

4.1 Physique image from *Physique Pictorial*, 4(3), Fall 1954

The subject as object

Photography and the human body

INTRODUCTION

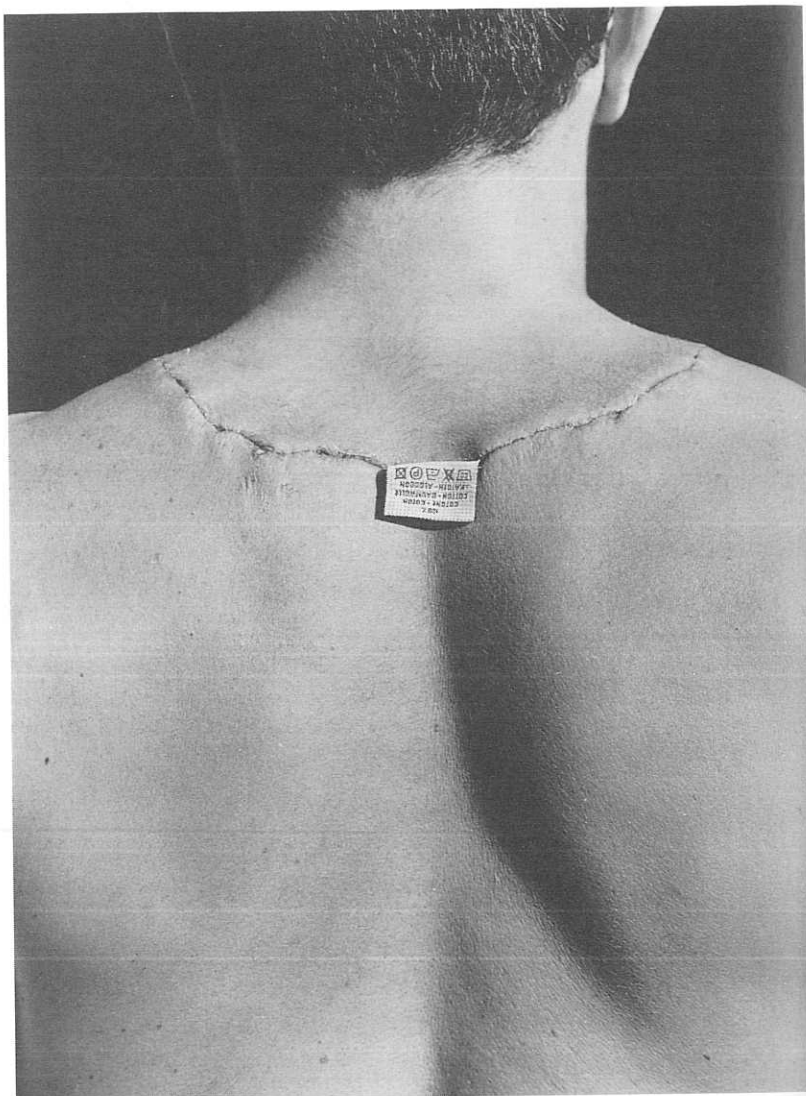
The photographic body in crisis

Since the late 1980s, an extraordinary number of photographic practices and critical texts have taken the human body as their central subject. For instance, the work of artists as diverse as Jo Spence, Cindy Sherman, and Annette Messager reflects on the ways photography contributes to perceptions of gender and ageing. And photography is used by, for example, the installation artists Mona Hatoum and Adrian Piper to critique ideas of racial difference. Other photographers such as Fran Herbello and Inez Van Lamsweerde have used digital techniques to produce unlikely and illusionistic images, drawing analogies between image manipulation and actual body altering practices and producing unsettling composite bodies. These and many other photographers are concerned not simply with how to represent bodies, or what kinds of bodies should be represented, but with the emergence of specifically photographic ways of seeing the body, and with the role of photography in the production of desire.¹

In the 1990s, photography historians and theorists suggested that the new interest in the body in photography was linked to the emergence of new critical theories and 'body politics'. They also argued that social crises, notably the AIDS epidemic, had politicised these photographic practices (Pultz 1995b: 7–10, Foster 1996: 122–3). Official representations of the AIDS crisis were opposed by agitational graphics groups such as Gran Fury, and artists

¹ The work of some of these artists is reproduced in widely available monographs and exhibition catalogues. It has not been possible to include full publication references for all of them. Fran Herbello's work can be found at www.zonezero.com.

JOHN PULTZ (1995)
Photography and the Body,
London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.



4.2 Fran Herbello, *Untitled*, from *A Imaxe e Semellanza*, 2000

Herbello's digital images represent the body as a kind of attire, and deal with the transformation of identity in the digital era, and the changes this may produce in our relationship with our bodies.

such as Nan Goldin documented the impact of the epidemic on actual communities and individuals (Dubin 1992: 197–225; Crimp and Rolston 1990; Kotz 1998). The fascination with the body has also been linked to the advent of new technologies and technical knowledges and new means of rapidly reproducing and distributing photographic images. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, media and art world attention has turned away

from AIDS (increasingly viewed as a 'third world' problem), but anxieties about the scientific manipulation of the human body are heightened: with fears about 'designer babies', stem cell research, cloning, and the possible effects on our bodies of genetically modified food. Developments in genetics and medicine appear to offer the possibility of radically transformed bodies (Ewing 1994: 9). In the early 1990s, many cultural theorists and writers viewed the prospect of a technologically altered 'posthuman' or cyborg body as exciting, even liberating. In the early twenty-first century, as this seems an ever more plausible reality, it is increasingly viewed in dystopian, rather than utopian terms (on the 'posthuman' see Deitch 1992; Hayles 1999; Badmington 2000).

The writer Chris Townsend argued that there have been two separate crises: first, a crisis of 'the body and social despair' and second, a crisis relating to looking, 'to the cultural uses of photography, and to disintegrating myths about the medium' which leads to conflicting views over how photography should be used to represent the human body (Townsend 1998: 8). However, the anthropologist **Carole S. Vance**, writing on photography and censorship in the US, shows how ideas about bodies and ideas about the meanings and uses of photographs are deeply interconnected (Vance 1990). Unlike Townsend, she sees the 'crisis of looking' and the 'crisis of the body' as closely related. Instances of censorship bring to light the way that conflict between different interest groups relates to conflicting interpretations of photography.² Vance's analysis shows how certain ways of reading photographs are used to challenge the legitimacy of different sexual practices and identities (see the section on antiporn campaigns p. 174). Her work offers one demonstration of how photographs of human bodies are caught up in social struggles, and how different views about the meanings and uses of photographs have political implications. These struggles are as old as photography, but they became particularly vivid in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century with the rise of both sexual politics and religious fundamentalism. At the same time, the globalisation and diversification of media and the targeting of specialised interest groups has made the range of photographic representations of the body more visible than ever. In this chapter, we consider not just this recent history but also older examples which show the social significance of photographs of and about bodies.

This chapter is organised thematically rather than chronologically, to allow discussion of a number of current and historical photographic practices and debates. There are, inevitably, some important issues not discussed here, such as the representation of disability or the controversies over the photographing of children. However, the ideas and theories introduced in this chapter may be applied to a wider range of examples than those specifically considered here.

In the first section we look at how photography has been used historically as part of a broader attempt to 'read' people's bodies: especially in relation to racial and ethnic classifications and the description and analysis of social

CAROLE S. VANCE (1990) 'The Pleasures of Looking: The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography versus Visual Images' in Carol Squiers (ed.) *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, Seattle: Bay Press.

² This was vividly demonstrated in the reactions to Robert Mapplethorpe's touring photographic exhibition *The Perfect Moment* (1989) and to Andres Serrano's 1987 photograph *Piss Christ*. See Dubin 1992.

deviancy. The next section considers how gender and sexuality are visually coded in certain photographs, focusing particularly on erotic or 'soft porn' photographs. The third section attends to the ways in which the camera as a technology intervenes in the body, and also how it represents the body's relationship with technology, through a consideration of medical imaging, early avant-garde photography and contemporary advertising images. It also addresses how digital manipulation participates in new ways of seeing and conceptualising the human body. The final section explores the view that photography is a practice deeply associated with death, and considers photographs relating to both birth and death.

EMBODYING SOCIAL DIFFERENCE

By the end of the nineteenth century, photography was being used to classify people into 'types', illustrating and extending the Victorian sciences of **phrenology** and **physiognomy**. The success of these popular sciences in the late nineteenth century has been described as part of a 'vast attempt at deciphering the body' in which the desire to classify bodies according to visual appearance is justified by the belief that the surface reveals hidden depths; in other words, that the outer surfaces of the body could be read as a series of signs or codes revealing or expressing inner character (Magli 1989: 124). Both phrenology and physiognomy appealed to a popular enthusiasm for classification according to 'type', and both became popular in the 1840s and 1850s at the same time as photography. 'Typological' classification was reassuring to the urban middle classes because its convenient generalisations helped make the mass of strangers in the city seem more familiar. As the sociologist Simmel noted, visual appearances were particularly important in a period when new means of public transport meant that many social encounters were primarily visual encounters:

Before the development of buses, railroads and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another.

(Simmel quoted in Benjamin 1938: 38)

Simplified, popularised versions of physiognomy and phrenology could be used to counteract the anonymity of urban life, and provided 'a method of quickly assessing the characters of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth century city' (Sekula 1989: 348). These 'sciences' are not, however, as harmless as they first appear. Whilst they may have reassured the dominant class, physiognomy and phrenology were also deployed as a means of social control via photography. Because it shows us only surfaces, photography is ideally suited to physiognomic and phreno-

phrenology was developed at the end of the eighteenth century by Franz Josef Gall. It was based on the idea that the contours of the skull could give clues to the mental functioning of the brain.

physiognomy was an ancient science, systematised in the 1770s by Johann Caspar Lavater, which claimed to read the character of a person through the classification of the features of head and face. Lavater saw a 'correspondence between the external and the internal man, the visible superficies and invisible contents' (Lavater 1789 quoted in Lalvani 1996: 48).

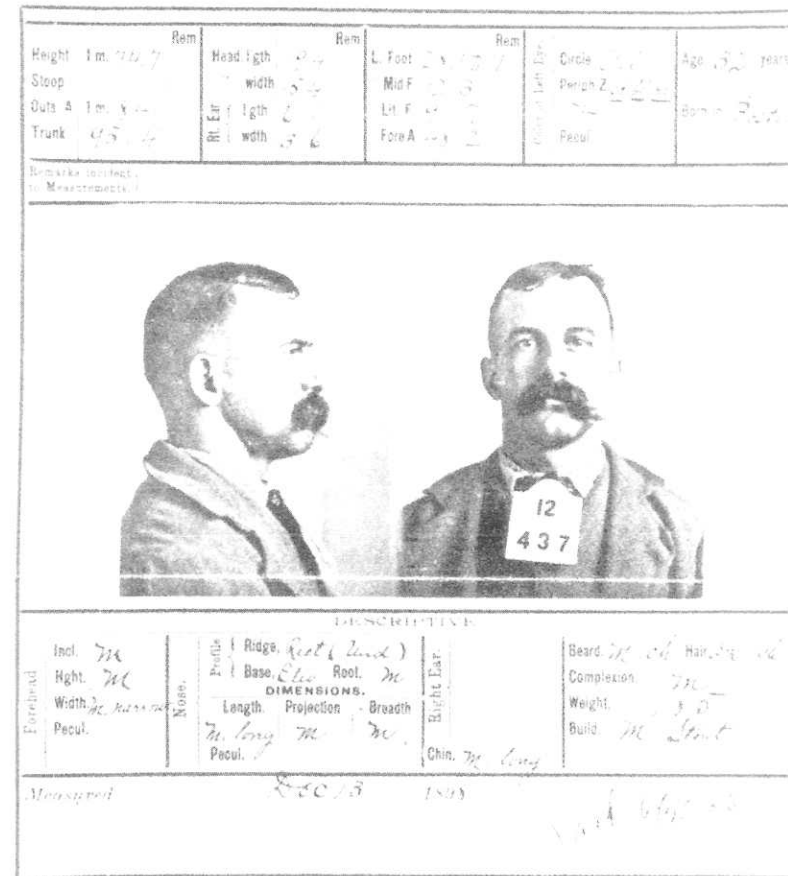
logical interpretation, and it became part of an increasingly professionalised and systematic police force.

The photographer and theorist **Allan Sekula** argues that the photographs taken for police and prison records should be seen alongside the portrait photographs that flourished at the same time. People were encouraged to read portraits using physiognomy, so the portrait of the respectable citizen emphasised facial characteristics associated in physiognomy with moral character and citizenship. The photographic police archives also relied on a physiognomic norm: the 'average man' was the physical and social ideal against which the criminal body was measured (Sekula 1989: 347, 354-6).

Photography historian **John Tagg** has also discussed photographs of criminals, using the work of the French social historian **Michel Foucault** (see

ALLAN SEKULA (1989) 'The Body and the Archive' in Richard Bolton (ed.) **The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

JOHN TAGG (1988) **The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories**, London: Macmillan.



4.3 Filing card using Bertillon's 'anthropometric' system, 1898
The standardised police records initiated by Bertillon produce 'a portrait of the product of the disciplinary method: the body made object' (Tagg 1988: 76)

also margin note p. 58) to understand how photography is used to 'discipline' people. Discipline in Foucault's sense refers to processes of surveillance, identification, classification, labelling, analysis and correction – as opposed to older regimes of punishment which did not seek to understand the deviant/deviation but rather to eliminate it. According to Foucault, in modern society, power is dispersed through social institutions (such as schools, asylums, prisons) and exists in insidious ways in everyday practices. The construction of archives is crucial to the everyday ways in which disciplinary power is exercised. Tagg quotes texts from the 1850s through to the 1970s which lay down strictures for photographing social deviants for the purpose of police, prison, asylum and legal archives. At first the photographic archive was a vast accumulation of unclassified and often unrecognisable photographic portraits, but in the 1880s a French bureaucrat, Alphonse Bertillon, developed techniques to standardise police records and enable identification of repeat offenders. He used photography as a means to train police in the classification and recognition of different facial features. His filing card system involved detailed measurements of the criminal, description of identifying marks, and use of two photos – front view and profile – which were taken using standardised focal length and lighting (Lalvani 1996: 109; Sekula 1989: 357–63, Kemp and Wallace 2000: 144–7).

To study the disciplinary uses of photography means considering the ways in which people are represented, arranged for the camera, made available to be gazed at, and placed in a system of signification which codes and classifies them. As Tagg notes, we can see

a repetitive pattern, the body isolated; the narrow space; the subjection to an unreturnable gaze; the scrutiny of gestures, faces and features; the clarity of illumination and sharpness of focus; the names and number boards. These are the traces of power, repeated countless times, whenever the photographer prepared an exposure, in police cell, prison, consultation room, home or school.

(Tagg 1988: 85)

Perhaps one of the most striking photographic techniques derived from physiognomy and phrenology is composite portraiture. This was introduced by Francis Galton in the 1880s. Galton developed a technique for superimposing a number of photographed faces of people with shared characteristics or circumstances. The composite image produced in this way supposedly revealed hereditary physical characteristics, the surface 'symptoms' of innate biology. At first he presented his technique as useful in the diagnosis of disease, but he also attempted to use composite portraiture to reveal the characteristic physiognomy of different 'types': the faces superimposed may all have committed the same crimes, or belong to the same ethnic groups. Galton's method is centred around a concept of race: using phrenology and



4.4 Francis Galton, *The Jewish Type*, composite photographs, 1883

Joseph Jacobs, the Jewish man who commissioned these images, saw them as validating Jewish identity, but they also reinforced Galton's own anti-Semitic views.

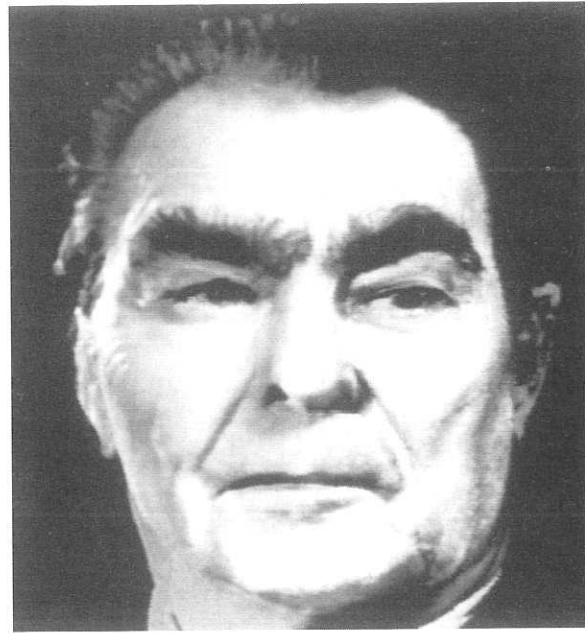
physiognomy, he naturalised social differences by describing social 'types' in terms of biology, that is, along the lines of race. In his work, different cultural groups or social classes appear as separate races with definite and visible physical characteristics.

So the popular sciences of phrenology and physiognomy, combined with new photographic techniques, produced a new and fundamentally racist vision of society. It is perhaps not surprising to learn that the racial classificatory system that Galton developed was later embraced by Nazism. It was Galton, the pioneer of composite photography, who introduced the 'science' of eugenics. Eugenics proposed that intellectual and moral qualities were hereditary and that some races were therefore superior to others. As well as conveniently providing a justification for European colonialism, eugenics represented class differences as biological, viewing the inclination of the lower social classes towards deviance as the result of a lack of hereditary good qualities.

These photographic practices are not confined to the nineteenth century. For instance, Sekula compares Galton's work to the recent use of composite (digital) photography by the American artist Nancy Burson, challenging the social and political implications of Burson's practice (Sekula 1989: 377). Burson's work questions nuclear weapons policies, advocates social welfare

4.5 Nancy Burson,
Warhead I, composite
image, 1982

Using computer imaging to superimpose faces, Nancy Burson updates the composite photography technique invented in the nineteenth century.



3 However, it could be argued that finding missing children is a different kind of activity from establishing the criminal 'type'. There are also problems with regarding all uses of composite imagery as leading us to physiognomy or eugenics. The photographer Gerhard Lang also uses Galton's techniques, but with closer attention to their social and historical significance and in more precise ways than Burson. See Kemp and Wallace 2000, pp. 190–9.

4 'I had Bill Clinton's Baby', *Marie Claire* 104, April 1997, p. 92. Even this mechanised composite uses racial typology – as well as programming in the preferred sex of your child you can choose your child's racial characteristics from 'Asian, Afro-Caribbean, Hispanic or Caucasian'. Chapter 5 gives a contemporary example of the way this works: some of Benetton's ads, while ostensibly about global harmony, use visual signifiers of racial and ethnic identity which reproduce ideas of absolute racial difference.

and tackles the conventions of feminine beauty, but like phrenology, it emphasises surface appearances. It has also been argued that the fact that Burson has used her methods to help find missing children 'returns the art of composite portraiture to the purposes for which Galton originally designed it', for police detective work (Taylor 1997: 57).³

Computer-generated composites have also become a form of entertainment: 'Foto Morphosis' photo-booths combine the faces of two individuals to produce their 'virtual reality' child.⁴ Composite imaging of a different sort, the 'photo fit', is regularly used by the police to attempt to identify criminals, and is based on classifying facial features according to type (this kind of mouth . . . or this kind?). Aspects of physiognomy and phrenology also exist today in market research attempts to identify and classify the consumer, just as the nineteenth century attempted to characterise strangers in the urban crowd. Most advertising today is too sophisticated to simply provide visual representation of the 'ideal consumer', but it still frequently deploys images of individuals as 'types'.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

Objectification and images of women

Even erotic imagery depended on the classification of social types, though not primarily through physiognomy. Clothing and props act as signifiers of

class and occupation in Victorian pornography. These images represented social types considered to be sexually available: for example, the laundress. The art historian Eunice Lipton has shown how, in Paris, the laundresses' low pay, visibility (the laundries were open on to the street), and tendency to drink wine to counteract the heat of the laundry, led to their reputation as sexually 'loose' women (Lipton 1980). Other Victorian pornographic images showed women and couples in clearly middle-class domestic surroundings.⁵

Today, erotica also works through classifying its subjects into recognisable types – in this way it makes different women appear sexually available to a presumed heterosexual male viewer. And, just as the criminal photograph reduces the depicted person to a series of signifiers, so pornographic images offer women as available objects of fantasy by attaching certain meanings to a narrow set of signifiers.

In the 1970s and 1980s, such representations of women became a focus of feminist criticism. Feminists questioned the existing distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate images (such as 'hardcore' pornography) which were based on degrees of explicitness of nudity and/or sexual activity.⁶ They criticised advertising and publicity images as well as erotica for eroticising the female body in a way which turned women into mere objects for a male gaze, a process usually termed **objectification**.⁷

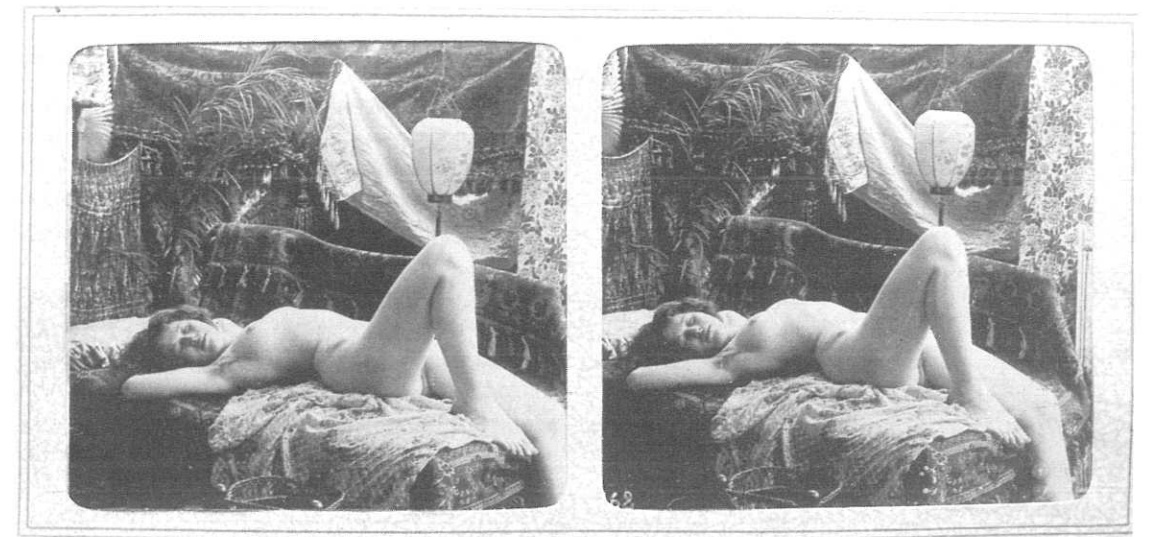
The concept of objectification has special relevance to photography. In one sense photography inadvertently objectifies people by turning them into

See figure 3.4 in chapter 3 which hints at this reputation, though more explicitly sexualised images of laundresses were also common.

5 Detailed discussion of Victorian erotic and pornographic photography can be found in Solomon-Godeau (1991c); Kendrick (1987), and Williams (1995).

6 The argument against the traditional 'hard'/'soft' distinction is put by Brown (1981).

7 Solomon-Godeau concludes that 'it may well be that the most insidious and instrumental forms of domination, subjugation and objectification are produced by mainstream images of women rather than by juridically criminal or obscene ones' (Solomon-Godeau 1991c: 237).



4.6 Anonymous stereoscope photograph from around 1895

The plants, fabrics and lamp in this image are used to suggest an exotic interior associated with the Orient and with the harem.

things to be looked at (Solomon-Godeau 1991c: 221–2). But it has also been suggested that in everyday life women are already constituted as objects to be looked at and men as 'possessing the gaze'. According to this argument, women internalise the male gaze to the point that they survey themselves. This relationship has been expressed by the critic John Berger:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

(Berger 1972a: 47)

If women are already objectified by the male gaze, and if objectification is in any case what photography does, then photographic images of women are doubly 'objectifying' (see Solomon-Godeau 1991: 221–2). We need to consider not only how photographs present women's bodies for a male viewer but also how this process spills over into everyday life and into how men view actual women, and how women view themselves. In relation to this 'spilling over', the everyday cultural objects, domestic settings and familiar poses used in soft porn and advertising are significant, because, as feminist theorist Beverly Brown has argued, this limited visual vocabulary operates as a 'short-cut' to sexual fantasy and in turn, leaves everyday life with a 'certain afterglow' (Brown 1981: 138–40). In advertising, this process is part of the attempt to eroticise commodities (see ch. 5).

Fetishism, voyeurism and pleasure

Photography theorists have made use of psychoanalytic theory to analyse how photographic images construct women as objects for a male gaze, and how the visual pleasures of looking at such images are implicated in the exercise of power. In particular the concepts of **voyeurism** and **fetishism** have been influential. These concepts were most famously formulated by Sigmund Freud, and have been developed by more recent psychoanalysts, notably Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein and Luce Irigaray (see Gamman and Makinen 1994: ch. 3). However, we will focus here on the terms as they were initially developed by Sigmund Freud (Freud 1905, 1927). (See also note p. 33.)

A Freudian approach considers the spectator's experience of visual pleasure in terms of his or her subjectivity which is shaped from early childhood. This visual pleasure or '**scopophilia**' is usually understood as an erotic pleasure gained in looking at another person or at images of other bodies. This pleasure is voyeuristic when it is dependent on the object of this gaze being unaware, not looking back. Voyeurism is a form of objectification which Freud saw as originating in childhood curiosity. At its extreme, it becomes an obsessive

sexual practice. Voyeurism describes a mode of looking related to the exercise of power in which a body becomes a spectacle for someone else's pleasure, a world divided into the active 'lookers' and the passive 'looked at'. To some extent photography, by the very nature of the medium, invites voyeuristic looking, although some photographs, such as those which depict a normally private or taboo activity and a subject apparently unaware that they are being photographed, are more explicitly voyeuristic (Sontag 1979: 11–14). The concept of voyeurism is applicable not only to sexualised or erotic images, but also in relation to the depiction of colonised peoples and of disability as spectacle.

Another concept which has been central to Freudian analyses of photography is fetishism (see Burgin 1982: p. 177ff). In Freudian psychoanalytic theory an important moment in the shaping of the self is the point at which the child becomes aware of sexual difference and moves away from its early close relationship with its mother: this process of entry into sexuality is what produces, in some people, sexual fetishism. Freud's definition of fetishism is derived from older anthropological definitions, in which an inanimate object takes on special powers such as warding off danger and misfortune and is the centre of religious rituals. In Freud's interpretation, an object becomes a fetish when it becomes the focus of (usually male) sexual desire. The male child develops an unconscious fear of castration at the sight of a woman's body, and fetishism is one means of allaying this anxiety: in a process termed 'disavowal' the fetishist knows but suppresses his knowledge of her 'lack' (of a penis) and idealises objects associated with the woman (for example, shoes).

The use of Freud's concept of fetishism to explain visual pleasure is controversial because it relies on the theory of male castration anxiety which implies that the fetishist is by definition male (Gamman and Makinen 1994: chs 3 and 6). Nevertheless, it is useful for thinking about the ways in which certain photographic styles and techniques are linked to objectification.⁸ For instance, the film theorist **Christian Metz** argued that a photograph works like a fetish because it freezes a fragment of reality, 'cutting off a piece of space and time . . . keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change' (Metz 1985: 85).

In the same way, fetishism, in Freud's interpretation, involves freezing a moment (the moment before the trauma of recognition) and fixating on a fragment, an object associated with the woman. Most of all, the photograph can be a fetish because of its physicality – we can touch and hold a photograph: 'The familiar photographs that many people carry with them always obviously belong to the order of fetishes in the ordinary sense of the word' (Metz 1985: 87).

But perhaps the reason why the theory of fetishism has been so important in analysing film and photography is that it helps to account for the ways in which visual images seem so often to objectify and fragment women's bodies in a way that is not common in representations of the male body.

⁸ In particular, it is a useful corrective to the tendency towards a literal interpretation in which a pornographic image which does not include a woman's head has 'decapitated her', or flattening lighting made for a 'one-dimensional' representation. Instead, a reading based in the concept of fetishism suggests flattening and fragmentation are part of the process by which the pleasures of looking at the image, or handling the object (a magazine page, a photograph), are translated into the pleasure of looking at (or imagining touching) the depicted body.

CHRISTIAN METZ (1985) 'Photography and Fetish', *October* 34, Autumn.

LAURA MULVEY (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Reprinted 1989 in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Macmillan.

9 In 1957 Roland Barthes observed similar qualities in the cinematic representation of the face of Greta Garbo (Barthes 1986: 56–7).

10 However, an advertisement such as this is clearly intended for a female readership. Even taking into account Berger's argument that women internalise the male gaze, the Freudian theory of fetishism is inadequate in explaining the fetishistic qualities of these advertisements (Gamman and Makinen 1994: 37–44, 95–105).

Freud's definition of fetishism can be understood in relation to the Marxist explanation of commodity fetishism: in which goods exchanged in a market appear to have value independent of the human labour that produced them, and independent of their usefulness. What a commodity is worth comes to seem 'natural' or inherent, comparable to the value of other commodities in the same way that their weight or size might be compared. It is this mystification of commodity value which Marx refers to as fetishism.

LAURA KIPNIS (1992) '(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*' in Lawrence Grossberg et al. (eds) *Cultural Studies*, London and New York: Routledge

11 *Hustler* had been used by Andrea Dworkin to demonstrate the misogyny she believes to be central to pornography (Dworkin 1981: 29–30). Kipnis' argument is a critique of approaches such as Dworkin's, which focus exclusively on gender in their discussions of pornography.

In a well-known essay, the film theorist and filmmaker **Laura Mulvey** used the theory of fetishism to explain ways in which certain films objectify the female star. She suggested that the female figure on screen is potentially troubling to male spectators: 'the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified' (Mulvey 1989: 21).

Mulvey contended that the male spectator is unconsciously reminded of the traumatic moment when he recognised sexual difference. One way he can deal with this is by disavowing it through fetishism. Mulvey suggests that certain films turn the represented figure of a female star (such as Marlene Dietrich) into a fetish by bringing together the beauty of the film as spectacle, the play of light and shadows, with the beauty of the woman as object. Close-ups, lighting and make-up fragment, flatten and render the female face one-dimensional (Mulvey 1989: 21–3).⁹ The formal qualities of the projected image are the reassuring substitute object which distracts the male spectator from the threat that the woman poses.¹⁰ Although Mulvey is discussing motion film, we can see similar qualities in the representation of the female face in current cosmetic advertisements in women's magazines. Here, a blank space in the image stands in for flesh: the faces are flattened with no shadows visible, reduced to a set of facial features arranged on a smooth and atonal expanse of skin. In this way the medium and image are conflated, the glossy, smooth feel of the magazine page stands in for the woman's skin (see Burgin 1986: 19).

In most accounts of fetishism (not just psychoanalytic accounts), the desirability of objects is related to a conflation of the human and the object world, so that things appear to be inherently desirable or valuable, even animated. (Leslie 2002: 6–8). Reciprocally, human beings become perceived and represented as objects. The rise of fetishistic representations of women in both pornography and advertising photographs is connected to the development of a capitalist economy, and to the fetishising of commodities. Fetishism describes not just a sexual preference of a minority (classified by Freud as one of the 'perversions') but a culturally dominant way of seeing both the object world and ourselves.

Class and representations of the body

One useful question raised by the debates around photographic images of women is how we distinguish a feminist political opposition to these images from a more conservative disgust at the portrayal of aspects of the body that are normally kept hidden from public view (Rodgerson and Wilson 1991: 28). The cultural theorist **Laura Kipnis** uses the example of the pornographic magazine *Hustler*.¹¹ Kipnis argues that *Hustler* needs to be understood in terms of class as well as gender, since it sets out primarily to provoke and disgust the 'establishment' (Kipnis 1992: 373–91).

To understand what disgust has to do with class, we need to look briefly at the history of attitudes towards the body. The historian Norbert Elias has described the change in attitudes that occurred as part of a shift from feudal society to a capitalist system in Europe. He suggested that, as a new class becomes dominant, it transforms the dominant ideas about the body and bodily decorum that had prevailed in the old social order (Elias 1994).

Medieval, feudal society was rigidly hierarchical, and control of bodies was a central part of social control of the population. But, as the Russian literary theorist **Mikhail Bakhtin** pointed out, in the medieval carnival these hierarchies were disrupted, and ideas of bodily decorum ridiculed or ignored. Carnival was the legitimate space where bodily excess was celebrated, where the lower body, orifices, reproduction, eating, defecation and copulation, pregnancy, birth and death were openly represented (Stallybrass and White 1986: 13; Dentith 1995: ch. 3).¹²

Bakhtin referred to this carnivalesque body as the 'grotesque' body. In the grotesque conception of the world, birth and death are cyclically related, and bodies are understood in collective terms, linked to one another and the world and continually growing and changing. Gradually, the grotesque body of the carnival was displaced by the dominant representation of the body, epitomised by the classical nude. The classical body is a smooth, orifice-less and self-sufficient body. While the grotesque tradition represents the body as ever-changing, from birth to death, and connected to the earth and to other bodies, 'classical' representations of the body omit these aspects: 'The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret; conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown' (Bakhtin 1984: 29).

One way the merchant classes in the sixteenth century and the industrial bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century maintained their political **hegemony** was through strictures about bodily control and decorum. Capitalist society places enormous emphasis on individualism, constructing a strict separation between the 'private' and the 'public'. Increasingly, the classical body became the publicly acceptable representation of the body in modern society, while those aspects associated with the lower body and the body's connection with the world were banished to the realm of the private, seen as disgusting and shameful, displaced into illicit and secret representations which were unmentionable and invisible in 'polite society' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 188). However, the advent of photography as mass reproduction made this division increasingly hard to control and the representation of the disgusting, the base, the distasteful became a means of challenging social hierarchies.

Kipnis sees *Hustler* in this light. She contrasts *Hustler's* use of photography with the more 'tasteful' images of *Playboy* and *Penthouse*:

The *Hustler* body is an unromanticized body – no vaselined lens or soft focus: this is neither the airbrushed top-heavy fantasy body of *Playboy*,

12 Other writers argue that it was legitimate precisely because it made it easier for those hierarchies to remain in place the rest of the time. See Stallybrass and White 1986: 13; Dentith 1995: 73–4.

MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVICH BAKHTIN (1895–1975) Bakhtin was a Soviet literary theorist. In 1929 he was arrested by Stalin's regime and until his death in 1975 worked in internal exile in the Soviet Union. His work focused on culture as a reciprocal process, and especially on the relationship between representation and social conflict, in which subordinate groups modify and reinterpret the representations produced by the dominant social class. His work was controversial and subject to censorship, since it defended the idea of multiple and conflicting perspectives ('heteroglossia') at a time when the Stalinist government was attempting to impose one ideological worldview. Bakhtin's most famous writings include the essays written in the 1930s and early 1940s, published in *The Dialogic Imagination* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas, 1981).

Bakhtin wrote about carnival and the grotesque in relation to the work of Rabelais and Dostoevsky in books eventually published in the mid-1960s: *Rabelais and his World* (trans. Heiëne Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (trans. Caryl Emerson, University of Manchester Press, 1984).

nor the ersatz opulence, the lingered and sensitive crotch shots of Penthouse, transforming female genitals into *objets d'art*. It's a body, not a surface or a suntan: insistently material, defiantly vulgar, corporeal.

(Kipnis 1992: 375)

But being insistently 'grotesque' does not necessarily make an image politically radical. The targets of carnivalesque ridicule and attack were just as often social outsiders or those considered inferior, such as women. To understand a reaction of shock or disgust at a photograph may mean paying attention to complicated intersections of categories such as class and gender. Middle-class women's disgust at the explicit representation of women's bodies for a male audience is inseparable from their own relationship to images of women's bodies and to their own bodies. Attempts to legally restrict the distribution of explicit photographs of women's bodies or of sexual activity were made to protect 'ladies' against seeing such representations, though the film historian **Linda Williams** suggests that they saw them nevertheless (Williams 1995: 25). This attitude to middle-class women as (potential) viewers of sexually explicit imagery is part of a wider ideology which incited in middle-class women a disgust at their own bodies. 'Ladies' were encouraged to develop a delicate 'feminine' sensibility premised on the repression and unmentionability of bodily experiences such as menstruation, excretion, and even childbirth: 'Since "respectable women" were defined precisely by their self-distancing from such indecent domains they were the social group most remote from any access to available symbolic articulations of the lower body' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 188–9).

By the late nineteenth century these 'symbolic articulations' included photographs. Even today, a middle-class woman's first encounter with a pornographic magazine may be an encounter with carnivalesque pleasures from which she knows she is excluded; she is not the intended viewer of these images, though she may be the object of the fantasies. Her disgust at these images may be a combination of her learned disgust at the lower body, her horror at the knowledge of her own exclusion (a body like hers is offered up for the pleasure of the readers, while she has had so little access to such representation) as well as feminist outrage at the ways in which the conventions of pornographic imagery construct the woman as an object of male sexual fantasy.¹³

The anti-pornography campaigns

Although, as Kipnis argues, feminist analyses of pornography have tended to underestimate the significance of class, they have effectively drawn attention to its often extreme misogyny and its role in women's subordination. In the 1980s, a number of feminist campaigns against pornographic imagery gained momentum, such as the 'Off the Shelf' campaign organised by the Campaign

LINDA WILLIAMS (1995)
'Corporealized Observers: Visual Pornographies and the Carnal Density of Vision' in Patrice Petro *Fugitive Images*,
Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

13 Disgust and desire are not necessarily mutually exclusive: 'disgust always bears the imprint of desire. These low domains, apparently expelled as "Other", return as the object of nostalgia, longing and fascination' (Stallybrass and White 1986: 191).

Against Pornography in the UK.¹⁴ These campaigns were influenced by the American Radical Feminists, such as Robin Morgan, who argued that 'Pornography is the theory – rape is the practice' and Andrea Dworkin, who famously stated: 'Pornography is violence against women' (Rodgerson and Wilson 1991: 26; Dworkin 1981). Dworkin's critique of pornography is passionate and almost evangelical in style, and has been very influential. It differs from previous forms of feminism in seeing texts (both visual and written) rather than social discrimination, as central to male dominance. However, it depends on a very narrow interpretive approach to photographs, and offers little evidence for the view that a photograph can be a *cause* of violence against women (Kendrick 1996: 231).

Other feminists, such as the group Feminists Against Censorship, argued that the anti-pornography campaigns risked undermining women's right to enjoy sexual and erotic imagery (Chester and Dickey 1988; Rodgerson and Wilson 1991; Segal and Macintosh 1992). A number of writers have pointed out how the category 'pornography' is a misleading one, and that we should pay attention to the range of images and audiences for whom 'pornography' has widely differing meanings and uses. As the critic Katherine Enos puts it:

For conservative feminists and the religious right, pornography is the theory, the rape and murder of women the practice. For queer culture, the production of their own pornographies can be a self-affirming form of representation in a straight culture where a 'lesbian kiss' on TV is so unheard of as to be a matter of public debate.

(Enos 1997/1998)

As the above quote implies, anti-pornography feminism found allies in political groups which were usually opposed to feminism. Whilst left-wing political parties were happier to support feminists on this issue than on many other feminist arguments, the religious Right also found it acceptable, even taking on board aspects of feminist arguments, such as the objectification argument.¹⁵ However, as the artist and writer **Deborah Bright** argues, the right wing, particularly in the United States, was primarily interested in responding to the new-found visibility of many minority communities and tackling what they saw as 'enemies within', such as 'immigrants, those on public assistance, young unemployed black men, unwed mothers, and gay men and lesbians' (Bright 1998: 1). State-funded arts agencies in the United States were relatively supportive of community-based art in the 1970s and 1980s. Right-wing groups responded by attacking state funding of photographic images which dealt with issues related to minorities, and especially to homosexuality. In particular they questioned the funding by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) of exhibitions of photographs which they saw as undermining norms of decency. They considered images which could be read as pornographic, sacrilegious or blasphemous as unsuitable for state funding; this

14 Previously, attention had focused on writing rather than images. One explanation for feminism's new focus on the visual image is that most visual erotica seemed to be of women and for men, while written erotica more frequently addressed a female audience. The Kinsey report research of the 1940s suggested that women are less sexually aroused by images than by literature, and this view is still commonly held. Walter Kendrick points out that attitudes to pornography in America (and Britain) have now shifted so much that "'Pornography" now means pictures, preferably, moving pictures' (Kendrick 1996: 243).

15 The feminist lawyer Catherine MacKinnon drafted anti-pornography legislation in Minneapolis which was then adopted by right-wing legislators in Indianapolis and New York (legislation subsequently declared unconstitutional).

DEBORAH BRIGHT (1998)
The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire, London and New York: Routledge.