

# PORNOGRAPHY AND OBJECTIFICATION

## Re-reading “the picture that divided Britain”

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### **Feminism, Objectification, and Pornography**

In this article, I want to examine the significance of the terms “objectification” and “pornography” and to ask how useful these are for analyses of contemporary sexual representations. I will begin by tracing some key approaches to objectification and pornography and by highlighting some of the differences in these approaches. While theoretical work from a range of fields—media and cultural studies, linguistics, queer theory and so on—has been productive in the analysis of sexual representation, it is work which focuses most explicitly on the realm of the pornographic or on the “effect” of sexually explicit material which has been most visible in this area of study, and which comprises an identifiable set of key approaches. Most visible among these have been a feminist anti-pornography position organized around the claim that sexually explicit representation is a form of sexual violence that depends on the objectification of women for its charge; an historical approach, which examines the regulatory significance of pornography for modern cultures; and an attempt to pinpoint the characteristic aesthetic features of pornography in a way that relates the pornographic to other forms of cultural production, most particularly in terms of its transgression of dominant cultural norms. In turn, while these general approaches have been drawn on by a variety of theorists working within this area, they are most closely associated with particular writers, and it is to the work of these writers that I will refer. In particular, the feminist anti-pornography work of Andrea Dworkin ([1979] 1999), the historical account of pornographic regulation given by Walter Kendrick ([1987] 1996), and the discussion of pornography’s transgressiveness put forward by Laura Kipnis (1996) will be the major points of reference.

I will argue that while all three accounts offer productive ways of framing the analysis of sexual representations, a tendency towards essentialism in all of them serves to limit their application. The prominence of these approaches, with their privileging of the key terms “pornography” and “objectification,” is highly problematic for the development of work in this area. I will attempt to demonstrate the strengths and limitations of these approaches by focusing on the public controversy around an advert for Opium perfume in 2000, and I will argue that a greater attentiveness to the context of particular images and to the reactions they provoke, an attentiveness which has perhaps been more successfully developed elsewhere in cultural studies, may provide a more helpful way of developing the analysis of contemporary sexual representations.

The term “objectification” has been central to feminist critiques of sexual representation that examine how woman functions as a sign for patriarchy as its other, its spectacle and its subordinate *thing*. It has also been important in establishing feminist

critiques of pornography which focus not on “the sexual explicitness in pornography,” but on pornography’s “sexism,” its “characteristic reduction of women to passive, perpetually desiring bodies—or bits of bodies—eternally available for servicing men” (Lynne Segal 1992, p. 2). That pornography reduces “woman” to “object,” and that, in addition, objectification is a form of violence against women, is made particularly explicit in the well-known claims that, “The word pornography ... means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores ... Whores exist only within a framework of male sexual domination” (Dworkin [1979] 1999, p. 200), and that, “Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice” (Robin Morgan 1980, p. 139).

These claims, which work to link pornography, objectification, and violence so closely, exist within a fairly wide range of feminist accounts of pornography. However, their prominence has generally served to mask the variety of feminist discourse on sexual representation; indeed, they have frequently been perceived as representative of feminist views on sexuality *per se*. The idea that the objectification of women in pornography works to effect sexual violence in society, *is* a form of sexual violence against women, and typically involves the depiction of violence—“women ... tied up, stretched, hanged, fucked, gang-banged, whipped, beaten and begging for more” (Dworkin [1979] 1999, p. 201)—has become well-established as a commonsense understanding of what pornography is, largely through repetition rather than verification. It has been particularly influential in academic, institutional, and public understandings of sexual representation, working to frame and structure most discussions about this type of representation since the 1980s. For example, ongoing legal and ethical debates about emerging forms of pornography on the Internet are still quite strongly influenced by this view, while most analytical accounts of sexual representation take it as the starting point for discussion, *the* point that enables a clear position to be taken and elaborated. Despite its inability to define “objectification” or “pornography” very clearly, or to substantiate the impact and significance of sexual representation, the feminist anti-pornography approach remains important for the way it highlights the need to investigate imagery which constructs sex and gender in ways that may be hostile to women. However, its tendency to close down other ways of making sense of sexual representation remains deeply problematic.

## Re-reading Pornography and Objectification

The real existence of any *thing* ought to be thrown in doubt by the failure of several generations’ efforts to define it. (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. xiii)

The difficulty of defining either objectification or pornography has led to two important developments in research on pornography. The first is an historical examination of the ways in which “pornography” functions as a regulatory category that is underpinned by particular social concerns. Walter Kendrick argues that the struggle over pornographic definition masks a struggle over “power ... access to the world around us ... control over our own bodies and our own minds” (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. 236). Middle-class white men have generally exercised this power over more powerless groups—women, children, the working classes—and the creation of a “Secret Museum” of pornographic texts has been justified in terms of a concern with the harmful effects of these texts on such groups. This concern with pornography’s “effects” reveals a deep-

rooted fear about the power of representation, not to mention a fear of those who are imagined to be susceptible to this power. According to Kendrick, it is the processes of definition, classification, and concealment that create "pornography," and it is these processes that are of interest to the historian. It is therefore the "perennial little melodrama" played out around pornography (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. xiii), in which pornographic things function as "a symbol for anarchy" (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. 219), and their concealment works "to regulate the behaviour of those who seem to threaten the social order" (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. 235), which becomes the focus of investigation in this approach.

A second development in research on pornography involves the textual re-examination of the aesthetic, generic, and cultural characteristics of pornographic *things*. As Linda Williams (1989, p. 29) argues, "how can we adequately discuss the pornographic without making some stab at a description of specific pornography?" While at odds with Kendrick's approach in its focus—Kendrick is profoundly uninterested in the "things" which are labelled as pornography—this line of inquiry has covered some of the same ground. The work of Laura Kipnis (1996, p. 166) in particular has put forward the argument that the pornographic genre is "a realm of transgression that is, in effect, a counter-aesthetics to dominant norms for bodies, sexualities, and desire itself." While it is the struggle over pornographic definition that is crucial for Kendrick's argument, it is the characteristics of transgression which are of greater significance for Kipnis. Nonetheless, both accounts produce a model in which pornographic definition is key to understanding regulation as a power struggle over forms of representation and consumption and between dominant norms and transgression.

These developments in the study of pornography have enabled a reconsideration of pornography as a cultural and social category. They suggest that the regulation of pornography involves the regulation of any representation which contradicts dominant norms of sexuality, and an exercise of power over the lower classes, women, and children. However, neither of these developments directly addresses the question of women's objectification in pornography and other representations of sexuality, and in this sense, they are limited for the understanding of this issue which has been of such overwhelming importance for feminist discussions of sexual politics.

As Segal (1992, p. 11) has argued, sexual politics and pornography have been conflated in contemporary Western cultures, while political disputes over sexual power, knowledge, and representation have often taken the form of "debates over pornography." The centrality of sexuality for feminist theory and activism during the 1980s tended towards a privileging of pornography as "*the* feminist issue of the 1980s" (Segal 1992, p. 3), as emblematic of women's oppression under patriarchy at a moment when sexual abuse, harassment, and violence appeared as the most urgent political issues for many Western second-wave feminists. A concern with the power of images, already established in contemporary Western cultures and newly significant in the feminist cultural politics of the 1980s, has also underscored pornography's apparent importance for an understanding of the connections between representation and reality. Pornography has become "overburdened with significance" (Segal 1992, p. 65), as a culturally established way for speaking about sex, power, and regulation, as a kind of shorthand for women's discontents, as an emblem of misogyny and as a symbol of the power of the image.

It is partly for these reasons that the anti-pornography feminist position still retains its power for many feminists, and indeed for many women who do not otherwise

associate themselves with feminism. For them, developments within the pornography debate may not provide a satisfactory or persuasive resolution to the claim that pornography harms and humiliates women, either by providing a template for male sexual behaviour, or as a representative cultural statement of woman's purpose as a 'thing' for men. As Laura Kipnis (1996, p. 199) writes, for many women, this account may feel "fundamentally irrational, but at the same time, correct."

While there are clear historical reasons for the continuing importance of the term "objectification" for feminist analysis—which make the shortcomings of historical and textual accounts of pornography all the more frustrating—there are further problems with all of the approaches I have described. These hinge on the question of how pornography is defined in each account. While historical and textual approaches use the term pornography quite precisely to describe texts which are produced as transgressive through processes of regulation and restriction, or those which are restricted and regulated because of their perceived transgressive characteristics, the claim that pornography objectifies women does not make use of the term in the same way, and it does not put it to work to explore the historical and textual significance of pornography as a category. Whereas pornography means "the representation of transgressive forms of sexuality" for Kipnis, and "the processes used to regulate forms of sexual representation" for Kendrick, it means "the depiction of women as sexual objects" in the anti-pornography feminist position.

The very different starting points of writers such as Dworkin, Kendrick, and Kipnis, and the different ways in which they use the term pornography, should, in theory, be a productive difference which enables a multi-dimensional analysis of sexual texts and their significance, but in practice it has tended to produce a rather difficult area of study where the analysis of pornography and the analysis of the representation of women's sexuality has become somewhat unclear and entangled. It is perhaps the tendency towards essentialism in all three accounts which has limited the development of this area of study. While the work produced by these writers is often rich and detailed, the conclusions which are drawn are rigid and circular. For Dworkin, all pornography objectifies women and everything that objectifies women is pornography. According to Kendrick, all sexual representations which are subject to regulation become pornography, and all attempts to regulate pornography are an exercise of power over powerless groups, including women. For Kipnis, pornography always transgresses dominant norms of sexuality and gender, and whatever is sexual and transgressive is pornography. Little attention is given to the range of texts or practices, which may constitute the representation of sexuality at any given point, or to the contexts in which sexual representations are produced, circulated, consumed, debated, or regulated. Because of this, the positions taken by these theorists appear to cancel each other out in terms of their usefulness for discussing the political significance of sexual representations, and they are limited in terms of their application to a wide range of examples.

### **Reading "Opium"**

Despite their limitations, all three approaches to pornography that I have described provide useful starting points for the analysis of sexual representation, and I want to consider how they can be applied and developed in relation to one particular example. My choice of example is the Yves Saint Laurent advert for Opium perfume featuring the

model Sophie Dahl. This image, though not clearly “pornographic” in terms of its positioning in the market, became the focus of some controversy and of renewed debate about pornography and objectification in 2000. The subject of complaint, discussion, and at least two parodies (the image became the basis of the cover of novelist, Jeanette Winterson’s *The Power Book*, and of an advertising campaign for Newcastle Brown Ale the following year), the Opium advert was described as “the picture that’s divided Britain” (*The Sun* 2000, p. 17).

The concerns of all three approaches—regulation, sexual objectification, and aesthetics and transgression—were clearly visible in the controversy around the display and eventual banning of this image from billboards after the Advertising Standards Authority received over 900 complaints about it. The question of pornography as a regulatory category received some attention in media coverage which focused on the issue of acceptable contexts for the display of the advert and on the rights and wrongs of censorship. Complaints from some members of the public and discussions in the press suggested some disagreement about whether the advert presented woman as a sexual object, but the advert was finally condemned by the Advertising Standards Authority as offensive and degrading to women. Finally, the generic characteristics of the image were claimed variously as artistic, erotic, and pornographic, and this level of uncertainty about the generic status of the image is a particularly interesting feature of the Opium controversy.

Yves Saint Laurent, whose company commissioned the advert, argued that its image was “a tasteful nude in the tradition of high art” (in *The Age* 2000). The model, Dahl, is conventionally beautiful, supine, gleaming, displayed, contorted, and depilated for maximum visibility, a series of features which are used in the representation of women’s bodies in the tradition of high art as well as in some forms of mainstream, soft-core pornography. Indeed, the image was also read in terms of pornographic style. While some commentators argued that the image was erotic, its *power* was also commented on as evidence of a pornographic sensibility. Dyer’s claim that pornography is often identified by its ability to move the body (Richard Dyer 1992, p. 121) may be borne out by these comments, though this and the use of the term “erotic” as a mark of approval are difficult to locate in relation to any particular textual elements. More specifically, Dahl’s body may be read as a “porn body;” her splayed legs, closed eyes and open mouth are characteristic of soft-core imagery, while her relative fleshiness locates her within pornographic rather than contemporary fashion codes of beauty, as a signifier of sexual appetite and of the body’s materiality. In fact, the image appears to draw on codes associated with art, pornography, and fashion through its combination of high art aesthetics, its display of a “porn body;” the use of a well-known fashion model, and the evident purpose of the image as an advert for designer perfume. The term “porn chic” (in Libby Brooks 2000, p. 6) usefully indicates the blurring of codes in the advert.

The different codes which are drawn on in the image and the readings made in relation to them reveal how pornography is often characterized through a location within aesthetic hierarchies used to differentiate a body which signifies reason, cleanliness, and order (Lynda Nead 1992, p. 7) from one which is “insistently material, defiantly vulgar, corporeal” (Kipnis 1996, p. 132), and visual pleasures of “contemplation, discrimination and transcendent value” from those involving “motivation, promiscuity and commodification” (Nead 1992, p. 89). However, the blurring of codes in the Opium advert meant that it was possible to locate it within these hierarchies in different ways. It seems

reasonable to suggest that concerns about the materiality of the body and about sexual appetite underpin this kind of aesthetic classification. The advert may also have been perceived as controversial precisely because of the difficulty of locating it decisively in relation to art, erotica, pornography, or fashion. Anxieties about a trend towards the “pornographication” of mainstream media (Brian McNair 1996, p. 23) indicated in the term “porn chic” also suggest a concern with the maintenance of boundaries between these categories.

By comparison, a reading of the controversy in the terms of Kendrick’s historical approach allows for a focus on the image as a location for what Kendrick calls the “perennial little melodrama” (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. xiii) of pornography in which a cultural text becomes “pornography” through acts of categorization and regulation. The use of complaints and graffiti to label the advert as pornography, the identification of some potential effects (car crashes, the degradation of women) and victims (women and children) of its display, the framing of the controversy as a question about censorship, for example, in *The Sun*’s question, “Is it right to ban this ad?” (*The Sun* 2000, p. 17), and the eventual banning of the advert by the Advertising Standards Authority all indicate this process.

The context of the image’s display emerged as a particularly important issue in this process of “pornographizing” the advert. It was the location of the image in public space on billboards (as opposed to women’s magazines) and the resulting widespread offence, which necessitated intervention and containment. Concerns about the advert’s transgression of the boundaries of public and private space and about its subsequent effect on sensitive or impressionable people, reveals how “pornography” can be seen as something that is constructed through the location of texts in relation to particular spaces and to particular understandings of sexuality. Kendrick’s claim that pornographic things serve as “a symbol for anarchy” (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. 219) is relevant here in highlighting how the process of regulation may be a response to generalized anxieties about disorder and the transgression of boundaries. The containment of imagery likely to cause offence and undesirable effects suggests that sexuality is conceptualized as a distasteful and disorderly force, a point already noted in relation to the aesthetic categorization of body images. In addition, the concern with maintaining clear distinctions between the public and private suggests both a specific anxiety about sexuality in public and a more general concern with maintaining cultural and social categories and boundaries. The Opium advert appears to have been read as particularly transgressive precisely because of its blurring of aesthetic, generic, and spatial boundaries.

Both of these accounts are useful in isolating particular aspects of the controversy over the Opium advert and in making sense of the codes, readings, and regulatory processes used to construct pornography. Neither, however, deals directly with the question of women’s sexual objectification, a question that was very prominent in the controversy around the image. If we take the notion of objectification as a starting point for making sense of the image, we can note that it is not possible to establish whether the Opium advert depicts Dahl as a “vile whore,” or whether its effect is or will be some form of “rape.” However, it is possible to locate the image in terms of a body of writing which identifies how woman is presented as an object across a range of cultural forms. Dahl’s appearance in the Opium advert may be read as consistent with this form of presentation; she is “an object of vision: a sight” (John Berger 1972, p. 47), a spectacle standing for “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Laura Mulvey [1975] 1989, p. 19). Her closed eyes and parted legs and lips invite the viewer’s scrutiny; she is both on display and apparently

“caught unawares” (Annette Kuhn 1985, p. 32). Furthermore, her nakedness, cultural unplaceability, and lack of physical activity connote the natural world and passivity (Judith Williamson 1997, pp. 26–27). The image is consistent with “a basic asymmetry” in the “language of visual representation” in which woman stands for sex and the body (Griselda Pollock 1987, p. 137). At the same time, it is evident that this kind of depiction in which woman becomes a signifier of visual and sexual pleasure for others is neither restricted to pornographic texts nor is it a necessary or inevitable characteristic of pornography.

In order to make use of the accounts of pornography and of objectification that I have described, it is necessary to disentangle the claims made by theorists working with these approaches. Textual and historical accounts of pornography are useful in isolating the issues at stake in the categorization of cultural texts as pornographic or otherwise. They reveal how pornography functions to express and contain a particular view of sexuality as disorderly and dangerous, and as part of a process of maintaining boundaries between the acceptable and unacceptable that it simultaneously transgresses and upholds. In this sense, “A culture’s pornography becomes, in effect, a very precise map of that culture’s borders” (Kipnis 1996, p. 164). The reading of the Opium advert as somehow pornographic may therefore be understood as an effect of its problematic location in relation to the culture’s borders. However, the specific charge that the advert was degrading to women, as both feminist graffiti and the Advertising Standards Authority concluded, requires a broader understanding of the significance of “woman” as a sign for sex, the body, and visual pleasure. Like pornography, the female body is overburdened with significance, and both are frequently at the centre of border disputes over sexual and representational norms. This is precisely the point where the accounts of pornography and objectification which I have described, become a little difficult to apply, because although they draw attention to the characteristic codes and practices that denote sex and gender norms and their transgression, they have little to say about the significance of these at any given moment in time. While the claims made by Kendrick that pornography is a “melodrama in which ... the parts remain much as they were first written” (Kendrick [1987] 1996, p. xiii), by Kipnis that pornography’s “primary rule is transgression” (Kipnis 1996, p. 164), and by Pollock that there is “a basic asymmetry” in the “language of visual representation” (Pollock 1987, p. 137) are useful in sketching out a broad framework for analysing this advert and the disputes about its significance, they are less helpful in contextualizing the significance of the image and the struggle over its meaning.

### **Re-reading “The Picture That Divided Britain”**

While debates about objectification are useful as a means of situating the Opium advert in relation to the cultural significance of “woman,” they reveal very little about the ways in which images of women may read in different contexts. As Kathy Myers (1987, p. 195) argues, “the notion that exploitation resides in the representation of female sexuality *per se*, rather than in its contextualisation” may lead to a “reductive essentialism.” Myers argues that all images involve some measure of objectification and that this is something that needs to be differentiated from the particular representational processes by which women are dehumanized, commodified, and alienated (Myers 1987, pp. 198–199). Her comparison of superficially similar soft-core pornographic and fashion

images in terms of their mode of address and conditions of production and consumption is useful in illustrating this point. She shows that while both of these put women on display, the fashion images address a female audience through a portrayal of “confident, self engrossed narcissism” (Myers 1987, p. 197) and an “ideal version of the self” (Myers 1987, p. 198). This portrayal is achieved not only through textual elements such as the model’s pose, but through contextual factors such as the choice of a slender fashion model, the cropping, retouching and anchoring of her image, and its location within a glossy women’s magazine. Myers’ points are important because they illustrate how images are always read in relation to other images and in relation to their context, and her argument is useful for recontextualizing a reading of the Opium advert.

As I have suggested, the Opium image called on a range of aesthetic codes in a way that allowed it to be located as art, fashion, erotica, and pornography. In some readings, this blurring of codes appeared to mobilize anxieties about the maintenance of aesthetic categories and hierarchies. That the advert also seemed to reference a contemporary pornographication of mainstream imagery may have intensified these anxieties. But in other readings, the image appeared to combine fashion elements which signified feminine pride and confidence with pornographic elements connoting the disorderly, pleasure-seeking female body in a positive and empowering way.

For a number of female journalists, it was also Dahl’s reputation and significance as a fashion model which framed their reading of the advert and its presentation of women’s sexuality. In particular, her healthy size compared to that of “superwaif” models allowed her image to be read favourably in relation to theirs. It was partly because of this that the objectification of Dahl’s body was perceived quite differently in these readings; her size was taken to connote and celebrate “the curves, lushness and passion of women” (Sally Emerson 2000, p. 9) and her fleshiness to signify “the very essence of a strong, sexy woman” (Sharon Hendry 2000, p. 17). Dahl was compared favourably to models like Claudia Schiffer who, it was argued, were “the embodiment of female sexual passivity ... as challenging as a blowup doll” (Brooks 2000, p. 6). Interestingly, these comments reveal something of a reversal of Myers’ points about the juxtaposition of fashion and porn bodies. Here, it is the fashion body, which connotes passivity rather than self-possession, while Dahl’s “porn body” signifies sensuality, strength, and power. It is also notable that in these readings the languid pose adopted by Dahl becomes a signifier of sexual autonomy and pleasure, despite its long history as a sign of women’s sexual passivity, not least in previous Opium advertising campaigns where the reclining model is understood to connote submission and even death (Rosalind Coward 1982, p. 18).

In addition, questions of “effects” and of regulation acquired new meanings in the reception of the image. Dahl’s size was often read in terms of an ideal version not only of but *for* the average woman—powerful and sensual, both desirable and desiring. By comparison, her tame superwaif counterparts were seen as damaging and harmful to women’s self-esteem. The visibility of this ideal, emphasized in Dahl’s physical size, and in the size and public location of the image on billboards, became the focus for some reconsideration of the effects of representations of women. In particular, what emerged in the positive responses to Dahl’s image was a demand for less restrictive ideals of female beauty and for “stronger” representations, both in terms of a more explicit sexuality and a more powerful presence. The recasting of conventional forms of representation (the safe, the thin, and the asexual) as harmful to women was an interesting development in the controversy. The implication that sexual display might be a source of

power rather than danger for women and that the regulation of strong imagery might conceal a disgust for women's bodies, indicates that the reading of pornography and objectification was publicly framed in quite new ways. For some viewers, the disruption of aesthetic categories and the spilling over of pornographic style into mainstream imagery and public space was perceived as a very welcome development in the depiction of female sexuality.

The range of sex and gender meanings that the Opium advert was able to generate demonstrates that the significance of sexual representations is always relational; the advert was read in relation to pre-existing artistic, pornographic, and fashion conventions, and derived its meaning in relation to a variety of discourses including those around body image, celebrity, feminist politics, and the sexualization of mainstream culture. The approaches to pornography and objectification that I have discussed have identified how some of these relations have been constructed, albeit in a general way, to denote a porn body, to signify female passivity and availability, or to produce a set of spatial arrangements that locate sexual representation as a private affair, for example. However, what these approaches do not adequately capture are the variations and changes in the ways that these relations are played out socially and culturally. For example, the division between porn bodies and fashion bodies is now generally less clearly marked than it has been in the past. The influence of feminist debates about body image and sexual display has in itself worked to reframe notions of female sexual objectification, and the erosion of boundaries between private sexual space and the public sphere in a variety of media has problematized any clear notion of effective regulation.

While issues of transgression, objectification, and regulation continue to be extremely important in the discussion of sexual representations, it is necessary to contextualize them precisely. Mark Jancovich (2001) notes that in contemporary consumer culture, an ethic of "fun" and "calculated hedonism" has increasingly worked to mainstream transgression and to celebrate a liberated, "sexy" body. The depiction of "new sexualities," evident since the 1990s in a range of popular media and breaking with existing norms of feminine behaviour by addressing women as knowing and lustful, has worked to re-frame sexualized images of women as a form of what Angela McRobbie has called "girls' camp" (Angela McRobbie 1997, p. 198). In such a context, the significance of the pornographic, of objectification, and of images of sexual display is modified. In this context, pornography generally attracts far less censure as a forbidden and harmful set of cultural texts, except where its production clearly indicates actual abuse. Objectification is, perhaps, more likely to be understood as a necessary precondition for erotic gazing in a narcissistic culture where the body is widely represented as an object for display and a key component of a marketable self (Mike Featherstone 1996). In this climate, where there is "strong encouragement to a female gaze and the creation of a space for male narcissism" (Kenneth MacKinnon 1997, p. 190), the ability to secure the gaze of others may increasingly connote desirability and self-importance for both women and men. Dahl's body is therefore available for reading as an emblem of liberation, fun, self-pleasure, and pride, not only within an older libertarian tradition which celebrates pornography, but also for a much wider readership for which sexy images have become the currency of the day.

That Dahl's fame and her size became key indicators in these readings is also indicative of the contemporary preoccupation with the celebrity body in today's consumer culture. Celebrity revelation and exposure has become quite firmly established as a trend in popular media, and the bodies of male and female celebrities have been used

to signify a quite different range of meanings from those of the anonymous models of porn, as powerful indicators of an ideal self rather than as disposable objects of use. The popular media has become an important domain for the negotiation of gender and of feminism (Janice Winship 2000, p. 30), and the female celebrity body has become a particularly potent sign for the successful performance of femininity in a consumerist and post-feminist world where self-fashioning, the cultivation of image, and the management of impressions is privileged. Sexual display has also to some extent developed more positive connotations in a culture in which female celebrities routinely present their bodies as objects of spectacle which indicate success, confidence, assertive female sexuality, and power. At the same time, celebrity bodies have become a focus for debate about body image, particularly in relation to size and nourishment, and, as I have shown, Dahl's significance within this debate was drawn on in some of the readings which were made of the Opium image. Thus, although notions of objectification as an expression of hostility towards women continued to be drawn on in some readings of Dahl's image, a range of other contextual factors were used in other readings to construct Dahl's body as an image of a strong and successful female self for whom sexual display represented a refusal of regulation and a transgression of older, dominant norms of good feminine behaviour.

Sexual tastes shift, though they remain a focus for contest as the controversy over the Opium image demonstrates. While established indicators of pornographic style and of spatial positioning were used by some viewers to establish a reading of the image *as* pornography, for others, the shifts which have worked to mainstream and routinize sexualized imagery meant that the image was framed quite differently, either as a form of porn-chic or perhaps not as any kind of porn at all. The movement of the Opium advert from women's magazines to billboards was also representative of a trend towards "in-your-face advertising," increasingly aimed at young, affluent women since the 1990s (Winship 2000, pp. 42–43) and including, most notoriously, the 1994 Wonderbra "Hello boys" campaign. Janice Winship (2000, p. 41) argues that this type of campaign was part of the new sexual discourse of the 1990s; a discourse which foregrounded women's sexual autonomy, and which in advertising campaigns often took the form of play with the significance of sexual objectification and spectatorship. In women's magazines, such campaigns functioned as a form of "private dialogue" with women about "holding attention" and "being held." As the campaigns moved from magazines to billboards, a number of boundaries were disturbed. A relatively private dialogue was placed in public space, and unusually, women were associated with and addressed in "the outdoors." In the process, sexual discourse was repositioned as public discourse (Winship 2000, p. 43). Campaigns such as "Wonderbra" became extremely visible in this way, both as a new form of popular but explicit representation and as a locus for discussion about sexuality and its representation. They can be seen as indicative of the shift towards a more sexualized culture in which the boundaries between mainstream and pornographic representation became increasingly blurred.

As Brian McNair has noted, we increasingly inhabit a sexualized culture. Forms of "porno-chic" which include texts that flirt "with the aesthetic and narrative conventions of pornography" and texts which talk "about pornography in various discursive modes" (Brian McNair 2002, p. 70) have proliferated and developed alongside the expansion of the "pornosphere" and of a "striptease culture" focused on "sexual confession and self-revelation" and manifested in talk shows, docu-soaps, print media, and on the

Internet (McNair 2002, p. 88). All these developments may be understood as part of a “wider culture of confession and public intimacy” (McNair 2002, p. 98), and, according to McNair (2000), interpreted as evidence, not only of “changing social attitudes and tastes” (p. 107), but of “a democratization and diversification of sexual discourse” (p. 205). While it may be the case that tastes in sexual representations are changing, the extent to which these are indicators of democracy and diversity is debatable. Certainly, a wider range of sexual texts and discourses are *accessible* to consumers, and they offer images of female sexuality which are capable of signifying more than “whore”—at least for some readers. The Opium image and the controversy which surrounded its display act as a useful barometer of how the mainstream sexual landscape may be changing, but we should be wary of jumping to conclusions about its wider significance. As Jancovich (2001) argues, the changing taste formations which have inflected the meanings carried by the pornographic, and by the disorderly or “grotesque” body, have worked to construct a representation of “liberated” sexuality which is “both a liberation from alienation and a whole new mode of alienation.” And, while the existence of the Opium image provides a measure of how much the sexual landscape has changed, the fact that it was widely experienced as controversial suggests a continuing struggle over the boundaries of acceptable representation and over norms of sexuality and gender.

The Opium advert controversy suggests that an understanding of pornography and objectification depends on and demands a continual reframing. Textual characteristics, aesthetic and spatial categories, processes of regulation, and conventions of sexual and gender representation depend on each other for their meaning. The image can be read not only in relation to other images but also in relation to established traditions of representation and to emerging discourses of gender and sexuality. Thus, its combination of aesthetic codes allows readings to be made which situate it in relation to other artistic, fashion, and pornographic representations and in relation to the developing trend towards sexualized mainstream media. Its placement in different spatial contexts highlights the connections and contradictions which are at stake in disputes over the ownership of space and media, and allows these readings to be further inflected. Finally, the image may be understood in the context of emerging discourses of gender and sexuality, on which feminism has itself made a significant impact. It seems likely that border disputes over categories, spaces, and women’s bodies are likely to be intensified in a climate where the boundaries between the real and representational, public and private, high and low cultural forms, and acceptable and unacceptable sexualities are widely experienced as disintegrating. In order to make sense of these border disputes, a combination and contextualization of insights into both objectification and pornography will be increasingly essential.

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