the necessary components of such a study, to raise some theoretical questions which relate to *Screen*'s recent concerns, and to give, in conclusion, a rather fuller account of the ways in which this exercise might provide

a materialist reading [specifying] articulations within the [picture] on determinate grounds.[2]

II

There has been an impatience lately in the pages of *Screen* with the idea that texts construct spectators, and an awareness that

films are read unpredictably, they can be pulled into more or less any ideological space, they can be mobilised for diverse and even contradictory projects.[3]

This is an impatience I share, and in particular find myself agreeing with Willemen that

the activity of the text must be thought in terms of which set of discourses it encounters in any particular set of circumstances, and how this encounter may restructure both the productivity of the text and *the discourses with which it combines to form an intertextual field which is always in ideology, in history. Some texts can be more or less recalcitrant if pulled into a particular field, while others can be fitted comfortably into it.*

It seems to me that *Olympia* in 1865 provides us with something close to a limiting case of this recalcitrance; and one which, with the array of critical writing at our disposal, can be pieced out step by step. Recalcitrance is almost too weak a word, and insignificance or unavailability might do better, for what we are dealing with in 1865 are the remains of various failures — a collective failure, minus Ravenel — to pull *Olympia* within the field of any of the discourses available, and restructure it in terms which gave it a sense. There is a danger of exaggeration here, since the disallowed and the unforgivable are in themselves necessary tropes of nineteenth century art criticism: there had to be occupants of such places in every *Salon*. But a close and comprehensive reading of the sixty texts of 1865 ought to enable us to distinguish between a rhetoric of incomprehension, produced smoothly as part of the ordinary discourse of criticism, and another rhetoric — a breaking or spoiling of the critical text's consistency — which is produced by something else, a real recalcitrance in the object of study. It is an open question whether what we are studying here is an instance of subversive refusal of the established codes, or of a simple ineffectiveness; and it is an important question, given *Olympia*'s canonical (and deserved) status in the history of avant-garde art.

2 C MacCabe, 'The Discursive and the Ideological in Film', *Screen* vol 19 no 4, p 36.

3 P Willemen, 'Notes on Subjectivity — On Reading "Subjectivity Under Seige"', *Screen* vol 19 no 1, p 55.

III

I would like to know which set of discourses *Olympia* encountered in 1865, and why the encounter was so unhappy. I think it is clear that two main discourses were in question: a discourse in which the relations and disjunctions of the terms Woman/Nude/Prostitute were obsessively rehearsed (which I shall call, clumsily, the discourse on Woman in the 1860s), and the complex but deeply repetitive discourse of aesthetic judgement in the Second Empire. These are immediately historical categories, of an elusive and developing kind; they cannot be deduced from the critical texts alone, and it is precisely their absence from the writings on *Olympia* — their appearance there in spasmodic and unlikely form — which concerns us most. So we have to establish, in the familiar manner of the historian, some picture of normal functioning: the regular ways in which these two discourses worked, and their function in the historical circumstances of the 1860s.

Olympia is a picture of a prostitute: various signs declare that unequivocally. The fact was occasionally acknowledged in 1865: several critics called the woman *courtisane*, one described her as 'some redhead from the *quartier Bréda*' (the notorious headquarters of the profession), another referred to her as 'une manolo du bas étage'. Ravenel tried to specify more precisely, calling her a 'girl of the night from Paul Niquet's' — in other words, a prostitute operating right at the bottom end of the trade, in the all-night bar run by Niquet in Les Halles, doing business with a clientele of market porters, butchers and *chiffonniers*. But by and large this kind of recognition was avoided, and the sense that Olympia's was a sexuality laid out for inspection and sale appeared in the critics' writings in a vocabulary of uncleanness, dirt, death, physical corruption and actual bodily harm. Now this is odd, because both the discourse on Woman in the 1860s, and the established realm of art, had normally no great difficulty in including and accepting the prostitute as one of their possible categories. There is even a sense, as Alain Corbin establishes in his study of *le discours prostitutionnel* in the nineteenth century, in which the prostitute was necessary to the articulation of discourse on Woman in general.[4] She was maintained — anxiously and insistently — as a *unity*, which existed as the end-stop to a series of differences which constituted the feminine. The great and absolute difference was that between *fille publique* and *femme honnête*: the two terms were defined by their relation to each other, and therefore it was necessary that the *fille publique* — or at least her *haute bourgeoise* variant, the *courtisane* — should have her representations. The *courtisane* was a category in use in a well-established and ordinary ideology; she articulated various (false) relations between sexual identity, sexual power and social class. Of

4 A Corbin, *Les Filles de noces. Misère sexuelle et prostitution aux 19e et 20e siècles*, Paris 1978.

course at the same time she was declared to be almost unmentionable — at the furthest margin of the categorisable — but that only seemed to reaffirm her importance as a founding signification of Woman.

So it was clearly not the mere fact — the palpable signs — of Olympia being a prostitute that produced the critics' verbal violence. It was some transgression of *le discours prostitutionnel* that was at stake; or rather, since the characterisation of the *courtisane* could not be disentangled from the specification of Woman in general in the 1860s, it was some disturbance in the normal relations between prostitution and femininity.

When I introduced the notion of a discourse on Woman in the 1860s, I included the nude as one of its terms. Certainly it deserves to take its place there, but the very word indicates the artificiality of the limits we have to inscribe — for description's sake — around our various 'discourses'. The nude is indelibly a term of art and art criticism: the fact is that art criticism and sexual discourse intersect at this point, and the one provides the other with crucial representations, forms of knowledge, and standards of decorum. One could almost say that the nude is the mid-term of the series which goes from *femme honnête* to *fille publique*: it is the important form (the complex of established forms) in which sexuality is revealed and not-revealed, displayed and masked, made out to be unproblematic. It is the frankness of the bourgeoisie: here, after all, is what Woman looks like; and she can be known, in her nakedness, without too much danger of pollution. This too *Olympia* called into question, or at least failed to confirm.

One could put the matter schematically in this way. The critics asked certain questions of *Olympia* in 1865, and did not get an answer. One of them was: what sex is she, or has she? Has she a sex at all? In other words, can we discover in the image of preordained constellation of signifiers which keeps her sexuality in place? Further question: can *Olympia* be included within the discourse on Woman/the nude/the prostitute? Can this particular body, acknowledged as one for sale, be articulated as a term in an artistic tradition? Can it be made a modern example of the nude? Is there not a way in which the terms *nude* and *fille publique* could be mapped on to each other, and shown to belong together? There is no *a priori* reason why not. (Though I think there may be historical reasons why the mapping could not be done effectively in 1865: reasons to do with the special instability of the term 'prostitute' in the 1860s, which was already producing, in the discourse on Woman, a peculiar mythology of invasion, whereby the prostitute was made out to have vacated her place at the edge of society, and be engaged in building a new city, in which everything was edges and no single demarcation was safe.)

It is a matter of tracking down, in the writings on *Olympia*, the appearance of the normal forms of discourse and the points/topics/tropes at which (or around which) they are simply absent, or present in a grossly disturbed state. For instance, the various figures of uncleanness, and the way these figures cannot be maintained as descriptions of sexual or moral status, but always teeter over into figures of death and decay. Or the figures which indicate the ways in which the hand of Olympia — the one spread over her pubic hair — disobeys, crucially, the conventions of the nude. The hand is *shamelessly flexed*, it is *improper*, it is *in the form of a toad*, it is *dirty*, it is in a state of *contraction*. It comes to stand for the way Olympia's whole body is disobedient: the hand is the sign of the unyielding, the unrelaxed, the too-definite where indefiniteness is the rule, the non-supine, the concealment which declares itself as such: the 'unfeminine', in short. Or again: the figures of physical violence done to the body, or of hideous constraint:

> *a woman on a bed, or rather some form or other, blown up like a grotesque in indiarubber, a skeleton dressed in a tight jacket made of plaster, outlined in black, like the armature of a stained glass window without the glass.*[5]

Or the figures which intimate — no more than that — the critics' unease over Olympia's handling of hair and hairlessness: precious *pudeurs*, with which the nude makes clear its moral credentials. One of the easy triumphs of Bertall's caricature is to put the cat and flowers in place of the hand, and let us have the great explosion of foliage, and the black absence at its centre.

5 Pierrot, 'Histoire de la Semaine — Une première visite au Salon', *Les Tablettes de Pierrot*, 14 May 1865, p 11; A J Lorentz, *Dernier Jour de l'Exposition de 1865*, p 13.

IV

Would it be helpful to say, at the conclusion of a reading of the critics, that *Olympia* failed to signify in 1865? I have already indicated some reservations about this: another would be the sheer neatness of the formula. But I think it possible to say that at its first showing *Olympia* was not given a meaning that was stabilised long enough to provide the framework for any further investigation — for some kind of knowledge, for criticism. It seems reasonable to call that a failure on *Olympia*'s part; since the picture, it is clear to us now, certainly attempts — blatantly, even ponderously — to instate within itself a relationship to established, previous forms of representation. The evidence suggests that this relationship was *not* instated, for the spectators in 1865; or that even when it was — in the very few cases when the picture's points of reference were perceived — this did not lead to an articulated and consistent reading (whether one of approval or dissent).

I shall give two examples: one concerning *Olympia*'s relation to Titian's so-called *Venus of Urbino* (Figure 5), and the other Ravenel's treatment of the picture's relation to the poetry of Baudelaire. That *Olympia* is arranged in such a way as to invite comparison with the Titian has become a commonplace of criticism in the twentieth century, and a simple charting of the stages of Manet's invention, in preparatory sketches for the work, is sufficient to show how deliberate was the reference back to the prototype.[6] The reference was not obscure in the nineteenth century: the Titian painting was a hallowed and hackneyed example of the nude: when Manet had done an oil copy of it as a student, he would have known he was learning the very alphabet of Art. Yet in the mass of commentary on *Olympia* in 1865, only two critics talked at all of this relation to Titian's *Venus*; only twice, in other words, was it allowed that *Olympia* existed 'with reference to' the great tradition of European painting. And the terms in which it was allowed are enough to indicate why the other critics were silent.

'This Olympia,' wrote Amédée Cantaloube in *Le Grand Journal*, the same paper that holds the bouquet in Bertall's caricature,

sort of female gorilla, grotesque in indiarubber surrounded by black, apes on a bed, in a complete nudity, the horizontal attitude of the Venus of Titian, the right arm rests on the body in the same way, except for the hand which is flexed in a sort of shameless contraction.[7]

The other, a writer who called himself Pierrot, in a fly-by-night organ called *Les Tablettes de Pierrot*, had this entry:

a woman on a bed, or rather some form or other blown up like a grotesque in indiarubber; a sort of monkey making fun of the pose and the movement of the arm of Titian's Venus, with a hand shamelessly flexed.

The duplication of phrases is too closely, surely, to be a matter of chance, or even of dogged plagiarism. The two texts seem to me to be the work of the same hand — the same hack bashing out a swift paragraph in various places under various names. Which makes it one voice out of sixty, rather than two.

In any case the point is this. For the most part, for almost everyone, the reference back to tradition in *Olympia* was invisible. Or if it could be seen, it could certainly not be said. And if, once, it could be spoken of, it was in these terms: Titian's arrangement of the nude was there, vestigially, but in the form of absolute travesty, a kind of vicious aping which robbed the body of its femininity, its humanity, it very fleshiness, and put in its place

6 See B Farwell, *Manet and the Nude, A Study in Iconography in the Second Empire*, unpublished PhD, University of California at Los Angeles 1973, pp 199-204.

7 21 May 1865.

TITIAN *Venus of Urbino*, Florence, Uffizi

une forme quelconque, a rubber-covered gorilla flexing her dirty hand above her crotch.

I take Pierrot's entry, and the great silence of the other texts, as license to say, quite crudely in the end, that the meaning contrived in terms of Titian — *on* and *against* that privileged schema of sex — was *no* meaning, had no meaning, in 1865. (This is a matter which becomes familiar in the later history of the avant garde: the moment at which negation and refutation becomes simply too complete; they erase what they are meant to negate, and therefore no negation takes place; they refute their prototypes too effectively and the old dispositions are — sometimes literally — painted out; they 'no longer apply'.)

The example of Ravenel is more complex. I have already said that Ravenel's text is the only one in 1865 that could possibly be described as articulate, and somehow appropriate to the matter in hand. But it is an odd kind of articulacy. Ravenel's entry on *Olympia* comes at the end of the eleventh long article in an immense series he published in *L'Epoque*, a paper of the far left opposition.[8] It comes in the middle of an alphabetical listing of pictures which he has so far let out of account, and not allotted their proper place in the extended critical narrative of the first ten instalments of the *Salon*. The entry itself is a peculiar, brilliant, *inadvertent* performance; a text which blurts out the obvious, blurts it out and passes on; ironic, staccato, as if aware of its own uncertainty.

M. Manet — Olympia. *The scapegoat of the Salon, the victim of Parisian lynch law. Each passer-by takes a stone and throws it in her face.* Olympia *is a very crazy piece of Spanish madness.*

8 7 June 1865.

which is a thousand times better than the platitude and inertia of so many canvases on show in the Exhibition.

Armed insurrection in the camp of the bourgeois: it is a glass of iced water which each visitor gets full in the face when he sees the BEAUTIFUL courtesan in full bloom.

Painting of the school of Baudelaire, freely executed by a pupil of Goya; the vicious strangeness of the little fauhourienne, *woman of the night out of Paul Niquet, out of the mysteries of Paris and the nightmares of Edgar Poe. Her look has the sourness of someone prematurely aged, her face the disturbing perfume of a* fleur de mal; *the body fatigued, corrupted* ['corrumpu' also carries the meaning 'tainted', 'putrid'], *but painted under a single transparent light, with the shadows light and fine, the bed and the pillows are put down in a velvet modulated grey. Negress and flowers insufficient in execution, but with real harmony to them, the shoulder and arm solidly established in a clean and pure light. The cat arching its back makes the visitor laugh and relax, it is what saves M. Manet from a popular execution.*

De sa fourrure noire [sic] *et brune*
Sort un parfum si doux, qu'un soir
J'en fus embaumé pour l'avoir
Caressé [sic] *une fois . . . rein qu'une.*

(From its black and brown fur / Comes a perfume so sweet, that one evening / I was embalmed in it, from having / Caressed it once . . . only once.)

C'est l'esprit familier du lieu;
Il juge, il préside, il inspire
Toutes choses dans son empire;
Peut-être est-il fée, est-il dieu?

(It is the familiar spirit of the place; / It judges, presides, inspires / All things within its empire; / Is it perhaps a fairy, or a god?)

M. Manet, instead of M. Astruc's verses would perhaps have done well to take as epigraph the quatrain devoted to Goya by the most advanced *painter of our epoch:*

GOYA-Cauchemar plein de choses inconnues
De foetus qu'on fait cuire au milieu des sabbats,
De vieilles au miroir et d'enfants toutes nues
Pour tenter les démons ajustant bien leurs bas.

(Goya — Nightmare full of unknown things / Of foetuses cooked in the middle of witches' sabbaths, / Of old women at the mirror and children quite naked / To tempt demons who are making sure their stockings fit.)

Perhaps this olla podrida de toutes les Castilles *is not flattering for M. Manet, but all the same it is something. You do not make an Olympia simply by wanting*

This is effective criticism, there is no doubt. But let me restrict myself to saying one thing about it. Ravenel — it is the achievement which first impreses us, I suppose — breaks the codes of *Olympia*. He gets the picture right, and ties the picture down to Baudelaire and Goya; he is capable of discussing the image, half playfully and half in earnest, as deliberate provocation, designed to be anti-bourgeois; he can even give Olympia, for a moment, a class identity, and call her a *petite faubourienne* — a girl from the working-class suburbs — or a *fille des nuits de Paul Niquet*. But getting things right does not seem to enable Ravenel to accede to meaning: it is almost as if breaking the codes makes matters worse from that point of view; the more particular signifiers and signifieds are detected, the more perplexing and unstable the totality of signs becomes. What, for instance, does the reference to Baudelaire *connote*, for Ravenel? There are, as it were, four signs of that connotation in the text: the 'school of Baudelaire' leads on (1) to the disturbing perfume of a *fleur du mal*, then (2) to two verses from a short poem from the first book of Baudelaire's collection, entitled *Le Chat*, a poem precise in diction, spare and lucid in rhythm, deliberately decorous in its intimations of sexuality; and then, in passing, (3) to the description of Baudelaire as 'le peintre le plus *avancé* de notre époque', where the ironic underlining of *avancé* does not make the meaning any easier to pin down; and finally (4) to the nightmare ride of Goya quatrain from *Les Phares*, the fetid stew of cooked foetuses and devil women, the self-consciously Satanic Baudelaire, the translator of *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*.

My point is this: the discovery of Baudelaire does not stabilise meaning. On the contrary, for a reader like Ravenel it destabilises meaning still further, since Baudelaire's meanings are so multiple and refractory, so unfixed, so unmanageable, in 1865. We are face to face with the only text equipped and able to take on the picture's central terms of reference; and this is how it takes them, as guarantee of its own perplexity, its opinion that the picture is a stew of half-digested significations. Perhaps guarantee is too weak a word in this connection: the code, once discovered, compounds the elusiveness; it speeds up the runaway shifts of connotation; it fails, completely, to give them an anchorage in any one pre-eminent, privileged system of signs.

The same is true for the recognition or attribution of class. Once again, we are entitled to draw breath at Ravenel's *petite faubourienne*: It may seem to us close to the mark, that phrase. But what does it signify in the text itself, what system of mean-

ings does it open on to? It means nothing precise, nothing maintainable: it opens on to three phrases, 'fille des nuits de Paul Niquet, des mystères de Paris et des cauchemars d'Edgar Poe'. A working girl from the *faubourgs*/a woman from the farthest edges of *la prostitution populaire clandestine*, soliciting the favours of *chiffonniers* (one might reasonably ask: With a black maid bringing in a tribute of flowers? Looking like this, with these accessories, this décor, this imperious presentation of self?)/a character out of Eugène Sue's melodramatic novel of the city's lower depths/a creature from Edgar Allen Poe. The shifts are motivated clearly, but it is thoroughly unclear what the motivation *is*: the moves are too rapid and abrupt, they fail to confirm each other's sense — or even to intimate some one thing, too elusive to be caught directly, but to which the various metaphors of the text all tend.

The identification of class is not a *brake* on meaning: it is the trigger, once again, of a sequence of connotations which do not add up, which fail to circle back on themselves, declaring their meaning evident and uniform. It may be that we are too eager, now, to point to the illusory quality of that circling back, that closure against the 'free play of the signifier'. Illusion or not, it seems to me the necessary ground on which meanings can be established and maintained: kept in being long enough, and endowed with enough coherence, for the ensuing work of dispersal and contradiction to be seen to matter — to have matter, in the text, to work against.

V

Nashville *articulates American politics and music in the space of cinema, and that articulation can only be understood by mobilising a heterogeneous set of knowledges (both cinematic and ideological) which will provide the specific analysis. Insofar as the knowledges we mobilise are, of necessity, heterogeneous, there can be no question that the reading produced is exhaustive. Between the alternatives of the formalist dream of the reading and the voluntarist nightmare of my/our reading, both of which exhaust the film's significance, a materialist reading specifies articulations within the film on determinate grounds.*[9]

My questions about this passage would be: what determines which set of 'knowledges' are mobilised? Is there some means by which we can test which readings are, if not exhaustive, at least *appropriate*? What is meant by 'determinate' in the last sentence? I suppose it will be obvious that *my* reading of *Olympia* will be produced as a function of the analysis of its first readings: I do not claim that this gives it some kind of objectivity, or even some privileged status 'within historical materialism'. But it provides

9 C MacCabe, *Screen*, op cit, p 36.

the reading with certain tests of appropriateness, or, to put it another way, it presents the reading with a set of particular questions to answer, which have been produced as part of historical enquiry. (I do not object to the formula 'historian's practice' here, as long as we are free to debate whether there are some practices of knowledge with more articulated notions of evidence, testing and 'matching' than others.)

My reading of *Olympia* would address the question: what is it in the image which produces, or helps produce, the critical silence and uncertainty I have just described? What is it that induces this interminable displacement and conversion of meanings? I would like, ideally, to give the answer to those questions an interleaved, almost a scholiastic form, tying my description back and back to the terms of the critics' perplexity, and its blocked, unwilling insight into its own causes. Clearly, the reading would hinge on *Olympia*'s handling of sexuality, and its relation to the tradition of the nude. (It would also have to deal with its relation to a new and distinctive sub-set of that tradition: the burlesque and comic refutation of the nude's conventions set in train by Courbet in the 1850s. There is no doubt that the critics in 1865 wanted *Olympia* to be part of that sub-set, whose terms they approximately understood, if only to abhor them; and there are ways in which the picture does relate to Courbet's Realism. A painting of a prostitute in 1865 inevitably bore comparison with Courbet's *Demoiselles de la Seine* or *Venus Capitonnée*; a comparison of subject-matter, obviously, but also of modes of address to the viewer, forms of disobedience to that 'placing of the spectator in a position of imaginary knowledge' which was the nude's most delicate achievement.) I shall give some element of the reading here.

VI

We might approach the problem by asking, would it do to describe the disposition of signs in *Olympia* as producing some kind (various forms) of *ambiguity*? The things I shall point out in the image may seem at first sight nothing very different from this. And the word would provide us with a familiar critical comfort, since it seems to legitimise the position of the a-historical 'interpreter' and allow the open, endless procession of possible meanings to be the very nature of the text, the way *art* ('literature') works, as opposed to mere practical discourse. I do not agree with that ethic of criticism, or the art practice it subtends. On the contrary, it seems to me that ambiguity is only functional in the text when a certain hierarchy of meanings is established and agreed on, between text and reader — whether it be a hierarchy of exoteric and esoteric, or common-sense and 'contrary', or narrative discourse and non-

narrative connotation, or whatever. There has to be a structure of dominant and dominated meanings, within which ambiguity occurs as a qualifier, a chorus, a texture of overtone and undertone around a *tone* which the trained ear recognises or invents. To put it another way, there has to be, stabilised within the text, some primary and partially systematic signified, in order that the play of the signifier — the refusal of the signifier to adhere completely to that one set of signifieds — be construed as any kind of threat.

It could be argued that *Olympia*'s recalcitrance is different from this. The work of contradiction — to repeat and generalise the point made with reference to Titian — might seem to be so complete in this picture that the reader is left with no primary system of signifieds to refer to, as a test for deviations. *Olympia* could be described as a tissue of loose ends, false starts, unfinished sequences of signification: none of them the main theme, none accompaniment exactly; neither systematic nor floating *semes*.

The picture turns, inevitably, on the signs of sexual identity. I want to argue that, for the critics of 1865, sexual identity was precisely what Olympia did not possess. She failed to occupy a place in the discourse on Woman, and specifically she was neither a nude, nor a prostitute: by that I mean she was not a modification of the nude in ways which made it clear that what was being shown was sexuality on the point of escaping from the constraints of decorum — sexuality proffered and scandalous. There is no scandal in *Olympia*, in spite of the critics' effort to construct one. It was the odd coexistence of decorum and disgrace — the way in which neither set of qualities established its dominance over the other — which was the difficulty of the picture in 1865.

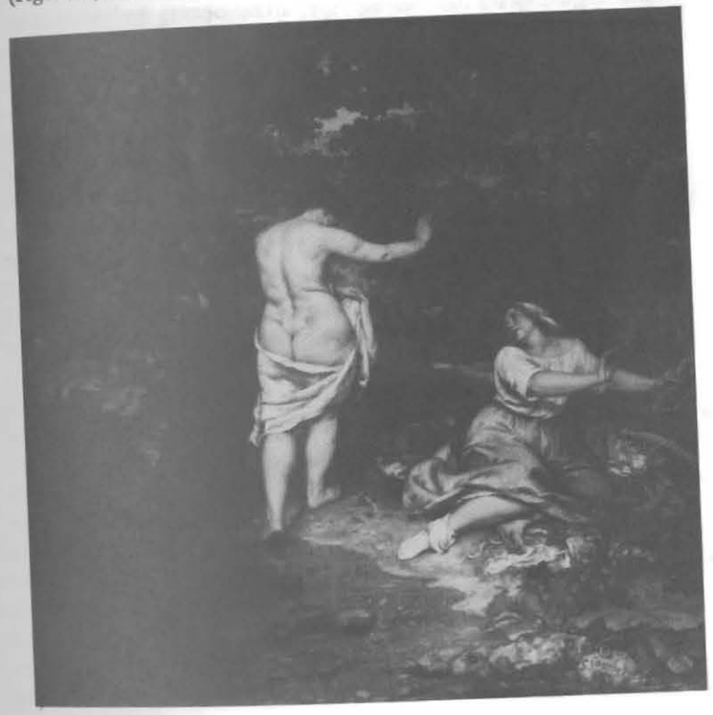
For instance, since the structure is grossly obvious here, the picture's textual support. On the one hand, there is the title itself: classical apparently, and perceived by some critics as a reference to a notorious *courtisane* of the Renaissance; but in 1865, taking its place in the normal repertoire of prostitution, part of the tawdry, mock-classical lexicon of the trade.[10] But that *false* classical does not subsist as the undisputed timbre of *Olympia*: in the *Salon livret*, the reader was confronted by the five lines of 'explanatory' verse I have quoted already. It is bad poetry, but correct. It is a performance in an established mode, Parnassian: restrained in diction, formal, euphemistic. Is the reader to take it seriously? Is it to be Olympia, cynical pseudonym, or 'l'auguste jeune fille en qui' — preposterous evasion— 'la flamme veille'? The disparity was obvious, I have said, and the critics could deal with it by simple, calm derision: they regularly did.

Other kinds of uncooperativeness were subtler and more complete, and the critics could only rarely identify what it was that refused their various strategies. I shall deal with three aspects of the matter here: (a) The question of access and address; (b) The 'incorrectness' in the drawing of the body; (c) The handling of hair and hairlessness.

10 See B Farwell, op cit, p 233.

(a) One of the primary operations of the nude is, to borrow MacCabe's phrase again, 'a placing of the spectator in a position of imaginary knowledge'. The spectator's access to the presented body has to be arranged rather precisely; and this is done first through a certain arrangement of distance, which must be neither too great nor too small; and then through a placing of the naked body at a determinate height, which in turn produces a specific relation to the viewer. The body, again, must not be too high — put up on some fictive pedestal — nor too low, otherwise it may turn into an object of mere scrutiny, or humiliation — laid out on the dissecting table of sight.

In the 1830s, Realism had invented a set of refutations of just these placings; though it should be admitted that the refutations were intermittent and unstable. Perhaps it would be better to say that in certain paintings by Courbet there appeared the first forms, the first suggestions, of ways in which the placings of the nude might be negated. Courbet's *The Bather* of 1853 is the strongest case (Figure 6), since it seems to have been such a deliberate sabotage:



COURBET *The Bather*
Montpellier, Musée Fabre

a travesty of the normal canons of 'Beauty', obviously, and an attempt to make the nude, of all unlikely genres, exemplify the orders of social class. *The Bather* was meant to be read as a *bourgeoise*, not a nude: she was intended to register as the unclothed opposite and opponent of male proletarian nakedness; and so Courbet displayed the painting in the *Salon* alongside another of roughly equal size, in which a pair of gnarled and exhausted professional wrestlers went through their paces in the *Hippodrome des Champs-Elysées*.

But *The Bather* broke the rules of the nude in other ways, which were hardly more subtle, but perhaps more effective. It seemed to be searching for ways to establish the nude in opposition to the spectator, in active refusal of his sight. It did so grossly, clumsily, but not without some measure of success, so that the critic at the time who called the woman 'this heap of matter, powerfully rendered, who turns her back with cynicism on the spectator' had got the matter right. The pose and the scale and the movement of the figure end up being a positive aggression, a resistance to vision in normal terms.

There is no doubt that for Manet and his critics in 1865 these precedents were inescapable: as I have said already, the critics *wanted* Manet to be a Realist in Courbet's terms. But *Olympia*, I would argue, takes up neither the arrangements by which the canonical images of the nude establish access, nor Realism's knockabout refutations. What it contrives is stalemate, a kind of baulked invitation, in which the spectator is given no established place for viewing and identification, nor offered the tokens of exclusion and resistance. This is done most potently, I suppose, by the woman's gaze — the jet-black pupils, the slight asymmetry of the lids, the smudged and broken corner of the mouth, the features half-adhering to the plain oval of the face. It is a gaze which gives nothing away, as the reader attempts to interpret its blatancy; a look direct and yet guarded, poised very precisely between address and resistance. So precisely, so deliberately, that it comes to be read as a *production* of the depicted person herself; there is an inevitable elision between the qualities of precision and contrivance in the image and those qualities as inhering in the fictive subject; it is *her* look, her action on us, her composure, her composition of herself. But the gaze would not function as it does — as the focus of other uncertainties — were it not aided and abetted by the picture's whole composition. Pre-eminently, if it is acccess that is in question, there is the strange indeterminate scale of the image, neither intimate nor monumental; and there is the disposition of the unclothed body in relation to the spectator's imaginary position: she is put at a certain, deliberate marked height, on the two great mattresses and the flounced-up pillows;

in terms of the tradition, she is at a height which is just too high, suggesting the stately, the body *out of relation* to the viewer's body; and yet not stately either, not looking down at us, not hieratic, not imperial: looking directly out and across, with a steadying, dead level interpellation. The stalemate of 'placings' is impeccable and *typical*, that is my point. If at this primary level — the arrangement within the rectangle, so to speak, the laying-out in illusory depth — the spectator is offered neither access nor exclusion, then the same applies, as I shall try to show, to the picture's whole representation of the body.

(b) What the critics indicated by talk of 'incorrectness' in the drawing of Olympia's body, and a wilder circuit of figures of dislocation and physical deformity, is, I would suggest, the way the body is constructed in two inconsistent graphic modes, which once again are allowed to exist in too perfect and unresolved an equilibrium. One aspect of the drawing of Olympia's body is emphatically linear: it was the aspect seized on by the critics, and given a metaphorical force, in phrases like 'cernés de noir', 'dessinée au charbon', 'raies de cirage' 'avec du charbon tout autour', 'le gros matou noir . . . ait déteint sur les contours de cette belle personne, après s'être roulé sur un tas de charbon'.[11] (These are figures which register also a reaction to Manet's elimination of half-tones, and the abruptness of the shadows at the edges of his forms: but this, of course, *is* an aspect of his drawing, taken in its widest sense.) The body is composed of smooth hard edges, deliberate intersections: the lines of the shoulders, singular and sharp; the far nipple breaking the contour of the arm with an artificial exactness; the edge of thigh and knee left flat and unmodulated against the dark green and pink; the central hand marked out on a dark grey ground, 'impudiquement crispée' — in other words, as Pierrot implies, refusing to fade and elide with the sex beneath, in the metaphoric way of Titian and Giorgione. Yet this is an incomplete account. The critics certainly conceived of Olympia as too definite — full of 'lignes heurtées qui brisent les yeux'[12] — but at the same time the image was accused of *lacking* definition. It was 'unfinished', and drawing 'does not exist in it'; it was 'impossible', elusive, 'informe'. Olympia was disarticulated, but she was also inarticulate. I believe that this is a reaction on the critics' part to other aspects of the drawing: the suppression of demarcations and definitions of parts: the indefinite contour of Olympia's right breast, the faded bead of the nipple; the sliding, dislocated line of the far forearm as it crosses (touches?) the belly; the elusive logic of the transition from breast to ribcage to stomach to hip to thigh. There is a lack of articulation here. It is not unprecedented, this refusal; and in a sense it tallies well with

11 L de Laincel, *L'Echo de Provinces*, 25 June 1865, p 3.

12 P Gille, *L'International*, 1 June 1865.

the conventions of the nude, where the body is regularly offered as a fluid, infinite territory on which spectators are free to impose their imaginary definitions. But the trouble here is the incompatibility of this uncertainty and fullness with the steely precision of the edges which contain it. The body is, so to speak, tied down by drawing, held in place — by the hand, by the black tie around the neck, by the brittle inscription of grey wherever flesh is to be distinguished from flesh, or from the white of a pillow or the colour of a cashmere shawl. The way in which this kind of drawing qualifies, or relates to, the other is unclear: it does not qualify it, because it does not relate: the two systems coexist: they describe aspects of the body, and point to aspects of that body's sexual identity, but they do not bring those aspects together into some single economy of form.

(c) The manipulation of the signs of hair and hairlessness is a delicate matter for a painter of the nude. Peculiar matters of decorum are at stake, since hair let down is decent, but unequivocal: it is some kind of allowed disorder, inviting, unkempt, a sign of Woman's sexuality — a permissible sign, but quite a strong one. Equally, hairlessness is a hallowed convention of the nude: ladies in paintings do not have hair in indecorous places, and that fact is one guarantee that in the nude sexuality will be displayed but contained: nakedness in painting is not like nakedness in the world. There was no question of *Olympia* breaking the rules entirely; pubic hair, for Manet as much as Cabanel and Giacomotti, was indicated by its absence. But *Olympia* offers us various substitutes. The hand itself, which insists so tangibly on what it hides; the trace of hair in the armpit; the grey shadow running up from the navel to the ribs; even, another kind of elementary displacement, the frothing grey, white and yellow fringe of the shawl, falling into the grey folds of pillow and sheet — the one great accent in that open surface of different off-whites.

There are these kinds of displacement, discreetly done; and then there is an odd and fastidious reversal of terms. *Olympia*'s face is framed, mostly, by the brown of a Japanese screen, and the neutrality of that background is one of the things which makes the address and concision of the woman's face all the sharper. But the neutrality is an illusion: to the right of *Olympia*'s head there is a shock of auburn hair, just marked off enough from the brown of the screen to be visible, with effort. Once it is seen, it changes the whole disposition of head and shoulders: the flat, cut-out face is surrounded and rounded by the falling hair, the flower converts from a plain silhouette into an object resting in the hair below; the head is softened, given a more familiar kind of sexuality. The qualification remains, however: once it is seen, this happens: but

in 1865 it was not seen, or certainly not seen to do the things I have just described. And even if it is noticed — the connoisseur's small reward for looking closely — it cannot, I would argue, be held in focus. Because, once again, we are dealing with incompatibilities precisely tuned: there are two faces, one produced by a ruthless clarity of edge and a pungent certainty of eyes and mouth, and the other less clearly demarcated, opening out into the surrounding spaces. Neither reading is suppressed by the other, nor can they be made into aspects of the *same* image, the same imaginary shape. There is plenty of evidence of how difficult it was to see, or keep seeing, this device. No critic mentioned it in 1865; the cartoonists eliminated it and seized, quite rightly, on the *lack* of loosened hair of *Olympia*'s distinctive feature; even Gauguin, when he did a respectful copy of *Olympia* later, failed to include it. The difficulty is visual: a matter of brown against brown. But that difficulty cannot be disentangled from the other: the face and the hair cannot be fitted together because they do not obey the usual set of equations for sexual consistency, equations which tell us what bodies are like, how the world of bodies is divided, into male and female, resistant and yielding, closed and open, aggressive and vulnerable, repressed and libidinous.

Or we might want to make a more modest point. (Because a hidden feature is discovered, we should not necessarily treat ourselves to a feast of interpretation.) Whether it was noticed ('seen as') or not, the barely visible hair functioned as a further interference in the spectator's fixing and appropriating of Olympia's gaze.

Hair, pubic or otherwise, is a detail in *Olympia*, and should not be promoted unduly. But the detail is significant, and it obeys the larger rule I wish to indicate. The signs of sex are there in the picture, in plenty, but drawn up in contradictory order; one that is unfinished, or rather, more than one; *orders* interfering with each other, signs which indicate quite different places for *Olympia* in the taxonomy of Woman; and none of which she occupies.

VII

A word on effectiveness, finally. I can see a way in which most of what I have said about *Olympia* could be reconciled with an enthusiasm, in *Screen* and elsewhere, for the 'dis-identificatory practices' of art, 'those practices which displace the agent from his or her position of subjective centrality', and, in general, with 'an emphasis on the body and the impossibility of its exhaustion in its representations'.[13] It would be philistine not to take that enthusiasm seriously, but there are all kinds of nagging doubts — above all, about whether 'dis-identificatory practices' *matter*. The question is adumbrated by MacCabe when he writes:

13 C MacCabe, 'On Discourse', *Economy and Society* vol 8 no 3, pp 307, 308, 303.

It is through an emphasis on the body and the impossibility of its exhaustion in its representations that one can understand the material basis with which the unconscious of a discursive formation disrupts the smooth functioning of the dominant ideologies and that this disruption is not simply the chance movement of the signifier but the specific positioning of the body in the economic, political and ideological practices.[14]

14 C MacCabe, *Economy and Society*, op cit, p 303.

This seems to address the question which preoccupies me, and which I would rephrase as follows: Is there a difference — a difference with immediate, tactical implications — between an allowed, arbitrary and harmless play of the signifier and a kind of play which contributes to a disruption of the smooth functioning of the dominant ideologies? If so — I am aware that I probably exceed MacCabe's meaning at this point — artistic practice will have to *address itself to* 'the specific positioning of the body in the economic, political and ideological practices'; it cannot take its own disruptions of the various signifying conventions as somehow rooted, automatically, in the struggle to control and position the body in political and ideological terms; it has to articulate the relations between its own minor acts of disobedience and the major struggles — the class struggle — which define the body and dismantle and renew its representations. Otherwise its acts will be insignificant — as Manet's were, I believe, in 1865.

There is a danger of sounding a hectoring, or even a falsely optimistic, note at this point. Only a sense that the burden of modernity in the arts *is* this insignificance will save us from the absurdity of feeling that we are not involved in Manet's failure; it might lead us to make a distinction between those works, like *Olympia*, which succumb to modernity as a fate they do not welcome, and those bland battalions which embrace emptiness and discontinuity as their life's blood, their excuse their 'medium'. *Olympia* is not like these, its progeny; its failure to mean much is a sign of a certain obdurate strength. It is admirable in 1865 for a picture *not* to situate Woman in the space — the dominated and derealised space — of male fantasy. But this refusal — to sound again the demanding note — is compatible with situating Woman somewhere else: making her part of a fully coded, public and familiar world, to which fantasy has entry only in its real, uncomfortable, dominating and dominated form. One could imagine a different picture of a prostitute, in which there would be depicted the production of the sexual subject (the subject 'subjected', subject to and subject of fantasy). Even, perhaps, the production of the sexual Subject in a particular class formation. But to do that — to put it crudely — Manet would have had to put a far less equivocal stress on the signs of social identity in this body and this locale. In fact, as we have seen, the signs of social identity are as unstable as all the rest. Olympia has a maid, which seems to situate her *somewhere* on the social scale; but the maid is black, convenient sign, stock property of any harlot's progress, derealised, telling us little or nothing of social class. She receives elaborate bouquets of flowers, but they are folded up in old newspaper; she is *faubourienne*, Ravenel is right, in her face and her disabused stare, but *courtisane* in her stately pose, her delicate shawl, her precious slippers.

Let me make what I am saying perfectly clear. Olympia refuses to signify — to be read according to the established codings for the nude, and take her place in the Imaginary. But if the picture were to do anything more than that, it (she) would have to be given, much more clearly, a place in another classed code — a place in the code of classes. She would have to be given a place in the world which *manufactures* the Imaginary, and reproduces the relations of dominator/dominated, fantisiser/fantasised.

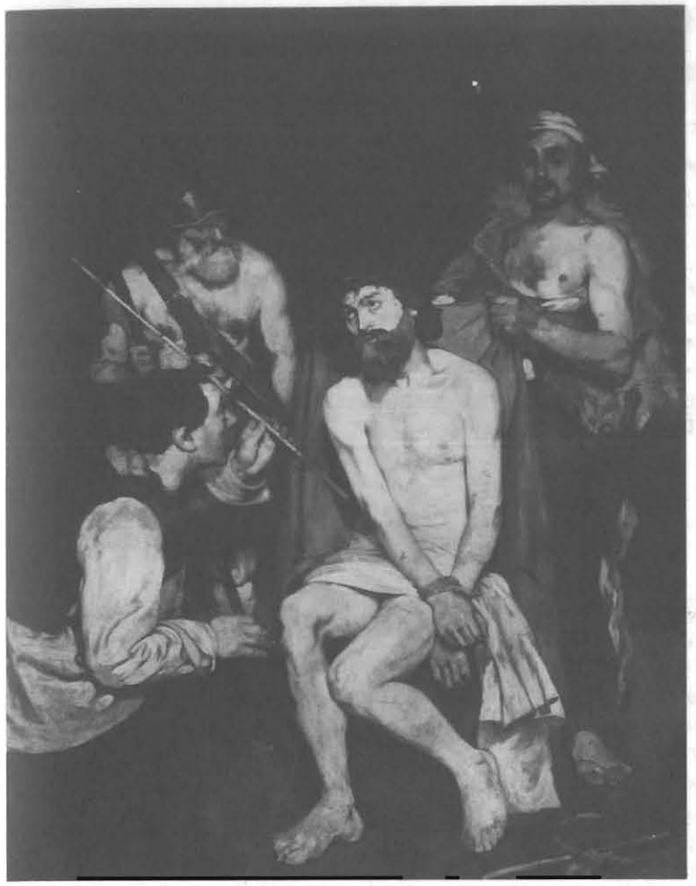
The picture would have to construct itself a position — it would be necessarily a complex and elliptical position, but it would have to be readable somehow — within the actual conflict of images and ideologies surrounding the practice of prostitution in 1865. What that conflict consisted in was indicated, darkly, by the critics' own fumbling for words that year — the shift between *petite faubourienne* and *courtisane*. In other words, between the prostitute as proletarian, recognised as such and recognising herself as such, and the other, 'normal' Second Empire situation: the endless exchange of social and sexual meanings, in which the prostitute is alternately — fantastically — recognised as proletarian, as absolutely abject, shameless, seller of her own flesh, and then, in a flash, misrecognised as *dominator*, as *femme fatale*, as imaginary ruler. (This dance of recognition and misrecognition is one in which the prostitute shares, to a certain degree. But she is always able — indeed liable — to flip back to the simple assessment of herself as just another seller of an ordinary form of labour power. She has to be constantly re-engaged in the dance of ideology, and made to collude again in her double role.)

I think I should have to say that in the end *Olympia* lends its peculiar confirmation to the latter structure, the dance of ideology. It erodes the *terms* in which the normal recognitions are enacted, but it leaves the structure itself intact. The prostitute is still double, abject and dominant, equivocal, unfixed. To escape that structure what would be needed would be, exactly, another set of terms — terms which would be discovered, doubtless, in the act of unsettling the old codes and conventions, but which would have themselves to be *settled*, consistent, forming a finished sentence.

It may be that I am asking for too much. Certainly I am asking for the difficult, and equally certainly for something Manet did not do. I am pointing to the fact that there are always *other* meanings in any given social space — counter-meanings, alternative orders of meaning, produced by the culture itself, in the clash of classes, ideologies and forms of control. And I suppose I am saying, ultimately, that any critique of the established, dominant systems of meaning will degenerate into a mere refusal to signify unless it seeks to found its meanings — discover its contrary meaning — not in some magic re-presentation, on the other side of negation and refusal, but in signs which are already present, fighting for room — meanings rooted in actual forms of life; repressed meanings, the meanings of the dominated.

How exactly that is to be done is another matter. It will most assuredly not be achieved in a single painting. (There is no hope for 'Socialism in one Art-work', to borrow a phrase from Art-Language.) A clue to Manet's tactics in 1865, and their limitations, might come if we widened our focus for a moment and looked not just at *Olympia* but its companion painting in the *Salon*, *Jesus insulted by the Soldiers* (Figure 7). This picture was also unpopular in 1865: some critics held it to be worse than *Olympia*, even; and many agreed in seeing it as a deliberate caricature of religious art. But the operative word here is *art*: if the *Jesus* is paired with the *Olympia*, the effect of the pairing is to entrench both pictures in the world of painting: they belong together only as contrasting artistic categories, as bizarre versions of the nude and the altarpiece. The contrast with Courbet's procedure in 1853 is striking: where the opposition of *The Wrestlers*[15] and *The Bather* undermined the possibility of instating either term in its normal place in the canon, and reading it as pictures were meant to be read, the conjunction of Olympia and Jesus was meant to establish Titian (and perhaps even Baudelaire) all the more securely. Not that it did so, in fact; but this is the abiding paradox of Manet's art. In any case, *Olympia* and *Jesus* were far from being Manet's last word on the subject: the particular pairings and groupings of pictures in subsequent *Salons*, and the whole sequence of pictures displayed — or refused display — in the later 1860s, is much more open and erratic and rebarbative. (*The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* as the intended focus on the 1867 one-man show; *The Balcony* beside *The Luncheon in the Studio* in 1869; the attempt to paint a big picture of a Bicycle Race in 1870.) But the ambiguities of Manet's strategy are clear. What gives his work in the 1860s its peculiar force, and perhaps its continuing power of example, is that at the same time as his art turns inward on its own means and materials — clinging, with a kind of desperation, to the fragments of tradition left to it — it encounters and engages

15 On *The Wrestlers* in 1853 see K Herding, 'Les Lutteurs "détestables": critique de style, critique sociale, *Histoire et Critique des Arts*, no 4-5, May 1978, which again examines the critical reaction in depth.



MANET *Christ insulté par les soldats*, Art Institute of Chicago

a whole contrary iconography. Its subjects are vulgar; the fastidious action of paint upon them does not soften, but rather intensifies, their awkwardness; the painting's purpose seems to be to show us the artifice of this familiar repertoire of modern life, and call in question the forms in which the city contrives its own appearance. Doing so, as we have seen, excluded Manet's are from the care and comprehension of almost all his contemporaries; though whether that is matter for praise or blame depends, in the end, on our sense of the possible, now and then.

VICTOR BURGIN

PHOTOGRAPHY, FANTASY, FICTION

I

SOME OF THE later numbers of *Novy Lef* carry an exchange between Aleksandr Rodchenko and Boris Kushner, the origin of which was an attack on Rodchenko in *Sovetskoe Foto*;[1] what is at issue is, quite literally, a point-of-view. In *Novy Lef* no 6, 1928, Rodchenko had written:

In photography there are old points-of-view, the point of view of a person who stands on the earth and looks straight ahead, or, as I call it, the 'navel photo', with the camera resting on the stomach. I am fighting against this point-of-view and will carry on fighting for photography from all positions other than the 'navel position', so long as they remain unrecognised. The most interesting angles at present are those from 'top to bottom' and 'from bottom to top' and there is much work to be done in this field.

Kushner comments, in *Novy Lef* no 8:[2]

Perhaps it is my personal lack of photographic knowledge, but I cannot find any convincing arguments for fixing the angle at a definite 90 degrees, on a vertical plane. The need to fight against the 'navel photo' can never explain why you give preference to the vertical direction in photography and reject all other possible perspective foreshortenings.

Rodchenko, in *Novy Lef* no 9:

If you take the history of art, you will find that paintings, with few exceptions, are painted either from the navel position or from

1 The complete texts of the Rodchenko/Kushner exchange may be found in Rosalind Sartori and Henning Rogge, *Sowjetische Fotografie 1928-1932*, Carl Hanser, Munich, 1975. Substantial extracts from this correspondence, together with translations of other writings by Rodchenko, are in Colin Osman (ed), *Camera International Yearbook 1978*, Gordon Fraser, London. I draw upon both of these sources here.

2 *Novy Lef* No 8 was subtitled 'Photo-issue', its editor was Tretiakov.

eye-level. It may appear that certain primitive pictures and icons[3] *employ a bird's-eye viewpoint, but this is only an impression. There is simply a raising of the horizon so that as many figures as are required may be got into the picture . . . they are placed one on top of the other, as it were, and not one behind the other as in realist painting. The same is true of Chinese painting.*

He concludes:

The antedeluvian laws of visual thinking have conferred on photography a lower stage of painting, etching or engraving with their reactionary perspectives. . . . *We do not see what we look at. We do not see the wonderful perspective foreshortenings and inclines of the objects. We, who have learned to see what we are used to seeing and what is indoctrinated into us, should reveal the world.* We should revolutionise our visual perception.

As criticism of him continues, Rodchenko's response becomes more politically detailed. In *Novy Lef* no 11, he writes:

Several comrades from Lef *warn us about experimentation and formalism in photography, judging not the 'how' but the 'what' to be the most important. . . . Comrades should note that a fetishism of facts is not only useless but detrimental to photography. . . . The revolution does not consist in photographing workers' leaders instead of generals while using the same photographic technique as under the old regime, or under the influence of Western art. The photographic revolution consists in the strong and unhoped for effect of the 'how' quality of the photographic fact. . . . A worker photographed like Christ, a woman worker photographed like the Virgin Mary, is no revolution . . . we must find a new aesthetic . . . to represent the facts of socialism in terms of photography.*

In *Novy Lef* no 12, Kushner replies:

Comrades of Novy Lef *have requested that I answer the warning of A Rodchenko published in no 11 of this magazine . . . I do not understand anything about Rodchenko's confused aesthetic philosophy. . . . But it is quite clear to me that Rodchenko is wrong to claim that the revolution does not consist in photographing workers' leaders instead of making portraits of (Czarist) generals. This is* precisely *where the revolution lies. . . . There could not have been any leaders before the revolution, inevitably there must have been just generals. It is unthinkable that there are any generals after the revolution, but leaders are essential and do exist. . . . According to every revolutionary-proletarian photographer the essence of the past revolution is based on this change.*

3 It is interesting to note, if only in passing, that it has been argued that icon painting was oriented to the point-of-view of an observer imagined to be *within* the picture, 'facing out'; in contrast to the Renaissance orientation from outside looking in. See, B A Uspensky, '"Left" and "Right" in Icon Painting', *Semiotica*, vol 13 no 1, 1975.

In the same, final, issue of *Novy Lef*, the editors of the magazine intervene:

The editors see a basic fault in both Rodchenko's warnings as well as Kushner's answer. Both ignore a functional approach to photography. For the functionalist there exists a why, a wherefore, as well as what and how. That is what makes a work into a 'cause', ie, an instrument of purposeful effect . . . Rodchenko interests himself only in the aesthetic function and reduces the whole task into a re-education of taste according to some new basic principles . . . Kushner's mistake is the opposite — for him the whole problem lies in representing new facts. For him it is immaterial how these facts are shown. Rodchenko states that photographing the leaders of the revolution in the same or in a similar way to the generals does not mean making a revolution: a photographic revolution of course. Kushner replies: precisely in the fact that, before, it was a general and now it is a leader — just this shows the essentials of the Revolution. But photography is not only to record but to enlighten. The form of recording is sufficient to externalise a leader; if however he is represented as a Red General, his character and social role is turned around and falsified. Either the old, authoritarian, fetishistic psychology *is thus quite mechanically transferred to the leader of the workers or it appears like a malicious parody. In either case an anti-revolutionary result is obtained.*

The editors' comments received no known response. There were to be no further issues of *Novy Lef*; with its demise the field of photographic criticism was left to *Sovetskoe Foto*. In 1931 *Sovetskoe Foto* changed its name to *Proletarskoe Foto*; never well-disposed towards the artistic left in photography it now moved into a position of unremitting hostility, having become in effect the unofficial organ of *ROPF*. In its initial manifesto of 1931, in *Proletarskoe Foto* no 2, the newly founded *ROPF* (Russian Society for the Proletarian Photojournalist) took up the theme of the necessity for unity in the photographic sector (the CPSU itself, in this period of the first Five-Year Plan, was increasingly coming to view the sectarianism of the artists' organisations as impeding the construction of socialism); *ROPF* accompanied their call for unity with the announcement of their initiation of a 'bitter struggle' against the leftists of the *Oktyabr* group to which Rodchenko belonged.

The *Novy Lef* exchange between Rodchenko and Kushner anticipated the essential details of the more general disagreement between the *Oktyabr* photography section and *ROPF*: the former committed to the development of new 'specifically photographic' formal structures, uncontaminated by 'bourgeois culture'; the latter seeing the need for swift and effective communication which

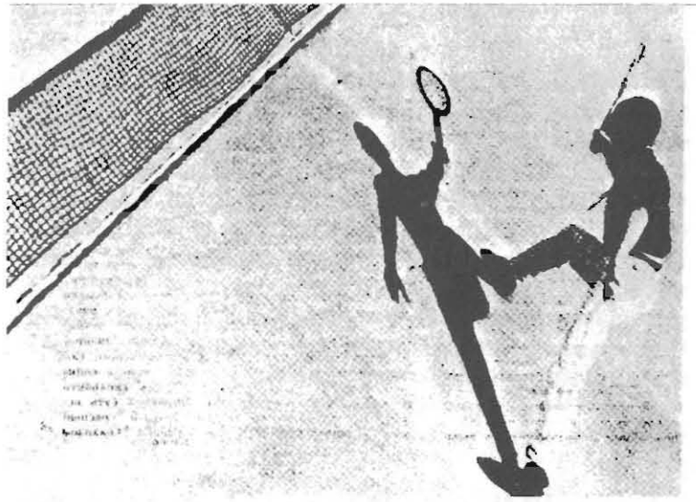
4 Contemporary commentaries in Sartori and Rogge, op cit, p 56ff.

everyone could easily understand. Neither the theories of the one nor the other were specifically post-revolutionary: *ROPF* revived a *Proletkult* notion of 'emotional infection' which may in turn be traced to Tolstoy, this they allied to an assumed unproblematical photographic realism; Rodchenko's notion of a 'revolution in perperception' would seem to be derived from early Futurist practice, and more specifically from Shklovsky's early work. Shklovskian themes are faithfully echoed in the writings of fellow *Oktyabr* photographer Volkov-Lannit:

the history of the appearance of outstanding works of art is mainly a history of break-throughs in perspective and habitual composition schemes . . . that is, a history of the disruption of the automatism of visual perception . . . *the manifestation of visual impressions is achieved through the use of 'new viewpoints'* — the unusual process of alienation (my emphases)

To Shklovsky, art is a set of 'techniques' for upsetting routine perceptions of the world. In left photography theory this notion collapses in upon a single such 'device': prioritisation of the unfamiliar view point.

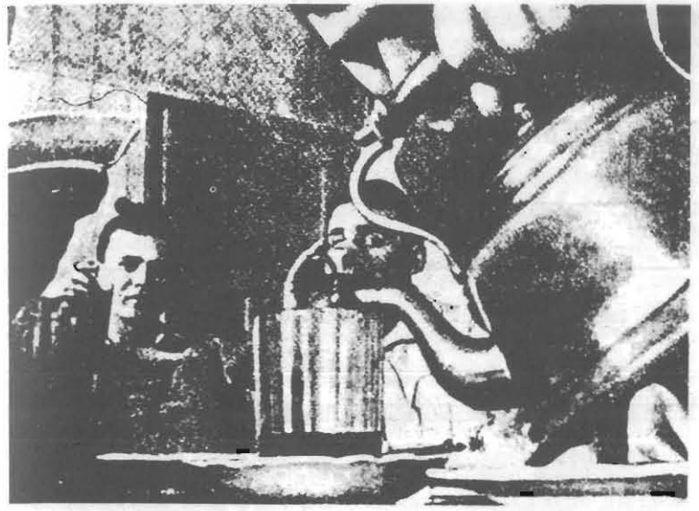
Contemporary workers' commentaries on published work by *Oktyabr* photographers[4] criticise the photographs precisely for their deviation from established norms of the visually 'correct'.



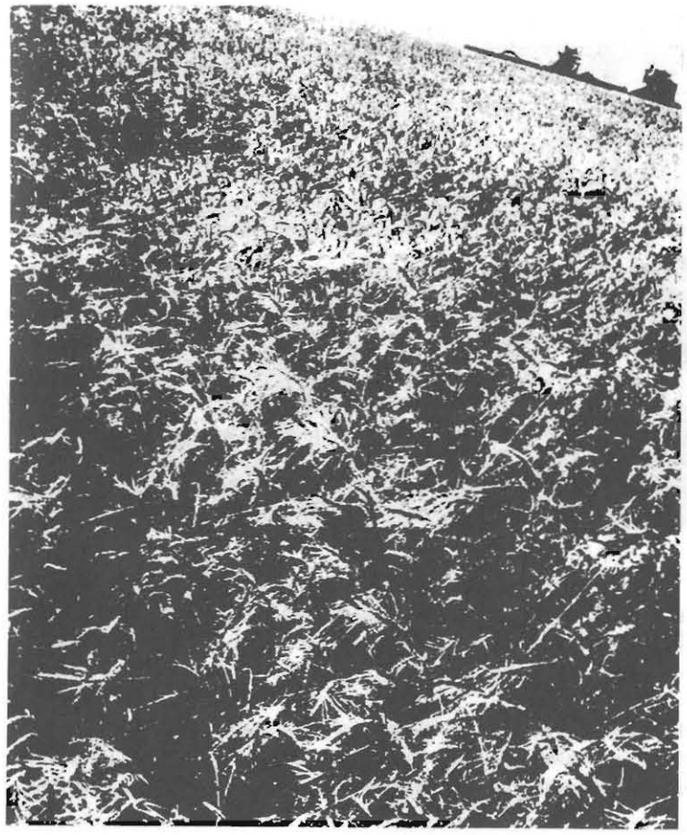
L Smirnov *Tennis*

A tilted frame brings the complaint, from a moulder in a clay-works,

Why does L Smirnov photograph the tennis player as if he were climbing a hill?



E Langman *Youth Commune of the 'Dynamo' Factory*



E Langman *Ahead with the '1040'*

A low view point prompts a potash worker to ask,

How often do we see teacups that are bigger than a human head?

Proletarskoe Foto describes Langman's photograph 'Ahead with *1040*':

A huge cornfield without fences and with a combine harvester as small as a flea. We see the strength of nature over the human intellect and the human will which is expressed through control over the machine. The Oktyabrists *do not like the human who leads the machine.*

By contrast, a photograph by *ROPF* member A Sajchet, 'He controls four workbenches', elicits this comment from a locksmith:

In this photograph everything is clear — no explanation is required. It is clear and sharp, one can recognise every screw and cog-wheel on the work bench.

Again, Sajchet's photograph 'Kindergarten on the *New Life* collective farm', described by ROPF colleague S Friedland:

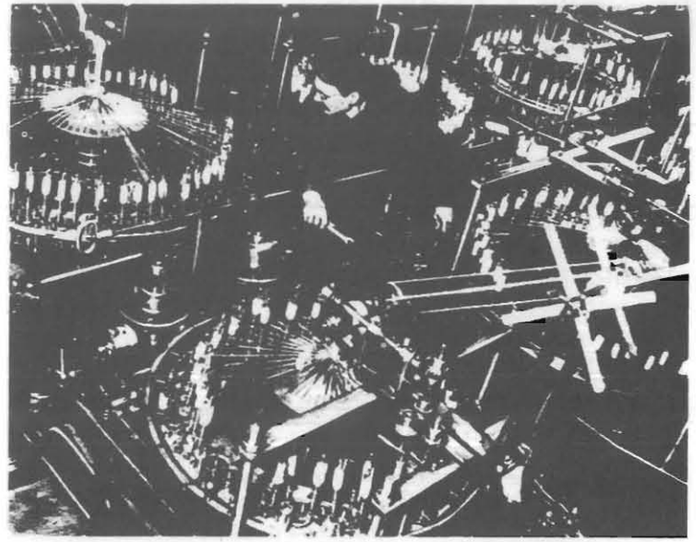
From the variety and multiplicity of collective life the author has taken two elements: (1) The children's cribs and (2) the collective women farmers going to work. The generalisation of the two subjects, although different, is closely linked internally — the women go to work and their children remain in reliable hands — and has a convincing effect.

Sajchet's photographs are indeed a model of expository clarity (it is to be remembered that such photographs were being published in a context of a widespread illiteracy); elsewhere *ROPF* practice consisted most predominantly of conventionally 'straight', or equally conventionally 'artistic', depictions of the 'shock worker' as socialist hero — anticipating the principles of Socialist Realism outlined by Zhdanov at the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.

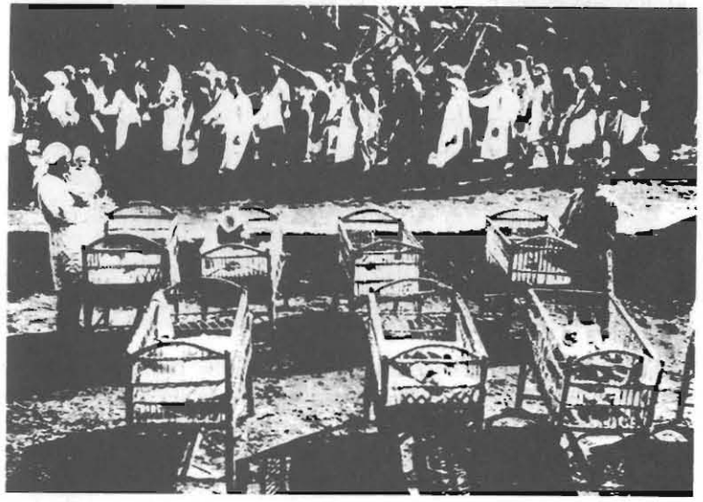
N Maksimov
Shockworker of the 'Hammer and Sickle' Factory

Clearly, the *Oktyabr* fraction photography programme was starkly irrelevant to the urgent propaganda needs of the first Five-Year Plan. In a statement of intent of 1930, the photographic section of *Oktyabr* had rejected alike,

the practice of AKhRR, *their demurely smiling pretty little faces, smoking chimneys, and the* Kvass-*sodden patriotism of workers uniformly shown with sickle and hammer [and] the bourgeois con-*



A Sajchet *He Controls Four Workbenches*



A Sajchet *Kindergarten on the 'New Life' Collective Farm*

cept of 'new form' and 'Leftist photography', which came to us from the West . . . the aesthetics of Mancel and Moholy-Nagy's abstract 'Leftist' photography,

asserting that photography supersedes, 'the obsolete techniques of old spatial arts'. Rodchenko was nevertheless expelled from *Oktyabr* following the scandal caused by the publication of his

deforming' portrait of a Pioneer, 'for propagating a taste alien to to the proletariat', and, 'for trying to divert proletarian art to the road of Western-style advertising, formalism, and aesthetics'; in 1931 the remaining members of the photography section of *Oktyabr* applied to be accepted into *RAPKH* (Russian Association of Proletarian Artists), confessing in their petition:

Oktyabr *has abandoned the social struggle to strengthen the position of Productivist art and seeks to replace it by an abstract theoretics, and leave the artists without support and guidance in their practical work.*[5]

In 1936, Rodchenko himself was dutifully to write, in *Sovetskoe Foto* (its original title now reinstated):

I wish to refute utterly the giving of first place to formal decisions and second place to ideological decisions; and at the same time to search unceasingly new riches of photographic language — that, with its help, I might create works on a high political and artistic level, works in which the language of photography serves Socialist Realism to the full.[6]

The debates were now ended. The theoretical issues they had raised however remain unresolved. Only months after the editors of *Novy Lef* had warned against the return of, 'the old authoritarian, fetishistic psychology', Stalin's first full-page portrait had appeared in *Pravda*. Rodchenko had condemned 'reactionary perspective'.

To assess the validity of the 'leftist' initiative in photography in its own terms we must begin by considering the claimed connection, in photography, between psychology and point-of-view.

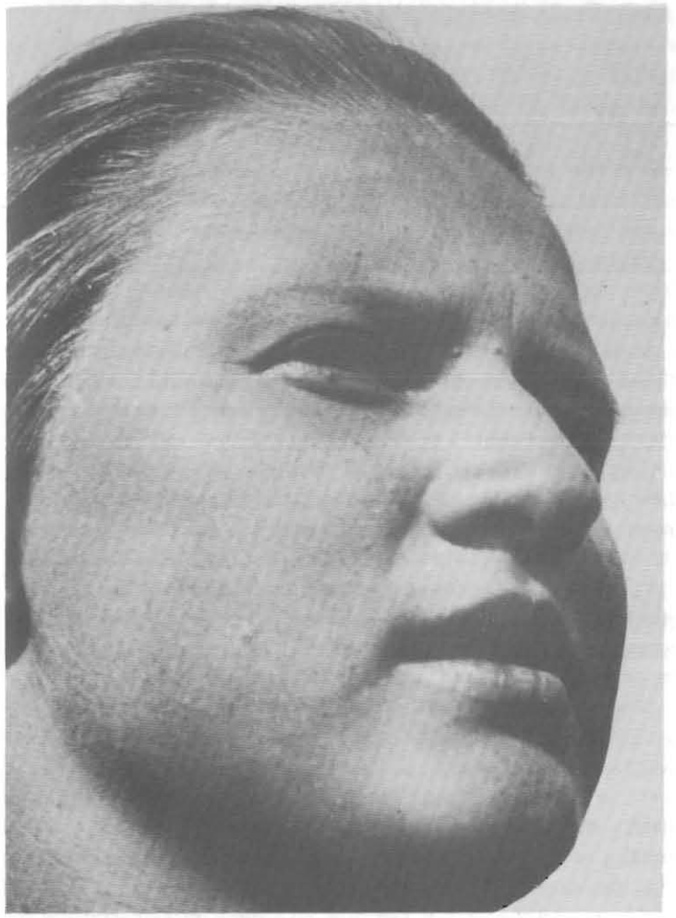
II

Spatial metaphors abound in the everyday discourse of politics: 'perspective', 'position', 'line', and so on. For Rodchenko, however, it is *not* a metaphor to speak of 'reactionary perspective', nor do the leftists' detractors differ from them in this: for example, what *Proletarskoe Foto* objects to in Langman's image of a combine-harvester dwarfed by a wheat-stalk is an error of 'proportion' in which the political is inseparable from the scalar. The complaint against Langman may be seen as arising from a reading which has its roots in that convention of Russian icon painting (and of Western 'primitive' traditions) according to which the relative importance of depicted figures is expressed in terms of their relative sizes; the claims of the leftists however more particularly concern that which they hold to be *unprecedented* in visual art: the *look* given by the camera.

In its essential details the representational system of photography is identical with that of classical painting: both depend (the former directly, the latter indirectly) upon the *camera obscura*. Projecting light reflected from a three-dimensional solid on to a plane surface, the *camera obscura* produces an image conforming to geometric laws of the propagation of light — an image seemingly sanctioned by nature itself, indifferent to the subjective dimensions of human affairs. In recent years, however, contestation of the supposed neutrality of the camera has been pursued to the *point* of that very subjectivity which the apparatus itself constructs. In advance of any other mediation whatsoever, whatever the object depicted the manner of its depiction in the camera implies a unique point-of-view; it is this position, occupied in fact by the camera, which the photograph bestows upon the individual looking at the photograph. The perspectival system of representation represents, before all else, a look.

5 G Karginov, *Rodchenko*, Thames & Hudson, 1979, p 258.

6 Colin Osman (ed), *Creative Camera International Yearbook 1978*, Gordon Fraser, p 190.



A Rodchenko *Young Woman Pioneer 1930*

Freud first identifies a psychological investment in looking ('scopophilia') as an independent drive in the 1905 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality',[7] where he refers to the voyeuristic activities of children. Elsewhere in his publications of that same year he emphasises: 'The libido for looking . . . is present in everyone in two forms, active and passive . . . one form or the other predominates.'[8] In their 'polymorphous perversity', children adopt active and passive roles in easy alternation, exhibitionism and voyeurism are bound in a form of *exchange*. The social world of adults however is ordered according to a sort of 'division of labour' in which the determinant look is that of men, and in which it is women who predominantly are looked at. Lacan's readings of Freud identify a double-inscription of psychic life in the look: the essentially auto-erotic, narcissistic, moment of the mirror-phase — the moment of identification of and with the self; and the look which is a component of the externally directed sexual drive to objectify the *other*. These aspects of the look may be conflated; Freud remarks that the scopophilic instinct is at base auto-erotic: 'it has indeed an object, but that object is the subject's own body'; Lacan's extended discussion of the look emphatically returns to this theme of the look as guarantor of imaginary self-coherence (a coherence threatened by the look which comes from the other).[9]

We may therefore endorse the basic premise of the *Oktyabr* leftists' programme for photography: looking is not indifferent. There can never be any question of 'just looking': vision is structured in such a way that the look will always-already entrain a history of the subject. However, this is to endorse the *Oktyabr* premise so completely as to overwhelm the argument based on it: that the ideology of the subject may be *overthrown* by a 'revolution in perception'. For it can now no longer be a question of the *ideology* of the subject — a body of ideas the subject 'owns', and may abandon; it is now rather a question of that very ideology of the *subject* which informs the previous formulation. Such a punctual subject of ideology may not be overthrown by the camera, since that subject is inscribed in the very functioning of the instrument itself, and in the very history of the act of looking. But at what risk? How secure is the coherence of the subject of photographs?

What is now at issue is the work of fixing those images which become reality for a subject, in the same movement offering the subject positions from which the images will be experienced as its own: understanding that this 'it' is only constituted *as* subject through the agency of such movement, that there is no subject prior to its construction across the field of representations. As Lacan puts it

7 S Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', *Standard Edition* vol VII.

8 S Freud, 'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious', *SE* vol VIII, p 98.

9 J Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth, 1977, p 67ff.

I do not think that one is dealing with the negation of the subject anywhere, at least in the field vaguely defined by this label. One is dealing with the dependency of the subject, which is extremely different; and more specifically, with the return to Freud, of the dependency of the subject vis-à-vis *something really elementary and which we have attempted to isolate under the term of 'signifier'.*[10]

Following recent discussions in *Screen* we may take the concept of *suture* to be centrally concerned with this imbrication of the subject within a discourse. Suture operates within all forms of discourse as a movement of construction/incorporation of the subject *in* the discourse in question; a set of effects in which the subject recognises the discourse as its own. From its origins in psychoanalytic theory, the concept has of necessity undergone a number of vicissitudes in the process of its incorporation into other fields. Perhaps its most prominent formulation is that *vis-à-vis* film, derived from Oudart and Dyan, which may be most simply expressed as: the appropriation of the subject into the imaginary field of the film through the agency of an identification of the spectator's look with that of a fictional character, this in turn being effected through such specific techniques as point-of-view and shot/reverse-shot cutting. Stephen Heath criticises this formulation as being, in itself, insufficiently sensitive to the variety and complexity of suturing moments in films. We may nevertheless take our departure from the Oudart/Dyan position in interrogating the movement of suture in the field of photography, a necessary interrogation in that, as Heath has put it:

No discourse without suture . . . but, equally, no suture which is not from the beginning specifically defined within a particular system which gives it form.[11]

The primary suturing instance of the discourse of still photography takes the form of an identification of the subject with the camera position. As already observed, the look from this position will shift between the poles of voyeurism and narcissism: in the former instance subjecting the other-as-object to an inquisitive and controlling surveillance in which seeing is disassociated from being-seen; and in the latter effecting a dual identification with both the camera *and* the individual depicted. Identification here is rarely the simple matter of like 'identifying with' like implied in an everyday use of the term; it is more often a matter of the *selective* incorporation of attributes of what may be a radically 'other' individual, by analogy with the mode of formation of the super-ego. Such selectivity may achieve that conflation of voyeurism and narcissism for which Freud allows. For example, the image of

10 Discussion of M Foucault, 'What is an Author', *Screen* vol 20 no 1, Spring 1979, p 33.

11 Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', *Screen* vol 18 no 4, Winter 1977/78, p 69.

the women 'surprised' in the act of masturbation is ubiquitous in pornography; if such an image is in turn used as an aid to male masturbation, the imaged woman, certainly, becomes the object of an inquisitive and sadistic voyeurism, but she may also, simultaneously, become the locus of a narcissistic identification in which the man's enjoyment of his own body becomes conflated in phantasy with the previously quite distinct *jouissance* of the woman. As it is a matter of phantasy and therefore of the participation of the primary processes, the 'contradiction' between identification and objectification is unacknowledged. We might further note that identification need not be with any overt depicted 'content' whatsoever: if we bear in mind the *gestalt* orientation of the mirror-phase — its emphasis on surface and boundary — we can admit that a narcissistic investment may be made in respect of the very specular brilliance of the tightly delineated photographic surface itself; certainly, appreciation of the superficial beauty of the 'fine print' is a centrepiece of photographic connoisseurship:

Art photography . . . can be something you actually want to hold in your hand and actually press close to you. You want to hold it near to your face or body because there's some subconscious reaction with it.[12]

Such fascination with the 'glossy' may recall the celebrated *glanz* fetishised by one of Freud's patients,[13] and indeed, the photographic look is ineluctably implicated in the structure of fetishism.

The photograph, like the fetish, is the result of a look which has, instantaneously and forever, isolated, 'frozen', a fragment of the spatio-temporal continuum. In fetishism, something serves in place of the penis with which the shocked male infant would 'complete' the woman; the function of the fetish is to deny the very perception it commemorates, a logical absurdity which betrays the operation of the primary processes. This structure of 'disavowal' is not confined to cases of fetishism proper, it is so widespread as to be almost inaccessible to critical attention. Mannoni observes that disavowal presents itself ubiquitously in the analytic situation, in the typical formula: 'I know very well, but nevertheless.' For Mannoni it is,

as if the Verleugnung *of the maternal phallus sketched the first model of all repudiations of reality, and constituted the origin of all those beliefs which survive their contradiction in experience.*[14]

The persistence of belief in the female penis is not confined to the male (although it seems that the consequence of pathological fetishism *is* — suggesting that perhaps the relation of the male look to photographs may be much closer to fetishism proper than

12 Bill Gaskins, interview in *Camerawork* no 5, 1976, p 3.

13 S Freud, 'Fetishism', *SE* vol XXI, p 152.

14 O Mannoni, 'Je sais bien, mais quand même', in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'Autre Scène*, Seuil, Paris, 1969, p 12.

is that of the female). To observe a structural homology between the look at the photograph and the look of the fetishist is not to claim, excessively, that all those who find themselves captivated by an image are therefore (pathological) fetishists. What is being noted is that photographic representation accomplishes that separation of knowledge from belief characteristic of fetishism. It is this pervasive structure of disavowal which links fetishism to the image and to phantasy. The motive of the disavowal is to maintain the imaginary unity of the subject at the cost of *(fetishism)/ in the face of (phantasy)* the subject's actual splitting; thus, this woman's report of her thoughts while watching Oshima's film, *In the Realm of the Senses*:

I was there, curled up in my seat, very aroused. I would really have liked to have gone that far, I dream of extreme experiences, but at the same time I know very well that I'm not capable of them.[15]

Disavowal in respect of photographs shifts polarity to accommodate the nature of the obstruction to desire: on the one hand,

I know that the (pleasurable) reality offered in this photograph is only an illusion, but nevertheless;

on the other hand,

I know that this (unpleasurable) reality exists/existed, but nevertheless here *there is only the beauty of the print.*

The (fetishistic) *fascination* with the photograph may be nuanced by implied imaginary relations with the viewed such as inferiority/superiority, culpability/moral-dstance, and so on; these being conveyed by the framing, angle-of-view, focal-length of lens, etcetera. However, the imaginary relation may not be held for long. To look at a photograph beyond a certain period of time is to become frustrated: the image which on first looking gave pleasure by degrees becomes a veil behind which we now desire to see. To remain too long with a single image is to lose the imaginary command of the look, to relinquish it to that absent other to whom it belongs by right: the camera. The image now no longer receives *our* look, reassuring us of our founding centrality, it rather, as it were, avoids our gaze, confirming its allegiance to the other. In still photography, one image does not succeed another in the manner of the cinema. As alienation intrudes into our captation by the still image we can only regain the imaginary, and reinvest our looking with authority, by averting our gaze, redirecting it to another image elsewhere. It is therefore not an arbitrary fact that

15 Marie-Françoise Hans, Gilles Lapouge, *Les femmes, la pornographie, l'érotisme*, Seuil, 1978, p 245.

photographs are deployed so that we need not look at them for long, and so that, almost invariably, another photograph is always-already in position to receive the displaced look.

The awkwardness which accompanies the over-long contemplation of a photograph arises from a consciousness of the monocular perspective system of photography as a systematic deception. The lens arranges all information according to the laws of projection which place the subject as geometric point of origin of the scene in an imaginary relationship with real space, but facts intrude to deconstruct the initial response: the eye/I cannot move within the depicted scene (which offers itself in the imaginary to precisely such movement), it can only move across it to the point where it encounters the frame, however the subject's inevitable recognition of the rule of the frame may be postponed by a variety of strategies — prominent amongst which are 'compositional' devices for moving the eye from the framing edge. 'Good' composition is probably no more or less than a set of devices for prolonging our imaginary command of the point-of-view, our self-assertion; a device for retarding recognition of the autonomy of the frame, and the authority of the other it signifies. Composition therefore is also to be seen as a means of suturing, a means of prolonging the imaginary force, the real power to please, of the photograph; it may be in this that it has survived so long, within a variety of rationalisations, as a criterion of value in visual arts generally.[16]

The subject's recognition of the absent other causes a 'tear' in its imaginary relationship with the visual field. In the cinema such devices as the reverse-shot close up this rent in the imaginary. The still has no reverse-shot (I am of course talking about the single image) but it does have, as I have observed, forms of identification, fetishistic fascination, multiplication/repetition, and 'good composition', all of which exert suturing effects. In addition, and most importantly, it has the ever-present caption, and other forms of linguistic expression which traverse, surround, and support the image. Unpleasure is thus further averted by recourse to *writing*, which reinvests the subject with an authority stripped from it by the absent other; for whereas as Metz has observed 'one of the characteristics of the world is that it is uttered by no one',[17] there is never any question but that the verbal address emanates from a subject and for a subject, it *recognises* the subject. As alienation intrudes to evacuate the subject from the visual register the subject can 'take place' again in the caption, and when it expires there it can find itself returned again to the image (what other purpose is served by those texts — short, pathetic — which invariably accompany 'pin-up' photographs in newspapers and magazines?)

16 Indeed, *all* of those attributes of the still image we tend to identify as 'aesthetic' may be brought within the purview of *suture*.

17 C Metz, 'Notes Towards a Phenomenology of the Narrative', in *Film Language*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974, p 20.

We rarely see a photograph *in use* which is not accompanied by writing: in newspapers the image is in most cases subordinate to the text; in advertising, and illustrated magazines, there tends to be a more or less equal distribution of text and images; in art and amateur photography the image predominates, although a caption or title is generally added. But the influence of language goes beyond the fact of the physical presence of writing as a *deliberate* addition to the image. Even the uncaptioned photograph, framed and isolated on a gallery wall, is invaded by language when it is looked at; in memory, in association, snatches of words and images continually intermingle and exchange one for the other; what significant elements the subject recognises 'in' the photograph are inescapably supplemented from elsewhere.

III

In a familiar cinematic convention, subjective consciousness — reflection, introspection, memory — is rendered as a disembodied 'voice-over' accompanying an otherwise silent image-track. I am not suggesting that such an interior monologue similarly accompanies our looking at photographs, nor do I wish to claim that in the process of looking at a photograph we mentally translate the image in terms of a redundant verbal description. What I 'have in mind' is better expressed in the image of transparent coloured inks which have been poured onto the surface of water in a glass container: as the inks spread and sink their boundaries and relations are in constant alternation, and areas which at one moment are distinct from one another may, at the next, overlap, interpenetrate. Analogies are of course *only* analogies, I simply wish to stress the fluidity of the phenomenon by contrast with the unavoidable rigidity of some of the schematic descriptions which will follow.

It is conventionally held that photography is a 'visual medium' (the contenders in the 1920s Soviet photography debate never doubted it). At a strictly physiological level it is quite straightforward what we mean by 'the visual': it is that aspect of our experience which results from light being reflected from objects into our eyes. We do not however *see* our retinal images: as is well-known, although we see the world as right-way-up the image on our retina is inverted; we have two slightly discrepant retinal images, but see only one image; we make mental allowances for the known relative sizes of objects which override the actual relative sizes of their images on our retina; we also make allowances for perspectival effects such as foreshortening, the foundation of the erroneous popular judgment that such effects in photography are 'distortions'; our eyes operate in scanning movements, and the

body is itself generally in motion, such stable objects as we see are therefore *abstracted* from an ongoing phenomenal flux;[18] moreover, attention to such objects 'out there' in the material world is constantly subverted as wilful concentration dissolves into involuntary association; . . . and so on. The detail of these and many other factors as described in the literature of the psychology of perception, cognitive psychology, and related disciplines, is complex, the broad conclusion to be drawn from this work may nevertheless be simply expressed:

What we see . . . is not a pure and simple coding of the light patterns that are focused on the retina. Somewhere between the retina and the visual cortex the inflowing signals are modified to provide information that is already linked to a learned response . . . Evidently what reaches the visual cortex is evoked by the external world but is hardly a direct or simple replica of it.[19]

The fact that seeing is no simple matter has of course been acknowledged in visual art for centuries. It is a fact which painting, facing the problem of representing real space in terms of only two dimensions, could not avoid (for its part, sculpture particularly emphasised the imbrication of the visual and the kinaesthetic, the extent to which seeing is a muscular and visceral activity). At times the aims of visual art became effectively *identified* with those of a science of seeing; Berenson complained of the Renaissance preoccupation with problems of perspective:

Our art has a fatal tendency to become science, and we hardly possess a masterpiece which does not bear the marks of having been a battlefield for divided interests.

Across the modern period, at least in the West, it has been very widely assumed that an empirical science of perception can provide not only a necessary but a sufficient account of the material facts upon which visual art practices are based. Thus, in this present century, and particularly in the field of art education, the psychology of perception has become the most readily accepted art-related 'scientific' discipline, the one in which 'visual artists' most readily identify their own concerns (correspondingly, where philosophical theories have been used they have generally had a phenomenological orientation). Certainly such studies in the psychology of appearances are necessary, if only to provide a corrective to the naïve idea of purely retinal vision. But if the explanation of seeing is arrested at this point it serves to support an error of even greater consequence: that ubiquitous belief in 'the visual' as a realm of experience totally separated from, indeed antithetical to, 'the verbal'.

18 See James J Gibson, 'Constancy and Invariance in Perception', in Gyorgy Kepes (ed) *The Nature and Art of Motion*, Studio Vista, 1967.

19 Karl H Bribram, 'The Neurophysiology of Remembering', *Scientific American*, January 1969.

Seeing is not an activity divorced from the rest of consciousness; any account of visual art which is adequate to the facts of our actual experience must allow for the imbrication of the visual with other aspects of thought. In a 1970 overview of extant research, M J Horowitz has presented a tri-partite model of the dominant modes of thought in terms of 'enactive', 'image', and 'lexical'.[20] *Enactive* thought is muscular and visceral, is prominent in infancy and childhood, and remains a more or less marked feature of adult thinking. For example: on entering my kitchen I found that I had forgotten the purpose of my visit; no word or image came to mind, but my gesture of picking up something with a fork led me to the implement I was seeking. The enactive may be conjoined with the visual. Albert Einstein reported that, for him: 'The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images . . . [elements] of visual and some of muscular type.'[21] The enactive also merges with the verbal: Horowitz supplies the example of a person who was temporarily unable to find the phrase, 'he likes to pin people down', an expression called to mind only after the speaker's manual gesture of pinning something down. We should also note the findings of psychoanalysis concerning the type of neurotic symptoms in which a repressed idea finds expression via the enactive realisation of a verbal metaphor; an example from Freud's case histories — Dora's hysterical vomiting at the repressed recollection of Herr K's sexual advances, an idea which 'made her sick'.[22]

Mental *images* are those psychic phenomena which we may assimilate to a sensory order: visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, olfactory. For the purposes of this article, however, I shall use the term 'image' to refer to visual images alone. If I wish to describe, say, an apartment I once lived in, I will base my description on mental images of its rooms and their contents. Such a use of imagery is a familiar part of normal everyday thought. However, not all imaged thought is so orderly and controlled. We may find ourselves making connections between things, on the basis of images, which take us unawares; we may not be conscious of any wilful process by which one image led to another, the connection seems to be made gratuitously and instantaneously. The result of such a 'flash' may be a disturbing idea which we put instantly out of mind, or it may provide a witticism for which we can happily take credit; or more commonly it will seem simply inconsequential. At times, we may deliberately seek the psychic routes which bring these unsolicited interruptions to rational thinking. In the 'daydream', for example, the basic scenario and its protagonists are consciously chosen, but one's thoughts are then abandoned to an only minimally controlled drift of more or less autonomous currents of associations. The sense of being in control of our mental

20 M J Horowitz, *Image Formation and Cognition*, Meredith, 1970.

21 Brewster Ghiselin, *The Creative Process*, Mentor 1955, quoted in Dan I Slobin, *Psycholinguistics*, Scott, Foresman, 1974, p 101.

22 S Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', *SE* vol VII.

imagery is of course most completely absent in the *dream* itself. Dreams 'come to us' as if from another place, and the flow of their images obeys no rational logic. As is well-known, Freud's study of dreams led him to identify a particular sort of 'dream logic' radically different from the logic of rational thought: the *dream-work*, the (il)logic of the primary processes of the unconscious. In a certain common misconception, the unconscious is conceived of as a kind of bottomless pit to which has been consigned all that is dark and mysterious in 'human nature'. On the contrary, unconscious processes operate 'in broad daylight'; although they are structurally and qualitatively different from the processes of rational thought and symbolisation enshrined in linguistics and philosophical logic, they are nevertheless an integral part of normal everyday thought processes taken as a whole. The apparent illogicality which so obviously characterises the dream invades and suffuses waking discourse in the form of slips of the tongue, and other involuntary acts, and in jokes. Additionally, and most importantly to this present discussion, the intrusion of the primary processes into rational thought (secondary processes) governs the mechanisms of visual association; and it may be useful therefore to give these a summary, *aide mémoire*, exposition.

Freud identifies four mechanisms in the dream-work: 'condensation'; 'displacement'; 'considerations of representability'; and 'secondary revision'. In *condensation*, a process of 'packing into a smaller space' has taken place:

If a dream is written out it may perhaps fill half a page. The analysis setting out the dream-thoughts underlying it may occupy six, eight or a dozen times as much space.[23]

It is this process which provides the general feature of over-determination, by which, for any manifest element, there can be a plurality of latent elements (dream-thoughts). By *displacement*, Freud means two related things. First, that process by which individual elements in the manifest dream stand in for elements in the dream-thoughts by virtue of an association, or chain of associations, which link the two. (Thus displacement is implicated in the work of condensation: displacements from two or more separate latent elements, along separate associative paths, may eventually reach a point at which the paths meet, forming a condensation at the point of intersection.) The second, related, meaning of the term 'displacement' is that process according to which the manifest dream can have a different 'emotional centre' from the latent thoughts. Something quite trivial may occupy centre-stage in the dream, as it were 'receive the emotional spotlight'; what has occurred here is a displacement of feelings and attention

23 S Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* vol IV.

from the thing, person, or situation which is in reality responsible for the arousal of those feelings. It is thus possible for something as inconsequential as, say, an ice-cube, to become in a dream the object of a strong feeling.

Of *considerations of representability*, Freud writes:

let us suppose that you had undertaken the task of replacing a political leading article in a newspaper by a series of illustrations . . . In so far as the article mentioned people and concrete objects you will replace them easily . . . but your difficulties will begin when you come to the representation of abstract words and of all those parts of speech which indicate relations between thoughts.[24]

24 S Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, *SE* vol XV, p 175.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud describes the various ways in which the dream deals, in visual terms, with such logical relations as implication, disjunction, contradiction, etcetera. We should note a particular role of the verbal in the transition from the abstract to the pictorial: 'bridge words' are those which, in more readily lending themselves to visualisation, provide a means of displacement from the abstract term to its visual representation. Thus, for example, the idea of 'reconciliation' might find visual expression through the intermediary of the expression 'bury the hatchet', which can be more easily transcribed in visual terms. This representational strategy is widely to be found in advertising, which relies extensively on our ability to read images in terms of underlying verbal texts. It may be appreciated that such readings readily occur 'wild', that is to say, where they were not intended.

Secondary revision is the act of ordering, revising, supplementing the contents of the dream so as to make a more intelligible whole out of it. It comes into play primarily when the dreamer is nearing a waking state and/or recounting the dream, but is nevertheless present at each instant of the dream. Freud had some doubts as to whether this process should properly be considered to belong ro the dream-work itself (in an article of 1922 he definitely excludes it). However, it is not important to our purposes here that this be decided; we should note that secondary revision is a process of dramatisation, of narrativisation.

Returning to Horowitz's schema of rypes of mental representation, *lexical* thought is 'thinking in words'. It should be stressed however that this is not simply a matter of the silent mental rehearsal of a potentially actualised speech. Lev Vygotsky has identified an *inner speech* fundamentally different in its nature from externally directed communicative speech. Inner speech:

appears disconnected and incomplete, . . . shows a tendency

towards an altogether specific form of abbreviation: namely, omitting the subject of a sentence and all words connected with it, while preserving the predicate.[25]

Inner speech in the adult develops out of the 'egocentric speech' (Piaget) of the small child. We should remark that Freud describes the primary processes as preceding the secondary processes in the mental development of the individual; they are pre-verbal in origin and thus prefer to handle images rather than words, where words *are* handled they are treated as far as possible like images. Thus, when Vygotsky observes that, in inner speech: 'A single word is so saturated with sense that many words would be required to explain it in external speech,'[26] we may be confident that the reference is to that same centrally important aspect of the primary processes that we encounter in Freud's work as 'condensation'. Freud notes that, in dreams, words and phrases are just meaningful elements among others, accorded no more or less status than are images, and their meanings have no necessary relation to the meanings they would carry in waking speech. We here encounter the question of the *nature* of enactive, image and lexical presentations in their unconscious transformation. I shall return to this question in the next section.

I prefaced my references to Horowitz's compartmentalised model of thought by stressing the fluidity of the actual processes it describes. Horowitz himself writes:

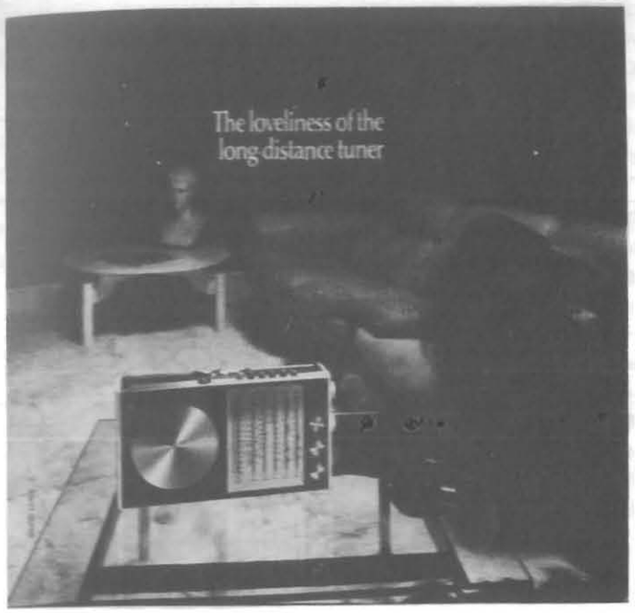
Normal streams of thought will flow simultaneously in many compartments without clear-cut division between modes of presentation. Enactions blur into imagery in the form of kinesthetic, somesthetic, and vestibular or visceral images. Image representation blends with words in the form of faint auditory or visual images of words. Words and enactive modes merge through images of speaking.[27]

Inescapably, the *sense* of the things we see is constructed across a complex of exchanges between these various registers of representation. Differing perceptual situations will however tend to elicit differing configurations and emphases of response: just as sculpture will tend to prioritise the enactive and kinaesthetic suffusion of visual imagery, so photographs predominantly tend to prompt a complex of exchanges between the visual and verbal registers: as I began by observing, the greater part of photographic practice is, *de facto*, 'scripto-visual'; this fact is nowhere more apparent than in advertising, and it may help here to refer to a particular example.

25 Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1977, p 139.

26 Lev Vygotsky, *ibid*, p 148.

27 J Horowitz, op cit, p 77.



IV

The particular conjuncture into which this advertisement was launched, in Britain in the early 1960s, included a best-selling novel by Alan Sillitoe, and a popularly successful film based on this novel — directed by Tony Richardson and featuring Tom Courtney — which retained the title of the original text: *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. The fact that Tom Courtney was at that time a prominent emerging young 'star' of British theatre and cinema ensured that the institutional spaces of television, and newspapers and magazines, were also penetrated. During the particular months in which this ad appeared therefore, the expression 'the loneliness of the long-distance runner' was transmitted across the apparatuses of publishing, cinema, television, and journalism, to become inscribed in what we might call the 'popular pre-conscious' — those ever-shifting contents which we may reasonably suppose can be called to mind by the majority of individuals in a given society at a particular moment in its history; that which is 'common-knowledge'. Two attributes therefore are immediately entrained by this content-fragment of the popular pre-conscious which serves the ad as *pre-text*: success and contemporaneity; additionally, the visual image across which the fragment is inscribed is clearly open to the implication of the

erotic. Ambition, contemporaneity, eroticism, together with the substantial primacy of the visual in their inscription: *the day-dream*.

In his 1908 essay, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', Freud remarks that day-dreams serve one, or both, of two impulses: 'They are either ambitious wishes, which serve to elevate the subject's personality; or they are erotic ones.' To identify these two wishes in all day-dreams is not, of course, to suggest that the manifest contents of such phantasies are themselves stereotyped or unchangeable:

On the contrary, they fit themselves in to the subject's shifting impressions of life, change with every change in his situation, and receive from every fresh active impression that might be called a 'date-mark'.[28]

As for thinking in pictures, in his 1923 paper, 'The Ego and the Id', Freud remarks that,

. . . in many people this seems to be the favoured method . . . In some ways, too, it stands nearer to unconscious processes than does thinking in words, and it is unquestionably older than the latter both ontogenetically and phylogenetically.[29]

The child, prior to its acquisition of language, inhabits a mode of thought not adapted to external reality, but rather aimed at creating an imaginary world in which it seeks to gratify its own wishes by means of hallucinatory objects. The day-dream — the conscious phantasy in which the subject constructs an imaginary scenario for the fulfilment of a wish — is one form of survival of such infantile thinking into adult life; however, as the day-dream is situated mainly at the preconscious-unconscious level then it is subject to the intermittent binding of its constituent thing-presenrations to word-presentations.

In his 1915 paper 'The Unconscious', Freud makes a fundamental distinction between the preconscious-conscious system and the unconscious:

the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone,[30]

but what is the nature of this unconscious 'thing'? In reiterating his distinction between Pcs-Cs and Ucs ideas in 'The Ego and the Id' (1923), Freud remarks that the unconscious idea is: 'carried out on some material which remains unknown'.[31] Across his various discussions of unconscious formations he nevertheless speaks both

28 S Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', *SE* vol IX, p 147.

29 S Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', *SE* vol XIX, p 21.

30 S Freud, 'The Unconscious,' *SE* Vol XIV, p 201.

31 S Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', *SE* vol XIX, p 20.

as if the unconscious works through literal word-play *and* as if it worked through imagery. Leclaire, in his contribution to a much discussed paper on the unconscious, finds amongst the most elementary particles of a patient's dream: 'the memory of a gesture engraved like an image' (cupped hands); and, 'the formula "I'm thirsty" ', and comments:

Inasmuch as we are thus able, through a fragment of analysis, to grasp what the 'ideational representatives' of the drive are, we may say that this gesture and this phrase are included among them. It is they, image and word, *that will pursue their adventures in Philippe's psychic life.*[32] *(my emphasis)*

Leclaire remarks that his patient, 'in recounting the memory, imitates the gestures'; referring to it as a 'motor-representation'; clearly the 'image' here is on the side of the *enactive*. We should also note that the 'word' at issue here is not a lexical item in the usual sense, it is a matter rather of phonic imagery indistinguishable from sense purely personal to the infant Philippe. Lyotard has spoken of 'word-things', the result of condensation:

their 'thingness' consists in their 'thickness'; the normal word belongs to a 'transparent' order of language: its meaning is immediate, . . . the product of condensation, as the name indicates, is, on the contrary, opaque, dense, it hides its other side, its other sides.[33]

Such condensation is at work in Philippe's discourse where the '*je*' of '*moi-je*' and the ultimate syllable of *plage* compact into the initial sound of '*j'ai soif*'. Condensation here is a product of after-repression, in which elements are attracted into the gravitational field of an ideational representative — '*j'ai soif*' — of the oral drive; this in turn being installed in the primary 'capture of drive energy in the web of the signifier, thus facing on to that literally *unspeakable* 'other side' to which Lyotard alludes. Freud writes:

repression does not hinder the instinctual representative from continuing to exist in the unconscious, from organising itself further . . . the instinctual representative develops with less interference and more profusely if it is withdrawn by repression from conscious influence. It proliferates in the dark, as it were, and takes on extreme forms of expression.[34]

Thus the ideational representatives will continue to, in Leclaire's phrase, 'pursue their adventures' — to quite particular ends.

The ideational representatives — 'mnemic traces', 'inscriptions', 'signs' — which form the nucleus of the unconscious, ramify and

32 J Laplanche and S Leclaire, 'The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study', *Yale French Studies*, no 48, 1972, p 145.

33 J-F Lyotard, *Discours, Figure*, Editions Klincksieck, Paris, p 244.

34 S Freud, 'Repression', *SE* vol XIV, p 149.

coalesce into specific themes. Laplanche:

As to the ontological status of the unconscious . . . the 'words' that compose it are elements drawn from the realm of the imaginary — notably from visual imagination — but promoted to the dignity of signifiers. The term imago, *somewhat fallen into disuse, corresponds fairly well, if taken in a broad sense, to these elementary terms of unconscious discourse . . . The 'sentences' that are found in this discourse are short sequences, most often fragmentary, circular and repetitive. It is these that we discover as* unconscious phantasies.[35]

Laplanche and Pontalis observe that when Freud speaks of 'unconscious phantasy':

He seems at times to be refering to a subliminal, preconscious reverie into which the subject falls and of which he may or may not become reflexively aware,

and they continue,

It is possible to distinguish between several layers at which phantasy is dealt with in Freud's work: conscious, subliminal and unconscious. Freud was principally concerned however less with establishing such a differentiation than with emphasising the links between these different aspects.[36] *(my emphasis)*

The actual 'substance' of the contents of the unconscious must *by definition* remain unknown. Freud speaks inconsistently on the matter; Lacan commits himself only to the observation that, although they may share identical formal properties, the conscious and unconscious signifiers are otherwise very different. It does seem to be the case however that (speaking now as if from the imaginary terrain of the first topography) the 'closer' we approach the unconscious the less differentiated become the modalities of thought: gesture, image, and word become compacted into dense multi-layered and faceted units; and it is as if these, in their turn, were *en route* to destinations of ultimate compression: 'knots' in the tangled associative skeins of the unconscious; *points-de-caption*[37] in the incessant sliding of sense. It is these which are the ultimate, if mythical, destinations of the bifurcating chains of associations which spread out from the manifest elements of a photograph into the 'intricate network of our world of thought': consciousness, subliminal reverie, pre-conscious thought, the unconscious — the way of phantasy; and it is by these same routes that, subject to the transforming vicissitudes of repression, contents may pass 'in the other direction', to *invest* the image, providing the purport of its cathexis.

35 Laplanche and Leclaire, op cit, pp 162-163.

36 J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, Hogarth, 1973, p 316.

37 The image here is Lacan's, but its extension to unconscious, as well as conscious, thought is Laplanche's. Lacan himself has rejected such an implication of *passage* between Cs-Pcs and Ucs systems, preferring the 'recto-verso' image of 'double-inscription' — correspondence without joining. See Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, Routledge, 1977, pp 249-251.

To return, then, to this particular image. Ambition, eroticism, contemporaneity — the theme of ambition is obviously central to advertising, as is the erotic, which is anyhow latent in *all* acts of looking. In this particular advertisement, the expression, 'The loneliness of the long-distance runner' offers a phantasy identification within a syndrome of success, and with a successful figure — as a certain familiar style of promotional language might have put it: 'Tom Courtney *is* the long-distance runner', ahead of his competitors, the 'leading man' both in the diagesis and in reality. This particular expression at that particular historical conjuncture brings the phantasy satisfaction of the ambitious wish 'up-to-date'. The conjunction of ambition and eroticism here is achieved, literally, through 'the agency of the letter' — the substitution of a 'v' for an 'n', and a 't' for an 'r', which tacks the manifest verbal text to its pre-text in the pre-conscious. By this device, the verbal fragment faces on to both unconscious contents (in the 'descriptive' sense; ie, Ucs-Pcs) and upon the manifest visual contents of the image.

The text says that the tuner is lovely, what it simultaneously *means* (through the anchorage by which it is related to the constellation of conventional associations around the figure of the woman) is that the woman is lovely; thus the word 'loveliness' acts as a relay in an associative chain linking the radio to the woman —a metonymic movement which facilitates a displacement of libidinal cathexis from the one to the other. The woman is 'lovely', she is also 'lonely': the suppressed term in the pre-text here serving as the material absence which nevertheless anchors the meaning of the woman's posture and, beyond, the entire 'mood' of the picture. Apart from the configuration of the woman's pose, the mood is given most predominantly by the way the scene has been lit; it is the sort of lighting popularly referred to as 'intimate' — a word which also takes a sexual sense. The term 'intimate' here is not reached by totally 'free' association, the association is conventionally determined to the point that we may consider this lighting effect to belong to the complex of 'considerations of representability' in respect of this term. The suppressed term 'lonely', then, in conjunction with the connotations of the lighting, anchors the particular sort of narrative implications of the moment depicted in the image, implications readily linked to the phantasy of seduction, widely encountered across advertising. This scenario is on the side of signification, there is however another history inscribed here on the side of *significance*.[38]

Along the axis woman/radio we encounter a double oscillation between revelation and concealment. First, the visible marks which dictate the reading 'woman' also suggest the reading 'naked' — there is not a single signifier of clothing. However, from the point-

38 There is no radical discontinuity between the primary and the secondary processes, both are ever present aspects of language. Kristeva has coined the term *signifiance* to indicate the simultaneous presence of these two registers (in her terminology, the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic') — *signifiance* exceeds the signification which unites signifier and signified along the syntactically ordered route of conscious discourse.

of-view offered by the shot, this additional reading cannot be confirmed; but it nevertheless insists even in the means of concealment: the veil of hair, a time-honoured convention for signifying feminine nudity without *showing* it (see, for example, conventional pictorial representations of Eve, and the text of Tennyson's 'Lady Godiva'). Secondly, while the woman's body is hidden, averted, the radio is completely exposed — lit and positioned to offer itself in precisely that 'full-frontal nudity' denied at the other terminal of the relay. (Through the agency of this oscillation then, driven by voyeurism/exhibitionism, and set in motion by the ambiguity of the woman, the cathexis of the product is further overdetermined).

In spatial terms, the axis woman/radio forms the base of a triangle which has as its apex the eye of the subject. Another triangle may be constructed from this same base but whose apex is now to be located at the position of the sculpted bust. If a look were to be directed from this position — a possibility alluded to by the 'head' already present there — it would take in that view of the woman's body which is absent from the subject's visual field while nevertheless available to its imaginary (or, as we might say, absent at one level of the imaginary but available at another). Significantly, the sculptured gaze is in fact averted from the woman, although its frozen fixated field includes the radio.

The elements of the image, resumed in their structuration of the subject of this scene, then, are these: the woman's body, represented as an ambiguity, a mystery, but finally as an *absence*; the radio, unambiguously foregrounded as dominant positive term in both imaginary and symbolic spaces; the look of the spectator from the camera position, a look which swings between woman and radio from its suspension point in the word 'loveliness'; the mirror identification of this look with the stone head in the background, from which position it might solve the riddle posed by the woman, but where instead it becomes literally *petrified*, fixated — the gaze, and knowledge, both averted. There is thus a second level of narrative to be read symptomatically across this particular image, a history of fetishism, related to one of the 'primal phantasies' — phantasies of seduction, castration, the primal scene, and inter-uterine life — which Freud held to be transindividual (to the point of suggesting that they are transmitted by heredity). The primal phantasies lie at the unconscious extremity of phantasy life in general. Phantasies may also be pre-conscious and, in the form of the day-dream, conscious; nevertheless all phantasies are rooted in an unconscious wish, they are essentially the *mise-en-scène* of desire as it seeks hallucinatory satisfaction.

This sketch analysis of an advertisement is to indicate how manifest visual and verbal elements engage with each other and with latent registers of phantasy, memory, and knowledge, much

as cogs engage gear-trains: transmitting, amplifying, transforming, the initial input. Most importantly, such effects are not erased, they become inscribed in memory; Horowitz:

Perceptions are retained for a short time, in the form of images, which allows continued emotional response and conceptual appraisal. In time, retained images undergo two kinds of transformation: reduction of sensory vividness and translation of the images into other forms of representations (such as words).[39] *(my emphasis)*

It is here that we encounter a general social effect of photographs. A major part of the political import of photographic signification is its constant confirmation and reduplication of subject-positions for the dominant social order through its imbrication within such dominant discursive formations as, for example, those which concern family-life, erotic encounters, competitiveness, and so on. The role of such scenarios in advertising will be readily conceded, as will the role of the verbal in achieving them — writing is physically integrated into nearly all advertisements. But 'art' photographs are not exempt from such determinations of meaning, determinations which are achieved even where actual writing is absent. I shall take my examples, again, from the period of the 1960s.

Throughout the 1960s in America, in the setting of the growing escalation of and protest against the war in Vietnam, blacks and women organised against their own oppression. In 1965 the Watts riots effectively marked the exhaustion of the predominantly Southern black strategy of non-violent political struggle, and the emergence of the concept of black power. In 1967 the Black Panthers went publicly armed and uniformed in Oakland, and carried their weapons into the California State House in Sacramento. In this same year the national women's peace march in Washington marked the effective inauguration of the Women's Liberation Movement. It is surely reasonable to suppose that the knowledge of events such as these suffused the collective Cs-Pcs of Americans in the sixties. Let us now consider some 'art' photography of this period.

The catalogue to a 1976 exhibition of Garry Winogrand's photographs[40] contains an image in which four women, talking and gesturing amongst themselves, advance towards the camera down a city street. The group of women, who are of varying degrees of middle-age, is the most prominent feature in the right-hand half of the image; equally prominent in the left half of the image, visually just 'touching' the women, is a group of huge plastic bags stuffed full of garbage. This photograph is also printed on the

39 J Horowitz, op cit, p 78.

40 *Garry Winogrand*, Grossmont College Gallery, El Cajon, Cal, 1976.

Garry Winogrand
untitled

cover of the catalogue; the author of the introduction to the catalogue tells us:

When four ageing women gossip their way past four ballooning garbage bags, it earns power for the eye that sees them. If that eye laughs and gloats it condemns the women to nothing more than participation in an eternal joke.

Concluding the montage of aphorisms which is Winogrand's own written contribution to the catalogue, Winogrand states:

I like to think of photographing as a two-way act of respect. Respect for the medium, by letting it do what it does best, describe. And respect for the subject, by describing it as it is.

But, as the women's movement so consistently argued, what the world 'is' depends extensively upon how it is *described*: in a culture where the expression 'old bag' is in circulation to describe an ageing woman, that is precisely what she is in perpetual danger of 'being'. Neither the photographer, nor the medium, nor the subject, are basically responsible for the meaning of this photograph, the meaning is produced, in the act of looking at the image, by a way of *talking* (it is even likely that this 'purely visual' communication could not have been achieved in any other language but English).

Regardless of how much we may strain to maintain a 'disinterested' aesthetic mode of apprehension, an appreciation of the 'purely visual', when we look at an image it is instantly and irreversibly integrated and collated with the intricate psychic network of our knowledge. It is the component meanings of this network that an image must *re-present*, reactivate and reinforce,

there is no choice in this. What flexibility there is comes in the way in which these components are assembled (and even here we may have less freedom than we like to believe). Such 'sexism' as might be ascribed to this image or to others, is not 'in' the photograph itself. Such 'isms', *in the sphere of representation*, are a complex of texts, rhetorics, codes, woven into the fabric of the popular pre-conscious. It is these which are the *pre-text* for the 'eternal joke', it is these which pre-construct the photographer's 'intuitive' response to these fragments of the flux of events in the world, producing his or her recognition that there is something 'there' to photograph. *It is neither theoretically necessary nor desirable to make psychologistic assumptions concerning the intentions of the photographer*; it is the pre-constituted field of discourse which is the substantial 'author' here, photograph and photographer alike are its products; and, in the act of seeing, so is the viewer.

Lee Friedlander
Madison, Wisconsin
1966

About a quarter of the way into Lee Friedlander's book *Self Portrait*[41] is a photograph captioned 'Madison, Wisconsin, 1966'. In it, the shadow of the photographer's head falls across a framed portrait of a young black person. The portrait is set in an oval aperture cut in a light coloured mount, an oval now tightly contained within the shadow of the head. Placed in this context the oval is made to serve as the schematic outline of a face, the shadows of Friedlander's ears are stuck absurdly one to each side, but the face which looks out from between the ears is black. Item 109 in the catalogue to the Museum of Modern Art exhibition *New Photography USA*[42] is an untitled photograph by Gary Winogrand taken in Central Park Zoo in 1967. It shows a young white woman close beside a young black man, each carries a live chimpanzee which is dressed in children's clothing. In everyday social

41 Lee Friedlander, *Self Portrait*, Haywire Press, 1970.

42 Szarkowski, Quintavalle, Mussini, *New Photography USA*, Universita' Di Parma/Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971.

Garry Winogrand
untitled

life it is the face which carries the burden of identity; in these terms, to exchange one's face for that of another would be to take the other's place in society. Friedlander's photograph suggests the idea of such an exchange of identities — if I am white it invites me to imagine what it would be like if I were black. In Winogrand's picture my identity and my social position are secure. We are all familiar with expressions of irrational fear of the 'mixed marriage': from the comparatively anodyne punning of the joke about the girl who married a Pole — and had a wooden baby — to the *cliché* insults of the committed racist, according to whose rhetoric the union of white and black can give issue to monkeys. In terms of these considerations therefore it should be clear that Friedlander's photograph is open to readings couched in terms of social change, to which Winogrand's image is not only closed but hostile. 'It should be clear . . . ,' but it is empirically obvious that no such *differences* are in practice constructed or sanctioned in the dominant discourse of the art institution within which these photographs are organically located. Friedlander and Winogrand in fact occupy virtually interchangeable positions in the established pantheon of photographic *auteurs*, the work of both having been assimilated *equally* to the discourse of art photography. Obviously, this discourse itself exercises its own massive determinations on the received sense of art photographs. The discourse in dominance in art photography is, *de facto*, that of 'modernism'; there has however been a significant inconsistency in the application of a modernist programme to photography.

V

The first paragraph of John Szarkowski's introduction to the catalogue which contains Winogrand's Central Park Zoo picture tells us:

New pictures derive first of all from old pictures. What an artist brings to his work that is new — special to his own life and his own eyes — is used to challenge and revise his tradition, as he knows it.[43]

There is a vivid similarity in this passage to the style and content of Clement Greenberg's writing, indeed the criteria for evaluating photographs employed throughout Szarkowski's texts corresponds almost identically to the programme for modernist art laid down by Greenberg. The 1961 essay 'Modernist Painting' is probably Greenberg's most succinct statement of his view of modernism, and may therefore serve here as a convenient checklist.[44] In this essay, Greenberg defines modernism as the tendency of an art practice towards self-reference by means of a foregrounding of: the tradition of the practice; the difference of the practice from other (visual art) practices: the 'cardinal norms' of the practice; the material substrate, or 'medium' of the practice.

In reference to *tradition*, Greenberg states:

Modernist art continues the past without gap or break, and wherever it may end up it will never cease being intelligible in terms of the past.

Szarkowski's endorsement of this position is quoted above. In respect of *difference*, Greenberg writes:

Each art had to determine through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself . . . It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium.

Szarkowski says, in an interview:

I think in photography the formalist approach is . . . concerned with trying to explore the intrinsic or prejudicial capacities of the medium as it is understood at that moment.[45]

Greenberg argues for the destruction of three-dimensional space in painting, 'For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art.' He argues for a renewed emphasis on colour, 'in the name of the purely and literally optical . . . against optical experience as revised or modified by tactile associations'. Flatness, the 'purely

43 Szarkowski, Quintavalle, Mussini, op cit, p 15.

44 C Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting', *Arts Year Book*, no 4, 1961.

45 Maren Stange, 'Szarkowski at the Modern', in *Photography: Current Perspectives*, Light Impressions, 1978, p 74.

optical', and other such things as, 'norms of finish and paint texture', belong to what Greenberg calls '*cardinal norms* of the art of painting'. Szarkowski devotes his catalogue introduction to the 1966 Museum of Modern Art exhibition *The Photographer's Eye*[46] to cataloguing such cardinal norms of photography, which he identifies as: 'The Thing Itself', 'The Detail', 'The Frame', 'Time', and 'Vantage Point'. What is not to be found in Szarkowski's discourse is Greenberg's emphasis on the *medium* defined in terms of material substrate. Greenberg insists on the materiality of the painted surface as a thing in itself in the interests of an anti-illusionism; to make a comparable insistence in respect of photography would be to undermine its founding attribute, that of illusion; we might further note that it might very well evict the camera itself from the scene, returning photography to, literally, *photo-graphy* — drawing with light. This elision, this failure to complete the journey upon which it has embarked (modernism is *nothing* if not totally internally coherent), marks a contradiction which runs like a fault-line through Szarkowski's discourse: illusion cannot be totally abandoned, but neither can the full consequences of retaining it be accepted.

We should recall that the modernist programme for painting dictated that the art work be a totally autonomous material *object* which made no reference whatsoever to anything beyond its own boundaries: the painted surface itself, its colour, its consistency, its edge, its gesture, was to be the only 'content' of the work. Any form of representation other than self-representation, in Greenberg's words, 'becomes something to be avoided like a plague'. This impetus is in direct line of descent from the desire of Bell and Fry, early in this century, to free art from concerns 'not peculiarly its own'. Bell, writing in 1913, stated: 'To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form . . . every other sort of representation is irrelevant'; and he complained of those who: 'treat created form as if it were imitated form, a picture as though it were a photograph'.[47] In the same movement in which, in the West, the issue of representation in art became a dead issue, photography became consigned to the far side, the 'wrong' side, of that divide which Cubism had opened up between the nineteenth century and the modern period. Initiatives to recover photography from this remote shore (in the history of which Steiglitz figures so prominently) were therefore unavoidably directed towards securing 'picture' status for photographs. The general programme of modernism showed the way: the *art* of photography is achieved only through the most scrupulous attention to those effects which are irreducibly derived from, and specific to, the very functioning of the photographic apparatus itself — representation may be the contingent vulgar flesh of

46 John Szarkowski, *The Photographers' Eye*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1966.

47 Clive Bell, *Art*, Capricorn, 1958, p 29.

photography, but its spirit is 'photographic seeing'. Szarkowski is thus able to judge:

Winogrand . . . is perhaps the most outrageously thoroughgoing formalist that I know. What he is trying to figure out is what that machine will do by putting it to the most extreme tests under the greatest possible pressure.[48]

However, although content in photographs may be ignored, it will not go away. The fear perhaps is that to *speak* of it would be to back-slide into Naturalism, that it would necessarily be to abandon the gains of the modernist discourse which has provided art photography in the modern period with its credentials and its programme. On the contrary, it would be to pursue the modernist argument with an increased rigour.

The modernist programme for a given practice is centred upon that which is irreducibly *specific* to the practice; in a sense, that which remains after eliminating the thing it is *not*. The initial definition of this specificity is therefore crucial, as all subsequent modes of action and evaluation will depend on it. In a 1964 article in the *New York Review of Books*[49] Greenberg himself is in no doubt as to the locus of the specificity of photography. First, photography is *not* modernist painting: 'its triumphs and monuments are historical, anecdotal, reportorial, obsetvational before they are purely pictorial'. But then neither is 'brute information' art, in fact: 'The purely descriptive or informative is almost as great a threat to the art in photography as the purely formal or abstract.' Greenberg concludes:

The art in photography is literary art before it is anything else . . . The photograph has to tell a story if it is to work as art. And it is in choosing and accosting his story, or subject, that the artist-photographer makes the decisions crucial to his art.

Greenberg however offers no suggestion as to how an impression of narrative can be given by a single image. Szarkowski, writing some two years later, can continue to assert: 'photogtaphy has never been successful at narrative. It has in fact seldom attempted it'. Photographs, he finds: 'give the sense of the scene, while withholding its narrative meaning'. [50] 'Narrative meaning' here is clearly equated with the sort of factual account of an event which might be sought in a court of law, obviously this cannot be derived from a single image alone; but what is this 'sense' which Szarkowski mentions but does not discuss; this 'stoty' which Greenberg names but cannot explain? Greenberg's equation of 'story' with 'subject' raises more questions than it answers, but they are productive questions — questions raised atound the

48 Maren Stange, op cit, p 74.

49 C Greenberg, 'Four Photographers', *New York Review of Books*, January 23, 1964.

50 Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1966.

ambivalence of his use of the term 'subject': subject of the photograph (the thing pictured); subject of the story (that which it is 'a tale of'). As I have observed, we may only resolve this ambivalence through the introduction of a third term — the seeing subject (the individual who *looks*); to introduce *this* subject is, in the same movement, to introduce the social world which constructs, situates, and supports it.

To speak of the 'sense' and 'story' of a photograph is to acknowledge that the reality-effect of a photograph is such that it inescapably implicates a world of activity responsible for, and to, the fragments circumscribed by the frame: a world of causes, of 'before and after', of 'if, then . . .', a *narrated world*. The narration of the world that photography achieves is accomplished not in a linear manner but in a repetition of 'vertical' readings, in stillness, in a-temporality. Freud remarks that time does not exist in the unconscious, the dream is not the illogical narrative it may appear to be (this is the dramatic product of secondary revision), it is a *rebus* which must be examined element by element — from each element will unfold associative chains leading to a coherent network of unconscious thoughts, thoughts which are extensive by comparison with the dream itself, which is 'laconic'. We encounter the everyday environment of photographs as if in a waking dream, a day-dream: taken collectively they seem to add up to no particular logical whole; taken individually their literal content is quickly exhausted — but the photograph too is laconic, its meaning goes beyond its manifest elements. The significance of the photograph goes beyond its literal signification by way of the routes of the primary processes: to use a filmic analogy, we might say that the individual photograph becomes the point of origin of a series of psychic 'pans' and 'dissolves', a succession of metonymies and metaphors which transpose the scene of the photograph to the spaces of the 'other scene' of the unconscious. Much of the ideological power of photographs surely derives from this — we cannot see in the photographic *image* much other than we already know, albeit the knowledge has been repressed or disavowed; it is this fact which must account for the sense of *déjà vu* which many have reported in their experience of photography.[51] Finally and most importantly, the scene of the popular pre-conscious: the scene of discourse inseparable from *language*.

51 Cf S Freud, 'Fausse Reconnaissance (Déjà Raconté) in Psychoanalytic Treatment', *SE* vol XIII pp 201-207.

VI

I began with a debate in photography which is now distant, the terms of the debate however have a mythic simplicity which still inspires our current controversies on the left of art and photography in the West; 'form' and 'content' ('how and 'what') are still the most visible marks in a terrain which, regardless of the number of times it has been ploughed, obstinately retains these salient features: an aesthetically conservative realism, in which the principle concern is who is to be represented and what they are to be shown as doing; and a leftist formalism which asserts that what people believe, and thus the way they will behave, can be changed by the very form of the way in which they are represented. These allow a middle ground: an ecumenically pious wish for a synthesis of the former and latter tendencies which will combine their strengths and eradicate their weaknesses. In their intervention in the Rodchenko/Kushner exchange the editors of *Novy Lef* sought not to unite the opposing factions but rather to restructure and realign the very terms of the debate. They proposed a 'functional' approach to photography; in the practical terms of that specific conjuncture we might judge *ROPF* practice (in effect, Kushner's words in action) to be the very model of the functional in serving the urgent information/exhortation needs of the first Five-Year Plan; in the context of that massive national struggle for production the capitulation of the leftists seems to have been inevitable. *Novy Lef*'s editors however were as critical of Kushner as of Rodchenko; they imply that the two opposed problematics are not necessarily mutually exclusive but that they rather occupy different registers, the possible imbrication of which has to be considered; moreover, they stipulate no particular sphere to which the consideration of 'function' should apply. Their unelaborated comments thus open on to such unresolved problems of recent theory as the articulation of the social subject with the 'subject in the text', and the specificity of political struggles on/for particular institutional ground.

I have observed that to take account of the 'function' of photography, in the literal sense of 'the mode of action by which it fulfills its purpose', is unavoidably to face the complexities of the imbrication/transposition/transformation of manifest visual elements within discourses which precede them: discourses of the unconscious: discourses of the popular pre-conscious; discourses of the specific institutions within which the photographic practice in question is situated. My discussion has been centred upon the institution of art: I have already alluded to some historical difficulties which beset photography in quest for credentials from established 'fine art' — these difficulties were not resolved; rather, the deep-rooted contradictions which caused them maintain the relation of photography to 'art' in a constant state of crisis. While, obviously, we should not underestimate the specific differences between representational practices as advertising, cinema, journalism, television, etc, neither should we overestimate the degree of discontinuity between them — together they form an integrated

specular regime, contributing to a unitary 'popular imaginary'. The progressive incursion of photography into the institutional spaces previously reserved for painting and sculpture has served to upset the conventional disavowal of the relation of art to such other representational practices, if only because photography is central to so many of them. As Peter Wollen has written:

For photography to be an art involves reformulating notions of art, rejecting both material and formal purism and also the separation of 'art' from 'commerce' as distinct semiotic practices which never interlock. Photography is not an 'art-in-itself' any more than film, but an option within an inter-semiotic and inter-textual 'arena'.[52]

Clearly, the discursive formation which supports the term 'art' out-runs any one site; the term is used in respect of a complex of institutions, practices, and representations: art museums, art magazines, art schools, . . . painting, photography, sculpture, . . . art history, art theory, art criticism, . . . across to representations of the artist in the popular media: Kirk Douglas' Van Gogh, Anthony Quinn's Gauguin, Charleton Heston's Michaelangelo, . . . and so on. Not the least important determinant in this complex is *art administration*; in an essay on the institutional determinants of photographic imagery Barbara Rosenblum concludes that fine arts photography 'does not have unlimited capacity to absorb all types of imagery', and that it differs from news and advertising photography in that determinants upon imagery 'are generated primarily through the distribution systems, rather than through the organisation of production'.[53] Modernist discourse rules the distribution systems of art photography aided extensively by John Szarkowski's directorship of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York — the institution which has served as primary power centre and ideological anchor for the expansion of 'art photography' even prior to, but certainly since, Szarkowski's predecessor Edward Steichen launched *The Family of Man* exhibition there in 1955. *The Family of Man* would appear to have foregrounded 'content', *history*; in fact its seamless totality collapsed in upon a single humanist myth.[54] The lines of today's superficially quite different 'formalism' ultimately converge within the same humanist perspectives.

E H Gombrich has traced the lineage of the belief in the ineffable purity of the visual image. Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates a doctrine of two worlds: the world of murky imperfection to which our mortal senses have access, and an 'upper world' of perfection and light. Discursive speech is the tangled and inept medium to which we are condemned in the former, while in the

52 P Wollen, 'Photography and Aesthetics', *Screen*, vol 19, no 4, Winter 1978/9, p 28.

53 B Rosenblum, 'Style as Social Process', *American Sociological Review*, vol 43, 1978, p 435.

54 See R Barthes, 'The Great Family of Man', *Mythologies*, Paladin, 1973, p 100ff.

latter all things are communicated visually as a pure and unmediated intelligibility which has no need for words. The idea that there are two quite distinct forms of communication, words and images, and that the latter is the more direct, passed via the Neo-Platonists into the Christian tradition. There was now held to be a divine language of *things*, richer than the language of words; those who apprehend the difficult but divine truths enshrined in things do so in a flash, without the need of words and arguments. As Gombrich observes, such traditions, 'are of more than antiquarian interest. They still affect the way we talk and think about the art of our own time'.[55] Foucault has directed our attention to the action of power in the truth-effect of 'the way we talk and think' within and across our major institutions: Society is *ordered* on the basis of what it holds to be true; truth does not stand outside discourse, waiting to be 'expressed' by it; a truth is *produced* by material forms of discourse inscribed in concrete practices. The global 'truth' whose perpetual regeneration is guaranteed across the discursive formation of art is that of the transcendent freedom of the sovereign individual — that 'freedom of the spirit' (a spirituality whose natural realm is that of *light*, pure vision) which we are guaranteed in exchange for the subjection of the *body* to extant structures of power.

The 'artist' discovers the truth in perplexed appearances on behalf of those unable to see it for themselves. The calling of the 'left' artist is no less elevated, it is that of Foucault's 'universal' left intellectual, who speaks as 'the consciousness/conscience of everyone'.[56] Again, it is a matter of a discourse uttered from one place *on behalf of* those who stand in another — the political is permanently displaced by a perpetual *elsewhere*, as if the actuality of dominance, repression, exploitation, subjection to a specific *order*, did not insinuate itself throughout the very fibre of art traditions and institutions *themselves*, (as if 'political' engagement were a *fixture* which can only be played 'away'). There have been two main consequences of this left humanism: on the one hand, the total evacuation of considerations of the political from art production itself, which becomes the receptacle of all that is 'timeless', 'biological', in 'human nature'; on the other the complete abandoning of the dominant sectors of the art institutions (certainly, a difficult and hostile environment) in favour of a 'popular' art of posters, banners, and murals.[57] To gain the ground conceded by these, the dominant tendencies, it is required that the familiar pronouncement 'everything is political' be taken precisely to the letter, rather than being used, as it is, as a segregationist gesture of laying aside (eg, 'art is political — it's a bourgeois weapon against the masses'). Thus Foucault:

55 E H Gombrich, 'Icones Symbolicae', in *Symbolic Images*, Phaidon, 1972.

56 M Foucault, 'The political function of the intellectual', *Radical Philosophy*, no 17, 1977, p 12.

57 Thus the easy-because-uncontradictory alternation in such left-leaning periodicals as *Time Out*, *New Statesman*, and *The Village Voice*, of occasional puffs on 'radical' artists (accompanying photograph 'the artist with his/her work' mandatory), with otherwise unbroken strings of art reviews indistinguishable from those in the *thoroughly-bourgeois* press.

To say that 'everything is political' is to recognise this omnipresence of relations of force and their immanence to a political field; but it is to set oneself the barely sketched task of unravelling this indefinite tangled skein . . . the problem isn't so much to define a political 'position' (which brings us back to making a move on a pre-constituted chessboard) but to imagine and bring into existence new schemas of politicisation. To the great new techniques of power (which correspond to multinational economies or to bureaucratic States) must be opposed new forms of politicisation.[58]

Without necessarily abandoning those forms which already exist, 'new forms of politicisation' within the institutions of art (and) photography must begin with the recognition that meaning is perpetually displaced from the *image* to the discursive formations which cross and contain it; that there can be no question of either 'progressive' contents or forms *in themselves*, nor any ideally 'effective' synthesis of the two; that there can be no *genre* of 'political' art (and) photography *given in advance* of the specific historical/institutional/discursive conjuncture; that there can be neither 'art for all' nor 'art for all time'. These and other unrequited spectres of the left art imaginary are to be exorcised; the problem here is not to answer the old questions, it is to identify the new ones. It follows that such politicisation must be 'pan-discursive' with respect to the discursive formation in question. In the register of theory there is still a need for that 'archaeology' which, as Foucault envisaged:

would not set out to show that the painting is a way of 'meaning' or 'saying' that is peculiar in that it dispenses with words. It would try to show that, at least in one of its dimensions, it is discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effects.[59]

Moving towards the register of 'practice', Benjamin saw the (inconvenient?) need for a pan-discursivity as a devolution of established subject positions, in which,

we, as writers, start taking photographs ourselves . . . technical progress is, for the author as producer, the basis of his political progress.[60]

58 M Foucault, 'Interview with Lucette Finas', *Michel Foucault — Power, Truth, Strategy*, Feral, Sydney, 1979,

59 M Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tavistock, 1974, p 194.

60 W Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Understanding Brecht*, NLB, 1973, p 95.

61 A Rodchenko, 'Ways in Contemporary Photography', *Novy Lef*, no 9, 1928, in Sartori and Rogge, op cit, p 114.

This article combines two papers: one given at the *Centre Universitaire Américain du Cinéma à Paris*, in May 1978; the other given at a symposium presented by the Program in European Cultural Studies, *Princeton University*, February, 1979.

JOHN ELLIS

PHOTOGRAPHY/PORNOGRAPHY/ ART/ PORNOGRAPHY

Preface

'PORNOGRAPHY' SEEMS TO me to be one of the urgent and unanswered questions that our culture presents to itself. The sense of urgency is provided by the constant activity in this area: police seizure of material; attacks by feminists on representations and those who market them; and the pornography industry's own attempts to get increased public acceptance. Now, the Williams Committee[1] has produced a series of recommendations for replacing the existing unworkable legislation in this area. My sense that the question remains unanswered is perhaps more contentious: several definitions of pornography do exist which are perfectly adequate for their protagonists. Yet they are purely moral definitions, concerned with recruiting for particular ideas of 'what should be done' about pornography. They all assume that 'pornography' is an inherent attribute of certain representations. This is an untenable assumption: 'pornography' is rather a designation given to a class of representations which is defined by particular ideological currents active in our society. These ideological currents are crystalised into particular political groupings which produce their own definitions of 'pornography' and propagate them through various kinds of actions against particular representations. Different criteria are used, so that the definition of 'pornography', its supposed effects, and methods of limiting them, are areas of struggle between differing positions.

The combination of vagueness and moralism in existing definitions of pornography has several effects. First, 'pornography' as a label always threatens to engulf any sexual representation that achieves a certain level of explicitness. There is no way that any representation — especially if it involves photography — can

1 Report of the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship, November 1979, HMSO Cmnd 7772. (References are to the numbered sections of the report). The Report does not consider Scottish law.

insure itself against such labelling. Second, it produces a real blockage in the analysis and the production of representations alike. A reticence about the portrayal of sexuality hovers over much British independent film production. I have felt a similar reticence in writing this article. Not only do definitions of pornography have an inhibiting moral force to them, but as a result of their blanket definitions, adequate means of writing and portrayal of sexuality have not been developed. Pornography is difficult to discuss because there is no discourse which is analytic yet nevertheless engages the subjectivity of the individual uttering that discourse. We are caught between personal confessions and general theoretical systematisations; mutually exclusive modes, each inadequate to the problems addressed.

I have written this article to break through some of the problems of 'pornography' by displacing the category itself. This involves a double approach. There is a preliminary investigation of how 'pornography' is defined for us now, how a particular area of signification is separated out across a wide range of media. Then, I have used a particular approach which seems to be able to differentiate between kinds of representations that are usually lumped together as 'pornographic', and thus can offer a perspective for progressive work in this central and neglected area.

Pornographic Definitions

Sexuality is never left unspoken in our culture: it is massively present, but always subject to limitations. It is exhaustively defined across a series of specialist discourses (medicine, psychiatry, criminology etc) but its more public manifestation is through allusion rather than description. Forms of humour, representations of women, clothing and other diverse practices all invoke sexuality. But they cannot be said to describe or to define sexual practices: they indicate obsessively, pointing towards sexuality, but they never differentiate, never show, never speak directly. Prohibitions exist not upon speaking about sexuality, but an explicit descriptions of sexual activities. Prohibitions exist upon representations which refer to sexual activity or display the human body in an overtly sexualised manner; on the public representation of sexual activity and the circulation of such representations. The conjunction of sexual activity and representation, where the representation specifies sexual activity rather than referring to it by inference or allusion, is the area of particular taboos and is the traditional area of pornography.

An industry has developed to produce and market such proscribed representations, ensuring their circulation outside the normal channels. This pornography industry is a reaction to the historically specific definitions of pornography, it is called into existence as a separate sector by campaigns and laws against pornography. Essentialist approaches to pornography as a particular kind of representation begin from the nature of the contemporary pornography industry and produce a definition of all that industry's products. Such an approach ignores the conditions of production of pornography as a proscribed area of signification. The various strong and specific definitions of pornography themselves produce this area, and it is with them that investigation of the constitution of 'pornography' must begin if it is to be examined in its specific existence at a particular historical moment.

There will be no one unitary definition of 'pornography' but rather a struggle for predominance between several definitions. These definitions will work within a context defined by several forces, the current form of the pornography industry and its particular attempts at legitimisation; the particular form of the laws relating to obscenity and censorship; and the general mobilisation of various moral and philosophical positions and themes that characterise a particular social moment. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the articulation of such general moral and philosophical currents with the specific question of pornography in the particular contemporary British attempts at defiintion of the area. More immediate is the complex question of the legal forms which are currently in use in Britain. These are by no means easy to describe (the Williams report concludes that, here, in England and Wales at least, 'The law, in short, is in a mess' 2.29), yet their effects across various media are quite marked. In addition, censorship is often undertaken by bodies of no formal legal standing like the British Board of Film Censors, which exists as a convenient delegate and centraliser of local authority film censorship powers. At every point, however, whether in pre-censorship as with cinema, or prosecution after publication as with printed material, both the law and its individual implementations rely on contemporary morality and definitions of what might constitute permissible representations of sexual activity. The mid-nineteenth century test of whether a particular representation has a tendency to 'deprave or corrupt' is used in most existing legislation. This requires jurors to have a definite image of what corruption and depravity might consist in their contemporaries: a definition which cannot but rely upon prevailing definitions of 'pornography', its supposed effects and its presumed social role.

Legal action against representations of a sexual nature depends upon the current prevailing definition of pornography. Legal action, or the possibility of it, in turn defines the nature of the pornography industry or institution. Representations become clandestine because they are threatened with prosecution; equally

they confine themselves to particular ghettos to avoid the 'public concern' which can be produced by vocal interest groups espousing definitions of pornography that entail censorship. At every point 'pornography' appears to be an area of representations whose limits and nature are the subject of a struggle between differing definitions. Definitions with such powers as these are the product of wider and institutionalised political positions. In contemporary Britain there seem to be three main positions which have emerged in relation to pornography: the right-wing 'Nationwide Festival of Light'; the feminist concern with representation of women; the liberal attitude exemplified by the Williams Report. Each has a distinctive power base. The Festival of Light relies on traditional Christian notions which are conceived as in decline and under threat. It incorporates Mary Whitehouse's highly successful campaign to de-liberalise television output, as well as many other such pressure groups, and has powerful support in the right-wing sections of the police force like the present Chief Constable of Greater Manchester (see Williams 4.23). The feminist campaigns against pornography have come particularly from those sections of the women's movement that see society as constituted by an antagonism between the sexes. This position finds its power base in a series of concerted campaigns, demonstrations, pickets of retailers of 'pornography', sloganising of sexist advertising material, etcetera. It is not primarily directed towards exploitation or change of existing legislation; it aims rather for a wholesale change in public attitudes by a redefinition of what constitutes an offensive representation. The final major position articulated in Britain is a liberal position, seeing society as pluralistic, containing many points of view in uneasy co-existence. This has recently been articulated by the Williams Committee which was convened to produce a report proposing and justifying rationalisation of English laws relating to obscenity. It regards the law as 'holding the ring', ensuring public safety and well-being, rather than as an interventionist instrument enforcing particular points of view. Thus the Williams Committee represents a particular and successful tactic by a liberal lobby: commissioned by a Labour Home Secretary, it has been delivered to a Conservative one. The choice which now faces the Home Secretary is one of maintaining the existing legal confusion or implementing something approximating to the Williams Report's recommendations.

Each of these positions define 'pornography' as a different object. They produce definitions which class certain forms of representation as 'pornographic'; they produce arguments about the social place, function and influence of these representations; and they advocate different forms of action towards these representations by judiciary and public alike. Each has a definite basis

JILL POSENER

Farringdon Road, London December 1979, available as a postcard from *Sisterwrite*, 190 Upper St, London N1.

within particular organisations and institutions, and are therefore able to make political interventions of a public and influential nature. These interventions and the struggle for general public acceptability between these definitions together bring about the current form of the pornography industry.

FESTIVAL OF LIGHT An exposition of the Nationwide Festival of Light's position can be found in the Longford Report.[2] This is a curious publication, taking the form of a report from a commission set up by Lord Longford to collect evidence about the pornography phenomenon. It was published as a mass sale paperback amid a blaze of publicity, aiming to capture the definition of pornography for a semi-religious right-wing position. The report has the overall style of a government report, with a panel commissioning research and receiving submissions from anyone who cared to make them, yet it has none of the scrupulousness about its statements and their veracity that usually characterises a Government report. The Longford Report takes pornography as an object which exists incontrovertibly in the world beyond its writings: its main aim is to define its influences. Pornography, it argues, is a representation which isolates one physical activity — sex or violence — from the social context which would justify it as an activity or portray its consequences.

Dr Claxton describes both 'hard' and 'soft' pornography as 'a symptom of preoccupation with sex which is unrelated to its purpose' — which he sees, of course, not exclusively in terms of the physical orgasm, but a relationship which transcends the merely physical (p 205).

2 Pornography: The Longford Report, Coronet, London 1972.

Pornography has as its aim the excitation of the viewer rather than, as Lord Clark argues, one of provoking thought and contemplation:

To my mind art exists in the realm of contemplation and is bound by some sort of imaginative transposition. The moment art becomes an incentive to action it loses its true character. This is my objection to painting with a communist programme, and it would also apply to pornography (p 100).

Pornography, it is argued, 'stimulates in the audience the kind of behaviour that may lead to violence' (p 45). Many of its representations cause 'extreme offence to the great majority of people' (p 193). It is a type of representation that is at once a symptom of a general decline of societal values (the 'permissive society'), and a cause of particular undesirable activities: perversions, rape, masturbation, dissatisfaction within marriages and so on. The metaphor of 'health' hovers over the report: healthy sexuality is a sexuality which is functional within a relationship; a healthy attitude towards representations is one of contemplation and uplift; a healthy society is one that contains no disruption of its tranquillity. Health defines the presumably normal: the report appeals to this sense of the average in order to promote it as the only acceptable form of behaviour. It then defines as pornography any representation that is capable of producing or suggesting behaviour outside this norm. Pornography for the Festival of Light is a class of representations which are concerned with sex or violence without their social or moral context. The representations aim to excite the viewer and have a concentration upon violence. They stimulate anti-social behaviour where it might not have existed before, and are a symptom as well as a cause of a wholesale decline in social value. Pornography should be banned wherever possible, and should certainly be kept away from children. Rigorously enforced legislation is seen to be the means to achieve this aim.

ONE FEMINIST APPROACH The most dominant feminist position finds itself confused with the Festival of Light's position at certain points, despite its different constituency and forms of campaigning. It produces a very similar definition of the object 'pornography', but traces its roots back to very different causes. Such a feminist definition of pornography points to violence, lack of social context of sexuality, and the symptomatic social role of pornography in the same way as the Longford Report. Pornography is seen as

violent and mysogynistic, and nothing to do with the free expression of 'healthy' sex, but rather the truly 'perverted' desire to trample on another human being.[3]

Pornography is also described as a depiction of sexual activity deprived of its social significance and offered to excite the viewer:

Pornography's principal and most humanly significant function is that of arousing sexual excitement. . . . It usually describes the sexual act not in explicit . . . but in purely inviting terms. The function of plot in a pornographic narrative is always the same. It exists to provide as many opportunities as possible for the sexual act to take place. . . . Characterisation is necessarily limited to the formal necessity for the actors to fuck as frequently and as ingeniously as possible.[4]

Pornography is even seen as the symptom of wider social trends, and as having a potential link with forms of violence perpetrated by men on women:

There is no evidence that porn causes rape directly, and there may be no causal *link. But they are linked in spirit. Both are manifestations of the same attitude towards women and sex — of a desire to avoid interaction with a woman as another human being* (Wallsgrove, op cit).

However, a feminist position would not base its notion of pornography on any notion of a 'healthy' society and its attitude of sex. Instead, many feminists perceive pornography as the product of a general antagonism between the sexes. Men are the subjects of pornography, it is produced for their gratification and pleasure; women are the objects of pornography, reduced to being sexual objects, degraded and humiliated. Sexuality and its representation in our society are both profoundly marked by the interpellation of men as aggressors, women as their victims. This argument is capable of designating a whole series of representations as 'pornographic', representations which do not feature in more conventional or right-wing defiintions. A feminist definition based on the notion of an antagonism between the sexes defines a continuum of representations of women defined according to their sexuality. This continuum stretches from many forms of public advertisement displays to hard-core pornography in the usual sense. Each representation is designated pornographic because it defines women as sexual objects offered for male pleasure. The terms of this argument are not found entirely in written arguments: it appears equally and publically in propagandist activities such as writing or putting stickers on posters, particularly in the Underground in

3 Ruth Wallsgrove, 'Pornography: Between the Devil and the True Blue Whitehouse', *Spare Rib* no 65, December 1977.

4 Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, Virago, London 1979, pp 12-13.

JAMES SWINSON

Detail from poster for *The Bitch*, London Underground, March 1980.

London. One such sticker is 'KEEP MY BODY OFF YOUR ADS' which condenses many of the problems with this position. It (polemically) confuses the real with representation, but in doing so it reduces the representation to being that of 'a body', and the aim of the campaign to that of repression, the banning of representations of bodies. Interestingly, it also has a central confusion about address. 'I' refers to the collectivity of women; 'you' is either the collectivity of men who in an undifferentiated way 'portray women', or (as is more probable given the address of most posters) the power elite of marketing personnel. In the first case, it is only to those who already have access to such feminist arguments that such a reading is possible: the sticker has no effect as propaganda towards those who do not. In second case, the (male) viewer is left in the same relationship to the poster plus sticker as he was to the poster alone: he is the voyeur to women speaking to the advertisers as he was voyeur to the woman performing in the poster.[5]

Attacking posters for their assumptions is one example of the distinctive forms of campaigning adopted by many feminists against all the manifestations that they perceive 'pornography' to have. This campaign is one to change public attitude, to render unacceptable many things that are currently taken for granted, like advertising, forms of sexual humour, 'beauty queens' and so on. The campaign includes a variety of signifying practices into an overall definition of 'pornography', and relies on 'popular opinion' to ensure that such forms fall into disuse. It is a campaign to change attitudes to sexuality and to women:

I believe we should not agitate for more laws against pornography, but should rather stand up and say what we feel about it, and what we feel about our own sexuality, and force men to re-examine their own attitudes to sex and women explicit in their consumption of porn . . . We should make it clear that porn is a symptom of our sexist society, a reflection of its assumptions (Wallsgrove op cit).

As a polemical and urgent task of redefinition, this feminist notion of pornography cannot rely on legislation nor upon traditional moral ideas. Its characteristic modes of operation are those of polemical writing, and forms of direct action such as those against advertising or the 'Reclaim the Night' marches through many cities in November 1977. This widespread position is the only conception of 'pornography' that is aware of itself as an active intervention, shifting and producing definitions. Such a self-awareness means that this basic position can give rise to a sophisticated debate which escapes sterile arguments about whether specific representations 'should be banned or not', and traces the complex links that

5 In this respect, the the sticker 'Who does this poster think you are?' would be a more effective way of confronting the attitude that advertising promotes.

ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

'Reclaim the Night' demonstration in the West End of London, 12 December 1977.

exist between representations of sexuality and the practical attitudes of individuals to their sexuality. Within the dominant forms of representation in our society, women are posed as the objects of men's activity, and particularly as objects of men's sexual activity. Women's sexuality is produced in representations as a commodity for men's pleasure. Feminist definitions therefore intervene within representational practices to displace this exploitative definition of sexuality. It is a measure of the distinctiveness of this position that it is incompatible with most of the basic assumptions of the Williams Report; it is a measure of its effectiveness that the Williams Committee took special pains to gain evidence from the Women's Movement (1.2).

THE WILLIAMS REPORT is a major achievement for the liberal lobby for reform of the current laws relating to obscenity and censorship. Costing £99,692 and two years' work, it is able to summarise such positions as that of the Festival of Light rather more elegantly than that lobby itself can, and then to refute both its internal logic and the empirical 'proofs' that it calls upon. Its recommendations are for an overall rationalisation and liberalisation of laws in this area, artfully calculated to appeal to a wide range of legislative sensibilities. Liberalisation entails 'one step to the left' in each medium, within an overall context of removing material that could 'cause offence to reasonable people' from public view.

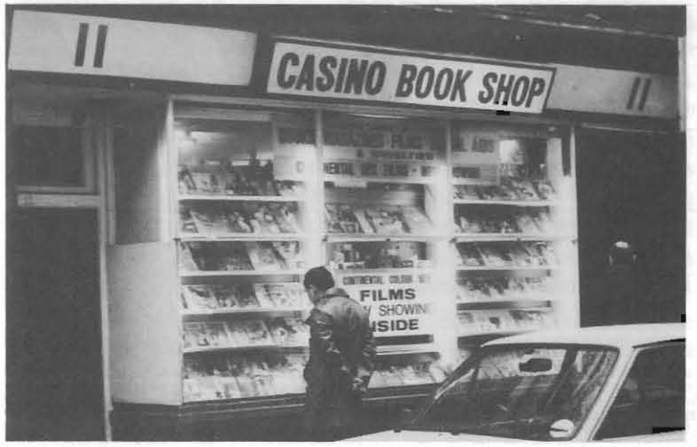
The report classifies representations as pornographic according to their function and content:

ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

London, November 1977.

We take it that, as almost everyone understands the term, a pornographic representation is one that combines two features: it has a certain function or intention, to arouse its audience sexually, and also has a certain content, explicit representations of sexual material (organs, postures, activity, etc). A work has to have both this function and this content to be a piece of pornography (8.2).

It reserves an aesthetic distance from the majority of such representations 'certainly most pornography is also trash: ugly, shallow and obvious' (7.2). It differs from both the feminist and the Festival of Light characterisation of pornography because it makes a rigid separation between the realms of the public and the private. Both feminist and right-wing characterisations are based on the assumption that the public and the private are inseparable: they see attitudes as existing in a continuum between the two realms. The Williams Report maintains that the two are different because they entail different conceptions of freedom, and impose different duties upon the legislature. The private is seen as the area of the purely personal, the area of freedom of choice and individual predeliction, into which others (whether individuals, groups or state) should make the least possible intervention. There should be no imposed morality, no attempt to legislate a prescriptive conception of the normal. The public is seen as the area of the uneasy co-existence of these plural private preferences. It is where individuals encounter each other and have effects upon each other, where individual activities have to be curbed for the safety and continued well-being of others. So the report provides as its first principle that there should be as little limitation upon the individual as possible, and that such limitation should be for the protection of the generality of other individuals. Pornography, however objectionable it might appear, should therefore be available for individuals unless it can be proved that its presence within society affronts other individuals going about their daily business, or indeed produces forms of anti-social behaviour such as aggression upon particular individuals. Therefore if it can be ensured that adult individuals can only come across pornography by their own conscious choice, and if no proof or strong evidence exists of a causal link between pornographic representations and particular, anti-social acts, then pornography should be given a legal existence in society. For this reason, the report devotes much space to refuting the Festival of Light's empirical proofs of links between pornography and particular acts of violence. Once this direct evidence is demolished, then more general assertions of indirect harmful effects upon society as a whole can be refused by asserting pornography's relative insignificance compared to 'the many other problems that face our society today' (6.80), and the difficulty of distinguishing whether a particular phenomenon is a



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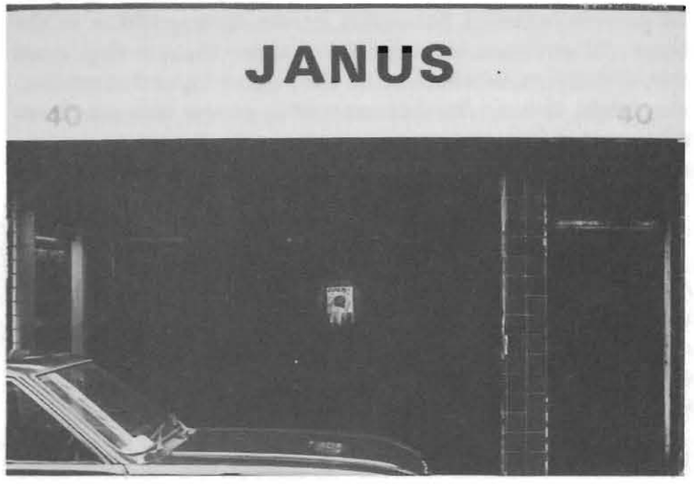
'Pre-Williams' (above) and 'Post-Williams' (below) shop fronts, Old Compton St, London W1, March 1980.

cause or a symptom of a particular social change (6.76).

The law is then framed to prevent the exposure of 'reasonable people' who might find certain material 'offensive'. The 'offensive to reasonable people' test then becomes the criterion for deciding what forms of representation should be restricted to particular designated sales points. If harm to individuals can be proved or strongly supposed to be involved in the production or dissemination of a representation, then it can be banned completely. So printed pornographic material is exempt from censorship except where its production has involved cruelty to those posing for it, or the exploitation of children. Written matter is exempt from any censorship. However, potentially 'offensive' material is only to be made available in separate premises which carry a standard designation and no other form of advertising. Most of the magazines



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Cinema hoarding, 7 Brewer St, London W1. April 1980.

currently available in ordinary newsagents would then be restricted to these premises. Live entertainment would be prevented from staging actual sex acts as this 'carried some dangers of public order problems' (11.9), which is why they are no longer permitted in Denmark. Video tapes and their proliferation receive no attention in the report, for which it has been criticised. Film remains the only medium to be subject to prior censorship, and the report envisages that certain films could still be banned altogether. The report's considered assessments tend to collapse here, under a belief in a realist aesthetic:

Film, in our view, is a uniquely powerful instrument: the close-up, fast cutting, the sophistication of modern make-up and special effects techniques, the heightening effect of sound effects and music, all combine on the large screen to produce an impact which no other medium can create. . . . We are more impressed by the consideration that the extreme vividness and immediacy of film may make it harder rather than easier for some who are attracted to sadistic material to tell the difference between fantasy and reality (12.10).

The argument is framed in terms of the possible consequences of violent material: it is conceived as possible that it could lead to violent acts in some way. Film censorship would be retained, able to ban certain films on the grounds of excessive cruelty, and allocating various certificates which would ban children under a series of specific ages from seeing particular films. An appeal against banning could be lodged on the grounds of the 'artistic merit' of a particular film. The present self-financing and advisory British Board of Film Censors would be abolished and replaced by an official state body allocating mandatory certificates. A new category of restricted film would be set up in addition to the current 'X' certificate banning children under 18. Such films could only be shown in halls licensed for the purpose by local authorities, who would thus retain their censorship powers only insofar as they could refuse to licence any cinema in their area for the showing of restricted films. A cinema so designated would continue to be able to show '*Bambi* in the school holidays if it wishes to do so' (12.39).

In practice [there will be] two sorts of designated cinemas. One will be a blue movie house, which rarely if ever shows anything else. The other will be, to some degree, an 'art' house, which shows a variety of films with various certificates, usually of minority appeal (12.39).

The overall effect of the Williams Committee recommendations, if they become law, would be to heighten the conflict over the term 'pornography'. Its explicit effect is to make the legal definition of pornography one that is variable with shifts in public opinion. It does so by defining pornography as a private matter, as existing in an area where the law 'holds the ring' rather than intervenes with particular definitions. The effect then is to shift arguments about the legal definition of pornography into the public arena where a struggle takes place to define the public consensus. But this shift can only take place within a liberal notion of pornography as a private matter, a definition that neither feminists nor the right-wing would accept. It is perhaps the kind of fiction that only liberals can believe. The Williams Report therefore embodies a particular liberal definition of 'pornography', distinct from other positions, whose power lies in its possible influence upon legal definitions, enabling a wider range of material to become available in more restricted marketing channels.

THE INSTITUTION OF PORNOGRAPHY The right-wing, liberals and feminists have three distinct definitions of pornography that conflict in attempting to define what pornography might be. The articulation of these three major positions with the present, confused, legal definitions of 'obscenity' produces a particular industry, the institution of pornography. This is an agglomeration resulting from a series of *ad hoc* distinctions between classes of representation across a number of media, which are recognised to have a common existence. Specialised marketing and production methods have been evolved within this institution, which exists rather separate from the conventional business operations in particular media.

The current general rules in Britain are that the following will be designated 'pornographic': any representation of male or female genitals (not breasts); any form of enactment of sex whether simulated or actual that is of any duration and level of explicitness; and any sustained reference to 'perversions', particularly a use of sexually-charged violence. Even representations whose general purpose is other than the excitement of the viewer for sexual purposes is liable to inclusion in this category. The boundaries are fluid and shifting, but a large-scale change has taken place during the last decade through which the 'pin-up' (the female body deprived of any genitals by artful posing or photographic processes) has become non-pornographic. It is now available daily in popular newspapers. Similarly, it can be argued that much advertising makes use of themes and poses derived from pornography, without receiving many objections other than from feminists. Within the boundaries, another distinction takes place

between classes of representation, depending upon an assessment of the likelihood of judicial seizure, and their acceptability to the potential advertisers of a wide range of consumer products. This distinction is usually designated 'hard-core'/'soft-core', terms which originate in an American distinction as to whether real sex or simulated sex have been involved in the production of a representation, but no longer have such a particular meaning. Soft-core pornography, available currently in public cinemas, in magazines on open sale in newsagents, attracts advertisements; hardcore pornography does not. Along with these advertisements comes a whole series of journalistic practices, from circulation audits to particular modes of address within written texts.

Pornography can designate itself by various simple mechanisms. An institution that is defined largely from outside by the suspicion of many vocal pressure groups is able to signify itself by exploiting the connotations associated with that suspicion. Thus 'Swedish', 'X', 'Emmanuelle', 'Sins' are precise generic indicators; as are a certain size of magazine with a near-naked female body portrayed on the cover, even before the list of contents develops the connotation. Similarly 'Books and Magazines', 'Adult' and 'Private' indicate 'hardcore' emporia. This activity of self-definition continues within the texts themselves, with the intrusive 'we' ('aren't we daring?') of editorial matter; the recurrence of models; and the habit in films of using the institution of pornography itself (eg photo sessions) as circumstances for sex. This process means that areas of representation constructed from outside as 'pornographic' never have to use that term to define themselves. The ground is never explicitly conceded.

Pornography in Britain occurs across a diversity of practices, each with their own means of marketing and dissemination, nevertheless unified by processes of self-designation into an institution of signification. Each practice has its own particular emphases and potentialities, both for marketing and for signification. Cinema is sharply divided into the kinds of soft-core films available in public cinemas, and the grades of sexually specific material to be found in 'clubs' of various sorts. The British Board of Film Censors ensures that public films are extensively cut from the form they take in other countries, reducing them to a traditional kind of 'teasing'; Tatler Cinema Clubs (associated with the Classic Cinema chain) show uncut American soft-core films; other clubs in city centres show film of actual sex acts of various kinds. Video tapes for home consumption are a fast developing industry, providing both material developed for the format (eg the video-magazine *Electric Blue*, developed on an analogy with soft-core magazines), and full recordings of films sometimes banned or censor-cut for cinema. Magazines comprise a large and diversified

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'Soft-core' in with the hi-fi and photography mags, Newsagents, 48 Old Compton St, London W1, April 1980.

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'Hard-core' display in specialised shop, 10 Moor St, London W1, March 1980.

market, with the half-dozen up-market soft-core monthlies (eg *Mayfair, Club International*) having sales between 150,000 and 250,000 each, and the down-market publications (*Fiesta, Knave*) possibly around 150,000 each (source: Williams Appendix 6 by Michael Brown). Readership of each copy is conventionally calculated at something like four times the number sold.

Their editorial contents, both fictional and allegedly 'factual', extensively describe varieties of sexual experience but their illustrations, majoring on high-definition female nudity, will not generally cover scenes of intercourse. The magazines . . . would treat auto-eroticism fully, touch on bondage, but shun more extreme perversions (M Brown, Williams p 250).

Magazines available only in specialised shops, for which no figures are available, provide what the generally circulated ones do not. Live performance in Britain takes advantage of the lack of censorship of theatre to present revues of various kinds in both 'legit' theatres and cabarets, which stop short of actual sex on stage. Writing and the fine arts are virtually freed from the emphasis that they used to have as major channels for pornography because they lack the immediacy of the 'photograph effect'. Prosecutions occur occasionally, however, but for some years have not involved pleas for the material made on the grounds of its 'artistic merit'.

The institution of pornography has been called into existence by the articulation of legal restraint and particular, conflicting, definitions of pornography. It produces no real justification of itself, no major articulation of 'pornography' as a class of representation no better and no worse than any other. To this extent, it accepts its own status as the pariah of representational practices. Practitioners in the industry tend to prefer silence to developing any kind of public definition of their activities. When forced into pleading their case, their definitions tend to weave through the interstices of other definitions, speaking of 'social function', 'liberation', 'sublimation' and other such gleanings from vulgar Freudianism or sociology. When a case is made for the ending of censorship on the grounds of intellectual freedom, it is not the pornography industry which makes it, but groups of liberal intellectuals who, like the Williams Committee, regard pornography as unappealing, but better permitted than banned.

The institution of pornography is a reaction to the designation of certain classes of representation as in some way objectionable. This designation is nowhere fixed, not even in law, but is the subject of a constant activity of redefinition as a result of struggles between definitions, particular initiatives on behalf of or against specific representations, and wider changes in moral attitudes.

Interface

The next step for this analysis is to find a way of characterising the representations designated as 'pornography' so that they can be seen as contradictory and open to change, even as undergoing change at the moment. This is the necessary other half of answering the inevitable (correct yet vexing) question: 'What position should be taken up in relation to the struggle between definitions?' In doing this I have employed a meta-linguistic approach like that used in the previous passage. This approach is necessary as an initial gesture that seeks to define a terrain in which further work (and not solely analytic work) can take place. As writing, it describes and delimits other forms of utterance, and is content to do so from a position of surveying those utterances from the outside. As an expression of an author-figure, it tends to evacuate the question of subjective response which pornography brings to the fore through its compelling implication of a sexed observer. Such a meta-linguistic approach tends towards the impersonal, even the magisterial. It is not particularly able to produce accounts of textual activity, of the process of *enunciation*; it tends towards characterisation of the facts of the *enounced*. A meta-linguistic approach has to be used before it can be displaced by more complex and supple forms of analysis which can sense the openness of specific texts, or by forms of film-making that develop along the lines of contradiction that meta-language can delineate.

The passage that follows therefore uses a typology of regimes of visual representations to examine one particular manifestation of representations called 'pornography'. This is the startling appearance of female genitals in easily available photographs and films: even in magazines sold in newsagents and films that are widely shown. This phenomenon does not account for everything that appears in pornography. I have chosen to concentrate on one public fact of pornography that has particularly caught my attention, because I think it can be made to reveal a particular shift within the area of representations that is designated 'pornography'. It is therefore a question that may be able to reveal 'pornography' as a contradictory area of signification, rather than as a regime of signification with a strong internal coherence.

Female Pleasure

The closest that a general typology of visual representations has come to a perception of a particular regime of representation involving particular audience positioning which is open to change is probably Laura Mulvey's highly influential article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'.[6] This has been central to the examination of the regimes of visual representation exploited in

6 *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

'mainstream cinema', and particularly the centrality of women to that cinema. Through an examination of the forms of looking and their pleasures (informed by psychoanalytic theory), Mulvey is able to give an adequate characterisation of such diverse phenomena as the star system, strip-tease and the narrative function of women in 'dominant cinema'. This characterisation indicates directions for film-making practice which try to undermine these forms. However, it seems to be unable to account for and analyse the ways in which current visual pornography is obsessed with women's genitals.

The directness [of vaginal imagery] radically questions the psychoanalytically based analyses of images of women undertaken by Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey and the notions of castration fear and the phallic woman.[7]

Mulvey's typology includes a notion of fetishism that is based on the letter of Freud's text,[8] taking fetishism as necessarily involving the disavowal of woman's lack of a penis. Hence current pornography would seem to contradict Mulvey's analysis, although in other areas it has proved to be crucial.

Mulvey describes cinema as an activity of looking[9] in which three looks are involved: that of the spectator to the screen; that of the camera to the event; and that of the actors within the event between each other. In classic cinema these are carefully arranged so that they never coincide: the camera never looks at the space that the audience 'occupies' (the 180° rule); the actors never look down the axis of the camera. This regime allows the full exploitation of all the 'pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him' (p 6). The first is the pleasure in looking itself, the scopophilic drive directed towards submitting others to a controlling and curious gaze. This drive is partly developed into a narcissistic form through which the viewer identifies him/her self with figures perceived as existing outside the self of the viewer. These two structures of looking exist in tension with each other, and are crossed by a further pair of contradictory structures produced within the castration complex: voyeurism and fetishism. Voyeurism is an active, mobile form, associated with change and narrativisation. It

demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end (p 14).

Fetishism according to Mulvey's account is in contradiction with

7 Griselda Pollock, 'What's Wrong with Images of Women', *Screen Education* no 24, Autumn 1977 p 30.

8 'Fetishism' (1927), *Standard Edition*, vol. XXI.

9 Although addressed to cinema, much of Mulvey's analysis is relevant to still images.

voyeurism: it involves a fixation which impedes narrative, centres on repetition of situations, the display of a star. Fetishism is a form of looking which disavows castration and hence sexual difference, whereas voyeurism involves an acknowledgment of sexual difference in its attempts to demystify or punish woman as object of the look. In both forms

ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of a penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance into the symbolic order and the law of the father (p 13).

Fetishism in Mulvey's account is a disavowal of woman's lack of a penis, and therefore should always involve avoiding the direct sight of the female genitals and finding a substitute penis in particular fetish objects, or in the whole figure of the woman-made-phallic. Current pornography would seem to refute this characterisation. Yet in every other respect, current visual pornography maintains the kind of textual structure that Mulvey associates with fetishism. It presents the repetition of events rather than narrative development towards the resolution of an enigma; it relies upon a concentration on the figure of the woman which tends to oust any other considerations; and 'the image [is] in direct erotic rapport with the spectator' (*ibid* p 14).

The fetistic representation attempts to abolish the distance between spectator and representation. Voyeurism installs a separation of seer and seen as the very principle of its operation, allowing the seer a secure position over and against a representation that permits the seen to change without threatening the position of the seer. This permits the development of editing, scene dissection and narrative in the cinema. Fetishism constantly attempts to reduce or annul this distance and separation. Hence it is only capable of producing an attenuared narration, a constant repetition of scenarios of desire, where the repetition around certain neuralgic points outweighs any resolution of a narrative enigma, any discovery or reordering of facts. At its most extreme, fetishism involves a concentration upon performance, explicitly posed for the viewer (sometimes involving the performer looking directly 'at' the audience), or even upon the frame-edge, or the two-dimensional reality of the realist photograph. A fetishist regime attempts to annul the separation of image and spectator, to reinstall an immediate relation that promises (in vain) to provide satisfaction to desire itself.

Thus Mulvey's use of the concepts of voyeurism and fetishism contains much that is vital to a metapsychological characterisation of the various modes of cinematic and photographic representation.

It cannot be discarded simply because it is unable in its current formulation to deal with the single (fairly ubiquitous) fact of direct depiction of female genitals. Rather, its Freudian basis should be re-examined.

10 Sigmund Freud 'Outline of Psychoanalysis, *Standard Edition*, vol XXIII, p 203.

FETISH: PENIS OR PHALLUS? According to the text of Freud's essay 'Fetishism', the construction of a fetish represents a disavowal of the *physical* fact of sexual difference, occasioned by an actual glimpse of female genitals. The structure that Freud describes is one in which the knowledge of the woman's lack of a penis is retained, but the infant is saved from acknowledgment of it by the substitution of what is seen in the moment before the sight of the genitals for that sight itself. The desire that the woman should after all have a penis is transferred to a particular part of the body, or to an object (eg shoes, fur, stockings) or to other sensations. This substitute object maintains the belief that the woman has a penis whilst the knowledge of this physical lack is also maintained: in clinical fetishists 'the two facts persist side by side throughout their lives without influencing each other'[10] The structure of disavowal is this: 'I know (woman has no penis), nevertheless (she has, through this fetish)'. In clinical fetishism the sight of the fetish is a necessary aid to sexual arousal, and Freud states that he has only encountered this state in males. Fetishism as a structure of (usually visual) perception however, can also be found in women: it is a matter of the fascination resulting from hesitation of the knowledge of sexual difference by a structure of disavowal, 'I know, but nevertheless'. For Freud's account of fetishism then, the penis, its presence or absence on the human body, is central.

Yet the presence or absence of a penis on a human body is only important insofar as it signifies, insofar as it already has meaning within a particular cultural formation of sexual difference. The penis, or its lack, stands as the inadequate physical stand-in for that signifier which institutes the play of signification and difference: the phallus. In effect, Freud's essay is aware of this distinction, only formulated clearly thirty years later. The child is already aware of sexual difference in Freud's account: what he seeks is confirmation that this suspicion might not be true after all. The desire that the woman should have a phallus in spite of everything is what gives the strength to the fetish, and allows the promotion of the moment before the physical confirmation as a substitute. Fetishism as a disavowal of sexual difference is thus a disavowal of the phallus by promoting in its place something else that the woman does possess. As a disavowal, it nevertheless maintains the phallus and thus the possibility of difference and language.[11] The structure is therefore one of 'I know that woman does not have the phallus, nevertheless she does have the phallus in this fetish'.

11 Freud presents his clinical fetishists as in no real way discommoded: 'usually they are quite satisfied with it, or even praise the way in which it eases their erotic life' *SE* vol XXI, p 152.

12 A bright point of light concentrated on the eyes of an actor is a standard indicator of an intense gaze in a film.

The fetish is a signifier which stands in for the phallus. Freud's example of the 'shine on the nose' can demonstrate how this substitution of signifiers takes place through a process of metaphor or metonymy. His patient could become sexually aroused only through the sight (real or supposed) of a shine on the nose of his partner. Freud's analysis of this fetish has two components: a story and a sliding of signifiers. The 'little story' is that of the child seeing female genitals, and looking up at the woman's face to gain a reassuring 'nevertheless' from the nose. Hence the story which lies hidden in the fetish is one of a glance that traverses the woman's body. The notion of the 'shine' comes from the condensation of this 'glance' and its story into the German 'Glanz' or 'shine'. Yet the condensation holds another possibility within itself, that the 'shine' could stand for a realisation of being looked at[12]: the 'shine' is that of the gaze of the woman returned to the inquiring child. It then becomes the woman's *look* in which the fetish is located, rather than the 'shine upon the nose' that Freud indicates did not necessarily have to exist to other observers. The woman's gaze is where her phallus is located. If this is so, then the story of the child's gaze may well itself be a substitute for this complex (nose/glance/Glanz) around the phallic gaze of the woman. It would then be a substitute that is provided in analysis in the form of a narrative; and narrative is always a suspicious or inadequate form for satisfactory analysis because of its insistence upon the serial nature of events (narrative can be said to lie behind the notorious 'stages' interpretation of Freud's explanations), and its tendency to invite us into a literal scenario (narrative fiction's constant lure).

Such an interpretation of Freud's celebrated example questions the centrality of the child's active gaze to the account. The 'little story' of the child's horror at the woman's lack of a penis can legitimately be seen as a substitute for the central and powerful gaze which constructs the fetish. The way is then open to examine fetishism as a particular kind of substitution of signifiers which does not necessarily depend upon a 'primal look'. Indeed fetishism does not necessarily involve looking: a fetish can equally be something that is felt, heard or smelled. Fetishism can be concerned with any or all of the invocatory drives and not just with a particular one: scopophilia.

What seems to be necessary for a particular object to become a fetish is that it should be constituted as a sexual signification by its articulation in a discourse of sexuality. The parts of the body, the objects and the sensations that usually become fetishes

are those which are already delimited and sexualised by a whole culture.[13] Hence those objects prone to fetishisation are those which are already sexualised: underwear, visible parts of the body, the sound of clothes rustling, the smell of sweat.

This account of fetishism is able to avoid the problems that are inherent in Mulvey's account, and equally in Freud's, where he is forced by his insistence upon the woman's literal physical lack of a penis and the child's actual understanding sight of this lack to stress the horror that would be involved in such a realisation: 'probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital' (*SE* vol XXI p 154).

This horror cannot be involved in the massive dissemination of images of female genitals that characterises particularly still photography in the pornographic sector. It is rather one result (and not the necessary result) of the quasi-identity that is produced between the phallus and the penis, between signifier and physical stand-in. It also produces the confusion between physical sexual difference and the distinction masculine/feminine that Freud took such pains to avoid.[14]

FETISH: THE WOMAN'S SEXUAL PLEASURE Mulvey's account of fetishistic modes of representation shows much that can be found in current pornography: cyclic narrative forms which re-enact scenarios of desire; particular stress upon performances addressed to the spectator of the representation and having only tenuous relation to any notion of verisimilitude within the representation; the reduction of diegetic space to the two-dimensional surface of the screen; the woman posed as phallus rather than as lack. In addition, the usual voyeuristic distance of spectator to representation is compromised such that the image poses itself as pure presence (as fulfilment of desire) rather than as present absence (as something photographed in another place, at another time). Such structures of fetishism appear in current visual pornography, but other phenomena also occur that cannot be readily accounted for in Mulvey's terms as they stand.

Besides the massive diffusion of vaginal imagery already remarked upon (imagery often described as 'explicit' or 'aggressive'), there also appears a concentration on lesbian activities in both film and photography, and upon female masturbation, particularly in still photography where it is often implied strongly by various poses. Feminist critics usually condemn the representation of masturbation as reinforcing the 'solipsism' of pornography,[15] but are much more equivocal about the representation of lesbianism. These diverse shifts in pornographic representations have appeared, particularly in the fairly public pornography of magazines available in local newsagents shops, and in films available in public cinemas.

The fetish offered by these representations is no longer a fragment of clothing, or even the deceptively smooth body of the phallic woman, it is now the woman's sexual pleasure. The woman nevertheless has the phallus in sexual pleasure; the woman's lack of a phallus is disavowed in her orgasm. Hence physical sexual difference is no longer unmentionable within public representations of women that are designated 'pornographic'. Physical sexual difference can be promoted within these representations because the fetish has been shifted from compensating for woman's lack of a penis to the finding of the woman's phallus in her sexual pleasure.

In orgasm woman no longer is the phallus, she has the phallus. Films currently produced within the pornographic sector gain their impulsion from the repetition of instances of female sexual pleasure, and male pleasure is perfunctory in most cases. The films (and photographs) are concerned with the *mise-en-scène* of the female orgasm, they constantly circle around it, trying to find it, to abolish the spectator's separation from it.

Female sexual pleasure has been promoted to the status of a fetish in order to provide representations of sexuality which are more 'explicit' for an audience conceived of as male. The pornography industry has regarded the process as one of the legitimate expansion of the very restricted and clandestine 'hard-core' representations into the more public arena of 'soft-core'. Thus the progressive revelation of pubic hair in photographs, and of (limp) penises in cinema have been regarded as the stealthy emergence of 'pieces' of the body into the daylight of soft-core representations. Yet the industry's own characterisation of the process, though to some extent a determinant upon it, is very far from being the whole truth. Female sexual pleasure has become perhaps the dominant fetish within current public pornographic representation as a result of this 'stealthy extension' of the industry, but the consequences are many and difficult to assess.

First, not every form of female sexual pleasure has an equal emphasis. Lesbian activity and female masturbation, when contained within a narrative, are always shown as subsidiary forms of pleasure, as surrogates for sex with a male, or as a form of experience that the heroine gains on her odyssey towards sexual satisfaction. Even within these passages, the emphasis on dildos and other substitute penises is quite marked: a male presence is maintained even within scenes of masturbation or lesbianism. Sexual pleasure for women, then, is posited as being dependent upon a male. This provides a certain security to the enquiry into female sexual pleasure: it is a fetish because it is in the orgasm that the woman's phallus is re-found. Woman finds her phallus in

13 For an examination of this process see Rosalind Coward, 'Sexual Liberation and the Family' in *m/f* no 1, 1978, especially pp 14-17.

14 For a similar discussion of fetishism, see Metz's 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, esp pp 67-75. Metz, however, is only concerned with the fetishism of the cinematic apparatus.

15 A humanist notion dependent on conceiving sexuality as permissible *only* when involving more than one person.

Notice outside *Blue Film* cine club and sex shop, 55 Old Compton St, March 1980.

the orgasm; woman is given that orgasm and hence that phallus by men. Both security and abolition of separation from the representation are provided for the spectator by this arrangement. The male's phallus is the condition for female sexual pleasure, the condition for the always-expected, never-found fulfilment of desire. The phallus for the woman in the representation is provided by the male in the audience: it is a 'gift' from a man or men that provides woman's orgasm.

Angela Carter calls this process 'a gap left in the text of just the right size for the reader to insert his prick into' (op cit, p 16): the representation of female pleasure is addressed to an audience constructed as masculine, as possessing a phallus (usually but not exclusively a biological male), because it erects the phallus of the individual in the audience as the condition of female pleasure. Female pleasure is the result, ultimately, of the gift of the phallus from members of the audience. Hence the current regime of pornographic representation retains its security for a (male) audience: it completes the fetishistic regime by providing the viewer with a direct relation to the representation through the gift of the phallus as the ultimate condition of female pleasure.

This regime is unquestionably an advance upon previous modes of representation of women in association with sexuality: the pin-up, the star system, much advertising rhetoric. It is equally an advance upon many forms of construction of 'woman' within other regimes of representation. The question of female sexual pleasure has remained unasked within public discourses for many decades in our culture: in pornography it is now receiving attention on a massive scale. The availability of vaginal imagery can be said to have a directly educative effect for both men and women, as well as tending to dispel the aura of strangeness produced by the centuries of concealment of the vagina in Western representations.

JAMES SWINSON

. . . the question of male sexual pleasure . . . 6 Brewer St, March 1980.

It is therefore an important shift in the representation of the female, a shift that is still the subject of a series of hard-fought battles, whether in legislation or in the streets. For it is a profoundly equivocal shift: all is not sweetness and light in this field, the shift cannot be counted as a simple advance, let alone a victory for feminism. The educative effects, the effects of dispelling a particular and deep-rooted form of disgust at part of another's body, these are little more than side-effects, especially given the current and probable future institutional connotations given to the forms of circulation of these images. For the fetishistic regime is maintained by the reassertion of the phallus as the possession of the male, and the female as dependent upon the phallus as access to pleasure. The male spectator is sutured into the representation as the possessor of this pre-requisite; and thus confirmed in a particular psycho-social construction of self.

However, this regime of representation is profoundly unstable. It has asked the question 'what is female pleasure?', a question that cannot find its answer in representations. The tawdry British sex comedies (still produced by the likes of George Harrison Marks) at least were based upon a question which could receive an answer: 'What does a nude woman look like?' Current pornographic films have gone further and asked the question that lies behind that of nudity; the question of the nature of pleasure. But all that can be shown in a film or a photograph is the conditions of pleasure, its circumstances and outward manifestations. These are never enough: all that the viewer finds as the reply to the question are the outward displays, what is *expected*. What *happens*, 'the fading of the subject', eludes the representation if the representation seeks to discover the elusive nature of the experience of sexual pleasure. The pornographic film text responds by multiplying instances of possible pleasure by multiplying its little stories of sexual incidents. Either that, or, in its more hardcore manifestations, it turns upon the object of the enquiry, the woman, and vents its (and the audience's) frustrations at the impossibility of gaining an answer to the question by degrading and humiliating woman, by attacking her for her obstinate refusal to yield this impossible secret. This aggression reaffirms the power of the phallus in response to a terror at the possibilities of the woman's escape from that power.

The formulation of this question in terms of a fetishistic regime has one further consequence: it leaves the question of male pleasure unasked. Attention is directed towards women and through them, to woman; male figures are attenuated in the sense that their sexuality is never really in question. The closest that questioning comes is in the often portrayed incidence of impotence or timidity, always cured. Male pleasure is assumed rather than

investigated; this provides the security of the male viewer. Yet in the very perfunctory treatment that it receives, the question begins to haunt the representation: a disparity between the pressure of desire and the inadequacy of its satisfaction begins to open the complementary question, 'what is male pleasure?' A question which, itself, has no real answer apart from the tautology of 'I know because I know it'.

All this points to an instability in the current regime of pornographic representation of sexuality, especially in the cinema. It is in cinema that the most hysterical responses to this instability occur. Two disparate manifestations of this hysteria: the extremes of brutality practised upon women within representations, and the proposal from the Williams Committee that cinema should be the sole medium in which active censorship is retained. The particular instability in this medum results from the cinema's ability to narrativise a response to the question of female pleasure, however inadequate the response might be. For the process of narrativisation produces significations, 'moves' the spectator, and definitively introduces a voyeuristic form of viewing which threatens the whole security of the fetishist regime of representation. This perpetual displacement/replacement of signification and spectator is beyond the scope of conventional photographic layouts usually employed in magazines. Such layouts serve to enact the placement of the phallus as the condition of female pleasure, but do no more than that. In cinema, the fetishistic regime only operates on the condition that it is established across a variation of image, a perturbation of any stability. A form of voyeurism is always present. In cinematic representations there appears most acutely the instability of the current regime of pornographic representation oriented around the question of female pleasure, initially posed as a fetish. The possibility exists, then, for some film work to begin to displace this fetishistic regime by foregrounding and promoting as the organising principle of the text those questions which begin to raise themselves behind the fetishistic posing of the question of female pleasure. It is possible to throw into question the nature of male pleasure by examining and frustrating what construction of the feminine it demands in particular circumstances. This to some extent is the effect of Nelly Kaplan's *Néa* (1976) which appeared briefly in Britain within the institution of soft-core pornography as *A Young Emmanuelle* (in early 1978).[16] It is possible also to use the questioning of pleasure, both male and female, to promote the notion of desire as the structuring principle of the text: desire which is constantly pursued but always elusive. Such is the enterprise of *Ai No Corrida* (*Empire des Sens*) sufficiently threatening to be liable to Customs seizure, and sufficiently enlightening for the Williams Committee to mention it as a film

16 See Verina Glaessner, *Monthly Film Bulletin* December 1977 p 263.

unjustly treated under the current regulation of film censorship. Stephen Heath has traced the film's concern with the impossibility of seeing, its hesitation of narration.[17] What is important here is the way the film demonstrates the possibilities that pornography offers for representations of sexuality and of women (and men). The instability of the current fetishistic regime, based on the question of female pleasure which is only partially answerable by the 'gift' of the phallus, provides opportunities for film-making practice. This would aim at a displacement of existing representations through foregrounding the aspects of the question which trouble the regime of representation that asks it. The institution of pornography would then begin to ask the questions whose space it occupies without being aware of it: 'What is sexuality? What is desire?'

17 Stephen Heath, 'The Question Oshima' in *Ophuls* Paul Willemen (ed), British Film Institute 1978.

18 Fines of £100 and over have been exacted for 'creative' writing on Underground posters.

Postface

This metapsychological approach has tried to characterise 'pornography' as a shifting arena of representation in which particular kinds of aesthetic struggle may be possible. The boundaries of this arena are defined by the major positions over 'pornography', the way that they articulate together, and the ways that they cross other definitions of morality, sexuality, representation and so on. If, because of its conception of representation as a process, this metapsychological approach has managed to move away from such definitions, then it should also have a rather different notion of politics in relation to the pornography question. In particular, to regard pornography as an area of struggle within representations necessarily involves a different conception of the role of legislation.

The major definitions of pornography all look to the law as a crucial power which can be recruited to enforce one conception of representation, one permissable 'pornography', or another. When the pornographic arena is regarded as the site of a particular struggle over representations, the law can be regarded only as providing or securing certain conditions for that struggle. This by no means coincides with the recommendations of the Williams Report. In some ways this report does not tackle the real problems faced by those attempting to change representations, their uses and their potential in our society; in other ways it actively blocks certain directions of work. The law as it stands provides certain obstacles for those trying to intervene actively (through stickers, graffiti for instance) in the area of public advertising. Recent cases have resulted in punitive fines for feminists undertaking such activity.[18] The Williams Report is unable to formulate any recommendations in this area, though recognising that 'many people,

as is clear from submissions to us, dislike [ie sexualised advertisements]' (9.9). Currently advertisements are regarded legally as private property (hence fines for defacing them), rather than as being in the public domain, on the grounds that their entire function is one of addressing all and sundry whether they choose to be so addressed or not. The implications of such an argument for legal reform are not considered by the Williams Report, and so in this sense it can be seen as not having tackled the problems for those attempting to change and challenge existing representations.

Other recommendations of the Report may provide new obstacles. Its recommendations are based on a public disavowal of a representational activity that is designated 'pornography' by general opinion. This will mean that the production of such representations will be confirmed as a separate industry, difficult to move into, closely linked with organised crime. The construction of pornography as 'I know it exists, nevertheless I choose to ignore it' will deprive many practitioners of the flexibility to move in and out of particular forms of signification which is implied by the notion of 'struggle within representations'. Some work will be public, some will be in plain wrappers, behind discreet doors. Such designations will provide institutional determinants upon the meanings that are being produced which will create severe problems. It may suit the industry to exchange relaxation of controls on representations for tighter controls on their dissemination; but this is bound to create further problems for disruptive representational work in the area of pornography.

The area of cinema is the only medium in which the Williams Report advocates specific censorship mechanisms. It allows that the defence of 'artistic merit' may be applied to films against the activities of the censor. If there is to be censorship of films by a Government body, then this should be a *public* process, similar to that used in Weimar Germany. The censorship body would have to publish arguments for specific alterations to films or bans upon films, which would then be argued out with the producers/distributors in public, if challenged. The potential would then be provided for censorship itself to become an area of struggle, rather than a secretive and unargued process as it is now.

It is too simple to support the Williams recommendations as they stand merely because they offer a possible liberalisation. Similarly, it is too simple to reject direct attacks upon public representations because the form of the attack is often open to accusations of puritanism. A politics in relation to pornography must develop from a conception of 'pornography' as a particular arena of representation in which certain displacements, refigurations, are or can be possible.

An earlier version of this article was given as a paper at the Communist University of London in July 1979. My thanks to all those present for the suggestions which have been incorporated here, as well as to Maria Black, Ben Brewster and Film Studies graduate students at the University of Kent.

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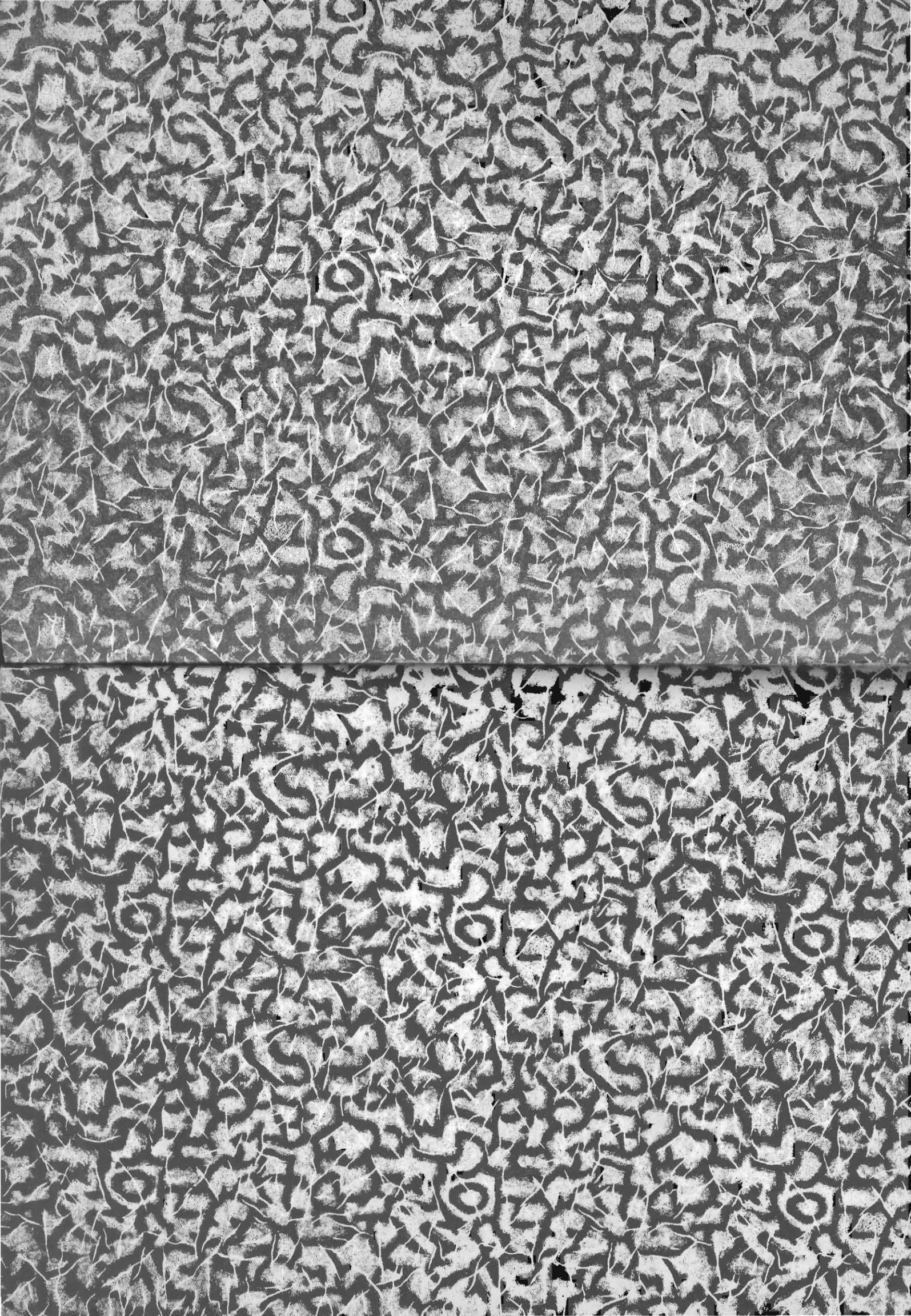

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