

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE PHOTO-TRANSFORMATION OF THE
HUMAN FORM, THROUGH A RESEARCH OF ITS CONTEMPORARY
INFLUENTIAL IMAGERY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR CULTURE

THESIS

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to look at how the figure is imaged through the photographic medium today.

Through this purpose I aim to explore the individual expression of the photographer in his photographic medium; the expression of the figure within the medium and the diverse practises of this medium in society – to build up an awareness and understanding of the diverse representations of the human form.

The general aims of study are:

- 1 – to study how these three photographers choose to photograph the figure, through their technical, compositional and individual approach.
- 2 – to show how diverse the usage of the photographic figure is in the visual world.
- 3 – to expose an awareness of the photographic figure as transformation of an expression of self.
- 4 – to show the relationship between the photographer and the figure, the camera and the photographer, the camera and the figure, and the photographic figure and the viewer.
- 5 – to study my own photographic imagery in relation to the other imagery discussed.

My research information was collected through: observations, discussions, literature and practical exploration.

This study will attempt to draw conclusions, from its explorations, that will highlight the importance of the individual eye: that it is the individual eye that becomes the vehicle of transformation.

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

“The seer cannot directly see his own eye. But the seer can be seen. Centres of seeing can arise everywhere, so that my seeing is seen. The life-field has a variable structure.”
(Tiemersma, 1989:348)

In these modern times, the photography medium has spread its powerful and visually-accessible image across the pages of our culture. It has become a marketing tool for the advertising media and the darker enigmatic world of the pornographic industry. It records these worlds and delivers to us, the viewer, products to choose from, convincing us that the product will result in a better living morale.

The lens has usurped the psychologically comfortable position of the voyeur. Now, through the magical eye of the lens, we can watch from the darker recesses of our egos and feed off the images that are continuously flashed before us. This is the photographer’s choice.

The three photographers which I have chosen to write about – Cindy Sherman (USA) (Plate 1), Robert Mapplethorpe (USA) (Plate 2) and Jan Saudek (Czech Republic) (Plate 3), each explore the expressive power of the human form, which they capture through the persuasive mechanics of the photographic medium. They use this charismatic relationship between body and camera to produce differing effects of portrayal and self-expression.

Thus, in observing The Photograph today – that is, the strong ties this imagery has to our social market, and what these three photographers ‘shoot’ as body-subject, we can see that their eye and expression are integrally connected with the socially-absorbed photographic image. Each of them successfully captures their own particular portrayals, because we as the viewers have already been visually prepared. Our perceptions of the human form have already been saturated by the visual availability the photograph has in our market today.

These photographers have then capitalised on this, or rather, they have extracted specific expressions of body-portrayal from the comfortable welter of social imagery we know it in and have ripped open its pretentious veneer. They have delved further into photography's comfortable portrayal and by exaggerating its very subtleties, have expressed the essence of that specific representation.

Cindy Sherman uses the photograph to record her performance as 'She' – she being the stereotypical woman, or women, in our society. Sherman works in series. Beginning with her B/W 8X10" prints, "Film Stills", reminiscent of 1950's 'film noir', Sherman plays upon the "B-rate" representations of the self-conscious, angst-ridden women evident in all levels of our society. From the bobbysoxed, bouncing-breasted American girl, to the mascara tear-stained woman in a bar, Sherman acts as director, stylist, actress and photographer. Her series have since progressed from the small B/W "Film Stills" to huge 95X64" colour representations of more contemporary everyday women. Her "History Portraits", using less theatrical props portray the role of the Madonna and even men in the more classic, old-master techniques of portrayal. Her more recent "Sex Series", using only plastic body-parts renders the graphic vulgarity of the stereo-porno image.

As Sherman uses the narrative in her performance-image, so Robert Mapplethorpe tells the story of his subjects through his portraiture. These include celebrities from the cultural world as well as the more underground participants of the homo-erotic domain. The starkly-lit B/W square-format technique captures the essence of expression and self in each image – whether it be his familiar black male nudes, his varied portrayals of Lisa Lyon, his vivid sado-masochistic imagery, celebrity portraits of people like Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman, or his Self-Portraits. Each image records the story of an event or of self as each subject unveils his own hidden self or selves - that essence of being which usually remains guarded from the outside world.

Jan Saudek expresses his own narrative too – that of the 'woman essence' which he idolizes in every girl-child and woman. Within his theatrical imagery, he combines his own subjective 'story' by using props and hand-colouring in conjunction with the

'realness' that is contained within his female figures. This results in an 'ambience' that extends beyond the picture plane into the world of the spectator. Saudek also photographs himself using his body-image in his few portrayals of the male figure. These are not self-portraits as such, as in Mapplethorpe's portraits of himself, but role plays for the male figure. They usually remain anonymous and have no facial reference.

In my own work, I attempt to explore the many aspects of the body form from portraiture, the nude, as well as the conceptual 'story' of the figurative. Each of these photographers have influenced the way in which I work. Sherman influenced my approach to representing the figure under certain concepts and themes, Mapplethorpe through his use of studio portraits and image-cropping and Saudek in his subtle erotic portrayals of the female within his environment of props and hand-colouring.

Their clarity in isolating socially-inflected and confused issues such as pornography, and how they interpreted and expressed these facets so subjectively, intrigued me. Their similarities and diversities compelled me to attempt to analyse this rich imagery collectively.

In writing this thesis, I will attempt to explore, in more detail, the use of the human form and its body-language as a powerful tool to illustrate visual diversity in our culture. In discussing these three contemporary photographers, I shall attempt to expose the influences they have in the public forum of photography today. I shall investigate the individual foundations they have laid in their work, through their extractive influences born from certain visual markets of the human form, such as advertising and pornography.

Because the visual representation of the human form is so diverse, I have discussed the different approaches independently. These include the portrait and the self-portrait, the nude and semi-nude figure and their erotic and pornographic content/intent. Within these methods of representation, I shall attempt to express the conceptual relationships of body-image, voyeurism and scopophilia, which forms a continuum between figure and lens, photographer and image, viewing space and spectator – the continuous full-flowing cycle or circle of the visual image.

THE PORTRAIT

The portrait is a representation of the sitter in their likeness. It is also a subjective direction of portrayal which the photographer has chosen to express them in. The sitter, placed before the camera becomes malleable – a sense of nakedness in self, as he waits to be directed by the photographer. He sits, poised in apprehension, wary, as this is the photographer's domain which he has the power to manipulate or extract from the sitter's own territory.

The portrayal of the sitter is therefore the photographer's interpretation of 'self'. The portrait is not designed to idealise but to express that hidden virtue of self in the one representation. The same sitter can be photographed more than once, each portrayal representing a different facet of self.

'Snap-shots' which contain people all lack 'selfness', except to those close to that particular moment in time. They are ghost-recordings of someone who was there, but who was never really there – the self remaining remote from the camera. The key element in the 'snap' which is this self-identity, is not disclosed and therefore collapses in on itself, unable to communicate as an honest expression.

Thus, the photographer involved in the genre of portraiture has immense control of the representational process and the final portrayal. One could call it 'style' – that the sitter can move around within himself attempting to rid himself of his self-consciousness. However, the realm in which he roams becomes the photographer's domain. The photographer's 'style' allows certain freedoms within self-dom in order to capture a particular kind of expression and hence, representation of a specific identity.

Through the aesthetic control of the photographer, the camera remains narcissistic. The camera, however, has technical limitations. Even operated by the photographer, the camera becomes a thrusting instrument forcing its eye into the heart of its subject. This causes self-consciousness in the sitter – the lens probing into the territory of self to extract an essence. It is intrusive in a way that most people find offensive and unnerving. Yet it is also a magical device which in stealthy silence can, with the focus of the

photographer, capture an essence of self. It's no small wonder that early primitive cultures at first introduction to being photographed, refused to pose on the grounds that the camera was a demon which stole the soul from the body. That fear still holds today, because people instinctively recognise the camera's ability to 'capture' and express something usually well-hidden behind some guise. People want to look good. They want themselves and others to see them as attractive. However, it takes a "moment of time" for the 'pose' to be enacted. The camera can simultaneously express this and also beyond it. Its magical eye has the power to focus on the real embodiment of the self behind the mask. It has the capacity to disclose the battle between body-image and self-dom.

In being photographed by Mapplethorpe, Susan Sontag describes the feeling of being "... stowed away, berthed, brought to heel, my consciousness has abdicated its normal function, which is amplitude – to give me mobility. I don't feel threatened. But I do feel disarmed, my consciousness reduced by an embarrassed knot of self-consciousness, striving for composure. Immobilized for the camera's security, I feel the weight of my facial mask ... I experience myself as behind my face ... Is it puritan anxiety about pretending, posing?"

(s.n.1985)

Mapplethorpe's portraiture explores the form of the human subject using a square format. He extracts a mystical quality of self. His adroit studio lighting enhances the enigmatic quality of the sitter – that substance of character which makes that person who they are. Light follows facial contours and expression, creating a contrast against his use of shadows and dark backdrops. The composition is always simple and formalised which strengthens the portrayal. Lisa Lyon, winner of the world's first women's body-building contest became a familiar subject for Mapplethorpe. In his book "Lady Lisa Lyon", he explored all possible portrayals of her using the dominant feature of her muscular form. This included beach scenes, erotic semi-clothed portrayals and studio close-ups of her body, always using the strong square format to create compositional strength. His ability to capture the 'female' form of Lyon both as a sensuous woman as well as a well-developed muscular shape is remarkable. His studio portrait, "Lisa Lyon" 1982, (Plate 4), expresses the essence of her as a woman, not as a

body-builder. In a play of light and dark, she stares into the lens with an expression of earnest suggestion around her mouth. Composed within the square format, she reveals her breasts, her fingers holding her nipples. This particular representation of her examines her erotic appeal as a beautiful woman, comfortable in her female body with no suggestion of her body-building activities evident, although it does portray her in a physical way. Her public 'face' is a physical one and this portrait reveals this, but through the expression of her femininity.

Although Mapplethorpe did many celebrity portraits, he also executed more subjective portraiture where expression is structured through light and more particularly, shape. "Ken Moody and Robert Sherman" 1984, (Plate 5), suggests an almost sculptural opaque quality to the human forms portrayed. Manipulating light and dark, light shape following dark shape becoming ethereal and diffusing stillness, yet remaining real as two human identities. The identities of the two subjects are strengthened through the title. Mapplethorpe recognises polarities in one composition extremely well, as reflecting one off the other.

However, there always remains a diversity of representation in Mapplethorpe's portraiture with regards to the type of sitter and the way in which he chooses to portray them. His portraits of celebrities differ from his sensuous studio portraits, as does his different approach in portraying couples from the homo-erotic world. This type of portrait was innovative at the time and therefore visually effective. These people were friends and felt comfortable 'sitting'. "Brian Ridley & Lyle Heeter" 1979, (Plate 6), portrays an S & M couple in an over-ornate and kitsch lounge. One can see that there is no false rendition of character here. These people are who they say they are, quite comfortably 'sitting', knowing that what they represent in underground society may be to many, plain unacceptable. This is all strangely and effectively contrasted by the very suburban kitsch lounge décor. This couple does not belong here. They are at odds with their immediate surroundings, visually as well as aesthetically, re-inforcing the potency of the portrait – the juxtaposition of two strongly opposing facets of society.

Mapplethorpe says about this image and others that he photographed from this subterranean world that, “I was in a position to take those pictures and I felt an obligation to do them. I knew those people, they were willing to pose for me and it was something that hadn’t been captured before by a photographer of any merit.”

(Weiley,1988:108)

One notable portrait by Mapplethorpe, is that of “Cindy Sherman” 1983, (Plate 7). She has explored many types of portraits in her own work so it is a pleasant surprise to see Sherman being portrayed without the familiar blanketing of her own work. This is Sherman as Sherman, representing only herself. Mapplethorpe’s manipulation of her pose in a jacket, keeps the composition austere and simple. The viewer’s eye moves from eyes to hair-shape to jacket shape and back to the eyes again, keeping the essence of expression within the simplicity itself. It de-mystifies Sherman in terms of its straightforwardness. We as viewers can now study Sherman as she – as a reflection upon her work.

Sherman, through her work, stands in stark opposition to Mapplethorpe’s portrait of her. These concentrated representations are an embodiment of various social roles enacted by Sherman in her theatre. They are not self-portraits, but rather well-rehearsed performances. As the actor embraces his role, so Sherman sheds her own body-image to express the Ego, (or lack of it) in her character portrayal. She has expressed the opinion that her work should be seen as a performance, and the camera-image a record thereof.

Sherman documents the labyrinthine maze of representation itself. She represents herself as a representation of a character that represents a certain social niche. The camera then presents the chosen representation to us as the viewer, completing the cycle of presenting representation itself.

“Once I’m set up, the camera starts clicking, then I just start to move and watch how I move in the mirror. It’s not like I’m method-acting or anything, I don’t feel that I am that person. I may be thinking about a certain story or situation, but I don’t become her. There’s this distance. The image in the mirror becomes her – the image the camera gets on film.”

(Marzorati,1983:81)

Sherman as herself becomes invisible. Cloaked within her guise, we do not see self, except representing what she wishes us to see and even that may not be her. In her "History Portraits", hours of preparation produce a reproduction of a Renaissance-like image. The use of false breasts, body-parts, wigs and make-up becomes the core of the guise. Sherman reveals no part of her own naked self. One interesting aspect of these "History Portraits", (Plate 8), is that Sherman transforms her own sex in her few representations of the male, something she did not explore in her previous series. This can be seen as a progressive step in Sherman's ability to submerge her-self down to the point of gender, from the preparation and into the performance of the character's role.

Sherman's earlier series or projects, her first Black & White "Film Stills" evolved to colour transparency records, the print format growing considerably in size. Her "Film Stills" – presented in B/W 8x10" print format, explored representations of stereotypical women. Compared to her later 95x64" colour images, these images depend less on theatrical props and more on the mood conveyed through environment, expression and placement of the figure within the composition. Sherman tells a story as if taken from a B-type movie, where the woman represented is in some kind of self-doubt or anxiety. If one compares "Film Still No.4" 1972, (Plate 9), to "Film Still No.27" 1979, (Plate 10), one can 'taste' the unsettled, doubting 'selfness' emanating from these female characters – variations of "She" arising from the different type of situation portrayed.

In keeping with the thematic rendering of "She", Sherman then moved on to using large colour format. Still using her 35mm SLR camera with a motor-drive on a tripod, she started exploring the atmospheric effects of placing coloured gels on her lighting in order to enhance her character's mood. "Untitled" 1982, (Plate 11), shows the more austere and formal image from this series – the everyday "She". The bursting tension of the image is expressed primarily through bodily pose and the revealing eye. The lighting which remains direct, enhances a climatic coldness, as well as the lurking shadow behind the figure.

“ ... I put some red make-up around my face to make it look like I was so angry I was going to burst ... It was a kind of Frances Farmerish influence.”

(Marzorati,1983:80)

Continuing to leave her work without titles, Sherman enhances the extraction of her performance. One could perhaps call them “universal representations” referring to no one thing in particular except societal roles. Another one of her personal techniques is her method of enlarging her performance records. She uses the photographic image in itself to enhance the representative aspect of her portrayals. By manipulating a law of optics through an exaggerated degree of enlargement, ($\pm 95 \times 64''$), the objects in the image are flattened and hence lean towards abstraction so that they lose some of their original identity through size.

According to Collins' Dictionary, (Second Edition:777), the self is described as “an individual's consciousness of his own identity of being”. However, looking at Sherman's images, although using herself as subject, she does not portray her own identity's consciousness. Sherman's consciousness lies in the expression of her creation, not in the self portrayed. She is not giving us, the viewer, a body-image of herself. She is transformed through a photo-reproduction of her theatrical role into representations of other 'selves'.

How then does the photographer use himself, his own body-image, to explore and express an aspect of himself? Painters have done it for centuries through different methods of painting techniques. Not many photographers have done this. To photograph oneself – to recreate a facet of oneself in a photo-portrait embodies a symbiotic relationship between the self and the camera. If the portrait is an honest expression of identity, then the self-sitter must shed his skin before the mechanical eye. The objective image must therefore be preceded by a subjective approach of elemental consciousness – a seeking to capture within the momentous blinking of the eye, the birth of a fundamental self-evidence.

The camera becomes again, a narcissistic body, a probing vehicle used by the photographer to seek an aspect of his identity. The photographer and the sitter become one through the eye of the camera, which takes control of what is seen and captured. The self-sitter in his latency, has only a sense of what is being seen, as he is now the one being looked at. He cannot see what the camera sees.

He has relinquished his control as photographer in his search for a sense of self, which he will only recognise after the development of the latent image. Only after he has resumed his role as photographer will he be able to see the identity he assumed as sitter.

As a photographer, this is what I experience in the isolated world of the self-taking-a-portrait-of-some-sense-of-self, otherwise termed the Self-Portrait. There, in front of the camera, with only thin definitions of the image-outcome, it seems an empty world on the other view-finding side. There seems to be an abyss in that world of watching. Now, here before the blinking-eye, there is only self-awareness of self-expression, only a latent idea of representation, but one that becomes self-consuming. The result is a visible representation of one expressionable facet of self.

“Film Stills No.s 2&3” (Plate 12), is my personal visual experiment of recording the self, paying homage to the influence of Cindy Sherman. I attempted to explore the self-portrait, through the same sort of performance Sherman uses. The B-rate horror theme is from the American fictional and somewhat trite character and film critic, Joe Bob Briggs, who drives around in the USA, from drive-in to drive-in, reviewing B-rate horror movies. So, I remain like myself, unlike Sherman, but express an essence of self through my fictional horror-performance. This is a fictional performance of a fictional trite theme in an attempt to express an honest essence of self. I wanted to explore the possibility of expressing something fundamental through a horror theme that can be simultaneously seen as sentimental. By placing the two “Stills” together, a continuation of this moment was made seemingly more conducive to portraying self-body-rhythm in the frozen film frames – the movement and time the body took to act emotionally and then registering as visual expression.

Robert Mapplethorpe also sought possible selves through the self-portrait. By looking at his two self-portraits from 1980, (Plates 13 & 14), one can see his own experiments documenting himself in certain roles of self.

“It was a goof to put make-up on and see how I look in drag . . . I never did it again, and I never will, I didn’t feel comfortable. But I wanted to see what it was like. I wanted to see what that experience was about.”

(Weiley,1988:108/9)

By juxtaposing the two portrayals – one naked and in make-up, the other in a teddy-boy impersonation, Mapplethorpe represents different facets of himself. They are both compositionally identical except for vital differences in facial expression and those expressed through his particular ‘dress’. They cannot be compared to Sherman’s use of role-playing, as these two presentations of Mapplethorpe’s are literally mirror-images – Mapplethorpe dressing up to experience recording and seeking a representative record of that exploration. There is role-playing in each image, but both remain direct and honest, not attempting to become anything other than explorative ‘drag-dressing’.

I also attempted this juxtaposing of two slightly differing portrayals with two different sitters. “Michael & Blue”, (Plate 15), represent the differing characteristics of the male body. These are but some of the many types of bodies. I was interested in this specific parallel as both exist in the same peripheral realm of the ‘norm’. Through keeping camera angle, lighting and composition of body the same within the frame, I achieve the juxtapositioning of a dark-skinned, dread-locked man with a fair-headed, pale-skinned man, both tattooed and both seductive within their masculinity, yet both different in physical form and expression. Although I placed them together in the viewing space, they do not form a diptych. They exist side by side as different entities requiring the viewer to contemplate them individually through the differences that are highlighted between them.

I started to explore the square format, particularly as regards studio portraiture, after observing how poignantly Mapplethorpe composed the figure within this difficult format. All four corners pull away, equally, from the centre. It is an extremely bold photographic format, which, if not carefully composed, can dominate over the image. Mapplethorpe’s portraits, most of which are head and shoulders, fit comfortably within the square, the sitter’s form nudging the four corners into a quiet shape.

I find, as a viewer, the shape of the 35mm negative a comfortable and accommodating space relative to the environment of the sitter. It allows the eye to move around within the edges of the frame. One has the choice of using a vertical or horizontal format, which can be used as a compositional device (as Cindy Sherman does). With the horizontal format a sense of space is created, as the eye reads from left to right, visually absorbing more of the sitter’s environment. With the vertical format, its upright shape creates a narrow and tense restriction, forcing the eye to read up and down.

We can see the effect of this compositional choice in Sherman's work, particularly in her early "Film Stills", (Plates 9 & 10). The horizontal images feed in more of the 'woman's' environment, whereas, if vertical, the eye is forced to concentrate more on the figure itself. Thus, technical choice of camera format when photographing the human form, is fairly important. It always remains the subjective choice of the photographer, bearing in mind that a photographic format can speak for itself and enhance the mood, particularly in portraiture. 'Mood' has to primarily emanate from the sitter as himself in an impersonal studio/location environment.

THE NUDE

In the worlds of art, advertising and pornography, the visual image of the human figure is always a dominant visual shape, either as a subject for sale, or as an illustration.

We as consumers, voyeurs, dreamers, spectators and creators love looking at the human form in all its guises. We all suffer from scopophilia – the love of looking at someone else's bodily form. The removed, elevated image gives us something to compare ourselves to. It allows us to bounce off reflections of our own image. It is an instinctive way of accepting and rejecting parts of our body image, moulding them into an acceptable mask with which we can face the outside world. It does not necessarily remain the passive pleasure of being the voyeur. It can be the active pleasure of being an exhibitionist who derives a feeling of self-satisfaction in being looked at.

Our love of looking and watching ties up with our awareness of ego. This is worn as an armour – the skin ego – a protective sheath that grows together with the foetus. It is a continuous protective surface that helps the Self distinguish between outside and inside stimuli. It enables the Self to register all the stimuli from the outside, through it, and to combine it all into one common sense or awareness. Through the skin ego, we obtain our sense of self-image, just as the mirror teaches the child to see his body objectively as others would see it. How we look at other body images, identifies how we look at the actions of our own.

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak."

(Berger,1972:7)

Paul Schilder, a psycho-analyst, claims the body-image to be, “the spatial image, which everybody has about himself,” (Tiemersma,1989:21). He defines this “spatial image” as existing in both mental and physical interpretations of the self – to be a “psychophysical” (Ibid.) construction. We interpret it mentally by imagining how we appear to ourselves, in conjunction with a physical representation, which has the power to stipulate certain behaviour patterns. The body image is always fluctuating. It is in constant reconstruction as we manipulate aspects of its expression and suppression, through the guises of clothing and bodily actions. This is then important in understanding the representation and expression of the photographic figure.

Portraiture, the semi-nude, the self-portrait and the starkness of the naked figure in pornographic imagery all express physical and emotional elements of the body image. These images are visual, objective records of the photographer and they demand from us, as spectators, a reaction. Our reply will depend on how our own body image reacts to what is seen, be it a physical and/or emotional response. It is a combination of the objectivity of the image and subjectivity of the viewer.

“It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive things.”

(Tiemersma,1989:232)

The nude body is seen in all spheres of the visual. It represents a mysticism that we all hope to contain and it can therefore sell products; be erotic; be romantic; be beautiful; and be graphic and explicit, through pornography.

“To be naked is to be without disguise. To be on display is to have the surface of one’s own skin, the hairs of one’s own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.”

(Berger,1972:54)

In the images we look at, the naked body is never revealed. It is the nude that discloses to us the message that it wishes to sell and express, particularly pertaining to its sexual interests. The pornography market uses the revealing figure as a tool for sexual arousal. Whilst hiding areas of sexual interest, the nude deliberately draws the viewer's attention to them. Pubic hair is shaven, drapery and hands positioned to hide, as are some postures, and nipples may be disguised. Through the coyness of covering, the eye of the spectator is forced to seek out forbidden fruits.

In "The Nude go Naked", (Plate 16), I explored the expression of the bare figure through the title, playing with the concepts of what is understood in the expressions "nude" and "naked". In agreement with Berger, I composed the figure without a disguise, the nakedness in itself becoming the expressive vehicle. The naked self has stepped out of its nudity. It has discarded its physical representation of a sexual interest in the public forum.

In observing how some viewers reacted to this image, I found none of the opinions referring to sexual implications. The figure in its nakedness is expressive of a mystical aspect of body-image, strengthened by its surrounding environment.

For Cindy Sherman however, her 'women' remaining clothed is more fundamental to their emotive expression. For her, these women in their clothing represent various social roles of the feminine. Sherman doesn't need to strip them down to skin – we know what they are, but we need to know who they are. When Sherman, in her "History Portraits", (Plate 17), reveals the breasts of her figure, they are false – plastic breast plates and heaving swollen nipples that almost bruise the eye. Here, she uses the concept of nudity as a disguise by revealing the areas of sexual interest in a false rendition. Sherman has no use for 'real' naked breasts and nipples. By using the device of a theatrical costume, she makes us realise that her figure has been photographed in a performance. It is not real, merely a fable with a social or historical role.

Why then does the partially-clad figure remain so effectively mysterious and erotic in a photograph?

Some images by Mapplethorpe show this. He combines a technique of cropping which forces the eye to focus on bodily parts, with a framing technique in which only those parts he wishes to show through clothing, or lack thereof, is used.

In "Man in a Polyester Suit" 1981, (Plate 18), he fetishizes the long silky penis of an anonymous black man. The organ's centrality, framed by the cheap creased suit, reveals Mapplethorpe's fascination with male virility. The black-body erotic and black-body graphic fascinated him, and his play on anonymity enhances this – and the myth that black men are sexually better-endowed than white men. Not all Mapplethorpe's photographs of the black male eros are anonymous, but many of them are. They become shape rather than person. This anonymity is used in the same way as pornographic anonymity. There is no potential snare of personality or person. The image becomes body – a vehicle full of lustful possibilities.

Although Mapplethorpe focuses on the black male eros in many of his images, not all of them are as direct as "Man in a Polyester Suit". The photograph is not particularly erotic, but it is a blunt sexual portrayal of this racist myth about virility. Comparing this image then to others such as "Phillip on a Pedestal" 1979, (Plate 19), one sees the subtlety of figurative grace that Mapplethorpe is capable of. Again, the subject remains anonymous except for the name given in the title. Anonymous, not through image or body-cropping, but through the mood which is conveyed through bodily pose. The image is top-lit, revealing bodily contours – and is spacious and sensuous – the curled and naked figure centralised and elevated by its position on the pedestal.

"Like his meditation on the Mystery of personality, his meditation on the anonymity of the flesh is an ethically inspired encounter with the lusting power of that anonymity, and with the secrecy and shame that accompany it."

(Koch,1986:145)

The photographic body, as nude, is malleable. Its moulding lies in the hands of the photographer who has the power to manipulate it – to create the image that we as spectators must reckon with. The clothed figure is impenetrable. The body-image masks, becoming armour or a sheath wearing a comfortable disguise. The voyeur remains clothed, protected and hidden. He can believe himself in control of the naked figure before him. The spectator and the photographer converge into voyeurism through the perspective of the image and angle of the lens. We are safe and we can look without fear.

Yet, as the semi-clothed, we are caught in the motions of dressing and undressing – a private act involving a pampering of self-touching and comfort. It can then perhaps be considered more erotic than the already naked figure – prepared and ready to pose. We are allowed to step into the disclosed world of the figure preoccupied with the self in the grooming stage of body-image preparation.

“Taking photographs has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events.”

(Sontag, 1973:11)

Most of Saudek’s images of ‘women’ portray this sense of semi-dress – that ‘half-way into facing the outside world’ feeling – used sometimes to create a sensuousness of the female, and sometimes not. His image of a pregnant woman wearing laddered green stockings stretched over her swollen belly and clutching a rag-doll as her feet turn inwards, speaks more of the defenceless girl-woman, (refer to Plate 20). It does not beautify the swollen belly. Saudek is not showing us how sensuous the pregnant shape can be. Yet, it is not a negative portrayal. The laddered stockings almost mould her awkward semi-clothed shape. This pose also embodies social class – that this woman, as awkward and defenceless as she is, cannot help herself. She, as a woman, must bear this shape.

Using the same stage in his theatre, Saudek creates many different performances. In comparing the swollen green stockinged woman to that of a young pubescent girl, (Plate 21), the ‘woman-shape’ speaks to us differently. The girl is semi-clothed and perched upon a fur-covered stool. Like most teenage girls, she sits coyly with one leg bent underneath the

thigh of the other, wearing only garter stockings and shoes. Her arms which are bent up behind her head, force her head down so it becomes more demure, stretching the agile curves of her body upwards. One can clearly see how her body remains untainted by age or child-bearing. The same rag-doll lies, almost discarded, on the floor – a portrayal of child-like sensuousness. This is a child breaking through the barriers of sexual growth, the discarded doll and the garter stockings framing the girl-child's budding sexuality.

Saudek has produced various portrayals of 'Lolita', the girl-nymph – child-like girls who exude incipient femaleness (Plate 22). All of them, again, act out their nymphette qualities semi-clothed. A naked girl would not be as intriguing. Their guise would be stripped down into the bare necessities of childhood form: – Girl – with open jacket, revealing no vest and a cigarette dangling from her hand; Girl – bare-chested with half-opened jeans hooked up by her thumbs and a key hanging dominantly around her neck; Girl – bare-chested, perched on a fur-covered stool preoccupied with a ballet tutu. All these images reveal various stages of the semi-clothed – how the body metamorphosises and transcends its other Selves, namely the Naked and the Dressed.

This intricate web of body-images is played out in advertising. It is a device which gives products the potential to change the average person's self-image – the voluptuous scantily-clad woman living out the sexual power which the perfume product gives her; the love given to a woman by her man, because she feeds him the right brand of margarine. We all know it is a myth, but the small voice inside us niggles at some inadequate attribute of self-presentation.

Figures sell well because they represent archetypal characters, (Plate 23) – those epitomes of perfection coming to undermine that self-confidence we have so far salvaged from the harshness of everyday banality. These fascinating figures appear everywhere in our society: in magazines; on the television; in the cinema and on billboards. Sleek and slim, their elongated limbs appeal to our desire for an improved way of life. The products they offer us is our key to confidence, elegance and success. We begin to feel deficiencies in our body-image and thus envious of the confident and perfected self-images that these figures secure.

“The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself.”

(Berger,1972:134)

The nude is not often seen in advertising material. Society has so loaded the nude’s body-language and expression with sexual implications that it has become extremely contentious subject-matter to use. In general advertising, we would not want to bruise the more sensitive consumer’s sensibilities because it would harm the product’s saleability. Advertising therefore moves into the realm of the semi-clothed, or semi-nude, depending upon individual choice. Either term describes, exactly, the figure’s ‘halfway’ state of being.

The semi-clothed/nude image can veil sexual areas, or more specifically, genitalia, yet still retain that alluring mystery of inner body-image power – the body-image exudes and becomes that which lies within. What better than the body as subject for selling? The perfect embodiment of sensuousness, grace and power. If you wear/eat/drink/use this product, you will feel and therefore look like this – an anodyne to our crumbling, fatigued self-image. We have become consumer addicts thanks to the photographic medium and its power to frame the body so profligately.

“It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more ... publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour.”

(Berger,1972:131)

In the advertising world, the semi-nude/clothed dominates the naked figure. It can play it safe. As mentioned earlier, the naked figure presents nothing except itself. The guise it wears is itself. Because no parts are veiled, the eye remains content to look at the nakedness as it is in its form or shape. The semi-nude/clothed figure draws attention to those forbidden areas underneath the drapery which focus the attention and therefore enhance the power of the product.

When comparing then the world of art to the world of advertising, the method and approach of body-image differs. In art, the image is the product. This is the final attempt to communicate with the spectator. The figure in the image must speak for itself. In advertising, the figure conforms and is orientated to the product and even more so, to the consumer. A photographic print shows the subjective ideas of the photographer, conveying them to the viewer through the figure.

We see this in the works of Sherman, Saudek and Mapplethorpe – the emotive power of the human form which communicates individual visual expression. It is the embodiment of self – a labyrinthian network of emotion and aesthetics, that appeals to us in all its many guises.

“The Self finds its identity in a bodily image.”
(Easthope,1986:53)

I am influenced by the ways in which these three photographers explore their individuality within the diverse genre of body-shape. I attempt to explore my fascination with body-form, to reveal an image of body that exudes its own attributes of self – something that contains, yet communicates; that expresses, yet intrigues; that retains its selfness beyond my dictation as photographer. “Lilith”, (Plate 24), speaks of womanly-shape – a seductive shape in the stage of undress. Lilith was the first wife of Adam in the Garden of Eden. She became the seductress, the mythical demoness who gave birth to monsters and seduced little boys in their sleep. I have attempted to portray this universal voluptuous power by framing the old testament myth through the contemporary guise of dress i.e. garters and stockings, and through the technique of cropping which forces the viewer to get tangled and caught up in the web of her sexual thrall. Facial reference would have destroyed the intrigue I wanted to capture in the shape alone.

Mapplethorpe influenced my techniques in terms of formal structure and placement of the body within the frame as well as his cropping technique, which reinforces the focus of the body in specific parts. Through Sherman I discovered my interest in thematic subject-matter, taking familiar themes, be they myth, concept or legend, and giving a contemporary portrayal of them. Sherman and Saudek both create an environment for

the figures, more so than Mapplethorpe, who is more concerned with the graphic and sculptural portrayal of his figure's body-shapes. For Sherman, the performance, and the role of the female, is of most importance – the photograph, a performance record. Saudek is more concerned with the aesthetics of the human form in its varying sensuous shapes surrounded by the familiarity of his stage and supportive props.

“Birth of Venus” (Plate 25), was my exploration into the possible ramifications of androgyny. In using the concept of Botticelli's Venus – the beautiful flowing-haired maiden landing on the shore in a shell, I attempted to recreate this virtuousness by posing my Venus as a male, leaving all the elements of hair and innocence intact – so subtle, that only a few viewers noticed the male element in the image. Through the use of my graphic technique of grain and hand-colouring, I wanted to portray the kitsch quality that one finds in the glam-trend of androgyny, finding humour in both this and the nauseating virtue of Botticelli's innocent maiden.

By juxtaposing my “Birth of Venus” and Saudek's portrayal of a young naked girl (Plate 26), I hoped to express the virtues of each of the figures – how each of them ‘sit’ easily within their stance and theatrical setting. Both images speak differently, yet the same, about being comfortable in their own self-body image. Their sex is concealed not from shame, but in the solace of their protective skin-egos. Neither of them are portrayed with any tension and both have been photographed within a specific theatre using props to direct the eye around the form.

Saudek's ‘girl’ again accentuates his passion for the sensuousness which is contained within the female identity. Compare this image to the earlier one of the younger girl with the discarded rag-doll (Plate 21) and one can see the continuation of explorative portrayal within the young girl-woman, within the continuation of his story, revealed inside his recurring costume theatre.

As Anna Farova says, "... he never searches for 'woman' as a thing of beauty, never the beautiful object, but rather woman, whose beauty exists to be discerned in her body – in every woman's body."

(Saudek,1983)

This highlights the stereo-typical portrayal of women in advertising and fashion – that every woman will only feel beautiful if she looks like the specified portrayed. Saudek is interested in the individual essence of femininity present in each woman.

The body-image and skin-ego of the figures photographed plays an important role in the final rendition of portrayal. Referring back to "Lilith" (Plate 24) – the skin-ego of Lilith is her potent sexuality. It dominates every other element of her character. Her skin-ego dominates the other traits of her body-image to express this specific self. We cannot look at her or any of Saudek's 'women' in any other way except how they have chosen to present themselves before us.

Merleau-Ponty claims in his theory of the body-schema that the body has its own intentionality – it has its own abilities and knowledge of the world surrounding it which appear prior to the conscious presence of knowledge and intention. (Tiemersma,1989:236)

Acknowledging this, we can then understand how these photographic figures, although made to pose, remain nevertheless masters of their space. A sense of their own presence seems to dominate and emanate the figure's actual consciousness of the photographic pose. This can be seen particularly in a contact sheet illustrating all the frames taken on a single photographic 'shoot' by the writer (Plate 27). In each frame we can see the various poses directed by the photographer that the model has expressed consciously, and yet there is another sense of presence in each image – the body's individual pre-conscious knowledge of its action. We as viewers of the photographic figure can thus recognise a pre-understanding of self, within the conscious visual identity of the figure.

PORNOGRAPHY AND EROTICA

There has always been some debate between what constitutes eroticism and what is pornography. Relevant issues are the amount of erotic content within the pornographic market, the aesthetics of eroticism in the art world and whether this type of imagery adheres to the hazy borderlines of pornography.

The word “erotic” stems from the Greek word “eros”, which means, or used to mean “love”. Today the term “eros” is equated with masculinity – the use of power which can be seen fairly clearly when looking at the pornographic and consumer advertising market. According to Longman’s Synonym Dictionary, the term “erotic” has been given three differing types of expression varying from such descriptions as: lovesome; passionate; infatuated, to seductive; aphrodisiac and finally, lustful; carnal; wanton and lecherous - which goes to show that “eroticism” in our language covers a large area of what is considered as sexual or sensual behaviour.

Pornography on the other hand, is described in Collins’ Dictionary (pg.657) as “writings, pictures or films, designed to be sexually exciting.” This comes directly from the original translation of “pornographos” which is the Greek term for “the writings of harlots”.

Thus, from this very basic terminology, we can see that the two terms are inextricably linked. We can now delve further into this underground visual realm of fantasy and sexuality that remains a carnal mystery and, “to our shame and glory, is not peripheral to our culture, it is central.”

(Peckham,1969:298)

“Fantasy is a valuable untapped source of knowledge about the inner workings of the unconscious mind ... the quest for self-understanding is enhanced by the use of fantasy as a guide to unexplored areas of the self.”

(Goldstein & Kant,1973:122)

Fantasy is central to our lives. In its original state, it remains a personal pivot around which we can create, grow and escape into. Both pornography and eroticism feed off fantasy to stimulate sensuality and the senses. Pornography uses the realm of fantasy – our sexual fantasy – in a realistic portrayal stripped bare of any romance. It is naked, humourless and ‘artless’ remaining true to its aim of promoting sexual arousal. Whereas erotic imagery, not necessarily tied to pornographic intent, can also bring upon the viewer a sense of arousal, but through the connotations of beauty and mystery. A photographic image of a nude figure expressing sensuality but not necessarily sexuality, can bring about an arousal of sensory ‘energy’ within the viewer. Yet that same viewer can receive some of that same sensory ‘energy’ through a photographic figure expressing explicit sexuality. Both pornography and erotica are sexually and sensory related emotions – the expression of the individual’s emotive response to his chosen visual material.

Camille Paglia, a post-feminist writer and Professor of Humanities at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia says, “One cannot separate the emotional arousal from sexual arousal.” (Paglia,1992a:35). She claims that the distinction between eroticism and pornography is “specious” (Nalley,1993:84-86) – that pornography, because of its voyeuristic capacity to objectify, results in an emotional response, which is a sensual response, which then becomes a sexual response (Paglia,1992a:35). She believes that one only differentiates something as pornographic when the physicality is considered too obscene and obtrusive. She also believes that pornography shows up the truth about sex, that it strips the sexual act of its romantic veneer (Nalley,1993:84-86) which would then perhaps be considered more erotic. The enigma of the erotic remains subtle, more ingrained within the woven social and aesthetic textures of our lives. Eroticism does not necessarily stay within the underground realm of pornography. It roams the vast rooms of our fantasy and creative taste.

So, individual reaction and selectivity towards nude-body portrayal depends upon the amount of ‘body-openness’ displayed or expressed to that individual viewer’s taste (Plates 28 & 29). The nude body can retain its erotic qualities without attempting to solicit sexual explicitness. It can also be seen as a naturally sensuous shape, focusing upon its beauty as figure and form in nature. So how then does a photographer, who is not primarily concerned with a sex or advertising market, express the emotive power of the nude-body form within his subjective world?

Jan Saudek attempts to portray in many of his images, created within his theatre, sensuous praise of the female body. His theatre becomes an environment – the emotive link between his many portrayals. His nudes have all been there. They have all experienced the atmosphere which has become Saudek’s forte – the damp peeling walls of his warehouse room, the old-fashioned second-hand props and clothing which comfort and familiarise the eye and allow the viewer once more to watch the nude – to watch her watching you, from within the warehouse haven – seemingly removed from the outside world. However, these women do bring the outside world inside Saudek’s comforting walls. Their outside life and experience has ingrained itself onto the body and skin of these women. Now, they stand here before us, resonating with the waves of their female experience that flows through as well as with Saudek’s subjective portrayal of them. He has chosen them because of who they are. Their bodies show us this and he portrays them realistically, yet fantastically – the imprint of life within the peeling damp-walled theatre.

In one particular image (Plate 30) – a woman’s buttocks, large and central and sensuously covered in wet, rippled cloth, (reminiscent of the ‘wet slip’ technique of Roman and Greek sculpture) – demands praise and recognition for its very womanly eroticism. This seems to project beyond the subject’s pictorial space and enter the fantasy realm of the viewer. This exudation of the body’s sensuality is enhanced by the same pictorial technique used by Mapplethorpe – the cropping of any facial reference and the focusing upon specific bodily-parts – the framing of the human form, in an almost graphic linearity, to enhance the focal point of the chosen shape’s sensuality.

Saudek’s own commentary on this image: “How can I, when I am always seeing her in front of me – this one or another. How she draws me to her with her sweet smell, how she lures and seduces me, how she swings heavily, under her denim skirt. How wonderful she is! She is my guide. I hear thighs rubbing against one another. I follow. I hear the gurgle of spring water, the sucking sound as of footsteps in a swamp, heat, fever.”

(Saudek, 1983:54)

Whilst studying this image of Saudek’s, I was interested to observe a strong similarity in the symmetry of my own image, “Stockings” (Plate 31). Saudek’s nude is more classically posed – a combination of drapery and weight shifted onto one leg, which emphasises the curvaceous mound of her buttocks. Both this image and “Stockings”, although telling a

different 'story', manage to express the erotic in the curves of a woman's buttocks – being revealing and yet showing nothing, baring all, yet not telling the secret to the mystery. The image of woman is revealed to us, as being contained.

Like Saudek, I used the props of clothing, as well as placing the figure in front of a specific background. And although working in symmetry, similar in composition and idea, the two images successfully play off one another – Saudek's 'classical' versus my 'vogueish' approach, my use of colour symmetry, acidic skin-tone and garter stockings versus Saudek's warm tones, soft contrast and use of the classical 'wet-slip' technique. Both images use a particular viewpoint and have cropped out unwanted body-parts to enhance and express the sensuality of the focal point.

In Saudek's image, he uses the same body-cropping technique as does Mapplethorpe (who uses it more frequently), to try and capture eroticism in the human figure. Where Saudek elevates the erotic beauty of the woman in most of his images, Mapplethorpe elevates the homo-erotic in his images of the male. Mapplethorpe straddles the borderline between the erotic and overt pornographic description. There is no subtlety or freedom of fantasy as in Saudek's imagery. It remains direct, lacking discretion in recording his theatre of underground celebrities.

There is eroticism in images when they are sensuously arousing without them necessarily being pornographic. There is eroticism in pornography. Pornographic erotica, because it is more descriptive, releases a heightened sense of sexuality, as it is a performance, performing the function of creating arousal. In its role-playing, it becomes an objective act with an objective viewing from the voyeur watching it. (Plates 28 & 29). The act of looking, and the love of looking at sexual imagery, is safe. It is voyeuristic and scopophilic. The viewer can remain hidden in his act, yet remain a passive participant in what is happening. Voyeurism plays an important role in pornography, for without the spectator's eyes, no revelation of the act would take place. It is theatre, where the audience, vital to the success of the act, remains cloaked in the security of the shadows, whilst the performance acts out its role to achieve a means to an end. The emotional and sexual response of the viewer, becomes subjective to himself.

“The voyeur, the peeper, the Peeping Tom, is a dark comedian. He is repulsive in his dark anonymity, in his secret invasion. He is pitifully alone. But strangely, he is able through this same silence and concealment to make an unknowing partner of anyone within his eye’s range. This is his threat and power.”

(Morrison,1985:13)

Camille Paglia poses the question of how conscious the figure in the photograph is of the viewer? That if the figure seems unaware of being watched and if there is no eye-contact, there is no possible opening of solicitation (Nalley,1993:84-86). In Mapplethorpe’s technique of cropping bodily parts, there is no facial reference and thus no avenue for solicitation. Through deliberately cropping, he has omitted any coyness of eye-contact and we as viewers are forced to look at how he has objectified the body. This leaves the photographer on the same level as the viewer – the role of a voyeur looking in on a seemingly natural sexual act becoming in that moment of viewing, a perversity.

“There is always an element of spying in photography.”

(Nalley,1993:84-86)

This sense of spying is perhaps the photograph’s main impact in recording the world. The images are not real, but behave as recordings of real-life situations or theatrical stagings of life, which result in the medium being unbashful and unashamed. This is what Mapplethorpe achieves through his lens – through his voyeuristic recording in many of his explicit sexual images.

There is much perversity in many sexual acts and some of Mapplethorpe’s photographs reveal this (Plate 32). Whipped and bound genitals are an extreme form of sexual gratification and as viewers, we cannot ignore it. It exists. Mapplethorpe has recorded and shown us this homo-erotic lifestyle. He has pared the subject down to straightforward formalism at the expense of any or little erotic content. These images are highly controversial. A man urinating into another’s mouth is not a generally acceptable form of sexual satisfaction condoned anywhere. But it exists. Mapplethorpe’s work makes sure we see it for what it is. Some critics have tried to obscure and cushion the issue which again shows our social conditioning in attempting to cover up something that we

should find sexually shocking. Hiding something makes it more intriguing. It becomes an ominous weight beneath the surface of what we have been conditioned to accept as normal.

“In his celebrations of homo-erotic beauty, which is one of the most ancient and enduring inspirations of Western Art, Mapplethorpe retrains our eye to see the penis and scrotum at their real size. Male genitals, except in outlandish comic orgy scenes in Greek art, have never before been so truthfully integrated into the high-art tradition.”

(Paglia, 1992a:44)

The phallus has been photographed by both Saudek and Mapplethorpe, each in their own ways, both of them erotic and both of them elevated from the basic vulgarity of portrayal in the pornographic market. They are both aesthetic, artistic portrayals, using the aesthetic photographic criteria of cropping, lighting and content.

Mapplethorpe’s “Untitled” 1981 (Plate 33), cropped below the chest and above the thighs, shows the phallus shot in profile as a shape made dominant by its placement in shadow balanced on the other side of the body by a hand-shape in light. The fact that the phallus is half-revealed dictates the image’s shock-cum-intrigue content.

Saudek’s erect phallus (Plate 34) an ‘anonymous’ self-portrait, (as he uses himself for most of his male shots), also remains hidden, clear only to those eyes which seek out the mystery of the image. A frontal male torso very much like the sculptures from Antiquity, is covered in wet, draped cloth. It is a quiet image – a still, theatrical performance going through the motions of being a sensuous figure which elicits pleasurable contemplation from the viewer. But in looking more closely, the torso is alive! It is of flesh and blood! An erect penis in the centre of the image stands in all its glory, but is shrouded by the folds of drapery. So it is there, but also not there – the subtlety of eroticism. Visible, but almost intangible.

Mapplethorpe's phallus is explicit. It is graphic – very much there. So, by comparison, one could say that Mapplethorpe's image is more porno-graphic than Saudek's. It speaks of shape, rather than mystery.

In comparing Mapplethorpe's work to the marketable world of pornography and both their causal visual and sensory effects, there remains a crucial difference. Mapplethorpe's images also display objectivity, not through any performance, but through his almost formal approach to his subjects. This is a record of a way of life. These people are not actors. They are his friends who live in this underground homo-erotic world, which is pervaded and controlled by sexual indulgence. Mapplethorpe does hone in on the pornographic element as it remains crucial for the images' shock intent, as well as its truthfulness in recording this world.

I have compared Mapplethorpe's approach to pornographic imagery to those of the commercial market and have seen a difference in their objective intentions. Objectivity seems to be the dominant factor in the photographing of pornographic acts. In the market, as discussed earlier, it arises mainly from the amount of role-playing involved. This highlights the senseless and unemotional act – to arouse, sell and survive in a saturated market. In being aware of this, one can then visually and aesthetically appreciate Sherman's exploration into this carnal web in her project, "Sex Series" (Plate 35). She has once again tapped into the photographer's ability to record objectively by objectifying the body through using false body-parts instead of her previous representations of self. She further objectifies the composition by framing these body-parts in sexual arrangements, that force us to react objectively as the voyeuristic eye.

Unlike Mapplethorpe, whose objectivity lay in his formal approach to composition and whose subject-matter was of complex personal relevance, Sherman objectifies the porn of the sexual world by removing the human element completely. Her specific arrangement of body-parts follows the contours of pornographic images – the direct insensitive bareness of flesh-arrangement focusing primarily on the sex-act. Yet Sherman uses her ominous lighting to re-enact the graphic structuring of 'limbs' into this primordial quagmire of urges.

This is the first series where she does not enact herself in the role – here, that would not work, in terms of expression and heightened record of objectivity. To see Sherman in a performance of the sexual act would destroy her intentions of role-playing. In this type of performance, Sherman would then be seen as too exposed, too close to her usual removed self and it wouldn't be any different to that of the porn magazines. By playing stylist and director, Sherman achieves the gory objectivity of these wanton (and disparate) body-parts. They allow us to see through the sexual bog of pornographic imagery through their 'life-less' objectivity which is portrayed with the same contorted explicitness.

This detached effect of these body-parts is made even more deliberate through Sherman's method of mixing the gender of the parts, so that one remains distanced from the gender, but nakedly aware of the explicit performance portrayed.

CONCLUSION

So, by highlighting the differences between these photographers' approach to pornographic imagery and that of the market, we can see there are strong differences. But the differences lie in the fact that they are of two separate, visually abundant worlds, running concurrently – that of the subjective aesthetic approach, brought into the art world of exhibitions and galleries – and that which sells for a specific reason in a specific market. There can therefore be no comparison, only the influential cross-overs from one world to the other where the sexual act becomes exposed, manipulated and contorted to visually descriptive ends. As Camille Paglia says: "Art for me means all works of imagination, from poetry to television commercials to pornography, with questions of quality still operative." (Paglia, 1992b:102)

The questions of quality lie in the hands of the individual. As John Berger says: "Perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. Everything converges onto the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God." (Berger, 1972:16)

We fumble, self-indulged before the body-image – a frozen motion of portrayal that is ‘real’, yet only a photograph. Yet it is exactly this static record that intrigues us. It is what that 1/60 of a second, that blinking of the lens-eye, has extracted and placed forever on hold – the immobile self-bareness of an individual.

Whether it be in the markets of fashion, advertising and pornography, or the market of galleries and exhibitions, the human form remains powerful subject-matter. From portraiture to the semi-nude, to the precise figure selling the product, to the role-player of erotica, these models/forms have been specifically chosen because their figure fits that particular body-image expression. Whatever the type of exhibition, there is always the concept to intrigue from the viewer to the representation of body-image: the sensuous enigma; the sanctifying product-image; the arousing shock-intrigue of pornography and the subjective expression of art-photography – they have all transformed body-image into an optically universal image style.

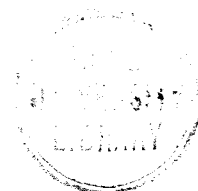
The individual eye of each of these photographers has used the photographic awareness that is rife in our visual culture, and extended and heightened the capturing attribute of the lens. They have each successfully delved into their own explorative avenues and have given us as viewers, a photographic quality of body-image. Through developing the primitive forces of the photographed human form that seethes through the visual labyrinth of our culture, they have proved to us that quality is indeed an individual choice – but a choice that must be of visual dynamism if it is to uplift and truly disclose a photo-transformation of the human form.

This seeing is then captured by the seer – his seeing is extracted and transformed from eye to lens, so that “(his) seeing is seen” (Tiemersma,1989:348). The cycle of the visual human form then remains intact and constant, as the universal eye continually praises the visual dynamism of the human form. In agreement with Tiemersma then, the life-field indeed has a variable structure – the diversity of the individual eye.

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7/20/87

*Kinda nervous talk about her
work. I wish it was... It's hard
to do a picture of yourself
without looking real stupid. But
she's coming out she takes me
photos, maybe I just don't know
what to do.*



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4

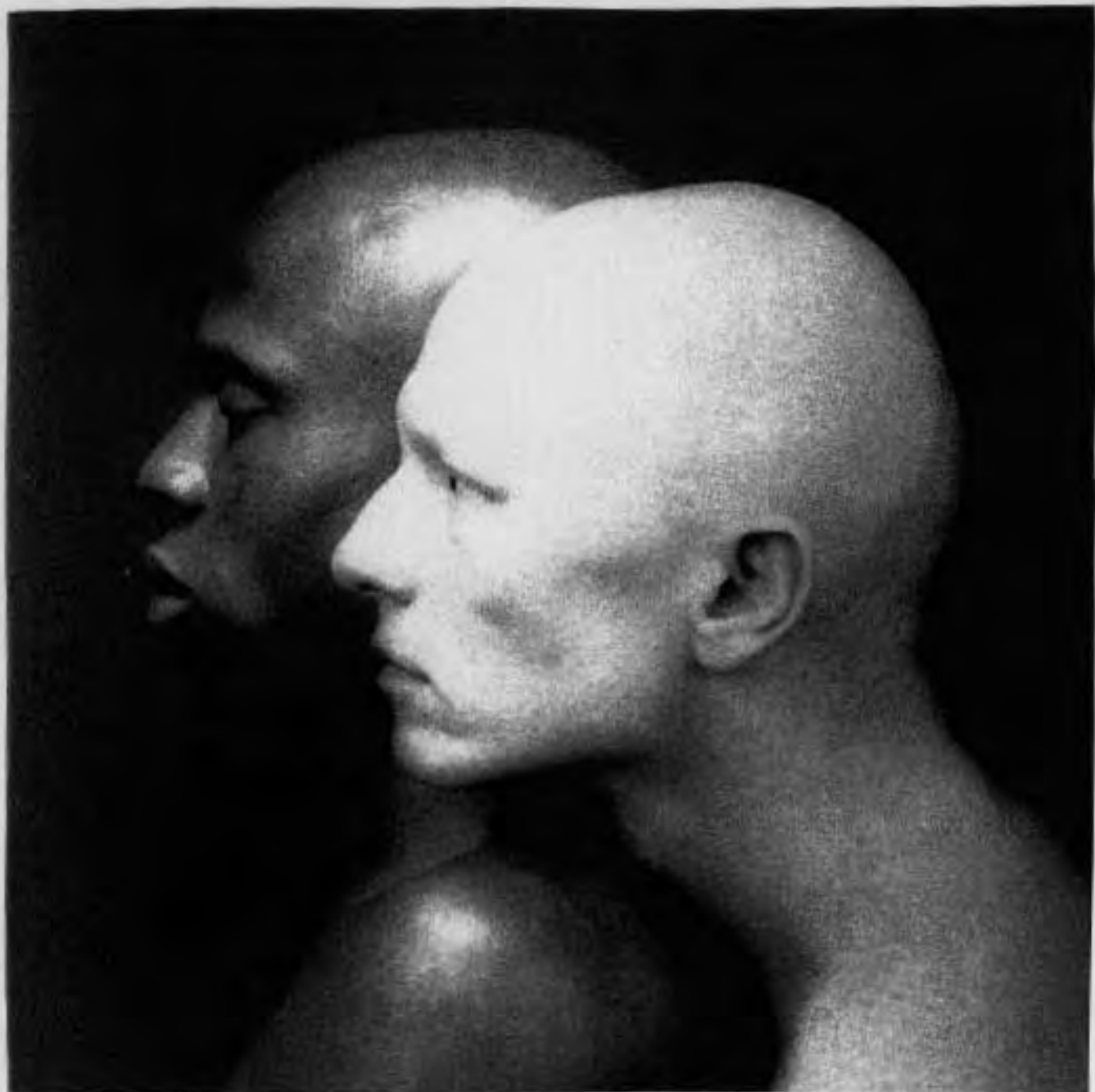


Plate 5





Plate 7







Plate 9



Plate 11.





Plate 13







Plate 16



Plate 17

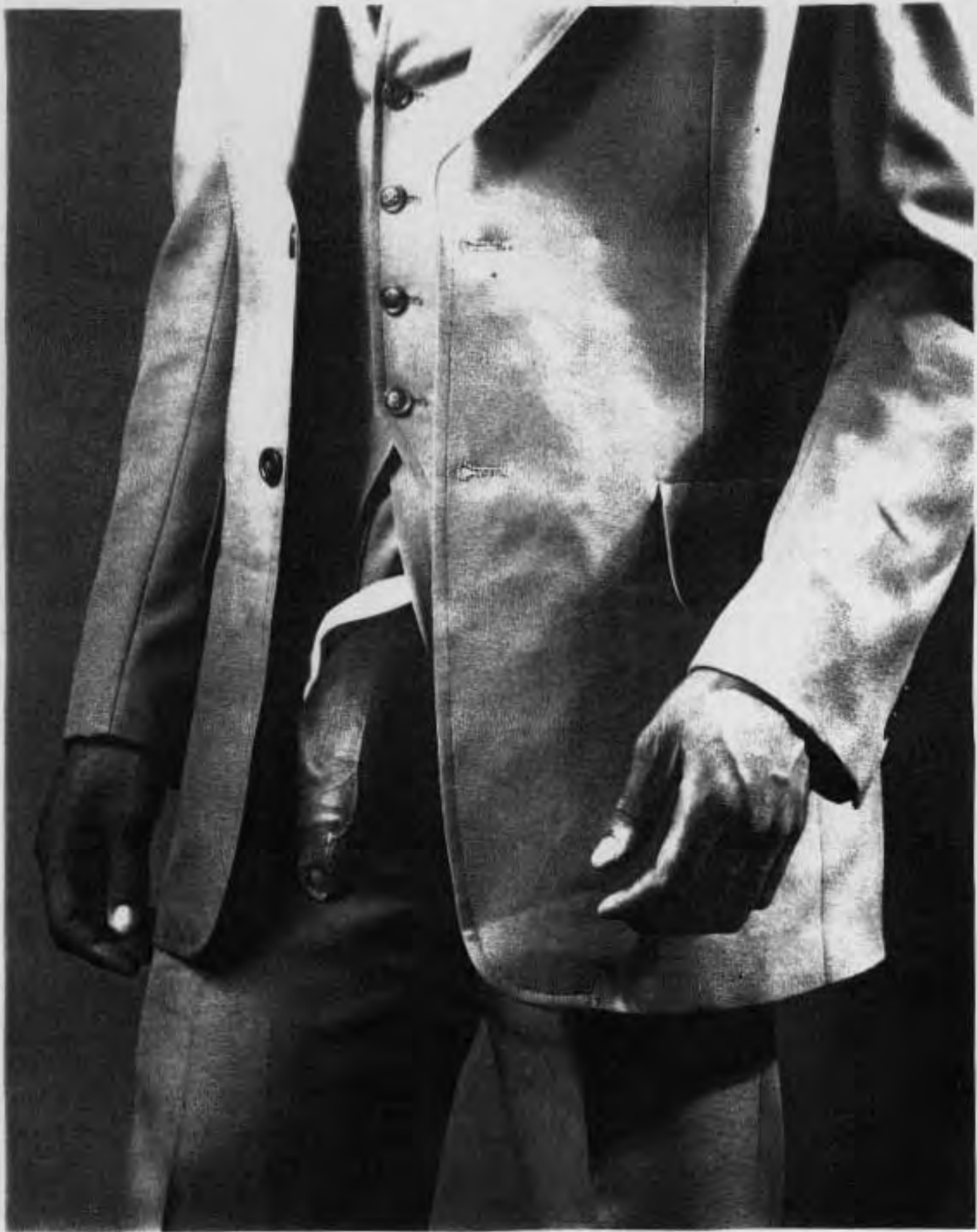


Plate 18



Plate 19

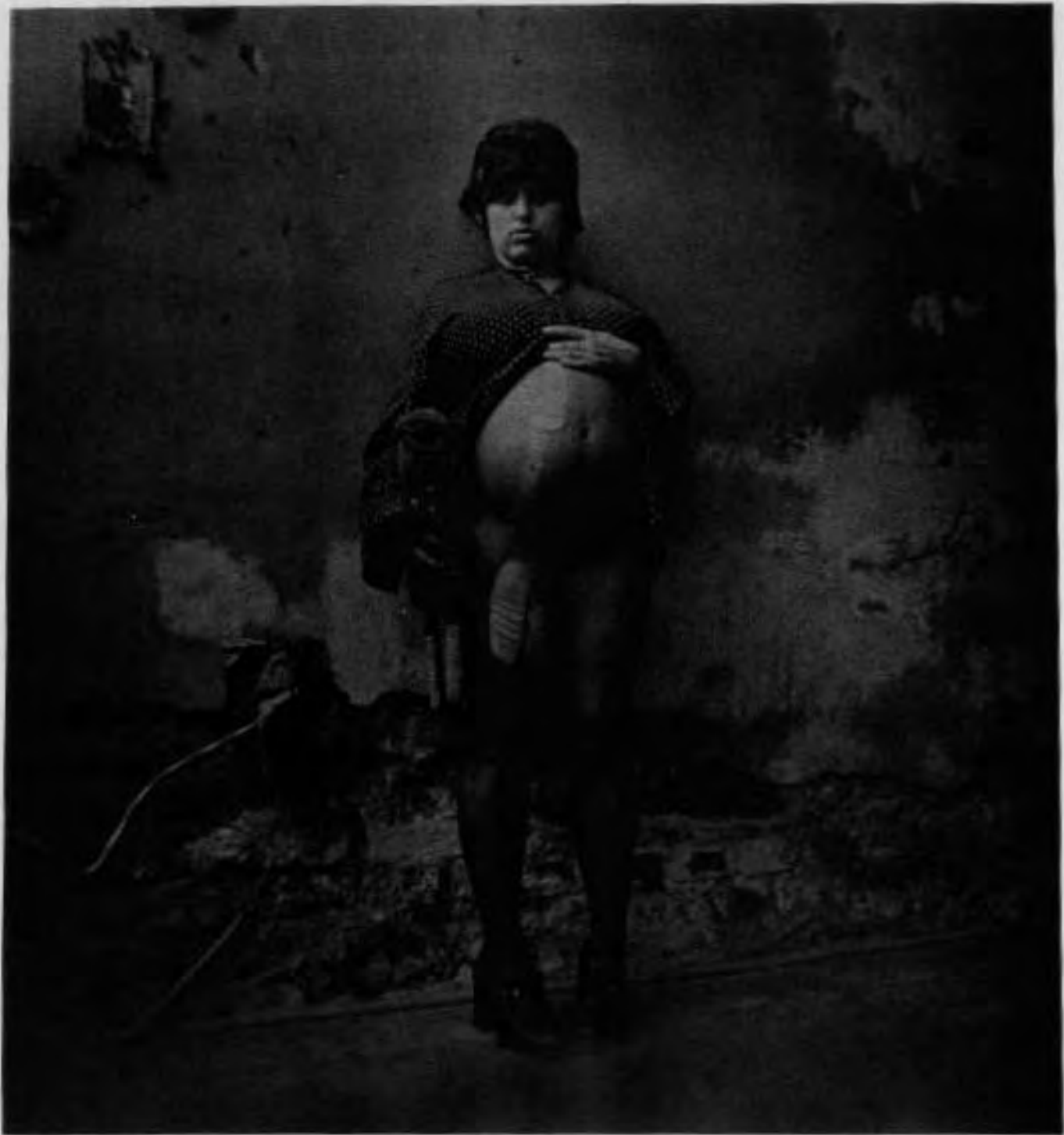


Plate 20



Plate 21





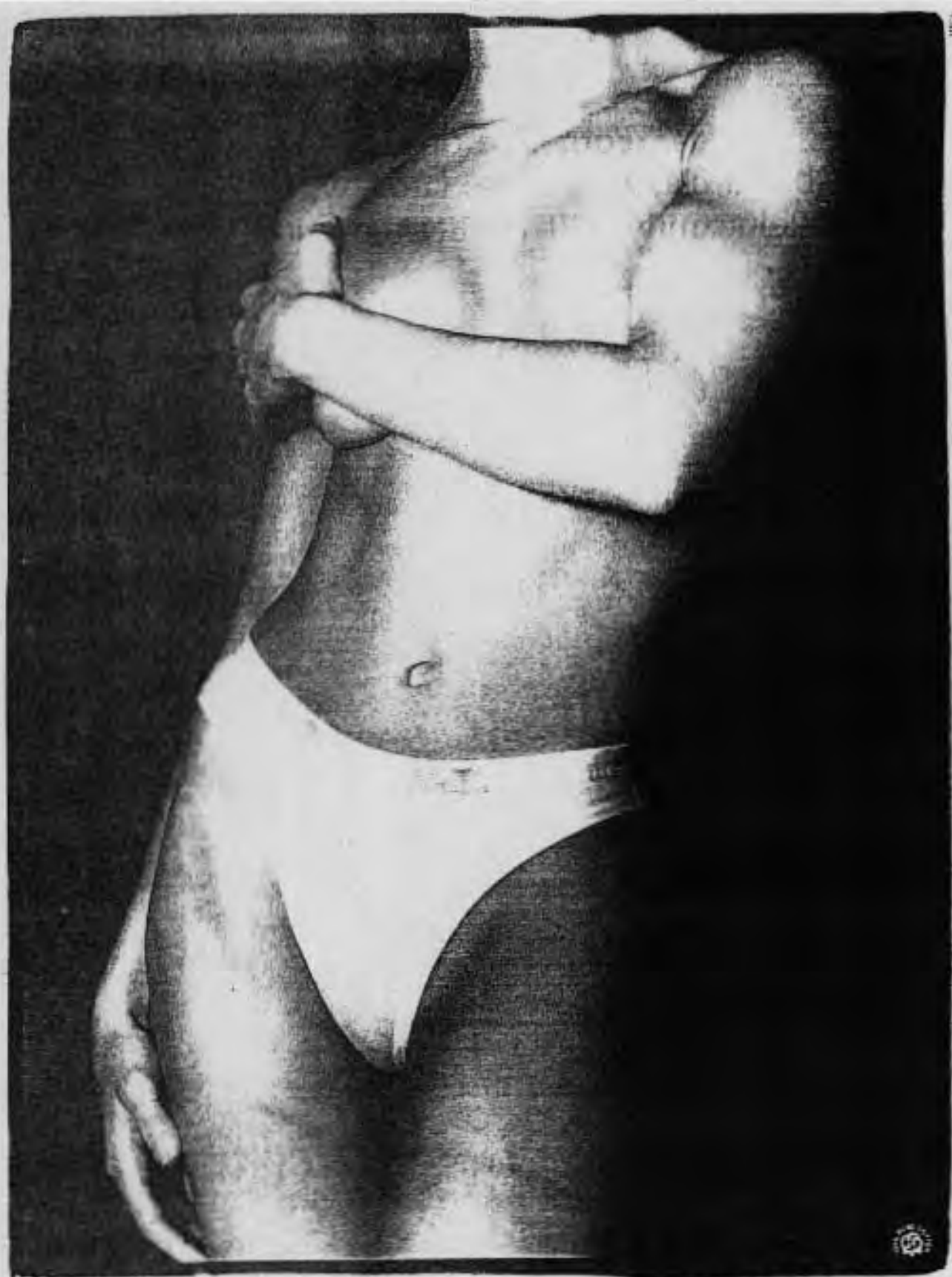


Plate 25



Plate 24





Dare to wear the Bear

Because we're all a little wild underneath...



An unashamedly body-conscious range of 100% pure cotton briefs by She.Bear - in tanga, g-string, bikini and hi-cut.



Plate 29









Plate 33



Plate 34

